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STATE GOVT CANCELS
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WORLD 7
CLASSICAL DANCER FROM
INDIA SHOT DEAD IN US

SPORT 12
NEW ZEALAND BOWL OUT
AUSTRALIA, CHASES 369

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BJP rolls out stalwarts on Lok Sabha 2024 pitch

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Hoping to get a massive first mover advantage as it works towards its target of winning 370 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the BJP on Saturday released its first list of 195 Lok Sabha candidates from 16 States and two Union Territories (UT), days after a marathon meeting of the party Central Election Committee (CEC) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As many as 34 Ministers and two former Chief Ministers are on the list, which also includes 28 women, 47 leaders under the age of 50, 57 members from the OBC community, 27 from Scheduled Castes and 18 from Scheduled Tribe community. Of the 195 candidates, 51 are from the all important State of Uttar Pradesh, 20 from West Bengal and five from Delhi.

The list includes the party heavyweights PM Narendra Modi, who will be contesting from Varanasi for the third time, Home Minister Amit Shah, who will be fielded again from Gandhinagar in Gujarat, Union Women and Child



BJP leaders (L-R) Sanjay Mayukh, Baijayant Jay Panda, Vinod Tawde and Anil Baluni during the announcement of first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections at a press conference in New Delhi, Saturday

Welfare Minister Smriti Irani from Amethi, Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, and Bhupender Yadav from Rajasthan Alwar. Sushma Swaraj daughter Bansuri Swaraj, will make her poll debut from the New Delhi seat, Kamaljeet Sehrawat will contest from the from West Delhi, MLA Ramvir Singh Bidhuri from South Delhi, Praveen Khadelwal from Chandni Chowk, while Manoj Tiwari has been retained from the North East Delhi. The list also included two former Chief Ministers -- Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Biplab Deb - as well as Om Birla from Kota in Rajasthan.

Continued on Page 6

BJP HEAVYWEIGHT CANDIDATES

CANDIDATES	CONSTITUENCY
● Prime Minister Narendra Modi	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
● Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah	Gandhinagar, Gujarat
● Union Women and Child Welfare Minister Smriti Irani	Amethi, Uttar Pradesh
● Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
● Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav	Alwar, Rajasthan
● Union Health and Chemical Fertilizers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya	Porbandar, Gujarat
● Union Ayush and DONER Minister Sarbananda Sonowal	Dibrugarh
● Union Minister Kiren Rijiju	Arunachal West, Arunachal Pradesh
● Union Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia	Guna, Rajasthan
● Union Minister of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal	Bikaner, Rajasthan
● Tourism and Culture & DONER Minister G Kishan Reddy	Sikandrabad, Khunti, Jharkhand
● Union Tribal Minister Arjun Munda	Rajkot, Gujarat
● Union Animal Husbandry and Dairy Farming Minister Purshotam Rupala	Udhampur
● Union PMO & Science Tech Minister Jitendra Singh	Kheri in Uttar Pradesh
● Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra Teni	New Delhi
● Bansuri Swaraj	Kota, Rajasthan
● Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla	Kota, Rajasthan

Government pulls up Google over apps issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a strong view of Google pulling out some apps from its Play Store, the Government on Saturday said delisting of Indian apps cannot be permitted and that the tech company and the startups concerned have been called for a meeting next week.

In an interview to PTI, IT and Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the startup ecosystem is key to the Indian economy and their fate cannot be left to any big tech to decide.

The Minister's comments assume significance as Google on Friday began removing some apps, including popular matrimony apps, from its Play Store in India over a dispute on service fee payments, even as

CALLS TECH FIRMS MEET



apps and well-known startup founders cried foul.

Taking a serious view of the issue, Vaishnaw said: "India is very clear, our policy is very clear...Our startups will get the protection that they need." The Minister said the Government will be meeting Google and app developers

who have been delisted, next week, to resolve the dispute.

"I have already called Google...I have already called the app developers who have been delisted, we will be meeting them next week. This cannot be permitted..This kind of delisting cannot be permitted," he asserted.

Stating that India has built a strong startup ecosystem of over one lakh startups, and more than 100 unicorns from scratch in a matter of 10 years, the Minister said the energy of youth and entrepreneurs must be channelised fully and "cannot be left to the policies of any big tech."

"I will be telling Google...Our entrepreneurial energy...Startups, look at the whole startup India programme, 10 years back we had practically nothing and today we have more than 1,00,000 startups, more than 100 unicorns...This is something...The energy of our youth, the energy of our entrepreneurs, energy of our talented people that has to be channelised fully well, it cannot be left to the policies of any big tech," Vaishnaw said.

Continued on Page 6

Bihar to promote Buddha

ARCHNA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adorned with UNESCO World Heritage sites like the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya and the ruins of the ancient Nalanda University, Bihar is mooting a proposal to hold its first ever international roadshow in Cambodia and Vietnam, two nations steeped in Buddhist

traditions to attract the pilgrims seeking to connect their spiritual roots in the State. "Plans are being finalized and nitty-gritty being worked out," sources in the Ministry said, adding that the move aims to tap a stream of visitors seeking to connect with their spiritual roots and explore sacred sites.ce.

Abhay Kumar Singh,



Chairman and Secretary of the Department of Tourism,

Bihar Government said that this will accelerate efforts to put the State on the global map. We are trying to tap in the huge tourism potential that these Buddhists dominate. Foreign tourists visit Gaya, Bodhi Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda and Vaishali, all major Buddhist tourism destinations.

Continued on Page 6

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STF nabs two in police exam paper leak case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Special Task Force of the Uttar Pradesh Police claimed to have arrested two accused involved in the recent police recruitment exam paper leak from the Vibhuti Khand area of the state capital on Saturday. Those arrested were identified as Ajay Singh Chauhan and Sonu Singh Yadav, both of Prayagraj district. The accused were allegedly members of a gang involved in the question paper leak of the Uttar Pradesh Recruitment and Promotion Board examination on February 17 and 18, the STF said in a statement.

The STF team recovered two mobile phones, Rs 1,970 in cash, admit cards, exam-related notes and other documents. They were arrested on Friday from near Kisan Bazaar, Near Shaheed Path Bridge under the Vibhuti Khand police station. During interrogation, Ajay Singh said revealed that they had a big gang which dealt in leak of exam question papers and employing/sending solvers who take competitive examinations for beneficiaries. He said Sonu, Rajan Yadav, and Sushil Bharti, both of Prayagraj, are the members of the gang.

