



OPINION 6
INDIAN DIPLOMACY:
LEVERAGING SOFT POWER

WORLD 8
HALEY HAMMERS TRUMP FOR
BEING ALL ABOUT HIMSELF

MONEY 10
SENSEX, NIFTY HIT
RECORD HIGH

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Modi Presides Over Lok Sabha Probables



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National President JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others during the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting to finalise the first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) convened a meeting late Thursday night at its Delhi headquarters, with deliberations led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, regarding their first list of candidates running late into the night, suggesting the inclusion of several high-profile leaders in the first list.

The CEC members, including Modi, the party's national president JP Nadda, and Union Ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, deliberated on potential candidates for States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, and Uttarakhand, among others, to finalise

the nominees.

The CEC meeting, which began around 10:30 pm on Thursday, lasted for more than five hours.

Before that, Shah and Nadda had met Modi at his residence to hold consultations, sources said. According to sources, the party may announce a list of 100-120 candidates in its first list. The party is likely to announce its candidates on "weak seats" in Uttar Pradesh before the Election Commission releases dates for the Lok Sabha elections.

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP will not

contest from all 80 seats and will reserve some for its potential allies like Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). In the last poll body meet, 56 UP seats were finalised.

The BJP, according to sources, employed a multi-layered and exhaustive process, encompassing public feedback, internal evaluations, and high-level strategic discussions, to select the candidates poised to represent the party in the upcoming electoral battle.

Sources said the BJP has harnessed technology to solicit feedback from the grassroots level.

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PM QUESTIONS MAMATA ON Maa, Maati, Manush

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ ARAMBAGH

Apparently setting the election agenda for the BJP in Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday focused on women voters, one of the main electoral bases of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He expressed regret over the insensitive attitude of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) towards "the better half of the population," citing their handling of the sexually abused women in Sandeshkhali.

Addressing a massive rally in Arambagh, Hooghly district, the Prime Minister, who launched projects worth ₹ 7,000 crore for developing railways, ports, petroleum, and other sectors, criticised the Trinamool Congress Government for protecting an accused of land grab and dishonouring women in Sandeshkhali.

He refrained from naming specific politicians but highlighted how leaders from the Congress, the TMC, and the Left parties remained silent on the oppression of women and the poor in Sandeshkhali during meetings held in Patna, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.

"When asked for his reactions the national president of the Congress party said on Sandeshkhali

that such incidents are usual in these areas ... Is this not an insult on the women of Bengal, the great men of the State who created the template of the Independence movement," Modi asked, saying the women of Sandeshkhali and Bengal

were hurt and angry and would "avenge their insult in the elections."

Saying that the TMC and its leadership were the protectors of the corrupt, the Prime Minister said the people of Bengal had made up their mind to throw them

out of power.

The Prime Minister's meeting at Arambagh assumes importance against the backdrop of the party's defeat here in the 2019 general elections by a small margin of about 1,300 votes.

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Sandeshkhali erupts in celebrations

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ SANDESHKHALI

Holi came a few weeks in advance at Sandeshkhali with the entire riverine island on Thursday virtually getting inundated in abir (vermillion) hours after the news of Sheikh Shahjahan's arrest at Minakhan about 20 miles inland.

Unconcerned about the much-talked about "body language" of Shahjahan — regarded as the unquestioned "don" of Sandeshkhali who doubled up as a powerful

Trinamool Congress leader and a vote and fund manager — post his arrest, the people, particularly women engaged in a pre-matured Holi saying however that this was "not the end of the movement but beginning of it." Shahjahan, the alleged mastermind of attack on a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials on January 5 besides the alleged perpetrator of large-scale land grabbing, sexual assault on women and other crimes, was at large for 56 days before being arrested on Thursday.

Continued on Page 8

BJP to strengthen alliance, Yogi to revamp Cabinet

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/GUWAHATI

Ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is set to maintain good relations with its existing allies by offering them more space in Assam and accommodating them in the Uttar Pradesh Government. Sources said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may expand his Cabinet and Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party president Om Prakash Rajbhar may be included in the Cabinet.

Similarly the ruling BJP will contest 11 Lok Sabha seats in Assam, leaving three for its allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma AGP will contest from Barpeta and Dhubri, while UPPL will field its candidate in Kokrajhar. The allies will support each other candidates in all the 14 constituencies.

In the Yogi Government, JP leader Dara Singh Chauhan and an MLA from Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) may also get entry in Team Yogi. It is also speculated that one Jat and one Muslim from RLD may get a place in the Yogi Government.

Sources said Yogi took the approval from the party high command on Thursday in the midst of CEC meeting.

India Intent on National Defence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday sealed five major defence acquisition contracts worth ₹39,125 crore, including the procurement of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, radars, weapon systems, and aero-engines for MiG-29 jets, as part of efforts to boost the combat capabilities of the armed forces.

The mega procurement projects were finalised amid India's lingering border row

with China in eastern Ladakh, and they will be implemented under the broad framework of the Government's policy to enhance domestic defence manufacturing.

The contracts for the procurement of the platforms and weapon systems were signed in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane, under whose guidance these deals were finalised, according to an official statement.



EC urges parties to maintain decorum

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of the concerning trends and cases of declining levels of political campaign discourse in recent elections, the Election Commission (EC) has urged political parties and their leaders to refrain from seeking votes based on caste, religion, or language. Additionally, they are warned not to insult the devotee-deity relationship or suggest any divine censure.

The poll watchdog has emphasised the need for maintaining decorum in public campaigning, placing additional responsibility on star campaigners and candidates, particularly those who have been issued notices in the past. This advisory comes just days before the



model code is expected to come into effect with the announcement of the Lok Sabha and four State Assembly polls later this month.

In its advisory, the EC has stated that candidates and star campaigners will face stern action for any violation of the Model Code of Conduct, replacing the previous practice of only 'moral censure'.

Furthermore, the EC has prohibited the use of temples, mosques, churches, gurdwaras, or any other place of worship for poll propaganda or electioneering. The EC's advisory also emphasises that references ridiculing devotee-deity relations or suggesting divine censure should not be made. Any surrogate or indirect

violation of the Model Code of Conduct will be dealt with sternly by the Commission.

Star campaigners and candidates have been put on notice by the EC regarding violations, following previously known methodologies during elections to avoid breaches of the Model Code of Conduct.

The commission will assess any indirect violations of the Model Code of Conduct as per the advisory to ensure fair and appropriate notices are issued in terms of timing and content for the forthcoming elections.

For the General Election to Lok Sabha and to four State Legislative Assemblies, all phases and geographical areas of elections shall be considered for determining "repeat" offenses.

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Bengaluru Blasted

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A bomb blast at a popular eatery in the city on Friday left nine persons injured and police have launched a probe from all angles after it emerged that an earlier suspected gas leak was not the cause of the explosion.

Police suspect that a bag at the eatery with a possible improvised explosive device (IED) could have exploded, even as the NIA and the IB have been apprised of the matter. Officials from the local unit of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) later arrived at the spot. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said investigation is on to ascertain the cause and nature of the explosion at the popular Rameshwaram Cafe in Whitefield, and added it might have been caused by an "improvised explosive" device.



Security officials and others at the Rameshwaram Cafe after a fire caused by a suspected cylinder explosion, in Bengaluru, on Friday

The incident should not be politicised and everyone should cooperate, adding strict action would be taken against those involved.

State police chief Alok Mohan described the explosion as a "bomb blast" and said nobody was seriously injured. "At 1 pm, a bomb blast

occurred at the hotel (cafe), nine people are injured, and no one is serious. We are investigating. FSL (forensic) teams have come and are checking. City police Commissioner and other officers are at the spot. We will certainly identify who did it," he said after visiting the spot.

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Yeh Badalta Mausam: India hit by freak weather

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is expected to witness high minimum temperatures in March, sounding alarms for the vital wheat crop, as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts above-average day and night temperatures from March through May across the nation, attributed to El Niño conditions. Exceptions are noted in isolated regions of the northwest, northeast, central, and peninsular India, sparking concerns for agricultural yields. This could impact agricultural

activities and crop growth, particularly for wheat. The minimum or night temperatures are also likely to be above normal over most parts of the country, the IMD said on Friday.

According to the IMD, the first half of March may see above-normal rainfall in north-western parts of the country, while the second half is likely to experience higher-than-normal temperatures.

Monthly maximum temperatures for March are expected to be above normal over most areas of peninsular India, the northeast, the west central



region, and the northwest. Normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely to persist over most parts of east and east-central India and some parts of northwest India. During the season (March, April, and May), above-normal minimum temperatures are most likely over most parts of the country.

IMD director general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said at a press conference that India is likely to see above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures in most parts of the country during the "Hot Weather Season 2024" between March and

May, with El Niño conditions predicted to continue through the summer season and neutral conditions likely to develop thereafter. The El Niño conditions in 2023 led to patchy and erratic monsoon in 2023, reducing India's foodgrain production by 6.1 per cent in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June).

"During March, April, and May, an above-normal number of heatwave days are likely over most parts of the country except over Northeast India, Western Himalayan Region, Southwest Peninsula, and West Coast," he said.

Continued on Page 8



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a meeting, in Kolkata, on Friday

UP issues over 5 cr Ayushman cards

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

While holding the top position nationwide, Uttar Pradesh has achieved a new milestone by surpassing the record of issuing over 5 crore Ayushman cards. Over the past year alone, over 2.80 crore Ayushman cards have been issued in the state under the scheme.

The implementation of this scheme, which prioritises the objectives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is continuously being improved in Uttar Pradesh, as a result of which UP has become of the leading states in terms of implementing this scheme in the country. UP ranks first in various parameters determined for the implementation of the scheme across the country. To provide Ayushman cards to all eligible individuals, the Ayushman Bhav campaign is being conducted across the country. Under the campaign in UP from September 17, 2023 to the present in just eight months, an additional 1.94 crore Ayushman cards, the highest number, have been issued across the country.

Currently, under the developed India resolution journey, special camps are being organised in all gram panchayats and ward/nagar panchayats of urban areas in the entire state. This journey

started on November 15, 2023, and so far, over 59 lakh Ayushman cards have been issued under this campaign.

CEO, State Health Agency (SACHIS), Sangeeta Singh said the achievement of issuing 5 crore Ayushman cards under the Uttar Pradesh government was a significant achievement for the (SACHIS).

“This achievement is the result of continuous support from the National Health Authority, skilled leadership of state officials, dedication of the Ayushman Bharat team, organisational commitment, and dedication of ground workers, panchayat assistants, ANMs, medical officers, ASHAs, and other workers. Along with this achievement, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of patients receiving free treatment under this scheme daily. Previously, the average daily admission of patients under this scheme was 2,000, which has now increased to approximately 8,000 per day,” she explained.

For the treatment of beneficiaries under the scheme in the state, more than 5,000 private and government hospitals have been enlisted. These hospitals provide treatment for various diseases ranging from common illnesses to serious conditions like cancer, heart disease, and organ transplantation.

All individuals getting equal opportunities, says minister

INDIA’S FIRST TRANSGENDER LITERARY, CULTURAL PROGRAMME

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant effort to uplift all segments of society, the Yogi Adityanath government is extending the benefits of various schemes, with a notable impact on the transgender community. Through these schemes, individuals from the transgender community are getting employment opportunities, steering the state towards progress by engaging in new business ventures and leaving behind traditional income sources.

In an event held at the Bhagidari Bhawan in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, on Friday, prominent individuals from the transgender community discussed the same in India’s first transgender literary and cultural programme. Transgender identity certificate and its benefits were also discussed. Fundamental rights were discussed with sensitivity and respect.

The discussions covered the process of availing benefits under the SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, including ben-



efits from Garima Grih, Ayushman Plus Card, scholarships, and more.

During the programme, Mahamandaleshwar Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi mentioned that the Uttar Pradesh government is doing a good job in bringing the transgender community into the mainstream. Through various schemes, they are getting employment opportunities, leaving behind traditional sources of income, and contributing to the progress of

society and the country.

Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Social Welfare, Asim Arun, said that the Yogi Adityanath government was providing equal development opportunities to every individual of society. In line with this, a transgender literary and cultural festival has been organised and our effort is to ensure that the transgender community receives a respectful place in society and by coming into the

mainstream, they can play their role in their own and the country’s development, he added.

During the programme, there was a discussion on the need and efforts to bring the transgender community into the mainstream through literature, art and music. In addition to this, the transgender community expressed their views through poetry recitation, street plays, dance dramas, ramp walks and emotional expressions, emphasising that they also have equal rights in society, and they are contributing to changing society.

The programme was inaugurated by Minister of State for Social Welfare Asim Arun. Throughout the event, key figures associated with the transgender community participated in the event, including Vice-Chairman of Uttar Pradesh Transgender Welfare Board Sonam Chishti, Principal Secretary (Social Welfare) Dr Hariom, Director of Social Welfare Kumar Prashant, Mahamandaleshwar Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, Mahamandaleshwar Kaushalya Nand Giri, Devika Devendra S Mangalamukhi, and other members of the Transgender Welfare Board.

Girl alleges rape by PAC constable on marriage pretext

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A PAC constable was accused of raping a girl on the pretext of marriage, in Mall police station area. However, a case was registered with the Talkatora police as the accused had first met her in the area. Both of them came close after coming in contact through Facebook.

The accused, Anuj Panwar, took her to Haridwar and allegedly raped her in a hotel. However, the accused promised to marry her soon.

The victim alleged that Anuj visited Lucknow on several occasions and had physical relations with her at different places. Anuj, who is a native of Saharanpur district, then started distancing himself from her in due course of time, the complainant alleged.

He had spent nearly a year with the victim, whose parents were not aware of their relationship. “We first met in May 2023. On our date, he spiked my soft drinks and then raped me. He requested me not to complain to anyone and promised to marry me. He also said that he did nothing wrong to me as I was his wife,” the victim said.

She said she called Anuj on December 21 and asked him

for marriage, but he refused instantly.

“I complained with the Mall police, but they sent me to Talkatora police station, saying the crime took place in that area,” she said.

Meanwhile, a Dalit woman accused a man of making sexual overtures towards her, in Talkatora on Friday. She further alleged that the accused and his aides abused her and hurled casteist remarks. She also alleged that they even threatened to abduct her. She said she came across the prime accused, identified as Rizwan, in her colony some time ago.

“He sought to befriend me and I ended up giving him my mobile number on February 14. It was a terrible mistake on my part. He started sending filthy messages and indulged in suggestive talks,” she stated in her complaint.

She said Rizwan’s friends Amar Chaudhary and Shadab also called and abused her. “They addressed me by my caste and said they would abduct me if I did not agree to Rizwan’s proposal. They said there was no one in the government to back people of my caste,” she stated in the complaint. Police registered a case under relevant sections of the IPC.

Rahul slams UP govt over law, order

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took on the Uttar Pradesh government on Friday, making a direct attack on it over the law and order situation in the state and leak of examination papers.

“The truth of the double-engine government in Uttar Pradesh is that it is a ‘guarantee of jungle raj’, Rahul Gandhi said on Friday while announcing a state-wide protest by Congress workers against the law and

order situation. “The law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh is the biggest example of how the Bharatiya Janata Party and (Narendra) Modi media together are indulging in the business of lies,” he alleged in a post in Hindi on X.

Highlighting several recent cases of crimes against women, he said the bodies of minor sisters were found hanging from trees at some places.

“Somewhere, the audacity of gang-rape by BJP members in IIT-BHU campus, and somewhere a woman judge was

forced to commit suicide for not getting justice. This is the condition of that state whose law and order system is being praised tirelessly,” Rahul Gandhi said. He also mentioned the recent murder of a Dalit student who was returning after appearing in her Class 10 examination in Rampur. “It is time to come out of the false image created by the Modi media and see the truth that the double-engine government is the ‘guarantee of jungle raj’, the former party president of the Congress said.

“Uttar Pradesh Congress workers will raise their voice for justice by protesting in every district and every tehsil on Friday against the BJP system and this alliance of criminals,” he said. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also slammed the BJP over yet another exam paper leak in Uttar Pradesh, accusing the ruling party of spoiling the foundation of crores of children and youths to save the examination mafia and corrupt people.

The mathematics and biology question papers of the Class 12 Uttar Pradesh Board exam were allegedly shared on a WhatsApp group an hour after the examinations began on Thursday, prompting authorities to lodge a police complaint.

On the complaint of the District Inspector of Schools, Agra, Dinesh Kumar, an FIR has been registered in Fatehpur Sikri.

Tagging a media report, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said in a post in Hindi on X, “Paper leaked once again! Why so? Under BJP rule, from job exams to board exams, almost every paper is getting leaked!”

The Congress general secretary said that the board examinations were the first challenge that children faced when they learnt to build their future. “If such a big betrayal happens to them at this juncture, what will they do next?” she asked. “To save the examination mafia and the corrupt people sitting in the government, the BJP is also hollowing the foundation of crores of children and youth,” she said.

Does the BJP not want the children of the state to improve their future by getting a good education? the Congress general secretary asked.

The principal of Atar Singh Inter College, Rajhauli, in Kiraoli of Fatehpur Sikri, his son, who works as a computer operator at the institute, and others have been named in the complaint, the FIR stated.

JM Park facilities to be upgraded

Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi announced the allocation of Rs 2 crore for enhancing Janeshwar Mishra Park in Gomti Nagar. This includes establishing a central cycling pool, boating in an artificial lake, and a permanent open-air theatre for sound and music programmes. Additionally, plans for a floating restaurant on a special deck in the upstream of Gomti river were revealed.

Furthermore, LDA aims to renovate the park for a better look, as maintenance work was suspended due to funding constraints since 2019. Boating facilities will be reinstated after five years, with over 20 specially designed boats equipped with life-saving devices. Additionally, 50 bicycles with GPS will be available for hire, allowing visitors to explore the 370-acre park with ease. The introduction of a permanent open-air theatre, with a capacity for 2,000 people, is also planned. LDA will collaborate with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for this endeavor, providing free seating arrangements excluding VIP enclosures.

the pioneer

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I Have changed my name From RITU Anand Jaiswal To Ritu Jaiswal in Future Let me known as Ritu Jaiswal w/o Rohit Anand Jaiswal R/o 22 sunder Bagh, Lal Kuan Lucknow.

