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BJP forms 27 members manifesto panel

Party brainstorms as it seeks people suggestions in effort to keep ear to ground

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Union Ministers Smriti Irani, Nirmala Sitharaman and former Chief Ministers Vasundhara Raje and Shivraj Singh Chouhan are among the 27 members manifesto committee, announced by the BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as the party brainstorms and seeks suggestions from people across the country for its election promises.

The BJP president JP Nadda released the names of the manifesto committee which include 11 Ministers and Chief Ministers besides others. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will head the manifesto committee, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman serving as the convenor, and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal as the co-convenor.

In January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the youth of the nation to contribute to BJP's manifesto for upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

This is the first time in many decades that some of the core ideological promises of the BJP may not find mention in its election manifesto has added to the general curiosity about what will be the highlights of the ruling party's poll pledges



Left to right: Nirmala Sitharaman, Smriti Irani, Vasundhara Raje, Shivraj Singh Chouhan

this time. With Article 370 repealed by the Government headed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its second term and the Ram temple construction in full swing and already open to devotees, two of the party's core promises for several polls stand fulfilled. The BJP Governments in some States are also working to implement the Uniform Civil Code, another of its foundational pledges. With Prime Minister Modi often asserting that his third term will be marked by big decisions, the buzz around its manifesto has been gaining in traction. The party is already in the process of seeking suggestions from different groups.

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Mahtab, Sandhu among 11 named in BJP fresh LS list

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday named its candidates for 11 more Lok Sabha constituencies, fielding a number of leaders who joined it from different parties recently such as Bhartruhari Mahtab, Ravneet Singh Bittu, Sushil Kumar Rinku and Preet Kaur. All these leaders have been fielded from the seats they represent in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu will be making his poll debut from Amritsar. Six-time MP Mahtab, who recently quit the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), has been fielded from Cuttack. Kaur, suspended Congress MP and wife of former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, is contesting from Patiala. A four-time MP and a former Union Minister, Kaur joined had the BJP in the presence of senior leaders at the BJP headquarters earlier this

month. Hans Raj Hans, who had won from North West Delhi in 2019 on a BJP ticket, will contest from the Faridkot seat, which is reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs). The BJP on Sunday named two candidates from West Bengal, three from Odisha and six from Punjab. It has so far announced its candidates for 411 seats. The party dropped actor Sunny Deol and fielded Dinesh Singh "Babbu" from Gurdaspur. Sandhu, who joined the BJP on March 19, served as Ambassador to the United States from February 2020 to January 2024. He is one of the most experienced former diplomats on US affairs, having served in the Indian Mission in Washington DC. Before his assignment in Washington DC, Sandhu was High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka from January 2017 to January 2020.

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Congress will usher in Rozgar Kranti: Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress will usher in a "Rozgar Kranti" by taking concrete steps to increase employment opportunities, enable entrepreneurship and realise the aspirations of the youth, party chief Mallikarjun Kharge said on Saturday. He said the Congress guarantees that the future of

youth will turn from bleak to bright and reiterated the "Yuva Nyay" guarantees which the party would implement if voted to power. In a post on X, he said, "The Congress party will usher in a 'Rozgar Kranti (employment revolution)' through Yuva Nyay guarantee! We will take concrete measures to increase employment opportunities, enable entrepreneurship and realise the dreams and aspirations of our youth."



Kharge listed the guarantees given by his party under its 'Yuva Nyay' pitch. Under the "Bharti Bharosa" guarantee, the Congress chief said his party would provide 30 lakh new Union Government jobs, according to a jobs calendar. As part of 'Pehli Naukri Pakki', the party will provide one year Right to Apprenticeship for all educated youth, at Rs 1 lakh per year, Kharge said.

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Delhi Minister and AAP leader Kailash Gahlot speaks with the media after appearing before the ED for questioning in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now scrapped Delhi excise policy, in New Delhi

Delhi Minister Gahlot grilled by ED days after Kejriwal arrest

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

There is more trouble for the ruling AAP Government in Delhi. Days after the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is now after Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot, who appeared before it in the liquorgate scam case on Saturday. The Transport Minister was questioned by the ED for more than five hours on Saturday. Gahlot was part of the Group of Ministers who prepared and implemented the liquor scheme. This was the second summons issued to Gahlot and he responded to it. He skipped the first one as Delhi Assembly proceedings were on at that time. Gahlot (49), an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA from Najafgarh, is the Minister for Transport, Home and Law in the Delhi Government. The Minister, who entered the ED office in Central Delhi around 11:30 am and left after 4:30 pm, said he answered all the questions from the agency and will continue to cooperate in the probe. Sources said Gahlot has been asked to appear for questioning in the case and getting his statement recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Gahlot said he was called by the ED for questioning in the case as "probably I was part of the GoM... (I questioning) was about all aspects of the policy and I answered to the

best of my knowledge and memory." He said this was the second summons sent to him as he could not depose for the first time about a month back as the Budget session of the Delhi Assembly was on. Gahlot told reporters that he told the agency he had no information that Nair used to live in a bungalow allotted to him. "I have never lived in my official bungalow at Civil Lines. Vijay Nair was living there or not I have no information," he said adding that there was no cross-questioning or confrontation with any other person or statement. "I never shifted to that bungalow and live with my family at my own house in Vasant Kunj that is in front of the school of my children," he said. The Minister also said that he was not involved in Assembly polls in Goa. "I have no idea about Goa and I had never been part of campaigning and had no knowledge who was incharge there or what activities were taking place," he said. Gahlot asserted that there was no "scam" and it will become clearer with the time. "There is no scam here... As the time goes by, everyone will be convinced about this," he told reporters while exiting the ED office. Gahlot's name featured in the high-profile case not only because he was part of the Group of Ministers behind the policy but also because AAP's Vijay Nair was staying at the bungalow allotted to him at Civil Lines.

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Speculation rife over Akhilesh opting out of Lok Sabha race

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As anticipation builds regarding the potential candidacy of Tej Pratap Yadav in Kannauj, questions have surfaced about whether Samajwadi Party (SP) Chief Akhilesh Yadav has opted out of the Lok Sabha race. The lack of clarity from the SP leadership has only served to intensify the suspense surrounding this matter. Initially, there were speculations that Akhilesh would contest from either the Azamgarh or Kannauj constituency, both of which have historically supported the Yadav family. However, with the announcement of Mulayam's nephew, Dharmendra Yadav, as the candidate from Azamgarh, attention turned towards Kannauj as a likely stronghold for Akhilesh. Recent reports suggest that Akhilesh intended to nominate Tej Pratap for Kannauj but asked him to contest from Rampur on the insistence of Azam Khan. Tej Pratap promptly left the election fray upon receiving a message from the SP chief and arrived in Rampur to file



his nomination. When Akhilesh met SP leader Azam Khan in Sitapur jail, Khan had insisted that either Akhilesh or another member of the Yadav clan contest from Rampur. However, subsequent developments led to Tej Pratap being replaced, and Maulana Mohibullah Nadiw was nominated from Rampur instead. Tej Pratap, the grandson of Mulayam's elder brother Ratan Singh, has previously served as an MP from Mainpuri and is married to the daughter of RJD chief

Lalu Prasad. Another potential candidate that emerged was Bidhuna MLA Rekha Verma, whose candidacy from Kannauj was supported due to the significant influence of the Yadav vote bank and the Lodh community in key Assembly segments of the Kannauj Lok Sabha seat. The uncertainty surrounding Akhilesh's candidacy in Kannauj stemmed from his recent statement during a party meeting, where he expressed his intention to

campaign for party candidates across the State rather than contesting his own election. In response to inquiries, SP chief spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary urged caution against premature conclusions, emphasizing the need to await a formal announcement from the party. Similarly, Kaleem Khan, the SP's Kannauj district president, affirmed ongoing preparations in the constituency guided by the directives of the party leadership. Kannauj constituency has consistently supported the SP's first family in six consecutive elections since 1999, when Mulayam was elected as MP. Akhilesh made his debut from Kannauj in a bypoll in 2000 and was subsequently re-elected in the 2004 and 2009 general elections. In 2012, Akhilesh's wife, Dimple Yadav, won a bypoll, followed by her victory in the 2014 elections. However, in the 2019 elections, BJP's Subrat Pathak secured the seat, defeating SP's Dimple. With the upcoming elections, the SP aims to reclaim its foothold in Kannauj.

Over 170 bogus voters shocker in Kerala ward

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

More than 170 fake names have been identified in the Lok Sabha electoral roll of a ward in Udumbanchola, a small town in Kerala's Idukki district. The State goes to the polls on April 26 and the disclosure has shocked all political parties barring the CPI (M). The 170 names identified in the electoral roll of Udumbanchola are those whose names figure in the electoral roll of Theni in neighbouring Tamil Nadu. MV Govindan, the CPI (M) State secretary, said there was nothing unusual in the duplication of names in electoral rolls. "The persons whose names figure in Udumbanchola roll are all plantation workers employed in rubber and tea estates in Idukki. They are all from Tamil Nadu's Theni district and there is nothing to worry about it," said Govindan. Kerala goes to the poll for 26th April while election in Tamil Nadu is scheduled for 19th April. But more than the issue of 170 voters in Udumbanchola, what haunts the major Opposition parties in Kerala is the propensity of the CPI (M) and the CPI to



manipulate and tinker with electoral rolls. The "impressive win" scored by the CPI (M) led LDF in the 2021 Assembly Election is still fresh in the minds of the people. The 2021 win in which the CPI (M) retained power in Kerala is likely to have shocked the Narendra Modi led Central Government. The 2019 Lok Sabha Poll from Kerala saw the Congress-led UDF sweeping the election by winning 19 out of the 20 seats from the State. The Congress candidate lost the Alappuzha constituency by 10,000 votes to the CPI (M) AM Ariff, an orthodox Islamist and that too in a three-cornered contest.

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Western Ghats gecko named after Van Gogh

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Meet Cnemaspis Vangoghi, a recently identified small-sized gecko (lizard) species in the nature's world whose dazzling hues and vibrant patterns on its back pay homage to Vincent Van Gogh's timeless masterpiece "Starry Night". With echoes of the iconic painting, this remarkable find by a team of wildlife researchers from Tamil Nadu's Southern Western Ghats adds to the wildlife treasure, enriching the biodiversity of our natural world. This serendipitous find by the scientists from the Thackeray Wildlife Foundation occurred during an expedition in the Southern State region in April 2022.



Ishan Agarwal, who took part in the study to describe the new lizard, explained that the striking colouration of the male lizards, with their yellow head and forebody and light blue spots on the back, reminded them of Van Gogh's iconic painting. The naming of the lizard is our tribute to the great painter,

said the team including Agarwal and other researchers Akshay Khandekar and Tejas Thackeray. Depicting a mesmerizing night sky filled with swirling clouds, bright stars, and a crescent moon over a tranquil village, the painting "Starry Night" is celebrated for its vibrant colors, dynamic brushwork,

and emotive expression, capturing the artist's unique vision and emotional depth. It is said that Van Gogh painted The Starry Night during his 12-month stay at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in France. The finding of the new species of gecko has been published in the peer-reviewed journal

ZooKeys. Besides, the small-sized gecko that can reach 3.4 cm in length, the team from the Foundation also discovered yet another new species named Cnemaspis sathuragiriensis, from the low-elevation forests of Srivilliputhur. Cnemaspis sathuragiriensis is named for its type locality, the Sathuragiri Hills. The two new species are found in low elevation (250-400 m above sea level) deciduous forests of Srivilliputhur and add to the five previously known endemic vertebrates from Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu. These lizards are diurnal, meaning they are active during the day, mainly during the cool hours of early morning and evening. They

are primarily found on rocks and occasionally on buildings and trees, Agarwal said, adding that the team expects to unveil over 50 new lizard species from Tamil Nadu, highlighting the region's exceptional biodiversity. "Tamil Nadu is an exceptionally biodiverse State and we expect to name well over 50 new species of lizards by the time we are done [with our expeditions]!", Agarwal further said. The discovery of the Starry Night inspired lizard not only adds to our knowledge of the incredible biodiversity found in the Southern Western Ghats but also highlights the importance of conservation efforts to protect these unique and often localized species, he pointed out.

Veteran Congress leader Shivraj Patil daughter in law joins BJP

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Dr Archana Patil-Chakurkar, daughter-in-law of veteran Congress leader and Lok Sabha's former Speaker Shivraj Patil Chakurkar, on Saturday joined the ruling BJP in the run-up Lok Sabha polls, by saying she was influenced by the party's women ideology.

Dr Archana Patil, whose husband Shailesh Patil Chandurkar is the Congress state secretary, joined the BJP in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and state party chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule. Talking to media persons after her entry into the ruling party, Dr Patil said: I have long been involved in social work. I had worked with Shivraj Patil saheb.... I have been greatly influenced by the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam brought in by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP gives equal opportunity to women... I am joining the BJP for taking up cause of women.

Dr Archana Patil, who is the chairperson of Lifecare Hospital and Research Centre at Udgir, is a known name in Latur district, the home turf of senior Congress leader and late chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and her own father-in-law Shivajirao Patil



Chakurkar. "I have worked at the grassroots level in Latur. I was never officially in the Congress. I will work at the grassroots level with the BJP. I joined the BJP because its ideology has a great influence on me," Dr Patil said. The BJP is currently holds the Latur (SC) seat, a seat it had won for the second time in 2014 and retained it in 2019 when party candidate Sudhakar Tukaram Shrangare trounced Machindra Kamat of the Congress by a huge margin of 2,89,111 votes. With Dr Patil's entry to its fold, it remains to be seen if the BJP will nominate her as its candidate in place of the sitting MP Sudhakar Shrangare. Dr Patil's father and veteran Congress leader Shivraj Patil

had been a seven-time MP from Latur. Apart from being a Minister of State for Defence and a Minister of State for Defence in the Indra Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi headed Congress governments, he was the Home Minister in the Dr Manmohan Singh-led UPA government. He was the Speaker of Lok Sabha from 1991 to 1996. He also worked as the Punjab Governor and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh from 2010 to 2015.

The BJP bagged the Latur (SC) seat for the first time in 2004 when its candidate Rupatai Nilangekar-Patil, daughter-in-law of former chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar defeated Shivraj Patil by 30,891 votes.

Stage set for Supriya fight with Ajit wife Sunetra in Baramati

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

It is official now. It is going to be a Pawar vs. Pawar or NCP Vs NCP fight in the forthcoming Lok Sabha at NCP chief Sharad Pawar's home turf of Baramati in western Maharashtra.

Two prominent members of the Pawar family --- Sharad Pawar's daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar --- will take on each other in Baramati constituency. Supriya Sule's name figured prominently in the first list of five candidates that the Sharad Pawar-led NCP released for the Lok Sabha polls on Saturday. The other candidates who have been nominated to contest the Lok Sabha polls are Nilesh Lanke (Ahmednagar), Dr Amol Kolhe (Shirur), Bhaskar Bagare (Dindori-ST) and Amar Kale (Wardha). An MLA and loyalist of Ajit Pawar, Lanke is the first MLA who returned to the camp of Sharad Pawar. Sr Pawar rewarded him by nominating him as his party's candidate from Ahmednagar. In the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra, the focus will be on Baramati where two members of the Sharad Pawar's family are contesting against each other for the first time. Supriya of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, a popular figure, will



clash swords with her sister-in-law Sunetra Pawar, wife of deputy chief minister and Sharad Pawar's politically estranged nephew Ajit Pawar. Baramati Lok Sabha constituency has been represented by the Sharad Pawar family for nearly four decades now. While Sharad Pawar was a two-time MP, his nephew Ajit Pawar represented Baramati for one term, Supriya Sule was a three-term MP from Baramati. Sharad Pawar's writ would run in Baramati for nearly decades. However, political equations changed in Maharashtra's prestigious Lok Sabha constituency after his nephew Ajit Pawar rebelled against Sr Pawar, walked out of the NCP with a sizeable number of supporters and took oath as deputy chief minister in the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena-BJP alliance government in the state on July 2, 2023. In the Gram Panchayat elec-

tions held in November last year, the Ajit Pawar-led NCP made inroads into the Baramati in the Gram Panchayat (GP) polls, when it walked away with 109 GP seats out of a total 231 seats followed among others by Sr Pawar-led NCP (27) and Congress (25). Even before the announcement of the election schedule, both Sunetra Pawar and Supriya Sule have held a series of meetings. Mobile vans (raths) of both Supriya Sule and Sunetra Pawar are going around the length and breadth of the constituency. On her part, Supriya has played down the election against Sunetra, who happens to be her sister-in-law, by saying: "For me it is an ideological fight. There is nothing personal in the contest. Pawar Saheb has stood for a certain ideology and we are committed to it," Supriya said.

Dalit outfit Bhimshakti offers support to MVA candidate in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a boost to the prospects of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra, an organisation of Dalits "Bhimshakti" on Saturday extended support to the Congress and MVA candidates in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Announcing his party's support to the Congress, Shiv Sena and NCP (Sharad Pawar), Bhimshakti chief and Raja Sabha member Chandrakant Handore said that his organisation had decided to throw its weight behind the INDIA Bloc candidates to "defeat" the BJP's intent to re-write Constitution if it returned to power in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. "If the BJP is eyeing 400-plus seats in the Lok Sabha polls, its clear motive is to change the Constitution drafted by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and work to achieve the RSS' agenda of creating a 'Hindu Rashtra' in its upcoming centenary year (1925)," Handore said.

"Bhimshakti will fully support all the MVA candidates and attempt to defeat the sinister agenda of the BJP-RSS combine in the highest number of seats in Maharashtra," he said. "As the people and Ambedkarites it is our princi-



pal responsibility to help save the Constitution and democracy which is under threat. The Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has raised awareness of this through the Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the past two years," Handore said. Handore said that his organisation activists and MVA workers would go door to door in the villages, towns and cities to make people aware of the BJP's conspiracy and call upon them to preserve the Constitution. The meeting, where Handore announced his organisation's support to Congress and other MVA candidates at an online event addressed by AICC General Secretary Ramesh Chennithala and state Congress leaders, urged the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) President Prakash Ambedkar to join hands with the MVA-Bhimshakti combine in this endeavour.

President confers Bharat Ratna on former PMs Charan Singh, Narasimha Rao

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday conferred Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, on former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Charandhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, posthumously at a ceremony on the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The awards to Rao, Singh, Thakur and Swaminathan were received by their kin. P V Prabhakar Rao, the son of former prime minister Rao, received the award conferred on his father from the president. Jayant Chaudhary, Charan Singh's grandson and chief of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), accepted the honour from Murmu. Swaminathan's daughter Nitya Rao and Thakur's son Ram Nath Thakur received the award from the president. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other dignitaries were present at the ceremony. This year, the government

announced five Bharat Ratna awards, including one to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalwart and former deputy prime minister L K Advani. Sources said President Murmu will pay a visit to Advani's residence and confer him with the prestigious award. This was decided in view of the ailing health of the veteran BJP leader Advani, they added. Born in Karachi, in present-day Pakistan, on November 8, 1927, Advani has served as the President of the Bharatiya Janata Party for the longest period since its inception in 1980. Capping a parliamentary career of nearly three decades, he was, first, the Home Minister and, later, the Deputy Prime Minister in the cabinet of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999-2004). Prime Minister Modi lauded the contributions of those conferred the Bharat Ratna paying rich tributes to former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Charan Singh besides other luminaries.