He disclosed that the gang charged a hefty sum of money for providing question papers to those seeking their 'services' before the examination, and they obtained the question papers from the active gangs by paying the money they collected from different candidates.

He further disclosed that in the police recruitment examination, Rajan Yadav had obtained question papers and answers from some active



paper mafia and made them available to many candidates by taking huge amounts of money. The accused said they were hiding after the government cancelled the paper and assigned the probe to the STF. The STF has lodged an FIR against the duo under the Indian Penal Code sections 419 (punishment for cheating by personation), 420 (cheating by inducement), 467 (forgery of valuable documents), 468 (forgery for the purpose of cheating), 471 (using as genuine a forged document) and 386 (extortion by putting any person in fear of death or of grievous hurt) at the Vibhuti Khand police station of Lucknow.

Meanwhile, a man lost Rs 2.75 lakh in a credit card fraud in Chowk police station area on Saturday. Reports said Mohammed Amir of Katra Azam Baig in Nakkhas had applied for a credit card from IDFC bank and a representative, Mohammed Haroon, visited his house to verify his credentials. Haroon collected all the information and then told the victim about a scheme regarding porting of Jio network to Airtel.

"Haroon used my documents and activated a SIM in my name, but using the identity of another person. He later withdrew the money using my credit card," he alleged.

History-sheeter batters brother to death

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A history-sheeter allegedly battered his eldest brother to death over a domestic dispute at their under-construction house in Nishatganj on Saturday afternoon.

As per reports, the victim, Babu Yadav aka Dashrath Yadav, was an electrician and ran a shop along with his brother Bhanu. Babu and Bhanu stayed in a rented accommodation opposite their parental house where construction work is currently going on. The victim was getting his portion of house constructed on the first floor and his youngest brother Raj Kishore aka Chresto on the ground floor.

Around 2 pm on Saturday, Raj Kishor, along with his wife Sushma and their daughter Kajla, reached the under-construction house. Babu also came out of his rented house

after having lunch. As it was drizzling, he shifted his cow under a shed in the under-construction house. Seeing Babu there, Raj Kishore lost his cool and picked a fight with him.

Hearing commotion, Babu's wife Kusum and their daughter Muskan intervened only to be attacked by Raj Kishor with bricks. He then attacked Babu with bricks till the latter collapsed. Babu was rushed to KGMU Trauma Centre where he was pronounced dead. DCP, Central, Ravina Tyagi said a case under culpable homicide was registered against the accused.

The victim's daughter said that Raj Kishore often argued with her father. Two days ago too, there was a dispute between Raj Kishore and Babu over the possession of the house. "However, neighbours intervened and pacified both. Raj Kishor would often threaten to kill Babu and his chil-

dren," relatives of the deceased alleged.

Muskan told the police that Raj Kishor also has a shop in Nishatganj and that he is an ill-tempered person. "He had beaten up Bhanu uncle a few years ago, making the latter deaf. He had a criminal history and the police used to raid the house off and on," she said, adding another brother (Nand Kishor) of the victim had settled in Bareilly.

Meanwhile, a 30-year-old man was killed in a road mishap in BBD police station area on Saturday. As per reports, Sandeep Singh of Noorpur Behta village in the area was going to his workplace in Chinhat when his motorcycle was hit by a speeding vehicle. Passersby took him to a hospital but he died on the way. Police registered a case on a complaint given by the deceased's brother Atul Singh.

Gujarat CM, ministers visit Ram temple



PNS ■ AYODHYA

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, along with his council of ministers, experienced a deeply emotional moment as they had the darshan of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya.

This is their visit to Ayodhya after the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla idol in the temple in Ayodhya on January 22 this year.

Addressing the media after the visit, Patel expressed the profound significance of the occasion, saying it was a big moment because it showed the importance of Lord Ram and the desire to make Ram Rajya last for a long time.

Accompanied by a 25-member delegation, Chief Minister Patel arrived in Ayodhya on Saturday to pay homage to Ram Lalla.

Reflecting on the spiritual journey, he emphasised the sanctity of the event, describing it as a moment of immense privilege and emotion for all involved.

In a bid to facilitate the pilgrimage for devotees from Gujarat, Patel announced plans for the construction of a Yatri Niwas in Ayodhya.

Recognising the influx of devotees from across the nation to witness the glory of the Ram temple, Patel underscored the importance of providing adequate facilities for pilgrims.

He said that the Gujarat government had initiated a special Aastha train to facilitate travel for thousands of devotees, ensuring they got the opportunity to seek blessings from Ram Lalla.

Expressing gratitude towards UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the Uttar

Pradesh government, Patel acknowledged their support in allocating land for the proposed Yatri Niwas that would be built by the Gujarat government.

With a budget of Rs 10 crore set aside for this purpose, the Yatri Niwas aims to cater to the accommodation needs of devotees visiting Ayodhya, offering them a comfortable resting place during their spiritual sojourn.

"As Gujarat extends its hand of hospitality to pilgrims, Chief Minister Bhupendra Bhai Patel's visit to Ayodhya not only reinforces the spiritual ties between the two states but also underscores the commitment to honouring the cultural and religious heritage of India," said Anil Mishra, a member of the Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Two held for fraudulently securing ₹17-lakh loan

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Police on Saturday claimed to have nabbed two cyber thugs for fraudulently securing a loan of Rs 17 lakh using the FD of a woman and for getting a four-wheeler financed using another bank account of hers.

Those arrested were identified as Mohammed Fahad and Mohammed Sartaj, both of Katra Azam Baig in Nakkhas under Chowk police station.

The police said that during a routine visit, the woman was informed by the Nakkhas branch of SBI that she had secured a loan of Rs 17 lakh. She was told that someone had got an SUV financed using the details of her joint bank account.

After she filed a complaint, the police swung into action. Investigations revealed that someone had secured full transaction rights by giving a fake application in her name

and forging her signature. It also came to the fore that her registered mobile number was also changed using her forged signature. The accused used a mobile app to get an overdraft of Rs 17 lakh against her FD.

They got an SUV financed in the name of her husband who had died seven years ago.

The police team tracked the IP address and other details of the accused, who were nabbed. The police also recovered the SUV.