NOTICE

I Asgar Ali Army no 15781056H Rank NK (OPR) Unit 157 Lt Ad Regt (com) my army document in my mother name SAJADA BIBI in the wrong but right Name SAJEDA BIBI in aadhar

INFORMATION

This is to inform that my name is registered as Shashi Bala Choudhary in my husband's job record Army No 9106623H Hav Udai Raj which is incorrect. whereas in other records my name is Shashi Bala, which is correct. Shashi Bala Choudhary and Shashi Bala are the names of the same person (Female). Therefore I Should be known, recognized and understood only by the name of Shashi Bala. Shashi Bala w/o - Udairaj Resedent Village-Kanauli Post-Majjar Ganj District & Teh-Rae Bareli (UP)

NOTICE

I have changed my name from KAMAL CHANDRA AGRAWAL to KAMAL CHAND AGRAWAL. In future I Shall be known as KAMAL CHAND AGRAWAL. KAMAL CHAND AGRAWAL S/o Mukund Chandra Agrawal, 330/144/1 Alopi Bagh, Prayagraj

AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 05-03-2024 अपरान्ह 12.00 बजे कार्यालय आयकर अपीलीय अधिकरण के पुराने कार्यालय-ए-ब्लॉक, पंचम तल, पिकप भवन, गोमतीनगर, लखनऊ में बुड्ढेन-वॉल पैन्ल पार्टीशन की नीलामी, सिक्योरिटी रु० 10000/- नगद, जी.एस. टी. पंजीकरण के साथ जमा होगी । आई.पी. सिंह एंड सन्स

NOTICE

I have changed my name from S.M. Khalid Iqbal to Syed Mohammed Khalid Iqbal.S/o Mr.S.S. Husain R/o 131 Prakash Lok Colony B. Block Indira Nagar Lucknow 226016 for all future purpose

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sahid Ansari To Salauddin Ansari for all future purpose, Salauddin Ansari S/O Amir Ansari R/O Akhlak Nagar, Katri Piper Kheda Ganghaghat, Unnao U.P.209861

NOTICE

In my army service record, dates of birth of my mother Chanda Devi and wife Rinku have wrongly been mentioned as 20-06-1953 and 20-07-1976. Their correct dates of birth are 07-10-1959 and 10-08-1977 respectively.JC 352999Y Subedar Store Keeper Arvind Singh S/o Late Nawab Singh R/o 32 O-1 Block, Devki Nagar, Yashoda Nagar, Kanpur Nagar.

UP to get 4 more Rahi tourist accommodations

Lucknow (PNS): The state will soon get four more Rahi tourist accommodation facilities. The Tourism department will develop these accommodation facilities in Hardoi, Agra, Mathura, and Lalitpur districts on a public-private partnership (PPP) mode. An agreement was signed on Friday between Principal Secretary (Tourism and Culture) Mukesh Kumar Meshram, and four developers.

These tourist accommodation facilities can be used for hotels, MICE activity centres, resorts, museums, restaurants, banquet halls, wedding tourism, adventure tourism, homestays, thematic parks, wellness centres, and other hospitality units.

Speaking on the occasion, Meshram said: “Investors in this project will be provided with eligible benefits and incentives under the State Tourism Policy-2022. This investment will encourage domestic and international tourists to the state for tourism and better experiences. Uttar Pradesh is making swift strides in tourism development, particularly emphasising tourist amenities. Our goal is to guarantee visitors depart with unforgettable experiences.”

There are currently 35 tourist accommodation facilities in the state, with nine already on the PPP mode. The new agreement covers four more, and action is underway for the remaining 22.

He emphasised that special attention should be given to the convenience of tourists.

CITYBRIEFS

AQUARIUM FABRICATION

An initiative was taken by ICAR-NBFGR under Mission NavShakti of SCSP to empower rural women belonging to SC community to gear up for market demand-based skills. One such skill was imparting aquarium fabrication, assembly and maintainable. Another skill is to rear aquarium fishes. Under hub-and-spokes model, a new initiative was taken by ICAR-NBFGR to create small backyard ponds in rural homes which can be used to rear and keep aquarium fishes for supplying to the market. The women belonging to SC community are building 50 small ponds with minimal input. These ponds are being used to rear molly and guppy live bearers. This initiative will help creating new source of income for women who can earn from the comfort of their homes. The initiative was taken by Dr Poonam Jayant Singh, ARS and nodal officer, SCSP, in coordination of Dr UK Sarkar, director of ICAR NBFGR. Indramani Raja supported the initiative by buying back aquarium fishes. This model can be replicated in every district, town and cities for creating new avenues of entrepreneurship and empowering rural women from SC community.

AWARENESS

SGPGI, Breast and Cervical Cancer awareness and early detection committee (SGPGIMS-BCCAP), in collaboration with JHPIEGO, organised a programme on “Women power and cancer” on Friday. A talk was delivered by Dr Ophira Ginsburg, senior advisor for clinical research at

the Centre for Global Health, National Cancer Institute (NCI), US. She emphasised the importance of affordable and equitable cancer care strategies for empowering women. She highlighted the Lancet commission’s report on the orphans who lost their parents to cancer as well as some real-life stories on those women who have been diagnosed with cancer.

HR CONCLAVE



An HR Conclave, organised by the Counselling and Guidance Cell, in collaboration with Happy Thinking Laboratory, University of Lucknow, saw industry experts sharing insights on career choices. Industrialists and HR experts from diverse MNCs shared experiences, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. Abhishek Prakash, CEO of Invest UP, outlined strategies to prioritise law and order, create diverse investment opportunities, and improve infrastructure. The event, convened by Prof M Priyadarshini and Dr Vaishali Saxena, facilitated meaningful interactions, offering a bridge between academia and the corporate world.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR

Mail i.d seccbbsr@gmail.com

E-procurement Tender Call Notice No.36 of 2023-24

No. 839 (Estg.) Bhubaneswar the 27th February-2024

The Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for two number road works to be received in online bidding, double cover system for construction work as detailed in: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5.00 P.M. of 01.03.2024 to 5.00 P.M of 15.03.2024. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 11.00 A.M. of 16.03.2024 in the Office of the Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersodisha.gov.in.

Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.

Sd/-Er.P.K.Mohanty

Chief Construction Engineer

Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-34156/11/0030/2324

इंडियन बैंक

(भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)

Indian Bank

(A Govt. of India Undertaking)

ALLAHABAD

POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable Property)

[Under Rule-8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002]

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the Indian Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002, (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3, 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice as detailed here in below calling upon the borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The Borrowers/Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers/ Guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of the powers conferred on him/ her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 and 9 of the said Rules.

The Borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charges of the Indian Bank.

The Borrower's / Guarantor's 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.

This Possession Notice is being served to the Borrower (s), Guarantor (s) & Mortgagor (s) to deposit the said dues. Details as under:

S. N.	Name & Address of the Borrower (s)/ Guarantor (s)/ Proprietor / Mortgagors	Description of the Immovable Property	Dt. of Demand Notice Dt. of Possession Outstanding Amount
Branch: Daliganj			
1.	M/s Khushi Departmental Store, 1/290, Vibhav Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of 1/290 situated at Vibhav Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, District- Uttar Pradesh State within the Registration District Lucknow, Area: 115.50.00 sq mt, Bounded by:- North: Road 12mt wide, South: Plot no 1/242, East: Plot no 1/289, West: Plot no 1/291	20.12.2023 26.02.2024 Rs. 10,19,895.81 and Interest thereon
2.	Mr. Vinod Gupta (Proprietor and Guarantor), 1/290, Vibhav Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow		
3.	Mr. Manorma Gupta (Guarantor), 1/290, Vibhav Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow		
4.	Mr. Neeta Gupta (Guarantor and Mortgagor), 1/290, Vibhav Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow		

Date : 02.03.2024

Authorised Officer Indian Bank

GBC@IV to transform Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura into prominent job cities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government is set to transform the three major centres of Sanatan dharma – Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura – into prominent cities for employment in Uttar Pradesh. Through the fourth edition of the groundbreaking ceremony (GBC@IV), projects worth more than Rs 48,000 crore have already been initiated in the three temple cities. It is noteworthy that around 14,000 people are expected to find employment through the top five projects that are being started at these three places. The projects are related to setting up of tourist centres, wellness centres and hotels, which will create jobs mainly in tourism and hospitality sectors in these three holy cities. It includes 372 projects worth around Rs 1,300 crore for Ayodhya. Abhinandan Lodha House is investing Rs 3,000 crore in real estate and commercial projects in Ayodhya, creating more than 100 job opportunities, whereas PKH Ventures Ltd. is establishing a Tourist Facilitation Centre with Rs 600 crore, wherein construction of a hotel with 500 rooms will take place, generating 300 jobs. Meanwhile, Pakka Limited is setting up a paper manufacturing unit in Ayodhya at a cost of Rs 550 crore, potentially creating over 600 jobs, while Innovators Digital Ads Pvt Ltd is constructing a luxury star category hotel in the city at a cost of Rs 510 crore, providing employment to 100 people. Additionally, Crescendo Interiors is building a private

industrial park at a cost of Rs 500 crore and it will create employment for more than 100 people. Similarly, Varanasi, known as the city of Lord Shiva, has witnessed the initiation of around 277 projects with a total investment of approximately Rs 19,250 crore, of which the top five projects alone are expected to provide employment to more than 1,500 people. The Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) is investing Rs 500 crore for the establishment of research and development (R&D) facilities and fabrication/manufacturing/testing facilities for the company's existing and emerging business areas (mechanical/electrical/electronic products/systems). This initiative is expected to create 225 jobs. Similarly, Roma Builders and Promoters Pvt Ltd is starting a mixed development project based on a 5-star resort with meditation and wellness centre, fruit farms, clubhouses, and housing societies. With an investment of Rs 500 crore, this project is expected to provide employment to 300 people. Moreover, Gajadhar Technosys LLP is spending Rs 350 crore on housing projects that will provide employment to 300 people in Kashi. Ansh Nirman Pvt Ltd is investing Rs 275 crore in a residential group housing project and commercial mall, creating job opportunities for 200 people. Furthermore, JS Residency Pvt Ltd will establish a hotel at the cost of Rs 250 crore in Varanasi, which will provide employment opportunities for 500 people.

Like Ayodhya and Varanasi, Mathura too has witnessed implementation of 415 projects worth around Rs 16,600 crore of which the top five are expected to create employment for over 11,000 people in Lord Krishna's birth-place. As per this, Air Liquide North India Pvt Ltd is establishing a state-of-the-art air separation unit for industries and hospitals in Mathura with an investment of Rs 3,075 crore. This unit, designed to produce liquid oxygen (including medical oxygen) 305 TPD, liquid nitrogen 45 TPD, and liquid argon 12 TPD, will be modern, fully automated and environmentally friendly. It is expected to provide employment to 50 people. Similarly, the Bennison is setting up the hotel at a cost of Rs 1,310 crore, creating several job opportunities. Keshav Publications Pvt Ltd has initiated manufacturing products such as stationery, electrical items and plastic products. With an investment of Rs 1,250 crore, it aims to create employment opportunities for 10,000 people. In addition to this, IFF Petro Products is establishing a lubricating oil refining plant at the cost of Rs 1,100 crore, creating job opportunities for 700 people. Avadi Industries Pvt Ltd is setting up an ACSR conductors manufacturing unit with an investment of Rs 500 crore, which will provide employment to 400 people in Mathura. The GBC@IV has also seen initiation of 902 projects worth Rs 77,312 crore in the other four religious sites of UP, namely,

Prayagraj, Chitrakoot, Naimisharanya (Sitapur) and Bareilly. This is likely to create thousands of jobs. Through the top five projects in these four religious sites, more than 12,500 jobs are expected to be provided. In Prayagraj, Varun Beverages (Rs 1,053 crore), DND India (Rs 600 crore), Omex Ltd (Rs 600 crore), Shourya Naturopathy and Resorts India Pvt Ltd (Rs 500 crore) and JK Cem (Rs 400 crore) are jointly creating around 2,500 jobs. Similarly, in the religious city Chitrakoot, Tusco Ltd (Rs 4,700 crore), Sahastrabhujia Food Products Pvt Ltd (Rs 500 crore), Varun Beverages Ltd (Rs 496 crore), Shree Cement Pvt Ltd (Rs 202 crore) and Jay Bulb Company Ltd (Rs 300 crore) will generate approximately 1,900 employment opportunities. In Naimisharanya, the sacred land of sages in Sitapur district, Greenlam South Ltd (Rs 1,500 crore), Century Plywoods India Ltd (Rs 1,500 crore), RAV Global Solutions Pvt Ltd (Rs 200 crore), Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Industries Ltd (Rs 170 crore) and The Seksaria Biswan Sugar Factory Ltd (Rs 132 crore) will generate more than 6,000 jobs. Meanwhile, in Bareilly, the famous as Nath Nagari, IFFCO (Rs 638 crore), Singh Enterprises (Rs 605 crore), Rinku Dairy Prop (Rs 490 crore), Reaplywoods LLP (Rs 408 crore) and Dhamapur Bio Organics Ltd (Rs 350 crore) together are expected to provide job opportunities for around 3,000 people.

Investment proposals worth ₹10L cr implemented in UP in single day

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a landmark achievement, Uttar Pradesh, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has implemented investment proposals of over Rs 10 lakh crore through various industries in a single day. It is worth reflecting on the transformation Uttar Pradesh has undergone in the past seven to eight years. Once dubbed 'Uttar Pradesh', the state has now emerged as 'Udyog Pradesh', setting new benchmarks in development across infrastructure, connectivity, power supply, law enforcement, healthcare and education. In every sector, Uttar Pradesh is making remarkable strides towards excellence. The state that once created fear in the minds of entrepreneurs has now evolved into a business-friendly state. Through comprehensive reforms in work culture at all

levels, Chief Minister Yogi has achieved what once appeared impossible. After taking charge of UP, the chief minister initiated work in mission mode to strengthen and streamline the law and order. His strong desire to connect the youth of the state with employment opportunities has significantly paved the way for the establishment of industries on a large scale. In addition to this, the state has introduced more than 25 sector-specific policies, a separate policy to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), rapid development of expressways in the state and the establishment of a 46,000-acre land bank along these expressways. To create a better environment for industries, the Yogi government has not only brought 481 services from 41 departments under the single window system but has also set a new record by disposing of more than 97 per cent of over

13 lakh applications for licence. Not only this, more than a thousand unique reforms under the Business Reform Action Plan (BARP) have also become possible for the first time. In addition to these achievements, whether it is providing no objection certificates (NOCs) within a specified time frame for over 200 services or reducing compliance requirements for nearly 4,500 compliances or eliminating over 577 compliances, the Yogi government has left no stone unturned in establishing an environment of ease of doing business in UP. With this, the state has now become one of India's top five manufacturing states, boasting a huge cluster of over 86 lakh micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the largest in any state in India. Moreover, the Yogi government's proactive approach in developing a land bank of over

46,000 acres near economic zones, expressways and corridors has started attracting significant industrial opportunities to the state. Notably, the image of the state government has become one of policy-based governance in the industrial sector, both in the country and globally. The government possesses more than 25 sectoral policies for industries and stands out for having separate policies for FDI, contributing significantly to its notable achievements. Uttar Pradesh is a large state with seven cities having a population of over 10 lakh and five cities with a population exceeding 5 lakh, with 56 per cent of its population working. The state has a huge consumer base with a population of 250 million and the neighbouring states have a population of approximately 425 million. Such a huge consumer market is also attracting industrialists and businessmen in the state.

LS polls: Owaisi queers SP pitch in west UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After the cross-voting by seven MLAs of the Samajwadi Party during the recent Rajya Sabha elections, the announcement by Asaduddin Owaisi of All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) to contest 21 Lok Sabha seats in western Uttar Pradesh with significant Muslim population has added to the woes of SP, a key constituent of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). As UP gears up for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, all eyes are on the 26 per cent Muslim voters in western UP, with more than 30 per cent in 21 seats, a crucial influence. The Owaisi factor has the potential of altering the dynamics of the Samajwadi Party-Congress tie-up in UP. AIMIM spokesperson Mohammad Farhan has demanded five seats from the opposition INDIA bloc, and has threatened to contest on 25 seats if denied. The party contends that not getting the requested seats would have significant consequences. There are speculations that Owaisi might choose to contest from Muslim-dominated seats in western UP – Moradabad or Sambhal. The AIMIM spokesperson said, "Just as Vasudev Shri Krishna had asked for five villages for the Pandavas, similarly Owaisi saheb is asking

‘EC may be making strategy to stop Samajwadis in UP’

Lucknow (PTI): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday suggested that the Election Commission might be strategising to defeat his party. The SP leader made the remark when asked by reporters to comment on the current visit of an Election Commission (EC) delegation to Lucknow to assess poll preparedness. "Ho sakta hai ki ranniti bana rahein ho ki Samajwadion ko kaise rokein (Maybe they are making a strategy on how to stop the Samajwadis)," he said. "The commission might be making this strategy, who knows," Yadav added. The SP chief also hit out at the BJP, saying it betrayed farmers and pushed the future of youngsters into darkness. "Members of the Samajwadi Party (SP) will go to villages with the slogan of '80 Harao, Loktantra Bachao (defeat 80, save democracy). This government has betrayed farmers," Yadav told media persons at the party headquarters here. "They came to power with the promise of doubling farmers' income. But the income of farmers has not risen... they (BJP) have pushed the future of the youths into darkness," he added. Uttar Pradesh has 80 Lok Sabha seats, the highest for any state in the country. "Farmers are angry and waiting for the elections because their earnings have not increased... youngsters are angry because question papers of exams they worked hard for were leaked," Yadav said. He was referring to the Uttar Pradesh government recently cancelling the recruitment exam

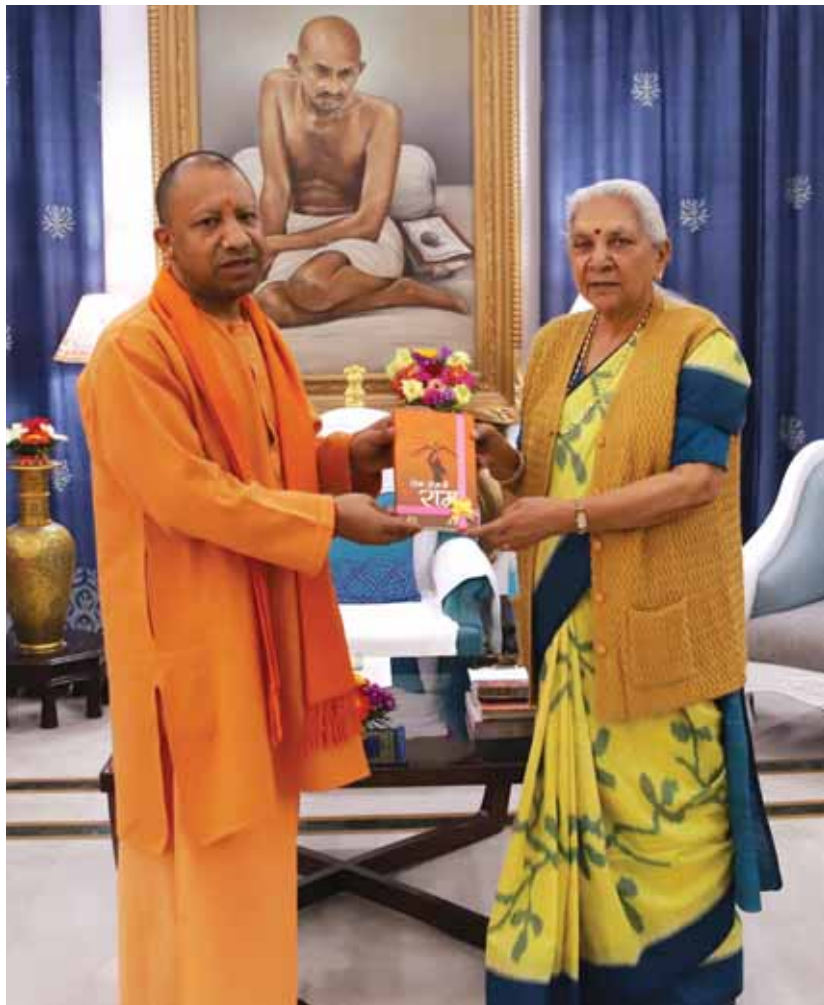


for police constables held last month following widespread complaints of paper leaks. "Today, very few people are happy... more are sad and those who are sad are with the PDA (backwards, Dalits and minorities), with us," the SP leader said. Referring to an incident connected to the 2022 Assembly elections, Yadav said, "We had identified 10 families in Kannauj who were alive but their votes were cancelled. When we complained about it, action was taken against junior officials. The district magistrate should have been suspended." "When we complained about deleted votes, the Election Commission gave us a notice on which we gave the details of 18,000 such votes. Will the Election Commission suspend the Returning Officer over it," he asked.

for only five seats for Dalits, Backwards and Muslims of Uttar Pradesh. If Samajwadi Party gives five seats, it would

be great. If not, the INDIA bloc will face consequences." Despite being in the opposition, Owaisi is seen as a

potential disruptor, with opposition parties often accusing him of being Bharatiya Janata Party's B



CM Yogi Adityanath paid a courtesy call to Governor Anandiben Patel in Lucknow on Friday

Mysterious balloon-like object found in Etawah

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A mysterious balloon-like object fell from the sky in Bauth village under Balrai police station of Etawah district on Thursday afternoon. A crowd of villagers gathered to see the balloon. Many electronic devices were installed in the balloon and something was written on the device in Chinese and Korean languages. The police, on receiving information, took possession of the balloon and informed the authorities and started an investigation. Jaswant Nagar's Sub-Divisional Magistrate Deepshikha said that a white

balloon had fallen from the sky in Bauth village under Balrai police station. The balloon is about three feet big. Many electronic devices were also found around the balloon. There is something written on it in Chinese and Korean language. A GPS system is also installed in the balloon. Investigation of the balloon has been started and senior officials of the district, including the sleuths of the Central and state intelligence agencies have been apprised of the development. Sources said that initially the officials suspected that it might be some object of the Meteorological department sent to study weather changes.

