



OPINION 6

LK ADVANI:
A RATNA OF BHARAT

WORLD 9

ISRAELI FORCES FIRE ON CROWD
WAITING FOR AID, 100 KILLED

MONEY 10

CABINET NOD TO ₹1.26 LAKH
CRORE CHIP MAKING UNITS

LUCKNOW, FRIDAY MARCH 1, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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RAHUL RULED
OUT, BUMRAH
RETURNS: BCCI
12 SPORTS

Sandeshkhali Shaitan Shackled

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
BASIRHAT

In an apparent damage-control exercise, the Trinamool Congress expelled Sheikh Shahjahan, the don of Sandeshkhali, a day after his arrest.

This action comes about two months after his men attacked a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials and, notably, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arambagh in Hooghly district of Bengal.

Speaking about the decision, TMC MP Derek O'Brien and State Minister Bratya Basu said Shahjahan was suspended from the party for six years and challenged the BJP leadership to take similar action against their leader and MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is accused of assaulting women wrestlers.

"There are two types of parties... One type of party, talk and talk while the other types like the Trinamool Congress... Walk the talk," O'Brien said.

Basu alleged that, taking advantage of some stray incidents "against which the TMC always takes a truthful decision," the Opposition parties like BJP were out to malign the Government.

Alleged to be the "fund manager and rigging expert" of his party in large parts of North 24 Parganas,

Shahjahan was arrested on Wednesday night about two months after he hit the national headlines when his men beat up and seriously injured a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials.

Apart from masterminding the attack on the ED team, Shahjahan, a Trinamool Congress leader and district board member of North 24 Parganas, is also charged with mass land-grabbing and alleged sexual assault on women in Sandeshkhali and the neighbouring riverine islands of the district.



ADG, South Bengal, Supratim Sarkar, said Shahjahan was arrested late on Wednesday night from the

Minakhan area, adding that he had been forwarded to Basirhat court. The TMC leader has been remanded to 10 days police custody, sources said.

A few of his cronies, including local TMC leaders Shibu Hajra, Uttam Sardar, and Ajit Maity, had already been arrested earlier.

Earlier, the Calcutta High Court had instructed the police to arrest him without delay.

Sandeshkhali has been in the national news after Shahjahan's men attacked the ED on January 5.

Subsequently, after about a month, emboldened by his absence from the area, hundreds of women rose up in revolt, complaining of land grab, sexual assault, and surrounded the local police station.

Since then, the area has been on the boil with successive visits of national commissions for women, SCs, and STs, almost all of whom have demanded the imposition of President's Rule in the area.

Regarding the TMC leadership's claim that they are the real party with a difference that acts against corrupt members, Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar said, "It is all drama being enacted by Mamata Banerjee... to save her face... Shahjahan had been under TMC's protection for the past two months.

The CPI(M) also said Shahjahan was an asset of the TMC and "the party could not afford to expel him... Not only because his goons rig polls, but also because he knows too much about TMC's money laundering." Meanwhile, the ED has moved the court, saying Shahjahan could tamper with the evidence for which the agency had raided his house. The agency could soon seek his custody in the ₹10,000 crore ration scam that has landed senior TMC leader and former Bengal Minister Jyotipriya Mallick in jail.



Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan, accused of sexual violence and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali village, being produced at the Basirhat court, in North 24 Parganas, on Thursday PTI

BJP suggests names of Lok Sabha Contestants

RAJESH KUMAR ■
NEW DELHI

From External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to late Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj, and Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, were among the names that circulated in the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting on Thursday as the party convened to release its first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Sources said the meeting discussed the seats lost in the 2019 General Elections and the margins of victory and defeat to decide on the various sets of names proposed by the ruling party. Prior to the CEC meeting, a five-hour-long session was held at the Prime Minister's residence at 7 Lok Kalyan Marg, attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the party's national president JP Nadda.

As per the first list to be released Modi will be the obvious contestant from his two term Varanasi constituency, Union Home Minister Amit Shah from Gandhi Nagar, Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, Smriti Irani from Amethi, while former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh



Chouhan from Vidisha, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju from Arunachal West, Arjun Ram Meghwal from Bikaner, Gajendra Sekhawat from Jodhpur, Sambit Patra from Puri, Jyotiraditya Scindia from Gwalior, Pratima Bhounik from Tripura west, Saroj Pandey from Korba, BD Sharma from Khajurao, Ajay Bhatt from Nainital, Ravi Kishan from Gorakhpur, Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi, Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma from West Delhi, Ramesh Bidhuri from South Delhi, Annapurna Devi from Koderma, Sunil Kumar from Chattr, Nishikant Dubey from Godda, Arjun Munda from Khunti, Kailash Chaudhary from Barmer, Om Birla from Kota, Rahul Kaswan from Churu, Dushyant Singh from

Jhalawar, CP Joshi from Chittorgarh.

A decision on candidates for the States of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu has been put on hold. Alliance discussions are in progress in all three States — with Akali Dal in Punjab, Telugu Desam Party and Jana Sena in Andhra Pradesh and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu.

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Devendra Fanavis, Prakash Javadekar, Mansukhbhai Mandaviya, Pushkar Dhami, Pramod Sawant, Bhupendra Yadav, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Keshav Maurya, Yogi Adityanath and others attended the meeting.

Continued on Page 8

NEWS BREAK

India blasts Pakistan for raising Kashmir at UNHRC

UNITED NATIONS/GENEVA: In a strong retort to debt-trapped Pakistan after it raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UN Human Rights Council, India has said it cannot pay any attention to a country which is soaked in red due to the bloodshed from terrorism that it sponsors around the world. First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva Anupama Singh exercised India's Right of Reply at the ongoing high-level segment of the 55th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday. India exercised the Right of Reply to respond to Türkiye and Pakistan after the two countries made references to Kashmir in their statements at the high-level segment.

Cancellation of protesting farmers visas sought

Chandigarh: In a development regarding the ongoing farmers' protest, DSP Ambala Joginder Sharma has revealed that efforts are underway to cancel the passports and visas of individuals allegedly involved in violence. "We have identified involved in violence coming to Haryana from Punjab in the name of farmers' protest. We have identified them with CCTV cameras and drone cameras. We will request the Ministry and embassy to cancel their Visas and passports. Their photos, name and address will be given to the passport office. We are working on canceling their passports", DSP Ambala Joginder Sharma said.

India's infrastructure friendly GDP Soars to 8.4 per cent



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth accelerated to 8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter of this fiscal, mainly due to double-digit growth in manufacturing and good showing by mining & quarrying and construction sectors.

The GDP (gross domestic product) growth was 4.3 per cent in the October-December 2022 quarter, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

The manufacturing sector's output, as per the gross value added in the third quarter of this fiscal, grew by 11.6 per cent compared to a contraction of 4.8 per cent in the year-ago period.

Mining and quarrying grew at 7.5 per cent in the third quarter, up

from 1.4 per cent a year ago.

The construction sector kept the growth momentum at 9.5 per cent against the same growth rate in the year-ago period.

However, the output of the farm sector declined by 0.8 per cent during the quarter compared to a growth of 5.2 per cent a year ago.

The national accounts data showed electricity, gas, water supply, and other utility services segment has grown by 9 per cent year-on-year against an 8.7 per cent rise. The GVA growth in the services sector — trade, hotel, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting — was 6.7 per cent during the third quarter against 9.2 per cent.

Financial, real estate and professional services grew by 7 per cent in the third quarter over 7.7

per cent earlier.

Public administration, defence and other services posted 7.5 per cent growth against 3.5 per cent in the third quarter of the last fiscal.

The NSO also released the second advance estimate for the current fiscal and pegged the economic growth at 7.6 per cent against 7.3 per cent estimated in the first advance estimate released in January.

"Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of ₹172.90 lakh crore, against the first revised estimates of GDP for the year 2022-23 of ₹160.71 lakh crore. The growth rate of GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 7.6 per cent compared to the growth rate of 7.0 per cent in 2022-23," the NSO statement said.

According to the statement, the nominal GDP or GDP at current prices in 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of ₹293.90 lakh crore against ₹269.50 lakh crore in 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 9.1 per cent.

It stated that the GDP at constant (2011-12) prices in Q3 of 2023-24 is estimated at ₹43.72 lakh crore against ₹40.35 lakh crore in Q3 of 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 8.4 per cent. The GDP at current prices in Q3 of 2023-24 is estimated at ₹75.49 lakh crore compared to ₹68.58 lakh crore in Q3 of 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 10.1 per cent, it stated.

Congress survives Himachal Tremor

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

With Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu taking responsibility for Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi's defeat in the Rajya Sabha polls, Priyanka Gandhi, a member of Congress' first family, once again proved to be the saviour for the party in preserving the Government in the state.

After intense deliberations within the party, the nominated central observers, and Priyanka, who serves as general secretary without any specific charge, Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Thursday disqualified six Congress MLAs who had cross-voted in the recent Rajya Sabha polls for the lone seat in the state.

They had also abstained from voting on Budget in the Assembly, defying a party whip to vote in favour of the Government on the Finance Bill. The ruling Congress had sought their disqualification on this ground. Following the



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, HP Congress Committee (HPCC) president Pratibha Singh with central observers and others during a Press conference in Shimla on Thursday PTI

disqualification of the rebel legislators, the effective strength of the House has reduced from 68 to 62 while the number of Congress MLAs has shrunk from 40 to 34 and the Government is safe as of now though Opposition Leader Jairam Thakur maintained that the Government will fall any day due to the disgruntled legislators and intense internal fighting. Addressing the media in Shimla, party observers

Bhupinder Hooda, D K Shivakumar said after one-to-one meetings with the Congress MLAs and deliberations with Sukhu and State Congress chief Pratibha Singh, differences have been ironed out. He also said it has been decided to form a coordination committee to sort out all internal matters and no leader would go to the press. The political crisis in Himachal Pradesh was triggered by cross-voting by six Congress MLAs in Rajya Sabha elections.

Continued on Page 8

India expands footprint in Indian Ocean region

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and Mauritius are natural partners in the maritime domain to combat traditional and non-traditional challenges in the Indian Ocean region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday after virtually inaugurating a new airstrip, a jetty and six community development projects in the island nation.

The India-assisted projects in Agalega island of Mauritius are seen as significant as they are expected to boost connectivity as well as maritime security and surveillance in the strategic waters in the region.

After inaugurating the projects along with Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, Modi

announced that Mauritius will be the first country to join India's Jan Aushadhi scheme, which is an initiative aimed at providing quality medicines at affordable prices.

In his remarks, Modi flagged concerns over challenges in the Indian Ocean region and said India and Mauritius are "natural partners" in the maritime domain to deal with them.

"Many traditional and non-traditional challenges are emerging in the Indian Ocean Region. All these challenges affect our economy. India and Mauritius are natural partners in the field of maritime security to deal with the challenges," he said at the virtual ceremony.

"We are actively working to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurate several India-assisted development projects at the Agalega Island in Mauritius, via a video conference, on Thursday PTI

ensure security, prosperity and stability in the Indian Ocean Region. We are cooperating together in all areas like monitoring of exclusive economic zone, joint patrolling, hydrography, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," he said. Modi's comments came amid increasing concerns in New Delhi over China's growing military forays into the Indian Ocean region which is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy.

He said the inauguration of the airstrip and jetty at Agalega island will further advance the cooperation. The Prime Minister described Mauritius as an important partner under India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and that the bilateral development

partnership has been an important pillar of the strategic relations.

"Our development partnerships are based on the priorities of Mauritius. Be it Mauritius's needs related to EEZ (exclusive economic zone) security, or health security, India has always respected the needs of Mauritius," he said. Modi said the basic objective of India's efforts is to bring about meaningful changes in the lives of common people in Mauritius. "Today holds a special significance for our development partnership. I am extremely happy that today we are seeing the completion of the commitment I had made in 2015. In India these days it is being called 'Modi's Guarantee'," he said.

The Prime Minister also talked about the "vibrant, strong and

unique" partnership between India and Mauritius, adding the island nation is New Delhi's special partner under its vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth For All in the Region).

"Our relations have gained unprecedented momentum in the last 10 years. We have achieved new heights in mutual cooperation," he said.

The inauguration of these projects came weeks after the launch of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) systems and RuPay card services in Mauritius.

"We are making history today on the island of Agalega with the inauguration of a new airstrip, a new jetty and several other development projects," Jugnauth said at the event.

DECLARATION
FORM IV (SEE RULE 8)

1. Place of publication

4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre,
Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226016

2. Periodicity of Publication

Daily

3. Printer's Name
(Whether citizen of India)
Address

Vijay Prakash Singh
Yes
224, Mahatma Gandhi Marg,
Lucknow Cantt (U.P.)

4. Publisher's Name
(Whether citizen of India)
Address

Vijay Prakash Singh
Yes
224, Mahatma Gandhi Marg,
Lucknow Cantt (U.P.)

5. Editor's Name
(Whether citizen of India)
Address

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P.O. Dikusha-226002

6. Resident Editor

Vijay Prakash Singh
224, Mahatma Gandhi Marg,
Lucknow Cantt (U.P.)

7. Name and address of Individuals
who own the newspaper and
partners or shareholders holding
more than 1% of the total capital

(1) IDBI
Indian Red Cross Building Society
1, Red Cross Road
New Delhi-110001
2. Opinion Express Communication
& Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.
3. Sanchar Holding Pvt. Ltd.
H-33A, Sainik Farms, Lane W 10C,
New Delhi-110062

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to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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PUBLISHER
THE PIONEER

Place: Lucknow
Dated: March 1st, 2024

NOTICE

I have changed My Daughter's name from Aqsa Imran to Inaya Imran daughter of Imran Ali Beg S/O Qamar Ali Beg, R/O 416-D Defence Colony Jajmau, Kanpur for all Future Purpose

NOTICE

I have changed My name from Arshia Farooqui to Arshia Farooqui W/O Imran Ali Beg, R/O 416-D Defence Colony Jajmau, Kanpur for all Future Purpose

OBITUARY

OBITUARY

NAIK ABHISHEK PRATAP
17 SEP 1991-01 DEC 2023

ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF NK ABHISHEK PRATAP WHILE SERVING WITH 31 BRTF, GREF.

FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

OBITUARY

OBITUARY

SEPOY KULDEEP KUMAR
18 JUL 1990 - 12 JAN 2024

ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF SEP KULDEEP KUMAR WHILE SERVING WITH 175 MH.

FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

OBITUARY

OBITUARY

NB SUB BADALE VIKAS NANA
04 MAY 1980- 15 DEC 2023

ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF NB SUB BADALE VIKAS NANA WHILE SERVING WITH MILITARY HOSPITAL JAIPUR.

FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

OBITUARY

OBITUARY

SEPOY SREE KUTTAN M
30 APR 1994 - 15 JAN 2024

ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF SEP SREE KUTTAN M WHILE SERVING WITH 307 F HOSP.

FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

Student on way to boards exams among 2 killed: A Class 10 student on her way to appear for her boards examination was among two who died after their motorcycle was hit by a truck in Ballia on Thursday, police said. Four people were travelling on the same motorcycle when the accident happened. *PTI*

NOTICE

The Original Allotment Letter and Possession Letter of EWS House No E-302 and E-301 Ravi Khand , Sharda Nagar Yojna Lucknow has been Lost somewhere. MANOJ KUMAR Pathak

NOTICE

I Patel Sanjay Kumar Sevntilala Army No 15791537H Rank HAV (Gnr) Unit 157 Lt Ad Regt (com) my army document in my father name Patel Sevantilal in the wrong but right Name Sevantilal Chaturdas Patel in aadhar

NOTICE

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I have changed My name from Imran Ali Beig to Imran Ali Beg S/O Qamar Ali Beg, R/O 416-D Defence Colony, Jajmau Kanpur for all Future Purpose

NOTICE

Deed No.3032/11 of Urmila W/o Jairam arakh Majula Bhavanipurwa, gata no.1598/2 Bangalipura, Banda, has indeed been lost by me on 10-2-2023. Anyone who finds it may return to me. Sushila Gupta W/o Suresh Chandra Gupta Mob.No.9415570987

NOTICE

In my high school CBSE board 2019 mark sheet, the name of mother & father has been recorded as Pratima Singh and Ashok Singh whereas the correct name of my mother & father is Sandhya Singh and Janardan Singh. I am Namrata Singh daughter of Janardan Singh village + post- Amora, Dist. - Ghazipur

Global market awaits India's skills in textile sector: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, asserted that the global market awaits India's skills, innovation and technology in the textile sector. He added that India exports carpets worth Rs 17,000 crore, with 60 per cent originating from Bhadohi, Mirzapur and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

During a media interaction on the fourth day of India Tex 2024 held at Pragati Maidan in Delhi, the chief minister extended a warm welcome to all buyers and visitors at the India Tex 2024 Uttar Pradesh Pavilion and expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving the opportunity to participate as a partner state in such a significant event. The exhibition showcases the past, present and future needs of the textile industry with special emphasis on the international aspect through the Bharat Mandapam and Yashobhoomi.

Praising Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's initiative, the chief minister mentioned that the exhibition, spanning the last four days, saw enthusiastic engagement from individuals nationwide and globally. He further noted that the textile industry was the second-largest employment provider after agriculture, offering boundless opportunities for technological advancements.

Chief Minister Yogi highlighted that in India Tex 2024, Uttar Pradesh has demonstrated its expertise in the textile sector, with 20 exhibitors in Yashobhoomi and 46 exhibitors in the Bharat Mandapam.

Artisans have displayed handicrafts, carpets and other handloom products from the state to buyers from across the country and the world and are receiving their appreciation.

"Uttar Pradesh holds limitless opportunities in the textile sector. Under Prime Minister Modi's PM Mitra Park Scheme, a mega textile park is set to be established in an area of 1,000 acres between Lucknow and Hardoi, as part of

the plan implemented at seven locations across the country. Additionally, efforts are underway to develop four new flat-ted factories in the state," the chief minister informed the gathering.

Yogi highlighted that significant efforts have been made in the past seven years to promote Lucknow's chikankari, Sitapur's durrie, Bareilly's zari-zardozi, and Bhadohi's carpets. All of these crafts serve as crucial means for creating employment opportunities. The global textile industry is currently looking at India with hope, he stated.

The chief minister also visited the stalls from different parts of the country at the exhibition, showing interest in their products while the artisans expressed their joy at meeting Chief Minister Yogi.

On this occasion, UP's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Minister Rakesh Sachan, Additional Chief Secretary Amit Mohan Prasad and other dignitaries were present.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at a stall in India Tex on Thursday

Cops booked for assaulting lawyers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Nearly 20 cops posted at the Vibhuti Khand police station were booked allegedly for assaulting a group of lawyers at Summit Building on Wednesday. The Vibhuti Khand police registered an FIR against the cops, eight of whom were identified.

"The incident had taken place on February 23 but the FIR was registered on February 28 under IPC sections 147 (rioting), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 325 (hurt), and 504 (insult)," ACP, Vibhuti Khand, Anindya Vikram Singh said.

The group of lawyers had earlier protested at the police station a few days back demanding an action against the accused cops.

The accused who have been identified are Rahul Baliyan, Jasim Raza, Phoolchand, Ritesh Dubey, Vinay Gupta, and Pandey, as per the FIR.

As per reports, the lawyers had gone for a dinner at a restaurant-cum-bar in Summit Building on February 23 when they had a scuffle with two other groups.

When the lawyers were leaving the building, they were surrounded by a group of policemen. "They assaulted us, leaving many of us injured. They then took us to the

police station and hurled abuses. They also booked us," the lawyers had alleged.

4 HELD FOR SHOOTING AT PROPERTY DEALER

Police on Thursday claimed to have arrested four accused who had shot at their rival over a property dispute in Bakshi-ka-Talab area on Wednesday afternoon. Those arrested were identified as Lavkush Yadav & Sonu Yadav of Sairpur police station area, Ravi Shanker Rawat of BKT and Surendra Singh of Jankipuram. The accused reportedly confessed to their crime and disclosed that property dispute with their rival Anand Yadav was the motive for the attempted murder.

The accused and Anand, who is a property dealer, had a business rivalry, which turned into enmity over plotting on a chunk of land in the area. The police said both the accused and the victim claimed ownership on the land. Both the parties had clashed over the issue in the past as well.

On Wednesday, Anand, along with his friends Tarun Singh and Naseem Ghazi, had gone to the disputed land when his rivals also reached there.

The accused thrashed Anand and attacked him with a sharp-edged weapon. As Anand tried to flee the scene to save his life, he was chased and pinned down. "They pinned me down and tried to pump a bullet into my chest. However, as I took evasive action, the bullet hit my hand," he stated in his complaint. The police had booked the accused under Section 307 of the IPC.

DUPED

In a case of cyber fraud, a man was duped of Rs 2.84 lakh in Madaon on Thursday. As per reports, Sharad Dixit of Priyadarshini Colony got a call from some unidentified person who offered him an online job in which he was supposed to complete tasks given by the company. However, he was later lured into investing money in the company on the promise of attractive returns.

The victim stated in his complaint that he ended up investing a huge sum even as he was promised attractive returns after the completion of maturity period. "I invested a total of Rs 2.84 lakh, but have yet to get my money back," he alleged. A case was registered in this connection.

LMC to come up with second animal birth control centre

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the rise in dog bite cases posing an increasing concern in the city, Lucknow Municipal Corporation is in the process of establishing a second Animal Birth Control (ABC) Centre, aimed at boosting the number of dog sterilisations.

According to animal welfare officer Dr Abhinav Verma, the proposed centre is slated for construction at Nadarganj Amausi. The proposal has been forwarded to the state government. Dr Verma elaborated on plans to ramp up sterilisation efforts with the new centre, aiming to increase daily procedures from the current 70-100 to around 150-160 per day once the second ABC Centre becomes operational.

Dr Verma said that the new centre is budgeted at approximately Rs 185 crore and will mirror the infrastructure of the existing facility in Indiranagar. Recruitment for the centre's team will be through a tender process, ensuring adequate manpower for operations.

Dr Verma said that the new centre will commence, as

detailed in the submitted project report. He said that over 75,000 dogs have already undergone sterilisation in Lucknow, covering 72 per cent of the city's stray dog population, based on a December survey indicating a population of 1.05 lakh. Daily drives continue as per standard protocols.

Regarding areas with high stray dog populations, Dr Verma said maximum complaints come from zones 1 & 6, emphasising the need for proactive measures in densely populated areas.

He mentioned that 70-100 sterilisations are conducted daily, contingent upon the previous day's dog catching activities. When queried about trends in dog bite complaints, Dr Verma noted consistent levels but highlighted increased media coverage of such incidents. In terms of pet dog registration, he said that 5,000 dogs are registered and 2,500 applications are pending. Plans for online registration alongside the existing offline process are underway for the next year to ensure broader coverage. Existing pending registrations will be addressed before the next licensing cycle begins on March 31.

Paper circulates on WhatsApp group during UP Board exam

Lucknow (PNS): A UP Board paper circulated widely on WhatsApp in Agra on Thursday, causing a lot of discomfort to the Education department officials. A committee has been set up to conduct a probe into the incident.