KGMU gets Pulmonary Rehabilitation Centre

Lucknow (PNS): The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Centre was inaugurated at the department of respiratory medicine, King George's Medical University, on Saturday. The centre aims to provide respiratory rehabilitation services to patients suffering from chronic respiratory diseases. Head of the department, Prof Surya Kant highlighted the centre's specialties. Established and operated by Cipla Foundation under the Corporate Social Responsibility scheme, the centre will offer cardio-pulmonary physiotherapy, and diet & psychological counselling to chronic respiratory patients at no cost.

The centre will cater to patients with various respiratory diseases — such as asthma, COPD, and interstitial lung disease — who experience persistent shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing during or after treatment. Through physical exercises, nutritional advice and counselling, efforts are made to enhance their quality of life and functional capacity. Patients will be registered on the advice of doctors for counselling and nutritional guidance. They can subsequently participate in online sessions as per their needs.

Vice-Chancellor of KGMU Dr Soniya Nityanand extended her best wishes for the project's success, emphasising the importance of respiratory physiotherapy, proper diet, and psychological counselling alongside medication in managing chronic respiratory diseases.

New director of RMLIMS to focus on trauma care, emergency medicine

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The newly-appointed director of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr CM Singh, who was heading the community medicine department of AIIMS (Patna), said here on Saturday that he would be focusing on trauma care and emergency medicine.

"There is no trauma centre at RMLIMS and my priority will be to strengthen the emergency medicine and start a trauma centre here. I will also be working to activate the neuroscience block since a lot of the patients are referred to other hospitals from there because the neurology and neurosurgery departments have only 24 beds each. I also want to establish a centre of excellence for research since I have seen that the extramural funding is very less at the institute," said Dr Singh, who will be taking charge shortly.

Listing out the strong points of RMLIMS, he said: "It is located in Gomti Nagar, the heart of the city. The second thing is that the patient load is good and nearly 200 students are getting admission in MBBS. Postgraduation courses have already been started, though the number is less. There are a lot of good things but then there are challenges too."

About his own background, Dr Singh said he belongs to Azamgarh and graduated from GSVN College in Kanpur (1991 batch).

"I did MD from Jhansi from 1999 to 2002 and worked



Dr CM Singh

as a senior resident at the Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU, from 2002 to 2005. I worked for a few years at the Chhattisgarh Institute of Medical Sciences and then joined the Rural Institute of Medical Sciences, Etawah, in December 2006 and worked there till July 2012. Then I joined AIIMS (Patna) and worked as medical superintendent for six years and then as dean of academics," he elaborated. "RMLIMS and AIIMS share the same objectives. I have been familiar with those areas for the last 12 years. I was very much aware of what I was required to do when I applied for the job," he said.

As for reforms, he said he would strengthen the hospital information system and work on the hospital revolving funds. "At AIIMS (Patna), I developed a system of hospital revolving fund in which every medicine is being purchased only from original manufacturers at very low cost so as to reduce the treatment cost. I will take the same initiative here as well," he added.

LMC to make eight roads smart

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Municipal Corporation will start construction of eight smart roads under the Chief Minister Grid Scheme. Chief engineer Mahesh Verma said Rs 250 crore have been allocated for it under the scheme and the work would begin in a month's time. He added that the work would be completed in a year's time. Verma said these eight already existing roads would be converted into smart roads through proper arrangements for seating, street lights, areas marked out for horticulture, shifting of cables underground, proper pathways for the pedestrians and streamlining of traf-

fic. Verma said that the only other smart road constructed in the city was Mahatma Gandhi Marg by Public Works Department.

The chief engineer said that the eight roads were selected by a committee headed by the mayor and consisting of the district magistrate, vice-chairman of Lucknow Development Authority, municipal commissioner and PWD engineers.

These roads the one in front of Lucknow University, the stretch from Rajnikhand Power House to Sainik Dhaba on the Rae Bareilly road, from Tadikhana divider to Pappu General Store in Jai Shankar Prasad ward, from Mantri Awas to Ayodhya road from Purania in Aliganj to Sector Q,

and from IGNOU turn to Allen House. The estimated cost of the project is Rs 133 crore, while the length covered is 142 km. The chief engineer said it was a new scheme and they would be using a new technology for the construction of smart roads. "We are using the CGBM (Cement Grout Bituminous Mix) technique. It is environment-friendly because the plastic generated in the environment is used for construction. We are collecting plastic for the purpose," he added.

Meanwhile, Verma said that there are 8,000-km roads in all eight zones under LMC. He said LMC was mainly carrying out the repair work in these zones.

Scores of women leaders, workers join RLD

Lucknow (PNS): Scores of women leaders and workers from various political parties like Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party and various social organisations joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal on Saturday. RLD national spokesperson Anil Dubey and national president of Nari Shakti Sangathan Manisha Ahlawat were present on this occasion. RLD national secretary Anupam Mishra said the workers and leaders who joined the party were inspired by the ideology of Bharat Ratna Chaudhary Charan Singh and expressed their faith in the leadership of RLD national president Jayant Chaudhary. Mishra said the new members would further strengthen the RLD's Nari Shakti Sangathan.

"With your support, RLD national president Jayant Chaudhary will get more political strength and the participation of women in the party will increase. Do consider the RLD a family from now and you all are honourable members of this family," he said.

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I Buniyad Baqar Rizvi Son of Yad Hasan Rizvi Residence of 27/6-K, Raja Ram Mohan Rai Marg, Ktraulia House Campus, Hazratganj, Lucknow- 226001, Uttar Pradesh. My alias name is Fawad Askari. Due to some mistake, in the record where my alias name Fawad Askari has been written my correct name Buniyad Baqar Rizvi should be updated in the record.

NOTICE
My name is registered as Vikas Kumar in my Aadhar card, whereas in the online registration form of my daughter Bhavya Yadav's Don Bosco School, my name has been erroneously mentioned as Vikas Kumar Yadav. While the correct name is Vikas Kumar, Moh. Kashinagar, Lakhimpur-Kheri.

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I PAARTH ASTHANA S/o Mr. MUKESH KUMAR R/o 293/245, OLD HAIDER GANJ, LUCKNOW, declare wide afdt. no. 81AE 901769 dated 01-03-2024 that my father's name was incorrectly spelt as MUKEH KUMAR in my class X certificates. The correct spelling of my fathers name is MUKESH KUMAR and should be considered for all purposes. Both MUKESH KUMAR and MUKESH KUMAR are the name of one and same person. i.e. my father.