Class 10 student hangs self in school hostel

Kaushambi (PTI): A class 10 student allegedly committed suicide in the hostel of a government boarding school here, police said on Friday. Paschim Sharira SHO Dhirendra Singh said Aditya Divakar (15) hanged himself from the ceiling in his hostel room using a muffler on Thursday night. According to other school students, Divakar had not performed well in his science exam due to which he was tensed, he said. The body has been sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, police said.



इंडियन बैंक				Indian Bank	
इलाहाबाद		ALLAHABAD			
Zonal Office Lucknow, New Building, 2nd Floor, Hazratganj, Lucknow-226001, Ph. 0522-2286272, 2287283, Fax: 0522-2288033, E-mail id: zolucknow@indianbank.co.in					
DEMAND NOTICE					
NOTICE U/S 13 (2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002					
Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized officer of Indian Bank (erstwhile Allahabad Bank) Issued Demand Notices under Section 13 (2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 to the Borrower's/Guarantor's herein below mentioned, Consequently upon the dispatch of such Notices through Post And returned Bank undelivered from the Borrower's/Guarantor's addresses. Through this Publication they are hereby called upon to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of publication of said notice failing which the bank will take the possession of the immovable and movable property will sell it through the process in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 8 & 9 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.					
Sl. No	Name & Address of the Borrower(s) No Guarantor(s)/Date of Demand Notice	Outstanding Amount Date of NPA	Description of the Property		
Branch : INDIRA NAGAR					
1.	1. M/S NOOR HUSSAIN, Prop- Late Mr. Mashroor Habib, Address: 69/18 Bheri Mandi, Lal Kuan, Lucknow 2. Shri Manvendra Singh S/O- Shri Vinay Kumar Singh (GURRANTOR), Address: 509/117, Old Hyderabad Lucknow - 226007 In case of a deceased party- 3. To 'the estate of the deceased Shri MASHOOR HABIB deceased Borrower and Mortgagor) deceased represented by legal heirs viz. (w/o) Mrs. Farheen Hussain W/O- Late Mashroor Habib (Legal Heir of Borrower & Mortgagor) (3 b). Ms. Zoya Hussain D/O- Late Mashroor Habib (Legal Heir of Borrower & Mortgagor) (3 c). Ms. Tuba Hussain D/O- Late Mashroor Habib (Legal Heir of Borrower & Mortgagor) Address: Add-301, Good Luck Palace, 7, Tilak Marg, Dalibagh, Lucknow-226001 Date of Demand: 01.02.2024	Rs. 3,75,05,903/- as on 01.02.2024 + interest & other charges Date of NPA: 28/03/2020	1. Plot no. 76A part of khasra no. 834B Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title deed dated 28.01.2011 registered with sub-registrar 2nd Lucknow in bahi no. 1, zild no. 10570 at serial no. 1147 from page no. 123 to 144, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 120.817 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: 20 ft wide road, South: Property others, East: Property others, West: Plot no. 76 2. Plot no. 97, 98 khasra no. 834A & 834 B Minjumla, Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title deed dated 12.07.2007 registered with sub-registrar 2nd Lucknow in bahi no. 1, zild no. 6763 at serial no. 6664, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 390.334 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Land Others, South: 25 ft wide road, East: Plot no. 96, West: Plot no. 99 3. Plot no. 58A part of khasra no. 834 B, Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title Deed dated 28.01.2011 registered with sub-registrar 2nd in bahi no. 1, zild no. 10570 at serial no. 1146 from page no. 99 to 122, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 139.405 sq. mt, Boundaries: North: 20 ft wide Road, South: Plot no. 56, East: Plot no. 73, West: Plot no. 58 4. Plot no. 54 & 55 part of khasra no. 834B, Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title Deed dated 28.01.2011 registered with sub-registrar 2nd in bahi no. 1, zild no. 10570 at serial no. 1145 from page no. 61 to 98, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 434.944 sq. mt, Boundaries: North: Plot no. 56, South: Property Others, East: Property Others, West: 25 ft Wide Road 5. Plot no. 13 part of khasra no. 834B, Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title deed dated 28.01.2011 registered with sub-registrar 2nd in bahi no. 1, zild no. 10570 at serial no. 1144 from page no. 29 to 60, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 260.223 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Plot no. 14, South: 20 Ft. wide Road, East: Plot no. 26, West: 25 ft. wide Road 6. Plot no. 77A part of khasra no. 834B, Bharwara, Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow, Title deed dated 28.01.2011 Registered with sub-registrar 2nd in bahi no. 1, zild NO. 10570 at serial no. 1148 from page no. 145 to 180, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 371.747 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Property Others, South: 20ft wide Road, East: Property Others, West: Plot no. 77 7. H. No. 69/18 Bheri Mandi, Lalkuan, Ward- Gautam Budh Nagar, Lucknow, Title deed dated 02.06.2003 registered with sub-registrar 1st Lucknow in book no. 1, khand no. 5623 at serial no. 7076/03 from page no. 261 to 282, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 459 sq. ft. or 42.65 sq. mt, Boundaries: North: House of Ghasite Ram, South: 15feet sarkari Rasta, East: Sarkari Gali 8 Feet, West: House of Sri Abdul Gafoor 8. Land part of khasra no. 78 minjumla at firojpur, Hasimpur, Kaiserganj, Bahraich, Title deed dated 31.03.2012 Registered with sub-registrar Kaiserganj Bahraich in zild no. 4302, at serial no. 2325 from page no. 247 to 288, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 1580 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Land pooran singh & others, South: Khet jagrani & Hukum Raj Singh, East: Khet bhulawan, West: Lucknow-Bahraich Road 9. Land part of khasra no. 78 minjumla at firojpur, hasimpur, kaiserganj, Bahraich, Title deed dated 31.03.2012 Registered with sub-registrar Kaiserganj Bahraich in zild no. 4302 at serial no. 2327 from page no. 317 to 370, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 2410 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Khet Ramial, South: land Minto Singh & others, East: Khet Bhulawan, West: Lucknow-Bahraich Road 10. Land part of khasra no. 78 minjumla at firojpur, hasimpur, kaiserganj, Bahraich, Title deed dated 31.03.2012 Registered with sub-registrar Kaiserganj Bahraich in zild no. 4303 at serial no. 2331 from page no. 1 to 68, Owner: Mr. Mashroor Habib, Area: 2410 sq. mt., Boundaries: North: Land Parmila singh & others, South: land raj kumar singh & others, East: Khet Bhulawan, West: Lucknow-Bahraich Road		
Date: 02.03.2024		Place: Lucknow	Authorised Officer Indian Bank (erstwhile Allahabad Bank)		

33 per cent RS members have declared criminal cases against themselves: ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Of 225 Rajya Sabha sitting members analysed, 33 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves while the total assets of these sitting MPs stood at Rs 19,602 crore, according to poll rights body ADR. Also, 31 of them or 14 per cent are billionaires.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) also showed that 18 per cent of these parliamentarians have declared serious criminal cases which include instances of murder and attempted murder.

In an analysis conducted by the ADR and National Election Watch (NEW), two Rajya Sabha sitting members have declared cases related to murder under IPC section 302, while four MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder under IPC Section 307.

“Out of the 225 Rajya Sabha sitting MPs analysed, 75 (33 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared criminal cases against themselves and 40 (18 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared serious criminal cases,” the report said. The analysis also delved into the distribution of these criminal cases across different political parties.

“The BJP leads with 23 per cent of its 90 Rajya Sabha members having declared criminal cases against themselves. Congress follows closely behind with 50 per cent of its 28 MPs facing similar charges.

The ADR analysis said five (38 per cent) out of 13 Rajya Sabha members from TMC, four (67 per cent) out of six members from RJD, four (80 per cent) out of five MPs from CPI(M), three (30 per cent) out of 10 MPs from AAP, four (36 per cent) out of 11 Rajya Sabha members from YSRCP and



two (20 per cent) out of 10 MPs from DMK have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

Moreover, when considering serious criminal cases, the trend persists, with significant percentages of MPs from various parties facing such charges.

“Ten (11 per cent) out of 90 Rajya Sabha MPs from BJP, 9 (32 per cent) out of 28 Rajya Sabha MPs from Congress, 3 (23 per cent) out of 13 Rajya Sabha MPs from TMC, 2(33 per cent) out of 6 Rajya Sabha MPs from RJD, 2(40 per cent) out of 5 Rajya Sabha MPs from CPI(M), 1(10 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha MPs from AAP, 3(27 per cent) out of 11 Rajya Sabha MPs from YSRCP and 1(10 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha MPs from DMK have declared serious criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits,” the report said.

The report said 11 (61 per cent) out of 18 Rajya Sabha members from Maharashtra, 8 (50 per cent) out of 16 MPs from Bihar, 9 (29 per cent) out of 31 MPs from Uttar Pradesh, 6(33 per cent) out of 18 Rajya Sabha members from Tamil Nadu, 6(67 per cent) out of 9 MPs from Kerala and 7(44 per cent) out of 16 MPs from West Bengal have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

The analysis covers 225 out of 233 Rajya Sabha members, with one seat from Maharashtra vacant and four seats from Jammu and Kashmir undefined.

Three MPs were not analyzed due to unavailability of their affidavits.

In addition to the criminal background, the analysis also delved into the asset holdings

of Rajya Sabha members. It was found that the average assets per MP stand at a staggering Rs 87.12 crore. Further dissecting the data, the report revealed significant disparities in asset holdings across different political parties. Among major parties, 9 (10 per cent) out of 90 Rajya Sabha members from BJP, 4 (14 per cent) out of 28 Rajya Sabha members from Congress, 5 (45 per cent) out of 11 MPs from YSRCP, 2 (20 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha members from AAP, 3 (75 per cent) out of 4 Rajya Sabha members from TRS and 2 (33 per cent) out of 6 MPs from RJD have declared assets valued more than Rs 100 crore.

Among the major parties, the average assets per MP for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 37.34 crore, Congress MPs have average assets of Rs 40.70 crore, TMC MPs have average assets worth Rs 10.25 crore, YSRCP MPs have average assets worth Rs 357.68 crore, TRS Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth a whopping Rs 1,383.74 crore, DMK Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth Rs 6.37 crore, and AAP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 114.81 crore.

Moreover, the total assets of the analyzed Rajya Sabha sitting members amount to a staggering Rs. 19,602 crore, according to the analysis.

When broken down by party, the total assets for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,360 crore, Congress MPs have total assets of Rs 1,139 crore, YSRCP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,934 crore, TRS MPs have total assets of Rs 5,534 crore, and AAP MPs have total assets of Rs 1,148 crore.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear an appeal of the Gyanvapi management committee against an Allahabad High Court order which held that lawsuits for “restoration” of a temple where the mosque stands in Varanasi are maintainable. “We will tag this with the main case,” a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said.

The plea in the top court was filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid, the committee which manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque. On December 19 last year, the Allahabad High Court had dismissed pleas challenging the maintainability of a 1991 suit seeking the “restoration” of a temple at the site where the Gyanvapi mosque stands.

The HC had said that the “religious character” of a disputed place can only be decided by the court.

It had dismissed five related petitions -- on maintainability and also against a survey of the mosque premises - filed over the years by the mosque committee and the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board.

SC agrees to hear appeal against HC order on Gyanvapi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has arrested a man named Piyush Jain in connection with its money laundering investigation linked to alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Rajasthan.

Piyush Jain was arrested on Thursday and a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Jaipur sent him to four days of ED custody, the federal agency said. This is the first arrest by the ED in this case.

The money laundering case

ED arrests man in money laundering case linked to Jal Jeevan Mission in Rajasthan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has arrested a man named Piyush Jain in connection with its money laundering investigation linked to alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Rajasthan.

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The money laundering case

of the ED stems from an FIR registered by the anti-corruption bureau (ACB) where it was charged that Padamchand Jain (proprietor of Shree Shyam Tubewell Company), Mahesh Mittal (proprietor of Shree Ganpati Tubewell Company), Piyush Jain and others were “involved in giving bribes to public servants in order to obtain illegal protection, tenders, getting bills sanctioned and covering up irregularities for work executed by them in respect of various tenders received by them from the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED)”.

Obesity a new threat to Indian children, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian kids are perched atop an obesity time bomb which has emerged as the predominant form of malnutrition in India with an alarming 12.5 million children aged between five and 19 reported overweight in 2022. Among them, 7.3 million were boys and 5.2 million were girls, according to a global analysis published in The Lancet journal. While this highlights the alarming rise in obesity rates among the younger population, for adults, the situation is equally concerning from bustling cities to rural landscapes. Globally, the total number of children, adolescents, and adults living with obesity has now reached one billion.

In India, the obesity rate among women increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022,



while among men, it surged from 0.5% to 5.4% during the same period.

This substantial increase underscores the need for urgent interventions to address adult obesity in India.

Globally, an estimated nearly 880 million adults were living with obesity in 2022 (504 million women and 374 million men), four and a half times the 195 million recorded in 1990 (128 million

women and 67 million men). Combined with the 159 million children living with obesity in 2022, this is a total of over one billion people affected by obesity in 2022. Despite global population growth, 183 million women and 164 million men were affected by underweight in 2022, 45 million and 48 million fewer, respectively, than in 1990.

The coexistence of obesity and underweight poses a sig-

nificant challenge for public health systems worldwide, including India. It necessitates a nuanced approach that addresses both ends of the malnutrition spectrum. External factors such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical conflicts further exacerbate malnutrition rates by increasing poverty and food insecurity, particularly in vulnerable populations.

“There is an urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address obesity and underweight in India, encompassing initiatives focused on promoting healthy lifestyles, ensuring access to nutritious foods, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure,” says the report. Socioeconomic disparities and limited access to healthcare and nutritious foods exacerbate the challenge, it added.

Another BRS MP joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Bharat Rashtra Samithi MP B B Patil joined the BJP on Friday in yet another setback to the regional party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls as the country's ruling party looks to boost its tally in Telangana and other southern state.

The development came a day after Pothuganti Ramulu, the BRS MP from the Nagarkurnool parliamentary constituency in the state, joined the BJP, which is expected to field the son of the Dalit leader from the seat and Patil from Zahirabad, which he currently represents in Lok Sabha.

After the BRS lost the assembly elections recently, a number of its leaders quit the party to join the BJP or the Congress, which is in power in the state now.

Two-term MP Patil lauded the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he joined the BJP in the presence of Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the party's Telangana in-charge Tarun Chugh and its OBC morcha chief K Lakshman.

On Thursday, Ramulu, his son



Bharat Prasad and some other BRS leaders from had joined the BJP.

Patil told reporters Modi has vision for the development of India and that is why the country has seen so much of work in the last 10 years. “He is known as the most trusted leader in the world,” he added.

He praised the Modi government for the Ram temple construction, the repeal of Article 370, banning the practice of triple talaq, and giving free

Covid vaccines among other issues.

“For the development of my parliamentary constituency and Telangana, there is no other option than taking this step. We need funds and work from the Centre. Definitely we got a lot of help from the Modi government,” he said.

Chandrasekhar said Patil's vote of confidence in Modi's leadership reflects the endorsement the prime minister has from across the country.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A section of members within the Pharmacy Council of India's (PCI) Central Council (CC) has voiced concerns over alleged irregularities in the election process leading to the appointment of the current president. Directing their accusations toward Registrar-cum-Secretary Anil Mittal, citing various clauses of the Pharmacy Act, 1948, they have now sought clarification on the perceived discrepancies. The present PCI president is Montu Patel.

Mittal, serving as both the administrative head and Treasurer of the Council, is accused of allegedly violating election norms in favor of the incumbent President, who, according to the dissenting members, lacked the prerequisite membership in the Central Council to contest for the top post.

The PCI's Central Council, which comprises representatives from diverse entities including the UGC, and Central and State



Governments, serves as the regulatory authority overseeing the pharmacy profession nationwide.

Central to the dissenting members' grievances is the alleged dual membership of the current President from both the Union Territory of Daman and Diu and the state of Gujarat, contravening established protocols. They have alleged that election norms have been violated by Mittal in favor of the incumbent President who, according to them, was not even a member of the Central Council, mandating

eligibility to contest for the top post.

“Mittal has violated all protocols by allowing such a person to contest the elections whose membership has been doubtful,” said Baldev Kumar, a senior pharmacist and a nominated member of the Central Council. Since the election in 2022, we had been constantly seeking reply from the registrar in the matter, but in vain.

In the first place, as per section 3(h) of the Pharmacy Act, 1848, Patel is not even a member of the Central Council

member which can make him eligible to fight for the post of President, pointed out Professor S Ramachandra Shetty, Head, Department of Pharmacology, Government College of Pharmacy, Bengaluru in his dissent letter written to the Registrar.

“...Further section 31 of the Pharmacy Act 1948 states that “A person who has attained the age of 18 shall be entitled on payment of prescribed fees to have his name entered in the first register if he resides, or carries on business or profession of Pharmacy in the state and if he.... However in the case of Montu Patel, he is not eligible as per the above sections of the Pharmacy Act 1948,” said Prof Shetty.

Another contentious point he raised was that the union territories of Daman and Diu and Dadar Nagar Haveli were merged and became one union territory. Since section 3 (h) of Pharmacy State mentions that only a person shall represent each state. Under this section Sri Ramanga Lingeshware Rao is already representing the Dadar Nagar Haveli and his

membership has not expired, although there is no provision for the nomination of one more member from the same union territory. Therefore the nomination of Montu Patel does not have any legal standing, he said.

Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the signing of Annual Performance Assessment Reports (APARs) by the President for the Registrar, a process deemed irregular due to the lack of authorization.

The dissenting members have now sought intervention from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Union Health Ministry in the matter and also investigate fraudulent practices, they alleged, were taking place within the PCI under the present PCI President.