According to reports, a section of the Biology (Jeev Vigyan) paper for Intermediate students started circulating on WhatsApp at 3:15 pm, nearly an hour after the exam began at 2 pm.

Director of Secondary Education Mahendra Dev said that a committee comprising three members had been formed to probe the matter, and an FIR would be filed soon.

He mentioned that a portion of the paper was circulating on WhatsApp after the exam had commenced.

"We are carrying out investigations. Paper leaks usually happen when the paper is out before the exam starts. In this case, portions of the paper

were circulating on a WhatsApp group outside the exam centre. However, we are examining the matter and awaiting the reports," he explained. Dev clarified that the paper differed across centres within the district, highlighting the safety measures implemented by the board while crafting the question paper.

IT'S A 'PAPER LEAK' GOVT IN UP: AAP

The Aam Aadmi Party described the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in Uttar Pradesh as a "paper leak government" and criticised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for failing to conduct examinations in a fair way after two intermediate papers of UP Board were leaked. AAP teachers' cell state vice-president Shailendra Singh Rathore said the chief minister should resign as he could not even conduct the UP Board examinations without leak of exam

papers. Rathore demanded that the examination of UP Board's biology paper of class 12 be cancelled and re-conducted. He said the mafias dealing in exam paper leak had exposed the tall claims of the Yogi Adityanath government.

Rathod pointed out that earlier the papers of police constables recruitment, RO and ARO examinations were leaked. He said the chief minister, who had failed in checking cheating and maintaining the transparency and fairness in the examinations, should resign immediately.

"The Yogi government is continuously playing with the future of the youth and those preparing for competitive exams. Papers are leaked and go viral on WhatsApp these days. The government has miserably failed in conducting examinations without paper leaks. Incidents of paper leaks are continuously coming to light in Uttar Pradesh," he said.

CEC Rajiv Kumar-led team in Lucknow to assess preparedness for LS polls

Lucknow (PTI): A delegation led by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar arrived here on Thursday for a three-day visit to assess preparedness for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Official sources said the 13-member team of the Election Commission, in a review meeting with officials on the first day of its visit, discussed the arrangement of resources required for free, fair and peaceful voting in the state.

Apart from this, the team also held meetings with national and state-level political parties, including Bharatiya Janata Party,

Congress, Samajwadi Party, Apna Dal (Sonelal), Bahujan Samaj Party and Communist Party of India. According to the sources, the Election Commission team held talks with the representatives of all these parties one by one. The delegation also inaugurated an exhibition 'Elections: Moving Steps' at Yojana Bhawan in the state capital. This exhibition depicts the evolution of the Indian electoral system over time. The exhibition showcases the entire journey from the first general election of independent India in 1951 to the adoption of VVPAT by the EC in 2013. It

also mentioned that 53 political parties and 1874 candidates had participated in the first general elections held on 489 seats. According to the sources, the commission team will hold a meeting with all the district magistrates, divisional commissioners and regional, zonal and district police chiefs of the state on Friday to take stock of the preparations for the Lok Sabha elections.

Meanwhile, UP Congress spokesperson Anshu Awasthi said that the party's delegation met the EC team and put forward several suggestions and demands through a letter.

9-day book fair to kick off tomorrow

Lucknow (PNS): The Lucknow Book Fair is scheduled to take place at Ravindralaya from March 2 to 10. Addressing mediapersons on Thursday, book fair convener Manoj Singh Chandel announced that this edition would feature a wide variety of best-selling titles by renowned authors under the theme on 'Sahitya Kala Sanskriti Utsav'.

Chandel mentioned that thousands of titles in Hindi, English, and Urdu would be available at various stalls throughout the 9-day fair. Notably, for the first time, The National Library of India, Kolkata, will participate in the fair to raise awareness about book and newspaper delivery under the Public Library Act 1954. Chandel emphasised the importance of publishers sending printed material to Kolkata for recording. In terms of the art aspect, efforts will be made to underscore the importance of

art conservation. Workshops will be organised, focusing on the conservation of art pieces such as the largest mural at Ravindralaya, created by an artist whose centenary is being celebrated.

Publishers from Delhi, Raipur, Kolkata, Patna, and Mumbai will be participating, and the last three days of the Lucknow Book Fair are designated as holidays, advantageous for the general public.

Book Fair director Aakarsh Chandel announced free entry as usual, along with a minimum 10% discount on books.

He highlighted the enduring benefits of books in the virtual world, emphasising their role as companions and societal catalysts. A waterproof 15,000 square-foot hanger has been installed for displaying thousands of titles from leading publishers, ensuring safe and comfortable access for book lovers.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
MARINE DEPARTMENT
No. MD/ACTS/WNR-01/2023/247 Date: 26.02.2024
e-Tender Call Notice (e-TCN) No.MD/
ACTS/WNR-01/2023/74 dtd. 16/01/2024
Name of the work: Engagement of 01 no. All
Weather Steel Hull Vessel along with Manning
Crew on hire for a period of 5 (five) years for
deployment at Paradip SPMS on round the clock
24x7 basis Pollution Response-cum-SPMS
Security Duties. Estimated cost put to tender:
Rs.42,91,10,000/- Last date & time of
submission of tender through on-line bidding is
15:00 hours on dt.18.03.2024. For further
details, please log on to the website:
<https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>
Sd/- Deputy Conservator,
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/92/2023-2024 dtd.28.02.2024

**GURU NANAK
DEV UNIVERSITY,
AMRITSAR**
Advertisement No.
1/2024

Online applications are invited for
the various Teaching and Non-
Teaching posts in the University.
Online registration of application
for these posts will start w.e.f. **04-
03-2024** and end on **25-03-2024**.
Last Date for submitting Hard
Copy of the Online submitted
application is **02-04-2024**. For further
details visit University
Website: <http://www.gndu.ac.in>.
Amritsar
29.02.2024
REGISTRAR
NA/12/22431/2023/33022
Dated CHD :- 2/29/2024

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES**
Office of the Additional Chief Engineer,
Rushikulya Bahuda Basin, Berhampur - 760004
e-mail id: se_sicbam@yahoo.com
e-Procurement Notice No. ACE,RBB – 23/2023-24

1. Type of Work

2. Total No of Works

3. Amount put to tender

4. Period of completion

-> Flood Protection Work.

-> 01 (One) No.

-> Rs **816.91** Lakh

-> **12** (Twelve) calendar months

Procurement officer	Bid Identification No.	Bid Amount (Rs. in lakh)	Availability & Submission of Bid On-line
Additional Chief Engineer, Rushikulya Bahuda Basin, Berhampur	ACE,RBB(BNID) - 45/2023-24	816.91	From 13.03.2024, 10.00 A.M. to 27.03.2024, 5.00 P.M.

Date of opening of the Technical Bid:- **28.03.2024** at **11.30 A.M.**
Further details can be seen from the Govt. website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
OIPR-32411/11/0030/2324

**Additional Chief Engineer,
Rushikulya Bahuda Basin,
Berhampur.**

UP to soon become first state with fire stations at tehsil level: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, said that Uttar Pradesh had seen the setting up of 73 fire stations in the last seven years and was well on the way to become the first state in the country to have fire stations at the tehsil level.

Inaugurating and laying foundation stones of 38 fire stations virtually from his official residence, Chief Minister Yogi said: “The UP Fire and Emergency Services was established in the state in the year 1944. However, until 2017, only 288 fire stations were established in the state, while in the last seven years, 71 new fire stations have been set up. Today, we are moving ahead to become the first state in the country to have fire stations at the tehsil level.”

The chief minister also flagged off 35 firefighting vehicles on the occasion. He remarked: “We have advanced the programme of extensive reforms in law enforcement. As

a result, rapid modernisation is taking place in fire services in view of its importance in dealing with emergencies. So far, we have allocated approximately Rs 1,400 crore for the strengthening of departmental services.” Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath highlighted the significant strides taken towards modernisation of the department over the past seven years, including the prompt deployment of officials.

These efforts have yielded visible results, he stated, pointing out that previously, complaints about the complexity of the NOC process were frequent. “We implemented various changes to streamline it, leading to a substantial enhancement in Uttar Pradesh’s ease of doing business ranking in recent years,” he added.

Chief Minister Yogi emphasised the need to prioritise reducing the response times for fire tenders to mitigate loss of life and property. Significant enhancements have been made in this area in recent years, resulting in the



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath flagging off firefighting vehicles on Thursday

saving of 3,780 lives in more than 33,000 fire incidents. Furthermore, lives of over 5,000 animals and properties valued at Rs 150 crore were also

saved from getting damaged. Additionally, the department remains vigilant in managing crop fires during hot winds and has focused on modernising

emergency services to address these concerns,” he said.

He added that the government has not only modernised fire services, but has also estab-

lished the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) in the state. Currently, six companies of SDRF are operational. Besides, the formation of the

Special Security Force for the protection of important buildings and institutions within the state has also been completed.

By advancing these efforts, the government aims to strengthen the confidence of the residents, investors, and tourists. In this regard, in the first phase, fire stations will be established at the district level, and in the second phase, at the tehsil level within one and a half years.

The CM said that reducing department response time would strengthen the common man’s trust in the department and the government. “We must ensure that help reaches people immediately after a fire mishap. Training and counseling of children in schools and colleges regarding precautionary and rescue measures should be part of the programme. This is crucial not only to rely on the department during normal days but also to initiate prevention as soon as an incident occurs,” he added. “We need to prepare people in advance for prevention.

Identify the negligence responsible for fire incidents, and educate people on how to prevent loss of life so that till the time help reaches, people themselves can carry out rescue operations at their level. Every incident should be a lesson for us, and we should communicate that lesson to the people so that negligence can be avoided,” he mentioned. Yogi lamented the insensitivity displayed by people during accidents by taking selfies at the accident site rather than helping the victim.

Meanwhile, the chief minister also visited the exhibition organised by the Fire and Emergency Services and got information about fire-fighting equipment from the officials.

Transport Minister Daya Shankar Singh, Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, Chief Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra, Principal Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad, DGP Prashant Kumar, Director General Fire and Emergency Services Avinash Chandra and other officials participated in the programme.

UP set to witness boom in real estate sector

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh is set to witness a boom in the real estate sector with the launch of projects worth over Rs 50,000 crore during the recently held fourth edition of groundbreaking ceremony (GBC@IV) and it will also see creation of a significant number of jobs for the youth in the state.

Many prominent real estate firms, including from within India and abroad, have initiated their projects in Uttar Pradesh. It includes M3M India Private Limited, which is investing Rs 7,500 crore to develop residential, commercial, official, retail and service apartments. The project will provide more than 14,000 job opportunities for the youth of the state.

Moreover, Abhinandan Lodha House has initiated a luxury residential and commercial real estate project in Ayodhya with an investment of Rs 3,000 crore and it is expected to create over 100 job opportunities. The other major investors in the real estate sector include Prateek Retailers India Pvt Ltd, Wonder Cement Ltd, Shippa Estate Ltd, Omex Ltd, Eureka Builders Pvt Ltd, Rishita Developers Pvt Ltd, Gallant Lifespace Developers Pvt Ltd, ANS Developers Pvt Ltd, SG Estate Pvt Ltd, ORO Infra Developers LLP, Guy

Laroche, Sanfran Developers Pvt Ltd, Jainco Developers Pvt Ltd, Apex Group, BBD Group Viraj Constructions Pvt Ltd, Gajadhar Technosys LLP, Amaravati Homes Pvt Ltd, Nilansh Builders Pvt Ltd, and Sapphires Infraventures LLP.

The above mentioned real estate projects will open the floodgates of employment opportunities to the youth of Uttar Pradesh.

Meanwhile, besides real estate, the logistics sector will also offer a plethora of employment opportunities to the youth of Uttar Pradesh with several prominent companies of the sector having implemented projects in the state through GBC@IV. The biggest investment of more than Rs 1,250 crore has come from the Sharaf Group, which is establishing a logistics park in the Moradabad district. The project will generate more than 1,250 employment opportunities in the state.

It is noteworthy that in view of the increasing industrial investment in Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath government has approved the Warehousing and Logistics Policy to increase the storage capacity of the state. This policy not only provides fast-track land allocation for logistics parks, but also encourages development of logistics zones.

Resignation of IAS officer Abhishek Singh accepted; likely to contest Lok Sabha poll from Jaunpur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The resignation of IAS officer Abhishek Singh has been accepted after getting approval from the Central government. It will be considered effective from Thursday (February 29, 2024).

Abhishek Singh was an IAS officer of the 2011 batch. He resigned in October 2023. Sources said that Abhishek Singh is likely to enter the political field after leaving the civil services job. He is continuously active in political and social work in Jaunpur. There are also speculations about Singh contesting the Lok Sabha election from Jaunpur on Bharatiya Janata Party ticket.

Singh, who has worked in many films, was under suspen-

sion from February 2023 due to a long absence. Abhishek Singh’s wife Durga Shakti Nagpal is also an IAS officer. At present she is posted as the district magistrate of Banda.

Abhishek Singh had gone to Delhi on deputation in 2015. In 2018, his deputation period was extended for two more years, but during that time he went on medical leave. After this, the Delhi government sent Abhishek Singh back to his native cadre UP but he did not join the job in the state for a long time. He did not even give any satisfactory answer to the Appointment department. Later he joined on June 30, 2022.

Abhishek Singh was sent as an observer by the Election Commission of India for the

Gujarat assembly elections in 2022. He took charge of observer duty. When his celebrity-style photo in front of a car went viral on social media, the Election Commission removed him from observer duty on November 18, 2022.

After returning from Gujarat, Abhishek Singh again joined his duty in UP. This time the UP government suspended him. After this he applied for voluntary retirement from service (VRS).

In the beginning of February, Abhishek Singh started a free Ayodhya Dham Yatra for the people of Jaunpur. In this journey, five buses will take the devotees to Ayodhya Dham every day and will drop them to Jaunpur in the

evening. He had also posted its video message on social media platform X. Abhishek Singh named the buses Jaunpur Nishad Rath.

Sources said that Abhishek Singh made this arrangement for the people of Jaunpur as he was preparing to contest parliamentary election from the district, probably on a BJP ticket. He also named the buses after Nishad as the community has a large presence in Jaunpur and plays a decisive role in the victory of candidates.

Even before this, Abhishek Singh has brought many celebrities to Jaunpur. He has been frequently organising big programmes for the public in Jaunpur, in which large crowds gather.

They act as BJP cell, says AKY on CBI summons

Lucknow (PTI): Reacting to the Central Bureau of Investigation summons to him in the mining case before elections, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday said they (CBI) act as a cell of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Attacking the BJP, Yadav mentioned Chandigarh mayoral poll and alleged that the BJP’s “theft” and “dacoity” of votes came to the fore as election was held through ballot and CCTV was there.

Yadav was talking to reporters on the sidelines of a conference of PDA (Pichhda, Dalit and Alpsankhyak) in

which office-bearers of backward, minority and Dalit cells of the party were present.

“Summons before elections... they (CBI) act as ‘prakoshthi’ (cell) of the BJP,” Yadav said at the party office here. “Jo kagaz aaya tha, humne uska jawab de diya hai” (I have given a reply to the paper that I got), he said.

The SP chief said in the Lok Sabha elections, the people of Uttar Pradesh would remove the BJP government at the Centre.

On investments in the state, the former chief minister said the dreams of investment

shown by the government were not fulfilled.

“Despite investment sums, nothing has come to the ground,” he said.

“In the BJP regime, inflation is at its peak, law and order has gone down and women are most unsafe in the present regime in the state,” he said, adding that the need of the hour was to make the people aware of what was going on.

The cases in which Yadav has been summoned pertain to the issuance of mining leases in alleged violation of the e-tendering process. The Allahabad High Court had ordered the

probe. It is alleged that public servants allowed illegal mining during 2012-16, the period when Akhilesh Yadav was chief minister, and illegally renewed licences despite a ban on mining by the National Green Tribunal.

Reacting to the notice in the cases registered in 2019, Akhilesh Yadav attacked the BJP, saying, “The SP is on the maximum target (of the BJP). In 2019, I got a notice in some matters as there were Lok Sabha elections then. Now, when the election is approaching again, I am getting a notice again.”

Give priority to families having more than one disabled person: Maurya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, on Thursday, issued a directive to give priority in Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana Rural to those having more than one disabled person in a family.

It may be mentioned that during the tour programmes and Janata Darshan of the deputy chief minister, the demands of providing permanent housing were often being made by the disabled persons. Taking cognisance of it, Maurya issued directives in this regard on Thursday.

CM’S RURAL HOUSING SCHEME

An official communiqué released on Thursday also confirmed that a big number of houses were already allotted to disabled persons under the Chief Minister’s Rural Housing Scheme.

It is also noteworthy that for the implementation of Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana-Rural, government orders were issued from time to time for the convenience and selection of the beneficiaries. Certain classes, communities, castes, tribes have been included in various

priority categories of eligibility determined under the scheme.

The communiqué said that in relation to inclusion of destitute women (age 18 years to 40 years), disabled persons and widows in the priority category of eligibility prescribed in the government order issued for Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana (Rural), after due consideration it has been decided to add the following provisions.

“If there is more than one disabled person in a family, then such family will be given

preference under Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Apart from this, if there are more eligible disabled people than the target allotted to the concerned district, then the poorest disabled person will be given priority by the district administration. Necessary mandate in this regard has been issued by the Uttar Pradesh Rural Development department. Rural Development Commissioner GS Priyadarshi has given instructions to all officials concerned to ensure compliance with the government order in letter and spirit.

MATHURA SHAHI IDGAH CASE

Suit seeking ‘removal’ of mosque barred by law of limitation, HC told

Prayagraj (PTI): The counsel for the Shahi Idgah managing committee on Thursday argued in the Allahabad High Court that the suit seeking ‘removal’ of the mosque adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura is barred by the law of limitation. The limitation law sets a specific time period to seek a legal remedy. Taslima Aziz Ahmadi, appearing for the Muslim side, told the court that the two parties in the case entered into a compromise on October 12, 1968, which was confirmed in a civil suit decided in 1974. The limitation to challenge a compromise is three years but the suit was filed in 2020 and thus the present suit is barred by limitation law, she told the court. The high court was also informed that the suit has been filed for possession after the removal of the Shahi Idgah structure as well as for ‘restoration of the temple and for a permanent injunction.’

The prayer in the suit shows the structure of the mosque is there and the committee of management is in possession of the same, Ahmadi said. “In this way, a question/dispute has been raised on Waqf property and thus provisions of Waqf Act will apply and in such it is the Waqf tribunal who has jurisdiction to hear the matter and not a civil court,” she said. After hearing the argument, the High Court fixed March 13 as the next date of hearing the

plea regarding the maintainability of the suit seeking ‘removal’ of the Shahi Idgah mosque, which the Hindu side claims has been built on 13.37-acre land of Katra Keshav Deo temple.

SP MLA who cross-voted in RS polls visits Ram temple

Lucknow/Ayodhya: Samajwadi Party MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey visited Ayodhya with his family on Thursday and paid obeisance to Lord Ram Lalla. Pandey, MLA from Unchahar in Raebareli, had on February 27 resigned from the post of SP chief whip and cross-voted in favour of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls.

“I believe that the country belongs to Lord Ram and he resides in the souls of everyone. Today I had darshan of Shri Ram with my family,” the MLA told reporters after his temple visit in Ayodhya.

“I was the one who had demanded that all the MLAs of the state should go for darshan. But unfortunately we had to

stop after our party’s leader gave instructions that no MLA will go to Ayodhya,” he said.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav had turned down an invite to attend the consecration ceremony on January 22, saying he would visit later with his family. The party’s assembly members also did not join the legislators during their visit to Ayodhya on February 11.

Pandey claimed that most of the Samajwadi Party MLAs wanted to offer prayers at the Ram temple. “Nothing can be more unfortunate than stopping them from the darshan of Ram Lalla,” he said. The SP MLA said he had had the opportunity of Ram Lalla’s darshan earlier as well, when the idol was kept in a tent before the consecration.



Asked about his recent meeting with Chief minister Yogi Adityanath, Pandey said, “I am the sitting MLA from Raebareli, so meeting the chief minister regarding development projects is part of my job.

Our recent interaction, too, was a routine meeting on similar grounds.” Reports suggest that the BJP could field Pandey from Raebareli in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. Pandey is a three-time MLA from Unchahar assembly segment that falls under the Raebareli parliamentary seat.

Earlier in the day, the SP MLA told PTI, “After sacrifice of a number of generations, the grand temple was built... It is a matter of pride that I am going to pay obeisance to Ram Lalla with my family. I had visited the city earlier as well and offered prayers to Lord Ram.” “I will pray for the well-being of the people. People are happy with decisions like free ration taken by the government,” he added.

Rajbhar not to celebrate Holi if denied ‘raaj paat’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a bold assertion, Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party national president Om Prakash Rajbhar has declared that he will refrain from celebrating Holi if his demand for raaj paat (ministerial berth) is not met.

Rajbhar justified his stance by citing the symbolic significance of raaj paat in the tradition of his community, emphasising its importance on the day of Holi. Despite his alliance with the National Democratic Alliance for several months, Rajbhar’s aspiration to secure a ministerial position in the Uttar Pradesh government remains unfulfilled. Expressing his frustration, Rajbhar has aired his grievance publicly on multiple occasions, with his latest ultimatum of boycotting Holi serving as a potent expression of discontent.

Adding fuel to the fire, Rajbhar also addressed the recent controversy surrounding cross-voting by a SBSP MLA during the Rajya Sabha

elections. Accusing Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav of orchestrating the cross-voting, Rajbhar vowed to take decisive action, threatening to annul the membership of the defiant party MLA.

In his characteristically candid manner, Rajbhar reiterated his commitment to honesty and transparency, declaring, “I speak honestly, whether bullets or shrapnel.”

Rajbhar’s bold statements underscore the growing tensions within the political landscape of Uttar Pradesh, as alliances are tested and aspirations clash with political realities. Rajbhar’s ultimatum regarding Holi reflects not only his personal frustration but also serves as a symbolic gesture of defiance, signaling his unwillingness to compromise on his demands.

As the political drama unfolds, Rajbhar’s stance poses a challenge to the stability of the NDA coalition in Uttar Pradesh and highlights the complexities of coalition politics in the run-up to crucial elections.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is for notice of the general public that a political party is proposed to be registered by the name of Rashtra Wadi Navnirman Dal. The office of the party is located at House No. 4 Singhani Kala, Ghaziabad U.P. This Party has submitted application to the Election Commission of India, New Delhi for its registration as Political Party under Section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951. Names/address of the office-bearers of the Party are as follows: **President / Chairman: Shrikant Tyagi, General Secretary: Anu Tyagi, Treasurer: Surender Singh** If any one has any objection to the registration of Rashtra Wadi Navnirman Dal they may send their Objection with reasons thereof, to the Secretary, (Political Party), Election Commission of India, Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001 within 30 days of the publication of this notice.