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I have changed my name from Anshuma To Anshuma Devi for all future purpose, Anshuma Devi W/O Vinay Pratap Yadav R/O 5-B, Rajeev Nagar Gangapur Colony, Post- Kidwai Nagar Kanpur

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I have changed my name from KAUSR JAMEEL to KAUSAR JAMEEL W/O ATAUR RAHMAN R/o 581/474 FAITHFULGANJ Kanpur NAGAR for all future purpose.

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I, Vinay Pratap Yadav S/o Shri. Babulal R/o 5-B Rajeev Nagar, Gangapur colony, Post-Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur nagar-208011. I have changed my Daughter Name from AKHAYA to AKHYA. Now she should be known and understand by name AKHYA.

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I am Abhishek Sharma s/o Shri Vijay Sharma, I have changed my son's name from Krishna Sharma to Abhigyan Sharma, in future my son should be known and recognized as Abhigyan Sharma. Krishna Sharma and Abhigyan Sharma both names are of my son. Abhishek Sharma s/o Mr. Vijay Sharma, 128/1180,Y Block Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Uttar Pradesh- 208011

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NOTICE
I have changed my daughter's name from Hiti Dwivedi To Mishaa Dwivedi for all future purpose, Mishaa Dwivedi D/O Puneet Kumar Dwivedi R/O 6/519, Nehru Nagar, Shuklaganj Unnao



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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vehicle Tata 207, Mahindra Maxi truck etc. for transportation of Milk from Societies/ Farms at MCC Samana(Route No. 14,15 & 28)	03 No's

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Tech bringing rapid changes in lives of common people: Yogi

CM inaugurates 1,100 Annapurna Bhawans

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, said that the increasing use of technology in government work was bringing about rapid changes in the lives of common people. He added that Ram rajya was all about good governance, ensuring every citizen's access to welfare schemes without discrimination.

The chief minister made these remarks while speaking at a programme organised by the Food and Civil Supplies and Rural Development departments at Lok Bhavan.

He said, "Reforms in every aspect of life, aligned with Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's vision, have not only increased transparency but are also contributing towards ending corruption."

The chief minister inaugurated 1,100 Annapurna Bhawans and launched electronic weighing scale-linked e-POS machines at 79,000 fair

price shops across the state on the occasion.

Chief Minister Yogi said that with the continuous efforts of public representatives, the government had been successful in providing food grains to every poor person.

"Before 2014, those in need did not receive ration. They had ration cards in their names, but the ration would be distributed elsewhere. In fact, before 2017, there were deaths due to hunger in several districts of the state," he stated.

"However, we have now started using technology such as e-POS and electronic weighing machines. This has led to extensive reforms in the distribution of rations. In the reforms carried out by the Food and Civil Supplies department, around 80,000 ration quota shops in the state are benefiting approximately 15 crore beneficiaries," Chief Minister Yogi added.

Referring to the technology-based food distribution system, Chief Minister Yogi said that it had not only solved the problem of hunger but has also ended corruption in the system.

"Earlier, once the ration left the FCI (Food Corporation of India) warehouses, it would disappear midway. But now it is being monitored from Lucknow itself to ensure that the ration actually reaches the allocated quota shop. This change is in line with the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' (development for all). This is Modi ji's mantra which is visible at the ground level," he asserted.

Chief Minister Yogi said that before 2014, such a scenario was impossible. "Getting ration to the poor was a distant dream, and these kinds of improvements were unimaginable," he remarked.

Speaking of the 1,100 Annapurna Bhawans, the chief minister said that they had now become permanent structures for the ration quota.

"Even if the shopkeeper changes the ration shops will remain the same. Apart from ration, these Annapurna Bhawans will provide other facilities as well, including

affordable generic medicines and other essential household items," he said.

"Additionally, there will be a common service centre where services like birth certificates, death certificates, income certificates and caste certificates



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath providing ration kits to a beneficiary

can be obtained. Currently, the initiative is starting with 1,100 shops and soon this arrangement will be extended to the 80,000 ration quota shops across the state," the chief minister said.

"When the government is

sensitive, it opens the doors to the people's safety and prosperity. The double-engine government is working at double speed because its sole aim is to develop, provide a secure environment, and bring prosperity. We are committed to

advancing the work of poverty alleviation without any discrimination," Chief Minister Yogi added.

Attacking the opposition, Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that due to lack of vision in earlier governments, ponds were dug once, then filled, and later dug again under MGNREGA scheme. "However, today, new construction projects are underway, and Annapurna Bhawans are being constructed. This not only provides employment but also facilities for the people," he said.

The chief minister mentioned that the government is soon going to take some more significant steps. The work of Aadhaar seeding of every ration card is underway. Family IDs for every individual are being prepared, which will determine the facilities received by each family member, making it easy to identify and allocate services.

He also said that soon, the people of Uttar Pradesh would not have to visit tehsils to check their revenue documents as all their documents will be available at one place. This facility will be integrated with the inheritance process, and

through technology, the perennial problem of metering will also be permanently resolved, he added.

On this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi handed over symbolic keys of Annapurna Bhawans to 10 fair price vendors of the state. Among them were Jaglal from Lucknow, Ashok Kumar and Dharendra Vikram from Rae Bareilly, Rekha Devi and Puspha Devi from Barabanki, Lokai Prasad and Malti Devi from Unnao, Anjani Kumar and Jitendra from Hardoi, and Mohammad Niyaz Khan from Sitapur. On this occasion, the chief minister also provided ration kits to the beneficiaries.

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, State Minister for Food and Civil Supplies Satish Chandra Sharma, State Minister for Rural Development Vijay Laxmi Gautam, Chief Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra, Principal Secretary (Food and Civil Supplies) Alok Kumar, along with other departmental officers from 1,100 Annapurna Bhawans of the state attended the programme. Public representatives were present through virtual medium.

CEC: Will ensure inclusive, participative elections



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar addressing mediapersons in Lucknow on Saturday

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the poll panel would take all steps to ensure inducement-free, black money and muscle power-free Lok Sabha elections. He said the Election Commission was fully committed to conducting free and fair Lok Sabha elections and ensuring level playing field to all political parties.