"Every Indian cherishes what PV Narasimha Rao Garu has done for our nation and feels proud that he has been con-

ferred the Bharat Ratna. He worked extensively to further our country's progress and modernization. He is also known as a respected scholar and thinker. His contributions will forever be cherished," Modi said on X. He said the Bharat Ratna for Charan Singh is a recognition of his contributions to India's development, particularly in agriculture and rural development. "I am sure this honour will inspire future generations to uphold the values of hard work, dedication and public service that he epitomized," he said. The country's highest civilian award for Karpoori Thakur is a fitting tribute to a stalwart who dedicated his life to social justice and equality, the prime minister said.

Known as a champion of the downtrodden, Thakur's contributions to the uplift of the marginalized and his relentless fight for the rights of the backward classes have left an indelible mark on the fabric of Indian society, he said. "The Bharat Ratna to him highlights the values of inclusivity and compassion that are essential to the nation's ethos,"



he said. Referring to agronomist M S Swaminathan, Modi described him as a revered figure in the world of agriculture who is widely admired for his pioneering work and research in the field of genetics and agricultural science. He said, "His efforts propelled India from struggle to self-sufficiency in food production. May the Bharat Ratna conferred on him inspire more people to take up research in agriculture and food security." Veteran BJP leader L K Advani is the only living person among the recipients of the

honour this year. P V Narasimha Rao, who was prime minister from 1991 to 1996 and often referred to as the Chanakya of Indian politics, is known for initiating far-reaching economic reforms and for his skilful political manoeuvring. He was the first prime minister from the south, the first Congress leader from outside the Nehru-Gandhi family to complete a full five-year term and the man who steered India through the turbulent early 1990s. Chaudhary Charan Singh, a Jat leader from western Uttar

Pradesh, was prime minister between July 28, 1979 and January 14, 1980. He died in 1987. Born on December 23, 1902, at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh in a middle-class family, Singh shifted to Meerut in 1929 and later joined the Congress. After the Congress split, he became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for the second time in February 1970 with the support of the Congress. However, the President's Rule was imposed in the state on October 2, 1970.

Considered the chief architect of land reforms in Uttar Pradesh, Singh had the reputation of being a hard taskmaster who would not tolerate inefficiency, nepotism and corruption in administration. A dedicated public worker and a staunch believer in social justice, his strength stemmed essentially from the confidence he enjoyed among millions of peasants. Agricultural scientist M S Swaminathan, who died on September 28, 2023, at the age of 98, is most widely known for transforming India from a drought-stricken country dependent on the

United States for foodgrain imports in the 1960s to being declared self-sufficient in food production in 1971.

His efforts involved introducing high-yielding genetic varieties of rice and wheat in India and the subcontinent, alongside American agronomist Norman Borlaug. Swaminathan was awarded the first World Food Prize in 1987 for his work. Swaminathan's research as a plant geneticist addressed the issue of food insecurity and helped small farmers augment their income by enhancing productivity. He dedicated his entire life to improving agriculture and the income of farmers.

Karpoori Thakur, popularly known as 'jannayak' (people's leader), served as Bihar chief minister from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979. He was a key figure in the struggle against social discrimination and inequality. A fountainhead of OBC politics in Bihar, Thakur was born on January 24, 1924, in one of the most backward sections of society - the Nai Samaj (barber community). His

political journey was marked by his unwavering commitment to the marginalised sections of society.

Thakur's commitment to affirmative action gave representation and opportunities to the poor, oppressed, exploited and deprived sections of the country. His policies and reforms were pioneering in bringing about significant changes in the lives of many, especially in the fields of education, employment and farmer welfare.

His tenure as chief minister is best remembered for the implementation of the Mungeri Lal Commission recommendations, whereby quotas for backward classes were introduced in the state. He died on February 17, 1988. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said conferment of Bharat Ratna on former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Charandhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur showed Modi government's commitment towards farmers, downtrodden and backward people of the country.

BJP forms 27 members manifesto...

From Page 1 Bharat Modi ki Guarantee" video vans, which are meant to travel across the country to collect people's inputs on the contents of its manifesto.

The BJP has also devised a 'GYAN' formula consisting of four segments - Garib (poor), Yuva (youth), Annadata (farmers) and Nari (women) - which will be focus in the manifesto. Earlier this week the ruling party had also released its State-wise list of star campaigners for the Lok Sabha polls - including Prime Minister Modi as well as numerous union and chief ministers.

Rajnath, a former party president, was the head of the BJP's manifesto committee for the 2019 polls as well. Many members have been repeated in the current panel as well. Ignored in Rajasthan, the party has included Vasundhara Raje in the manifesto committee. The 27-member list released

by the BJP also includes the names of the recently elected Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav as well. The party has also appointed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as a member of the election manifesto committee.

However, not all Chief Ministers, including Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh, are its members, with party sources saying that senior leaders of the party who are not in the committee may be made part of other organisational exercises related to the elections.

Bihar leaders Sushil Kumar Modi and Ravi Shankar Prasad, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, former Union minister Jugal Oram, party's organisational leaders like Vinod Tawde, Radha Mohan Das Agrawal, Manjinder

Singh Sirsa and Tariq Mansoor have been included in the committee too. Senior Congress leader AK Anthony's son Anil Anthony was also included in the manifesto committee. Antony and Mansoor are among the party's Christian and Muslim faces respectively.

Former Haryana BJP president OP Dhankar is also a member. According to sources, the BJP manifesto will also highlight the achievements of the Modi government's 10 years rule. Nearly 97 crore eligible Indian voters will over six weeks and seven phases starting April 19 decide which political party will form the next Government in the world's largest democracy.

Following slogans like 'abki baar Modi sarkar' in 2014 and 'phir ek baar Modi sarkar' in 2019, the BJP's new campaign chant in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is 'abki baar 400 paar'.

Mahtab, Sandhu...

From Page 1

He had also served at the High Commission of India, Colombo earlier as the Head of the Political Wing from December 2000 to September 2004.

Sandhu was Consul General of India in Frankfurt from September 2011 to July 2013. He has worked in the Ministry of External Affairs in various capacities: as Joint Secretary (UN) from March 2009 to August 2011; and later as Joint Secretary (Administration)

heading the Human Resource Division. He also served as an Officer on Special Duty (Press Relations), at the Ministry of External Affairs from December 1995 to March 1997.

Veteran Parliamentarian Mahtab, who quit the BJD recently, will contest from Cuttack, Bittu, who quit from the Congress, will contest from Ludhiana, Kaur from Patiala, and Rinku from Jalandhar, a seat reserved for SCs.

Congress will usher in...

From Page 1

He said under the 'Paper Leak se Mukti' guarantee, the party will provide a law to completely end all paper leaks. The party has also promised better working conditions and social security for gig workers and a Rs 5,000 crore startup fund for the youth, Kcharge pointed out. The Congress has pitched its Lok Sabha polls on 25 guarantees under five Nyays -- Nari Nyay, Yuva Nyay, Shramik Nyay, Kisaan Nyay and Hissedari Nyay. It has promised to implement them immediately if it comes to power.

Over 170 bogus voters shocker in...

From Page 1

Public resentment against the CPI (M) was at its peak because of issues like the lathi charge and attacks against pilgrims to the Holy Shrine of Lord Ayyappa and also the big time scams like gold smuggling and corruption, the epicenter of which was the Chief Minister's Office, according to Prime Minister Modi himself.

The 2019 Lok Sabha poll results showed that 2.04 crore voters cast their votes in the election, which means there was a turnout of 77.8 per cent. The Congress-led UDF recorded 96.29 lakh votes while the CPI (M)-led LDF had to content with 71.56 lakh votes. The question that remains unanswered is how the total number of electors in 2019 increased from 2.04 crore to 2.75 crore within a span of less than two months.

But what happened in the

2021 Assembly election remains a big mystery. More than 2.75 crore voters cast their votes (75.6 per cent of the total voters). The LDF polled more than one crore votes (1 crore 5 lakh votes) while the UDF was relegated to the second position with 81 lakh votes. This means that while the CPI(M)-led front polled 45.43 per cent votes, the Congress and its partners had to remain content with 39.47 per cent votes.

VD Satheeshan, Leader of the Opposition, said after the results were announced that there were anomalies and abnormalities in the 2021 Assembly election and he would take it up with the Election Commission of India. "Situation in Kerala remained the same between 2019 and 2021 with massive corruption and nepotism by CPI (M) leadership. Though a section of the CPI(M) leadership claims that the

free ration kit bags issued by the LDF Government turned the tide in favour of the party, this reasoning is far off the mark," said Mohammed Shiyaz, senior Congress leader. Told The Pioneer, The CPI(M) had allowed "guest workers", (party tag for migrant and illegal labors from north east and Bangladesh) to cast their votes. All these workers had landed in Kerala with fake aadhar cards and identity cards issued by the Government of West Bengal, according to Kurian Abraham, a Congress leader from Pambadi.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is spearheading the campaign against CAA has declared from all platforms that the State would not allow the legislation in Kerala. It is for the ECI to probe and identify the illegal voters in the rolls," said a former police chief of Kerala.

Delhi Minister Gahlot grilled...

From Page 1

The ED has mentioned Gahlot's name in its chargesheet and in the context of Nair, the AAP communications in-charge arrested earlier in the case, saying Nair lived in the

Government bungalow allotted to Gahlot, who "ironically" lives in Najafgarh in southwest Delhi.

Describing this practice of allowing the use of a Government residence to someone else by a public servant as a "criminal breach of trust", the ED had said it had asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take action in the matter.

This is the first time that AAP Minister appeared before the ED in the second summon issued to him. Kejriwal did not appear before the ED after the 10th summons issued to him before his arrest. He termed ED's action politically motivated and cited various reasons including election campaigning to avoid the summons. The ED has also alleged in its chargesheet

that Gahlot handled a single SIM number but his IMEI (international mobile equipment identity) was changed thrice. Earlier, the ED alleged that Gahlot repeatedly changed his mobile numbers. Interestingly, this is not the first time that Gehlot has come under the scanner of law agencies.

The I-T department had seized unaccounted jewellery worth Rs. 28 lakhs

from a locker in the name of Gahlot and his wife. The total seizure amounts to Rs. 2 crore of jewellery and cash of Rs. 37 lakhs. The raid was conducted on 25 October 2018. Meanwhile, trouble continues for Kejriwal as a fresh Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Delhi High Court seeking his removal from the post of Chief Minister. The petition, filed by Hindu

Sena President, Vishnu Gupta, says that the situation after Kejriwal's recent arrest by the ED in connection with the money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam constitutes a breach of Constitutional trust mandated by the Constitution. Gupta's petition, however, argues that under Article 164 of the Constitution, a Chief Minister's dismissal is

warranted if they act in a manner that undermines the rule of law or breaches constitutional trust. The crux of the PIL revolves around whether the Governor possesses the discretion to dismiss a Chief Minister in an extraordinary situation such as arrest, given the Constitution's silence on the matter. Delhi BJP president Sachdeva reacted to the summons. "Another Delhi government

Minister has been summoned (by ED) now. The truth will come forth to the public. (Delhi CM) Arvind Kejriwal and his party's corrupt face is now in front of everyone," he said. The ED claimed that AAP leaders received kickbacks worth Rs 100 crore in the excise policy. Kejriwal's name has also been mentioned multiple times in the charge sheets filed by the ED.

ED files first chargesheet in PMLA probe into DJB irregularities

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed its first chargesheet in connection with a money-laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB). The about-8,000-page-long prosecution complaint, that includes 140 operational pages apart from annexures, was filed by the federal agency before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi on March 28, the sources said. The court has listed the matter for April 1 for taking cognisance of the chargesheet,

they said. Four individuals and a company have been named as the accused in the chargesheet -- former DJB chief engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora, contractor Anil Kumar Agarwal, former NBCC general manager D K Mittal, one Tejinder Singh and NKG Infrastructure Limited. The agency has sought prosecution of these accused under the PMLA and informed that it might file supplementary complaints in the future. The ED has alleged that bribe money generated from corruption in a contract issued by the DJB was "passed on" as election funds to the ruling Aam Aadmi Party

(AAP) in Delhi. The agency had also summoned Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for questioning in the case, but he did not depose before it. Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21 in another money-laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the excise policy for the national capital. The agency had raided the premises of Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar, AAP's Rajya Sabha MP and treasurer N D Gupta, former DJB member Shalabh Kumar, chartered accountant Pankaj Mangal and some others as part of the probe in February. An FIR lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI),



which accuses Arora of awarding a DJB contract to NKG Infrastructure Limited for a total cost of Rs 38 crore despite the fact that the company "did not meet" the technical eligibility criteria, is the basis of the ED case. The ED arrested Arora and Agarwal in the case on January 31. NKG Infrastructure Limited bagged the contract by submitting "forged" documents and Arora "was aware of the fact that the company does not meet the technical eligibility", the agency has claimed. An ED statement has alleged that Arora "received" bribe in cash and in bank accounts after awarding

the contract to NKG Infrastructure Limited and "passed on" the money to various people managing the DJB affairs, including "persons connected with the AAP". "Bribe amounts were also passed on as election funds to the AAP," the federal agency has alleged. This is the second case in which the ED has charged the AAP with taking kickbacks. It has alleged that bribe money of Rs 45 crore, out of the total of Rs 100 crore, from the scrapped excise policy of 2021-22 was used by the Kejriwal-led party for campaigning in the Goa Assembly polls.

The agency has said the DJB contract was awarded at "highly-inflated rates", so that the bribes could be collected from the contractors. "As against the contract value of Rs 38 crore, only about Rs 17 crore were spent towards the contract and the remaining amount was siphoned off in the guise of various fake expenses. "Such fake expenses were booked for bribes and election funds," the ED has alleged. Delhi minister Atishi had denied the charges at a press briefing and claimed that the case was another attempt to tarnish the image of the AAP and its leaders.

Man held for burning barricade to make video

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi police has apprehended a man for making a video that involved burning of a road barricade by the police department and led to major traffic jam on a busy road in the national capital's Paschim Vihar area. According to the police on Saturday, "An information regarding severe traffic violation by a modified car (Golden colour) was received through a social media platform-X (formerly twitter) in which a person was seen in a video at main flyover outer ring road, Paschim vihar resulting in blocking the road leading to a heavy traffic jam."



The offender identified as Pradeep Dhaka, aged 25 years, is a YouTube content uploader and had made these videos for the uploading. However, the police said that he had violated traffic rules and damaged government property. He has been arrested after a

video went viral on social media in which some youth were burning a barricade of Delhi Police to make a reel. An FIR in this regard was registered in Nihal Vihar police station on Friday. Attempts to arrest the other accused are underway. While sharing the video on X (formerly Twitter), a user,

while tagging authorities, wrote, "Viral Video of Youth Halting Traffic on Paschim Vihar Flyover has gone viral Whether to call it a money addition or a quest for fame, a youth is seen recklessly performing stunts by stopping cars on a flyover in Paschim Vihar, @DelhiPolice @dtp-traffic @LtGovDelhi

@HMOIndia". The offending vehicle which is a HI-Lander and costs around Rs 20 Lakhs with the name plate HR 26 FB 5112 has been seized. Further, a hefty penalty of Rs. 36,000 was also issued against violation of traffic rules and regulations by traffic police. "Afterwards, the offending

vehicle was impounded u/s 39/112 MV Act, 100.2/177 MV Act, 184MV Act at Police Station Paschim Vihar East," added the police official. The police have also requested all content creators to follow traffic rules and obtain proper permission before shooting such videos. In the recent past, many such incidents of traffic violations have emerged including the video of two girls sitting on the back of the scooty indulging in obscene and celebratory gestures, applying colour on each other, in Noida. There was a boy riding the vehicle, all of the three without helmets. The Noida Police took cognisance of the video and levied a hefty fine of Rs 33,000 on the three youngsters in the video. "Taking cognisance of the above complaint, action has been taken against the concerned vehicle for violation of traffic rules by issuing e-challan (fine ₹33000/-) as per rules," @NoidaPolice said on X.

Country amazed to discover new exposure in corruption stories: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Saturday said here people of the country are amazed to see a new exposure in the corruption stories of Aam Aadmi Party and Congress and today both the parties stand on the same page of corruption sagas of all INDI Alliance partners. He made these claims in the wake of Enforcement Directorate(ED)questioned AAP minister Kailash Gahlot in connection with the liquor scam. Sachdeva said Gahlot's role has come out in liquor scam on one hand and on the other hand a revelation that Congress received around Rs. 626 crores in cash from different companies between 2014 to 2019. He added this has shocked the people. Delhi BJP President said Kailash Gahlot has been a comparatively silent minister and exposure of his role in



liquor scam has shocked Delhiites beyond expression in words and now people believe that entire government and party MLAs are inundated in corruption. Earlier this week we also saw enforcement directorate investigating an MLA Gulab Singh Matiala and some leaders of AAP from Goa too. Sachdeva said people of Delhi are shocked to see Team Kejriwal stoop to lowest ebb seeking political protection from people like MPs Kailash Sibal and Sharad Pawar whom once they cursed as India

Against Corruption activists. Delhi BJP President said on Sunday Delhi's Ramliya Ground will cry when it watches AAP leaders stand with Congress and other INDI alliance leaders whom they cursed in this very Maidan in August 2011 during Anna Hazare's rally. Sachdeva said Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has slapped Aam Aadmi Party in his press conference on Saturday when INDI alliance rally is not for supporting an individual as being reported by media but for alliance's common agenda.

Delhi Police prepares as INDIA Bloc maharally at Ramliya Maidan today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and INDI Alliance have claimed the gathering may reach up to one lakh, at 'Maharally' at Delhi's Ramliya Maidan on Sunday which is the full capacity of ground. The Delhi Police has made elaborate arrangements with checking at every gate and deployment of paramilitary personnel in and around the Ramliya Maidan. Interestingly, the opposition INDI Alliance has termed the rally to "safeguard" the country's interests and democracy. "It is not a person-specific rally. That is why it is called Loktantra Bachao Rally. This is not one party's rally, about 27-28 parties are involved in it. All constituents of the INDIA jandhan will be taking part in the rally," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, addressing a press conference on Saturday. Ramesh said the issues of rising prices, the highest unemployment rate in 45 years, economic disparities,

social polarization and injustice against farmers will be raised by opposition leaders at the rally. His remarks assume significance in view of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders pitching the rally as being specific to protesting against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate. All the MLAs had held outreach programmes in their respective assembly constituencies to ensure maximum participation of people in the rally. Party workers were deputed to mobilise people for the Sunday rally. AAP leaders Gopal Rai and Dilip Pandey on Saturday visited the Ramliya Maidan to take stock of the preparations for the rally. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police has made elaborate arrangements with checking at every gate and deployment of paramilitary personnel in and around the Ramliya Maidan for INDIA bloc's 'Maharally' organised by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on March 31. The Delhi Police has allowed



the rally to take place with certain conditions, including no march, no tractor trolleys, and no weapons in central Delhi, they said. Although the rally is allowed, Section 144 will remain imposed at the DDU Marg, where the offices of political parties are located, an officer said. No march will be allowed around the Ramliya Maidan, he said, adding that strict action will be taken if any violations take place.