UTTAR PRADESH STATE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
H.O.: A-1/4, Lakhanpur Kanpur-208024

Notice for Public Objection/Suggestion on Layout Plan of Industrial Area Sandila Phase-1, District-Hardoi by which Industrial Plot No. F-3 & F-4 has been amalgamated and created a new Plot No. F-3/4 (Measuring-4500.00 Sq.m.).

- (a) The Layout Plan of Industrial Area Sandila Phase-1, Distt-Hardoi of Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) situated in District Hardoi has been prepared.
- (b) A Copy thereof will be available for inspection at the Regional Manager of the Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority, HIG-66, Sector-E, Aliganj, District-Lucknow between 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on all working days till the date mentioned in Para 3 hereafter as well as **website: www.onlineupsida.com**
- Objections and Suggestions are hereby invited with respect of the Draft Amended Layout Plan.
- Objections and Suggestions shall be sent in writing to the office of Regional Manager, UPSIDA at HIG-66, Sector-E, Aliganj, District-Lucknow within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice mentioning subject as **“Regarding Public Objections/Suggestions on draft partial amendment in Layout Plan of Industrial Area Sandila Phase-1, Distt-Hardoi”**. Any person marking the Suggestions or Objections should also give his/her full name & address, Email id and contact number.

(Regional Manager)
U.P. State Industrial Development Authority

ARYAVART BANK
(A Joint Undertaking of Govt. of India, U.P. Govt. & Bank of India)
Regional Office: Lucknow Aryavart Bhawan 569/20/K/1 Sneha Nagar VIP Road Opp Awadh Hospital Alambagh Lucknow

आर्यावर्त बैंक
(भारत सरकार, उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार एवं बैंक ऑफ इण्डिया का संयुक्त उद्यम)
Regional Office: Lucknow Aryavart Bhawan 569/20/K/1 Sneha Nagar VIP Road Opp Awadh Hospital Alambagh Lucknow

Possession Notice Under Rule-8(1) (for Imovable Properties)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized officer of ARYAVART BANK, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the securities Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand notice in the account mentioned hereunder on the dates mentioned before the names calling upon the borrower and guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notices along with interest within 60 days from the date of receipts said notices. The borrower/legal heirs of borrower and guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notices are hereby given to the Borrower/legal heirs of borrower and guarantor in particular and the public in general that the undersigned has taken the possession of the properties described here below in exercise of power of conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the dates mentioned against each property. The borrower/legal heirs of borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property. Any dealing with the under noted property will be subject to the charge of ARYAVART BANK for the amount with interest and other charges etc. thereon. **The Borrower’s/Guarantors attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets**

Details of Properties whose possession has been taken are as follows:-

Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors/Branch	Description of the properties	Amt. due as per demand notice (Date Demand Notice Date of Possession)
Borrower: Late Mrs. Krishneshwari W/o Late Vishnu Kumar Srivastava, Mrs. Vimlesh Srivastava W/o Late Devendra Srivastava And Mr. S/o Late Srivasatava S/o Late Saraswati Prasad Srivastava, R/o 616/95 B Vasant Vihar Colony, Behind Madiyaon Thana, Sitapur Road, Lucknow Branch: Mail	Residential House Property: Residential House No. 616/95 B Vasant Vihar Colony, On Plot No.-22 Upon Minjuma Khasra No.173, Semra Gaurhi, Ward-Faijullaganj, Behind Madiyaon Thana, Sitapur Road, Lucknow, As Per Sale Deed Dated 20.02.2000, TITLE HOLDER- Mrs. Shanti Devi Srivastava w/o Late Sri Saraswati Prasad Srivastava, Boundaries: EAST- 15 feet wide road, WEST- Abaadi Land, NORTH-Plot No. 23, SOUTH-Plot No. 21 AREA- 1400 Sq.ft. As Per Legal Search Report Dated 10.12.2004 and 20.05.2011, TITLE HOLDER- Mrs. Shanti Devi Srivastava w/o Late Sri Saraswati Prasad Srivastava, Boundaries: EAST- 15 feet wide road, WEST- Abaadi Land, NORTH-Plot No. 23, SOUTH-Plot No. 21 AREA- 1400 Sq.ft.	Rs. 4,94,034.00 and interest thereon 20.02.2017 26.02.2024

Date : 01.03.2024**Place : Lucknow****Authorised Officer**

Varanasi seventh in UP in PMMVY-2.0 registration

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 19,667 eligible women have been registered in the district till now under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY-2.0), a scheme very effective in reducing maternal and child mortality and creating awareness in the community. The PMMVY- 2.0 was started in a new form from September last year. In relation to the target achieved at the state level, the achievement of registration under the scheme in the district is 86.34 per cent and due to this, Varanasi ranked at seventh place in the state. Giving this information here on Thursday, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said as

per the instructions of the government under the scheme emphasis is being laid on maximum registration to provide benefits to pregnant and lactating women on the birth of their first and second child (girl). During this period, public awareness programmes were organised so that eligible beneficiaries can get the benefits of the scheme, he said, adding that the work of filling the registration forms of the scheme is done at the district and block level, while after verification of the forms uploaded on the PMMVY-2.0 portal by the government, the amount is sent directly to the beneficiary's account through DBT. Nodal officer and Deputy CMO of the scheme Dr HC

Maurya said registration for benefits can be done within 570 days from conception. "For first time pregnant women, the amount to be given will be paid in two instalments, in which ₹3,000 in the first and ₹2,000 in the second instalment will be sent to the registered bank account of the beneficiary woman,"he said. According to him, under the new system of the government, if the second child is a girl, a lump sum amount of ₹6,000 will be given. In this, registration for benefits can be done within 270 days from the birth of the child. If the second child, a girl, is born on or after April 1, 2022, then registration can be done in this case. Dr Maurya further said

2,527 women received a lump sum amount of Rs 6,000 for having a girl child for the second time. Besides, 19,667 (86.34 per cent) beneficiary women have been registered in the district from September 2023. In this 4,885 women who are pregnant for the first time have been sent ₹3,000 as first instalment while ₹2,000 to 742 women as second instalment in their registered bank accounts. At the same time, a lump sum amount of ₹6,000 has been sent to the registered bank accounts of 2,527 beneficiary women who are having a girl child for the second time. The remaining beneficiaries will be paid on time as per the rules of the scheme.

IIT-K alumnus contributes USD 250,000 to establish three endowed programmes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) alumnus Dr Rajeev Gautam has made a significant contribution of USD 250,000 to establish three endowed programs in the Department of Chemical Engineering, IITK. The development comes as part of a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between IIT-K, IIT Kanpur Foundation, and Dr Gautam. The sum will be utilised towards the institution of an Endowed Faculty Chair, a Faculty Fellowship and a Travel Grant programme for students.

The contribution comes as a major boost to enrich academics and research activities in Chemical Engineering at IIT-K. The endowments will provide faculty and students alike with opportunities to further excel in their respective fields. Sharing gratitude for this gesture, Director, IIT-K, Prof. S Ganesh, said, "We are grateful to Dr Rajeev Gautam for his generous support to his alma mater. The institution of the Endowed Faculty Chair, Young Faculty Fellowship and Travel Grant will enrich faculty and student endeavours by facilitating more robust research efforts, recognising young faculty talent and providing global exposure opportunities to students. I am sure these programmes will further strengthen the academic and research activities at the Chemical Engineering department by empowering emerging researchers." The endowed pro-



(L-R) Dr Jayant K Singh, Prof S Ganesh, Dr Rajeev Gautam and Prof Kantesh Balani at the MoU signing ceremony at IIT Kanpur.

grammes supported under the donation, namely Om Prakash Gautam Endowed Faculty Chair, the Rajeev and Joyce Gautam Faculty Fellowship, and the Rajeev and Joyce Gautam Travel Grant for students, reflect Dr Gautam's commitment to nurturing future leaders in the field of Chemical Engineering.

Dr Rajeev Gautam, commenting on the significance of the endowed programmes, said, "It brings me immense pride to be able to give back to my alma mater in whichever possible ways to promote research and academic excellence. The Department of Chemical Engineering provided me with resources to set a strong technical foundation for my professional journey and success. I hope that the endowed programmes empower the next generation of changemakers in the field of Chemical Engineering." Graduating in Chemical Engineering from IIT-K in 1974, Dr Gautam went on to

make a mark in the field while pioneering creative solutions to meet industry demands. He has played a key role in the creation and introduction of various catalytic and separations applications for the refining, petrochemical and gas processing sectors. Spanning a four-decade-long stint with Honeywell, Dr Gautam retired as President Emeritus, Honeywell Performance Materials and Alumni, IIT-K, Prof Kantesh Balani, said, "We sincerely appreciate Dr Rajeev Gautam's vision and generosity in instituting these endowed programmes that would strengthen IIT-K's research excellence in Chemical Engineering. Such strong support from our alum-

ni community strengthens our efforts to provide transformative learning experiences. We are confident this will have a lasting impact in empowering students and faculty to push boundaries and attain new heights." Head of the Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT-K, Dr Jayant K Singh, said, "We are thankful to alumnus Dr Rajeev Gautam for his generous contribution to chemical engineering at IIT-K. This support will enrich our department's research ecosystem and learning environment. It reaffirms our culture of excellence and will benefit both faculty and students. We look forward to the progress in chemical engineering knowledge and innovation through these transformative initiatives."

The MoU represents a significant milestone in IIT-K's journey towards academic excellence and the institution's commitment to cultivating a culture of innovation, scholarship and global engagement in the field of chemical engineering.

YOUTH KILLED: A youth was killed while two others were injured when a speeding dumper laden with pebbles knocked down their bike near Mangatkhedha village under Asoha police station area of Unnao on Thursday morning. All three were going to appear in the High School examination. The accident took place near a petrol pump in Mangatkhedha, which led to killing of Adarsh and serious injury to Arun and Amar Pal.

Three die after being hit by train in separate incidents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Three people, including two brothers, died after being hit by train in two different places. In the first incident, two brothers died after being hit by a train while crossing the railway track at Pachdevra under the Naini Kotwali area around 10 pm on Wednesday. The accident happened when they were returning from the market with goods. They belonged

to Madhya Pradesh (MP) and used to work as labourers here. Manju Bhuria (38), a labourer from Jhabua in MP and his brother Ramsu Bhuria (26) lived in Pachdevra with family. On Wednesday night, they went to the market to bring goods and were hit by the train while crossing the railway track in Pachdevra. As a result both of them died on the spot. On getting information the police reached the spot. After

identification, the body has been sent for the post-mortem examination. Meanwhile Irfan (20), a resident of Mandandeh Mafi of Puramfti police station area, died after being hit by a train late on Wednesday night. The police sent his body for an autopsy. **ATTACKED:** A case of attack on a review officer of Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission Shekhar Singh and his family has come to

light. After a dispute over parking, the attackers allegedly entered his house, beat him and his family with iron rods. The entire family was injured in the incident. A report was been lodged at Dhoomanganj police station in this connection. Inspector Dhoomanganj Rajesh Kumar Maurya said there was a dispute between people living in the apartment and the review officer was assaulted. However, the matter is being investigated.

IDA campaign: 2.45 lakh given medicines in Cholapur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Only 78 per cent residents took anti-filarial medicines in Jaipur in the city while the response of rural area of Cholapur block was comparatively good at 87 per cent under the Mass Drug Consumption Triple Drug Therapy (IDA) campaign run for the eradication of filariasis in the district from February 10 to 28. During the door-to-door campaign, the people were approached to take medicines to prevent filariasis. In view of the response, the Health department has given another chance to those families and beneficiaries who had missed the medicine due to some reason or who were indifferent. Under the IDA campaign, the mop up round will be started from Thursday which will continue till March 5. CMO Dr Sandeep

Chaudhary said filariasis is a mosquito-borne incurable and serious disease and the only solution to avoid this is anti-filarial medicine. Therefore, he said as part of the filariasis eradication programme that runs once a year, one must take medicine to prevent filariasis. "Filaria infection can be prevented by taking this medicine continuously for five years and once a year. Filariasis can happen to any person,"he said. Nodal Officer and ACOMO of Vector Borne Disease Control Programme Dr SS Kanodia said under the IDA campaign, everyone has to take this medicine except pregnant women, children below two years and seriously ill people. "This medicine will provide protection from filariasis, which we also know as elephantiasis. The medicine should not be taken on an empty stomach," he added. District Malaria Officer

Sharad Chand Pandey said under the IDA campaign, in the last 10 days, 2.45 lakh population in Cholapur and 52,011 population in Jaipur have been given this medicine to prevent filariasis. "As against the target, 87 per cent population in Cholapur and 78 per cent population in Jaipur have been covered. In the mop up round, 100 per cent people will also be given anti-filarial medicine. He said that filaria is caused by the bite of female Culex mosquito. It is also called elephant foot. Due to its effect, symptoms like swelling in feet and hands, hydrocele (swelling in testicles) in men and swelling in breasts in women etc occur. Symptoms of the disease appear after five to 15 years. This disease not only makes the person disabled but also has a negative impact on the mental condition of the patient, he added.

2 girls found hanging

PTI ■ KANPUR

Two girls were found hanging from a tree in a field near the brick kiln they were working in here in a village in the Ghatampur area — days after they were allegedly raped, police said on Thursday.

The family members alleged that the minor girls were raped a few days ago by the contractor of the brick kiln, his son and nephew. Additional CP (law and order) Harish Chandra said. All three accused have been arrested, he said.

According to the families, the accused had also made a video of the act to blackmail the girls — due to which they took the extreme step on Wednesday, Chandra said. The victims went missing on Wednesday and hours later in the evening, their bodies were found hanging from a tree, 400 metres from the brick kiln, the ACP said.

29 applications received at KDA mutation camp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) organised a mutation camp on Wednesday. Out of 29 applications (10 from zone 1, 4 from zone 2, five from zone 3 and 7 from zone 4) received in the camp, 13 were disposed of on the spot. Two applications were related to World Bank Colony and one to the rental property section. These camps will be organised every Wednesday from 11 am to 2 pm. Secretary Shatrohan Vaishya, OSD Sat Shukla and Law Officer SB Rai were present.

Meanwhile, the enforcement squad got 15 plots vacated from unauthorised possession in Chaitanya Vihar on Wednesday.



The squad also got the plotting work being done on five bighas of land on Chirag Road without layout stopped and demolished the boundary wall. In a complaint made by allottee Kishore Lal to the erstwhile DM/Vice-Chairman Rakesh Singh in the past about the unauthorised possession on his plot, the enforcement squad of zone 1 reached Chaitanya Vihar and

demolished the unauthorised construction on plots from No 106 to 120. The encroachers failed to show relevant documents. The formalities of handing over possession to the real allottees of these plots are being completed. The squad also demolished boundary wall and other construction of illegal plotting done on five bighas of land on Chirag Road.

Workshop organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A workshop on research paper writing was organised at Dr Virendra Swarup Institute of Professional Studies, Kidwai Nagar, through online/offline mode on Thursday. Chief Guest Prof Sunil Kumar Upadhyaya told about writing a research paper and its importance. He said the well written research paper could be published in any good research journal. He also replied to the queries of teachers present in the workshop.

Principal Dr Poonam Madan was also present on the occasion. Prof Najis Khan commended the programme while Dr Asha Awasthi proposed the vote of thanks.

Prayagraj Chheoki stn selected to promote 'Arth Ganga' programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Prayagraj Division of North Central Railway (NCR) has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Jal Shakti (Namami Gange Mission) to give its participation in the Namami Gange Mission of Jal Shakti, one of the top 10 missions in the world and to popularise the flagship programme of Namami Gange Mission.

Under this agreement joint efforts will be made to increase the participation of general public through various campaigns to make the common



people aware to keep the Ganga clean. The movement of the common people at railway stations remains constant so more and more people can be made aware through stations.

Prayagraj Chheoki station has been selected to promote the 'Arth Ganga' programme

running under Namami Gange Mission of the Ministry of Jal Shakti. Under the 'Arth Ganga' programme various aspects and efforts related to how the general public can ensure their participation in keeping the Ganga clean will be shown at Prayagraj Cheoki station.

Prayagraj Chheoki station, the first station of Indian Railways, has been selected for this programme, establishing better coordination with the Ministry of Jal Shakti. In the presence of Union Minister of Jal Shakti Gajendra Shekhawat, Secretary/DG Namami Gange Ashok and other dignitaries, the MoU (memorandum of understanding) was signed with Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM)/Infra/Prayagraj Division Naveen Prakash and Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (SDCM) Himanshu Shukla in Delhi on Wednesday.

Flower exhibition: Horticulture unit of NER's Varanasi div bags 71 medals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Horticulture Unit of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) performed superbly well in a two-day flower and vegetable exhibition organised by the Government Horticulture and Food Processing Department, Uttar Pradesh recently at the Government Horticulture Garden, Company's Bagh near Kutchery. It bagged 71 medals, including 24 first, 20 second, 27 third awards, breaking its previous year's record of 60 awards. It also won the first running shield in the category of evergreen plants.

Out of the total 153 categories of this exhibition, Varanasi division of NER put up its botanical displays in 92 categories. In this exhibition, it won first places in petunia,



marigold, salvia, lupine, lily, aster, cymas, bonsai, aloe vera, cactus, rangoli, bouquet, garland etc while second in the potted begonia, money plant, dahlia, flower necklace and third in croton, cyanaria, gazania, pansy etc. In the prize distribution ceremony, CDO Himanshu Nagpal was present as the chief guest and participants were given running

shields and awards. Divisional Railway Manager Varanasi Division of NER Vineet Kumar Srivastava and Senior Divisional Engineer (Coordination) Rakesh Ranjan congratulated the Varanasi Division's Horticulture team and Assistant Divisional City Engineer. They also praised the hard work and dedication of all the employees of the Horticulture Unit.

Special lecture held at BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Eminent sociologist and professor of Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Surinder Singh Jodhka Prof Surinder Singh Jodhka said that the egalitarian, humanist society and Begumpura that Ravidas talked about started being discussed quite late in modern India. Sant Ravidas envisioned a society either people living in harmony without any sort of discrimination and he named this ideal society 'Begampur' (a place with no pain). He was delivering a special lecture on 'the making of Ravidasi identity in Punjab' in Banaras Hindu University (BHU). The programme was organised under the joint auspices of Malviya Moolya Anushilan Kendra and Centre for Intercultural Studies on Wednesday.

verka		
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.		
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX No. 0172-5041812,66		
Notice Inviting Tender		
e/sealed tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-		
Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh Empowerment of statutory auditor for Verka Jalandhar Dairy.	2023-24 to 2025-26
2.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy a) Sealed tender for hiring of five seater Tata Xenon / Mahindra Bolero Pickup or equivalent vehicle along with driver. b) e- Tender for providing Manpower as per requirement of milk plant, Chandigarh/ Milkfed Head Office, Sec-34, Chandigarh.	01No. -
3.	For Verka Mohali Dairy a) Hiring of:- • Passenger vehicle/taxi for officers in Delhi area. • Insulated vehicles of minimum 01 MT capacity for 2 nd leg delivery of verka milk and milk products in Delhi-NCR area. • Insulated and refrigerated vehicles for the supply of Verka milk and milk products in Punjab, Tricity & adjoining areas and Rai (Sonapat) area. b) Hiring of:- • Manpower required for Job Contract. c) Hiring of:- • Insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in Milk shed area. • Vehicles for Sale Depot, Bathinda & Verka Bathinda Dairy for Supply of Ghee, Butter, Powder, Panjiri, Tetra Pack & other Products all Punjab & other States. • Road Milk Tankers for transportation of Milk within/outside Punjab.	02 No's/no. may increased or decreased) 08 No's/no. may increased or decreased)
4.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy a) Manpower required for Job Contract. b) Hiring of:- • Insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in Milk shed area. • Vehicles for Sale Depot, Bathinda & Verka Bathinda Dairy for Supply of Ghee, Butter, Powder, Panjiri, Tetra Pack & other Products all Punjab & other States. • Road Milk Tankers for transportation of Milk within/outside Punjab.	Annual One year with extension up to one year/ 05 No's. As per requirement Capacity 15 tons and above
5.	For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy Disposal of the unserviceable material.	One time Basis/ Annual
6.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy a) Sealed tender for hiring of godown for storage of skimmed milk powder. b) e-tender for hiring of:- • Deep freezer (Cold Store) for storage of White Butter at -18°C or below. • Refrigerated Container. c) Steam Cook. d) Fabrication of incubation room (including door) with put panel and Supply, installation, testing & commissioning of heating units. e) Outsourcing of Manpower. f) e-Tender for the purchase of:- • Electronic weighing balance capacity 200kg. • Ventilation fan for Dairy Barn. g) Construction of:- • Boundary Wall approx. 600 feet. • Record Room approx 20x35 mtr.	01 No. Annual/01No. 01 No. 1500 MT Complete Job 02 Years 50 No's 100 No's Complete Job
7.	For Verka Jalandhar Dairy a) Steam Coal having calorific value not less than 5500kcal/kg. b) Job contract for:- • Pest and Rodent Control services. • Providing labour through service provider who is having EPF/ESI no. and Labour proving License.	2000 MT Annual As per requirement.
8.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy Hiring of:- • SS Road Milk tankers Cap.15, 18, 20, 23, 25, 30 KL for transportation of milk from Verka Sangrur Dairy to other plants of Punjab and outside punjab. • Diesel Car. • Mahindra Bolero Camper or equivalent to lift milk product from milk plant/stores to various milk bar field/extension work.	02 No's 02 No's Annual/01 No.
9.	For Verka Ferozepur Dairy a) Hiring of:- • Diesel Car for Marketing Section. • Insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and Butter ASC Ferozepur and ASC Fazilka Milk in shed area. b) Supply of freshly cut firewood for boiler.	01 No. Annual 550 Tons
10.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Supply, Installation and Commissioning of:- • GLC Machine. • RP-HPLC Machine.	One time purchase 01 No. 01 No.
11.	For Verka Mega Dairy, Bassi Pathana Engaging of outsourcing agency for providing of Security Supervisor/Guards.	Annual
NOTE: 1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in. 2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.		
Incharge (Purchase)		

Modi to launch ₹22,200 crore projects in West Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in West Bengal on March 1 and 2 to launch multiple development projects worth over Rs 22,200 crore, a visit which becomes politically significant as well as it comes amid the BJP's sharp attack on the state government over the Sandeshkhali issue.

An official statement said that on March 2 Modi will launch many development projects, worth over nearly Rs 1.83 lakh-crore, from Bihar for across the country in his first visit to the state after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar quit the opposition bloc and joined hands with the BJP.

While the projects to be launched from Bihar are meant for regions spread across the country, a sizeable part of them will be based in the state. The prime minister will inaugurate and lay

foundation of numerous development projects worth over Rs 35,700 crore in Jharkhand too on March 1, the statement added.

In Bengal, he will attend public programmes in Arambagh on March 1 and Krishnanagar on March 2, while in Bihar he will visit Aurangabad and Begusarai, it said.