CEC Rajiv Kumar was addressing a press conference here on Saturday after the end of the poll panel team's three-day visit to Lucknow to review the poll preparedness for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

He said certain political parties had expressed apprehensions over the electronic voting machines (EVMs) and demanded that they be transported only in government vehicles. The CEC said the poll panel had taken effective measures to curb the use of unaccounted money and muscle power. He said besides digital transactions, a candidate would have to make all expenditures through cheques and each candidate would be given a cheque book of 200 cheques.

The CEC said the poll panel would ensure inclusive and participative election and focus on youth. He said all initiatives would be taken to increase the participation of female voters. On corrective measures to ensure better poll percentage, Kumar said 10 Lok Sabha constituencies had been

identified for targeted intervention and voters of these constituencies were being sensitized and awareness was being spread.

In these 10 constituencies, the voter turnout in 2019 Lok Sabha elections ranged between 54 per cent to 48 per cent, which was below the state's turnout of 59.11 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh is the largest state with 80 Lok Sabha constituencies, which include 17 seats reserved for scheduled castes. The total number of polling stations in UP is 1,62,012 which includes 38,959 in urban areas. The number of electorates in UP is 15.28 crore.

He said for the multi-story apartments, separate polling booths will be set up.

Kumar said the ECI would ensure participation of voters of all walks of life and senior citizens and Divyang with over 40 per cent disability would get facility of voting from home. He said on the demand of political parties the postal ballots would be counted first.

Kumar said central paramilitary forces along with state police would be deployed at all polling booths and all booths would be assured minimum facilities, where voters would get amenities like toilets, ramps and drinking water.

The CEC said during the visit the full Election Commission of India team held discussions with different stakeholders like political parties, District election officers cum district magistrates and

other senior field officers, Central police forces and various enforcement agencies.

He said the election seizure management system, a tech platform, was in force which was providing real time updates on seizures. The CEC said during the review meeting with police officials, enforcement agencies and nodal officers of Central police forces the ECI team gave thrust on synchronised efforts along the interstate border, international border, airports, railway stations and helipads.

The ECI directed that strict vigil be maintained at international and interstate borders. In Uttar Pradesh, 30 districts share borders with nine states and seven districts share an international border with Nepal running a length of 555 kilometres.

Kumar said strict vigilance would be observed to curb the menace of fake currency, illegal arms, freebies, liquor and black money. He said full transparency would be ensured during distribution of EVMs and polling agents would be apprised about the movement of the EVMs to booths.

The CEC said a level playing field would be provided to all political parties irrespective of their stature and strength and the district magistrates and district police chiefs would have to ensure this. "If any officer violates it the Election Commission of India will strongly deal in the matter," he said.

LS poll: BJP forms election steering committee for UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Following the recent meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Central Election Committee in Delhi, the formation of an election steering committee has been announced for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. The committee, comprising five members, will be chaired by Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, with PWD Minister Jitin Prasada serving as the co-convenor.

Other members of the committee include BJP state vice-president Mohit Beniwal, Kanta Kardam, MLC Dharmendra Singh, UP's Cooperation Minister JPS Rathore, and MLA Pankaj Singh. Their responsibilities encompass campaign management, booth organisation and liaising with the Election Commission of India.

In light of the BJP's defeat in 16 seats parliamentary constituencies in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, strategies are being devised to reclaim these seats. While BJP secured victories in the Rampur and Azamgarh by-elections, efforts are underway to regain the remaining 14 seats.

Discussions during the BJP Central Election Committee meeting in Delhi revolved around formulating strategies and identifying potential candidates for these constituencies.

Among the Lok Sabha seats targeted for resurgence are Ghazipur, Ghoshi, Nagina, Saharanpur, Bijnor, Amroha, Shravasti, Ambedkar Nagar, Lalganj, Mainpuri, Jaunpur, Sambhal, Rae Bareilly and Moradabad. Notably, the BJP has recently made strides in Ambedkar Nagar, with Bahujan Samaj Party MP Ritesh Pandey joining the party's ranks.

Consideration of candidates on these seats extends to

ministers, MLAs, actors, and allied parties, as per sources within the BJP's election committee. The BJP Central Election Committee also scrutinised high-profile Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh during its recent meeting. Over 50 seats in the state were discussed, including those held by prominent figures such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Varanasi), Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (Lucknow), Union Minister Smriti Irani (Amethi), Union Minister SP Singh Baghel (Agra) and Union Minister Sanjeev Balyan (Muzaffarnagar).

The BJP committee is considering nominations for these seats, with potential candidates ranging from ministers and MLAs to individuals from the film industry.

In a departure from previous practices, the BJP Lok Sabha Election Committee has outlined specific criteria for ticket allocation in each constituency. MPs aged above 75 years, those embroiled in controversies, and those facing anti-incumbency sentiments within their constituencies are likely to have their tickets revoked.

Notable MPs falling under these categories include Mathura MP Hema Malini, Prayagraj MP Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Bareilly MP Santosh Gangwar, Kanpur MP Satyadev Pachauri and Bahraich MP Akshaywar Lal Gaur.

Additionally, parliamentarians such as Kaiserganj MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, Kheri MP Ajay Mishra Teni, Mohanlalgarh MP Kaushal Kishore, Dumariaganj MP Jagdambika Pal, Meerut MP Rajendra Agarwal, Sultanpur MP Maneka Gandhi and Pilibhit MP Varun Gandhi may be denied tickets due to various factors, including controversies and performance concerns.

Govt cancels RO, ARO exams

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant development, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took swift action on Saturday to address allegations of paper leak surrounding the Review Officer/Assistant Review Officer (Preliminary) Examination-2023, which took place on February 11, a government spokesman said here on Saturday.

The chief minister emphasised the need for transparency and fairness in the examination process, stating that a fresh examination will be conducted within the next six months to ensure a fair and impartial assessment of all candidates.

In addition to the decision to reschedule the examination, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has instructed the case to be referred to the Special Task Force (STF) of the state. The STF will be tasked with identifying individuals

involved in the alleged criminal activities of leaking examination materials. Strict legal and punitive actions will be taken against those found responsible.

The chief minister emphasised the urgency of the STF investigation, expecting swift results. He assured the public that all individuals involved in compromising the integrity of the examination will face appropriate consequences.

"The government remains committed to upholding the sanctity of the examination process and ensuring a level playing field for all aspiring candidates," the chief minister said in a statement issued here.

Earlier, the government had ordered the cancellation of the police constables recruitment examination in which papers had leaked on February 17 and 18. The STF is also probing this matter.