Members have also written to the Daman and Diu administrator regarding Patel's status as PCI member, seeking clarification on his status. We want a thorough investigation and remedial action to uphold integrity and fairness in PCI's operations, they said.

Congress president Kharge targets Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday targeted the Governments at the Centre and in Gujarat over “high suicide rate” in the BJP-ruled State and alleged they have failed to fulfil their promises of creating new job opportunities for youths.

He also said the prime minister's “silence on this grave human tragedy in his home state is deafening”.

He urged the Gujarat government to prioritise the well-being and safety of citizens and take action to address the problem that has cast a dark shadow over the state.

“It is with grave concern and profound disappointment that I address the distressing revelation brought to light by the Gujarat government regarding the shockingly high suicide rates,” he said in a statement. The Congress chief said the latest data presented in the state assembly underscores a harrowing reality that



under the rule of the BJP Government, more than 25,000 lives have been lost to suicide over the past three financial years, with nearly 500 of them being students.

He said the statistics paint a grim picture of a populace grappling with despair, hopelessness, and unaddressed grievances. In a State that boasts of progress and prosperity, it is unconscionable that so many citizens have felt compelled to take their own lives, Kharge said.

“This is another example of the BJP's double-engine misgovernance that has already

inflicted several anyays (injustice) on the country. Its state and central government have failed to fulfil their promises of releasing and filling job vacancies and creating new job opportunities,” he said.

“The prime minister's silence on this grave human tragedy in his home state is deafening,” the Congress president said.

He said Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel's acknowledgement of this crisis is “while condemnable, falls short of addressing the fundamental failures of governance” and the dire need for

concrete action to stem the tide of preventable tragedies.

“It is abundantly clear that the current administration has failed in its duty to safeguard the wellbeing of our citizens and address the root causes behind the escalating suicide rates,” he said.

Kharge also said that the fact that the maximum number of cases emanate from cities like Ahmedabad (3,280), Surat (2,862), and Rajkot (1,287) is a “damning indictment” of the government's inability to provide adequate support and resources to the vulnerable.

“I call upon the Gujarat government to prioritise the well-being and safety of its citizens above all else, and to take immediate and decisive action to address the escalating suicide rates that have cast a dark shadow over our state,” the Congress president said.

The Gujarat government earlier this week informed the legislative assembly that more than 25,000 people, nearly 500 of them students, have

ended their lives due to various reasons in the state during the last three financial years.

According to the data shared by the state government on the floor of the House, as many as 25,478 people have committed suicide in different parts of Gujarat during the last three years and of these, 495 were students. In reply to a question by Imran Khedawala (Congress), Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who also hold the home portfolio, said in a written response that 8,307 people ended their lives in financial year 2020-21, 8,614 in FY 2021-22 and 8,557 committed suicide in FY 2022-23.

Among these, the maximum number of suicides was reported in the Ahmedabad city (3,280), followed by 2,862 in Surat city and 1,287 in Rajkot city. Some of the reasons for the suicides, as cited by the government, included mental health matters, love issues, serious illness, family problems, financial crisis and a fear of failure in exams.

Auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input: CAG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

CAG of India Girish CChandra Murmu on Friday said auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input, address concerns, and promote transparency and accountability.

Addressing the three-day International Conference on Strengthening of Grassroots Democracy, he also emphasised on the need to prioritise audit procedures based on identified risks, focusing on areas with the highest potential for fraud, mismanagement, or regulatory non-compliance.

“Together we need to advocate transparency and accountability in local government operations, encouraging the adoption of best practices in financial reporting and governance,” Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said on the concluding day of the conference.

He also stressed that auditors need to consider factors



such as the size, complexity, and resources of the local government entity when applying auditing standards.

Audit, Murmu said, should be familiar with the political, social, and economic context in which the local governments operate to tailor audit procedures and recommendations accordingly. Stakeholder involvement ensures audit findings are relevant, credible, and actionable, he added.

“To effectively navigate the complexities of auditing local governments, we need to build

capacity of our auditors as well as the local government employees to enhance their understanding of financial management practices and internal controls,” the CAG added.

The participating Supreme Audit Institution (SAIs) shared insightful country reports that brought out significant issues and challenges pertaining to the local government accountability frameworks, the CAG said in a release.

The conference highlighted collaborative efforts in enhancing transparency, accountability, and good governance at the grassroots level. The insights gained and connections formed are expected to drive positive changes in local governance worldwide.

The three-day conference was attended by SAIs of 10 countries — Georgia, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, Oman, Poland, South Africa, and Uganda. India is the host country.

A spot of good news

India's leopard population surges despite facing challenges from humans and Nature

Amid rising environmental and human-animal conflict challenges, India's leopard population has recorded an increase to reach the enviable count of 13,874. This rise underscores the resilience of these magnificent creatures and the success of conservation efforts in our country. Leopards in India inhabit diverse landscapes, from dense forests to even urban areas. However, this proximity to human settlements often leads to conflict as leopards venture into villages in search of food or territory, resulting in attacks on livestock and occasionally on humans. Such encounters pose a significant threat to both leopard populations and human communities. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering natural habitats and prey availability. Besides, forest fragmentation, loss of biodiversity and other changes contribute to the stress on leopard populations. Besides, poaching is a lucrative business and many influential people engage in it by employing locals while themselves remaining anonymous; they must be identified and brought to book. Despite these adversities, the surge in India's leopard population can be attributed to various factors, including conservation initiatives and stricter wildlife protection laws.



The Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been actively involved in habitat preservation, anti-poaching efforts and raising awareness among local communities about leopard conservation. Techniques such as camera trapping and satellite tracking provide valuable insights into leopard behaviour, habitat usage and population dynamics, aiding conservation strategies. Community-based conservation approaches have shown promising results. Engaging local communities in conservation efforts fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility in them. To ensure the continued growth of leopard populations, there is a need for concerted Government efforts. Though the rise in leopard population is welcome, it cannot be at the cost of human lives. Awareness campaigns must be launched in leopard-inhabited areas about their behaviour, conservation importance and conflict prevention strategies. Low-cost innovative ways can be employed so that human lives are not lost: In Sundarbans, for example, they wear masks at the back of their heads to dodge the Royal Bengal Tigers. Then there is an immediate need to strengthen habitat conservation efforts, including reforestation, establishment of wildlife corridors and curbing human encroachment into natural habitats. There is also a need to dispel the misconceptions that rural communities are hostile towards animals; they have been living with wild animals for centuries. Law enforcement agencies must rigorously enforce wildlife protection laws to combat poaching, illegal wildlife trade and habitat destruction. Collaborating with international organisations and neighbouring countries to address transboundary conservation issues will also help. We need a new wildlife policy that takes into account the prevailing conditions and balances human-animal interests.

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PICTALK



Theyyam artistes perform at Chala Kadankottu Makkam Bhagavathi temple, in Kannur

PTI

Why do Indians do better abroad than in India?

The root cause of this paradox can be attributed to the lamentable state of public education in the country

Regarding global achievements, Indians have left an indelible mark across diverse fields, from technology and entrepreneurship to academia and healthcare. Yet, an intriguing paradox persists – why do Indians often find unparalleled success on foreign lands but encounter unique challenges within their homeland? This thought-provoking question demands immediate attention and the exploration of the multifaceted challenges. Why do Indian minds shine bright internationally, but systemic deficiencies mar the domestic educational landscape? Well, there lies a critical anomaly – the failure to replicate this success on home soil is primarily due to the state of public education. The EW story “Why Indians Succeed Everywhere Except in India” adeptly dissects the paradox of Indian success on the global stage against a backdrop of domestic struggles, attributing this paradox to the unfortunate state of public education, which is accurate.

Education and Governance: Thought leaders underscore the symbiotic relationship



between the quality of education and the overarching progress of the nation. Recognizing education as a catalyst for effective governance and economic prosperity, it is crucial to position education at the forefront of national development strategies. **The Crisis in Primary and Secondary Education** One cannot help but ponder the intricacies of the connection between education and our nation's destiny. If education is the bedrock upon which a society is built, then what does the current state of our primary and secondary say about the trajectory of the world's largest democracy? The ASER surveys unveil a stark truth – a significant portion of our youth lacks even the basic skills expected at their grade level.

It's not just about rote learning or lack of infrastructure; it's a systemic failure that threatens the very foundation of our future. Yet, as we traverse the proposed solutions and underlying assumptions, a more discerning response is required to navigate the intricacies with utmost scrutiny. **Higher Education: A Crisis of Quality** You throw that graduation cap in the air, but does it open doors to a world of opportunities? India is tackling the woes of higher education – the mismatch between degrees and employability. What's the deal with most engineering, arts, science, and commerce graduates being deemed unemployable? It's time to question the very essence of what higher education institutions are delivering and whether they're preparing graduates for the dynamic job market. The portrayal of India's higher education system is a sad reflection of the systemic challenges faced by graduates and the subsequent migration of talent abroad.

The Brain Drain Dilemma: While we proudly export our talent to foreign shores, the

numbers reveal a disconcerting truth – a drain on our intellectual capital that could have been harnessed for national growth. Is it a necessary sacrifice or a symptom of deeper issues within our educational framework? A thought-provoking analysis probes the migration patterns of Indian graduates and school leavers to foreign shores, challenging the conventional narrative of brain drain. Balancing the discourse on brain drain by acknowledging the positive impact of the diaspora would bring a more nuanced perspective to the debate. **A Vision for Change: A Unified Call to Action** The portrayal of the emigration of skilled individuals as a loss for India is correct. While the emigration of skilled individuals is sometimes portrayed as a positive development, the reality is that India loses out on valuable talent. India needs a detailed program to reverse this trend, attract exceptional scientists and researchers back home, and invest more in R&D.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



RADHIKA SHRIVASTAVA

lamentable state

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(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Indian diplomacy: Leveraging soft power

India is strategically positioning itself on the global stage, leveraging soft power elements to deepen diplomatic ties and foster regional stability



SANTOSH MATHEW



In today's geopolitical landscape, the traditional metrics of national power are transforming. Policymakers and diplomats are increasingly recognizing the importance of soft power elements in shaping international relations, shifting their focus from sheer military might to cultural influence and moral authority. India, in particular, has adeptly utilized its cultural assets to assert itself on the global stage. Religion plays a crucial role in shaping politics. As Niall Ferguson has said, “Faith, then, is perhaps as important a component of power as material resources... Faith cannot move mountains. But it can move people.” A recent exemplification of India's strategic cultural diplomacy was witnessed in the inauguration of the first Hindu temple in the UAE, presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. With the inauguration ceremony of the Bocharanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) Mandir, India is set to deepen bilateral ties with the UAE while also having proactive engagement within the region. This event demonstrates a diplomatic approach that, while rooted in faith, culture, and religion, aims to foster cooperation across a spectrum of critical areas, including security, energy, maritime affairs, and infrastructure. The discussions held during the visit focused on enhancing cooperation in various fields, including trade, investment, and security. This isn't the only instance that indicates the changing diplomacy of India with the Gulf. In a triumph for India's diplomatic endeavours, Qatar released eight Indian nationals who had been detained since 2022. The release came after extensive diplomatic efforts by the Indian government, highlighting the effectiveness of India's diplomatic channels in securing the freedom of its citizens abroad. Through meticulous negotiation and strategic dialogue, our government has once again proven its dedication to protecting the interests of

every Indian, no matter where they may be in the world. India's historical and close relations with Qatar were also reiterated by Prime Minister Modi ahead of his visit to Doha. The strong bonds of diplomatic engagement have aided in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and enhancing regional stability. These diplomacy initiatives by Narendra Modi are not only events to establish closer ties with the Gulf leaders but also strategic plans to accelerate the economic growth of India. India, with long-term economic cooperation with the Middle East, can leverage the Gulf's capital potential while aiding them with defence cooperation. India's cultural diplomacy extends beyond the realm of Hinduism, as evidenced by the Buddhist Circuit, aimed at revitalizing Buddhist heritage sites and boosting tourism in the region. This pilgrimage circuit, introduced under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, covers the four major sacred places according to Buddhist traditions, namely Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, and Lumbini. It is one of India's first transnational tourist circuits. Beginning from the place of birth of Buddha, Lumbini in Nepal, it serves as an initiative of Buddhist Diplomacy (strengthening a nation's soft

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI HAS STRATEGICALLY LEVERAGED BUDDHIST HERITAGE AS CULTURAL ASSETS TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH ASIAN COUNTRIES

power with the exchanges of Buddhist ideas, sacred objects and trading relations). Invoking the cultural linkages with the region and the religion of Buddhism, India seeks to overcome the territorial tensions between the two nations by fostering a positive people-to-people tie across the border. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strategically leveraged Buddhist heritage as cultural assets to strengthen ties with Asian countries. During the Global Buddhist Summit in April 2023, Modi said that the challenges faced by the modern world can be solved by employing the teachings of Buddha. Through his Act East Policy, India has upgraded its strategic relationship with the major countries in the Asia-Pacific while using Buddhism as the cultural link between India and the Southeast Asian countries. Exploring its historical ties to Buddhism, India is not only preserving its cultural legacy but also strengthening its soft power and attracting visitors from around the world. Through these initiatives, India can bolster its image as a flag-bearer of ancient civilizations and traditions. Moreover, ventures like these also contribute towards economic development through tourism. India is trying to create a greater affinity towards Asian coun-

tries while projecting itself as a model of religious tolerance, pluralism and a responsible global nation. Speaking of being a responsible global stakeholder, take for instance our commitment to humanitarian assistance. The recent incident in which the Indian Navy in swift response to the Houthis strike on the merchant ship in the Gulf of Aden, sent the missile destroyer INS Vishakhapatnam shows India's role as a responsible maritime player. Indian diplomacy extends beyond the realm of culture, encompassing strategic engagements and humanitarian efforts. By providing timely humanitarian assistance, India reaffirms its commitment to upholding peace and stability during crises in the international arena. In the realm of diplomacy, every gesture and every interaction holds the power to shape bilateral relations and forge alliances. India's assertive stance in leveraging cultural and public diplomacy reflects its growing influence and engagement on the global stage. Through proactive engagement and strategic partnerships, India continues to strengthen its position as a key player in international affairs, contributing to regional stability and global cooperation. *(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL POACHING

Sir — The editorial, ‘Himachal crisis’ (29-2-24) carries the sentiments of everyone. Of course, this is not the first time the country has witnessed such shabby scenes of one party poaching the elected representatives and the elected representatives belying the mandate of the voters to satisfy their thirst for power and purse. These repeated happenings are nothing but a mockery of democracy. Legislative bodies being converted into a mere market to buy and sell lawmakers project a very shabby image of the democracy being practised in the country. The party engaged in poaching and those who offer themselves to be sold for power or purse also should have some respect for the mandate of the people. If this trend continues the country is likely to fall into the hands of dictators yielding to the concept of ‘Might is Right’ and the Might will be decided by Money power. It is time to bring legislation to stop elected representatives from crossing the floor just like that for some benefit or the other. If they want to shift their loyalty they should resign their post and contest again to get re-elected. Similarly, the role of money in the election process should also be curtailed to keep democracy alive. Voters should be educated to boycott both the poachers as well as the prey. Leaders speaking about the fight against corruption are being laughed at as nothing else could be more blatant corruption than poaching and yielding. India needs electoral reforms to address these basic issues.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

TAMIL NADU'S CONTROVERSIAL AD

Sir — It is a matter of shame and eyebrow-raising to see the Tamil Nadu Government display an advertisement for the new Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) spaceport in Kulasekarapattinam featuring a rocket with the flag of China. When the mat-

Mission Gaganyaan



PM Modi has announced the selection of four astronauts for the Gaganyaan mission, marking a historic moment as they will be the first Indians to travel to space in an indigenous space vehicle. These astronauts were chosen and selected for the mission four years ago and have undergone extensive training in Russia. Currently, the training programme is underway at the ISRO training centre in India. Before the astronauts set foot in the crew capsule, a humanoid named Vyommitra will be launched on Gaganyaan to ensure safety.

The crew members will be on a three-day mission, reaching a 400km orbit. This achievement serves as an inspiration and aspiration for all 140 crores Indians. The mission not only aims to send four astronauts into space but also to instil pride in every Indian. It represents India's capabilities in human spaceflight, technological development, and scientific advancement, and lays the groundwork for future missions. As Indians, we are expecting further scientific developments in the days to come.

Preetiyukta Mohakud | Bhubaneswar

ter turned controversial the ruling party and its bigwigs came out with excuses and explanations. Is it not the responsibility of the government and its concerned department that came out with this advertisement to scrutinise it before publishing it? The Prime Minister on a visit to this region of the state has lambasted that the ruling party has insulted Indian scientists and the space sector, giving impetus to the BJP to lampoon the state government.