His visit to Bengal comes amid rising political heat in the state after many women in Sandeshkhali accused ruling Trinamool Congress strongman Shajahan Sheikh and other members of the party of land grab and sexual assault, an issue seized by the BJP to corner its rival.

Giving details of the project, the PMO said Modi will inaugurate the Sindri fertiliser plant of the Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Ltd (HURL) in Jharkhand.

The statement said the PM

will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of several rail projects worth more than Rs 17,600 crore in Jharkhand. Another key project to be inaugurated in the state is the Unit 1 (660 MW) of North Karanpura Super Thermal Power Project (STPP) in Chatra.

In Arambagh in West Bengal, he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of developmental projects related to sectors like rail, ports, oil pipeline, LPG supply and wastewater treatment. He will inaugurate Indian Oil's 518-km Haldia-Barauni crude oil pipeline developed at a cost of about Rs 2,790 crore. This pipeline passes through Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal and will supply crude oil to Barauni, Bongaigaon and Guwahati refineries in a safe, cost-efficient, and environment-friendly manner, the statement said.



He will also launch multiple projects for strengthening of infrastructure at Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata worth about Rs 1000 crore. In Krishnanagar, the statement said he will lay the foundation stone of

Raghunathpur Thermal Power Station phase II (2x660 MW) located at Raghunathpur in Purulia district. This coal based thermal power project of the Damodar Valley Corporation employs highly-efficient

super critical technology. The new plant will be a step towards strengthening the energy security of the country, it said.

Among other projects, he will inaugurate the flue gas desulfurization (FGD) system of the unit 7 & 8 of the Mejia

thermal power station developed at a cost of about Rs 650 crore and the road project for four laning of Farakka-Raiganj section of NH-12 developed at a cost of about Rs 1,986 crore.

In Bihar's Aurangabad, he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for several national highway projects worth more than Rs 18,100 crores. He will also lay the foundation stone of the six-lane bridge across Ganga that will be developed as a part of the Patna ring road. It will be one of the longest river bridges in the country and help decongest traffic through the capital city and provide faster and better connectivity between the north and south regions of the state.

He will also inaugurate 12 projects under Namami Gange in Bihar that have been developed at a cost of about Rs 2,190 crore.

In Begusarai in Bihar, the

projects to be launched will witness a significant boost to the energy sector in the country as he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for multiple oil and gas projects worth about Rs 1.48 lakh-crore. The projects are spread across the country in various states like Bihar, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka along with KG Basin. The oil and gas sector projects worth about Rs 14,000 crore will be taken up in Bihar. This includes foundation stone laying of the expansion of the Barauni refinery with project cost of more than Rs 11,400 crore.

He will also inaugurate the HURL's fertiliser plant in Barauni which has been developed at a cost of over Rs 9,500 crore. The prime minister will launch several railway projects worth about Rs 3,917 crore as well, the statement said.

Deployment of 3.4 lakh CAPFs for polls to begin from today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The first phase of deployment of more than 3.4 lakh central armed police forces (CAPFs) for the upcoming general elections in the country and Assembly polls in few States will begin from Friday. According to the plan, about 2,000 companies will be mobilised as part of the pre-poll deployment in sensitive and hyper-sensitive constituencies beginning March 1. About 1.5 lakh personnel will move through roads and rail as part of this mobilisation, sources in the government said.

The first CAPF units will start reaching the states affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE), apart from West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir, later this week, they said. The second phase of inducting the poll companies will be initiated from March 7, followed by some last units moving in their designated locations in the second and third week of March, they said.

The commanding officers of these units have been issued the movement orders and directed to familiarise

their troops about the areas they are going for polls duty apart from the general instructions issued by the Election Commission, a senior CAPF officer said.

In the first phase, companies deployed for law and order duties in various states and those in reserve like training exercises are being sent. Some units deployed for regular duties like border guarding and security will be withdrawn and deployed during the later phases, the sources said. The troops of these CAPF companies are drawn from the CRPF, BSF, ITBP, CISF and SSB.

As many as 3,400 companies of the CAPFs and state police forces have been requisitioned by the EC for ensuring free and fair polls during the upcoming general elections and assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim. The poll panel is expected to announce the phases and poll dates in March. It has also directed the railway board to ensure "smooth and hassle-free" train movement for the troops and officers of these security forces.

India trying for discharge of 20 nationals working as Russian Army support staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it is trying its best for an "early discharge" of around 20 Indian nationals who are working as support staff to the Russian army.

"It is our understanding that there are 20-odd people (Indians) who have gone their to work as support staff or as helpers with the Russian army," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing here.

"We are trying our level best for their early discharge," he added.

Jaiswal said the "20-odd people" contacted the Indian embassy in Moscow.

According to media reports, many Indians recruited as security helpers in the Russian military, have been forced to



even fight with Russian soldiers in certain areas along Russia's border with Ukraine.

"We are trying our best to get them out. We are trying to get them discharged and support them," Jaiswal said.

"They are at various places and our embassy is in touch with the Russian authorities," he added.

Jaiswal said India is in regular touch with Russian authorities, both in New

Delhi and Moscow, to ensure the return of the Indians. "We told people not to venture into the war zone or get caught into situations which are difficult. We are deeply committed for the welfare of all our people," he said.

On Monday, the MEA said several Indians who worked as support staff to the Russian army were discharged following India's demand.

It said India remains committed, as a matter of "top priority", to actively pursuing with the Russian authorities all the relevant cases of Indian nationals for an early discharge from the Russian army.

On the safety of the Indians going to Israel, Jaiswal said nobody has gone to that country after the provision of a recent inter-governmental framework for mobility of people.



Telangana BRS MP Ramulu joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BRS MP from Telangana Pothuganti Ramulu joined the BJP here on Thursday, quitting his party ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Along with Ramulu, his son Bharat Prasad and several other BRS leaders from Telangana, also joined the BJP in the presence of senior party leaders, including Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and party in-charge for Telangana Tarun Chugh. BJP national vice president D K Aruna and the party's OBC Morcha chief K Laxman were also present at the BJP headquarters on the occasion.

Welcoming the politicians to the BJP fold, Laxman called Ramulu, a BRS MP from Nagarkurnool Lok Sabha constituency, the "most dedicated Dalit leader" in Telangana. "I welcome Ramulu to the BJP on behalf of the party chief P Nadda. I also welcome other leaders of the

BRS joining the BJP along with him. All these leaders have quit BRS and joined the BJP," Chugh told at a press conference at the party headquarters here.

He said the leaders joined the BJP as they were impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies and work that his government has done for the development of the country.

"From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Guwahati, every day some or the other big leaders, social workers, doctors, engineers, who have dedicated their lives for the society, are joining the BJP," Chugh added. Chandrasekhar said, "I am happy and grateful that they have joined Team Modi."

"In Prime Minister Modi's efforts, vision and 'sankalp' (resolve) to create a viksit bharat (developed India), we all will work together as party workers and leaders to deliver on that goal of our prime minister," the MeitY MoS added.

PM SHRI schools: Centre concerned over five States not signing MoU

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has expressed strong concerns about five States not signing MoUs with the Education Ministry for PM SHRI schools and Punjab not implementing it despite continuing to take funds under the Samagra Shiksha scheme, sources said on Thursday.

Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Delhi have not yet signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Union Ministry of Education, while 30 states and union territories (UTs) have done so. The scheme targets to upgrade 14,500 schools and is expected to benefit 1.8 million students. It also aims to ensure these schools serve as model institutes and encapsulate the spirit of National Education



Policy (NEP) 2020. The government has already selected 6,448 schools from 28 states and UTs for the upgrade in the first round.

"Despite taking funds from Centre for Samagra Shiksha Scheme, the refusal of five States/UTs, namely Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu,

Kerala and Delhi to sign MOUs for PM SHRI schools reflects a troubling pattern. Punjab, after initially signing the MoU, stopped the implementation of PM SHRI" government officials said.

"It is a clear politicization by the States/UTs, where they accept funds under Samagra

Shiksha but resist signing an MoU for PM SHRI," the source added.

Asked about if the Centre can halt funding under Samgra Shiksha scheme for these states, the source said "nothing can be ruled out". The Samagra Shiksha Scheme is the largest Central government scheme for school education for universalisation of education. The scheme also supports the states in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009; and Strengthening and up-gradation of State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and other agencies for teacher training. In the financial year 2023-23, the Centre set aside Rs 37,453 out of Rs 68,804 allocated for the school education in its budget.

Work is done anonymously in CBI: Sood

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

CBI Director Praveen Sood on Thursday said the Central probe agency is a place where work needs to be done anonymously and silently while staying away from seeking recognition through external platforms.

Addressing investiture ceremony of sub-inspectors at the CBI Academy in Ghaziabad, Sood said young officers must strive to do their work by employing out-of-the-box thinking and looking for achieving better results through approaching their tasks differently. "This will do away with the mundane work by replacing the same with smart work which will yield better results," he said.

The officers have been inducted after a 38-week training in different disciplines and specialisations. Among the 30 pass-outs, Sood awarded medals and trophies as well.



Jumrani Prince Omprakash was awarded 'DP Kohli Award for Best All-Round SI Trainee', Vicky Raj got 'DCBI Trophy for Indoor Studies' and 'Trophy for Cyber Crime Investigation. While Sudhanshu was selected for the 'John Lobo Trophy for Best Outdoor' and Ankit Tanwar received the 'CBI Academy Trophy for Dedication and Exemplary Conduct'.

The CBI chief told the new recruits that the agency offers multiple specialisations in investigations of various crimes like anti-corruption, cyber crime, economic offences, special crime and they should work in a manner that they are equipped with specialization of

their choice in the next four-five years.

"Noting that most of the officers are from technical background, he underlined that the knowledge and learning acquired during academics and during the training, will come handy as the officers embark on real part of their learning process when they assume charge," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The director said that as CBI officers, the new inductees are going to be the brand ambassadors of the organization as their conduct and work will always be up for scrutiny by the court and public which will reflect upon the agency.

"Calling upon the officers to maintain good conduct throughout the service, the director emphasized that CBI is a place where work needs to be done anonymously and silently, staying away from seeking recognition through external platforms," the statement said.

Places of Worship Act must be repealed, says historian

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Historian Vikram Sampath has demanded that the Places of Worship (special provisions) Act, 1991 must be repealed in the light of the findings by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) in the Gyan Vapi Mosque on the order of the court.

The historian has also stated that the law enacted by parliament in the backdrop of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and against the Babri Mosque is

draconian for the Hindus to reclaim their places of worship in the country.

In his book, 'Waiting for Shiva: Unearthing of the Truth of Gyan Vapi', Sampath writes: "Draconian laws like the Places of Worship Act, 1991, prevent Hindus from even seeking peaceful, legal reclaim of what has been forcibly snatched away from them. Which justice-abiding democracy in the world would have made such provisions?"

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 was enacted by the Congress-

led Government at the Centre which was headed by former Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government at the Centre has left the 1991 law untouched even while the spotlight from within the saffron outfits is now shifting to Kashi and Mathura after the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Sampath also made reference to Turkey converting historic churches into mosques to argue for a revisit of the 1991 law which calls for status quo in matters of religious places.

Air India fined ₹30 lakh for not providing wheelchair to elderly passenger who died

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 30 lakhs on Air India after an incident of non-availability of a wheelchair to an 80-year-old passenger who collapsed and died after walking from the aircraft to the airport terminal at Mumbai. The incident occurred on February 12, when a passenger requested a wheelchair upon arrival in Mumbai. While his wife was already using a wheelchair, Air India allegedly asked the elderly passenger to wait due to "heavy demand" for wheelchairs. The passenger reportedly opted to walk instead, ultimately collapsing and passing away during the immigration process.



"However, the airline failed to show compliance of the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) as the airline did not provide any wheelchair to the elderly passenger," the regulator said. "Further, Air India did not inform about any action taken by the airline against the erring employee(s) and the airline also failed to submit any corrective

actions taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future." Accordingly, a financial penalty of Rs. 30 lakh has been imposed on Air India as per Aircraft Rules, 1937 for violating the provisions of the aforementioned CAR," the DGCA said.

The regulator further said that an advisory had also been issued to all airlines to ensure that an adequate number of wheelchairs are available for passengers who require assistance during embarking or disembarking from the aircraft during their journey. Issuing an official statement, the airline had said that the passenger's wife had been provided a wheelchair and staff had asked him to wait while they arranged another one. But he instead chose to walk to the terminal with his wife.

Indian scientists develop wound dressing material with banana fibers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), have developed an innovative cost-effective wound dressing material using banana fibers, a byproduct of the extensive banana farming industry in the country.

Led by Prof. Devasish Chowdhury and Prof. (Retd) Rajlakshmi Devi, along with research scholar Mridusmita Barman, the team has repurposed banana pseudostems, typically discarded as agricultural waste, to create an eco-friendly wound dressing solution. By combining banana fibers with biopolymers such as chitosan and guar gum, the researchers engineered a versatile patch with superior mechanical strength and antioxidant properties. Additionally, the patch is loaded with an extract from the Vitex negundo L. plant, showcasing its potential as an effective drug release system and antibacterial agent in vitro. Importantly, all components used in manufacturing the dressing material are natural and readily available locally, ensuring a straightforward, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly production process.

The development of this sustainable wound dressing material not only addresses the need for effective wound care solutions but also presents a novel application for banana plants, potentially benefiting farmers and reducing environmental impact.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Upmanship

Both TMC and BJP rush forth to claim credit for fugitive Sheikh Shahjahan's arrest after 55 days

The arrest of Trinamool Congress strongman Sheikh Shahjahan, who was wanted for the Sandeshkhali infamy involving the charges of gang rape and landgrab, is likely to further muddy political waters in West Bengal and intensify the bitter war of words between the Mamata Banerjee-led State Government and the BJP. On the run for 55 days following a mob attack on Enforcement Directorate officers during a raid at his house on January 5 in a ration scam case, Sheikh was finally taken into custody within 24 hours of the Calcutta High Court stating that the CBI, ED or State police could arrest him. However, the delayed development has opened a can of worms in political circles. While the ruling TMC maintains that Sheikh was apprehended now since the High Court had cleared the ambiguity on a stay on his arrest, the Opposition BJP claims that the accused was being shielded by the police and his arrest was "scripted" because of the "intense pressure brought on the Government by us". As the drama



unfolds in West Bengal, one thing remains clear: Sheikh's arrest has ignited a firestorm, with both the main players vying for supremacy in the State's ever-evolving political milieu. While the development has sent shockwaves across the State, the political manoeuvrings have understandably quickened as both the TMC and BJP seek to capitalise on the situation, especially since the Lok Sabha elections are very much in sight, and Sandeshkhali and its aftermath could be a game changer for both parties. For the TMC, it presents an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to combating corruption and upholding the rule of law. The party has wasted no time in touting the arrest as

a testament to its dedication to clean governance and accountability. On the other hand, the BJP has seized upon the arrest as evidence of its growing influence in West Bengal's political arena. The party sees it as vindication of its anti-corruption stance and validation of its claims of rampant corruption within the TMC-led Government. However, under the surface lies a deeper struggle for supremacy in the State's tumultuous political arena. The fierce battle for electoral dominance has only intensified with Sheikh's arrest, with each party seeking to leverage the situation to bolster its poll prospects. However, amid the political grandstanding, it is important not to lose sight of the broader implications of the fugitive strongman's arrest. Beyond being a mere pawn in the State's political underbelly, Sheikh's case underscores the pervasive issue of corruption that continues to plague governance in West Bengal. His arrest serves as a stark reminder of the challenges facing the State in its quest for clean and transparent governance, irrespective of political affiliations. Amid the cacophony of competing claims and counterclaims, the true test lies in the ability of Bengal's political class to address the underlying issues of corruption and criminalisation of politics, which continue to undermine the State's progress and development.

PICTALK



A local artiste with long mustache poses for photos, in Bikaner

PTI

Empowering grassroots innovation for progress

Science and technology stand as the twin engines propelling our nation towards progress, but they must address the needs of society

Science and technology serve as the driving force propelling our nation forward, akin to the wheels of progress. However, the efficacy of these wheels determines the speed of our journey. Since independence, Bharat has experienced significant advancement, largely attributable to strides in scientific innovation undertaken by our scientific community. This progress is evident across various sectors crucial to human life, including agriculture, food, healthcare, infrastructure, and communication. Yet, the translation of scientific innovations into societal benefits often encounters challenges, primarily due to a disconnect between scientific research and grassroots needs. While many innovations originate from peer-reviewed publications, often authored by Western scientists, they may lack relevance to local contexts. Consequently, solutions to everyday challenges remain elusive, despite remarkable achievements in space and technology. This reliance on external sources creates a bottleneck in developing disruptive discoveries



tailored to local needs. Historically, groundbreaking innovations were not solely the domain of trained scientists but also arose from the keen observations and creativity of untrained naturalists. Preceding the advent of modern science, human civilisations thrived for millennia, leveraging state-of-the-art technologies of their time. Many contemporary innovations find their roots in ancient technologies, underscoring the contributions of our forebears. However, the contemporary scientific community often falls short in generating truly novel ideas, frequently resorting to replicating concepts from Western literature. This approach results in innovations primarily catering to

industrial needs rather than addressing societal issues. The critical distinction between invention and utility underscores the necessity for originality and societal relevance in innovation. Grassroots innovators emerge as pivotal agents in bridging this gap, offering solutions rooted in local contexts and addressing specific community needs. These individuals possess an intimate understanding of their environment, enabling them to develop tailored interventions that resonate with the realities of daily life. Their localized approach ensures solutions are not only relevant but also sustainable, addressing root causes rather than superficial symptoms. By empowering grassroots innovators, communities can leverage their inherent knowledge, creativity, and resourcefulness to solve their challenges. This bottom-up approach fosters ownership and collective responsibility, driving more effective and sustainable solutions. Initiatives such as those facilitated by the National Innovation Foundation-India exemplify the government's

commitment to promoting grassroots innovation and integrating it into the mainstream. While India has made significant strides in fields like space science, vaccine development, and agriculture, persisting societal challenges necessitate a collaborative approach between scientific institutions and grassroots innovators. Celebrating National Science Day under the theme 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat' provides an opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of grassroots innovators. Their selfless dedication to improving their communities exemplifies the spirit of innovation and underscores the potential for transformative change when science aligns with grassroots needs. In conclusion, the journey of progress propelled by science and technology requires not only scientific excellence but also a deep-rooted connection to societal needs. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

LK Advani: A Ratna of Bharat



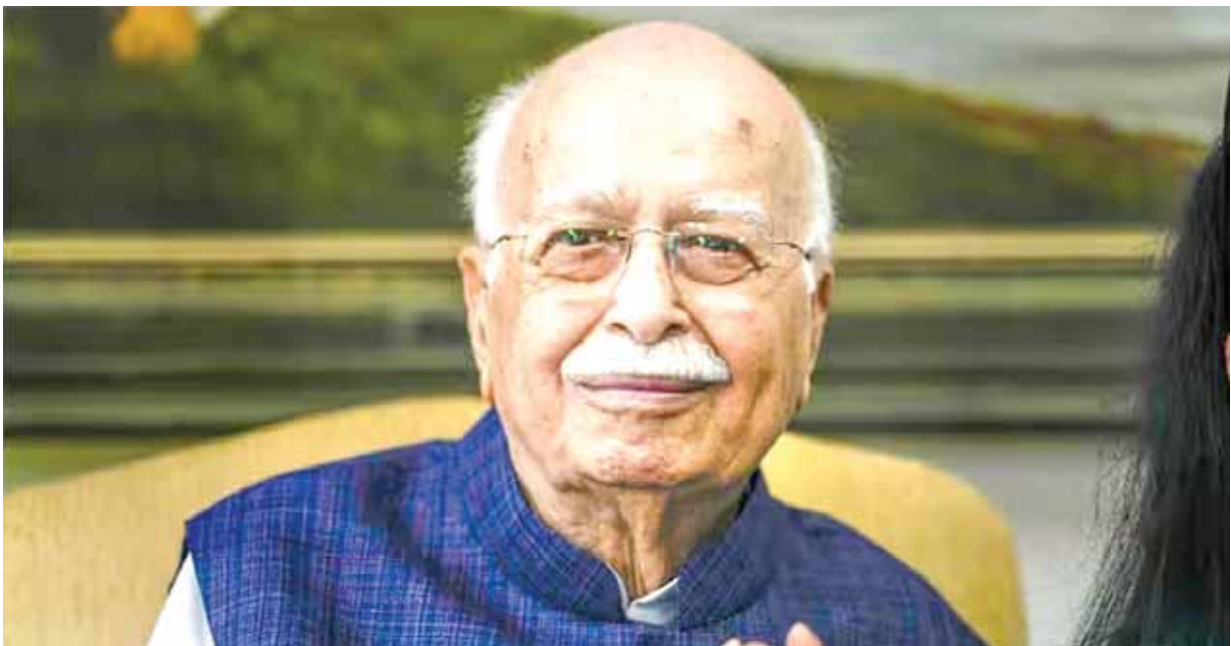
PRAFULL GORADIA

From attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow

The biggest sacrifice Lal Krishna Advani made was to distance himself from the culmination of the Babri edifice at Ayodhya. Understandably, the Hindu public was disappointed; Advani's followers were heartbroken. Many of them went to the extent of alleging that he had let down the cause. For a conscientious leader, this was like cutting his nose and throwing it away. During the spring of 1991, Advani told me that it was Ayodhya that had made him a national figure. Until his leading the Rathayatra from Somnath to hopefully reach the birthplace of Shri Ramchandra—which was intercepted by Lalu Prasad Yadav at Samastipur in 1990—Advani was merely a senior party apparatchik.

It was his taking up the cause of the Ramjanmabhoomi that catapulted him to the gallery of national figures. When, therefore, Advani spoke to the press saying that December 6, 1992, was the darkest day of his life, he knew what he was throwing away. Soon thereafter, accompanied by friends, I called on him at the Irrigation Department's guest house near Jhansi, where he along with a few other senior BJP leaders had been kept under house arrest, following the demolition of the Babri edifice on that fateful day of December 6 that year. Advani told me that after seeing my letter published in the Pioneer, wherein I had rejoined to his remark written that "There have been darker days," he knew I had come to protest against his statement. It took him quite a while before he came around to believing my denial. He was right to the extent that I continued to hold the view (which I of course, still do) that the Babri edifice was a baggage of dacoity and had to be confiscated.

Advani then went on to explain: Whatever my explanation, I had to realise that party unity, regardless of anything else, was our uppermost duty. Atalji (Vajpayee) was our seniormost leader, and no party member should differ with him publicly on such a matter of policy. Should party members flagrantly violate their party's



commitment made to the Supreme Court, that the edifice would be safe? Its future would be for the court to decide. First, who then would ever again have faith in the word of a BJP leader? Secondly, the opposing parties would go to town saying that the BJP was a party ridden with factions. Its top leader does not believe in masjid-hunting while one of its chief ministers practices the exact opposite. Thirdly, an upright party is a united party, and we are known as a party with a difference. Becoming a faction-ridden party is not the difference between our aspirations. Fourthly, discipline has been our hallmark. Did the karsevaks at Ayodhya behave in a disciplined way, by going against the leadership and demolishing a place of worship of another community?