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53.79 LMT paddy procured from over 8 lakh farmers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government, during the ongoing Kharif marketing season 2023-24, has procured 53.79 lakh metric tons of paddy from over eight lakh farmers.

The government has so far made payment of over Rs 11,745 crore to the farmers.

The maximum purchase of paddy has taken place in Lucknow division, with Bareilly at second place.

The government had set the minimum support price for common paddy at Rs 2,183 per quintal and Rs 2,203 per quintal for Grade A paddy.

In terms of procurement, Lucknow division tops the list, with purchase of over 7.52 lakh metric ton of paddy. Bareilly division has secured the second position with 6.49 lakh metric ton paddy pro-

urement, followed closely by Varanasi division with purchase of more than 6.18 lakh metric ton of paddy.

Additionally, procurement from over one lakh farmers was recorded in both the Lucknow and Ayodhya divisions.

Additionally, Gorakhpur division purchased 5.09 lakh metric ton of paddy, Ayodhya division 5.78 lakh metric ton, Moradabad division 4.61 lakh metric ton, Prayagraj division 4.53 lakh metric ton, Devipatan division 3.38 lakh metric ton, Basti division 2.89 lakh metric ton, Mirzapur division 2.68 lakh metric ton and Azamgarh division 2.12 lakh metric ton.

Furthermore, Kanpur division procured 1.81 lakh metric ton of paddy while Chitrakoot Dham division purchased over 42,000

metric ton.

The Yogi Adityanath government provided extensive support to farmers for paddy procurement, resulting in high participation from across the state.

The highest number of purchases were made from farmers in Lucknow division, totalling 1,05,925. Similarly, paddy was purchased from 1,02,908 farmers in Ayodhya, 91,409 in Gorakhpur, 90,145 in Varanasi, 79,960 in Bareilly, 78,933 in Prayagraj, 54,604 in Moradabad, 47,242 in Devipatan, 40,831 in Mirzapur, 38,079 in Azamgarh, 36,252 in Basti, 24,035 in Kanpur, and 7,650 in Chitrakoot.

Overall, paddy was procured from 8,01,624 farmers at 5,207 centres spanning eastern and western Uttar Pradesh.

Haiderpur Wetland to host Bird Festival today

Lucknow (PNS): Bird enthusiasts, nature lovers, and tourists are eagerly anticipating the upcoming Bird Festival at Haiderpur Wetland, set to take place on Sunday (March 3). Hosted by the Uttar Pradesh Eco Tourism Development Board, this festival promises an unforgettable experience amidst the scenic beauty of Haiderpur Wetland, showcasing a diverse range of avian species thriving in their natural habitat.

The festival will begin at 7 am with an enthralling bird-watching expedition led by expert naturalists. The attendees will have the opportunity to witness firsthand the mesmerising array of birdlife inhabiting the wetland, providing a unique insight into their ecology and behaviour.

Additionally, newcomers to birdwatching can take part in

informative workshops aimed at enhancing their understanding of avian life. As the day unfolds, participants will delve into the aquatic realm with a captivating dolphin boat safari scheduled from 11 am to 12 pm. This rare excursion offers a glimpse into the world of these majestic creatures, adding another dimension to the festival experience.

Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiver Singh said, "We are thrilled to host the Bird Festival at Haiderpur Wetland. It will provide a platform for individuals to connect with nature and promote the rich bird biodiversity and eco-tourism of Uttar Pradesh. There is a huge potential in eco-tourism and adventure tourism in Uttar Pradesh for which the government is committed to developing tourism facilities in these destinations."

LU prof pens book on Modi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Professor of economics at Lucknow University, MK Agarwal has authored a book titled 'Modi Empowers Development' on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Agarwal explained that the idea for this endeavour stemmed from a lack of authentic research on PM Modi's developmental works, with existing analyses predominantly in fictional or political formats. He emphasised academic perspective in analysing Modi's developmental initiatives through the book.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated a series of economic, technological, governance, and institutional reforms. The sequencing of these reforms indicates a well-thought-out strategy for efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Although the time frame for

these initiatives is not extensive enough for a time series analysis, their magnitude and positive outcomes motivate us to scrutinise the economic strategy of the Modi government since 2014," he said.

Agarwal acknowledged the impossibility of encompassing all initiatives within one volume but affirmed that the book provides a comprehensive picture of the government's success and transformative potential. The book comprises 19 chapters covering various aspects such as constitutional to competitive federalism, inclusive development strategies, fiscal prudence, self-reliant India, connectivity, rural development, health sector, agricultural development, e-governance, tourism development, telecommunications, power, space, Jammu and Kashmir, minorities, north-eastern states, and women empowerment.

Agarwal also raised questions regarding GDP estimation, highlighting instances where strategies aimed at societal well-being might not directly contribute to GDP growth, such as in the health sector. The author said that the book took a couple of years to complete, starting in the late 2020s and concluding in 2022.

While Agarwal emphasised on presenting the book as an academic exercise devoid of political bias, he acknowledged the inherently political nature of economics. He stressed that the analysis was based on facts, figures, and theories.

In a chapter called 'Inclusive Development Strategies of the Modi Government', Agarwal commended the government's efforts to uplift the poor since 2014, noting successful achievement of many targets within defined time periods.