M Pradyu | Kannur

THE SUCCESS OF SAGAR MANTHAN

Sir — The tactfulness of our Indian Security agencies is so impressive in terms of their activeness for their stringent actions, especially for seizing the Nacro products from the Arabian Sea. This time, it was codenamed as ‘Sagarmanthan-1’. It is a point of con-

cern as well as appreciation on both nodes. Appreciation because, our Navy is actively vigilant in addressing these concerns, at the same time concerning because India is pumped with such contraband of 3,132 kg which costs around Rs. 2000 crores, as per international market valuation, which is huge and appreciable. We must cherish the alertness of the trio the Gujarat Police, NCB and the Indian Navy. But this very incident raised eyebrows that still in the eye of Narco Dealers and smugglers, the route of the Arabian Sea is fragile and easy to breach. We must not forget the incident of 26/11. Strengthening the eastern and western coast of India is the utmost responsibility of our Naval forces.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

CHERISH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD

The verses of the Bhagavad Gita offer profound insights into life's purpose



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with verse # 3.8 of the Bhagavad Gita, which is, "You should always do your duty. Because action is superior to inaction. Maintenance of the body will also not be possible through inaction." We all know what our duties are according to time, place and circumstances. We also know that neglecting our duties impacts our maintenance. For example, a student does not pay attention to his studies. What happens subsequently? He finds it hard to maintain himself. For whose benefit was this verse spoken? Let me take another verse, which is very famous. I am referring to verse #2.47, which goes like this, "You have a right only in action, not ever in predetermining fruits. You should not speculate about the fruit of action; your attachment to inaction also should not be there." For whose benefit was this verse spoken? Do we have any other right except to do our duties? And we must not neglect to do them. As regards the results of our actions, the right to decide them has been kept by God with Himself. The third verse chosen by me is very telling, in which Lord Krishna promises, "People who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for these regular practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has." Verse after verse the Lord is cajoling us to do what will fulfil all our desires, which are according to dharma. God couldn't be a party to anything against dharma. Could He? The fourth verse in this connection is: "Where there is yogeshwara Shri Krishna and where there is Arjuna (meaning us), there will be opulence, victory, wealth and morality." (18.78) What are our desires generally? That we should succeed in our endeavours. We would if we were aiming for what is according to morality, i.e. dharma. The same is about



wealth. Don't we need enough resources for our maintenance? Not only wealth, there will be 'saubhagya' (good fortune). Who benefits from all these? We do; God doesn't because He is complete in all respects. (3.22) The next verse is about gaining peace and a perfect destination. Lord Krishna instructs, 'In all respects, take My shelter only. By My mercy, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode.' What is it that we lack after gaining material needs, comforts, etc.? It is peace, which is what God is promising. Not only that, God is also assuring eternal abode, which is free from the defects of this material world. How nice it will be to not be subjected to repeated birth and death? God is prepared to grant this also. God is always wanting to give. He has so much to give if we become deserving. Isn't that fair? How do we become deserving? Lord Krishna describes, 'Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me.' (18.65) One may feel that all these activities relate to God. Yes, they do but do they benefit Him? No, far from it; they only purify our existence. And God had to set some conditions to qualify for His special favour. How else was He to reward anyone? Just focus on how easy they are to do. I will take up one more verse, which is, 'Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace.' (18.58) This is quite an amazing offer from God. Aren't we all struggling with one problem or another throughout our lives? We do, but our ego comes in the way. We are not prepared to accept that somebody can be superior to us and to such an extent that we have to take His shelter and His alone. (18.66) We would rather suffer but won't do as instructed by God. Do we realise that our acts will benefit the world if we obey God's instructions? We will become better persons by following dharma – the rules for proper behaviour. We will fit in the System created by God, which is required for the creation to exist eternally. (The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Delhi's floral splendour: A tale of tulips and traditions

The Delhi Tulip Festival stands as a testament to resilience, beauty and the enduring spirit of life's eternal dance

Nestled within the heart of New Delhi's diplomatic enclave of Chanakypuri, Shanti Path emerges as a mesmerizing canvas painted with vibrant hues, adorned by a tapestry of tulips in an array of colors - red, white, pink, yellow, and purple. The 'Delhi Tulip Festival', now in its second consecutive year, came to a close on February 21, 2024, having commenced on February 10. Visitors, drawn from distant lands, stood in awe at the spectacle of nature's grandeur, echoing the immortal verses of poets like P. B. Shelley and John Keats. As the festival unfolded, the city's roundabouts and parks, maintained by the New Delhi Municipal Council and the Delhi Development Authority,



bloomed with the arrival of Spring, welcoming all with renewed grandeur. But what is the story behind these tulips? Originating centuries ago in the ancient lands of Persia, tulips held significance as symbols of love and prosperity. Their journey along the silk routes carried tales of exotic lands and distant horizons, captivating hearts from Istanbul to Amsterdam. It was

in the fields of the Netherlands during the Dutch Golden Age that tulips blossomed into a cultural icon. Despite uncertainty surrounding its introduction to Western Europe, the efforts of individuals like Botanist Carolus Clusius in the late 16th century popularized tulips, leading to the famous 'tulip mania' of the 17th century. By the 19th and 20th centuries, tulip cultivation flourished in the Netherlands, solidifying its position as the world's leading producer. The association between tulips and the Netherlands was further immortalized with the iconic song 'Tulips from Amsterdam' in the 1950s. Intriguingly, it was through diplomatic channels that tulips found their way into the gardens of New Delhi.



Indo-Dutch relations provided fertile ground for this botanical ambassador to take root, inspired by festivals like the 'Amsterdam Tulip Festival' and Srinagar's Tulip Garden. Imported from the Netherlands, these tulips have been lovingly nurtured by skilled gardeners trained by the NDMC's horticulture department. As the sun casts its golden rays upon the city, tulips burst into bloom, transforming every corner into a canvas of nature's masterpiece. From the picturesque avenues of Shanti Path to the vibrant Tulip Festival Garden, each location becomes a testament to the enduring cycle of life and beauty. Engaging citizens through various competitions

and events, the festival fosters a deeper connection to nature's rhythms and the bonds of community. Sh. Amit Yadav, the NDMC Chairman, revealed that seven types of tulips were planted, with three lakh bulbs sourced from the Netherlands and an additional 40,000 bulbs donated by the Dutch Embassy. From early to late bloomers, each tulip whispers tales of resilience and renewal. This festival not only celebrates beauty but also underscores the importance of stewarding and protecting nature for future generations. The Delhi Tulip Festival epitomizes the fusion of urban elegance and ecological consciousness, enchanting visitors and serving as a beacon for sustainable tourism. Beyond

its aesthetic charm, it stands as a testament to the power of beauty and art in fostering global connections and enhancing a city's allure. As visitors from around the world gather to admire the kaleidoscopic beauty of tulips, the festival becomes a celebration of global heritage, transcending cultural barriers and fostering understanding and appreciation among people of diverse backgrounds. In more ways than one, the festival symbolises the resilience and endurance of nature, standing tall amidst the chaos of urban life. As the curtains draw to a close on the Tulip Festival, the flowers continue to adorn the cityscape with their vibrant hues. Amidst the bustling rhythm of urban life, the tulip

stands as a silent sentinel of hope, its petals a testament to the enduring spirit of life's eternal dance. Today, the tulip serves as a symbol of resilience and endurance, having traversed oceans and centuries to become a cherished emblem of beauty worldwide. While the curtains have been drawn on the Tulip Festival, the flowers continue to stand tall, adorning the cityscape with their vibrant hues. This festival is more than just a local event; it's a part of global heritage, a celebration where visitors from around the world gather to admire the kaleidoscopic beauty of colors spanning far and wide. (The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Sansthan, views are personal)

MSP methodology and farmer demands



UTTAM GUPTA

Questions arise about the rationale and implications of adopting Dr Swaminathan's proposed methodology for MSP calculation



Co-terminus with the legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, another demand raised by the farmers relates to how the MSP is fixed. They want it to be calculated based on the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) under Dr MS Swaminathan (2006). All along, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a statutory body under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare - has been setting MSP at the level of the so-called comprehensive cost or C2 cost. C2 is arrived at by adding three components viz. A2 covers all paid-out expenses, both in cash and in kind, incurred by farmers on seeds, fertilizers, chemicals, hired labour, fuel and irrigation; FL is the imputed value of unpaid family labour; and rental value of owned land and imputed cost that would be incurred on owned fixed capital assets (OFCA), call it to return on assets or RoA. Put simply, MSP is equal to A2 + FL + RoA. It takes care of all the costs incurred by the farmer for growing the crop - both paid out and own - besides including an element of profit i.e. RoA. That is why it is banded as 'comprehensive'. The formula was used for determining MSP till FY 2017-18. The Government normally accepts recommendations made by CACP. In its fifth report submitted in October 2006, the NCF recommended that MSP should be "at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production". The recommendation did not specifically mention what 'measure of costs' would be used. However, Dr Swaminathan clarified: "When we recommended 50 per cent over costs, we meant complete costs called C2, which includes all assumed costs". Can the clarification given by him many years after the report was finalized and submitted be taken to mean that the Commission had meant it that way? A recommendation emerges from deliberations and is based on consensus among



IN ITS FIFTH REPORT SUBMITTED IN OCTOBER 2006, THE NCF RECOMMENDED THAT MSP SHOULD BE 'AT LEAST 50 PER CENT MORE THAN THE WEIGHTED AVERAGE COST OF PRODUCTION.' THE RECOMMENDATION DID NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTION WHAT 'MEASURE OF COSTS' WOULD BE USED

members. This also applies to a clarification given on an important aspect of the recommendation. That would not have been possible as you can't expect Dr Swaminathan to go back to other members and check. The big question is: Is giving the farmer at least 50 per cent more than the 'C2' costs logical? The purported rationale for giving 50 per cent extra is that she should get a handsome profit after covering all paid-out costs. Profit as it is understood in business parlance is essentially meant to give a return to the owner for her invested capital. In the case of a farmer, her investment in crop growing business is by way of 'land' and 'OFCA' besides her labour. But, remuneration/return for all these is already incorporated under C2. To give a further sweetener (read: 50 per cent profit) over and above these would be illogical. Let us understand this with the help of an example. In the case of paddy, the all-India weighted average A2 cost for the 2017-18 Kharif season, as estimated by the CACP, was Rs 840 per quintal; A2+FL cost: Rs 1,117 per quintal and C2 costs: Rs 1,484 per quintal. In the total cost of Rs 1,484 per quintal, the amount going towards the farmer's income was Rs 644 per quintal (1484-840). Of this, Rs 277 per quintal (1117-840) was for FL and Rs 367 per quintal (1484-1117) for RoA. If one were to go by NCF recommendation as clarified by Dr Swaminathan, the farmer would have to be given Rs 742 per quintal (0.5x1,484) in addition to an income of Rs 644 per quintal already built into C2 thus taking the total to Rs 1386 for each quintal of paddy. This translates to 93 per cent of C2 costs. Taken as a proportion of the revised MSP of Rs 2226 per quintal, this will be 62

per cent. Where does one get such a fantastic return? This is happening because the farmer is being remunerated twice over first under C2 and then a further profit of 50 per cent. Furthermore, the way profit is calculated '50 per cent of C2; you end up giving a 'return on return': RoA component under C2 being Rs 367 per quintal, she gets a fortuitous gain of Rs 183.5 (0.5x367). Unequivocally, there is a flaw in the above method. Either, the government should continue with the extant method of using C2 for fixing MSP. On the other hand, if it wants to go for 50 per cent profit, then this should be applied only to the paid-out costs namely A2. In other words, MSP should be set at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2. On this basis, in the above example, the MSP would be Rs 1537 per quintal (1117+0.5x840). What did the Modi - government do? In its poll manifesto for 2014, the BJP had promised to implement NCF recommendations on MSP. The announcement in this regard was made by the then Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his Budget speech for FY 2018-19. Later, while replying to a debate in Parliament, Jaitley clarified that 'the production cost would be taken as actual paid A2 plus FL'. In other words, it decided to set MSP at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2+FL; it comes to Rs 1675 per quintal (1117x1.5). The formula adopted by the incumbent government also suffers from a flaw to the extent that 'it also adds return on the imputed cost of family labor' which is unjustified. Have received wage/income for the work done on the field, how can a farmer also earn a profit on it? In the above example, this fortuitous amount is Rs 138 per quintal (277x0.5).

Moreover, the very approach of the Dr Swaminathan committee of arriving at a profit by taking a percentage of the cost is susceptible to sharp increases in payments to farmers. With every rupee increase in the cost, farmers' profit will increase by 0.5 rupees. At present, most of the agricultural inputs are subsidized. On fertilizers, there is a massive subsidy (urea is sold at about 1/10th of its cost). If the subsidy is slashed leading to a steep rise in the cost of fertilizers, the formula will give an unwarranted bonanza to the farmers by a corresponding increase in profit. At a fundamental level, profit is meant to reward an entity for the capital invested in any enterprise. This is precisely what was being done before the FY 2018-19. That formula (read: C2 for fixing the MSP) ought to have been continued. The MSP setting exercise suffers from another aberration. The cost of producing a crop varies from place to place depending on the soil conditions, weather, irrigation, price of inputs and so on. However, to arrive at MSP, the CACP takes the 'weighted average' (WA) cost of production. When the price determined in this manner is given to all farmers, those producing at a higher cost stand to lose whereas others with lower cost make a fortuitous gain. Today, the government is trapped in the vicious cycle of having to procure farmers' produce at ever-increasing MSP, now under pressure to pick up 'all of it' at MSP which can denude the exchequer. This, in turn, is because it is trying to substitute the role of the market. It should disentangle from this trap and focus on agri-market reforms which alone can help farmers get a good price. (The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)

CPI(M) promoting SFI as criminal mafia force: Arif

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala is promoting and facilitating the growth of its student wing SFI as a criminal mafia force in the State, according to Governor Arif Mohammed Khan. Speaking to media after calling on the parents of J S Sidharth, a second year veterinary degree student, who was lynched by SFI leaders of the Kerala Veterinary and Agricultural Science University at Pookkottu in Wayand district, the Governor said that it was a criminal act committed by the SFI with the blatant support of the CPI(M).

Arif Mohammed Khan also asked the political parties in the State to shun violence and stop supporting criminal activities of students.

Sidharth, an apolitical student who was liked by his colleagues in the bathroom of his hostel. Though he was found hanging in the wash room, there were deep wounds and serious injury marks on his body which were inflicted by deadly weapons. The SFI leaders and activists were assaulting him and physically abusing him since 14th February as they found that Sidharth could emerge as a potential threat to their undisputed position as the law makers of the University.

It was on 24th February



Sidharth was found dead in his wash room in the hostel building. It took the police seven days to arrest eight students (all SFI leaders) in connection with the unnatural death of Sidharth. According to Sidharth's parents, some of his colleagues had intimidated them that Sidharth was executed by the SFI leaders for not kowtowing to their diktats.

"After going through the reports and versions of Sidharth's colleagues, one cannot be blamed for doubting the syllabus followed by the University. It seems the B V Sc students, who are expected to cure and save animals are taught how to cut people into pieces and how to murder the victims without leaving traces of any foul marks," said S Jayasankar, Kerala High Court lawyer and the State's The lead political commentator.

There are allegations that a former CPI(M) MLA is behind

the move to save the SFI leaders who were behind the death of Sidharth. Leader of Opposition V D Satheeshan and former Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala accused the CI(M) of other party workers.

It is reported that Sidharth was murdered by SFI activists for his 14th February fusion music dance program along with his colleague, a Muslim girl. The incident comes at a time when the CPI(M) is getting ready for the Lok Sabha poll. Early this week the Kerala High Court upheld the verdict by the trial court in sentencing all the CPI(M) leaders to life imprisonment in the T P Chandrasekharan murder case.

Chandrasekharan was a Marxist leader who came out of the CPI(M) and launched the RPM in protest against the highhanded behavior of some of the bigwigs in the party.

Daily count of DTC passengers declines, says Economic Survey of Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The average daily count of passengers travelling in DTC buses declined from 33.31 lakh in 2019-20 to 25.02 lakh in 2022-23, while the corresponding figure for cluster buses fell from 17.71 lakh to 16.39 lakh, according to the Delhi Economic Survey 2023-24.

Finance Minister Atishi presented the Economic Survey in the Delhi Assembly on Friday. According to the survey, the average daily passenger count in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses is yet to reach pre-pandemic figures.

The report showed that while the bus fleet in DTC has declined from 3,951 in 2017-18 to 3,937 in 2022-23, the cluster bus fleet has grown from 1,744 to 3,293.

According to the Economic Survey, the average daily number of passengers travelling in DTC buses stood at 29.86 lakh in 2017-18. It rose to 30.15 lakh in the next financial year and then to 33.31 lakh in the 2019-20 fiscal.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed due to it, the figures fell to 12.24 lakh in 2020-21. In 2021-22, the figure stood at 15.62 lakh and in 2022-23, 25.02 lakh, it said. The survey showed that the average daily passenger count for cluster buses was 11.65 lakh in 2017-18, 12.24 lakh in 2018-19



and 17.71 lakh in 2019-20.

The count stood at 8.51 lakh in 2020-21 and 9.87 lakh in 2021-22. In 2022-23, the figure was at 16.39, according to the survey.

During her address in the Delhi Assembly, Atishi said the government has achieved significant accomplishments in the transportation sector.

"Public transportation plays a crucial role in the development of any economy. In this regard, the Delhi government has strengthened its public transport system," she said.

"During 2022-23, the average daily passenger count was 25.02 lakh for DTC buses, 16.39 lakh for cluster buses, and 46 lakh for Delhi Metro. In total, more than 87 lakh passengers use our public transportation systems daily," Atishi said.

She said Delhi has a total of 7,582 buses in its fleet, including 1,650 electric ones.

"Delhi now has the world's third-largest fleet of electric

buses, after Beijing and Santiago. Through the 'Pink Ticket' initiative, free bus travel has been provided to women. In the fiscal year 2022-23, Delhi women availed free bus travel through the 'Pink Ticket' a staggering 45.44 crore times," the minister added.

According to the Economic Survey, the DTC has incurred a loss of Rs 2,666.25 crore in 2023-24 so far, as compared to Rs 2,687.92 crore in 2022-23.

"Till the year 2010-11, the Delhi government used to meet the working losses of the DTC by providing them with a loan. From the year 2011-12, the system has been changed by providing them with grants, instead of a loan, to meet working losses," the report said.

During 2022-23, the Delhi government released an amount of Rs 200 crore to the DTC and Rs 200 crore to cluster buses to meet their expenditures on account of free travel for women.

A few able to avail assistive tech due to affordability barriers, says experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Even as there are an estimated 250 million Indians in need of Assistive Technology/Assistive Products (ATs/APs) to address disabilities, aging, or chronic illnesses, just a few are able to avail these vital resources due to barriers such as affordability and accessibility, lamented experts here at an event held to deliberate on ways how to bridge the gap.

Dr. R K Srivastava, former Chairman of the Medical Council of India and ex-Director General of Health Service, emphasised the increasing demand for assistive care solutions, highlighting the significance of these solutions for the elderly, long-term hospital patients, and individuals with congenital or acquired disabilities.

This demographic comprises 18% of India's population, indicating a substantial requirement for assistive care products ranging from spectacles to wheelchairs.

Dr. Ashoo Grover, Deputy Director General of the ICMR, echoed similar sentiment, emphasizing evidence-based approaches to bridge the gap between innovative AT products and end-users. "There is a need for collaboration among stakeholders to

ensure the availability of customized AT solutions to meet diverse needs," he said at the 8th National Health Writers and Influencers Convention (NHWIC-2024) at AIIMS Delhi here.

Dr. Chandrakant S Pandav, a Padma Shri Awardee and global public health expert known as the 'Iodine Man of India', and a prominent advocate for people with disabilities, shared his personal experiences using a wheelchair and emphasized the lack of societal acceptance and infrastructure faced by the disabled community in India. He called for a change in societal attitudes towards individuals who rely on ATs, urging people to view them as valued members of society.

Last year, the ICMR had compiled the National List of Essential Assistive Products (NLEAP) of 380 APs for people with functional impairments. The growing attention towards APs reflects the increasing prevalence of functional impairments among populations worldwide.

As societies age, the demand for APs rises, driven by age-related functional restrictions, limitations, or impairments. Moreover, factors such as injuries, mental illnesses, learning disorders, and chronic diseases contribute to the heightened need for APs.

PM QUESTIONS MAMATA on Maa, Maati...

From Page 1

Incidentally Arambagh is also adjacent to Hooghly parliamentary seat presently held by BJP's Locket Chatterjee.

Attacking the TMC, and Congress for failing India and Bengal in development schemes, the Prime Minister said how the Centre had started a number of schemes which had taken off in other States but were being hindered in Bengal.

"Till the TMC Government is there in Bengal no development can take place... They will only promote the criminals and the corrupt," he said, adding how scams worth crores had taken place in teachers' recruitment, ration and many other departments in Bengal.

"Their leaders have gone to jail for perpetrating corruption in teachers' recruitment, cattle smuggling ... Till they are in power no development can take place in Bengal," said the Prime Minister, adding only the BJP can develop Bengal and look after the people's interest as they did in Sandeshkhali. "The TMC is only engaged in corrupt and criminal activities and appeasement politics... Now even the Muslims have decided to leave them," the Prime Minister, who will address yet another meeting at Krishnagar in Nadia district on Saturday, said.

DDA to rejuvenate Mehrauli Archeological Park

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping up with the vision of Delhi LG, VK Saxena's efforts to convert the Capital into a 'City of Heritage', the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) will now be undertaking the work of conservation, restoration, rejuvenation and redevelopment of the Mehrauli Archeological Park, Sanjay Van and Shalimar Bagh, at its own cost, under the overall

supervision of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

These parks under the ownership of DDA have several ASI-protected monuments, which were hitherto lying in a state of neglect. Sources said an MoU to this effect is set to be signed between DDA and ASI within the next one week. However, basic works like drawing, planning, mobilisation of resources

etc. has already commenced without waiting for a formal MoU, as agreed between DDA and ASI. Following communications between the Lt. Governor, VK Saxena and Union Culture Minister, G Kishan Reddy, wherein the former had requested for handing over these sites to DDA for restoration and redevelopment, the latter has agreed to hand over ASI monuments location in these sites to DDA.