"We have made elaborate security arrangements so that the general public doesn't face any inconvenience due to the rally," a senior police officer said. The traffic police will also remain deployed to regulate the traffic and parkings near the ground, he said. Sources said about a dozen companies of paramilitary personnel will be deployed around the Ramliya Maidan and other parts of central Delhi, including DDU Marg. The administration has allowed

20,000 people to come for the rally, but police expects it to exceed 30,000. The officer said seven gates have been prepared for entry and exit at the Ramliya Maidan. "Among these seven, one is for VIPs and another for the media," officer said. Every visitor will be checked with door frame metal detectors and hand-held machines at the entry gates, he said. The Delhi Police has also installed CCTV cameras and set up a control room centre from where they could watch the activities at the Ramliya Maidan. Police said the organisers have made the sitting arrangements for visitors. The facilities for drinking water and washrooms will be provided at the ground, officials said. Rameshsaid party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi will address the rally, among other senior leaders. Ramesh said the likes of Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren, NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar,

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja, National Conference leader Feroz Khan Noon, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti, Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav, DMK's Tiruchi Siva, TMC's Derek O'Brien, among others, will participate in the rally. The Congress leader said the INDIA bloc sounded its Lok Sabha poll bugle in Mumbai on March 17 and the rally would be its second poll bugle. He said it will also send out a message of solidarity and unity among the bloc. Speaking at the presser, AICC in-charge of Delhi Deepak Babaria said that the rally will have maximum participation and convey a message for saving the democracy and Constitution. Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, who also addressed the press conference, said the rally will mark the beginning of the decisive and final political assault on the BJP from the people of the country.

Traffic advisory issued

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has issued a traffic advisory in view of the opposition INDIA bloc's 'Loktantra Bachao Rally' on Sunday and said movement of vehicles in the city will be regulated for six hours on that day. Top INDIA bloc leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav will attend the rally at the Ramleela ground on March 31. It is being held in the backdrop of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest. According to the traffic advisory, traffic movement will be regulated and may be restricted on Ranjeet Singh Flyover from Barakhamba Road to Guru Nanak Chowk, Vivekanand Marg from Minto Road to roundabout Kamla Market, Hamdard Chowk, JLN Marg from Delhi Gate to Guru

Nanak Chowk and Ajmeri Gate, round about Kamla Market to Guru Nanak Chowk and Chaman Lal Marg near VIP Gate, Guru Nanak Chowk to Turkman Gate from 9 am to 3 pm. Traffic diversion may be imposed on Rajghat Chowk, Minto Road, DDU Marg, Mirdard Chowk, Paharganj Chowk, A-Point, and Delhi Gate from 9 am onwards, it stated, adding that traffic regulations and diversion will be reviewed according to the requirement and update will be issued accordingly. The commuters are requested to cooperate by avoiding or bypassing the roads, if possible, and by making maximum use of public transport, especially metro services, it said. People going towards ISBT, railway station or airport have been advised to carefully plan their travel with sufficient time at hand.

AAP questions TDP move to field liquor scam case approver father as LS candidate

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday questioned BJP ally TDP's move to field the father of Raghav Manguta Reddy -- who turned approver in the Delhi liquor policy case -- as its Lok Sabha candidate. AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party will campaign for a man who is a key witness against Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. Addressing presspersons, Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj charged Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, father of one of the accused in excise policy case Raghav Manguta Reddy, is TDP's candidate from Ongole Lok Sabha seat. "I challenge the ED if it is an independent agency to bring in record this connection and probe it," Atishi said and alleged that the so-called 'South Lobby' of liquor traders. Atishi charged the South Lobby of businessmen had direct connections with the BJP. She alleged Sarath Reddy,



another witness in the liquor policy case has donated Rs 60 crore to BJP through electoral bonds. "Sarath Reddy donates Rs 60 crore to BJP through electoral bonds. Meanwhile, father-son duo M. Srinivasulu Reddy and Raghav Magunta join BJP's ally TDP And M. Srinivasulu Reddy gets the Lok Sabha ticket," she charged. Atishi alleged that the ED had been "torturing" the witnesses till it got statements from them against Kejriwal. Bharadwaj said Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, a former MP of YSR Congress Party joined TDP last year and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will now be campaigning for a key witness against Kejriwal in the liquor policy case.

"Earlier, another witness against Kejriwal in the excise policy case, Sarath Reddy, had paid Rs 55 crore to the BJP through electoral bonds which proves the party has connection with the 'South Lobby'," Atishi further alleged. She charged that the ED had been "torturing" the witnesses till it got statements from them against Kejriwal. Referring to the questioning of Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot by the ED in the excise policy case, she said, "They may summon me, Bharadwaj and other AAP leaders and arrest us but we are not scared of going to jail." She said Kejriwal's arrest was an "assault on democracy" in the country and the whole of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc opposed it. Kejriwal was arrested on the basis of four statements including by the Maguntas, the AAP leaders claimed. The Delhi chief minister was arrested on March 21 in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case being probed by the ED.

Case filed against Elvish, Fazilpuria for using rare snakes in music videos

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following a Gurugram court order, Bigg Boss OTT 2 winner Elvish Yadav and singer Rahul Yadav, known as Fazilpuria, have found themselves embroiled in additional legal trouble with the district police registering a case against them for allegedly featuring rare species of snakes in their music videos. This development stems from a complaint filed by Saurabh Gupta of People for Animals (PFA), who accused the duo of using snakes without proper permissions and thereby violating animal welfare laws. Earlier on Thursday, the court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Manoj Kumar Rana had ordered a case against Yadav and Fazilpuria. The case has been registered against the duo under various sections including the Cruelty to Animals Act, and Section 294 of the IPC at the Badshahpur police station. "Based on the court order, a case was registered against Elvish Yadav and Rahul Yadav

on Saturday. However, both of them have not been arrested. Further proceedings are underway," Satish Deshwal, station house officer (SHO) of Badshahpur police station told a news agency. Meanwhile, the next hearing into the matter has been fixed for April 10. On this date, the Badshahpur Police Station team will submit the compliance report in this case to the court. A complaint filed by Gupta, People for Animals (PFA) member, in November last year demanded that an FIR be registered against Elvish Yadav and Rahul Yadav, alias Fazilpuria, alleging that they had illegally used rare species of snakes in their music videos. He alleged that they had not obtained permission from the Animal Welfare Board, the district administration, or the Forest Department to shoot the videos. Gupta had also filed an application with the court, stating that he has been receiving threats from wildlife smuggling gangs.

Capital witnesses deviation in normal temperature in 24 hours

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two days after experiencing its highest temperature of the year, reaching 37 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, the national capital witnessed a slight deviation in normal temperatures in the last 24 hours, with the maximum temperature reaching 35.2°C, which is 3°C above the usual departure. Conversely, the minimum temperature was recorded at 21.8°C, indicating a departure of +4°C from the typical minimum. However, despite these temperature variations, there was only a trace of rainfall recorded during this period, suggesting dry weather conditions. The weatherman said that humidity levels fluctuated throughout the day, with the maximum humidity reaching 90% at some point, indicating relatively high moisture content in the air. On the other hand, the minimum humidity dropped to 39% during the same period, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The weather observations for various stations indicate a relatively warm day with maximum temperatures ranging



from 34.1°C to 36.6°C. Palam recorded a maximum temperature of 35.4°C, while Najafgarh experienced the highest maximum temperature at 36.6°C. The minimum temperatures ranged from 20.2°C to 26.9°C, with Ridge recording the lowest minimum temperature at 20.2°C and the Sports Complex registering the highest at 26.9°C. In terms of rainfall, most stations recorded minimal precipitation, with only Ayanagar reporting a slight rainfall of 0.5 mm in the morning while other stations either had trace amounts of rainfall or none at all during the observed period, as per the analysis of the data available from the IMD. Overall, the weather remained

warm and dry across the observed stations, with some variability in temperature and negligible rainfall. The weather office has forecast a partly cloudy sky with gusty winds on Sunday. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to hover around 35 and 20 degrees Celsius, it said. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in the national capital was recorded in the "moderate" category with a reading of 182 at 6 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

Zelenskyy fires more aides in reshuffle

AP ■ KYIV
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed a longtime aide and several advisers on Saturday in a continuing reshuffle while Russia unleashed fresh attacks overnight. Zelenskyy dismissed top aide Serhiy Shefir from his post of first assistant, where he had served since 2019. The

Ukrainian president also let go three advisers, and two presidential representatives overseeing volunteer activities and soldiers' rights. No explanation was given immediately for the latest changes in a wide-reaching personnel shakeup over recent months. It included the dismissal on Tuesday of Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defence

Council, and Valerii Zaluzhnyi as head of the armed forces on February 8. He was appointed Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom earlier this month. Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia launched 12 Shahed drones overnight, nine of which were shot down, and fired four missiles into eastern Ukraine. Russia unleashed a barrage of 38 missiles, 75 airstrikes and

98 attacks from multiple rocket launchers over the last 24 hours, Ukraine's armed forces said in social media posts. Ukrainian energy company Centrengo announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest thermal power plants in the eastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in

place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 people had lost electricity after the plant was hit on March 22. Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days, causing significant damage in several regions. Officials in the Poltava region said Saturday there had been "several hits" to an infrastructure facility, without specifying whether it

was an energy facility. Meanwhile, the toll of Friday's mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across Ukraine came to light on Saturday, with local officials in the Kherson region on Saturday morning announcing the death of one civilian. A resident of the Dnipropetrovsk region died in a hospital from shell wounds, according to regional Gov. Serhiy Lisak.

China assures Lanka PM of easing debt burden

PTI ■ BEIJING

China will play a "positive role" in easing the financial difficulties of cash-strapped Sri Lanka and its bid to achieve "debt sustainability" while Colombo will accelerate the formulation of a BRI cooperation plan to advance Beijing's projects in the island nation, a joint statement said on Saturday. As Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena wrapped up his official weeklong visit to China, the joint statement brought out the highlights of the agreements discussed during his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang besides attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. "The Chinese side expresses its readiness to continue supporting its financial institution in actively consulting with Sri Lanka, maintain friendly communication with other creditors, and play a positive role in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help Sri Lanka ease its financial difficulties and achieve debt sustainability," the joint statement said. During Gunawardena's visit, both countries agreed to work together to deepen high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, accelerate the formulation of a Belt and Road cooperation plan,

and make all-out efforts to advance the Colombo Port City project and the integrated development project of Hambantota Port as signature projects of Belt and Road cooperation between the two countries, the joint statement said. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's ambitious multi-country varied infrastructure project. According to the joint statement, Sri Lanka has agreed to accelerate the formulation of a BRI cooperation plan notwithstanding criticism of their financial viability. China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender owning 52 per cent of the USD 40 billion external debt when Sri Lanka announced its first sovereign default in 2022. Seventeen countries that had extended loans to Sri Lanka formed a committee last year to discuss steps for debt restructuring negotiations but China preferred to take part only as an observer. The development comes days after the IMF, which concluded its second review of the USD 2.9 billion bailout with Sri Lanka earlier this month, said reaching an agreement with the country's commercial creditors, the international bondholders and China Development Bank was the key to achieving debt sustainability.

Hostages held in Dutch nightclub, cops detain man who walked out

AP ■ EDE (NETHERLANDS)

Dutch police detained a man on Saturday after he left a nightclub where hostages had been held, apparently bringing a peaceful end to a tense, hours-long standoff. "The last hostage has just been released. One person was arrested. We cannot give more information at the moment," police said in a message on X, formerly Twitter. The man walked out of the club and was ordered by armed police to kneel with his hands on his head. He was then handcuffed before being led into a waiting police car. Earlier, three young hostages left the Cafe Pettecoot in the central town of Ede. A fourth person was released shortly before the suspect was arrested. Heavily armed police and spe-

cial arrest teams, some wearing masks, had gathered outside the popular club. Some 150 nearby homes were evacuated. It was not clear what the motive was for the hostage-taking. Police said earlier in a message on X that "at the moment there is no indication of a terrorist motive." Before the latest developments, Ede Mayor René Verhulst called the standoff a "terrible situation for all these people. My concern and thoughts go out to them and their loved ones. I hope that the situation is now resolved quickly and safely." Ede is a rural market town 85 kilometers (53 miles) southeast of Amsterdam. The municipality said that all shops in the center of the town would remain closed while the situation continued. Trains to and from the town's station also were halted.



Moscow (AP): Foreign diplomats in Russia laid flowers on Saturday at the site of last week's attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that killed 144 people. Those in attendance included ambassadors from the United States, EU countries, Africa and Latin America. Russian state news agency RIA Novosti noted that the "around 130

diplomatic missions" taking part included representatives of "unfriendly states". Since the attack, thousands of people have brought bunches of flowers, wreaths and other tokens such as teddy bears, creating a makeshift memorial at the Crocus City Hall. Russian state news agency Tass reported Saturday that the number of peo-

ple wounded in the attack was 551, quoting figures from the Moscow regional department of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry. Previous figures have been much lower and it did not explain the discrepancy. The death toll rose to 144 on Friday when a severely injured victim died in a hospital.

Pak keen for better ties with Russia

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said Pakistan wants to enhance bilateral cooperation with Russia in energy, trade and investment, among other areas. Prime Minister Sharif, during a meeting with the Ambassador of the Russian Federation Albert P. Khorev, also urged the Russian side to send a delegation to Pakistan to hold discussions with their counterparts to identify ways to enhance the existing level of trade and investment ties between the two countries. Sharif also stressed the need for early convening of the 9th session of the Russia-Pakistan Inter-governmental Commission (IGC), due to be hosted by Russia later this year, state-owned news agency Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said, quoting a statement from the PM Office Media Wing. The Russian ambassador assured the prime minister that Russia wanted to build stronger ties with Pakistan and said that, in addition to energy, trade and investment, Russia was also keen to

enhance cooperation in education and culture, the APP said. Later, the Russian Embassy in Pakistan posted on its X handle: "The sides discussed in detail the political, trade and economic aspects of Russia-Pakistan cooperation, as well as exchanged views on international and regional agenda issues of mutual interest." Meanwhile, during the meeting with Khorev, who called on him, Sharif expressed deep condolences on the loss of precious lives in the Crocus City Hall attack outside Moscow last week and said Pakistan stood in solidarity with Russia at this tragic hour. He also thanked President Vladimir Putin for the congratulatory message sent to him on his re-election. Sharif fondly recalled their (Sharif-Putin) meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Samarkand in 2022 and reiterated his invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his earliest convenience, the APP report added.

Ships with second round of aid for Gaza leaves Cyprus

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A three-ship convoy left a port in Cyprus on Saturday with 400 tonnes of food and other supplies for Gaza as concerns about hunger in the territory soar. World Central Kitchen said the vessels and a barge were carrying ready-to-eat items like rice, pasta, flour, legumes, canned vegetables and proteins that were enough to prepare more than 1 million meals. Also on board were dates, which are traditionally eaten to break the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan. An Open Arms ship inaugurated the direct sea route to the Palestinian territory earlier this month with 200 tonnes of food, water and other aid. The United Nations and partners have warned that famine could occur in devastated, largely isolated northern Gaza as early as this month. Humanitarian officials say deliveries by sea and air are not enough and that Israel must allow far more aid by road. The top UN court has ordered Israel to open more land crossings and take other measures to address the humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, the United States welcomed the formation of a new Palestinian autonomy government, signalling it is accepting the revised Cabinet lineup

as a step toward political reform. The Biden administration has called for "revitalising" the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority in the hope that it can also administer the Gaza Strip once the Israel-Hamas war ends. It is headed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who tapped US-educated economist Mohammad Mustafa as prime minister earlier this month. But both Israel and Hamas — which drove Abbas' security forces from Gaza in a 2007 takeover — reject the idea of it administering Gaza, and Hamas rejects the formation of the new Palestinian government as illegitimate. The authority also has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians because of its security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank. The war began after Hamas-led militants stormed across southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 others hostage. More than 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank or east Jerusalem since Oct. 7, according to local health authorities. Dr. Fawaz Hamad, director of Al-Razi Hospital in Jenin, told local station Awda TV that Israeli forces killed a

13-year-old boy in nearby Qabatiya early Saturday. Israel's military said the incident was under review. A major challenge for anyone administering Gaza will be reconstruction. Nearly six months of war has destroyed critical infrastructure including hospitals, schools and homes as well as roads, sewage systems and the electrical grid. Airstrikes and Israel's ground offensive have left 32,705 Palestinians dead, local health authorities said Saturday, with 82 bodies taken to hospitals in the past 24 hours. Gaza's Health Ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its toll but has said the majority of those killed have been women and children. Israel says over one-third of the dead are militants, though it has not provided evidence to support that, and it blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in residential areas. The fighting has displaced over 80 per cent of Gaza's population and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine, the UN and international aid agencies say. Israel's military said it continued to strike dozens of targets in Gaza, days after the United Nations Security Council issued its first demand for a cease-fire.

US welcomes new Palestinian govt

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The United States has welcomed the formation of a new Palestinian autonomy government, signalling it is accepting the revised Cabinet lineup as a step toward Palestinian political reform. The Biden administration has called for "revitalizing" the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority in hopes that it can also administer the Gaza Strip once the Israel-Hamas war ends. The war erupted nearly six months ago, triggered by an October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. In a statement late Friday, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the United States looks forward to working with the new group of ministers "to deliver on credible reforms." "A revitalized PA is essential to delivering results for the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and Gaza and establishing the conditions for stability in the broader region," Miller said. The Palestinian Authority administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It is headed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has not faced an election in almost two decades. The United States sees the Palestinian Authority as a key part of its preferred plans for

post-war Gaza. But the authority has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians, with many viewing it as a subcontractor of the occupation because of its security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank. Earlier this month, Abbas tapped Mohammad Mustafa, a US-educated economist, as prime minister. On Thursday, Mustafa named his new lineup. It includes relatively unknown technocrats, but also Abbas' interior minister and several members of the secular Fatah movement he leads. Several of the ministers are from Gaza, but it's not clear if they are currently living there. The Islamic militant group Hamas, a rival of Abbas, drove his security forces from Gaza in a 2007 takeover. The United States wants a reformed Palestinian Authority to return and administer Gaza, an idea that has been rejected by both Israel and Hamas. A major challenge for the Palestinian Authority, should it be given a role in administering Gaza, will be reconstruction. Nearly six months of war has destroyed critical infrastructure including hospitals, schools and homes as well as roads, sewage systems and the electrical grid. Airstrikes and Israel's ground offensive have left more than 32,000 Palestinians dead, according to local health authorities.

Brazil's apex court rejects Bolsonaro's request for passport

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil's Supreme Court has denied a request by former president Jair Bolsonaro's lawyers that his passport be returned to him so that he can travel to Israel, according to an official document released here. Bolsonaro's lawyers said in a statement on Thursday that Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had invited Bolsonaro to an event in May, and requested the Supreme Court to restore his passport. "It is absolutely premature to remove the restriction imposed on the investigated person," Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes wrote in his decision, which was in line with a recommendation from the prosecutor general's office cited by Moraes. Bolsonaro's passport was taken, precisely, to prevent him from leaving the country, given "the danger to the development of criminal investigations and the possible application of criminal law," the prosecutor general's office said earlier in its opinion. Federal Police seized Bolsonaro's passport in February during a raid related to an investigation into whether he and top aides plotted to ignore the 2022 election results and stage an uprising to keep the defeated leader in power.