In April 1998, I became the party's Member of the Rajya Sabha through a bye-election. Among members generally, it seemed that interest in Ayodhya had waned. The case lay in court without active hearings. When I thought of the vanished edifice, I did wonder whether at that rate

“IF THERE IS TO BE ANOTHER LEADER IN THE FUTURE, HE SHOULD HAVE THE WIDE ACCEPTANCE AND LOYALTY THAT ATALJI COMMANDED. THAT IS WHAT A DIVERSE COUNTRY LIKE OURS NEEDS”, ADVANI OPINED

the Congress with a clever leader might just snatch the issue out of the BJP's hands and use it for electoral benefit. How popular the issue was kept becoming clear over and over again. Meanwhile, many more pilgrims continued to visit the holy city. One day in July 1999, Advani called me to his room in Parliament House for a chat over toast and coffee. He opened up by showering praise on Vajpayee's tactful leadership of a coalition of so many parties with so many different political ideologies ranging from the Shiv Sena on the one hand to the DMK on the other. There was no doubt that Vajpayee was running a complex government very successfully. Advani was full of praise for his leadership. If there is to be another leader in the future, he should have the wide acceptance and loyalty that Atalji commanded. That is what a diverse country like ours needs, Advani opined. All of us in our party should give up small differences and think of large policy issues. Automatically, such a leader and his party would attract votes as well as an ongoing following.

He went on to say that India's future lies in the integrity of politics. Rather than recommending any shift towards moderation or 'soft secularism', Advani stressed the unity of thought, policy and leadership. By implication, he was asking for a united party under a broadminded leader. He was repeatedly emphatic about parties rather than the party. Even dynastic parties are not free of factions and breakups, and it is the BJP alone that has admirably avoided going that way. It seemed as though he wanted to give up all he had stood for earlier and espouse a new cause, not only for the BJP but for the sake of the country. As I knew him, I can state that this was no mere shift but a sacrifice. From his eloquence of attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow. It could not have been easy for him, but that is what he is.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

14 BANK HOLIDAYS IN MARCH

Sir — People who are planning to visit banks in the first week of March and thereafter will have to plan very well in advance. Locker operation for the marriage will have to gear up early. The banks across the country will remain closed for 14 days on various counts due to holidays and the end of the financial year at the fag end of March. According to the bank calendar released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the coming weeks of March and April will witness over seven days of holidays.

These include all Sundays, the second and fourth Saturdays, public holidays, and regional holidays. In the state of Maharashtra, the bank is closed on March 8 as well for Mahasivarathri, March 25, Monday for Holi second day, and March 29 for Friday. People with pending work related to the banks also need to note that there will be only two days when the banks will continue their services between March 27 and April 4 will remain shut as it will be the last day of the financial year (FY 24). In April, the banks will be shut down to close their yearly accounts. April 2 will be a holiday on account of Good Friday while the services will be affected further.

Jayanthy Subramaniam | Mumbai

RARE DISEASES

Sir — Autoimmune disorders, inherited cancers and congenital conditions are not uncommon. Across the globe, some three fifty million people live with about seven thousand of what are called "rare diseases". A disease is "rare" when it affects fewer than one in two thousand people. More than seventy per cent of these diseases begin in childhood. Insufficient knowledge on the part of the doctor and lack of awareness among the patients render these rare diseases challenging. That more than seventy-five per cent of rare diseases are of genetic origin, and fifty per cent are present from birth further complicates things. Besides misdiagnosis leading to inadequate treatment, crippling pain and discomfort are unpleasant companions of the patients with rare diseases. 'Rare Diseases Day' on

Reservations rendered ineffective



The struggle for reservation is carried forward by many castes. A few individuals whip the sentiments of the concerned people and involve them in a struggle by which the individuals gain fame and benefits. Reservations are sought to get admission to educational institutions and to gain jobs in government institutions. But everyone talking about reservations should, first of all, analyse how many vacancies

in government institutions are filled and how many have been recruited permanently on reservations in the last 10 years. The recruitment in government offices is filled on casual, contingent, daily wage, contract or outsourced basis. Under these systems, reservations have no relevance. Recruitment is carried on only for the top layer posts where reservations have their place. PSUs were recruiting employees under the rules of reservation. Now they are either closed or facing closure. Moreover among the unemployed lot, more than 40% are educated youth. In this background fighting for employment opportunities is all the more important. The present struggles resemble searching for fuel sticks in a desert land. Leaders and followers should think before embarking upon a struggle. Struggling for reservations is struggling for non-existing jobs.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

February 29 aims at achieving "true equity" for those afflicted by rare conditions. Equity in health access, treatment, and social opportunities is crucial for patients with rare diseases. In India, one in twenty suffers from rare diseases. All this said, the biggest difficulty that arises in the management of rare diseases is their treatment, which takes a heavy financial toll on the patients as well as their relatives. Moreover, treatment is long and tiring, so patience and equanimity among all stakeholders can go a long way.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

THE HUMAN COST OF UKRAINE WAR

Sir — Ukrainian President Zelensky told reporters on February 22, in the second year of the Russian invasion, that Ukraine had lost more than 31 thousand soldiers in the war. The lives of civilians would have been even greater than this. On Monday evening, French President Emmanuel Macron indicated that he was willing to send his troops to Ukraine. But immediately after his statement, almost all EU and NATO member countries distanced them-

selves from Macron's suggestion. All refused to deploy their troops in Ukraine. Whereas just two days ago, US President Joe Biden's views were being read on his social media platform 'X' in which he wrote, "When Putin ordered his tanks to enter Ukraine, he thought the world would bow down. To provide "so that the Ukrainian troops have the necessary weapons and ammunition to defend themselves". The Second World War also ended only when all the Allies entered the field together, otherwise before that the German victory campaign was uninterrupted. Was moving forward. According to the latest data, Ukraine is losing more and more of its territory to Russia. Kyiv is facing a shortage of military equipment as well as trained combat soldiers. In such a situation, if Ukraine has to save its existence, then NATO's soldiers will have to be fielded in the region to fight Russian invaders.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

DOMESTIC POLITICS

AMID GLOBAL AGENDA

India advocates for a balanced voice in shaping a multilateral world order



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

As elections draw closer, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been frequenting India's south more than championing the causes of the global south across available diplomatic platforms. One reason is that his party seems to have a weaker presence down south. Earlier, as a strategic choice, PM Modi chose to inaugurate a Hindu temple in a Muslim country during his last foreign trip in the current tenure. Even as he did so, statements regarding continuity of policies and outlook were subtly delivered when PM Modi confidently told his audience that he already has invitations from several foreign governments for the middle and latter part of 2024, indicating confidence in his potential third term. A third term for Modi would have wider ramifications for a whole bunch of issues, not to mention foreign policy, given India's rising economic clout and confidence, making it a significant player in global affairs. India is expected to be the third-largest economy after the US and China in PM Modi's next term, which, besides putting a couple of stars on the shoulder, will also mean a heavy lift of responsibilities. One of the significant achievements for Mr. Modi, particularly during his second term, has been uplifting the India-US relationship and situating it in the Indo-Pacific context. While the India-US bilateral is by far at its strongest ever in history, the two nations have managed to work through several plurilateral platforms, the most important being the QUAD (a grouping of the US, India, Australia, and Japan), each having significant stakes and interests in the Indo-Pacific, while also wary of the dragon in the region, never stopping short of using any overt or covert means to push its assertive agenda.

While some of the world's finest diplomats, policymakers, and think tanks were deliberating on global issues last week, EAM Jaishankar found some time to speak to a whole bunch of policy strategists on the relevance of QUAD and the way forward. EAM highlighted the changing nature of India's foreign policy outlook over the last decade when he mentioned "remarkable changes in India's bilateral relationships with its three Quad partners. With the US, we put behind ideological hesitations of history. With Japan, we gave longstanding goodwill much more practical shape. And with Australia, we actually made a real beginning in seriousness." Even though there hasn't been a QUAD leaders summit since May last year, backroom meetings between foreign ministers from the member countries to discuss issues of regional and global importance haven't taken a backseat. Given the political compulsions, it might be difficult for India to host the QUAD leaders summit this year, as it will be too close to the US elections by the time the new Indian government is in place. However, the significant targets India aims to achieve through the QUAD group, as highlighted by EAM, namely, "it reflects the growth of a multipolar order. Two, it is a post-alliance and post-Cold War thinking. Three, it is against spheres of influence. Four, it expresses the democratizing of the global space and a collaborative, not unilateral, approach. And five, it is a statement that in this day and age, others cannot have a veto on our choices," shall remain in focus. It is this message of continuity of policies that the Indian government is highlighting to the domestic and international audience at a time when instability is the norm for most, including powerful nations in the world. India has effectively managed the QUAD as a non-military arrangement, unlike NATO, with shared interests of all members in the region. Mr. Jaishankar highlighted in his address, "Among Quad countries, there is a growing comfort in working with each other given the strong consensus we have in our strategic outlooks. India's bilateral partnerships with each of these three Quad countries have also transformed in recent years." The message is clear: India will continue to push for a multilateral world order with a fair share of voice on international forums.

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



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

New India: Roti, kapda, makaan, vigyan and aatmasamman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development, empowering every section of society

The Modi government's comprehensive strategy for tackling fundamental aspects of development such as food security (Roti), clothing (Kapda), housing (Makaan), science and technology (Vigyan), and self-respect (Aatmasamman) stands as a remarkable example of effective policymaking. These initiatives have not only brought about socio-economic transformation but have also significantly contributed to the nation's advancement. The Modi government has aimed to uplift and empower every section of society. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development. Through numerous flagship



ANIL AGRAWAL

schemes, significant strides have been made towards building a stronger, more resilient India. As we reflect on the journey of India's transformation over the past decade, it becomes evident that the Roti, Kapda, Makaan, Vigyan, and Aatmasamman initiatives have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape. Moving forward, it is imperative to build

upon these foundations and continue striving towards a more prosperous and equitable future for all. Through revolutionary initiatives, the government has aimed to enhance agricultural productivity and bolster the textile industry, thereby encouraging research in science and technology, stimulating economic growth, and creating employment opportunities for Aatmanirbhar Bharat. A pivotal aspect of the Modi government's initiatives has been the empowerment of Bharat, ensuring self-reliance and dignity for every citizen. This vision extends to promoting social justice, gender equality, and skill development, encapsulating the ethos of "Aatmanirbhar Bharat." Initiatives aimed at uplifting

marginalised communities exemplify the government's commitment to fostering an inclusive society. **Roti: Transforming Food Security in India** The Modi government has taken a multifaceted approach to food security, encompassing macro and micro levels. Initiatives like PMGKY and ONORC have bolstered vulnerable groups' food access, provided relief during crises, and built resilience. Prioritising nutrition through POSHAN Abhiyaan demonstrates a commitment to tackling deficiencies. **Kapda: Enhancing Textiles and Khadi** The remarkable growth in Khadi's turnover, from Rs. 31,154 crores in 2013-14 to Rs. 1,34,630 crores in 2022-23,

underscores its economic revitalization. This surge in demand has propelled production and employment opportunities, reflecting the government's commitment to nurturing indigenous industries. India's textile exports have increased from \$12 billion in 2010-11 to \$39.2 billion in 2017-18. The textile industry in India is currently a \$75 billion industry and is expected to grow to \$300 billion by 2025-26. **Makaan: Revolutionising Housing** In a nation as vast and diverse as India, characterized by historical socioeconomic disparities, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has emerged as a transformative force. This initiative transcends mere housing provision; it catalyses

profound change. Through Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), expansive coverage underscores the unwavering dedication of the Modi government and the vision of converting mere structures into cherished homes and dreams into tangible realities, marking a testament to the government's commitment to the well-being and prosperity of its citizens nationwide. The "Housing for All" scheme represents a multifaceted approach to address the critical issue of housing in India. The Light House Projects (LHPs) stand as a pioneering initiative under the visionary Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India), spearheaded by the Government of India since its launch in 2019.

Vigyan: Advancing the Space Sector India has emerged as a prominent space power in the world, with significant global implications. Chandrayaan-3 hailed as India's lunar triumph, reaffirms India's technological prowess and solidifies its position as a leader in space exploration, paving the way for future lunar endeavours, including human exploration. Aditya-L1, a state-of-the-art coronagraphy spacecraft meticulously crafted by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), embarked on a pioneering mission to explore the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, particularly focusing on the corona and chromosphere.

Aatmasamman: Empowering Bharat Once an individual has secured all the necessities for a comfortable life, the concept of "Aatmasamman," or self-respect. Beyond material needs, self-respect becomes the cornerstone of emotional and psychological well-being, encompassing a profound sense of dignity, worth, and integrity. Stand Up India Scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme, Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have been supportive of empowering numerous sections of society. (The author is a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, views are personal)

Protests stress need for climate-smart agriculture



KOTA SRIRAJ

There is a pressing need for proactive measures aimed at protecting both farmer livelihoods and national food security



The ongoing farmer protests that began on February 13th have already claimed five lives and resulted in Delhi bearing the brunt of economic losses to the tune of 300 crores as nearly five lakh traders who did regular business in Delhi from adjoining states suspended their businesses given the unrest. Since 2020, farmer protests have unfortunately assumed a regular frequency not only in Delhi and Punjab but across India. According to consultancy firm Verisk Maplecroft estimates, India has accounted for the biggest global share of farmer protests in the past three years. The farmer protests 2.0 again highlight the fault lines in India's agricultural viability and this time the farmers are demanding conclusive government action. The protesting farmers want a firm minimum support price (MSP) that is backed by a legal guarantee for all crops. Another demand is to implement the recommendations of the MS Swaminathan committee on agriculture which will enable increasing MSP to 50 per cent above the weighted average cost of production. Other demands include better sugar cane prices and a pension of Rs 10,000 a month for every farmer above the age of 60. The government is engaged in feverish negotiations with the farmer unions to break the impasse. However, a breakthrough achieved may be short-lived, as the government would have only successfully attended to the symptoms and not to the problem itself. India's agri sector contributes only 15 per cent to the GDP but engages 58 per cent workforce. This lopsided proportion is made worse by the fact that 85 per cent of the farmers operate in less than five acres of land half of which in many parts of India may be dry and barren. This translates to low yields, low earnings and high debt and when combined with increasing challenges of climate change on agriculture, the problem assumes a much larger and ominous proportion. Climate change whether it is unseasonal rain, hailstorms, floods, or drought, India's agri-sector has seen it all. The lingering uncertainty due to environmental issues



BEST FARMING PRACTICES NEED TO BE PROMOTED ACROSS THE SECTOR TO ENSURE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

keeps the farmers on their toes leading to income insecurity and mounting debt. An example is the casualty in the current protests of a marginal farmer whose 8-acre agricultural land had 8 lacs of debt on it, making it virtually impossible for the farmer to pay it off and continue with another crop. Climate change-driven issues such as these have made the farmers demand an MSP law to act as a safety net for the time, effort and risk they invest in farming. The perennial shortage of water resources is the first symptom of climate change's impact on the agri sector. According to Rainfed Atlas, it is estimated that between 52% and 55% of the farming community have no means of irrigation and are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. But due to climate change temperatures are spiralling and rainfall has become more erratic, with longer dry spells resulting in droughts and shorter periods of more intense rainfall causing floods. This results in a domino effect whereby crop yield is adversely impacted while high Co2 levels cause low nutritional value of crops. This translates to low marketability of the produce therefore causing financial distress and rising debt for the farmers. The impact of climate change on the agri-sector and the sluggish government response in managing its fallout has come as a double whammy for the farmer community. The lack of robust insulation measures that seek to protect the sector from the vagaries of climate extremities is now having a telling impact on productivity. The cereal crop productivity of most cereals is slated to decrease due to an increase in temperature and CO2 levels, and the decrease in water availability. According to estimates, there will be a projected loss of 10-40% in crop production by 2100 if no climate change adaptation measures are

taken. A one-degree Celsius increase in temperature may reduce yields of major food crops by 3-7%. Given these troubling projections, the government must extricate the agri-sector from the clutches of climate change. This alone can ensure the best interests of farmers, safeguard national food security and protect livelihoods. An audit of the agri-sector at the micro-level is essential to identify and remove processes that are detrimental to natural resources. This will ensure weeding out of inefficient water-intensive practices and allow optimal use of the precious resource. Similarly, best farming practices need to be promoted across the sector to ensure climate change adaptation and mitigation in the sector. For example, the raised-bed planting of wheat in the Indo-Gangetic plains enables 20-25% savings in irrigation water and also helps in reduced herbicide use. Measures such as these combined with water accounting methodologies can build long-term sustainability, efficiency and resilience of the agri-sector besides immensely benefiting the marginal farmers. The government must also initiate climate-smart agriculture strategies which aim at adapting agriculture to climate change. This can be done by implementing technologies that help farmers plan crops by considering the climate specifics of their area through easy-to-use apps on their smartphones. This can be done by prioritising botanical research to develop crop species that are more tolerant to water deficiencies and extreme temperatures. Additionally, ecologists can evolve effective soil management methods that reduce the depletion of topsoil, promote carbon sequestration, and reduce chemical application. Advanced farm irrigation technologies can also help proper water saturation levels in the soil, prevent water flooding,

and help avoid top-soil runoff. The government must focus on specially developed software solutions for agriculture that can help in real-time monitoring of the crops and allow farmers to accurately calculate the required inputs, which reduces costs in the short term and protects nature in the long term. Technology-assisted cover crops for instance can not only help prevent soil erosion, and promote water retention and nitrogen fixation but also serve as organic manure for fodder. Smart agri-software can help farmers implement differentiated applications of fertilisers which can help decrease soil pollution and increase crop nutrient levels. The software can also have in-built weather-related tools that provide timely alerts of extremities, elaborate weather forecasts to schedule farming events and enable prediction of general climate change tendencies by analysing historical weather data. Currently, the agri-sector problems and farmer grievances are dealt with on a reactive basis; this is evident in the form of chronic farmer agitations that come back every year. The government must realise that a lasting solution is only possible if actual problems, including the impact of climate change on agriculture, are addressed with the participation of all stakeholders of the sector. The collaboration of farmers, policymakers, environmentalists, botanical scientists and technology experts can help chalk out long-term strategies and solutions and ensure a robust agri-sector that is resilient against climate change onslaughts. Farmer protests are a symptom of climate change's impact on agriculture. Protecting the sector from adverse impacts will automatically ensure farmer well-being and prosperity. (The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

Stop segregating prisoners on caste, religion basis: MHA to States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked states and Union Territories not to segregate prisoners on the basis of their caste and religion and to stop assigning duties like managing prison kitchens according to the discriminatory approach. In a communication, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said the jail manuals of some states provide for segregation of prisoners based on their caste and religion and they are being assigned duties in the prisons accordingly. "It may be noted that the Constitution of India prohibits any kind of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, or place of birth. The Model Prison Manual, 2016 prepared by the Ministry of

Home Affairs and circulated to all states and UTs in May 2016 explicitly prohibits caste and religion-based discrimination of prisoners in the management of kitchen or cooking of food on caste or religious basis," the communication said. "The manual also provides that any special treatment to a group of prisoners belonging to a particular caste or religion is strictly prohibited," it added. The MHA said the prison manual also provides that no classification of prisoners shall be allowed on grounds of socio-economic status, caste or class. All states and Union Territories are requested to take note of the above and ensure that their prison manual or prison act should not contain such



discriminatory provisions, it said. The MHA said in case any such provision exists, immediate steps must be taken to amend or remove the discriminatory provision from the manual or the act. It is reiterated that there should be no caste-based assignment of duties or work in the prisons, it said. The MHA said it has been the constant endeavour of the central government to reach

management. The MHA said it has been advising the states and Union Territories from time to time to ensure that due importance is given to the physical and mental well-being of prisoners. To maintain uniformity in the process of medical check-ups of prisoners, the Model Prison Manual 2016 provides for the procedure to be followed by the states and Union Territories. The MHA said health check-ups of prisoners especially those who are old and specially-abled should be conducted regularly. Special health check-ups of women prisoners and transgender prisoners should also be conducted besides periodic check-ups or screening of inmates for their mental well-being, it said.

Local awarded for raising alarm leading to Pak drone recovery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU



A resident of the border area was rewarded by the officers of the Jammu and Kashmir police along with the Border Security Force with a hefty cash incentive of Rs 3 lakhs for raising a timely alarm leading to the recovery of a Pakistani drone in the Ramgarh sector of Samba district on Thursday. The reward was given as a part of J&K Police's policy recently announced by DGP J&K. On January 18, 2024, a resident of the village Nandpur alerted the jaws of the BSF that an object (drone) was lying in his field located close to the Chamliyar border outpost of the BSF in the area. Acting swiftly on the information, the security forces recovered a Pak surveillance drone fitted with a camera from the field of the informer. Speaking on the occasion, SSP Samba Vinay Kumar sought cooperation and support from the general public living near the International border in curbing the menace of narco-terrorism sponsored by Pakistan. SSP Samba further apprised the general public about different types of rewards recently announced by DGP J&K for people who will provide information & intelligence on trans-border

tunnels, drones, narcotics, terror activities, and terrorists. Inspector General BSF Jammu Frontier DK Boora also interacted with the local public and urged them to remain alert and extra vigilant and ensured full cooperation of BSF to the people especially those who cultivate land near the International Border. Under the new policy, J&K Police has recently announced different types of cash reward which includes a Cash reward of Rs 5 lakh for those who provide information about trans-border tunnels used by Anti-National elements to transit terrorists, explosives and contraband consignments. A cash reward of Rs 3 lakh to those: a) who sights a drone flown from across the border to drop narcotics or explosive material and which leads to the recovery of the said dropped material, b) who gives actionable intelligence about a person connected with receiving drone deliveries and/or transporting arms/ammunition/narcotics from border/LoC to hinterland or Punjab and the said intelligence gets corroborated during further action. Cash reward of Rs 2 lakh each has been announced for people providing information about inter-state narcotics modules, people talking to Pakistan-based terrorists and separatists in jails and persons talking to or communicating with terrorist handlers across the border or with their agents within J&K and branding citizens as informers. Police also announced Rs 1 lakh cash reward for persons providing information about those inciting and encouraging people to join terrorist ranks and to pick up guns. Rs 2 lakh to Rs 12.50 lakh reward has been announced for those giving specific information about the presence of terrorists, resulting in successful operation leading to arrest or combat, and cash rewards will be provided as per the category of A, B and C.