Sandeshkhali erupts in...

From Page 1

Anita Mal, a homemaker whose husband was forced to leave the village two years ago after he protested against the illegal activities carried out by his goons said, "This is not the end of the struggle as it is the time to rebuild the area ... We will have to remain extremely vigilant because the hyenas of Shahjahan are on the prowl ... They will leave no stone unturned to come back at us again."

Recounting her horrors Asima Dhali (name changed) another woman from Jeliakhali said,

"It is not possible for a woman to recount the days when her honour was looted ... But I am doing so ... I am happy at his arrest but I want him hanged."

She trembles in anger even as she relates how she was grabbed by her hair and kept locked inside the party office for two days after she refused to desert her husband a CPI(M) activist.

She and tens of others smear each other in red or saffron-pink one apparently representing the Left and the other the BJP.

AI workshop organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Acknowledging the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing governance, a large number of ministers and MLAs from diverse departments of the Uttar Pradesh Government attended a capacity-building workshop in the

State capital recently. The aim was to empower participants with essential knowledge and tools in this cutting-edge technology.

Chaired by Suresh Khanna, the Finance Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, the workshop received accolades for its proactive approach in leveraging technology for the welfare of Uttar

Pradesh. Minister Khanna reiterated the significance of AI and expressed satisfaction at the substantial turnout of legislators and ministers for the capacity-building workshop.

At the workshop, Dr Subi Chaturvedi, AI expert and Chief Corporate Affairs and Public Policy Officer at InMobi, highlighted the transformative potential of AI.

Delhi records minimum temperature of 10.8 degrees C, very light rain likely during day

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The mercury settled at a low of 10.8 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, in Delhi on Friday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The humidity level was recorded at 96 per cent.

The IMD has predicted partly cloudy skies and very light rain during the day.

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'moderate' category at 180 at 9 am, according to Central

Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

MODI PRESIDES OVER...

From Page 1

Using the Namu App, the public was given a platform to voice their opinions on the performance of incumbent MPs, and in a departure from conventional methods, the BJP sought the opinions of the people on the ground by enquiring about the three most popular leaders in each area.

This bottom-up approach, according to the party, aimed to ensure that the candidates resonated with the sentiments and aspirations of the local population. Over the past two years, the BJP has continually sought feedback from its MPs, evaluating their performance and addressing concerns.

To further enhance the decision-making process, the BJP reached out to survey agencies to compile comprehensive reports on each parliamentary constituency.

They said the first list may have the names of Modi, Shah and Singh from their current seats Varanasi, Gandhinagar and Lucknow respectively besides several Union Ministers, including some

who will be contesting Lok Sabha polls after having served in Rajya Sabha.

Scindia's expected seat in Madhya Pradesh is seen as a sure thing since it is his family citadel.

Union Ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Bhupender Yadav, Mansukh Mandaviya, Dharmendra Pradhan and Parshottam Rupala are likely to be fielded in the polls. There is a buzz that Chandrasekhar will be pitted against Shashi Tharoor, the three-term incumbent Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram.

The sources said three of the four BJP MPs-- Union minister G Kishan Reddy, Bandi Sanjay Kumar and Dharmapuri Arvind-- will be contesting from their current constituencies Secunderabad, Karimnagar and Nizamabad respectively.

A large number of those seats that the BJP has targeted for improving its prospects after unsuccessfully contesting those in 2019 may figure in the initial lists of candidates, following the template of recent Assembly polls, the sources said.

EC urges parties to...

From Page 1

Acknowledging the need to balance freedom of expression with a level playing field, the advisory noted that the commission has been adopting a self-restrained approach in recent rounds of elections, assuming that its notice would serve as moral censure to the candidate or star campaigner. The commission's advisory has formally set the stage for ethical political discourse and aims to reduce clutter in the 2024 General Elections. A methodical approach to MCC violations has been adopted, preparing the ground for civilised campaigning.

It urged parties to elevate the level of election campaign to issue-based debate and cautioned against making statements without factual basis or misleading voters.

Regarding social media engagement, the advisory emphasised that posts vilifying or insulting rivals, or those of bad taste or below dignity, should not be made or shared.

The advisory also covered the use of inappropriate

language against star campaigners of other political parties, false allegations, and unverified advertisements masquerading as news items.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar recently emphasised that political parties should promote ethical and respectful political discourse that inspires rather than divides, promoting ideas instead of personal attacks.

The advisory said political party leaders designated as 'star campaigners' under Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, deliver speeches during significant political rallies.

It is essential to interpret this within the framework of harmonious and purposive construction, as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and statutory provisions of the Act complement each other.

Therefore, while enjoying the privileges granted by Section 77, star campaigners also bear the responsibility of upholding the highest ethical standards during election campaigns.

Bengaluru Blasted

From Page 1

Speaking to reporters, he said the injured -- both staff and customers -- are undergoing treatment.

Asked whether an IED was used for the blast, he said, "we are checking."

"Let's not say anything now itself. The FSL team has come and they are checking. Once they collect (samples from the

spot), we will examine."

Divya Raghavendra Rao, Co-Founder & Managing Director of Rameshwaram Cafe told a Kannada news channel the blast occurred in the area where customers wash their hands. A stand is also kept there, where the waste is collected.

The explosion was caused from a bag placed by someone from outside, she claimed. A CCTV video of the incident showed an explosion, leading to smoke and panic-stricken customers and others fleeing the place.

The Opposition BJP sought a detailed probe into the matter.

"Deeply troubled to hear about the blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bangalore (sic). Praying for a swift recovery of all the injured in the incident. State Government should order a detailed enquiry & spare no efforts in apprehending the perpetrators," BJP state president Vijayendra Yediyurappa said in a post on 'X'.

'Callousness' of the Government in downplaying such crimes "is pushing the State into this chaos & proving

to be a safe haven for antisocial elements."

"Failure of police intelligence is also evident in this incident. We strongly urge the police to conduct a thorough probe & eradicate these elements from the core without yielding to any political pressures," he demanded.

R Ashoka, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly said, "the bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru is yet another glaring example of the deteriorating law and order situation in Karnataka ever

since CM @siddaramaiah led @INC Karnataka Govt came to power in the State."

While it was initially suspected that a gas leak could have triggered the blast, the fire department ruled out the possibility and said a bag was found at the spot.

Subsequently, police were looking into all angles related to the incident.

A bomb disposal squad and forensic teams were at the spot. CCTV footage is being scanned to check if there was any suspicious movement in and around the cafe.

"At 1.08 pm today, the fire department received a call about LPG leakage fire in the cafe. When our officers and teams reached the spot, there was no fire or flame. A bag which was lying behind a woman who was sitting with six other customers at the eatery exploded. It is suspected that the explosion could have been caused due to some object in that bag," TN Shivashankar, Director of Karnataka State Fire and Emergency Services department told PTI.

It is not clear whose bag it was.

Ruling out about the possibility of any gas cylinder leakage, the officer said, "I along with my team of officers inspected the spot. But there is no sign of any leakage from the gas cylinder. We have checked it. Another LPG gas cylinder inside the kitchen which was used for making tea and coffee also was checked but there is no leakage from it as well. There is no sign of gas leakage from any cylinders at the spot as per our initial probe."

The cafe which is located at Whitefield's Brookfield area, a vibrant neighborhood, a

business centre as well as a tech hub.

It is usually crowded with employees from nearby offices during the lunch hours.

Edison, an eyewitness said, "I was waiting outside the eatery for my turn when suddenly we heard a loud noise... An explosion. We got scared not knowing what it was. There were around 35-40 people at the eatery. They all started rushing out and there was absolute chaos. They started saying that a cylinder exploded. But we don't know exactly what happened."

Navalny, who galvanised oppn to Putin, laid to rest

AP ■ MOSCOW

Under a heavy police presence, thousands of people bade farewell Friday to Alexei Navalny at his funeral in Moscow after his still-unexplained death two weeks ago in an Arctic penal colony. The service followed a battle with authorities over the release of the body of President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic. His supporters said several churches in Moscow refused to hold the funeral for the man who crusaded against official corruption and organised big protests. Many Western leaders blamed the death on the Russian leader, an accusation the Kremlin angrily rejected.

Navalny's team eventually got permission from the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows, which was encircled by crowd-control barriers on Friday.

As his coffin was removed from the hearse and taken inside the church, the crowd waiting outside broke into respectful applause and then

chanted: "Navalny! Navalny!" Some also shouted, "You weren't afraid, neither are we!" and later "No to war!"

Western diplomats, including US Ambassador Lynn Tracy, were among those who attended, along with presidential hopefuls Boris Nadezhdin and Yekaterina Duntsova. Both wanted to run against Putin in the upcoming presidential elections and opposed his war in Ukraine; neither was allowed on the ballot.

A photo from inside the church showed an open casket with Navalny's body covered with red and white flowers, and his mother sitting beside it holding a candle.

Navalny's father was also present, but it wasn't clear who else in his family attended. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, just two days ago addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France; his daughter is a student at the Stanford University, and the whereabouts of his son are unknown.

The politician's closest associates have left Russia under pressure and watched



Workers carry the coffin of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to the Church.

the funeral, which was streamed live on his YouTube channel, from abroad.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov urged those gathering in Moscow and other places not to break the law, saying any "unauthorised (mass) gatherings" are violations.

"Those people who follow what is happening, it is of

course obvious to them that this man is a hero of our country, whom we will not forget," said Nadezhda Ivanova, a Kaliningrad resident who was outside the church with other supporters. "What was done to him is incredibly difficult to accept and get through it."

After the short funeral, a crowd of thousands marched

from the church to the nearby Borisovskoye Cemetery, where the police were also out in force for the burial.

With the casket open, Navalny's parents and others stroked and kissed his body. Meanwhile, a large crowd of supporters gathered at the gates of the cemetery, chanting: "Let us in to say say goodbye!"

The coffin was then lowered into the ground, allies said.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, spent eight days trying to get authorities to release the body following his Feb 16 death at Penal Colony No. 3 in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow.

Even on Friday itself, the morgue where the body was being held delayed its release, according to Ivan Zhdanov, Navalny's close ally and director of his Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Authorities originally said they couldn't turn over the body because they needed to conduct post-mortem tests. Navalnaya made a video appeal to Putin to release it so she could bury her son with dignity. At least one funeral director said he had been "forbidden" to work with Navalny's supporters, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on social media. They also struggled to find a hearse. "Unknown people are calling up people and threatening them not to take Alexei's

body anywhere," Yarmysh said Thursday.

Russian authorities still haven't announced the cause of death for Navalny, who was 47.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin.

His Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his regional offices were designated as "extremist organisations" by the Russian government that same year.

His widow accused Putin and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin of trying to block a public funeral.

We don't want any special treatment — just to give people the opportunity to say farewell to Alexei in a normal way," Yulia Navalnaya wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. In a speech to European lawmakers on Wednesday, she also expressed fears that police might interfere with the gathering or would "arrest those who have come to

say goodbye to my husband".

Moscow authorities refused permission for a separate memorial event for Navalny and slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov on Friday, citing COVID-19 restrictions, according to politician Yekaterina Duntsova said. Nemtsov, a 55-year-old former deputy prime minister, was shot to death as he walked on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin on the night of Feb 27, 2015.

Yarmysh also urged Navalny's supporters around the world to lay flowers in his honour Friday.

"Everyone who knew Alexei says what a cheerful, courageous and honest person he was," Yarmysh said Thursday.

"But the greater truth is that even if you never met Alexei, you knew what he was like, too. You shared his investigations, you went to rallies with him, you read his posts from prison. His example showed many people what to do when even when things were scary and difficult."

'UK's Rwanda deportation plan may cost 500 mn pounds'

AP ■ LONDON

The British government's contentious plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda could cost nearly half a billion pounds, or about \$630 million, plus hundreds of thousands for each deported person, a report said Friday. The National Audit Office report — issued at the behest of parliamentary committees that complained of being in the dark about costs of the plan — provided the most comprehensive cost estimate so far. The Conservative government had earlier only revealed a 290 million pound (\$366 million) commitment, so the new figures opened the plan to wider scrutiny from critics.

"These figures reveal the extortionate bill the taxpayer will have to pay the Rwandan government for an unworkable and inhumane scheme that will not deter people seeking protection on our shores," said Enver Solomon, chief executive of the Refugee Council.

No asylum-seeker has been sent to Rwanda under the plan, which has been blocked by the courts, though the UK government has already paid 220 million pounds (\$278 million) to the government in Kigali under the Economic Transformation and Integration Fund to support the country's growth.

The plan is aimed at deterring unauthorised migrants from making dangerous English Channel crossings in unsafe boats. Under the plan, asylum-seekers would be sent to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed and where they would stay if approved. Human rights groups have attacked the plan as cruel and unworkable. After the Supreme Court blocked the plan as unlawful, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants and

lawmakers in the House of Commons approved a bill that declared the east African nation a safe country. The bill still needs approval in the House of Lords, where it has run into resistance. The audit showed an extra 100 million pounds would be spent for the partnership through 2026 and 120 million pounds (\$151 million) would go into the fund after 300 migrants are relocated to Rwanda.

In addition, each migrant's plane ticket would cost 11,000 pounds (\$13,900). Another 20,000 pounds (\$25,200) would be paid to Rwanda for each relocated asylum seeker and nearly 151,000 pounds (\$190,000) would be spent over five years for processing costs and living expenses for each person who stays in Rwanda.

"This report reveals the national scandal the Tories have been trying to hide," said Yvette Cooper, a Labour member of Parliament.

"Its shocking analysis shows the costs of the failed Rwanda farce are even higher than previously thought," she added. "In order to send less than 1% of UK asylum seekers to Rwanda on a few symbolic flights, the taxpayer will be forced to fork out over half a billion pounds — with no ability to recover any of the money already sent."

The Home Office defended the plan and said the government would focus on starting flights once the Safety of Rwanda Bill is passed and the treaty between the two nations is in place. "It is vital we respond to illegal migration with bold, long-term solutions," a statement read. "Unless we act, the cost of housing asylum seekers is set to reach 11 billion pounds (\$13.9 billion) per year by 2026. Illegal migration costs lives and perpetuates human trafficking, and it is therefore right that we fund solutions to break this unsustainable cycle."

Veteran British left-wing disruptor wins special election

London (AP): A veteran British political disruptor has won a special election in a town in northern England with a big Muslim minority following a contest that was mired in chaos and controversy and dominated by the war in Gaza. George Galloway, 69, swept to victory in Thursday's contest, winning almost 40% of the vote in the parliamentary seat of Rochdale.

In his victory speech, Galloway took aim at Keir Starmer, the leader of the main opposition Labour Party, who according to opinion polls is likely to become Britain's prime minister at the general election this year.

"Keir Starmer, this is for Gaza," he said. "You have paid, and you will pay, a high price for the role that you have played in enabling, encouraging and covering for the catastrophe presently going on in occupied Palestine in the Gaza Strip."

Galloway, a former Labour member of parliament who was expelled from the party in 2003, also declared "Labour is on notice" and a "shifting of the tectonic plates". Labour said Galloway only won because the party pulled its support for its candidate, Azhar Ali, for suggesting Israel was complicit in Hamas' attack on Oct 7. Without the backing of Labour, Ali ended up coming fourth. Galloway's victory means that from next week, Parliament will once again be home to one of the most eloquent orators from the left wing of UK politics, who will clearly use his position to raise his opposition to Israel's operation in Gaza. "George Galloway is someone who stokes up division and fear," said Ellie Reeves, Labour's deputy national campaign coordinator.

PTI ■ DHAKA

A massive fire that ripped through a seven-storey shopping mall in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka that also housed several illegal eateries killed at least 46 people and injured 22 others, the government said on Friday, in one of the worst infernos to hit the country in recent years. The fire broke out around 9:50 pm on Thursday at a popular restaurant named "Kacchi Bhai" on the first floor of the building, Green Cozy Cottage, and quickly spread to the upper floors that had more restaurants and a garment shop, according to fire service officials.

Health Minister Dr Samanta Lal Sen said around 2 am that 33 bodies were brought to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and 10 others to the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. Another victim died at the Police Hospital.

The condition of those injured is "critical," he told reporters at a briefing.

"One more person died during treatment in the intensive care unit of Dhaka Medical



ICU this morning. A total of 46 people have died so far," Sen said on Friday.

Currently, 10 people are undergoing treatment at the Sheikh Hasina burn unit and two at DMCH, he said.

Till now, the bodies of 39 people have been identified. Of them, at least 31 bodies of the victims have been handed over to families without an autopsy. Till now, the identities of six bodies remain unknown. The

authorities will hand them over after conducting a DNA test.

The commercial building that was gutted did not have permission for restaurants. The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The building had permission for office use, not restaurants and eateries, according to Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk). But the building housed eight restaurants, a juice bar and a tea and

Stubb: It took final step into Western community by joining NATO

AP ■ HELSINKI

Alexander Stubb was sworn in Friday as Finland's new president and said the Nordic country has taken "the final step into the Western community of values" by becoming a NATO member. The 55-year-old former prime minister replaced President Sauli Niinistö, who held the job for two six-year terms. Stubb, a conservative, was elected head of state in a narrow February 11 runoff victory against independent candidate and former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto of a left-leaning party.

Stubb has held several government posts, including foreign minister, and led the Finnish government in 2014-2015.

He and Niinistö arrived together in high hats at the 200-seat Eduskunta legislature.

Stubb took his oath in Finnish and Swedish, Finland's two official languages, becoming the country's 13th president since it gained its independence from the Russian empire in 1917. Finland joined NATO in April following Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine. It has the military alliance's longest land border with Russia — 1,340 kilometres — and is one of the most active European providers of military and civilian aid to Ukraine.

Stubb said in a speech that "as a result of allying ourselves militarily and joining NATO we have taken the final step into the Western community of values" to which Finland has belonged "in spirit throughout its independence."

"We will see regionalisation of power as well as unholy alliances," Stubb said. "In other words, a kind of an à la carte

world, where allies are cherry-picked. We must remain alert."

The president of Finland, a nation of 5.6 million people, holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government. The president also commands the military.

Stubb is expected to remain above the fray of day-to-day politics and stay out of domestic political disputes while acting as a moral leader of the nation. The president appoints the prime minister and Cabinet members. Niinistö said in a speech that "there is concern about the future of NATO," and referred to a comment by former US President Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican Party's nomination this year, that he once warned a NATO ally that he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they

want" to countries in the alliance that don't spend enough on defence. "The comment they must pay their bills" was probably drafted for domestic use," Niinistö said. "It is high time to awaken to securing the state of peace, in other words, to strengthen ourselves."

Speaking to Stubb, Niinistö said, "I wish you strength and wisdom in these unpredictable times."

Until recently a professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, Stubb holds a doctorate in international relations from the London School of Economics.

"Even though the world seems to be in chaos right now, we should not despair," Stubb said. "Fear is the worst possible guiding principle in foreign policy."