इण्डियन ओवरसीज बैंक (भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)			Indian Overseas Bank (A GOVERNMENT OF INDIA UNDERTAKING)	E-Auction Notice
RO: Lucknow CO: Chennai				
Date & Time of E-Auction-20.03.2024 from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM. (With Auto extension of 10 minutes each till sale is completed) Last Date for submission of online application for BID with EMD-19.03.2024 upto 1:00 PM				
E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF MOVABLE-IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES				
E-Auction Sale Notice for the Sale of Movable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rules 6(2) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002				
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) Mortgagor(s), Guarantor(s), Director(s) and Legal Heir(s) that the below described movable Property Mortgaged/charged to the Secured creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Indian Overseas Bank (Secured creditor), will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" on above mentioned date of sale, for recovery of mentioned below amount & future interest and other charges due to the Indian Overseas Bank (Secured creditor) from mentioned below Borrower(s) Mortgagor(s), Guarantor(s), Director(s) and Legal Heir(s). The reserve price and earnest money deposit amount is mentioned below. The sale will be done by the undersigned through e-auction platform provided at the Web Portal https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi .				
Name & Address of Borrower/ Mortgagor/Guarantors		Description of Movable property	Outstanding Amount	Reserve Price - Rs. Bid Increase Amt.
Branch- Asset Recovery Management Branch, Add.: 3rd Floor, Navchetna Kendra, 10, Ashok Marg Lucknow-226001(UP), Email-ibob2594@ibob.in, Ph.-0522-4934668				
1.M/s Vinayak Cold Storage (Borrower) Village & Post of M/s Vinayak Cold Storage situated at Kiroli District-282007		Plant & Machinery of M/s Vinayak Cold Storage situated at Khasra No. 491, Mauza- Keetham, Keetham Achhnera Road, Dist-Agra	Rs. 10,14,25,297/- as on 29.02.2024 +further interest at contractual rates and rests Charges etc.	Rs. 4,85,100/- Rs. 48,810/- Rs. 10,000/- +Applicable GST
2.Smt. Veero Devi W/o Late Ghanashyam (Partner/ Mortgagor) R/o -276, Maharisipuram Behind Amar Ujala Agra-282007.				
3. Smt. Premwati W/o Mr. Madhav Dixit (Partner/ Mortgagor) R/o -276, Maharisipuram Behind Amar Ujala Agra-282007.				
4.Mr. Madhav Prasad Dixit (Partner/Guarantor/ Mortgagor) R/o 276, Maharisipuram Behind Amar Ujala Agra-282007.				
* Electricity Dues on Cold Storage- Electricity Dues known is Rs.14,11,950/-				
A/c Details-Indian Overseas Bank, A/c Name -Safraesi Sale Parking Account, A/c No. 25940113035001, IFSC Code: IOBA0002594, Branch Code: 2594				
*Bank's dues have priority over the Statutory dues. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the service provider's link https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi or bank's website http://www.ioib.in . For Properties inspection or Participating in bid of the above properties for any clarification interested purchaser may contact above mentioned Branch Manager/Authorised Officer.				
Date: 01.03.2024		Place: Lucknow	Authorised Officer, Indian Overseas Bank	

Governor for action plan to educate differently-abled kids with ease

PNS ■ VARANASI

Governor Anandiben Patel, during her two-day visit to Varanasi, held a meeting with officials at the Circuit House on Friday evening and asked them to prepare and implement an effective and efficient action plan on priority basis for providing education to Divyang (differently-abled) children in schools with ease so that quality education can be easily provided to them from primary to higher education.

She asked the officials to ensure that all the differently-abled children who were ready to study after Class 8 were counseled and given admissions in Class 9 to 12 in secondary level schools by establishing contact with them and their parents. She said that as Shakuntala University provided free education, accommodation, food and all types of education for the differently-abled students and such students willing to get higher education should be motivated for maximum admission there.

During the meeting, Chief Development Officer Himanshu Nagpal informed the governor that medical camps were recently organised for the children of Anganwadi Kendras and primary schools, in which medical check-up of 600 children was done. Along with this, he apprised the governor that the needy differently-abled children were provided appliances and about 3,000 children had benefitted from the Mukhyamantri Sponsorship Yojana. District social welfare officer, district inspector of schools, basic shiksha adhikari and other officers were also present. Earlier, the governor participated in a programme organised for strengthening Anganwadi Kendras in the commissionerate auditorium. During the programme, kits were distributed to Anganwadi



Governor Anandiben Patel talking to officials at Circuit House in Varanasi on Friday evening

Kendras with the help of GAIL India Limited.

Addressing the function, Governor Anandiben Patel appreciated everyone's efforts for the memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed on the occasion.

"Today's child is our future tomorrow and if we pay attention to her/him today then she/he will prove helpful in making India a world leader tomorrow," she said.

Highlighting her efforts in the Gujarat government in 1998, Governor Anandiben Patel said the ICDS Unit and Women and Child Development department came into existence and major welfare schemes gradually came into existence on the national platform.

"If children get good care before and after birth, then health problems can be controlled to a great extent. All deliveries should take place in hospitals so that proper care of the mothers and children can be taken at the time of birth," the governor said, adding that by distributing these types of kits, children who are slow learners can be identified and by taking proper care of them in time, they can be brought into the cat-

egory of good children.

She stressed on early screening to prevent the increasing cases of cancer in women. She asked various companies to spend their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for women and girls so that serious diseases can be prevented while giving a new life to the society.

She said that only in Uttar Pradesh, about 15 lakh women were suffering from cancer and to prevent it, the women should get tested for early detection.

UP's Labour and Employment Minister Anil Rajbhar, while mentioning the governor's continuous efforts in this direction, said that people of other states were also eager to adopt her initiatives. Rajbhar said that due to the efforts of the governor, the poor settlements were also getting benefits.

Appreciating the continuous efforts of Anganwadi workers in various fields, he also underlined their cooperation in self-reliant India.

Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH Dr Dayashankar Mishra thanked the governor for how she took care of women and children and expressed his gratitude for her special atten-

tion to Varanasi.

Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya expressed gratitude to the governor for paying special attention to Varanasi and praised the Anganwadi workers for their attachment towards small children.

CDO Himanshu Nagpal said that GAIL India Limited had ensured distribution of kits at 500 Anganwadi Kendras during the day and in the past too, kits had been distributed to 715 centres. Besides, he said, in the past also 1,419 centres had been rejuvenated and Poshan Vatikas (nutrition gardens) had been established at 2,500 centres.

As a result of various health efforts, out of 25,000 children identified, 9,000 have been completely cured by treatment. The attendance of children at Anganwadi Kendras has increased from 45 per cent to 80 per cent and continuous administrative efforts are being made to increase it to 100 per cent. Varanasi has been at the first position on the nutrition tracker for the last one year, he added.

GAIL General Manager Sushil Kumar and many senior officers were also present.

Preps in full swing for Mahakumbh

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Preparations for Mahakumbh, to be held in Prayagraj next year, have intensified. Special arrangements are being made for the security of devotees coming to the grand event. Preparations are being made to install double the number of CCTV cameras in Mahakumbh 2025 as compared to Kumbh-2019. The entire mela area will be covered with these cameras. There will also be 120 parking lots. Artificial intelligence-based video analytics will be used to get better feed from the cameras for better crowd management analysis. Using this model will be easier for the administration to safely evacuate people from overcrowded places on time and make better arrangements for crowd management on overcrowded roads. In order to make this model foolproof, a dry run will be conducted beforehand. Every type of error testing will be done so that no problem arises during Mahakumbh.