At collapsed Baltimore bridge, focus on removing structure

AP ■ BALTIMORE (US)

Teams of engineers are now focused on the formidable job of hauling the shattered remains of the Francis Scott Key Bridge out of Maryland's Patapsco River, the first step toward reopening the Port of Baltimore and recovering the bodies of four workers who are still missing and presumed dead. A massive cargo ship felled the span Tuesday after striking one of its main supports. Experts are trying to figure out how to "break that bridge up into the right-sized pieces that we can lift," US Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said Friday at a news conference. The tools that are needed have been coming into place. They include seven floating cranes — one of which is one of the largest on the Eastern Seaboard, capable of lifting 1,000 tons — 10 tugboats, nine barges, eight salvage vessels and five Coast Guard boats.

"To go out there and see it up close, you realize just how daunting a task this is," Gov. Wes Moore said Friday afternoon as the massive crane loomed behind him. "With a salvage operation this complex — and frankly with a salvation operation this unprecedented — you need to plan for every single moment," Moore added. Moore surveyed the scene and saw shipping containers ripped apart "like papier-mache." The broken pieces of the bridge, including its steel trusses, weigh as much as 4,000 tons. The wreckage has blocked ships from entering or leaving the vital port and also stymied the search for the missing workers. "We have to bring a sense of closure to these families," Moore said. Moore also spoke of the disaster's severe economic impact, saying, "What we're talking about today is not just about Maryland's economy; this is about the nation's economy."



The port handles more cars and more farm equipment than any other port in this country," Maryland's Department of Transportation is already planning for rebuilding of the span and "considering innovative design, engineering and building methods so that we can quickly deliver this project," Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld said. Adam Ortiz, the Environmental Protection Agency's mid-Atlantic Regional

Administrator, said there was no indication in the water of active releases from the ship or materials hazardous to human health. Col. Roland L. Butler Jr., superintendent of the Maryland State Police, said the Federal Aviation Administration has been asked to establish a flight restriction area that would begin 3 nautical miles in every direction from the bridge's center span and extend upward to 1,500 feet.

Butler advised people to keep drones away and said law enforcement is poised to act on any violations of that airspace. The victims, members of a crew fixing potholes on the span when it was destroyed, were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, officials said. At least eight people initially went into the water when the ship struck the bridge column, and two of them were rescued. Divers then recovered the bodies of two men from a pickup truck in the river, but the nature and placement of the debris has complicated efforts to find the other four workers, as have the murky water conditions. "The divers can put their hands on that faceplate, and they can't even see their hands," said Donald Gibbons, an instructor with Eastern Atlantic States Carpenters Technical Centers. "So we say zero visibility. It's very similar to locking yourself in a dark closet on a dark night and really not being able to see

anything." Baltimoreans made morning stops at vantage points Friday to watch for the cranes. Among them was Ronald Hawkins, 71, who used to be able to see the bridge from his home and recalled watching its construction in the 1970s. "I'm going to come up here every day, because I want to see the bridge coming up out of the water," Hawkins said. "It's a hurtin' thing." President Joe Biden's administration has approved \$60 million in immediate aid, and Biden has said the federal government will pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge, which was completed in 1977 and carried Interstate 695. Ship traffic at the Port of Baltimore remains suspended, but the Maryland Port Administration said in a statement Friday that trucks were still being processed at marine terminals. Federal and state officials have said the collision and collapse appeared to be an accident.

PIA suspends crew member after being detained in Canada

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's ailing flag carrier PIA has suspended a crew member after she was briefly detained by Canadian customs authorities' inquiry report. The spokesman said the three female crew members freed by the Canadian customs authorities after investigation would return to Pakistan on Saturday. Last month, PIA crew member Maryam Raza, who was on duty, slipped away after landing in Canada. According to the PIA, at least eight flight attendants disappeared over the last year and a half. They have abandoned their jobs and are believed to have sought asylum in Canada, a spokesperson for the government-owned airline told Canada's CTV News. PIA spokesman Khan said at least eight flight attendants "have gone missing" after flying to Pearson International Airport in Toronto. He said these incidents have been happening over the last 10 years, but are now occurring more frequently. "Since probably October of 2022, the number of the people that have opted for asylum has increased tremendously," Khan said in an interview with CTV News from Karachi, where the airline is based.

case. He said the suspended crew member would face further departmental and legal action in light of the Canadian authorities' inquiry report. The spokesman said the three female crew members freed by the Canadian customs authorities after investigation would return to Pakistan on Saturday. Last month, PIA crew member Maryam Raza, who was on duty, slipped away after landing in Canada. According to the PIA, at least eight flight attendants disappeared over the last year and a half. They have abandoned their jobs and are believed to have sought asylum in Canada, a spokesperson for the government-owned airline told Canada's CTV News. PIA spokesman Khan said at least eight flight attendants "have gone missing" after flying to Pearson International Airport in Toronto. He said these incidents have been happening over the last 10 years, but are now occurring more frequently. "Since probably October of 2022, the number of the people that have opted for asylum has increased tremendously," Khan said in an interview with CTV News from Karachi, where the airline is based.

Office space net leasing up 44 per cent in top 8 cities: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Net leasing of office space rose 44 per cent annually in this quarter across eight major cities on higher demand from corporates for expansion of their businesses, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

According to data released on Saturday by real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield (C&W) India, the net leasing of office space stood at 115.14 lakh (11.5 million) square feet (sq ft) during January-March as against 80.09 lakh (8 million) sq ft in the year-ago period.

"This is the third-highest level recorded in the last five years, demonstrating a robust appetite for office space among businesses," the consultant highlighted.

Net absorption or leasing rose in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR and Chennai but fell in Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

"The Indian office market is experiencing a robust momentum. We haven't witnessed 20 million square feet of gross leasing being recorded for two consecutive quarters in recent history.

"This strong performance may signal a shift and has the potential to become the new standard for the Indian market," Anshul Jain, Chief Executive, India & Southeast Asia and Head of Asia Pacific Tenant Representation at C&W, said.

Gross leasing of office space across eight cities rose 33 per cent to 201.31 lakh (20.13 million) sq ft in January-March from 151.57 lakh sq ft in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The strong leasing signifies a surge in tenant interest in office space, he added.

"As witnessed in the previous quarters, the impressive surge in office demand is primarily driven by fresh leasing. We are confident that a balanced



supply pipeline and continued tenant demand will propel further growth in the Indian office market," Jain said.

Among cities, Mumbai witnessed a more than three-fold jump in net office leasing to 24,69,912 sq ft from 7,23,735 sq ft. In Bengaluru, the net absorption of office space jumped more than two times to 35,98,732 sq ft from 15,65,599 sq ft.

Net office space leasing in Chennai surged 77 per cent to 8,75,783 sq ft from 4,95,886 sq ft.

Delhi-NCR saw a modest growth of 18 per cent in net leasing to 14,51,214 sq ft from 12,34,254 sq ft.

However, the demand for net leasing fell in Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

In Kolkata, the net leasing fell 82 per cent to 1 lakh sq ft from

5.51 lakh sq ft.

Ahmedabad saw a 53 per cent fall in net leasing to 1,08,551 sq ft from 2,32,733 sq ft.

In Pune, the net office leasing fell 17 per cent to 13,04,107 sq ft from 15,65,754 sq ft.

The net office space leasing in Hyderabad declined marginally by 2 per cent to 16,05,953 sq ft during January-March 2024 from 16,40,242 sq ft in the year-ago period.

Gross leasing of office space

means all leasing activity in the market, including renewals of contracted term by corporates.

Net absorption or leasing means new space occupied, adjusted for exits, if any.

Nikhil Madan, co-founder of coworking operator The Office Pass, said, "Similar to the previous quarters, we continued witnessing the robust demand for our flex space solutions in Q1 of 2024 as well."

As more and more companies pushing for work from office or hybrid working for their employees, the enquiries for spaces are constantly on rise, he said.

"Owing to this strong demand, we added two more coworking offices at Golf Course Road, Gurugram in this quarter and looking to add another 25,000-30,000 sq ft in couple of months to remain the front-runner in the highest number of coworking offices in Delhi NCR," Madan said.



India forex reserves hit fresh peak of USD 642.63 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves increased by USD 140 million to touch its all-time high of USD 642.63 billion during the week ended March 22, the Reserve Bank said.

This is the fifth consecutive week of a jump in the overall reserves. The kitty had increased by USD 6.396 billion to USD 642.492 billion in the previous reporting week.

The previous peak level was recorded in September 2021 when the country's foreign exchange reserves reached USD 642.453 billion.

The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended March 22,

the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 123 million to USD 568.264 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 347 million to USD 51.487 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 57 million to USD 18.219 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 27 million to USD 4.662 billion in the reporting week, the RBI data showed.

Unsold homes in nine cities down seven per cent in last three months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unsold housing inventories fell 7 per cent in the last three months across 9 major cities to around 4.81 lakh units on higher sales than new supply, according to PropEquity.

Real estate data analytic firm PropEquity data showed that unsold housing stock has come down to 4,81,566 units at the end of March this year from 5,18,868 units at the end of December 2023 across 9 major cities.

These cities are Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Delhi-NCR (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and Faridabad), Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata.

PropEquity founder and Managing Director (MD) Samir Jasuja said the unsold housing stocks have declined as "sales are surpassing the new launches which is a positive indicator for the market".

During January-March period of 2024, housing sales across 9 major cities stood at 1,44,656 units while the new launches were 1,05,134 units. This led to a reduction in the unsold stocks.

As per the data, Pune saw the



maximum 13 per cent fall in the unsold housing stocks to 65,788 units at the end of this month from 75,521 units at the end of December 2023.

In Delhi-NCR, the unsold inventories have come down 12 per cent to 27,959 units from 31,602 units.

According to PropEquity, the unsold stock in Mumbai fell 11 per cent to 48,399 units from 54,633 units.

In Navi Mumbai, the unsold inventories declined 11 per cent to 33,385 units from 37,597 units.

Thane witnessed a fall of 5 per cent in unsold housing stocks to 1,06,565 units from 1,12,397 units.

Unsold housing stocks in Bengaluru have come down 5

per cent to 44,837 units from 47,370 units.

Hyderabad witnessed a 4 per cent fall in unsold stocks to 1,10,425 units from 1,14,861 units.

In Kolkata, the fall in unsold housing stocks was 2 per cent to 23,249 units from 23,745 units.

As per the data, Chennai market witnessed a marginal decline of 1 per cent in unsold homes to 20,959 units this quarter from 21,142 units at the end of December last year.

P E Analytics owns and operates PropEquity, which is an online real estate data and analytics platform covering over 1,50,000 projects of 45,000 developers across 44 cities.

Assam: Two days petrol pump strike deferred

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The petrol pump strike in parts of Assam, scheduled to begin on Saturday morning, was deferred, a leader of their association said.

The North East India Petroleum Dealers' Association (Greater Guwahati Unit) had called for

'no purchase no sale' from 5 am on Saturday till 5 am on Monday over a host of demands.

Among their demands was the revision of the dealers' commission, which has been pending since 2017.

"Following the intervention of the government, we have decided to defer the strike. In

the meantime, we will hold further talks with the oil companies on resolving our issues," the leader said.

The announcement came hours after the state government brought petroleum dealers and retailers under the Essential Services Maintenance (Assam) Act or ESMA, which prohibits strikes.



Jaiprakash Associates plans to restructure bonds worth USD 120 million

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Crisis-hit Jaiprakash Associates, which is into cement and construction businesses, on Saturday said around 92 per cent of bondholders have given consent for restructuring of foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCBs) worth USD 120 million, which were issued by the company and due for payments in 2020 and 2021.

In February, the debt-ridden company had announced plans to restructure these bonds.

On February 27, Jaiprakash Associates informed that the company has executed a non-binding term sheet and related access agreement with the company.

So far, the company said it has executed the non-binding term sheet and related access agreements with (i) 93.99 per cent of holders (by principal value outstanding) of the Series A Bonds and (ii) about 91.67 per cent of holders (by principal value outstanding) of the Series B Bonds.

Cumulatively, 92.57 per cent of the collective holders of the Series A Bonds and the Series B Bonds have given their consent.

The bonds restructuring is proposed to be implemented through a process, which involves passing of the necessary resolutions by the relevant bondholders and undertaking the relevant amendments to the existing trust deed related to these bonds.

"The bonds restructuring will be subject to various approvals, including the approval of the shareholders of the company, the Reserve Bank of India and other legal and statutory authorities (if required as per applicable law)," Jaiprakash Associates said.

For the last few years, the company has been selling its cement plants to reduce its huge debt.

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OpenAI reveals Voice Engine, but will not yet publicly release risky AI voice cloning technology

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI is getting into the voice assistant business and showing off new technology that can clone a person's voice, but says it won't yet release it publicly due to safety concerns.

The artificial intelligence company unveiled its new Voice Engine technology Friday, just over a week after filing a trademark application for the name. The company claims that it can recreate a person's voice with just 15 seconds of recording of that person talking.

OpenAI says it plans to preview it with early testers "but not widely release this technology at this time"

because of the dangers of misuse.

"We recognise that generating speech that resembles people's voices has serious risks, which are especially top of mind in an election year," the San Francisco company said in a statement.

In New Hampshire, authorities are investigating robocalls sent to thousands of voters just before the presidential primary that featured an AI-generated voice mimicking President Joe Biden.

A number of startup companies already sell voice-cloning technology, some of which is accessible to the public or for select business customers such as entertainment studios.



OpenAI says early Voice Engine testers have agreed to not impersonate a person without their consent and to disclose that the voices are AI-generated. The company, best known for its chatbot and the image-generator DALL-E, took a similar approach in announcing but not widely releasing its video-generator Sora.

However a trademark application filed on March 19 shows that OpenAI likely aims to get into the business of speech recognition and digital voice assistant. Eventually, improving such technology could help OpenAI compete with the likes of other voice products such as Amazon's Alexa.

IndiGo announces direct flights between Abu Dhabi and Kerala Kannur

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leading airline IndiGo has announced new direct flights between Abu Dhabi and north Kerala district Kannur from May 9.

Extending its international presence, the airline will operate daily non-stop flights from the coastal city of the southern state to the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the airline said in a release on Friday.

Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo said with the addition of these flights, the airline will operate 56 weekly flights to Abu Dhabi from 8 cities in India, promoting travel, trade, and tourism between the two countries.

With these new flights to the UAE from Kannur, passengers have more travel options during the upcoming summer vacations, it said.

Furthermore, this direct connectivity also offers customers from Abu Dhabi the opportunity to explore the panoramic small city of Kannur, famous for its vibrant beaches, rich historical monuments, exquisite handloom works and the colourful Theyyam art form, the release added.



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Sri Lanka, India to review bilateral projects for timely implementation

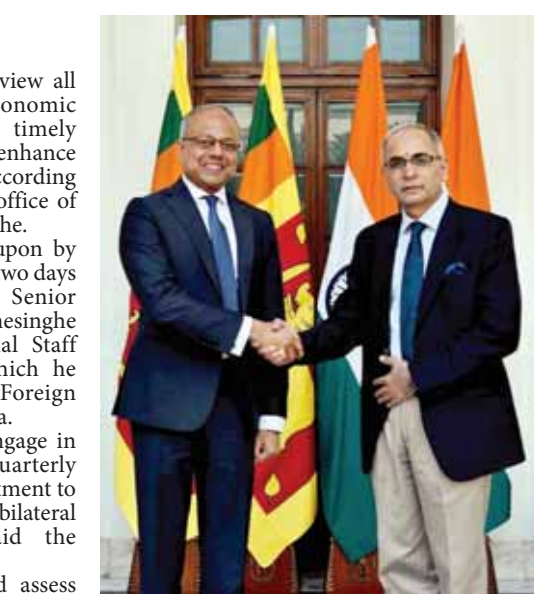
PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka and India will review all the existing bilateral economic projects to ensure their timely implementation in a bid to enhance the bilateral economic ties, according to a statement issued by the office of President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The joint move was agreed upon by the two neighbouring nations two days after the visit to India by Senior Advisor to President Wickremesinghe and the Chief of Presidential Staff Sagala Ratnayaka during which he held discussions with Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra.

"It was mutually agreed to engage in this review process on a quarterly basis, demonstrating a commitment to ensuring effective progress in bilateral economic cooperation," said the statement.

The aim was to discuss and assess



bilateral economic connectivity projects between Sri Lanka and India.

Foreign Secretary Kwatra extended a warm welcome to Sagala Ratnayaka, acknowledging the positive momentum in Sri Lanka's economic growth. He emphasised that the current juncture presents an opportune moment for both countries to advance agreed-upon projects, attributing this progress to the strategic vision of President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the statement said.

The discussions underscored the shared commitment of Sri Lanka and India to strengthen the partnership and foster greater economic collaboration.

With both nations poised to capitalise on emerging opportunities, the discussions in New Delhi marked a significant step forward in deepening bilateral ties and advancing mutual interests, the statement said.



JSW Steel commissions hot strip mill with 5 million tonnes capacity

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JSW Steel on Saturday announced commissioning of a hot strip mill at its integrated steel plant in Vijayanagar, Karnataka.

The company has also made first dispatch of steel products from the mill having an annual capacity of 5 million tonnes (MT). JSW Steel said in an exchange filing.

"JSW Vijayanagar Metallica Ltd (JVML), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company, today successfully commissioned its hot strip mill (HSM) at Vijayanagar plant with a capacity of 5 MTPA and has made its first dispatch," the company said.

The HSM facility has the capability of manufacturing plates and coils and is equipped with advanced features such as digital reheating furnaces, evaporative cooling system and waste heat recovery system, among others.

The facility was lit-up on March 17, 2024, and after successful completion of trial runs and quality & delivery testing, the commercial manufacturing and sales have commenced, JSW Steel said.

SINNER, DIMITROV ADVANCE TO MIAMI OPEN FINAL

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (US)

Jannik Sinner is starting to dominate. Sinner overwhelmed third-seeded Daniil Medvedev 6-1 6-2 on Friday in the semifinals of the Miami Open to improve to 21-1 this year.

The second-seeded Sinner, rock-solid with his firecracker forehand, became the first man to reach back-to-back Miami Open finals since John Isner did it in 2019. In last year's Miami final, Medvedev prevailed over Sinner at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins.

This time, Medvedev's three games tied his career low for wins in a match. He committed 22 unforced errors.

"I'm happy about this season — who wouldn't be happy?" Sinner said.

"I know the players will get to know me more and study me so I have to be ready."

Sinner, 22, will play in the final Sunday against 11th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov, who beat No. 4 seed Alexander Zverev in the other semifinal after knocking out top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz in the quarterfinals.

Sinner began his revenge against Medvedev for last year's Miami final by beating him in the Australian Open final in

January — rallying from two sets down — and setting the stage for a wonderful 2024 campaign.

Sinner posted his fifth straight win over Medvedev, all in the past 12 months.

"He's serving ten times better," Medvedev said.

"He always served well but now he serves big, big."

This match was a lot easier than Australia in the 80-degree South Florida heat as the Italian jumped to a 5-0 lead at the outset in posting two straight breaks of the Russian's serve. It was over in 69 minutes.

Sinner's opponent in the final, the surging Bulgarian Dimitrov, backed up his upset of Alcaraz by pulling off a win over the German Zverev in a three-setter, 6-4 6-7(4) 6-4.

With fans chanting "Gri-gor, Gri-gor" and several Bulgarian flags waving, the match went on for two hours, 36 minutes.