DMK allots two LS seats each to CPM, CPI

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The DMK on Thursday completed its first round of allocation of Lok Sabha seats to fringe outfits like the CPI(M) and CPI, two constituents in the front led by the former. The CPI(M) and CPI have been allocated two seats each by the Dravidian major. The allocation process was a smooth affair as both the Communist parties expressed satisfaction and happiness over the kindness of Big Brother DMK. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election too, the CPI(M) and the CPI had been allocated two seats each and both the parties won the seats. The DM K also allocated one seat each to the Muslim League and Kongu Desiya Murpokku Kazhakam. A release from DMK headquarters said the allocation of seats was a smooth affair and all the constituents in the front (Secular Progressive Alliance) were confident of repeating the 2019 show. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the DMK and its allies had whitewashed the AIADMK front by winning 37 out of the 38 seats which were at stake from Tamil Nadu. The DMK is yet to finalise seat deals with the Indian

National Congress, Makkal Neethi Mayiam (led by actor Kamal Haasan) and some other fringe outfits like VCK. The Pattali Makkal Katchi led by Dr S Ramdoss and DMDK launched by late actor Vijayakanth are yet to decide on which front to align with. A senior PMK leader who is close to party founder Dr Ramdoss said there is a strong anti-incumbency wave blowing across Tamil Nadu against the DMK Government. "People are sad and shocked over the kind of corruption and favoritism of the Stalin government. We will take a decision taking into all accounts all these issues," said the PMK leader. S Semmalai, veteran AIADMK leader who is the last link between party founder MG Ramachandran and the present day leadership, said the DMK-led alliance despite the anti-incumbency wave remains intact and this has made the odds in favor of that party. Unless and until there is a revolt among the alliance partners, the DMK is in strong wicket though it is not as safe as in 2019," Semmalai told The Pioneer. The next two weeks will see the fronts led by the DMK, AIADMK and the BJP giving finishing touches to the battlelines.

Seat sharing deal in JK by next week: Congress

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Amid hard bargain by the National Conference, the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee Chief Vikar Rasool Wani is hopeful of formalizing a seat-sharing arrangement by the end of the first week of March 2024. "After holding internal dialogue within the party, talks are going on with the constituents of the INIDA bloc. We are hopeful of finalizing the seat-sharing arrangement by the end of the first week of March", the J&K Unit Chief of the Congress party said. The National Conference leadership has toughened its

stand ahead of the second round of discussions with the Congress party. Party Vice President and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has made it clear on several occasions that the party was in no mood to surrender the three Lok Sabha seats it won during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. A senior Congress leader privy to informal discussions so far disclosed talks are on to arrive at a consensus on giving three seats to the National Conference, two to the Congress party, and one to PDP. Under this arrangement, the National Conference is expected to contest from

Srinagar and Baramulla Lok Sabha seats along with a Lok Sabha seat from Ladakh while the Congress party is expected to contest two Lok Sabha seats from the Jammu region and PDP would be asked to contest Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. A senior Congress party leader claimed the constituents of the INDIA bloc are expected to finalize the seat-sharing arrangement in the next meeting to give a tough fight to the BJP candidates. On the other hand, the Peoples Conference Chief Sajad Lone is also going to fight Lok Sabha polls from the Baramulla seat making it a multi-corner contest.

Former Intel India chief Saini killed in accident

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Noted chip designer and former Intel India chief Avtar Saini was killed after his bicycle was rammed into by a speeding taxi in the adjoining satellite township of Navi Mumbai. The incident took place at the Nerul Junction and the NRI-Seawoods Estate Signal in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday, when 68-year-old Saini, a resident of Chembur in north-east Mumbai was cycling along with a group of cycling enthusiasts. Saini was rushed to the D Y Patil Hospital but pronounced dead on admission. Immediately after the accident, cab driver Hrishikesh Khade tried to flee the spot but was caught and handed over to the police by those present at the mishap site.



microprocessor design. "At Intel, we are deeply saddened by the demise of former country manager and director Intel South Asia, Avtar Saini. He played a key role in setting up the Intel R&D centre in India. Avtar will be remembered as a prolific inventor, an outstanding leader and a valuable mentor," Gokul V Subramaniam, Intel India President and Vice President, Client Computing Group, Platform & Systems, Sustainability Strategy at Intel Corporation, posted on LinkedIn. Saini's death comes after runner Rajalakshmi Vijay, the Chief Executive Officer of Business Altruist Technologies Pvt. Ltd, a BPO company, was killed after being run over while cycling on Worli Sea Face, on March 19 last year.

Delhi Government likely to present Budget on March 4

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government is likely to present its budget for the 2024-25 financial year on March 4, sources in the AAP dispensation said on Thursday. The Economic Survey and the Outcome Budget for the financial year 2023-24 are likely to be presented on Friday. "The budget is likely to be tabled in the Assembly early next week. It will in all probability be presented before the Assembly on Monday," a source said. The source also said that with 2024 being an election year, the government could make some major announcements. "This is the election year. Expect some major announcements in the budget," said the source. This will be Atishi's first budget as Finance minister after she was inducted into the cabinet last year in March. The Budget session of the Delhi Assembly commenced on February 15 and was supposed to end on February 21. The session was extended till the first week of March with Atishi citing a delay in budget finalisation due to certain reasons.

Trader body writes to EC over active cooperation in LS polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With 35003 traders' organisations in Delhi and over 48,000 across the country, which represent more than 9 crore traders and indirectly employing around 25 crore people in domestic trade, the top traders body has approached the Election Commission (EC) proposing active cooperation from traders' organisations in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. In a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, the Confederation of All

India Traders (CAIT) said there are approximately 3,500 traders' organisations in Delhi and over 48,000 across the country, representing more than 9 crore traders and indirectly employing around 25 crore people in domestic trade and this extensive network of these organisations reaches every corner of the country, from cities to remote villages to encourage them to cast their votes to increase the voting percentage. CAIT national president, BC Bhartia, and secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said therefore, traders' body

has proposed cooperation with the Election Commission for traders' support in enhancing the voting percentage. Khandelwal mentioned that the extensive network of the trading community across the country has a direct contact with every individual in every state and as such country's 140 crore people reaches out to a traders shop for their necessities. Due to the good relations between traders and customers, any campaign encouraged by them has a significant impact. Taking advantage of this

extensive network, CAIT intends to encourage voter awareness, disseminate informational material, and motivate voters to exercise their right to vote in collaboration with the Election Commission. According to traders, many restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, salons and even medical practitioners may also offer some discounts for voters and reach out to people to encourage a high voter turnout. Even housing societies may offer some incentives to their residents if they cast their votes.

Congress survives...

From Page 1

While longest serving party president Sonia Gandhi has taken a break from day to day affairs of the party Rahul Gandhi visiting abroad currently, Priyanka was instrumental in arresting the crisis similar to the one she used her acumen to consolidate the Congress-Samajwadi Party alliance for INDIA Bloc last week. Sources in the party said Priyanka who in recent times maintained distance from major programmes including her brother led Bharat Nyay Yatra until she joined for couple of days last week, played a "pivotal" role in protecting the Congress Government in the Himalayan State by remaining in constant touch with

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and senior leaders to "foil" the BJP's operation Lotus. Besides HP Congress remains in full majority power in Karnataka and Telangana while a coalition in Jharkhand. Priyanka swung into action along with senior party leaders Hooda, Shivakumar and Baghel who were sent as observers on her instruction for the crisis management. "When the decision was taken Rahul was mid-air to London, who took a break from his yatra to be there for a lecture in Cambridge University," party sources said. Priyanka was the face of the Congress' campaign in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections in 2022.

votes polled. Effective booth management has been one of the hallmarks of the new BJP under Shah and Modi. Using both online and offline affordances, the party has optimised the turnout of its support base on the polling day. The Gujarat model, replicated in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Assembly polls last year, is a case in point. Leaders from various states, including Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Gujarat's Bhupendra Patel, Madhya Pradesh's Mohan Yadav, Chhattisgarh's Vishnu

Deo Sai, Uttarakhand's Pushkar Singh Dhami and Goa's Pramod Sawant, were among those who arrived at the BJP headquarters for the meeting. State leaders attend the CEC meeting when candidates for constituencies falling in their respective states are discussed. The BJP's poll candidate lists have often been as significant for those missing out as for the new faces given a chance and all eyes will be on whether it drops some well-known names or does some fresh experiment in selecting its nominees.

Kharif rice production to increase by 9.46 MT: Ministry

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Agriculture Ministry on Thursday released the second advance estimates of 2023-24, estimating 1541.87 lakh million tonnes (LMT) of Kharif foodgrains and 1551.61 lakh million tonnes of Rabi foodgrains. According to the second advance estimates, Kharif rice production is estimated at 1114.58 LMT as compared to 1105.12 LMT in 2022-23, showing an increase of 9.46 LMT. Production of Rabi Rice is estimated at 123.57 LMT. Production of Wheat is estimated at 1120.19 LMT, which is higher by 14.65 LMT as compared to previous year production of 1105.54 LMT. "Production of Shree Anna (Kharif) is estimated at 128.91 LMT and Shree Anna(Rabi) is estimated at 24.88 LMT. The production of Jowar (Kharif) and Jowar (Rabi) is estimated at 15.46 LMT and 24.88 LMT respectively, which is higher by 0.66 LMT and 1.66 LMT respectively, than the previous year. Further, Production of Nutri/Coarse Cereals (kharif) is estimated at 356.11 LMT and Production of Nutri/Coarse Cereals (Rabi) is estimated at 144.61 LMT," it said. The ministry said production of Tur is estimated at 33.39 LMT which is approximately similar to last year's production of 33.12 LMT. Further the Tur harvesting is still progressing, which may result further changes in successive estimates. Production of Gram is estimated at 121.61 LMT which is marginally lower from previous year's gram production but higher than the average (2018-19 to 2022-23) Gram production. The production of Lentil is estimated at 16.36 LMT which is higher by 0.77 LMT than the previous year's production of 15.59 LMT. The production of Soybean is estimated at 125.62 LMT and production of Rapeseed & Mustard is estimated at 126.96 LMT which is approximately similar to last year's production however higher by 20.57 LMT from average production. The production of Cotton is estimated at 323.11 Lakh Bales (of 170 Kg each) and production of Sugarcane is estimated at 4464.30 LMT. "While preparing the kharif crop production estimates the Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) based yield has been considered. However, States are still under the process of compiling results of Kharif CCEs."

Israeli forces fire on crowd waiting for aid, 100 killed

Palestinian deaths in Gaza pass 30k

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli troops fired on a crowd of Palestinians waiting for aid in Gaza City on Thursday, witnesses said. More than 100 people were killed, bringing the death toll since the start of the Israel-Hamas war to more than 30,000, according to health officials. Hospital officials initially reported an Israeli strike on the crowd, but witnesses later said Israeli troops opened fire as people pulled flour and canned goods off of trucks.

Israeli officials acknowledged that troops opened fire, saying they did so after the crowd approached in a threatening way. The officials insisted on anonymity to give details about what happened, after the military said in a statement that “dozens were killed and injured from pushing, trampling and being run over by the trucks”. Gaza City and the surrounding areas in the enclave’s north were the first targets of Israel’s air, sea and ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas’ Oct 7 attack. The area has suffered widespread devastation and has been largely isolated during the conflict. Trucks carrying food reached northern Gaza this week, the first major aid delivery to the area in a month, officials said



Palestinians living in Lebanon hold placards and their national flags during a protest to demand a ceasefire and support Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in front of the headquarters of U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon on Thursday.

AP/PTI

Wednesday.

Aid groups say it has become nearly impossible to deliver humanitarian assistance in most of Gaza because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order, with crowds of desperate people overwhelming aid convoys. The UN says a quarter of Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians face starvation; around 80% have fled their homes.

Kamel Abu Nahel, who was being treated for a gun-shot wound at Shifa Hospital,

said he and others went to the distribution point in the middle of the night because they heard there would be a delivery of food. “We’ve been eating animal feed for two months,” he said.

He said Israeli troops opened fire on the crowd, causing it to scatter, with some people hiding under cars. After the shooting stopped, people went back to the trucks, and the soldiers opened fire again. He was shot in the leg and fell over, and then a truck ran over his leg as it sped off, he said.

UK descending into mob rule: Sunak

Critics accuse him of undermining protest rights

AP ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Britain is descending into “mob rule” because of the pressures created by protests against the Israel-Hamas war — words criticised as alarmist by a human rights group. Sunak told a meeting of police leaders on Wednesday that there was a “pattern of increasingly violent and intimidatory behaviour” that’s intended to “shout down free debate and stop elected representatives doing their job”.

“There is a growing consensus that mob rule is replacing democratic rule,” he said, according to a transcript released by the prime minister’s office. “And we’ve got to collectively, all of us, change that urgently.”

Tom Southerden of Amnesty International said Thursday that talk of mob rule “wildly exaggerates the issue and risks delegitimising the rights of peaceful protest.” Mass protests have drawn hundreds of thousands of people to central London almost weekly to call for a cease-fire in a conflict that has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Israel says Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and abducted roughly 250, in the Oct. 7 attack.

The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, though there have been dozens

Sunak calls on police chiefs to get tough on ‘mob’ protests

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called on the country’s police chiefs to use the full spectrum of their powers to ensure that protests are not allowed to descend into “mob rule”.

The British Indian leader was speaking after a meeting at 10 Downing Street on Wednesday during which ministers and senior police chiefs agreed to sign up to a new “democratic policing protocol”.

It comes in the wake of growing security concerns for British MPs and some violent incidents during large-scale marches on the streets of the UK in protest over the raging Israel-Hamas conflict.

of arrests over signs and chants allegedly supporting Hamas, a banned organisation in Britain. Jewish organisations and many lawmakers say the mass marches have created an intimidating atmosphere for Jewish Londoners — though members of the Jewish community have been among those on pro-peace-fire marches.

Divisions over the conflict in Gaza have convulsed British



politics, with some lawmakers saying they fear for their safety after receiving threats over their positions on the war. Reports of both antisemitic and anti-Muslim abuse in Britain have soared since Hamas’ Oct 7 attack on Israel, which triggered Israel’s invasion of Gaza. A debate last week in the House of Commons on whether to call for a cease-fire descended into chaos amid allegations the speaker of the house had bent parliamentary rules in response to pressure from pro-Palestinian activists.

During the debate, protesters projected “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” — a slogan some see as calling for the destruction of Israel — onto Parliament’s Big Ben clocktower. On Saturday, Sunak suspended Conservative lawmaker Lee Anderson from the

party for saying London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who is Muslim, was controlled by Islamists and had allowed them to take charge of the city.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators protested at the house of a Conservative lawmaker earlier this month, while environmental activists have targeted Sunak’s family home in northern England.

The prime minister met police chiefs after announcing a 31-million-pound (\$40-million) fund to step up security for lawmakers after politicians reported threats and intimidation connected to the war.

At Wednesday’s meeting, the government told police chiefs that protests at politicians’ homes “should generally be considered to be intimidatory,” Sunak told officers to take a “robust approach...to protect our democratic processes from intimidation, disruption, from subversion.”

British lawmakers have a tradition of meeting regularly with constituents in their local communities, but security has been tightened after several attacks in the last decade.

In 2016, Labour lawmaker Jo Cox was killed by a far-right extremist, and Conservative David Amess was murdered in 2021 by an attacker inspired by the Islamic State group. Sunak’s comments follow several years of increasingly stringent restrictions on peaceful protest by the Conservative government.

It has passed new laws to

clamp down on broadly defined “public nuisance,” punishable by up to 10 years in prison, and giving police more powers to restrict protests judged to be disruptive. Hundreds of environmental activists have been arrested and sometimes jailed for blocking roads and other nonviolent acts.

“Freedom of expression and assembly are absolutely fundamental rights in any free and fair society,” said Southerden, law and human rights director at Amnesty UK.

“The UK has undergone a major crackdown on protest rights in recent years, with peaceful protest tactics being criminalised and the police being given sweeping powers to prevent protests taking place,” he said.

Voters in the town of Rochdale in northwest England went to the polls Thursday to elect a lawmaker, after a chaotic special election campaign dominated by the Gaza war. The Labour Party disowned its candidate, Azhar Ali, for claiming that Israel allowed Hamas’ Oct 7 attack to happen as a pretext to invade Gaza. His name remains on the ballot, alongside candidates including George Galloway, a former Labour lawmaker who is campaigning against Labour’s stance on the Israel-Hamas war, and Simon Danczuk, yet another former Labour legislator who now represents the right-wing Reform UK.

White House: Biden doing everything to improve visa process

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden is doing everything he can to improve the process related to the sought-after H-1B visa, Green Card backlog and other issues related to the country’s legal immigration system, the White House has said.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

“One of the steps, if we look at the H-1B visa process, we have taken action to improve that and the process and backlog for lawful permanent residents (Green Card) who are eligible to become US citizens,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters at her daily news conference on Wednesday.

A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently.

Jean-Pierre was responding to questions about the feeling among a section of Indian Americans that the president is not putting as much effort into addressing the woes of legal immigrants as he is doing for illegal immigrants.

Biden heads to the southern border with Mexico in Texas on Thursday. “Just last month, for example, as a part of our efforts to strengthen the integrity of our immigration system and reduce the potential for fraud, the Department of Homeland Security pub-

lished a final rule relating to H-1B visa,” Jean-Pierre said.

“So, the changes promote fairer and more equitable outcomes and, so, we will continue our work to improve the system within our authorities and that has certainly been a priority,” she said and added that the administration takes that “very seriously” and is continuing to do everything that it can to improve the visa process.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced the launch of myUSCIS organisational accounts that will allow multiple people within an organisation, as well as their legal representatives, to collaborate on and prepare H-1B registrations, H-1B petitions and any associated Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service.

A new organisational account is required to participate in the H-1B Electronic Registration Process starting in March 2024, the USCIS said.

“We are working expeditiously to address any technical issues that may arise for legal representatives whose accounts migrated when they logged into their online account on or after February 14, 2024, including impacts on cases other than H-1B filings,” it said.

The initial registration period for FY 2025 H1B cap will open at noon Eastern on March 6, and run through noon Eastern on March 22.

During this period, prospective petitioners and their representatives, if applicable, must use a USCIS online account to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated registration fee for each beneficiary, its media alert said.

SC sets April arguments over whether Trump can be prosecuted for election interference

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to decide whether former President Donald Trump can be prosecuted on charges he interfered with the 2020 election, calling into question whether his case could go to trial before the November election. While the court set a course for a quick resolution, it maintained a hold on preparations for a trial focused on Trump’s efforts to overturn his election loss.

The court will hear arguments in late April, with a decision likely no later than the end of June. That timetable is much faster than usual, but assuming the justices deny Trump’s immunity bid, it’s not clear

whether a trial can be scheduled and concluded before the November election. Early voting in some states will begin in September.

The court’s decision to intervene in a second major Trump case this term, along with the dispute over whether he is barred from being president again because of his actions following the 2020 election, underscores the direct role the justices will have



in the outcome of the election. Trump’s lawyers have sought to put off a trial until after the election. In the end, the timing of a possible trial could come down to how quickly the justices rule. They have shown they can act fast, issuing a decision in the Watergate tapes case in 1974 just 16 days after hearing arguments.

The decision in Bush v. Gore came the day after arguments in December 2000. By taking up the legally untested question now, the justices have created a scenario of uncertainty that special counsel Jack Smith had sought to avoid when he first asked the high court in December to immedi-

ately intervene. In his latest court filing, Smith had suggested arguments a full month earlier than the late April timeframe. Trump wrote on Truth Social that legal scholars “are extremely thankful” the court stepped in to decide on immunity. “Presidents will always be concerned, and even paralyzed, by the prospect of wrongful prosecution and retaliation after they leave office,” he wrote.

A Smith spokesperson declined to comment. The trial date, already postponed once by Trump’s immunity appeal, is of paramount importance to both sides. Prosecutors are looking to bring Trump to trial this year while defense lawyers have been seeking delays in his criminal cases.

US Pres continues to be fit for duty, says his physician

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Joe Biden “continues to be fit for duty” and “fully executes” all of his responsibilities, his physician has said after an annual health checkup, asserting that the 81-year-old US President does not have any major health concerns. The White House on Wednesday shared a memo with President Biden’s “current health summary” following his annual routine physical at Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre. Biden, whose health has been under scrutiny ahead of November’s presidential election, underwent the assessment on Wednesday. “He continues to be fit for duty and fully executes all of his responsibilities without any exemptions or accommodations,” Dr Kevin O’Connor, physician to



the US President, wrote in a memo shared with reporters. Biden’s annual medical checkup included speciality consultation with several Presidential Specialty Consultants.

These specialties included Optometry, Dentistry,

Orthopedics (Foot and Ankle), Orthopedics (Spine), Physical Therapy, Neurology, Sleep Medicine, Cardiology, Radiology and Dermatology.

Soon after his return from Walter Reed, Biden told reporters that doctors told him he looked too young. The think you look too young,” he said amidst laughter. “No, there is nothing different than last year. Everything is great,” the president said, responding to questions on his health checkup.

It is a White House tradition to publicise the annual health checkup of the US President in the form of a memo from the president’s physician.

The White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters at her daily news conference that Biden’s doctors decided against a cognitive

test. Such a test is being demanded by several of his political opponents, including Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley.

“The President doesn’t need a cognitive test. That is not my assessment. That is the assessment of the President’s doctor. That is also the assessment of the neurologist who has also made that assessment as well,” Jean-Pierre said.

“The President’s doctor has said, if you look at this, the President, who is also the Commander-in-Chief, passes a cognitive test every day, as he moves from one topic to another topic, understanding the granular level of these topics,” she said.

“You saw him talk about a fighting crime today. Tomorrow, he’s going to go to

the border. Next week, he’s going to give a State of the Union Address,” she added.

Asserting that this is a very rigorous job, she said that Biden has been able to do it every day for the past three years. “And let’s not forget, he is also leading a historic presidency, which is also important to note in everything that we’ve been able to do — he’s been able to get done over the past three years,” the press secretary said.

Biden is the oldest president in the history of the United States.

The president’s health was in the news earlier this month after a special counsel investigating Biden for improperly storing classified documents suggested he was suffering from mental decline due to his age.

I2U2 continues to be priority for Biden admn

Washington (PTI): The grouping of India, Israel, the UAE and the US continues to be a priority for the Biden administration and is not on the back-burner due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the White House has said, underlining that the President is “deeply committed” to making sure that the I2U2 initiatives make progress.

The I2U2 grouping was conceptualised during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the four countries held on October 18, 2021. The I2U2’s first summit was held on July 14, 2022, to establish the group.

The grouping remains critically important, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters at the White House here on Wednesday.

Asked if the grouping is now on the back-burner or no longer active because of the Israel-Hamas conflict, the official said, “No, not at all, still a priority.”

“The I2U2 remains critically important and the president is deeply committed to making sure that we continue with the I2U2, obviously with our partnership among our four countries and beyond through innovative, inclusive and science-based solutions to advance... let’s not forget, enhance food and energy security space operations and other ventures, advancing projects on water conservation, waste management and other areas,” Jean-Pierre said. So, there is a strong future for the I2U2 and “we’re looking forward to continuing that partnership” and it has not taken on the back-burner, the White House official said. “It certainly continues to be a priority,” Jean-Pierre said.