Concern over Pope asking aide to read speech aloud for him

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis, who has been suffering from the flu, asked an aide to read out his prepared speech at a conference in the Vatican Friday, saying he has not yet fully recovered from his latest ailment that has raised concerns about his capacity to continue leading the Roman Catholic Church.

The 87-year-old Pontiff, who was taken to a Roman hospital on Wednesday for diagnostic testing after having to cancel some public audiences, handed his speech to his aide, Mons. Filippo Ciampantelli.

"I still have a cold and I get fatigued after reading for a while," he said. Francis, who has been hospitalised three times since becoming pope in 2013, began using a wheelchair and came to walk after suffering knee trouble last year.

Speaking off the cuff at the opening of the two-day conference, entitled "Man-Woman Image of God - For an Anthropology of Vocations," he blasted what he called "gender ideology" as the "ugliest danger."

"It is very important that this meeting is taking place, this encounter between men and women," he told the audience. "Because the ugliest danger today is the gender ideology...I have asked for studies to be done on this ugly ideology of our time, which cancels out differences and makes everything the same. To cancel difference is to cancel humanity," he said.

The pontiff had cancelled appointments last Saturday and Monday due to a persistent, but "mild flu", but appeared as usual for the Sunday blessing from a window overlooking St Peter's Square.

Haley hammers Trump for being all about himself

PTI ■ VIRGINIA

Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley has hammered her rival Donald Trump for being all about himself as she told enthusiastic crowds here that one more term for her ex-boss would throw the country into another four years of chaos. Haley was addressing two well-attended political rallies on Thursday in Richmond and Falls Church in Virginia, which is one of the 16 states for Super Tuesday.

To earn the party's nomination either of the two candidates — Trump and Haley — need at least 1,215 delegates. After primaries in five States — Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina, and Michigan, Trump has 122 delegates and Haley has 24 delegates in her kitty.

Both her rallies in Richmond and Falls Church were marked with protestors



who were opposed to her candidacy, and many said were supporters of 77-year-old Trump, who is leading the national polls against 52-year-old Haley by more than 64 percentage points, according to Real Clear Politics that monitors all such polls.

Addressing overflowing halls in Virginia, Haley hammered Trump for being all about himself and alleged that

he cares little about the country and its people.

She told the cheering crowd that electing Trump as the president would result in four years of chaos in the US.

"Everybody in the media is trying to figure out 'why does she keep fighting?'" Haley told the crowd in Richmond, VA. "The answer is I'm doing this for my kids, and your kids," she said. Asserting that the admin-

istration of both Trump and incumbent President Joe Biden has worsened the country's economy, she said it's time to have an accountant in the White House, which was greeted with applause from the audience.

The two rallies attracted many Indian Americans in Virginia, which has a significant Indian American population. They said that it's a difference of day and night between her and Trump.

"She's very charismatic, she's clever, she's compassionate. She's a very eloquent speaker, and she said all the right things. She demonstrated leadership today in multiple different ways. And she is without a doubt, the best candidate that's running today," eminent Indian American Suresh Shenoy told PTI. "What I liked about Nikki Haley is she based everything on data and numbers and not subjective like many of the other politicians do? I really

admired her for that. And also the vision that she set for America, I think is just fabulous," said Neena Shenoy after the rallies.

Attending the first rally of Haley, Sachin Chandra from Virginia described it as amazing. "I think she has to beat those two dudes. That's really what it comes down to. She will be awesome for the country and for the world," he said. Haley has clarity of thought and policies. "There's no ulterior motives. It's just what a president should be standing for," he said. The main difference between Trump and Haley is their character, said Shankar Krishna. "She's not afraid to speak the truth. You don't need lies.

She's saying things that take us to the right place and do the right things. Get us out of this deck. A lot of problems in the country that we need to solve, and we need practical American solutions.

Musk sues OpenAI and its CEO Sam

San Francisco (AP): Elon Musk is suing OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman over what he says is a betrayal of the ChatGPT maker's founding aims of benefiting humanity rather than pursuing profits. In a lawsuit filed at San Francisco Superior Court, billionaire Musk said that when he bankrolled OpenAI's creation, he secured an agreement with Altman and Greg Brockman, the president, to keep the AI company as a non-profit that would develop technology for the benefit of the public.

Under its founding agreement, OpenAI would also make its code open to the public instead of walling it off for any private company's gains, the lawsuit says.

However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives have set that pact "afire" and are "perverting"

the company's mission, Musk alleges in the lawsuit.

OpenAI, Inc. has been transformed into a closed-source de facto subsidiary of the largest technology company in the world, Microsoft, the lawsuit filed Thursday says. "Under its new Board, it is not just developing but is actually refining an AGI to maximize profits for Microsoft, rather than for the benefit of humanity,"

AGI refers to artificial general intelligence, which are general purpose AI systems that can perform just as well as — or even better than — humans in a wide variety of tasks. Musk is suing over breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices. He also wants an injunction to prevent anyone, including Microsoft, from benefiting from OpenAI's technology.

Sensex, Nifty hit record high

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied more than one-and-a-half per cent to hit their lifetime highs on Friday helped by impressive GDP data and fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,245.05 points or 1.72 per cent to reach 73,745.35 — its all-time closing peak. During the day, it zoomed 1,318.91 points or 1.81 per cent to hit a record intra-day high of 73,819.21.

The Nifty climbed 355.95 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,338.75. During the day, it soared 370.5 points or 1.68 per cent to reach its intra-day record peak of 22,353.30.

A rally in global markets and auto sales numbers added to the positive momentum in the equity markets, analysts said.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 6 per

cent while JSW Steel climbed a more than 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers.

HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards.

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 — the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years.

The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic

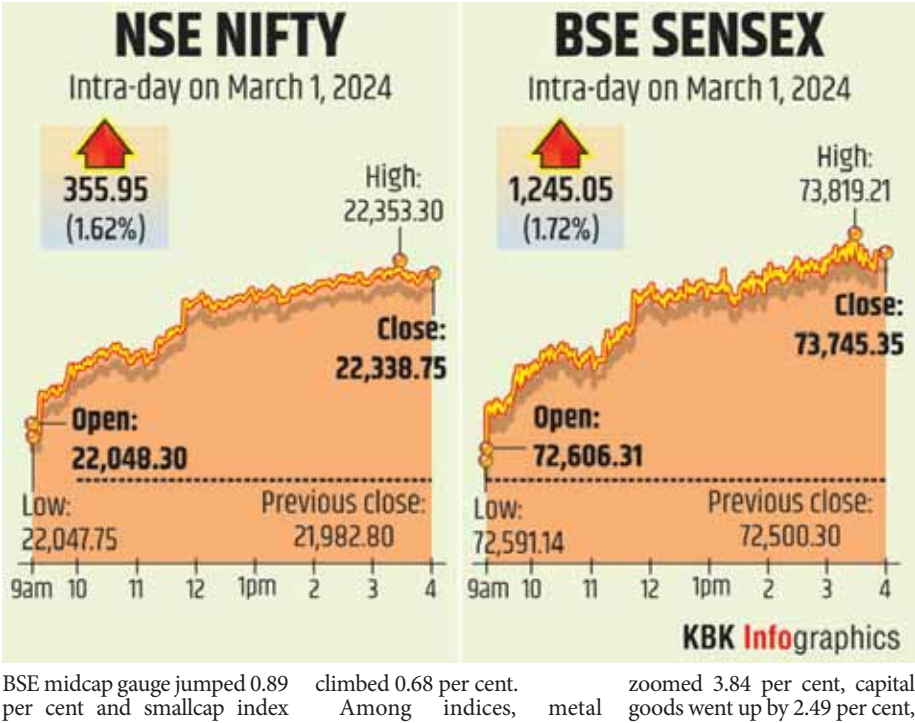
and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023.

"Better-than-expected Q3 FY24 GDP and ease in US inflation added buoyancy in both domestic and global markets. As the general election draws closer, stellar economic growth data raised confidence among investors for a pre-election rally.

"On the global front, in-line US personal consumption expenditure data and benign Euro zone inflation will influence global central banks to take a dovish view on interest rates," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the



bankex climbed 2.48 per cent, auto advanced 2.23 per cent, energy (2.14 per cent), oil & gas (2.14 per cent), commodities (2.12 per cent) and industrials (1.91 per cent).

IT and tech were the laggards. A total of 2,387 advanced while 1,451 declined and 109 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains.

European markets were trading in positive territory. The US markets ended in the green on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday as they bought equities worth Rs 3,568.11 crore, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 on Thursday. The Nifty gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to 21,982.80.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.82 per cent to

USD 82.58 a barrel.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site.

The special live trading session will have intra-day switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery (DR) site.

The exchanges said there will be two sessions — the first from 9:15 am to 10 am on the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm on the DR site.

"Trading members are requested to note that the exchange will conduct a special live trading session with intraday switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery Site (DR) on Saturday, March 2, in equity and equity derivatives segments," BSE and NSE said in separate circulars.



Indian logistics market to grow at 8.8 per cent annually by 2029

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian freight and logistics market is estimated to grow at 8.8 per cent annually to USD 484.43 billion by 2029 from USD 317.26 billion in 2024 due to technological advancement, as per a report released at logistic fair LogiMAT India.

LogiMAT India 2024, the satellite show of Europe's biggest intralogistics exhibition LogiMAT Stuttgart, is organised by Messe Stuttgart India Pvt Ltd on February 28-March 1 at India Expo Mart.

According to a statement, the integration of cutting-edge technologies and advancements in intralogistics, automation, warehousing, and transportation management heralds a transformative era for the logistics sector in India. Indian freight and logistics market is poised for remarkable growth.

LogiMAT India 2024 projections indicate a surge in market size to USD 317.26 billion by 2024, with a projected CAGR of 8.83 per cent, catapulting it to USD 484.43 billion by 2029.

This surge not only signifies robust economic expansion but also holds the promise of substantial job creation and enhanced business scalability, it stated.

Together, these developments are set to redefine the logistics landscape, ushering in a new

era of efficiency and innovation.

Sachin Patil, MD and CEO of Messe Stuttgart said the transformative potential of new technologies and innovations showcased at LogiMAT India is immense.

"We envision these advancements to not only attract substantial investments to India's logistics sector, but also to create a significant number of jobs, driving economic growth and prosperity," he added.

Furthermore, these technologies have the potential to scale logistics businesses to unprecedented levels, enabling them to optimise operations, enhance customer service, and achieve greater profitability, the statement said.

By leveraging robotics, automation, AI, and other cutting-edge solutions, logistics companies can streamline processes, reduce costs, and stay ahead of the competition in today's dynamic business environment, it pointed out.

Messe Stuttgart India Pvt Ltd is the wholly-owned subsidiary of Landesmesse Stuttgart GmbH.

With a focus on innovation and technology, the event provides a comprehensive platform for industry professionals to explore the latest trends and advancements in the intralogistics, transportation, warehousing and automation sectors.

Gold jumps ₹350; silver rallies ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices jumped Rs 350 to Rs 63,320 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal closed at Rs 62,970 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 74,500 per kg, while it settled at Rs 74,100 per kg in the previous close.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,320 per 10 grams, up by Rs 350, taking bullish cues in the overseas market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.



In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,045 per ounce, up by USD 11 from the previous close.

Following the release of the Personal Consumption

Expenditure (PCE) price index data, which indicated signs of slowing inflation in the US and raised expectations of a monetary policy rate cut by the Federal Reserve later this year,

Gandhi said. After the release of the data, the yellow metal prices surged to a four-week high, he added.

Silver was also up at USD 22.60 per ounce, while it had ended at USD 22.50 per ounce in the previous close.

Investors will also look forward to the release of major macro data, including global US manufacturing PMI (January) and ISM manufacturing (February) which will shape the expectations for the Fed's monetary policy rate outlook and further direction for the gold prices, Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said.



Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 82.90 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 82.90 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday amid rising crude oil prices in the overseas market and increased demand for the American currency from importers.

However, a rally in equity markets and robust domestic macroeconomic data supported the local currency and restricted the fall, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.86 and traded in a narrow range of 82.84 and 82.91 against the greenback.

The local unit finally settled at 82.90 (provisional) against the dollar, down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee settled 2 paise higher at 82.89 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, dipped marginally by 0.02 per cent to 104.07.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the US dollar rose on month-end rebalancing by importers and oil marketing companies.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on improved risk sentiments in the domestic markets following stellar GDP data and positive domestic equities. However, strong US dollar and elevated crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside," Choudhary said.

He said the traders may remain cautious ahead of ISM manufacturing PMI and con-

struction spending data from the US. "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10."

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 1.26 per cent to USD 82.94 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex climbed 1,245.05 points, or 1.72 per cent, to settle at a new peak of 73,745.35. The Nifty rose 355.95 points, or 1.62 per cent, to close at a record 22,338.75.

A monthly survey released on Friday showed India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by domestic and external demand. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023.

According to the government data released on Thursday, 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 a good showing by mining & quarrying and construction sectors.

The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 11 lakh crore at January end touched 63.6 per cent of the revised annual target. In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit or gap between the expenditure and revenue was 67.8 per cent of the Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23.

Paytm shares jump 5 per cent; hit upper circuit limit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns and operates Paytm, on Friday, jumped 5 per cent after the company said the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies.

The stock climbed 5 per cent to Rs 425.45 — its upper circuit limit — on the BSE after falling in the past three trading days. Shares of the company had fallen by 5.31 per cent in the last three days.

The stock jumped 4.99 per cent to Rs 423.45 — the upper circuit limit — on the NSE.

In traded volume terms, 7.97 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 46.64 lakh shares on the NSE during the day.

Amid RBI's action on its associate firm, One97 Communications on Friday said the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies.

The move assumes significance as Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is under the RBI's lens over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns.

In a filing on Friday, One97 Communications said the company and its associate entity, Paytm Payments Bank Limited, have introduced additional



measures to strengthen their approach towards independent operations of PPBL.

"As part of this process to reduce dependencies, Paytm and PPBL have mutually agreed to discontinue various inter-company agreements with Paytm and its group entities," the BSE filing said.

Also, the shareholders of PPBL have agreed to simplify the Shareholders Agreement (SHA) to support PPBL's governance, it added.

The Board of OCL (One97 Communications Ltd) approved the

termination of agreements and amendment of SHA on March 1, 2024.

Paytm had announced earlier that it would sign up new partnerships with other banks and take measures to provide seamless services to its customers and merchants.

In a regulatory action in January, the RBI barred PPBL from accepting fresh deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29 — a deadline that was later extended to March 15.

India set to become global semiconductor manufacturing destination: Industry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet's nod to three upcoming semiconductor manufacturing units is a step towards self-sufficiency and makes the country's dream of becoming a global chip making destination achievable, according to industry players.

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved setting up three semiconductor-making units, entailing an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore, as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet the requirements of chips.

According to S P Kochhar, Director General, COAI (Cellular Operators Association of India), the approval for these units which has come under India's Semiconductor Mission is a positive and commendable development.

"This is a progressive step for India and the strongly emerging manufacturing ecosystem in the country. We believe this serves as an



excellent example for our nation towards attaining self-sufficiency in line with our honourable prime

minister's vision of 'Atmanirbharta' and will further inspire India's goals to become a global manufacturing and

supply chain hub" he said. Kochhar said that with the output from these facilities being poised to benefit various sectors, it is expected to provide a fillip to the 'Digital India' mission through increased technological prowess and advancement of the indigenous industrial ecosystem, besides generating employment and attracting more investments in the country.

Chairman of ICEA (India Cellular and Electronics Association) Pankaj Mohindroo said the move will pave the way for setting up more semiconductor fabrication plants (Fab) and outsourced semiconductor assembly and test units (OSAT) in the country.

"The emergence of Bharat as a global semiconductor manufacturing destination no longer seems to be a distant dream. By 2027 we will have the FAB and OSAT units producing. By the end of the decade, we may have more than 10 fabs and 20 OSAT units in production besides many semiconductor product companies," Mohindroo said.

GDP growth in FY24 likely to be within striking distance of 8 per cent: SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GDP growth for the current financial year could be within striking distance of 8 per cent, a study by the State Bank of India (SBI) said on Friday, a day after India posted an 8.4 per cent growth in the December quarter, and revised upwards the estimates for the preceding two quarters.

"The third quarter GDP numbers jolted the psyche and cognitive framework of most in markets, while sweeping some by a pleasant surprise. Clearly, right policy prisms and perspectives can trump irrational expectations bordering fault lines," SBI said in its research report 'Ecowrap'.

It noted that defying all estimates, the economy grew 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2023-24 after exhibiting more than 8 per cent growth in the preceding two quarters.

The buoyancy in indirect tax mop-up (32 per cent year-on-year growth), gap between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Value



Added (GVA) growth widened.

"For fiscal 2023-24 GDP growth is expected to increase 7.6 per cent and GVA growth by 6.9 per cent... We estimate fourth quarter GDP growth at 5.9 per cent, which we believe is an understatement. Thus it is most likely that FY24 GDP growth could be within striking distance of 8 per cent," the SBI study said.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has revised GDP estimates for the first and second quarters of this fiscal to 8.2 and 8.1 per cent from 7.8 per cent and 7.6 per cent, respectively.

With the revisions, the GDP growth during April-December works out to be 8.2 per cent.

The SBI report further said with the government's efforts to ensure quality of life for all citizens and stopping leakage of benefits through direct benefit transfer, for the first time the per capita GDP at current prices crossed Rs 2 lakh mark in 2023-24.

In constant prices, too, per capita GDP has increased to Rs 1.24 lakh in the current fiscal.