The victory gave the veteran Dimitrov back-to-back wins over top-5 opponents for the second time in his career.

As such, Dimitrov should surge into the top 10 for the first time since 2018.

"Whatever I say doesn't do it justice," Dimitrov said.

"I fight my own battles. I run my own race. All that comes



with the work we all put in as a team. I'm at a very different path in my life and my career. ... I kept on believing. This is just a cherry on the cake."

Dimitrov has lost two of three matches all-time to Sinner. Sinner, who said his serve has improved because he's gotten stronger, broke Medvedev four times, didn't get broken, had seven aces and won 80 per cent of his first serves.

"This year, I have another chance," Sinner said in the on-court interview.

"I don't think he played his best tennis and I tried to stay focused and in my rhythm."

In the match's second game, Sinner hit a cross-court forehand winner on a third break point for a 2-0 lead. Medvedev motioned a thumbs down at his player's box.

The Italian went up 4-0 after cashing in on his fourth break point of the game, flicking away a short ball by Medvedev, who was flustered by two net cords during the game.

Sinner broke Medvedev in the first game of the second set and was on his way. Late in the second set, down 5-1, Medvedev heard jeers and whistles when he appeared to frustratingly hit a ball back to a ball girl with extra zest.

Sinner, whose only loss this

year was to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, said on Friday was "one of the best matches in how I handled everything."

"It's a great feeling," he said.

Long ago touted as the next major champion, Dimitrov is now 32 years old and has never been to a final of any of the four majors.

On serve at 5-4, Dimitrov broke Zverev for the first set, hitting a spectacular backhand volley after which the German then got tight. Zverev committed two straight unforced errors, including on set point a shanked forehand that sailed 2 feet long.

After losing the second-set tiebreaker, Dimitrov stayed resilient. At 3-3 he broke Zverev after a forehand winner and falling-down volley winner as he acrobatically blocked back a shot that caromed off the net cord.

That gave him a 4-3 lead. He held both his service games to close it out.

Alcaraz can attest to Dimitrov's current play, saying after his loss, "He played amazing tennis, almost perfect. ... He made me feel like I'm 13 years old."

The women's final is set for Saturday when American Danielle Collins faces No.



Messi will miss Miami game against NYCFC

AP ■ FORT LAUDERDALE (US)

Lionel Messi's hamstring injury will keep him sidelined for Inter Miami's home game against New York City FC on Saturday, but he could return for the CONCACAF Champions Cup quarterfinal first leg against Mexico's Monterrey on April 3.

After missing on Saturday, Messi will have played in nine of 19 MLS matches since joining Miami last summer.

"He is working with the physios," Miami coach Javier Morales said on Friday, "but he won't be available because we are doing all we can to get him

ready for next Wednesday. There is a possibility he will play in that game — that is what we are working for."

Messi has not played for Miami since March 13, when he left a 3-1 win over Nashville just a few minutes into the second half because of discomfort in his right hamstring.

The 36-year-old also missed Argentina's exhibitions this month against El Salvador and Costa Rica.

Miami has won all five matches that Messi has played in this season but has lost two of three without him, including a 4-0 defeat at New York last Saturday.

Versailles Palace gardens get ready for Olympic equestrian events

AP ■ VERSAILLES (FRANCE)

Preparations are underway for the gardens of the Versailles Palace to welcome Olympic horse riders and tens of thousands of visitors when it hosts equestrian and modern pentathlon events during this summer's Paris Games.

Temporary facilities including grandstands are being built across the park, where up to 40,000 people are expected to attend the cross-country part of the event.

The main arena will hold over 16,000 seated spectators for the dressage and showjumping competitions. Located at one end of the Grand Canal, the largest basin in the park, it will offer a spectacular view of the palace, once home to Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette.

"It's a real opportunity to be able to organize such an event in such an amazing and iconic venue. We feel very honored and respectful," said Anne Murac, who is in charge of the Versailles site for the Paris 2024 organizing committee.

On the western side of the park, temporary stables, with air conditioning, remain to be built. A nearby track with both grass and sand surfaces has already been set up to allow horses to warm up before the competition.

In addition, the 5-kilometer (3-mile) cross-country path is being carefully prepared, Murac said.

"We are working the ground very deeply



to put some sand and drainage to make sure the cross-country track will be consistent and to be able to guarantee the safety of the horses and the riders," she said.

Pontoon bridges, tested last summer, will enable horses to cross the Grand Canal during the cross-country.

Several water obstacles are being prepared. One newly created pond will have the shape of the royal lily, or fleur-de-lis, a symbol of the French monarchy. Horses will also pass through water in the circular basin of a fountain which had not been filled for over 40 years until now.

Murac said, "we wanted to integrate sports and culture altogether and to be able to promote French heritage."

The five events of the modern pentathlon (swimming, fencing, riding, running and shooting) will also be held in the gardens of the Versailles Palace.

The site will offer "a wonderful frame" for the horse trials, Versailles Palace President Christophe Leribault said. "Horses are so obviously in the iconography of the palace," including in paintings, sculptures and fountains, he said. "So it's a wonderful meeting of this old tradition and the modern sport."

After the end of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, all temporary facilities will be removed, the soil will be entirely put back in place and grass will be reseeded to leave the place the way it was before, organizers said.



Lille goes to third in Ligue 1 after derby win over Lens

AP ■ LILLE (FRANCE)

Edon Zhegrova scored in each half for Lille to beat Lens 2-1 in their derby and move up to third place in the French league.

The Kosovan winger got the opening goal after nine minutes when he superbly controlled a long ball from Nabil Bentaleb and fired a low shot into the corner from 15 meters out.

His second came on the hour mark. Gabriel Gudmundsson's

strike was parried by goalkeeper Brice Samba and Zhegrova had the simplest of tasks converting the rebound.

Elye Wahi got a goal back for Lens with 13 minutes remaining.

The result extended Lille's unbeaten run to six games and lifted it above Monaco on goal difference. Monaco plays at Metz on Saturday.

Lens remained in sixth place. Paris Saint-Germain tops the table 12 points clear of second-placed Brest.

AP ■ CADIZ (SPAIN)

New manager, old problems for Granada in La Liga defeat at Cadiz

It was new coach, old problems for Granada, as the Andalusian side went down at Cadiz 1-0 and extended its winless run to 10 games in the Spanish league.

José Ramón Sandoval took charge of the relegation-threatened club for the first time since replacing Alexander Medina last week but there was no sign of any new manager bounce.

The goal came from Robert Navarro after 51 minutes on Friday. The midfielder deftly cushioned a pass from Rubén Alcaraz and let it bounce once before volleying past Augusto Batalla.

Granada came more into the game after going behind and Bruno Mendez missed a late chance to equalize. At the other end, Cadiz striker Juanmi had a goal ruled out for a foul.

The defeat left Granada second from bottom on the table and needing a miracle to avoid relegation. It is 11 points adrift of Cadiz and 13 behind fourth bottom club Celta Vigo. Three



clubs go down to the second division.

"Once again we've not got the result," Gerard Gumbau told broadcaster DAZN.

"We're shaken. There is little time left and we're a long way back. ... The new coach has come to change our mentality and we're doing that, but there isn't much time left."

Cadiz, meanwhile, can dare to dream of another season in the top flight.

AIFF forms panel to probe alleged physical assault of two women footballers in Goa

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Saturday asked its executive committee member Deepak Sharma to refrain from game-related activities till the conclusion of a probe by a panel into his alleged physical assault of two women footballers in Goa.

Two footballers of Himachal Pradesh-based Khad FC, taking part in the Indian Women's Football (IWL) League second division, had alleged that Sharma, the owner of the club, had barged into their room and physically assaulted them on the night of March 28.

They filed a complaint with the competition committee of the AIFF and the Goa Football Association (GFA), which was hosting the tournament, also lodged a complaint at the Mapusa police station on the basis of the complaint of the two women footballers.

In the complaint, according to sources, the two players said Sharma was in an inebriated state for most of the time and they were "scared of their lives". Sharma was later arrested by Mapusa police under various sections, including causing hurt, using force against women, among others, according to Deputy Superintendent of Police Sandesh Chodankar.

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur earlier in the day asked the AIFF to take "quick" and "strong legal action" against the official.

The AIFF stopped short of suspending Sharma, who is



Officer Rita Jairath and Vijay Bali.

Taking a serious note of the incident, Thakur had said that the safety and security of players are of utmost priority for the sports ministry.

"The Ministry of Sports has taken a serious note of an alleged physical assault upon women footballers by an official during the ongoing Indian Women's League in Goa," he tweeted.

"AIFF has been directed to take quick action and ensure the safety and security of our footballers. The ministry has further directed AIFF to take strong legal action and inform the ministry about actions taken. The safety and security of players are our utmost priority."

Asked why Sharma was not suspended immediately, AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey said, "If we do that (suspension of Sharma), the committee would have been left with little work."

"There are two versions and unless we come to the correct information ... The girl is saying he (Sharma) slapped her. He is saying the girl had gone out after 11pm and so it was a fatherly scolding and he was concerned more about her safety and security going out at 11pm."

"The girl is saying she was feeling hungry and she had gone out to buy eggs. He is saying since he is the secretary-general of the state association and owner of the club, it was his responsibility to take care of the safety and security of all the players and hence scolded them as a father figure."

Hannah Green shoots 11-under 61 to take 1-shot lead at LPGA Ford Championship

AP ■ GILBERT (US)

A sore throat and runny nose lowered Hannah Green's expectations for the second round of the LPGA Tour Ford Championship. She sure felt a lot better after a career-best round on a day full of low scoring.

Green birdied the final six holes for an 11-under 61 on Friday, giving her a one-shot lead going into the weekend.

"I missed short putt on the first and I was like, Oh, OK, that's fine," Green said.

"I really took advantage of the shorter holes we had. I also holed a couple really long putts, maybe even moved the hole — it was that firm. But just felt really good out there, just had a really nice morning."

Increased wind did little to slow the low scoring in the inaugural event at Seville Golf and Country Club, with 20

players shooting 67 or better and a cut line of 5 under - tied for lowest in LPGA history.

Green set the standard at 14-under 130 after making 11 birdies, tied for second-most ever behind Annika Sorenstam's 13 during her historic 59 in 2001. Sarah Schmezel had a bogey-free 63 to match Peiyun Chien (65) at 13 under.

Azahara Munoz (68) and Hyo Joo Kim (67) were 12 under. Yuka Saso shot a bogey-free 63 that included two runs of four straight birdies. She was 11 under. Lydia Ko was tied with her and three others following a bogey-free 64.

Lexi Thompson moved into contention with a second-round 65. She was among 12 players at 10 under.

"The greens are firm, which is nice, but it's kind of forgiving, too, so you can be aggressive and make lots of birdies," Munoz said.



All the low scores left top-ranked Nelly Korda feeling a little left out, even if she's still within reach of the lead. She closed with a bogey to shoot 68 and was four back in her bid to become the first LPGA player to win three straight starts since Ariya Jutanugarn in 2016.

Korda had consecutive birdies after starting on the back nine and had two bogeys in three holes to turn in 1-under 35.

She had two birdies and eagled the par-5 fifth, but dropped a shot on the long par-4 ninth when the remnants of a dust devil knocked her approach shot short left and she couldn't get up and down.

"A couple mistakes at the beginning and then obviously ending my round with a bogey didn't feel great," Korda said.

"But overall, still kept it under par and hopefully I can give myself a shot at the weekend."

Green had no trouble going low.

The 27-year-old Australian took a six-week break following the Australian Open that included her marriage to Jarryd Felton.

Recharged, Green won the HSBC World Championship in China, but returned to the US to miss the cut at the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship last week in Southern California. She started Friday's second round at Seville six shots back and started racing up the leaderboard.

Green shot 4-under 32 on the front nine, added a birdie on No. 10 and closed with a flourish to shoot 29 on the back.

"The golf course is set up this week it's definitely gettable," Green said. "Obviously, you still have to do it."

Jennifer Song had a hole-in-one the 160-yard 14th, but missed the cut at 4 under.



BATTLE OF UNEQUALS: DC NEEDS SHAW BOOST AGAINST FORMIDABLE CSK

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Delhi Capitals will be aiming to rejig their out-of-depth batting order by bringing the flamboyant Prithvi Shaw in the mix against the defending champions Chennai Super Kings in what could be safely termed as a 'battle of unequals' on Sunday's Indian Premier League encounter.

In T20 format, reputations do go for a toss but DC in their last four meetings haven't been able to get past CSK and the margins of defeat — 91, 27 and 77 runs respectively paints a sorry picture. One also needs to take into account that in those three heavy losses, the core of the Delhi team has been more or less same save their last meeting when Rishabh Pant wasn't available.

Hence a win against CSK would be considered as a big upset in the tournament. If CSK once again looks like a team to beat with all its bases nicely covered, it has been

quite the opposite for the Ricky Ponting coached Capitals, which has been outplayed in both departments of the game. DC's co-owners GMR and JSW have been completely messing up the team composition at the auction table itself for some years and there is hardly anything that Ponting or Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly could do with domestic talent that lacks quality. CSK got an uncapped Sameer Rizvi for 8.40 crore and the two sixes in his first IPL innings against Punjab Kings showed why the franchise was desperate to get him on board. Among all franchises, DC probably has had the weakest talent scout program and it is paying a huge price for poor recruitments.

The gulf between domestic cricket and IPL once again became evident with Ricky Bhui, the highest scorer in Ranji Trophy with 902 runs in the just concluded season. That Bhui is out-of-depth at

this level was cruelly exposed by young South African pacer Nandre Burger of Rajasthan Royals. The manner in which he set up with a fast full delivery to peg Bhui on the backfoot and then a well-directed bouncer that was aimed for his skull left the burly Andhra captain both scared and scarred.

Shaw, who made a comeback to competitive cricket during second half of Ranji Trophy, might not exactly conform to the fitness standards set by Ponting and his support staff but even the biggest punter in the DC change room knows where to put his money if the choice is between Shaw and Bhui. There is too much on the plate of David Warner, who is well past his prime and skipper Rishabh Pant, who will take some time to find his groove. Mitchell Marsh's time with DC for the past two seasons can't exactly be termed consistent and the presence of Shaw will indeed add some muscle to



DC's batting against an attack comprising Mustafizur Rahman, Deepak Chahar, Matheesha Pathirana and Ravindra Jadeja. Add to it, Daryl Mitchell's seam-up stuff and Rachin

Ravindra, whose bowling potential hasn't yet been unlocked by CSK's 'spiritual captain' Mahendra Singh Dhoni. If DC bring in Shaw, they can push Marsh as one down,

which could lend a bit more solidity to the top-order but the real challenge will be facing the pace-off deliveries bowled by Mustafizur, who cleverly mixes his variety of cutters to make life miserable for the

batters. The problem with DC is lack of quality power hitters among domestic talents in case Pant fails to fire and also there isn't much difference between Shai Hope and Tristan Stubbs, both of whom take time before going for the jugular. Similarly DC's death bowling is one of concern and save Axar Patel, whose economy rate is less than six in two games, none of the other bowlers have gone for anything less than 7.50 per over. Anrich Nortje couldn't hit the right length in the Royals game where DC lost it in the last five overs of their bowling innings. DC would need Ishant Sharma to come back as he could have some questions for Rachin Ravindra, who has started the tournament in imperious fashion. Shivam Dube's pyrotechnics will meet its match in Kuldeep Yadav's guile and that will be one battle that cricket lovers would be waiting for.

TEAMS
CSK: MS Dhoni (c), Moeen Ali, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Shivam Dube, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Mandal, Mukesh Choudhary, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Mitchell Santner, Simarjeet Singh, Nishant Shindhu, Prashant Solanki, Maheesh Theekshana, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur, Daryl Mitchell, Sameer Rizvi, Mustafizur Rahman and Avانش Rao Aravely.
Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abhishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dube, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Sunrisers Hyderabad explosive form threatens Gujarat Titans

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A depleted Gujarat Titans bowling attack will have to raise its game by quite a few notches if it intends to stop a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad team fresh from its record total against Mumbai Indians, in the upcoming afternoon IPL match here on Sunday.

Sunrisers are coming here on the back of breaking the ceiling for all time IPL total when they plundered 277 against Mumbai Indians to secure their first win of the season.

First time skipper Shubman Gill's Titans, who started off with a win at home against Mumbai Indians, on the other hand slipped in Chennai in their previous game.

The profligate Umesh Yadav is no match for injured Mohammed Shami and that is proving to be a big factor for Titans.

The resounding 63-run defeat affected their net run rate as it plummeted to -1.425, worst among the league's 10 teams, which could cause some problems towards the business end of the tournament. It can't be denied that losing Hardik Pandya, who lends necessary balance with his all-round skills has also been a big factor. Winners and runners-up in the last two seasons, GT's success under Pandya has centred around one of their batters ability to come up trumps and play a match winning role.

Whether it's Wriddhiman Saha, David Miller, Pandya, or Rahul Tewatia, one of them has typically ignited the batting lineup. However, in the absence of the inspirational India all-rounder, their batting display appears drab and lacking its usual spark.

GT had a one-day style batting



approach chasing Chennai Super Kings' imposing 207, and barring Sai Sudharsan none could reach 30s.

The likes of Sudharsan, Vijay Shankar look unidimensional, while Gill's T20 batting will again come under scrutiny, after his knocks of 31 and 8. That their finisher Miller (12 and 21) is also struggling underscored their slow approach in the middle overs (11-15) where they managed just 34 runs.

They would hope that Miller is able to get his mojo back as they would have to bat out of their skin to match SRH's batting might.

Tournament dark horses SRH have lit up the IPL with a record-breaking performance at home in their last match. Their 277/3 against Mumbai in Hyderabad on Wednesday took them past the previous record IPL total of 263/5 set by Royal Challengers Bangalore against Pune Warriors in 2013. Australia World Cup winner Travis Head (62; 24b) made a stunning debut for SRH, smashing the fastest fifty for the franchise, taking 18 balls for the milestone to give them an explosive start.

The feat was then bettered by uncapped Indian Abhishek

Sharma who got to his fifty in just 16 balls.

With the South African duo of Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen too have been in imperious form lower down the order, the likes of Umesh Yadav and Rashid Khan will be tested.

Being an afternoon match, the dry surface may also prove handy for the spinners as Rashid and Sai Kishore will be crucial for either sides.

It's not just their batting their bowling also looked balanced and the Australian World Cup winning skipper Pat Cummins has shown his ability to utilise his resources well.

Despite a thin spin presence, Cummins did well to use left arm orthodox Shahbaz Ahmed to good effect in dismissing Ishan Kishan inside the power-play.

In the pace bowling front, Cummins has formed a fine partnership with Indian veteran Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who bowled a superb 13th over, giving away just five runs in a game that was primarily dominated by batters.

Cummins then conceded just three runs in the 15th over and also dismissed Tilak Varma against the run of play to turn the course of the game.



Matt Henry replaces David Willey in Lucknow Super Giants squad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lucknow Super Giants on Saturday named New Zealand fast bowler Matt Henry as a replacement for England all-rounder David Willey.

Henry joins LSG at his base price of Rs 1.25 crore. Willey had withdrawn from the tournament citing personal reasons.

Willey joined the Super Giants through the auction last year after representing Royal Challengers Bengaluru during IPL 2022 and 2023.