EU to release billions of frozen euros to Poland

Brussels: The European Union’s powerful Commission announced on Thursday that it will begin releasing billions of euros to Poland that were frozen over the previous government’s policies that the bloc said amounted to widespread backsliding on fundamental democratic principles.

The move had been expected after Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised “good news” last week to reward Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk for his efforts to overturn a series of measures imposed by the previous conservative government that went against EU judicial cornerstones. Thursday’s move cemented a sea change in relations. Both sides had openly clashed.

Macron says he will swim in River Seine

Paris (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron boldly promised to swim in the River Seine being cleaned up for the Paris Olympics as he toured the new complex that will house athletes on Thursday. Macron cited pollution-reduction in the Seine as one of the Games’ positive long-term impacts. He noted “extraordinary” public-funded investments being poured into making the river — largely off limits to bathers since 1923 — swimmable again.

Asked by a journalist whether he would bathe in it, Macron replied, “Me, yes, I’ll go.”

But he refrained from saying when. “I’m not going to give you the date; There’s a risk you’ll be there,” he said.

Regardless of whether he does indeed don trunks,

Macron’s visit to the future high-security Olympic village served to highlight how the Paris Games are helping to transform some disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the French capital’s poorer suburbs.

The eco-friendly village led to nearly 2,000 jobs being created, with 1,136 going to local residents. It cost about 2 billion Euros (USD 2.2 billion), most of it investment by property developers but also including 646 million Euros (USD 700 million) from public funds. The Olympic construction company, Solideo, transferred the village to Paris Games organizers on Thursday, symbolically handing over a large key, with Macron watching.

“It’s a very big day,” Macron said. “It’s a demonstration that France is a nation of builders.”

Idaho halts execution by lethal injection after 8 failed attempts to insert IV line

AP ■ KUNA

Idaho halted the execution of serial killer Thomas Eugene Creech on Wednesday after medical team members repeatedly failed to find a vein where they could establish an intravenous line to carry out the lethal injection. Creech, 73, has been in prison half a century, convicted of five murders in three states and suspected of several more. He was already serving a life term when he beat a fellow inmate, 22-year-old David Dale Jensen, to death in 1981 — the crime for which he was to be executed.

Creech, one of the longest-serving death row inmates in the US, was wheeled into the execution chamber at the Idaho Maximum Security Institution on a gurney at 10 a.m.



Three medical team members tried eight times to establish an IV. Department of Correction Director Josh Tewart told a news conference afterward. In some cases, they couldn’t access the vein, and in others they could but had concerns about vein quality. They attempted sites in his arms, legs, hands and feet. At one point, a medical team member left to gather more supplies. The warden announced he was halting

the execution at 10:58 a.m.

The corrections department said its death warrant for Creech would expire, and that it was considering next steps. While other medical procedures might allow for the execution, the state is mindful of the 8th Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment, Tewart said. Creech’s attorneys immediately filed a new motion for a stay in US District Court, saying “the badly botched execution attempt” proves the department’s “inability to carry out a humane and constitutional execution.” The court granted the stay after Idaho confirmed it would not try again to execute him before the death warrant expired; the state will have to obtain another warrant if it wants to carry out the execution. “This is what happens when unknown individuals

with unknown training are assigned to carry out an execution,” the Federal Defender Services of Idaho said in a written statement. “This is precisely the kind of mishap we warned the State and the Courts could happen when attempting to execute one of the country’s oldest death-row inmates.” Six Idaho officials, including Attorney General Raul Labrador, and four news media representatives, including an Associated Press reporter, were on hand to witness the attempt — which was to be Idaho’s first execution in 12 years. The execution team was made up entirely of volunteers, the corrections department said.

Those tasked with inserting the IVs and administering the lethal drug had medical training, but their identities were kept secret.

Cabinet nod to ₹1.26 lakh crore chip making units

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved setting up three semiconductor-making units by firms, including Tata Group and Japan's Renesas, at an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet requirements of chips.

The units which will make chips for sectors including defence, automobiles and telecommunications, will begin construction within the next 100 days, Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The three units will be set up under the 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem' programme that provides government support of up to Rs 76,000 crore.

Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp at Dholera in

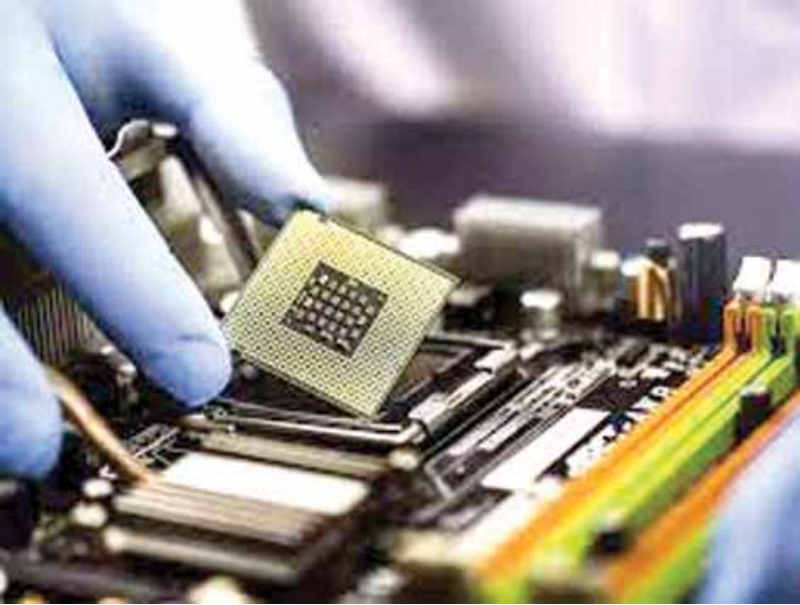
Gujarat. The plant will have a capacity to produce 50,000 wafers per month and will involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore.

Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt Ltd (TSAT) will set up a semiconductor unit in Morigaon, Assam, at an investment of Rs 27,000 crore. CG Power in partnership with Renesas Electronics Corp and Stars Microelectronics of Thailand will set up a unit in Sanand in Gujarat at an investment of Rs 7,600 crore.

In June last year, the Cabinet approved a proposal of Micron for setting up a semiconductor unit in Sanand, Gujarat.

The approvals are part of the Modi government's ambitions to make India a chipmaker for the world and cutting reliance on countries like Taiwan.

Vaishnaw said the Tata plant at Dholera will produce high-performance compute chips with 28 nm technology for electric vehicles (EV), telecom, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display and power electronics.



The unit in Assam will have a capacity of 48 million per day for automotive, electric vehicles, consumer electronics, telecom, and mobile phones. The CG power semiconductor unit will manufacture 15 million chips for consumer, industrial, automotive and power applications.

"Within a very short time, India's semiconductor mission has achieved four big successes. With these units, the semiconductor ecosystem will get established in India. India already has deep capabilities in chip design. With these units, our country will develop capabilities in chip fabrication. Advanced packaging technologies will be indigenously developed in India with today's announcement," he said adding the three units will generate direct employment of 20,000 advanced technology jobs and about 60,000 indirect jobs.

These units will accelerate employment creation in downstream automotive,

electronics manufacturing, telecom manufacturing, industrial manufacturing, and other semiconductor-consuming industries. Construction of Micron's Sanand unit is progressing at a rapid pace and a robust semiconductor ecosystem is emerging near the unit, he said.

Tata Electronics' partner PSMC is renowned for its expertise in logic and memory foundry segments. PSMC has 6 semiconductor foundries in Taiwan. Power management chips the two will manufacture are high voltage, high current applications.

TSAT semiconductor is developing indigenous advanced semiconductor packaging technologies including flip chip and ISIP (integrated system in package) technologies.

Renesas is a leading semiconductor company focussed on specialised chips. It operates 12 semiconductor facilities and is an important player in microcontrollers, analogue, power, and System-on-chip (SoC) products.

Sebi bans entities for manipulative trades in V Marc India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Thursday barred 12 entities, including promoter of V Marc India Ltd, from the securities market for engaging in a fraudulent scheme to manipulate volumes and price of the company's shares.

Additionally, the regulator impounded wrongful gains of Rs 6.38 crore made by some of the entities from the manipulative scheme, according to an interim order.

This case primarily deals

with fraudulent and manipulative trading in the scrip of V Marc India Ltd, listed on NSE's SME segment, prima facie orchestrated by the promoter and company management, along with connected parties.

In its order, Sebi, prima facie, found that V Marc's promoter and MD Vikas Garg and Sandeep Kumar Srivastava, former Whole Time Director of the company-- engaged the services of Prijesh Kurani to

'operate the market'.

It further noted that Kurani, in turn, in addition to using his own and his connected entities' trading accounts, engaged accounts of persons connected to Garg to manipulate the scrip. Further, Garg and the company management channelled funds through their connected entities to Kurani for executing the fraudulent scheme.

The alleged fraudulent scheme was set in motion as soon as the scrip was listed on April 8, 2021. "The impact of

this alleged fraudulent scheme is evident in the manner volumes surged and prices increased after which most of the entities -- PV Manipulators-- as well as the IPO subscribers - exited fully. The shares offloaded were purchased by public shareholders leading to the increase in their numbers as well," Sebi said. Accordingly, Sebi has restrained 12 entities "from buying, selling or dealing in the securities market or associating themselves with the

securities market, either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders". Apart from Garg, Srivastava and Kurani, the other entities barred by Sebi are -- Sudhir Gupta, Dharini Kurani, Rekha Kurani, Surbhi Aggarwal, Vinod Vilas Sable, Seema Garg, Madhu Srivastava, Jai Kishorr Singhal and Seema Agarwal. Sebi's examination which covered the period from April 9-30, 2021, was aided by data obtained from the mobile device of

Kurani, seized following the 'search and seizure operation' carried out by the regulator at his residence in May 2022, in the context of investigation into the matter of 'Front Running of Trades of Axis Mutual Fund'.

The data from the device, particularly messages exchanged on WhatsApp involving entities referred to in this order, including a copy of a signed agreement between certain entities, has served as important evidence in this case.

Royalty rates for critical, strategic minerals approved

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the amendment in the MMDR Act to specify the royalty rate on 12 critical and strategic minerals, an official statement said. A decision in this regard was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of Mines said in a statement.

"The Union Cabinet... Approved the amendment of Second Schedule to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) for specifying rate of royalty in respect of 12 critical and strategic minerals," the statement said. The 12 critical and strategic minerals are beryllium, cadmium, cobalt, gallium, indium, rhenium, selenium, tantalum, tellurium, titanium, tungsten, and vanadium, it said.

This completes the exercise of the rationalisation of royalty rates for all 24 critical and strategic minerals, the Ministry said.

The government notified the royalty rate of four critical minerals, namely fluorocite, potash, molybdenum and platinum group of minerals

on March 15, 2022 and of 3 critical minerals lithium, niobium and rare earth elements on October 12, 2023. As per the statement, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023, which has come into force from August 17, 2023, had listed 24 critical and strategic minerals in Part D of the First Schedule of the MMDR Act.

The amendment provided that mining lease and composite licence of these 24 minerals shall be auctioned by the central government.

The approval for specification of rate of royalty will enable the Centre to auction blocks for these 12 minerals for the first time in the country.

Royalty rate on minerals is an important financial consideration for the bidders in auction of blocks, the statement said.

Further, manner for calculation of Average Sale Price (ASP) of these minerals has also been prepared by the Ministry of Mines, which will enable determination of bid parameters, it said.

The Second Schedule of the MMDR Act provides royalty rates for various minerals.

Markets close higher, RIL gains after mega merger

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed with gains on Thursday in a highly volatile trade amid the scheduled monthly expiry of derivative contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30. During the day, the benchmark oscillated between a high of 72,730.00 and a low of 72,099.32.

The broader Nifty of NSE gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to close at 21,982.80.

"Domestic benchmark traded near a flat-line trend throughout the session, but some buoyancy emerged by the end of the day. Investors adopted a cautious wait & watch approach on the verge of a heavy economic data week," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Among Sensex shares, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Reliance Industries climbed nearly 2 per cent



intra-day before closing more than half-a per cent higher after the company and Walt Disney announced the signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create

a Rs 70,000 crore behemoth.

Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, ITC, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

"Markets traded volatile on the monthly expiry day but managed to end marginally higher," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.84 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.50 per cent. Among the indices, services jumped 1.46 per cent, power climbed 1.01 per cent, commodities (0.79 per cent), industrials (0.74 per cent), metal (0.74 per cent) and capital goods (0.65 per cent).

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended marginally lower on Wednesday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,879.23 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88 on Wednesday. The Nifty slumped 247.20 points or 1.11 per cent to settle at 21,951.15.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.43 per cent to USD 83.32 a barrel.

FDI inflows decline in April, December 2023

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharma sectors, according to the latest government data.

FDI inflows stood at USD 36.74 billion during the corresponding nine months of the preceding fiscal.

Inflows during the October-December quarter of the current fiscal, however, rose by 18 per cent to USD 11.6 billion as against USD 9.83 billion during the same quarter of 2022-23.

The total FDI — which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital — declined by about 7 per cent to USD 51.5 billion during the period under review against USD 55.27 billion in April-December 2022, the data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) showed.

During the nine-month period of this fiscal, FDI equity inflows decreased from major countries, including Singapore, the US, the UK, Cyprus and the UAE. Investments fell significantly from the Cayman Islands and Cyprus to USD 215 million and USD 796 million, respectively, during April-December 2023 as against the two comparative figures of USD 624 million and USD 1.15 billion recorded in the year-ago period.

However, inflows increased from Mauritius, the Netherlands, Japan and Germany.

Protect investors in small, midcap schemes: Sebi to mutual funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has asked mutual fund houses to put in place a framework to safeguard investors, who invested in smallcap and midcap schemes, amid a "froth building up" in these categories.

Also, the regulator has suggested steps such as restrictions on inflows in these segments, portfolio rebalancing, and laying guidelines to safeguard investors from the first-mover advantage of redeeming investors.

This came in the backdrop of strong flow in the small and midcap schemes of mutual funds over the last few quarters.

In a communication to Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Tuesday, Sebi asked the industry body to inform trustees of all the mutual fund houses to frame a policy to protect the interest of investors of smallcap and



midcap schemes.

"In the context of the froth building up in the small and mid-cap segments of the market and the continuing flows in the small and mid-cap schemes of mutual funds, trustees, in consultation with unitholder protection committees of the AMC's shall ensure that a policy is put in place to protect the interest of all investors," the regulator said.

The market regulator said that "appropriate" and "proactive measures" should be taken by Asset Management Companies (AMCs) and fund managers to protect investors.

Key infrastructure sectors growth slows to 15 months low in January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The growth of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed to a 15-month low of 3.6 per cent in January, on account of poor performance of sectors like refinery products, fertiliser, steel and electricity, according to the official data released on Thursday.

The growth of eight core sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery

products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity — was 4.9 per cent in December.

It was 9.7 per cent in January 2023. The previous low level of growth rate was recorded at 0.9 per cent in October 2022. Cumulatively also, the growth rate in the output of these sectors slowed down to 7.7 per cent as against 8.3 per cent in April-January 2022-23.

The output growth of

Lagged deposit growth to constrain credit growth for banks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Lagged deposit accretion poses the risk of constraining credit growth for banks in FY25, India Ratings and Research said on Thursday.

Maintaining its "neutral" outlook on the banking sector for FY25, the agency said the deposit growth is likely to moderate to 12-13 per cent in

FY25 from the 13.8 per cent estimated for ongoing fiscal year. The loan-to-deposit ratio for the sector is at a five-year high of 81 per cent, which makes deposit growth as a crucial part in banks' credit book expansions, it said.

The agency said it expects credit growth to come at 20.5 per cent in FY24, including the positive impact of the HDFC twins merger, and

Agri-tech startup Otipy joins ONDC to sell fruits, vegetables

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Agri-tech startup Otipy on Thursday said it has joined Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) to sell fruits and vegetables to consumers in Delhi-NCR and Mumbai.

In a statement, Otipy said this integration ensures its catalogue is visible on various apps, making it easy to discover and enabling smooth transactions on the growing network.

As Otipy onboards ONDC, it is set to expand its customer reach, making its products available to a wider audience through popular ONDC seller apps like Pincode (by PhonePe) and Paytm apps.

This move aims to strengthen the brand's presence in Delhi-NCR and Mumbai, the statement said.

Moreover, Otipy will also focus on bulk procurement directly from farmers and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).



"As we join the ONDC Network, it helps us in expanding our reach to varied customer segments. Through the network, we not only plan to enrich buyer choices but also elevate the shopping experience, facilitating inclusivity in a dynamic e-commerce landscape," Varun Khurana, Founder and CEO of Otipy, said.

"With Otipy on the Open Network, it not only stands to benefit from an extensive reach of the network but also reinforces its commitment to fostering a sustainable and inclusive e-commerce framework," T Koshy, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of ONDC, said.

Cabinet okays ₹75,000 crore rooftop solar scheme

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday approved a rooftop solar scheme, PM-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojna, with an outlay of Rs 75,021 crore, to provide up to Rs 78,000 subsidy for the installation of solar plants and 300 units free power for one crore households.

Briefing media after the Union Cabinet meeting, I&B Minister

Anurag Thakur informed that approval has been given for the scheme for installing rooftop solar and providing free electricity up to 300 units every month for one crore households.

"The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved PM-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojana with a total outlay of Rs 75,021 crore for installing rooftop solar and providing free electricity

up to 300 units every month for one crore households," an official statement said. The Prime Minister launched the scheme on 13th February 2024.

The scheme provides a central financial assistance (CFA) of 60 per cent of system cost for 2 kW systems and 40 per cent of additional system cost for systems between 2 kW to 3 kW capacity. The CFA will be capped at 3 kW.

At current benchmark prices, this will mean Rs 30,000 subsidy for 1 kW system, Rs 60,000 for 2 kW systems and Rs 78,000 for 3 kW systems or higher. The households will apply for subsidy through the National Portal and will be able to select a suitable vendor for installing rooftop solar.

The National Portal will assist the households in their decision-making process by providing relevant

information such as appropriate system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating etc. Households will be able to access collateral-free low-interest loan products of around 7 per cent at present for installation of residential RTS (rooftop solar) systems up to 3 kW.

Other Features of the scheme include a Model Solar Village to be developed in each district to act as a role model for adoption of rooftop

solar in rural areas.

Besides, Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions shall also benefit from incentives for promoting rooftop solar (RTS) installations in their areas.

The scheme provides a component for payment security for renewable energy service company (RESCO) based models as well as a fund for innovative projects in RTS.

New records, tales of grit emerge

Khelo India University Games 2023

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

It has been tales of grit and determination at the Khelo India University Games (KIUG) Ashtalakshmi 2023, which comes to an end on Thursday, with new meet records achieved and paths set for future star players of the country.

The athletics section boosted of at least four new KIUG records at the events played at the Indira Gandhi stadium here.

Pole vaulter M Gowtham of University of Madras cleared the distance of 5m to take home the men's pole vault gold medal.

Javelin thrower Jyoti of Chaudhary Devi Lal University, who had won the gold medal in the National Open Athletics meet in Bengaluru in October last year, came up with a throw of 53.16m in her fourth attempt to clinch the women's javelin throw gold, and also set a new meet record.

In the women's 800m event, Panjab University's Amandeep Kaur clocked 2:11.27s to clinch the gold

medal with a new Games record, while Vikash of Chandigarh University registered a new Games record in men's 1500 m clocking 3:50.70s to take the gold. Chandigarh University looks poised to top medals' tally with 28 golds in its kitty already, followed by Lovely Professional University with 17 golds and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, with 12 golds.

The KIUG 2023 were held in 18 venues across seven cities of North East, with Guwahati hosting the opening ceremony which was attended by Union Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Anurag Thakur, among others.

More than 4,500 players from over 200 universities competed in this fourth edition of KIUG.

The KIUG is a part of the Indian government's Khelo India initiative that was launched in 2016, focussing on promoting grassroots sports and identifying young talents from across the country.

For some like Mrinal



Chauhan of Lovely Professional University, a second spot in the Recurve men on debut at the KIUG was no mean feat.

With limited financial

means to pursue archery which involves high cost training equipment as his family depends on the earnings of his father's stationery shop, Mrinal's early

struggles are now nearly over.

Support through the (Taget Olympic Podium) TOP scheme, a flagship initiative by the ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs,

meant that he could take forward his passion, honing his skills at the Tata Archery Academy in Jamshedpur.

"TOPS has allowed me to dream bigger, aim higher.

Now, I don't have to dependent on my father for my financial needs as I get stipend every month," the 20-year-old said, adding that the Games were also a vital preparation for the upcoming trials leading to the Paris Olympics qualification events.

Jyoti Kattimai of Karnataka University may have failed to make a podium finish, but her story of fighting tough financial constraints to make this far is an inspiration in itself.

With her father working as a scrap dealer and mother as a housekeeping staff in the same sports hostel in Dharwad where Jyoti trains, it has been a tale of long struggle for the 24-year-old.

Jyoti's family of eight members (including four sisters) expanded to 13 after two of her elder sisters returned home with their children after a few years of marriage, and the family just about pulling along.

She may have had to remain contend with the fifth spot in the 800m for women, but Jyoti hopes to keep on

pursuing her game with her coach Shamla Patil being her biggest support, who also sponsors her university fees.

The vital role of coaches in shaping a player or a team cannot be stressed enough, and Bharati Vidyapeeth's rugby team credit their coach for the show they could put up.

Coming in as defending champions, the team did not have high hopes for a podium finish as the core of their team that won the gold in Lucknow last year had passed out of the varsity.

But the team with almost all new players was marshalled brilliantly by Prashant Arvind Singh, who works as a gym instructor in Mumbai, to clinch the bronze medal here.

"It is a big thing for us because we reached here after only 15 days of preparation. We will return next year and win our third gold," said Prashant, who has also represented India at the U-19 level and was part of the silver medal-winning Maharashtra team in the National Games held in Goa last year.

Athletes to be issued digital certificates: Anurag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday announced that the government will issue digital certificates to registered athletes across the country, a move which would ensure a transparent account of their participation and performance. The digital certificate will have dates of the athletes' participation in competitions and serve as proof of their achievements.

"With athletes at the heart of our progressing and growing sporting ecosystem, the sports ministry has made a crucial decision to promote the

'issuance of digital certificates to athletes,' wrote Thakur on 'X'.

The ministry has directed all National Sports Federations (NSFs) to only release merit and participation certificates through the DigiLocker.

The minister had first announced his plan to simplify things for athletes and National Sports Federations (NSFs) during the National Sports Day on August 29 last year.

On Thursday, the minister said, "Keeping up with our policy of 'athlete-first', NSFs have been advocated to issue certificates to athletes via



DigiLocker, an initiative of Ministry of Electronics and IT." He said the digital certificates will add a new aspect to sports and administration management of sportspersons.