PLAY ON

SHOBORI GANGULI takes an indulgent plunge into a theatrical restaurant pool that proves to be a novel immersive culinary experience

Along the winding fine dining streets of South Delhi's heart and lungs, Mehrauli, you must stop at a place that literally invites you to come in and Play. Yes, Play is all about a delectable indulgence in all things heady about Asian and Mediterranean confluence. I find fusion too limiting a term for the entity Play has created. The unique decor, the theatrical culinary presentation, the awesome open air terrace, everything about Play exudes the kind of warmth you so desire on a frosty winter evening. Of course, in the company of good friends. Standing out in all its opulence at the Qutub Complex, Play has carefully sought to extend the norms of conventional dining and to forge a cocktail bar and restaurant with innovation writ large. Kanishk Tuteja, the creative force behind Play, envisions a space where culinary artistry seamlessly meets theatrical elegance. As the founder, he expresses that "Play transcends the traditional definition of a



restaurant — it's a stage for unforgettable experiences. The fusion of diverse flavours, mirrored illusions, and dynamic ambience invites guests to embark on a journey of luxury and delight at Play, where every moment is meticulously crafted for those who seek the extraordinary." To dwell briefly on the décor, which while being overwhelming is only a part of what Play has on offer, we are informed that the interior design has drawn inspiration from the "theatrical elegance" and "blending" influences of Asian and Mediterranean cultures. Mirrored elements on the walls indeed create mesmerising spatial illusions, promising to cast a magical spell even before the heady spirits and aromatic flavours flow in to gently lure you into wonderland. As explained by Play's General Manager Kunal Kumar, the place promises to remain etched in our memories well beyond the moment of our departure. The special menu crafted by Chef Rishi Prakash for us indeed continues to linger on even now. As I mentioned, the Asian and



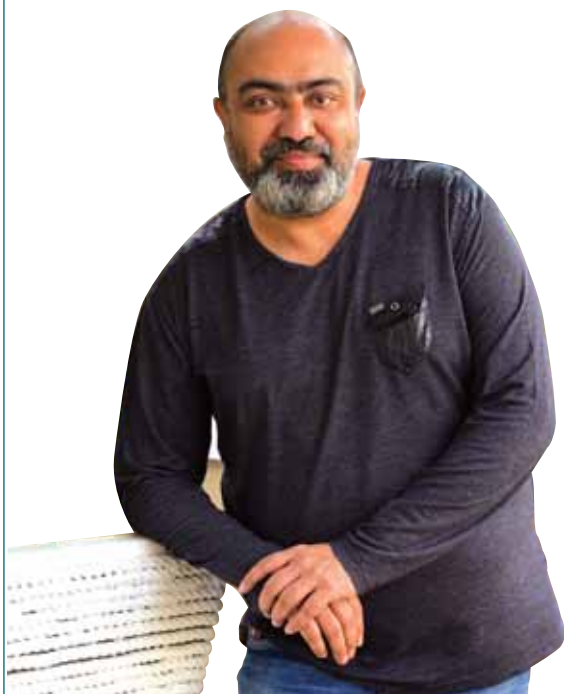
Mediterranean confluence of cuisine and culture is Play's signature touch. From specially infused sushi to inventive tapas, each dish has a unique narrative. Chef Bulut's theatrical presentation skills were on full display which elevated the dining experience to another realm altogether. Alongside Play's signature gems Black Cod Miso and the irresistible Baklava, Chef Bulut's mastery of a visually stunning and theatrical presentation certainly made the evening special. The specially crafted menu for us included a Leaks and Chicken soup alongside an option of Vietnamese Banh Pho. We savoured an array of appetizers — Soy Caramel Mushroom, Guaca Beets Tart, a Mock Meat Stir Fry. The meat eaters were of course



treated to an Arabic Lemon Garlic Fish, Char Siu Chicken and a scrumptious Shrimp Avocado Tart. The salads comprised a healthy mix of Moroccan Carrot and Quinoa, with Beet Root Carpaccio. From the Chef's Theatre came Lamb Adana and Cottage Cheese Shish Touk. The main course was a refined amalgamation of Buck Wheat Pancake, Sundried Tomato Barley, Japanese Katsu Curry, Tofu and Chicken Cutlet, and River Sole. For desserts, we literally dug into the Mixed Berry Cheesecake and Chocolate Forest. I and my friends resolved to return for more fun at Play. Highly recommended for an evening or afternoon of guilt-free indulgence.

Talking Tokyo

For a city known for its love for butter chicken, Guppy celebrates a decade of educating Delhiites about Japanese flavours, writes **PAWAN SONI**



In the hospitality industry, where employee turnover is high, encountering someone who has remained with a group for 15 years and been with the brand since its inception 10 years ago is rare. I had the pleasure of meeting Chef Saurabh Sharan at Guppy, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Hailing from a humble background and raised in Bihar, I was intrigued to learn about Chef Saurabh Sharan's journey from Bihar to managing one of Delhi's finest Japanese restaurants. The chef, with a smile, shared that he always remained open to learning. Starting at a junior level, he had the opportunity to work with some of the best chefs, and today, he has risen through the ranks. We began our lunch eagerly. The first one was Yo! Guppy, which had a subtle hint of wasabi with a sour



mix. It was so delightful that we ordered another round. On the culinary front, we began with the fried calamari. I was expecting the typical breaded calamari, but what arrived was a delightful surprise. The calamari was pan-fried a la plancha style, seared in high heat, and served with quality olives, cherry tomatoes, and pepper coulis. Absolutely delicious, though it reminded me more of Spanish tapas. A side of garlic bread would have perfected this dish for me. The salmon tartare is another dish worth trying, with fresh avocado, tobiko for crunch, and umami flavors from bonito mayo. The braised eel on top of pan-fried sushi rice was delightful, though I would have preferred it served in smaller pieces for easier eating with chopsticks. The only disappointing dish on the



menu was the Ramen burger, where the noodles were shaped into a bun. Once a popular trend on the internet and globally, I found the ramen to be overly crispy, and the pork belly, bacon, and tomatoes overloaded the burger. While it may be visually appealing for

Instagram, consuming all the ingredients in one bite proved to be a challenge. The meal ended on a sweet note with a deconstructed banoffee cake, featuring toffee sauce and caramelized banana served with fresh cream alongside banana cake. In a world where most brands struggle to survive even a few months, Guppy is celebrating its 10th anniversary. For a city known for its love of butter chicken, Guppy not only serves but also educates many Delhiites about Japanese flavors, becoming a favorite among its patrons. This achievement is truly commendable.

Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

KAPIL BACKS BCCI STRICTNESS ON DOMESTIC CRICKET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A few players will suffer, but let it be," said legendary former India captain Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI's decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect marquee first-class events like the Ranji Trophy.

Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were on Wednesday excluded from the BCCI's central contracts after ignoring the board's diktat to play in the Ranji Trophy. The decision evoked mixed reactions with some former players like Kirti Azad and Irfan Pathan backing the out-of-favour duo.

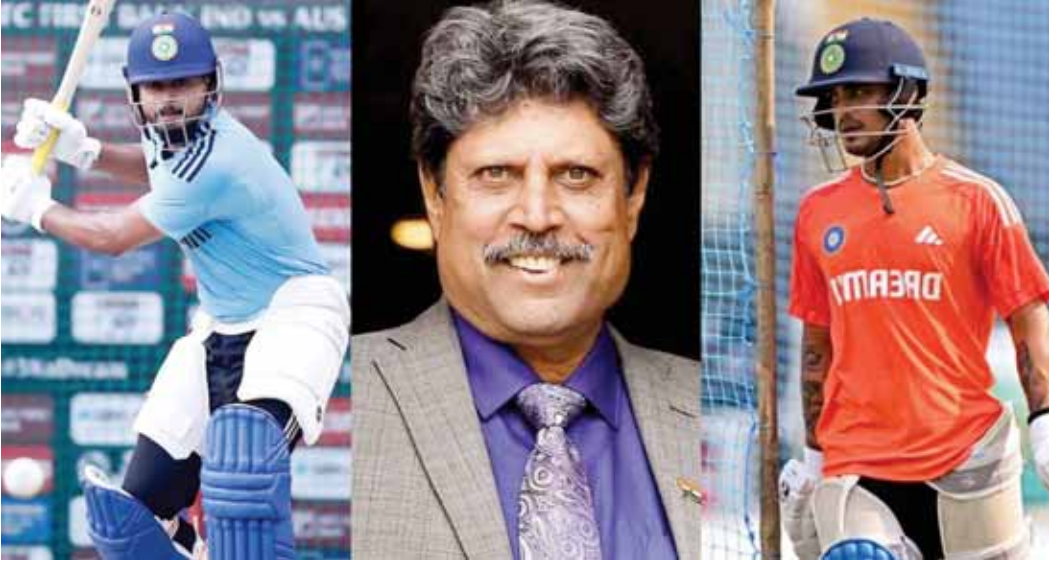
Kapil refrained from taking names but said the BCCI's decision to assert the importance of domestic cricket was long overdue. "Yes, few players will suffer, but

logon ko taqleef hogi, hone do lekin desh se badhkar koi nahi hai (some people will feel hurt but let it be because nobody is bigger than the country). Well done," he said.

"I congratulate the BCCI for taking the much needed step to protect the status of domestic cricket. I was sad to see domestic cricket being given the skip by players once they had established themselves in international cricket," the captain of the 1983 World Cup-winning side observed in his statement.

The BCCI, while announcing the central contracts, urged the players to give due importance to domestic competitions.

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 after leaving the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He instead



focussed on preparing for the IPL next month for his franchise Mumbai Indians. Iyer, on the other hand, did not make himself available for Mumbai's Ranji quarterfinal against

Baroda after being excluded from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for Mumbai's Ranji semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting March 2.

"It was high time the message was given and this strong step by the BCCI will go a long way in restoring the prestige of domestic cricket," he added.

Kapil asserted that it was the duty of established stars to play domestic cricket as they owe their success to their respective states.

"I have always believed in the process of international players making themselves available to play for their respective states. It helps them extend their support to domestic players. Also it is a nice way to pay back for the services rendered by the state association in grooming a player," he said.

Kapil also expressed his gratitude to the BCCI for enhancing the

pension of former cricketers, saying it has come as a major relief to families of several yesteryear players.

In 2022, the board had announced a hike in the monthly pensions of former cricketers — both men and women.

Former first-class men's cricketers, who earlier got Rs 15,000 per month are now getting Rs 30,000, while former Test players, who got Rs 37,500, are now getting Rs 60,000. Women international players, who received Rs 30,000 prior to the revision are now receiving Rs 52,500, while first-class cricketers who retired before 2003 and were getting Rs 22,500 are now getting Rs 45,000.

"I am also happy that the BCCI has increased the pension amount of the players. This was a much needed boost to those whose family depends on the pension received," added Kapil.



We are thrilled to have Shreyas in team for Ranji semifinal: Rahane

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane on Friday backed Shreyas Iyer to put the contractual turmoil behind him and deliver a punchy performance for the team in the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu, beginning here on Saturday.

Shreyas along with Jharkhand's Ishan Kishan were not considered for the annual central contracts after both the players skipped the Ranji matches of their respective teams in violation of BCCI's diktat. Shreyas sat out of Mumbai's quarterfinal against Baroda here while complaining of back pain.

"He's an experienced player. His contribution has been amazing whenever he turned up for Mumbai. We are thrilled to have him in our team for the semifinal," Rahane told the media here at the BKC Ground. Rahane said Shreyas would not require any extra motivation to do well for Mumbai against TN.

"I don't think he needs any encouragement or advice. He has always contributed with the bat for Mumbai, and him being around other players in the dressing room will also help the team's cause," said Rahane.

However, Rahane himself is waging a personal battle after scoring just 115 runs from six matches at an average of 12.77

with a lone fifty.

But the 35-year-old did not read much into those anaemic numbers.

"It's just a phase and you have to respect it (not scoring runs). When you're batting well and scoring runs, it happens consistently. There's nothing wrong with my batting. I just have to remain positive and back my game and instinct," he said.

Rahane said he needed to bat freely to get back into his run-scoring ways. "I just have to go out there and play freely. I feel as a player you have to be confident and respect a phase, move forward and learn whatever you can. You don't want to go too far ahead," he added.

Rahane confirmed that opener Prithvi Shaw has recovered from a finger injury which had forced him to bat in the middle-order during the quarterfinal. "His finger was hurt, that's why he came down the order. We wanted him to go before Musheer (Khan). But obviously, because of the injection's effect, he had to go after him," Rahane said.

Rahane hoped that Shaw, who has made 389 runs from four matches at an average of 64.83, would find his A game against Tamil Nadu.

"Prithvi is really aggressive and he gets those runs very quickly. As a batsman, I don't think he (has) changed much. He's hungry to score runs.

That's what we want from Prithvi. We don't want him to change his game," Rahane said.

He said Mumbai will adopt a pressure-free approach in this game.

"We are playing really well. We don't want to think about the quarterfinal, semifinal or final. It is just another game for us. If we can do that and be in the moment as a team and individuals, it will help us," Rahane noted.

Rahane was obviously pleased with the hundreds Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande, the No 10 and 11, made in the last outing and said such efforts will add a lot of meat to the whole batting unit. "Everyone is working really hard, especially the bowlers, with their batting. I think when No. 8, 9, 10, 11, contribute with the bat, it becomes really crucial for the team.

Those guys have worked really hard throughout the season on their batting, you know, those extra 15-20 minutes after they bowl (at nets). It's paying off," Rahane said Kotian has the potential to become an all-rounder.

"I'm happy for Tanush because earlier he has made those crucial 70s, 80s and 90s. But I think the hundred he got is a benchmark (for him). He has the calibre to become a good all-rounder," Rahane signed off.

He is the new Ravi Ashwin: Vaughan on Bashir

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England captain Michael Vaughan feels England have discovered a "world-class superstar" in young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who has the skills to emulate the success of India's Ravichandran Ashwin.

Despite England's five-wicket loss in Ranchi, 20-year-old Bashir, playing only his second Test, impressed as he returned with a match haul of eight wickets. His magnificent performance included a five-wicket haul in the first innings.

Ashwin, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the history of Test cricket.

The senior spinner recently became only the second Indian bowler to snare 500 wickets in the longest format and is set for his 100th Test in Dharamsala next week against England.

"One of the great weeks, celebrating another world-class superstar that we've unearthed, Shoaib Bashir. That's what we're celebrating. Second Test match, eight wickets, he's the new Ravi Ashwin, and we've unearthed him.



"So, we're celebrating a new superstar in English cricket," Vaughan said on Club Prairie Fire's YouTube channel.

India handed England their first series defeat under coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes after winning the fourth Test in Ranchi to take a 3-1 lead in

the ongoing series. Vaughan backed England to win the dead rubber in Dharamsala.

"They will go with their best XI. It's going to be cold in Dharamsala and it will suit England. I expect England to win," Vaughan said.

Made some mental adjustments to convert starts into big scores: Shafali

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Big-hitting batter Shafali Verma says she has made minor adjustments to her approach towards the game in the last one year, which is helping her convert good starts into big knocks in the ongoing Women's Premier League.

Verma struck a half century and stitched a second-wicket stand of 82 runs with Alice Capsey (46) as Delhi Capitals defeated Royal Challengers Bangalore by 25 runs in a WPL match here on Thursday night.

RCB could only muster up 169/9 in their 20 overs, pursuing a 195-run victory target.

"Last time in the WPL, I was getting out in the 30s or 40s. Those knocks taught me a lot. I think because of that, now I want to convert a 30 or 40-run score into a 50 for the team and



for myself," Verma told 'Jio Cinema'.

"The main change is a slight adjustment in my mindset and I want to take this forward," she added.

Verma's team is currently top of the table with two wins from three matches.

The 20-year-old Verma, who became the youngest to play cricket for India when she debuted as a 15-year-old, also acknowledged the positive impact of playing alongside seasoned Australian Meg Lanning in her WPL team.

"When a very experienced person is standing across from you, your body language changes on its own. Playing with a player like that and building partnerships is a great privilege in my opinion.

"She has changed the game with her batting," she said.

Delhi Capital will next taken on Gujarat Giants on Sunday.



BCCI to conduct women red ball tournament in Pune

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Women's red-ball cricket will return to India's domestic calendar after six years when the BCCI conducts a Senior Inter Zonal Multi-Day Trophy in Pune from March 28.

The move comes after the Indian women's team's return to Test cricket. The side has played Tests against Australia and England in the recent years. Domestic red ball cricket for women was last held in 2018.

"It is a welcome step taken by BCCI. The national team has started playing Test cricket again and we need the next generation of cricketers to play red ball cricket at the domestic level," former India pacer Amita Sharma told PTI.

"I would also want red ball to be played at the state level and not just zonal level. Back in the day we had both those events," she added.

The Maharashtra Cricket Association will be hosting the tournament which will feature six teams, representing East, West, North, South, Central, and North-East zones.

They will be competing in a series of five matches to be played across three days each, which is a day more than the two-day games played in the 2018 season.

The tournament will begin right after the ongoing Women's Premier League, which ends on March 17.

It will start with the quarterfinals between East Zone and North East Zone and West Zone and Central Zone on March 28 with the semifinals slated on April 3.

Australia 13-2 as New Zealand strikes back late

AP ■ WELLINGTON

The almost comical run out of Kane Williamson for a second-ball duck was one of many setbacks suffered by New Zealand on the second day of the first test Friday as it fell 217 runs behind Australia.

That was until the very end of the day when Australia batted for a second time after passing up the chance to make New Zealand follow on. Tim Southee dismissed Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne to have Australia 13-2 in its second innings after it had led by 204 on the first.

At stumps Usman Khawaja was 5 not out and nightwatchman Nathan Lyon was 6 not out. Lyon was dropped at slip by Tim Southee off the last ball of the day.

Smith was out for a duck to the third ball of the innings, bowled by Southee, and

Labuschagne fell to Southee in the fifth over for 2. After falling for 1 in the first innings, it was Labuschagne's lowest aggregate score in a test in his career. They were the 12th and 13th wickets to fall in the day which mostly had not gone New Zealand's way.

First, New Zealand needed more than a full session to claim one wicket and end Australia's first innings.

In that time Cameron Green and Josh Hazlewood put on 116 runs to increase Australia's total from 279-9 after the first day to 383. Green finished 174 not out.

Then New Zealand lost three wickets at 12 and two at 29, was 29-5 before Glenn Phillips' half century from 41 balls slowed its steady downhill slide.



New Zealand eventually was all out for 179 in 43.1 overs, a deficit of 204. Phillips made 71 and Matt Henry 42.

"Obviously the way Cam Green played with Hazlewood, they put on a massive partnership and that wasn't exactly ideal for us wanting to wrap up the tail," Phillips said. "At the end that's what test cricket is about."

New Zealand always will be able to look back and pinpoint where this match began to get away from it. It started on the second day when Australia was 89-4 and Mitch Marsh made a fast 40 in a 67-run fifth-wicket partnership which seemed to energize Cameron Green.

Green went on to reach his century in the last over of the first day and was able to form an heroic last-wicket partnership with Hazlewood which frustrated New Zealand for all of the first session and an additional 20 minutes before Hazlewood fell for 22.

This test match is the first in eight years between New Zealand and Australia in New Zealand, has been much anticipated and this match at the Basin Reserve is sold out

on all five days.

Watching Australia go from 267-9 on day one when the match was about even to 383 when Australia was totally in charge left fans dispirited.

Tom Latham fell for 5 when New Zealand was 12, changing his decision to leave a ball from Mitchell Starc too late and directing the ball back onto his stumps. Then disaster. Williamson played a ball from Starc back past the bowler. Will Young at the non-striker's end turned to watch the ball, then looked up to see Williamson had set off for a run. Young turned to see the ball heading straight to mid off and looked again to see Williamson bearing down on him on a collision course. As Young swerved to his left, Williamson dodged to his right and the pair collided in mid-pitch as Starc tried to take evasive action. Williamson was

stranded as Marnus Labuschagne's throw hit the stumps directly at the non-striker's end.


Williamson walked off without looking back. New Zealand had lost two wickets in two balls and that became three in five when Rachin Ravindra drove too freely too early in his innings and sliced the ball directly to Nathan Lyon at point.

Wicketkeeper Alex Carey caught Daryl Mitchell (11) off Cummins from the last ball of the 17th over and Young (9) from Mitch March off the first ball of the 18th as New Zealand slumped to 29-5.

Phillips and Tom Blundell provided New Zealand's first real period of competitiveness in all of the second day in a partnership of 84 for the sixth wicket. Both played aggressively and runs came quickly.

Phillips reached his third test half century, his second against Australia and his first in New Zealand. But Blundell fell next ball, caught by Travis Head at short leg off Nathan Lyon and the innings sputtered again. Phillips was out for 71

off 70 balls and Henry took his 42 runs from 34 balls with four sixes as New Zealand briefly looked like avoiding the follow-on. But he holed Labuschagne off Nathan Lyon with New Zealand still four runs short.

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4405951000000350	14.71	12.4	Mr. Shahid Jamal, 15/151 B 5 M, Faruqi Nagar, Bazardiha, Varanasi - 221109 (U.P.)
Place : Varanasi Dated : 29.02.2024			Sd/- Branch Head

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