The left-arm seamer had also complained of fatigue after spending more than two months on the road after appearing in other T20 tournaments like

ILT20 (Abu Dhabi Knight Riders) and Pakistan Super League (Multan Sultans) earlier this year.

Willey is the second England pacer to be unavailable for LSG after Mark Wood was pulled out by ECB to manage his workload ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup.

Wood was replaced by West Indian pacer Shamar Joseph. For Henry, LSG is his third IPL team after being a part of Chennai Super Kings and Punjab Kings, for whom he played two matches in IPL 2017.

Overall, the 32-year-old Henry has represented New Zealand in 25 Tests, 82 ODIs and 17 T20Is, grabbing 256 wickets.

KKR pummeling reveals lack of variety in RCB bowling

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Three matches might be too small a sample size to form an opinion but going by the lack of variety that has been on show in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's bowling attack, they might just be staring at a long, tiring IPL season this year.

The match against Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday offered the latest and the largest footprint of this particular weakness as the RCB bowlers failed to check a set of free-hitting batters while defending 183.

The immediate defence will be to project the presence of dew and an improved M Chinnaswamy pitch during the second innings. But a deep dive will give a different picture.

Defending a total, even a competitive one like 183, demands a tight beginning, however, the RCB bowlers were profligate.

Mohammed Siraj's length ball was walloped over mid-wicket for a six by Phil Salt, and the Englishman was served with two more juicy offerings on the fifth stump which were carted for a six and four each. The first over produced 18 runs.

Alzarri Joseph was introduced in the third over. But the pacer gave Sunil Narine a length ball on leg-stump which was dispatched for a six over long-on and two balls later a short-pitched delivery was sent in the same direction for a maximum.

These are the balls that will be punished at this level — dew or no dew, whether it is easy pitch



or tough pitch.

There was an exception in Vysakh Vijayakumar who used knuckle balls and pace-off deliveries to good effect to return with excellent figures of 1/23, but the more experienced names were reluctant to bring in those variations — at least consistently.

"The second innings was slightly better to bat because the ball came on to the bat a bit quicker because of the dew. I was trying to use hard-length balls and short balls banged into the pitch to contain batters," Vijayakumar said in the post-match press conference.

"But it was still gripping from both the ends. We did try to mix it up but they (KKR batters) got away with it."

There's some truth in his words. The stats show that KKR bowlers used 22 balls under 120 kmph and conceded just 20 runs off them to pick up three wickets.

Gill has embraced captaincy, he will learn to make tactical decisions: Gary Kirsten

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Titans might have made a topsy-turvy start to IPL 2024 but their mentor Gary Kirsten backed Shubman Gill, and said the young captain will learn the nuances of making tactical decisions in the fast-paced world of T20 cricket.

Titans, the IPL 2022 winner and the current runners-up, are now placed seventh on the table with two points from as many matches after a win over

Mumbai Indians and defeat against Chennai Super Kings. "It's a fast game. You are making tactical decisions on a regular basis. It's not like Test cricket where it unfolds over a long period of time."

"I've been really impressed with the way he's conducted himself as a leader," Kirsten told the media on the eve of GT's day-game against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

Kirsten said Gill, who took

over as GT skipper after Hardik Pandya moved to MI, has adjusted to his role well. "I think he's embraced it (captaincy) really well. He's shown some good leadership qualities. He's a smart guy. He's a young captain, and there's lots to learn, especially in T20. So, he'll learn along the way."

Kirsten admitted that the Titans were well below par in their big 63-run defeat against the Super Kings, which also affected their net run rate.

"As with any cricket team, you want to play to the best of your ability. We weren't good enough that day (against CSK). I think we've acknowledged that and we've had our conversations around what we need to make sure that we are better to gain from our skills."

"Every team has different kinds of strengths and we didn't show that in the CSK game and we just got to move on," he said.



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PCB wants to bring Babar back as captain

PTI ■ LAHORE

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has offered Babar Azam captaincy in the white ball formats but the star player has not yet made his decision, sources have claimed.

It has been learnt that Babar has set down conditions for accepting the captaincy, including having a say in appointment of coaches. Babar has conveyed that he should give the reins of the side in all three formats.

The national selection committee, though is divided on the issue. A former Punjab caretaker minister, who apparently has no cricket background, is not in favour giving back absolute power to Babar.

"Some members of the selection committee now feel the best thing is to let Shaheen Shah Afridi continue as captain for the home T20 series against New Zealand in April and give him a chance to prove his credentials," one well-informed source said.

He said there was a feeling among some selectors it would be best to wait



for a series or two before taking a final decision to bring back Babar as captain.

The interesting part is that the selectors including Muhammad Yousuf, Asad Shafiq, Abdul Razaq, Wahab Riaz and the former minister, Bilal Afzal after meeting with Mohsin Naqvi asked him

to make the final call. "They made their opinions clear to the PCB chief and have now asked him to make a final call and Naqvi has told them to convince Babar to accept the white ball captaincy for now and the Board will take a call on the red ball captaincy after the T20 World Cup," the

source added.

This despite the fact that the PCB chief gave clear mandate to the selectors while appointing them to select the captain.

The Test captaincy is with Shan Masood.

Similarly there is also no clarity on what the PCB is doing about the appointment of foreign coaches with the national team.

"As of now the PCB has met with refusals from several foreigners including Adam Voges, Luke Ronchi, Shane Watson and Mike Hesson," the source said.

He said presently the PCB is hoping that their negotiations with Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie are successful as they want them to take over as white ball and red ball coaches. "The only catch is that both Kirsten and Gillespie are adamant they will bring their own support staff while the PCB wants to make the other appointments as it wants some of its local players on the support staff as assistant specialist coaches," he said.

Sri Lanka openers make good progress in second Test against Bangladesh

AP ■ CHATTOGRAM (BANGLADESH)

Opener Nishan Madushka scored an unbeaten half-century as Sri Lanka made a solid start to the second and final test, reaching 88-0 at lunch on Saturday.

After winning the toss and opting to bat first, the tourists made a fluent start with Madushka driving pacer Syed Khaled Ahmed for a four past boundary in the first over.

Karunaratne also began with a boundary when he clipped a full length delivery of debutant Hasan Mahmud past mid-wicket.

Bangladesh's bowlers still created some chances in the otherwise barren session but their fielders couldn't hold on to the catches.

Madushka was dropped on 9 when Mahmudul Hasan put down a straightforward chance off fast bowler Mahmud at second slip.

His opening partner Dimuth Karunaratne was also lucky to have survived as he top-edged a Mahmud delivery but Shakib Al Hasan, playing his first game since the 2023 World Cup in India, fumbled it over the boundary line to give Karunaratne a six.

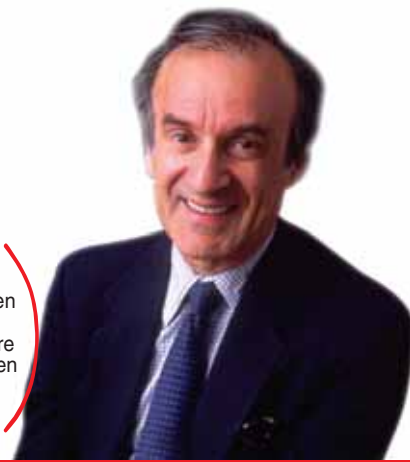


Madushka reached his second fifty off 80 balls, when he punched offspinner Mehidy Hasan to mid-off for a single.

Madushka was batting on 55 from 97 balls, hitting six fours at the interval with Karunaratne on 33. Sri Lanka made one change from the team which won the first test by 328 runs with Asitha Fernando replacing the injured Kasun Rajitha, who took eight wickets in that match.

Star all-rounder Shakib and Mahmud — who played 39 white-ball matches for Bangladesh before making his test debut here — replaced fast bowlers Nahid Rana and Shoriful Islam for the hosts.

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest!”
— Elie Wiesel



SIDHARTH MISHRA delves into the ideological moorings of the Anna Hazare movement and what change, if any, this agitation brought to our social system. It is difficult to find an answer

THE UNGANDHIAN ANNA HAZARE

Come April, come the anniversary of the agitation which was expected to prove to be a game changer in Indian politics, however, as American poet TS Eliot would put it, ‘went down with a whimper’. It all began with the Anti-Corruption Movement launched by Anna Hazare in 2011, and whatever was left of its ideals have been given a firm burial with the arrest of movement’s mainstay Arvind Kejriwal. First at Jantar Mantar in April and thereafter in August, 2011 dawned on historical Ramlila Grounds in Delhi a social reformer from Maharashtra, Kisan Baburao Hazare. He was at the helm of an anti-corruption movement against the Congress governments both at the Centre and in the state. Popular as Anna among his followers, Hazare, a former army truck driver, dressed like an Indian farmer-dhoti (a wrapper), kurta (a tunic) and a cap, popularly called Gandhi Topi (cap), all made in handspun fabric of Khadi. In Anna people saw, though briefly, a reincarnation of Gandhi, and no wonder in effort to identify themselves with Anna they started to wear the Gandhi like cap with these words printed on it “Main Hun Anna” (I am Anna). People who joined the agitation wearing Anna Caps were later to realize that the movement was Gandhian neither in letter nor in spirit but did thrive on Gandhian imageries. The identification with Gandhi, as the events which later unfolded showed, was superficial. This was a successful exercise in the branding of the movement by its clever brand managers led by now incarcerated chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal. While Gandhi insisted that his followers wore caps made from handspun fabric, Anna’s followers wore caps from an environmentally degrading synthetic material. The environmentalist in Gandhi would have never approved of use of synthetic material for sewing caps, as he would have not approved of the turn this movement took. Media Event Sold Gandhian Movement Use of Gandhian caps was not the only instance of misuse of the Gandhian image during the Anna Hazare Movement. During the agitation in April 2011 at Jantar Mantar, the highest circulated newspaper of the nation-The Times of India-carried the headline: “INDIA WINS AGAIN.” If culmination of every successful media event was to make India win, yes, the headline was appropriate. But would the newspaper recall its headline now 13 years later, after the arrest of movement’s architect Arvind Kejriwal. One is still to know what was the ideological basis of this movement? The leaders from the movement have gone different ideological ways. What change it brought other than blowing our Constitution to the smithereens and setting up another political party? In this era of publicity, anonymity is tyag (abnegation), a certain Gandhian ideal. Wearing a Gandhi cap and a khadi dhoti-kurta alone doesn’t make one a Gandhian. In what he wore, Mahendra Singh Tikait, the Kisan leader from Muzzafarnagar in Uttar Pradesh was as much a Gandhian as Anna Hazare of Ahmednagar in Maharashtra. In fact, Gandhi decided to wear the cap in the early part of his career to identify with the Indian peasantry, who he rightly realised was integral to the success of the people’s movement.

Hazare was un-Gandhian as far as his leadership of India Against Corruption movement went. The Civil Society, which played the role of catalyst during the movement, largely connotes the creamy layer of our social system with little connect to our social and cultural dynamics. Unlike Anna, Gandhi’s movement was not captive to certain self-acclaimed representatives of the people. The representation was based on a detail electoral process ensuring a true representation of the people in the decision-making process. The AAP grounded the internal democracy in the party a few years after its founding establishing Arvind Kejriwal as its dictator. Anna Hazare too was no different in his world view. If one looks for comparisons for Anna Hazare’s agitation, one can find only one-the public outcry in 1999 against the hijacking of the Indian Airlines IC-814 flight from Kathmandu to Delhi to the Taliban land of Kandhar. The television cameras then too had gone to town over people agitating against “the Government’s failure to save the lives of its citizens.” It brought such pressure on our Government that we had to release the terror vendors, who had been arrested following martyrdom of several Indian soldiers. Till date, the nation is paying a heavy price for releasing the likes of Azhar Masood, who later founded Jaish-i-Mohammed to secure the release of citizens held hostage. An evil plaguing the television media is that in their craving for TRPs they rush to ferret out the imitation as the real. They seldom make an effort to go beyond the superficial. In my initial years as journalist, my first chief reporter would always take me to the task for having an opinion. “Report news, write comments when you have a column to yourself,” he would thunder. In 1999, when the television media cried hoarse on the demand by the citizens to secure release of the hostages of IC-814, little did it realize that it was the Opposition Congress, in a bid to embarrass the Government, which was surreptitiously instigating people? The leader of the agitation was one Shreeram Maggo, a Congress worker from West Delhi. For his services, he was later bequeathed with a ticket to contest the Assembly polls and still later his daughter-in-law became member of the Municipal Council of Delhi on a Congress ticket. In a just case of poetic justice, the Congress-led Government in 2011 suffered at the hands of the same media. The Congress claim of the Opposition elements adding fuel to the Jantar Mantar fire went uncontested as then non-Congress Chief Ministers Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar openly supported the movement. The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) too released a statement in the support of the cause. There was open sloganeering against Sonia Gandhi’s foreign origin and Manmohan Singh being of not much consequence than a family butler. Non-Gandhian Venue for Protest Another point of difference between Gandhi’s and Anna’s movements was venue of the protest. Gandhi never chose New Delhi as the site for any of his major Satyagraha Movements. New Delhi is best remembered as the site of his assassination. The studio hunters of national Capital would do well to travel to Motihari, where Gandhi launched the Champaran Satyagraha a century ago. Even in this age, a television OB van would find difficult to easily reach Motihari. A century ago Gandhi went



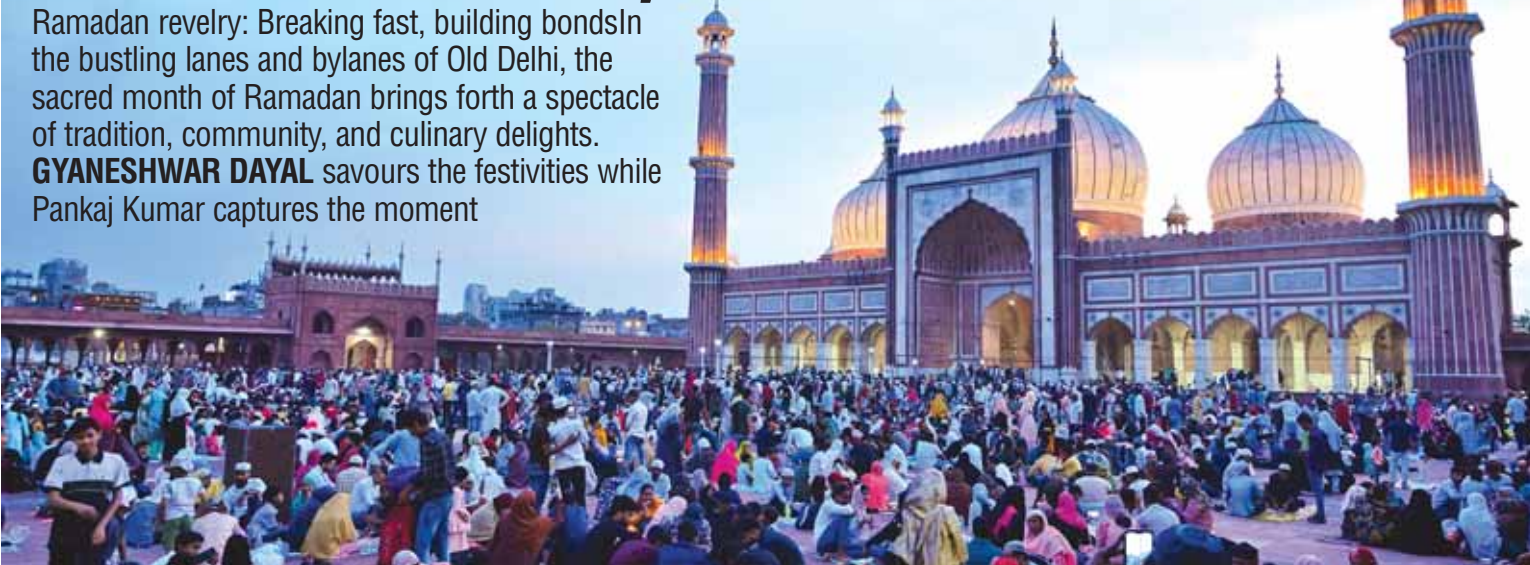
POPULAR AS ANNA AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS, HAZARE, A FORMER ARMY TRUCK DRIVER, DRESSED LIKE AN INDIAN FARMER-DHOTI (A WRAPPER), KURTA (A TUNIC) AND A CAP, POPULARLY CALLED GANDHI TOPI (CAP), ALL MADE IN HANDSPUN FABRIC OF KHADI. IN ANNA PEOPLE SAW, THOUGH BRIEFLY, A REINCARNATION OF GANDHI, AND NO WONDER IN EFFORT TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES WITH ANNA THEY STARTED TO WEAR THE GANDHI LIKE CAP WITH THESE WORDS PRINTED ON IT “MAIN HUN ANNA” (I AM ANNA)

there to launch movement to be with the people and not the Press reporters. Talking of the Press, Gandhi seldom took criticism negatively. Mahatma recounts in My Experiments with Truth an interesting appointment with the editor of The Pioneer, then considered an opponent of Indian aspirations, at Allahabad: “He promised to notice in his paper anything that I might write but added that he could not promise to endorse all the Indian demands, inasmuch as he was bound to understand and give due weight to the viewpoint of the Colonials as well. It was enough that he should study the question and discuss it in his paper.” Unlike the Mahatma, the Anna Gandhians took to lobbying, threat and blackmail to silence voices of criticism. Attempts by probing reporters to question the protagonists of the movement were stonewalled with replies, “What’s the point talking to you people, you are against us.” Mahatma never took decisions in a hurry and never really craved for the crowd and media support when he decided to launch a movement in sustenance of a cause. He in fact walked an extra mile to convince those holding adverse opinion in media and never indulged in McCarthyism as in the case of the pretenders to the Mahatma’s legacy. The similarity between Hazare’s agitation and Gandhi’s movement ended with the images that the organisers tried to create pushing a clueless girl child to offer juice to Anna to end his fast, to recreate the famous image of a young Indira Gandhi offering juice to Mahatma to end his fast in 1924. When the fast by Anna Hazare at Ramlila Maidan ended in August 2011, in a speech, Hazare sermonised on the virtues that every participant of his movement should follow. None followed including its leaders, four of whom are now in jail on corruption charges. Difference in Approach Having discussed matters material, I would once again come back to the question of the ideological moorings of this agitation. What change this agitation brought to our social system? It’s difficult to find an answer. If it failed to bring social change, is it correct to even call Anna’s agitation a public movement, let alone a Gandhian movement. Hazare wore Gandhi cap, increasingly acquired Mahatma’s mannerism (as seen in Richard

Attenborough’s magnum opus) and resorted to some bhajan listening. But unlike the Mahatma, he tore constitutionalism to shreds at the outset. He, through his interlocutors led by Arvind Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan and Yogender Yadav, held out a threat to the Government at every step of negotiation. Those who reached out to cheer him realised little that in action Hazare was actually eroding the authority of Parliament, something which suited a highly discredited Manmohan Singh Government. It created a committee to draft the Lokpal Bill, denying the Opposition benches the right to debate the provisions of the Bill. The Government then thought that to get the Bill passed, the treasury benches could conveniently deploy the Movement Against Corruption to have its own way. Hazare in a way usurped the space of legitimate Opposition. Gandhi for sure would have never advised to lose faith in our Constitutional mechanism. During their agitation in Ramlila Ground in August 2011 I vividly recall a placard carrying photos of Anna Hazare, Kiran Bedi, Arvind Kejriwal and Prashant Bhushan calling them present day Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Lakshmi Bai and Chandrashekhar Azad respectively. This placard made it abundantly clear that the movement orchestrated by Team Anna did not have a cohesive ideological base. Forget their inspirations even in their practice, the members of the core committee showed very divergent personal worldviews. The only point, on hindsight, which seems to have brought them together was the desire to destabilize the government. They together with the Government representatives-Pranab Mukherjee, P Chidambaram, Kapil Sibal, Salman Khursheed and Veerappa Moily-were initially tasked to give us the Lokpal Bill, which was to act as panacea to all ills related to corruption. One recalls Hazare having rebuffed a media query on how the Opposition was kept out of the law-making process. He said and probably believed also that the Opposition mattered little. Less than six months later, his Team was wooing the Opposition to rescue them, when Government decided a go-slow on the Bill. More shamelessly members of his team went to Hisar in Haryana campaigning against the Congress and nearly facilitating victory of a tainted and charge-sheeted Ajay Chautala in the assembly bypolls. Earlier in April, when the father of Ajay Chautala, former Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala had come to pledge support to Hazare at Jantar Mantar, he was shooed away. How quick the change of heart and colour! A quality which the Mahatma never possessed. (THE WRITER IS AN AUTHOR AND PRESIDENT CENTRE FOR REFORMS, DEVELOPMENTS AND JUSTICE)

RAMADAN REVELRY BREAKING FAST, BUILDING BONDS

Ramadan revelry: Breaking fast, building bonds in the bustling lanes and bylanes of Old Delhi, the sacred month of Ramadan brings forth a spectacle of tradition, community, and culinary delights. **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** savours the festivities while **Pankaj Kumar** captures the moment



Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

Old Delhi, the pulsating heart of India's capital, holds a special significance during the holy month of Ramadan. Steeped in tradition and vibrant culture, this historic enclave comes alive with fervour as the faithful observe the sacred rituals of fasting and prayer, and experience community dining. At the heart of these celebrations stands the majestic Jama Masjid, serving as a beacon of spiritual unity and culinary delight.