"This decision has been taken to ensure the accessibility, security and veracity of documents and promote transparency and efficiency in the sports administration of the NSFs. This will further lead to ease

of living for our sportspersons across the nation.

"From June 1 this year, only certificates issued by the (sports) federations through DigiLocker shall be valid and no physical certificates issued will be recognised for government and other benefits. We have advised the federations that their affiliated units must also start issuing the certificates through the DigiLocker from January 1 next year," added Thakur.

Enumerating the benefits of issuing sports certificates through DigiLocker, Thakur said it will make access and sharing of certificates easy, eliminate the need for physical

copies, provide a secure environment for storing and verifying documents and ensure their integrity and authenticity.

This, he said, would streamline the certificate issuance process and reduce administrative burden.

"These certificates are proof of the athletes' commitment, effort, and accomplishments in their respective sports, and are currently distributed through outdated and inefficient, conventional methods," he said, adding that NSFs must put in place technology-based tools and solutions to serve the interest of sports, especially athletes.



Bajrang refuses to appear in selection trials under WFI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rejecting the Wrestling Federation of India's invitation to compete in the upcoming national trials, ace Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia has moved an urgent petition in the Delhi High Court, seeking a stay on the selection competition here on March 10-11.

It has been learnt from reliable sources that Bajrang, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and her husband Satywart Kadiyan moved the court on Wednesday and the matter will be heard on Friday.

While Bajrang did not confirm filing a petition, he questioned the government's silence on the issues concerning Indian wrestling.

The Indian team for the Asian Wrestling Championships Olympic Qualifier in Kyrgyzstan next month will be selected on the basis of the trials at Delhi's JG Stadium.

Bajrang told PTI from Russia, where he is training for the last two months, that he has spent a fortune abroad but he won't compete in trials if they are conducted by the Sanjay Singh-led WFI.

"I would not spend Rs 30 lakh on my training if I were to not compete in the trials, but how the suspended WFI is conducting the trials? I don't get what the government's compulsion is (on allowing WFI to

conduct trials)?" Bajrang said.

"I don't understand how a sports body suspended by the Indian government issue a circular and announce the trials. Why is the government silent? We will appear in the trials only if the ad-hoc panel or the government conducts it. How can a suspended body announce the trials?" he asked.

WFI president Sanjay Singh had appealed to the protesting wrestlers to forget the past and appear for the trials.

The trio had led a prolonged protest at Jantar Mantar, demanding the arrest of then WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who they had accused of sexual harassment.

Bajrang, the Tokyo Olympics bronze winner, said that not just him but Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat will also skip the trials. "This decision to not appear in trials is a joint decision taken by us. We are together in this," he said.

PTI tried to reach out Sakshi and Vinesh for confirmation but the former did not return calls and the latter could not be contacted.

Asked specifically if they have moved court against the trials, Bajrang denied the development but a source in the WFI confirmed to PTI that four wrestlers have approached the Delhi High Court.

Manchester Derby can further expose gulf between City and United

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Jim Ratcliffe's determination to bring down Manchester City is abundantly clear.

So is his admiration, it seems, for the team he calls "the enemy." Since becoming co-owner of Manchester United last week, Ratcliffe has spoken about the "driven and elite environment" that has been created at City in its Abu Dhabi-controlled regime.

He described City's 4-0 win over Real Madrid in last season's Champions League semifinals as "the best football I have ever seen."

He was even behind United's recent appointment of one of City's former top executives, Omar Berrada, as the new chief executive in what United said was the first step on a journey "to put football and performance on the pitch back at the heart of everything we do." Ratcliffe acknowledged United was a "long way behind" City. Just how far might be placed into sharp focus this weekend.

It's the 192nd Manchester derby on Sunday, pitting two rivals at opposite stages of their modern development: City, the English, European and world club champion, vs. United, a fallen giant looking



to be kickstarted by the riches and passion of a locally born billionaire.

Few are giving United a hope in the Premier League clash at Etihad Stadium - privately, maybe even Ratcliffe will not expect a win, either - but his recent investment in United, not forgetting his comments about knocking City and fellow local rival Liverpool "off their perch" within three years, provides the narrative and backdrop to a fixture that, for the most part, has been one-sided in recent years.

Take last season's match at the Etihad, for example, where Erling Haaland and Phil Foden scored hat tricks in City's 6-3 thrashing of United.

Or this season's match at

Old Trafford, where United was overrun and ultimately humiliated in a 3-0 loss in October.

City comes into the derby following a 6-2 win at Luton in the FA Cup highlighted by a five-goal performance by Haaland. United has actually won seven of its nine games in all competitions in 2024 but barely ever convinces, which leaves Ten Hag under permanent pressure. Tellingly, Ratcliffe, in his round of post-takeover interviews, never gave his complete backing to the Dutchman.

March will also see United take on its other big foe, Liverpool, in the FA Cup quarterfinals. It's a month of great opportunity for Ten Hag and his players but also one of potential danger, if United was to lose to City - and therefore further jeopardize its Champions League qualification ambitions - and Liverpool.

Fifteen points separate second-placed City and sixth-placed United, and that could be 18 by Sunday evening.

More important for City is the points gap to leader Liverpool, which stands at one heading into the weekend. Liverpool plays first, away to Nottingham Forest.

Kostyuk, Saville and Boulter advance to quarterfinals of Cymbiotika San Diego Open

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, Daria Saville of Australia and Katie Boulter of England advanced to the quarterfinals of the Cymbiotika San Diego Open. Kostyuk continued to build on the form that saw her reach her first major quarterfinal last month at the Australian Open. The sixth seed knocked off the last remaining wild card by beating 18-year-old Taylah Preston of Australia, 6-4 6-3 on Wednesday.

For Kostyuk, 21, it was almost like facing a mirror image of herself.

"I was playing her for the very first time. She's still very young. She reminds me a little bit of me," said Kostyuk, who finished with 25 winners to 17 unforced errors, including nine double-faults.

"I knew I had to fight and grind. It was very close."

Preston, who notched her first tour-level main-draw singles win in the opening round against Magdalena Frech, impressed with her natural power and clean groundstrokes. She has jumped from No. 819 to No. 153 in a matter of one year, and will reach yet another career high when the updated WTA rankings are released



on Monday.

Saville, a qualifier, saved a match point to overcome Germany's Tatjana Maria in a dramatic 3-hour, 14-minute marathon, 5-7 7-6(2) 6-2. Serving to stay in the match at 4-5, 30-40 in the second set, Saville hammered a crosscourt forehand winner to keep her hopes alive. She eventually forced a third set in a tiebreak.

It was anything but a comfortable matchup for the 29-year-old baseliner.

"There was no comfort ever, at all," said Saville, who avenged a quarterfinal loss to Maria in Barranquilla in 2023.

"I think I kind of experienced today, tonight, probably what I do to players. It was a fun match - only

because I won in the end. But it was a tough battle."

The 47th-ranked Maria's unconventional slice-and-dice game repeatedly left Saville scrambling for answers, but the 36-year-old managed to convert only six of her 23 break-point opportunities in taking the loss. "I needed two hours to adjust, three hours," said Saville of facing her crafty veteran foe.

"I think I'm going to have to readjust tomorrow, hitting with someone who hits with spin. I hit a lot of balls today. It's going to be really important for me to do the right recovery and get ready for the next round."

It marked the fourth win of the week for Saville including the qualifying rounds.

Praggnanandhaa commits blunder, loses second round match in Prague

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa committed a time-pressure blunder as he suffered defeat at the hands of Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran in the second round of Prague Masters Chess tournament here. The defeat ended Praggnanandhaa's impressive 47-game unbeaten streak in Classical Chess.

The 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa also lost the top ranking in live ratings among Indians -- a spot reclaimed by the legendary Viswanathan Anand who is

also the brand ambassador of this event.

D Gukesh, meanwhile, came up with an impressive performance with black pieces to beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czech Republic while the other three games in the 10-player round-robin event ended in a draw.

With seven rounds still to come, Iranian GM Maghsoodloo is sitting pretty on two points, a half point ahead of Gukesh and Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan who played out a draw with India's Vidit Gujrathi.

Praggnanandhaa, Gujrathi,



Richard Rapport of Romania and David Navara of Czech Republic share the fourth spot on one point each while Vincent Keymer of Germany and Mateusz Bartel of Poland are on joint eighth spot with 0.5 point in their kitty. Van is the only player yet to open his account.

Praggnanandhaa went down fighting from a position he would have easily saved on another day. Playing the black side of a London System, the Indian did not have much trouble in equalizing and Maghsoodloo kept on looking for ways to complicate the

position.

At some point in the middle game, Praggnanandhaa even looked better but with the clock ticking away it was not an easy task to finish. Maghsoodloo by then had trained his eyes to go for the black king and all he needed was a blunder that created several threats. It was over in 38 moves.

Gukesh's perseverance paid off against Dai Van in a reverse Benoni game wherein the latter played white. Gukesh just kept himself in the game by slow and steady improvement right through and his tactic proved right as the Czech player fell

prey and gave up a rook for minor piece.

Wasting no time, Gukesh converted to an endgame and found a beautiful finish towards the end to force matters. The game lasted 52 moves.

Gujrathi accepted an early pawn sacrifice by Abdusattarov out a Four Knights opening. Playing black, the Uzbek never looked like in any real danger despite the material deficit and in the end drew in just 35 moves.

In other games, Bartel Mateusz had an easy game with Rapport while Keymer did not

find any difficulty in signing peace with Navara.

In the Challengers section, R Vaishali lost her second straight game against Ediz Gurel of Turkey.

Results Round 2 (Indians unless stated): Parham Maghsoodloo (Iran, 2) beat R Praggnanandhaa (1); David Navara (Cze, 1) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 0.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 0) lost to D Gukesh (1.5); Vidit Gujrathi (1) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattarov (Uzb, 1.5); Richard Rapport (Romania, 1) drew with Bartel Mateusz (Pol, 0.5).

RAHUL RULED OUT OF FIFTH TEST, BUMRAH RETURNS: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior India batter KL Rahul will not feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala owing to an injury while pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will return to the team, the BCCI said on Thursday.

Rahul, who continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps, has travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury.

The wicketkeeper-batter became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January and as per the BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month.

“Mr. KL Rahul, whose participation in the final IDFC First Bank Test was subject to fitness, has been ruled out of the fifth and final Test in Dharamsala. The BCCI Medical Team is closely monitoring him and



coordinating with specialists in London for further management of his issue,” the Board said in a release.

Meanwhile Bumrah, who was released from the squad for the fourth Test in Ranchi

in line with the team’s workload management policy, will link up with the squad in Dharamsala for the final Test, beginning March 7.

India have already taken an unassailable 3-1 lead,

following the victory in the fourth Test in Ranchi.

Rahul’s absence from the final Test means Rajat Patidar remained with the squad but the MP batter can’t be sure of his place in the playing

eleven, having aggregated only 63 runs in six innings.

All-rounder Washington Sundar has also been released from the squad.

“He will join Tamil Nadu - his Ranji Trophy side - for their Ranji Trophy Semi-final fixture against Mumbai, starting March 2nd, 2024. He will join the India squad after the completion of the domestic fixture for the fifth Test, if need be,” the BCCI said.

Rahul needs to be fully fit before the IPL where he will lead Lucknow Super Giants and is expected to bat in the middle order to bolster his chances of making the India squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean.

It is the same quadriceps injury that had sidelined Rahul for almost four months last year.

Having got injured during the IPL, Rahul returned to action during the Asia Cup

in September last and made instant impact. In the Test tour of South Africa last year, Rahul was the only century-maker for India in the drawn series.

The BCCI also said senior pacer Mohammed Shami is recovering well after undergoing a surgery on February 26 for his right heel problem.

“He is recovering well and will soon head to the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru to commence his rehabilitation process,” the Board said of Shami.

India’s updated squad for fifth Test: Rohit Sharma (C), Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.



Even Rohit, Kohli should play domestic cricket when free: Kirti

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team Kirti Azad on Thursday backed the BCCI’s directive for cricketers to play Ranji Trophy, saying it’s a good move and the rule should be applicable to every India team player, including Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

The out-of-favour duo of Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were excluded from the list of centrally-contracted players after they ignored the directive to play Ranji Trophy.

“It (directive) is a very good move. Everybody should be playing Ranji Trophy cricket, but currently the emphasis is on the IPL. It is good, it is entertaining but the real cricket is the (five) days’ cricket. Playing in domestic cricket is good, it keeps you in touch.

“But whenever you are free, even if you’re a Rohit Sharma or a Virat Kohli, you should go back and play domestic cricket for the state. That (state) gave you the opportunity to be a player, get selected and then play for the country.

He felt that penalising just Ishan and Iyer wasn’t right.

“Just to penalise the two is not correct, I think everybody should be penalised. Everybody should be seen with the same mirror,” Azad told PTI Video.

Azad declined to comment on whether this was the potential end of the road for Ishan and Iyer after their names were excluded from the list of centrally-contracted players.

“My question is, are they playing enough domestic cricket? They are playing T20

cricket, nowadays and every other state has a T20 cricket league. Back in the days when we were starting our careers, players like Bishan Singh Bedi, Madan Lal, Surinder Amarnath, Mohinder Amarnath, Chetan Chauhan, Sunil Gavaskar, Sandeep Patil, Karsan Ghavri played alongside youngsters like me and Ravi Shastri.

“All these senior Test team players would play for their sides, would play for the pride of their state which seems missing in the youngsters nowadays,” he added.

He questioned why India players had issues playing domestic cricket while England cricketers willingly played county cricket when not in the national side.

“Look at county cricket; there are 20-plus counties and there are numerous three-day and four-day games along with T20 cricket, but every player is involved there. If a player is left out of the Test squad, then he returns to play for his county.

“So why can’t we have our players playing those domestic matches, that’s the big question,” he added.

He praised players like Dhruv Jurel and Sarfaraz Khan for finding the balance between T20 cricket for their IPL teams and playing Ranji Trophy.

“There are players like Jurel, Sarfaraz who do play T20 cricket but, at the end of the day, are also representing their states in the Ranji trophy. The bowlers also get into the rhythm of bowling longer spells when they regularly play domestic cricket. It (Ranji) is not a form of slam-bang and thank you,” he said.



Smith pushes for rule reform

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

Australian batting star Steve Smith has said that the cricketing authorities should urgently address the issue of pacers persistently bowling bouncers to a leg side field, as it restricts a batter’s ability to hit the ball “anywhere in front of the wicket”.

The former Australia captain, who is playing the opening Test against New Zealand here, added a bowler should be allowed just one or two such deliveries, after which he should be warned or the delivery be called a wide.

“I think there could be some slight rule changes in terms of balls going down the leg side when you set that field.

“You really can’t hit the ball anywhere in front of the wicket really, and I feel like it is almost like when a (left-arm) spinner comes over the wicket and they get the warning down the leg side and then they start getting ‘wided,’” Smith was quoted as saying by Sydney Morning Herald.

“If you’re bowling balls consistently in that area down leg, it should be a similar ruling to the spinner if that makes sense. Basically bowl one or two, then get a warning and then get wides called,” he added.

Smith, who made a 31 in Australia’s first innings on the opening day of the Test here as Australia ended day one at 279/9, added that if the ball is drifting too much down leg, it’s impossible for a batter to play any kind of stroke.

“To have those catchers (fielders) there in position, it can be challenging for sure. The only thing I’d like to see is if you get too much down leg, you can’t really score anywhere else, and all the fielders are there. That would be the only change I wouldn’t mind seeing,” added Smith.

Smith has found himself getting bogged down by pace bowlers over the years as they use the tactic to stop the flow of runs, or force him to play a hook shot in frustration to one of the fielders.

Smith praised New Zealand pace bowler Neil Wagner, who announced his retirement from Test cricket on Tuesday, for his accuracy.

“Ultimately it is a good skill what Neil’s been able to do, the way he can get the ball between throat and chest height consistently, not bowl his two (bouncers) for the over and just carry on doing it,” Smith said.

“It’s a good skill and it can be challenging, particularly for guys that are pullers of the ball.”

Irfan questions denial of contracts to Iyer, Kishan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India pacer Irfan Pathan has questioned the BCCI’s decision to deny central contracts to Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer for ignoring a diktat to play Ranji Trophy, saying that players like Hardik Pandya have not been judged on the same parameter.

The BCCI on Wednesday terminated Kishan and Iyer’s central contracts, while Pandya, who has not featured in Tests since 2018, secured a place in Grade A.

“If players like Hardik don’t want to play red ball cricket, should he and others like him participate in white-ball domestic cricket when they aren’t on national duty?” he questioned BCCI’s decision, in his post on X.

“If this doesn’t apply to all, then Indian cricket won’t



achieve the desired results!” he added. The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team’s campaign in Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty since leaving from the tour of South Africa in December last, citing personal reasons.

He has instead focussed on preparing for the IPL next month. He is competing in the ongoing DY Patil T20

Riders in the IPL beginning on March 22. Irfan believes that the duo will come back strongly. “They are talented cricketers, both Shreyas and Ishan. Hoping they bounce back and come back stronger,” he said.

The exclusion of Iyer and Kishan is being seen as a stern message to young players unwilling to put in the hard yards in first-class cricket, while chasing white-ball glory and lucrative IPL contracts.

On Wednesday, former India coach Ravi Shastri also backed the embattled duo.

“In the game of cricket, comebacks define the spirit. Chin-up, @ShreyasIyer15 and @ishankishan51! Dig deep, face challenges, and come back even stronger. Your past achievements speak volumes, and I have no doubt you’ll conquer once again,” Shastri had posted on X.

Australia 279-9 on Day 1 of 1st Test against New Zealand

AP ■ WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND)

The sun came out around lunchtime at the Basin Reserve on Thursday. Its appearance at first breathed life into New Zealand’s bowling performance on the first day of the first cricket Test against Australia.

Then the tall West Australian Cameron Green took the upper hand for Australia with an unbeaten 103, reaching his second test century in the last over of the day. At stumps Australia was 279-9 and Green appeared to have wrested control of the match from New Zealand at the last minute.

Green was reluctant to say so.

“The match is pretty close,” Green said.

“They’re probably just on top. They’ve got a quality

batting lineup and we’ve got to bowl well tomorrow. It’s a lot about the overhead conditions and we’ve got to wake up tomorrow and see how the overheads are.”

New Zealand had bowled unproductively on a cool, overcast morning and Steve Smith and Usman Khawaja had looked like carrying Australia to lunch without loss after it had sent in on a green pitch.

As the sun broke through the clouds and began to warm a capacity crowd at the inner-city oval, New Zealand’s luck changed. After going 24 overs without a breakthrough in the morning, Matt Henry dismissed Smith (31) 10 minutes before lunch.

Marnus Labuschagne (1) fell just after the resumption, then Khawaja (33) and Travis Head (1) were out as Australia slipped from 61-0 to 89-4.



Mitch Marsh and Green counter-attacked with a partnership of 67 for the fifth wicket before and directly after tea. Marsh made 40 from 39 balls with six fours and a six but he also fell to Henry.

Green went on to turn the tide of the first day with his century from 154 balls. He lashed three late boundaries

to do so, reaching his century from the penultimate ball of the day.

When the covers came off at the Basin Reserve about 8 am Thursday after light rain overnight and in the early morning, the pitch looked bright green and moist. With the two teams captained by faster bowlers in a rarity for

Test cricket it was inevitable the team that won the toss would bowl.

Pat Cummins called tails, it was a head and Tim Southee said New Zealand would field, saving his batters from the need to face Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc and what looked like a green seamer.

As it turned out, the pitch was not as lively as it appeared, at least at first. There was a bit of grass to aid seam, a little swing in overcast conditions but not as much pace at it might have seemed.

Smith and Khawaja were bent on surviving the morning, not too concerned with runs and they came within minutes of doing before Henry struck just at the sun began to shine.

Henry had Smith caught by wicketkeeper Tom Blundell with a good length ball that

just left the batter, sending Blundell diving across first slip. Australia went to lunch at 62-1 and New Zealand may have felt the morning was less productive than it should have been.

The bowlers settled into more productive lengths after lunch and used variations more effectively which resulted in the quick wickets of Labuschagne, Khawaja and Head. O’Rourke dismissed Head, first setting him up with a series of fuller balls then catching him out with a shorter one going across him which he followed and guided to Blundell.

Starc (9) and Cummins (16) fell before the second new ball which was taken in the last half hour. Hazlewood (0) will join Green on Friday morning as Australia attempts to add late runs to its total.

Kiran opens new avenue for UP Warriorz

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Kiran Navgire would not have opened but for a freak shoulder injury to Vrinda Dinesh and now her bruising fifty against the Mumbai Indians might just prompt UP Warriorz to rework their combination at the top in the ongoing Women’s Premier League.

Navgire struck a 31-ball 57 and combined with Alyssa Healy (33) to help UPW overhaul a 162-run target in just 16.4 overs against the defending champions last night.

It could shake things up in the line-up, which has till now worked around the far more traditional opening pair of Healy and Vrinda.

“When the innings ended the head coach (Jon Lewis) came up to me and said I had to open. I was happy, because I opened the batting in domestic cricket, and I had the chance to do that here,” Navgire said in the post-match press meet.

Range hitters are a rare breed in women’s cricket and Navgire has opened that option for the UP outfit. The Warriorz have been



notoriously slow starters in the WPL with their middle-order batters creaking under massive run-rate pressure.

In their first match against Royal Challengers Bangalore, UP made 36 for 1 and they were 21 for three against the Delhi Capitals in the second game. But with Navgire coming in as opener, UP made 61 for no loss in the Power Play segment. It was their fastest start, for that matter any team’s, in this edition of the WPL.

Navgire, a big fan of former Indian captain MS Dhoni, is not new to opening the

innings. She garnered instant attraction during the 2021-22 domestic season as a guest player for Nagaland.

She hammered 35 sixes in the Senior Women’s T20 league that season, the most ever in the history of that tournament.

The 29-year-old, who hails from Maharashtra, also became the first Indian woman to score a 150-plus score in T20 when she blasted a 76-ball 162 against Arunachal Pradesh.

Her approach is as simple as the big shots she executes. “I just played the ball on

merit (against MI), played my natural game. If the ball is in my arc, it should go into the stands - that is my natural thought,” said Navgire.

Her assault on MI pacer Issy Wong in the third over of UPW’s chase underlined Navgire’s growth into an all-round batter.

When Wong pitched short, Navgire stood tall and sent the ball to the mid-wicket boundary with a strong pull.

In the next ball, the England pacer pitched the ball further up but Navgire muscled it through mid-off for a four.

MI coach Charlotte Edwards admitted that they were not prepared for Navgire’s aggression. “Kiran Navgire played brilliantly and took the game away from us in the period that she batted and we never quite recovered.

“Firstly, I don’t think Navgire was going to open. The injury (to Vrinda), I guess, gave them a licence to put her up in the order. We weren’t quite planning for her in the batting,” said Edwards. Now that Navgire has the licence to kill, the Warriorz can hope for a more productive WPL season.