As the sun sets over the labyrinthine lanes of Old Delhi, a palpable sense of anticipation fills the air. Families, friends, and strangers alike converge upon the centuries-old Jama Masjid, drawn by the allure of the iftar, the evening meal that breaks the day-long fast. The sprawling courtyard of the mosque transforms into a bustling hub of activity, teeming with worshippers and diners eager to partake in the age-old tradition.

The scene is one of camaraderie and kinship, transcending barriers of caste, creed, and class. As Azaan, a call to prayer, resonates through the air, a hush descends upon the gathered throng, signalling the end of the day's fast. With a collective sigh of relief and gratitude, the faithful begin their iftar, breaking their fast with dates and water by Islamic tradition. But it is the community iftar spread that truly captures the essence of Ramadan in Old Delhi. Long rows of intricately woven mats are laid out on the mosque's courtyard, adorned with an array of delectable dishes that showcase the rich culinary heritage of the region. Fragrant biryanis, succulent kebabs, piping hot samosas,



and decadent sweets vie for attention, tantalising the taste buds and igniting the senses. Roohafza sharbat is everywhere. This year, it's being referred to as 'mohabbat ka sharbat' or the 'love potion.' Amidst the aromatic symphony of spices and flavours, a spirit of generosity and abundance prevails. Strangers become friends as they pass around plates heaped with delicacies, sharing laughter, stories, and blessings. The boundaries between rich and poor blur as all partake in the community feast, reaffirming their shared humanity and solidarity. The iftar meal is not just a physical nourishment but a spiritual rejuvenation, a time for reflection, gratitude, and connection with the divine. As the faithful break bread together, they are reminded of the importance of empathy, compassion, and gratitude in their lives. It is a time to seek forgiveness, to mend broken relationships, and to strengthen bonds of love and fellowship. As the night deepens and the festivities continue, the spirit of Ramadan permeates every



corner of Old Delhi. The narrow streets come alive with the hustle and bustle of shoppers, vendors, and well-wishers, creating a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds,



and smells. The twinkling fairy lights cast a magical spell over the ancient city, evoking a sense of wonder and enchantment. Jama Masjid is the same but wears a different look. Constructed by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan between 1644 and 1656, Jama Masjid stands as an architectural masterpiece and a symbol of India's rich cultural heritage. Situated in the heart of Old Delhi, it was designed by the renowned architect of that time, Ustad Khalil, Jama Masjid is characterised by its imposing red sandstone and marble structure, adorned with intricate carvings, towering minarets, and three

majestic domes. Serving as a beacon of Islamic faith, Jama Masjid has witnessed centuries of history, from Mughal grandeur to colonial rule and beyond, remaining a revered landmark and a testament to India's pluralistic ethos. It thus aptly serves as the focal point of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Amid this joyous chaos, the true essence of Ramadan shines through – a time of spiritual renewal, communal harmony, and boundless compassion. In Old Delhi, as in countless cities and towns across the world, Ramadan is not just a religious observance but a celebration of the human spirit, a testament to the power of faith, love, and unity to transcend all barriers and divisions. As the dawn approaches and the faithful prepare to begin another day of fasting, the echoes of laughter and prayer linger in the air, a poignant reminder of the enduring legacy of Ramadan in Old Delhi – a timeless tradition of faith, fellowship, and feasting that continues to inspire and uplift all who partake in its blessings.



SOUTHERN COMFORT

From Mathura to Chennai, Hema's Kitchen and **CHEF ANJALI GUPTA** have a unique culinary narrative to tell. **SHOBORI GANGULI** got the opportunity to delve into her lavish South Indian spread recently at Lodi Hotel's Elan. Photographs by **PANKAJ KUMAR**

YEARS ago, a young woman from a traditional Hindu family from Mathura got married into a Mathura-based family in Chennai. This is the incredible journey of Chef Anjali Gupta whose signature menu was showcased recently by Lodi Hotel's Elan. She has a rich lineage of South Indian cooking spanning three generations. The finely curated menu from Hema's Kitchen, founded by her mother, was literally a voyage of discovery.

On another note, it is indeed heartwarming to see that starred hotels and restaurants across the board are providing their patrons a taste of India, sourcing the secret flavours of traditional Indian regional kitchens and placing their myriad cuisines on the fine dining table.

I must admit that the surname Gupta did inject a bit of skepticism in my mind. To be then informed that her family hails from Mathura raised further doubts. But then Chef Gupta sat down to narrate her fascinating family history. Her grandfather founded the legendary Ratna Café in Chennai back in 1948. It is now being run by the fourth generation Guptas.

Born and brought up in Chennai Chef Gupta's Hema's Kitchen broke barriers never imagined. Meat and fish gently crawled into the Gupta kitchen down South, much to the horror and dismay of the extended family up North. It's nothing less than revolutionary for a non onion or garlic eating Gupta household to experiment and innovate with South Indian cuisine, and non vegetarian at that.

As we sat at the table in Elan, Chef Gupta could be seen energetically pacing



up and down in the kitchen to send across some delectable dishes, generic South Indian food but with the special Gupta ingredient twist to each one of them.

The appetizers were enough to launch us on a grand gourmet sojourn. First up were Raw Banana Fries tossed with black salt and served with spicy beetroot and peanut chutneys. Alongside came crunchy Prawns fried in a crumb of homemade *malgopodi* (a spice mix of lentils and dry chillies; each home kitchen has its own version), this one from Hema's Kitchen. This was plated with the world famous sundried Guntur chillies, not for the faint hearted, but I simply loved it. The prawns were served with tamarind chutney.

Chef Gupta followed this up with Steamed Kottu Parottas wrapped in Banana leaves. This dish particularly stood out for me. A famous Sri Lankan and Tamil dish, this is basically crushed Parottas and shredded chicken wrapped in curry masala and steamed in banana leaves, served with tomato salna (a rich tomato curry).

As we wandered into the main course came Kerala's famous Chicken Ishtew, a subtle amalgamation of chicken, potatoes, spring and baby onions cooked in coconut milk with a curry leaves garnish. The Malabari Fish Curry was delectable, fresh Surmai fillets steeped in a tangy tomato curry.

For me, the winner was Chef Gupta's signature dish, the Andhra Shredded Mutton Pepper Masala with the perfect balance of spices for the black pepper to stand out. I can still sense the richness and aroma of that preparation.

All the dishes were accompanied by Appams (the English could not pronounce it so in Sri Lanka to this day so they are called Hoppers). While the rice Appam was good, the sunny side up Egg Appam, sprinkled with Chef Gupta's secret spices, the famous gunpowder, was delicious to slice into. The surprise innovation was of course the stout Ragi Millet Appam (steamed with a mix of ragi millets, rice, lentils and coconut), a real challenge for a cook to achieve the right consistency.

We could not end our meal without the gamous South Indian filter coffee. On a sweeter note was the Ananas Kesari Bath (fresh pieces of pineapple cooked with brown sugar and ghee). For one so careful in keeping health and indulgence in balance we signed off with Chef Gupta's Coastal Paan. I expected a paan (betel leaf) as we in North India know it. But this was a digestive of freshly chopped betel leaves, rose petals, tossed in freshly grated coconut and saunf. Never tasted a crushed paan, so I was truly impressed.

May Delhi get to see more of our rich and diverse culinary heritage in days to come.

Shangri-La is renowned for its commitment to providing exceptional guest experiences. How do you ensure that this commitment is consistently met across all aspects of the hotel?

At Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, every aspect of the guest experience is meticulously crafted to exceed expectations and create indelible memories. Through rigorous staff training and active feedback, we provide personalised service tailored to individual preferences. Meticulous attention to detail ensures every aspect of the guest experience exceeds expectations, including innovative dining options like Le Petit Chef, India's first 3-D immersive dining experience. We pride ourselves on curating memorable experiences for special occasions, such as Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day and festive celebrations like Diwali and Holi. In addition to our commitment to service excellence, we offer diverse dining options and comprehensive wellness amenities. Guests can enjoy award-winning Italian cuisine at Sorrento, modern Indian street food at Mister Chai, an array of global flavours at Tamra's lunch buffet, Shangastic Dimsum lunch at Shang Palace, and cocktail concoctions at Grappa along with the Moonlight brunch 2.0. Exciting pop-ups with renowned chefs throughout the year add to the culinary excitement for the guests.

For ultimate relaxation, Chi, The Spa provides guests with rejuvenating Asian-inspired treatments, while our state-of-

PARADISE ON EARTH

In a candid interview the **ABHISHEK SAHOO**, General Manager, Shangri-La talks about his work, life and "Paradise on Earth" that is Shangri-La Eros, Delhi

the-art Health Club ensures that guests can uphold their wellness regimens effortlessly. With our exceptional offerings, we ensure that every stay is memorable at Shangri-La, leaving the guests with At Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, our dedication to delivering exceptional guest experiences encompasses personalized service, innovative dining options, memorable celebrations, and rejuvenating wellness amenities, all meticulously designed to leave an enduring impression on our guests

The hospitality industry is dynamic and ever-evolving. How do you stay updated on industry trends, and how do you incorporate innovation into the operations of Shangri-La Hotel?

In the fast-paced and dynamic landscape of the hospitality industry, staying ahead of trends is of paramount importance to me. I prioritise continuous learning and information gathering through participation in industry conferences, forums, and networking events. Engaging with industry associations, subscribing to relevant publications, and maintaining open lines of communication

with industry peers help me stay informed about emerging trends and best practices. Regular brainstorming sessions and collaboration with our dedicated team ensure that innovative ideas are not only identified but seamlessly integrated into our operations, maintaining my position as a trailblazer in the ever-evolving hospitality landscape.

How does the hotel contribute to the local community, and how do you keep staff motivated and encourage staff participation in such initiatives?

To ensure our staff stays motivated and engaged, we prioritise communication and education on sustainability's importance. This involves regular training sessions, recognizing and rewarding staff contributions and offering professional development opportunities in this field. By fostering a sustainability culture, we empower our team to positively impact the local community while maintaining our leadership in environmental stewardship. Our commitment to the local community is demonstrated through our "Rooted in Nature" campaign. This initiative showcases our



dedication to sustainability by incorporating locally sourced produce into our menu, supporting local farmers and reducing our carbon footprint. As a part of Rooted in Nature, we have incorporated Baby Spinach, Avocado, and Beetroot Salad, Pasture-Raised Grilled Chicken at Sorrento and Shang Palace's menu now features new additions such as Free Range Chicken Clear Soup, Stir-Fried Hydroponic Pokchoy, and Kale. This culinary evolution caters to diverse tastes and adds an extra layer of excitement to

our guests' dining experiences.

Are there emerging opportunities or trends that you believe will shape the future of the hotel industry, and how is Shangri-La positioned to leverage them?

The hotel industry is currently undergoing significant transformations, presenting us with exciting opportunities and trends which we are eagerly embracing. One notable trend is the rising demand for personalised and distinctive

experiences. To capitalise on this, we've introduced our pioneering initiative, the Le Petit Chef experience, which has been the first 3-D immersive digital dining experience in India. Le Petit Chef offers guests an unforgettable culinary journey that seamlessly blends cutting-edge technology with gourmet cuisine.

Furthermore, we recognize the pivotal opportunity in integrating technology into our services. Therefore, we are committed to investing in advanced systems that facilitate seamless and contactless experiences, including digital concierge services and smart room technologies.

Moreover, our esteemed Shang Palace, the 39th of its kind globally, has been a beacon of excellence since its establishment, epitomising our dedication to celebrating the elegance, richness, and dynamism of Cantonese cuisine. In an increasingly globalised world, authentic and culturally rich dining experiences like those offered at Shang Palace resonate deeply with discerning travellers seeking genuine cultural immersion.

Can you briefly describe your professional journey and how you ascended to the position of General Manager at Shangri-La Hotel?

Embarking on my journey in the world of hospitality, I dedicated myself to mastering diverse operational roles, instilling in me a deep-seated commitment to excellence. My Shangri-La adventure has been a dynamic progression through various departments, each contributing to the success of different properties within the Shangri-La family. This journey reached its pinnacle as I assumed the role of General Manager at Shangri-La Eros, New Delhi. This ascent symbolises not just a career trajectory but also my unwavering dedication to providing unparalleled hospitality. It is a journey fueled by the collaborative efforts of a talented team and grounded in the Shangri-La ethos, where guest satisfaction and innovation take precedence. In my current role as General Manager, I am privileged to lead a team dedicated to elevating the guest experience and upholding the highest standards of service, making each guest's stay at Shangri-La Eros, New Delhi, truly exceptional.

What motivated you to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, and how has your background contributed to your success in this role?

As a passionate hotelier, my journey in the hospitality industry was driven by a deep-seated desire to create memorable experiences and genuine connections with people from all walks of life.

From a young age, I was drawn to the dynamic nature of the hospitality sector, where every day presents new challenges and opportunities to delight guests and exceed their expectations. My background, steeped in education from IHM Business School and practical training at the Institute of Hotel Management, laid a solid foundation for my career in hospitality. The rigorous curriculum and hands-on experiences equipped me with the essential skills and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of this industry with confidence. Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of serving in various capacities, from Resident Manager to Director of Operations, honing my expertise in Operations, Sales and Marketing, Revenue Management, Finance, Renovation, and loyalty marketing along the way. Each role has provided me with invaluable insights and experiences that have shaped my approach to leadership and management. I firmly believe in leading by example and fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and service excellence within my team. Moreover, my ability to adapt to changing market dynamics and leverage emerging trends has been instrumental in driving the success of Shangri-La Eros New Delhi. By staying abreast of industry developments and constantly striving for improvement, I've been able to position the hotel as a premier destination for luxury hospitality.



SUMIT KAUSHIK

Decoding Modi's North East Story

As history's dust clears, an extraordinary story unfolds—one of India's North East transformed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary leadership. At its core is a once-marginalized region now rejuvenated through comprehensive development and social unity efforts

A recent literary contribution, "Modi's North East Story," penned by Tuhin A. Sinha, the BJP's national spokesperson, and Aditya Pittie, an experienced entrepreneur and angel investor, serves as a beacon illuminating this transformative journey. This literary work isn't just gaining traction within India but is resonating deeply among the Indian diasporas. It's a testament to the emergence of 4.7 crore citizens of Northeast India as the vanguard of Bharat's resurgence. What struck me most upon reading this narrative was the realisation of the Northeast's immense potential. Blessed with unparalleled natural beauty, extraordinary biodiversity, and a skilled workforce, the region had languished in obscurity for far too long. However, under the dynamic leadership of PM Narendra Modi, a new dawn has emerged for the Northeast.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TRANSFORMATION

The eight states of the Northeast—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—share borders with neighbouring countries such as Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. This geographic location has historically endowed the region with a rich tapestry of social and cultural connections, often referred to as 'Suvannabhumi' (land of gold) in ancient texts.

However, delving into the pages of this enlightening tome, one confronts the stark reality of neglect endured by the Northeast under previous regimes. This grim scenario changed when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government came to power in 2014 and took landmark steps to promote social harmony and peace in the region. The government has shown respect and sensitivity towards the culture, identity, and dignity of the people of the region and has engaged in dialogue, development, and democracy to address the grievances and aspirations of the people. The government has made efforts for the surrender of militants through various peace talks and accords, the rehabilitation of surrendered insurgents, the creation of several autonomous councils for different tribal groups, the removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from several districts, and the reduction of border conflicts, among many other measures. The signing of the Karbi Peace Accord,



the Assam Adivasi Peace Accord, the Dimas Peace Accord, and the Bodo Peace Accord are examples of how the government has made a lasting difference.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND CONNECTIVITY

Underpinned by the twin pillars of peace and development and manifested in unprecedented infrastructure creation and an increase in connectivity, the Northeast is witnessing an exponential leap in its quality of life today. The sheer magnitude of the all-round transformation of the Northeastern states in the last decade under PM Narendra Modi's dynamic leadership is a case study for all scholars of social sciences and public administration. The speed of infrastructure projects undertaken in border areas has boosted the standard of living in far-flung districts. Northeast India witnessed an unprecedented jump in the number of airports in the North Eastern Region (NER), which rose from nine to 16, and the numbers of flights have increased from about 900 to 1,900 post-2014. Some Northeastern states have made their way onto India's railway

map for the first time, and efforts are being made to expand the waterways too. At the same time, the restoration of age-old conflicts and improved law and order situations have led to record tourist footfalls in the region. Under PM Modi's visionary leadership, the Northeast has emerged as an important reservoir for India's growth in the decades to come.

THE 'ACT EAST POLICY' AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

When Narendra Modi became the PM of India in 2014, he had a vision of transforming India. He put the Northeast at the heart of his vision. He changed the 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy' and took a holistic approach to tackle the challenges of the region. PM Modi's vision for the Northeast extends beyond mere economic development. It encompasses a holistic approach that embraces the region's cultural diversity and heritage. The launch of the 'Act East Policy' has opened new avenues for trade and collaboration, positioning the Northeast as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Central to this narrative is PM Modi's 'Act East Policy', which reimagines the Northeast as India's gateway to

Southeast Asia. Through enhanced connectivity and strategic collaborations, the region emerges as a pivotal player in fostering regional integration and economic growth. After 2014, a major impetus was given to further strengthen this relationship between the Indian Northeast and Southeast Asia. Modi envisaged the Northeastern states as India's gateway to Southeast Asia. To realise this potential, work is resolutely underway on projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT Highway) and the Agartala-Akhaura rail project. Once complete, these would be complete game changers for the region. When the outlook changes, the rest of the changes are mere formalities.

LEADERSHIP AND PEOPLE-CENTRIC GOVERNANCE

Unlike most PMs in the past who handled the Northeast from a distance, PM Modi has visited the Northeast around 60 times in nine years, which is perhaps more than the total number of visits by all his predecessors put together. The result is a miraculous transformation in the region, with the Northeast being cited all over as

the Modi government's development model.

INCLUSIVITY AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

It may be noted that in the last few years, the Northeast has witnessed many firsts that should actually have happened long, long ago. Almost 60 years after Nagaland attained statehood, the national anthem was played inside the Nagaland Assembly for the first time on February 21, 2021. Similarly, the Tripura Assembly played the national anthem for the first time on March 23, 2018, after the BJP government was sworn in the state. For the first time since our independence, under PM Modi, our most farflung villages on the border have been given top priority for development and employment generation under the recently launched Vibrant Village Programme. These endeavours epitomise a commitment to inclusivity and progress, reflective of PM Modi's mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'.

ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

While infrastructure and economic development are

crucial, the preservation and promotion of the unique cultural heritage of the Northeast have not been overlooked. Prime Minister Modi's dedication to nurturing and celebrating the diverse traditions, languages, and customs of the region has not only strengthened the social fabric but has also projected the Northeast onto the global stage. Since then, on his nearly 60 visits to the Northeast, he has inaugurated many projects, held rallies and roadshows, and attended swearing-in ceremonies. of North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) governments. Yet, beyond the realm of infrastructure lies a concerted effort to preserve and celebrate the Northeast's rich cultural heritage. Prime Minister Modi's unwavering dedication to this cause not only strengthens the social fabric but also elevates the region onto the global stage. This transformation didn't materialise overnight. It's the culmination of relentless engagement, dialogue, and empowerment—markers of PM Modi's leadership since 2014. His unprecedented visits to the Northeast, coupled with strategic

initiatives, have sown the seeds of progress and prosperity. Economic indicators underscore this remarkable turnaround, with the Northeast witnessing a surge in GDP and trade, coupled with a decline in insurgency and enhanced connectivity. The cumulative GDP of the Northeastern states has more than doubled from 2.97 lakh crore to 6.81 lakh crore, and their share of the Indian GDP has increased from 2.6 percent in 2013-14 to 2.9 percent in 2021-22. The Northeast has undergone a tremendous economic transformation under the Modi government.

CONCLUSION

In a world often beset by cynicism, the Northeast stands as a beacon of possibility—a testament to the transformative power of visionary leadership and collective endeavor. The progressive journey continues, fueled by the promise of a brighter tomorrow for all.

In decoding Modi's Northeast Story, we unearth not just a tale of development but a narrative of resilience, renewal, and the promise of a brighter future for all. As we celebrate the Northeast's resurgence, let us continue to amplify these voices and pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous India. Unlike most Indian PMs who did not challenge the status quo, PM Modi thrives on taking the uncharted route. Social justice and historical course correction are always high priorities of the Modi government, be it about individuals or a region. Northeast India today has the highest-ever representation in the Union Council of Ministers, wherein there are two cabinet ministers and three ministers of state. For the first time, a Member of Parliament (MP) from Tripura has found a place in the Council of Ministers. Over the years, Nagaland's biggest annual cultural extravaganza, the Hornbill Festival, and Manipur's Sangai Festival have been attracting visitors from all parts of the country.

As we navigate through the labyrinthine corridors of change, it's imperative to acknowledge the voices and narratives that animate this saga. "Modi's North East Story" serves as a conduit, amplifying the voices of facilitators, executors, researchers, and witnesses, democratising this tale of hope and empowerment.

(The writer is a PhD Candidate and impact consultant; views are personal)

We are far away from the 2030 goal of gender equality

Globally, 60 per cent or about 1.12 billion women of reproductive age, live where abortion is broadly legal, while, 40 per cent or 753 million under restrictive laws

On the eve of the International Women's Day, France enshrined abortion rights in its constitution. While, addressing the French lawmakers, the French Prime Minister said that the country had 'a moral debt to women', and the lawmakers 'a chance to change history'. In the aftermath of the SC decision in the USA, overriding the 1973 verdict in Roe v. Wade, eliminating the constitutional right to an abortion, abortion laws have once again come to spotlight. Earlier, Poland, had effectively banned it, while, Hungary imposed several bureaucratic hurdles for women. In India, the test of 'foetal viability' may prove to be a handicap for many women. While, in 2022, Dr. Natalia Kanem, UNFPA, asserted that 'women's bodily autonomy is the foundation for gender equality'. Globally, 60%, or about 1.12 billion women of reproductive age, live where abortion is broadly legal, while, 40% or 753 million under restrictive laws. In today's world of growing violence, physical, emotional or sexual, against women and girls, especially, by husbands or intimate partners, is becoming a cause for concern. In 2021, one woman was killed in every 11 minutes by a relative, while, a quarter of people worldwide believe, it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife. New forms of violence against women



are also emerging online, fuelled by digital tools like deepfakes and by misogynistic influencers, forcing women out of digital spaces (UNDP, 2024).

Even though the world is committed to promoting women's economic justice and closing gender gaps in the world of work (SDG-10), one in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty, and if the current trends continue by

2030, an estimated 8 per cent of the world's female population, 342.4 million women and girls - will still be living on less than \$2.15 a day, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Close to one in four, and will experience moderate or severe food insecurity. An estimated 73.5 per cent of women in wage employment do not have access to social protection. Only 61.4 per cent of prime working age women

are in the labour force, compared to 90 per cent of men. More than 2.7 billion women in 69 economies are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men, and 43 economies have no laws on sexual harassment in the workplaces. There is a wide wage disparity as well, with each dollar a man earns in labour, a woman only 51 cents. Women spend about 16.4 billion hours on

unpaid care work every day, three times more than men, and at this rate, it would exceed up to 40 per cent of GDP in some countries by 2050. While, the closure in gender gap in labour force participation could give a raise of USD 7 trillion to the global economy and an average 20% higher GDP per capita.

Sadly, halfway through the gender equality goal (SDG-5), not a single indicator for SDG-5 (gender equality and empowerment) has been met, or even almost met, with only 15.4 per cent of indicators are 'on track', 61.5 per cent at a moderate distance and 23.1 per cent are far or very far off track from 2030 targets. It is estimated to take at least 300 years to end child marriage, 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace, and 47 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments (UN). There is a need for an additional USD 360 billion per year to achieve gender equality and failure to prioritise it, could not only jeopardise the entire 2030 Agenda for SDGs, but, 'the very foundation of a fair society, a goal upon which all other goals must stand' (UN DESA).

Now, one of the key challenges is lack of financing. There is a staggering USD 360 billion annual

deficit in spending on gender-equality measures (UNWomen). The rising costs of conflicts and fuel and food prices, forced almost 143 countries in undertaking policy measures that undermined their capacity of spending on public services and social protection. A recent study called for alternative economic models shifting towards a green economy and care society for amplifying women's voices, and achieving feminist climate justice, as the impending climate crisis is likely to push up to 158.3 million more women and girls into poverty.

As the conflicts proliferate across the globe, women face more challenges with increased maternal mortality and morbidity, lack of healthcare, and girls being deprived of school education. The 2024 Women's Day has rightly focused on investing in women for accelerating all round progress. Now, it is imperative for nations to redouble their efforts in realising the committed goals, to ensure women and girls get access to healthcare, education and capacity building, opportunities for power-sharing and economic participation, and end gender-based violence by breaking the stranglehold of normative behaviour and stereotypes.

(The author is former Director General, Doordarshan & All India Radio, views are personal)



ARCHANA DATTA

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week heralds a phase where joy and unity have previously filled your home, yet attention must now turn towards personal well-being and economic stability. Recent indulgences in rich foods may necessitate a visit to a healthcare professional for advice. Heed your inner voice; adopting a more orderly and disciplined lifestyle promises to be beneficial. For the younger members, especially those engaged in learning, it's crucial to stay focused on educational pursuits. Distractions may arise from romantic interests or leisure activities, potentially stirring strong emotions or unusual dreams. These could lead to disagreements with close family members or negatively impact academic performance. An inclination to allocate resources towards personal and health-related issues might strain your budget. Embracing moderation and restraint as guiding principles this week can help navigate these challenges.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Friday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

You find yourself seeking an escape from current challenges, hoping a change of scenery will ease your struggles. Your hesitance to confront these issues stems from underestimating your own strength, leading to a search for external support. However, midweek promises a positive shift. You might receive encouraging news from a distance, hinting at opportunities for personal growth or a potential advancement in your career path. This period also brings joy through family connections, particularly from younger members, injecting your days with light and enthusiasm. The latter part of the week invites you to embrace a more carefree attitude. An influx of vibrant energy encourages you to seek pleasure and social gatherings, while a tendency towards idealism may have you indulging in daydreams.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Orange
Lucky day Tuesday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, your inherent kindness and empathy shine brightly as you find joy in extending support and gifts to those in need, enhancing their lives and yours. There's a strong presence in your life, someone keen to offer you both emotional and financial guidance, steering you towards positive paths. Should you face legal challenges, victory leans in your favor, though it may come at a financial cost. This fortunate turn of events seems to echo the goodwill you've amassed, suggesting a rewarding return of past virtuous actions. As the week unfolds, the aura of love and connection envelops you, hinting at the blossoming of new bonds or the deepening of existing ones, bringing you unparalleled joy and fulfillment. This period marks a significant phase of emotional growth and joy.

Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Black
Lucky day Wednesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week, your self-assurance and vitality are soaring. Positioned at a crossroads with much at stake, you encounter unforeseen obstacles. In these moments, envy arises from others, impressed by your accomplishments. Yet, you remain unshaken, refusing to let adversaries gain the upper hand. Your steadfast demeanor is the key to your achievements, asserting your autonomy. Joy permeates the family atmosphere, with the potential to lay the groundwork for a home or establish a durable base. Couples find themselves in sync, making impactful decisions regarding their children, who also bring joy into your life. Academic achievements of the young ones bring unexpected joy, and the celebrations are a shared delight. As the week concludes, those unattached might find themselves embarking on a new romantic journey.

Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Monday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

In your journey through life, you naturally gravitate towards pioneering endeavors. Your innate charm propels you towards leadership roles, irrespective of the setting. Your aspirations soar high, and your adventurous spirit leads you to form connections effortlessly, making you a focal point in social gatherings. When it comes to competition or group activities, your excellence shines, contributing significantly to communal joy. Your inclination to lead often manifests as assertiveness, which on occasion, could be perceived as overbearing, potentially alienating others. Midweek calls for a period of introspection and recuperation. It's a prime time to seek harmony within, perhaps through a serene getaway, allowing for a rebalancing of your inner dynamics. As the week winds down, be mindful of potential emotional turbulence, particularly in professional relationships or familial interactions, especially involving maternal figures or authority.

Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Saturday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

The course of your journey is undergoing a significant shift, signaling the dawn of a new chapter in your existence. This transformation is rooted in purpose, heralding substantial alterations that might manifest in your daily habits or perspectives. A previous belief or behavior that once served you now seems obsolete, prompting you to release it. This period feels as though when one opportunity dwindles, another emerges more aligned with your path. You might find yourself exploring new dietary choices or considering a change in your mode of transportation. Throughout the week, your work setting showcases your leadership skills and resilience, creating an atmosphere where you motivate and elevate those around you. A harmonious blend of rationality and emotion guides your decisions, ensuring that your choices are thoughtful and balanced.

Lucky number 16 | Lucky colour White
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week holds a surge of dynamic potential for you, propelling you towards fully investing in your professional pursuits. For those eyeing a step up in their careers, the pinnacle of success is tantalizingly close. As the week unfolds, expect pivotal evaluations from those above you, with your hard work and dedication likely to be recognized towards the week's closure. Anticipate positive changes, possibly including a promotion or an increase in remuneration, as a testament to your relentless drive and commitment. Celebration in a picturesque setting may be in order, marking a well-deserved break from your endeavors. However, a word of caution: remain vigilant against those who might wish to undermine your achievements. There could be attempts to diminish your reputation, appropriate your innovative ideas, or monopolize your time, driven by competitive motives or envy.

Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Blue
Lucky day Thursday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week, you're drawn to activities that sharpen your intellect, like solving puzzles and delving into creative projects. Your quest for knowledge will make your thinking clearer, resolving many misunderstandings. However, this single-minded focus might lead to neglect in other life areas, stirring emotional unrest. Relationships could face strains; be mindful to maintain harmony. Towards the week's end, your efforts in professional pursuits may be recognized, possibly leading to a promotion or financial reward. This period also enhances your standing within your social circle, possibly bringing new responsibilities. Amidst intellectual pursuits, remember the importance of balance to avoid potential personal conflicts. Nurturing your relationships and giving attention to emotional well-being is key to making the most of this period's opportunities.

Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Pink
Lucky day Monday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

Your proficiency and skill in handling tasks are clearly displayed, demonstrating not only a solid grasp of your duties but also an insight into the techniques and driving forces behind them. Your interactions, especially when engaging with others, are marked by a charismatic eloquence that seems to weave enchantment. Your self-assurance in your competencies and the ability to manifest desired outcomes underscore your distinctive presence, illuminating your path toward acclaim. This period appears favorable for financial prosperity as well. A sequence of prospects emerges, signaling a turn towards improved fortunes and financial gain. Expectations of receiving financial benefits, possibly through gifts or significant life events, hint at the fruition of your prior endeavors. You also devote time to personal growth and enlightenment, maintaining a grounded approach and letting pragmatism steer you towards triumph.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Grey
Lucky day Thursday



CANCER June 21-July 22

You have a unique ability to navigate through people's emotional and personal challenges, offering guidance on matters of the heart, friendships, and domestic issues. Yet, it's vital not to let your own emotional ups and downs control you. As the week unfolds, you'll experience a transformation in your thinking and behavior. You'll find yourself more in control and emotionally resilient. Despite potential feelings of sadness or emptiness, these moments are stepping stones to greater strength and self-improvement. Your determination, faith, and motivation will be key to overcoming any obstacles. An opportunity for travel or a new adventure may arise, offering a fresh perspective. Your ability to steer your life with intention and energy will be crucial as you move towards achieving your dreams.

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Red
Lucky day Sunday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

Currently, there's a phase where one might feel overwhelmed by uncertainty, with their thoughts oscillating between fantasies and fears. This period is marked by a sense of unease, as emotional and psychological challenges dominate. Concerns about the future, along with a lack of support from acquaintances, contribute to a stressful atmosphere. Financially, there's more outgoing than incoming, leading to feelings of isolation and stress. This moment calls for introspection and learning from past errors. Despite achievements and gains in various aspects of life, there's been a reluctance to share these blessings, driven by a fear of loss. This mindset has prevented true enjoyment of these successes. As the week progresses, there will be a realization of one's stable standing in terms of wellness and financial security.

Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

As the week unfolds, an unexpected triumph in your professional life greets you. The dedication, enthusiasm, and resources you've poured into your endeavors are finally yielding significant rewards, instilling a sense of pride and empowerment within you. Your journey, marked by perseverance despite early obstacles, stands testament to your resilience. The collaborative efforts and mutual support within your team are now bearing fruit, highlighting the strength of unity. Your leadership shines through, a result of mastering your emotions. However, as the week draws to a close, there's a temptation to excessively indulge in leisure activities. It's advised to steer clear of prolonged digital interactions, focusing instead on appreciating your achievements. Embracing practices that foster tranquility and harmony, you're reminded of the importance of balance in relationships and personal well-being.

Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Maroon
Lucky day Saturday

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Watch your thought



Mind is the prime mover of a being, which with its 'power of knowing' drives us through in life. It holds the key to all human functionalities, with related bearing far beyond the individual self. All doings on our part, before coming into play, originate in mind - arousal of desire and thereby related thoughts, ideation, articulation, and the will to act upon. How we engage with the world around, or the way we react or respond to external stimuli, is again directed by the mind. It also attends to emotional stimuli from within and beyond. The most striking feature of human mind is its capacity to guide our actions by choice and discrimination. But whenever there is choice, the probability of its use and misuse becomes equal. That turns mind into a double-edged weapon, which could act either way. It could lead us conduct rightfully and turn life into a pleasant experience. In the same vein, it could act a trickster, delude us, and lay down the ground for self-invited pains and sufferings in life. Even more, because of unique character of each being, which

varies from person-to-person, coming as it may as Karmic carryover from the past. The unique character of a being is what makes one perceive things a particular way, and accordingly pursue the journey of life. Owing to this indwelling sense of duality, mind often gets trapped into self-excited conflicting thoughts as well. This human vulnerability makes a being an enigma by oneself. No wonder, both creative as well devilish streaks are in evidence all around. This riddle needs to be resolved for a smooth run of life, individually and collectively. What further complicates the mind function is its wandering nature. Mind keeps breeding thoughts every moment. Also, gets caught up in external promptings of the seeming world. And then randomly flirts with them, as a monkey unthinkingly jumping from one branch of a tree to the other. Caught up in such a self-created web, mind is not left with enough of space to objectively process the thoughts playing within. The sense of discriminating ability then takes a back seat, and with obvious consequences. The beauty of mind as an instrument,

however, is that it is also armed with the capacity to self-reflect upon thought-trends playing within. That helps every unitary mind explore its own strengths and vulnerabilities. One could identity and acknowledge the

fault lines, make necessary amends through fresh educative inputs, and expand the vision. Also, identify one's indwelling potential, hone them further, and come out with one's best. Provided one remains conscious of

this empowerment mechanism, which majority, caught up in the usual mills of life, seldom seem to care. The paradox, however, is that ordinarily one's sense of Ego-consciousness identifies itself with inherent mind-trends, as if that would be its prime mover. It doesn't let you have a dispassionate look at your own-self, and the least of all acknowledge own weaknesses. Here comes astrology to one's aid, which helps analyse personality trends by looking into the energy signature of a being. And energy knows no bias. Here is the case of a young man, who even in his late thirties, caught up in his inconsequential illusionary perceptions, has not been able move forward in life, despite having immense potential. The two luminaries, the Sun and Moon, are beautifully aligned. That helped get things easy in life. Benevolent Jupiter over the head when born, he enjoyed strong parental support. But Moon is placed adverse to Saturn, Mercury, mischievous Neptune, and Uranus. This, in the first place, brought in a negative mindset, and would be suspicious of others. He

will avoid taking challenges and keep delaying his initiatives. He will be critical of others. He remains vulnerable to being subject to limitations and hardships of his own making. Second, it speaks of his worrisome nature. He will be indecisive, lacks focus, and would be resentful of others. Third, he would be an escapist, stuck to his illusionary thoughts, distanced from ground reality. He may not acknowledge truth in its first appearance, and rather prefer pursuing his ideas on hope against hope, till pushed to the wall. Fourth, he has a mercurial temperament often showing signs of eccentricity. Mercury also placed adverse to Saturn and Neptune accounts for his fixated one-track mind, as well as his insensible reasoning and judgement. The result is there to see. I wish he works upon himself as suggested to come out of his negative bind when his potential side will begin playing out unhindered. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com