In Mahakumbh, the call centre running in ICCC (Integrated Command and Control Centre) will also be expanded. The number of seats will be increased from 30 to 50. Apart from this, there is a proposal to increase the viewing centres from two to four. Apart from ICCC and Modern Control Room, Police Line MCR (CCC), one viewing centre each will also be built in Jhunsi and Arail areas. In order to further improve crowd management and security and surveillance in Mahakumbh 2025, the ICCC will be upgraded.

Many important decisions were taken in a meeting held in this regard. Mela Adhikari, Mahakumbh, Vijay Kiran Anand said preparations were going on in view of Mahakumbh-2025.

Cop hacked to death by kin

PNS ■ KANPUR

A police constable was hacked to death over an old family dispute in Etawah on Saturday, police said. The accused have been held and the murder weapon has been recovered, they said.

Saifai Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Verma said the victim, Anil Kumar (36), was killed by his kin Darshan Singh and his friends who attacked him with a knife and a shovel on Saturday morning in Gauvapura village, Saifai.

Kumar, a constable posted in Mathura district, had come home on leave on Friday. "We have Darshan Singh and one of his accomplices and recovered the murder weapon from the spot. The body has been sent for post-mortem and investigations are underway," said the officer.

Meanwhile, a youth, who had gone to a wedding ceremony on Friday, was found dead under mysterious circumstances in a field in Safipur Kotwali police area of Unnao on Saturday morning. He was identified as Manoj (30), son of Suryapal of Atwa village. He had gone to Asiwani police area for the marriage of Lakhan's son Lallan on Friday. On Saturday morning, his body was found lying face down in a mustard field on the outskirts of Mawail village, about two kilometres away from Aliganj under Safipur



Etawah SSP Sanjay Kumar Verma conducting investigations into the constable's murder case on Saturday morning

Pioneer

Kotwali police area of Unnao. His bike was also found parked beside the body. Father Surya Pal stated in a complaint that 10 days ago, the mobile phone of Manoj's brother Sanjay was stolen during the 'tilak' ceremony of Lallan and he had a heated exchange with guests accompanying the bride. He alleged that he was murdered over the issue. Kotwali Incharge Shyam Narain Singh said the body had been sent for autopsy. Family members were also quizzed and further probe was on, he added.

In another incident, a motorcyclist was killed and his friend grievously injured when their bike fell into a pit on Sandila-Bangermau road in Unnao late Friday night. Ram Bhajan (45) of Gopikhedra, PS Mujawar (Unnao), worked as a car driver in Delhi. He had returned home for a three-day

break. In order to board a Delhi-bound bus, he, along with friends Pushpendra Pal and Shailendra, left home around 11:30 pm on Friday. Near Makhankhedra village on Sandila-Bangermau road, the bike skidded on pebbles and fell into a pit. Ram Bhajan and Pushpendra were injured in the mishap. Both were taken to the Bangermau CHC where Ram Bhajan succumbed to injuries.

Meanwhile, a kanwaria was killed and two others injured when a speeding unidentified car knocked them near Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary on Lucknow-Kanpur national highway in Unnao late Friday night. Those injured were rushed to the district hospital where Santosh Kumar (45) of Ikharra Sikanderpur, Ajaigarh Kotwali police area of Unnao, was declared dead.

Dhrupad maestro to be felicitated



Kanpur (PNS): Renowned dhrupad maestro Pt Vinod Kumar Dwivedi is the first artiste of Kanpur to receive the prestigious Kendriya Sangeet Natak Akademi Samman of the Government of India. He will be felicitated by the President of India at a function to be organised in New Delhi on March 6 for his contribution in the field of 'Dhrupad Dhamar' style of recital. Director of Ranjana Devi Sangeet Mahavidyalaya and Dhrupad Kendra, Juhi, Pt Vinod Kumar Dwivedi has so far written and composed around 600 songs based on Indian classical music including Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khayal, Chaturang and Bhajan. He introduced people with the 'Dhrupad Dhamar' style of recital by performing in India and abroad. He has so far trained over 1,200 artistes in this style of music in the past 35 years to popularise the art globally.

JOB FAIR

The Career Counselling Cell of Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kidwai Nagar, in association with CSJM University, organised an employment fair on Saturday. The chief guest on the occasion was MLC Arun Pathak, who inaugurated the programme. Principal Prof Anju Chaudhary wished the students success in career prospects. Speaking on the occasion, Pathak said education should not be confined to get-

ting a degree but be career-oriented. "For this, one should have the requisite qualification and vocational skill," he added. Six companies were present in the job fair, wherein around 450 students participated. The students were also given job offers.

INSPECTION

Municipal Commissioner Shivsharanappa GN carried out a physical inspection of the selection trials of EWS players at The Sportz Hub (TSH) on Saturday. It may be recalled that 327 EWS players have been selected for free training in 11 indoor games for the two-day selection trials on Saturday and Sunday. Talking to media persons, he said the best performers would also be felicitated. Budding players nominated by the legislators and corporators were also included in the selection trials. After the physical test on Saturday, they will undergo the skill test on Sunday. TSH managing director Rajiv Garg said that of the total 385 application forms received from EWS players, 327 had been shortlisted for onward selection of 300 for the fourth phase of training. Under the scheme, 27 players have won medals in different state and national level competitions.



India-centric world need of hour: Singh

PNS ■ VARANASI

Education advisor to Uttar Pradesh government and former chairman of University Grants Commission, Prof DP Singh said that Panchsheel sutra was important for sustainable development and India-centric world was the demand of the contemporary era.

Addressing the 11th two-day international conference on 'Indian Knowledge System for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals' at the School of Management Sciences (SMSO), Varanasi on Saturday, Prof Singh said that during the time of COVID-19 pandemic, many difficulties had to be faced in making the New Education Policy (NEP). He said that self-consciousness was at the core of the NEP.

"This period is undoubtedly important in building a developed India and we all need to create such a system in which love for teaching and education develops, only then the goal of a truly developed India can be achieved," he said, adding that for sustainable development we need to look into the past. Quoting Swami Vivekananda, Prof Singh stressed the need to make the concept of love for learning.

Veteran filmmaker Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri of 'Kashmir Files' fame was present as a special guest. While interacting directly with the students, he said that Sanatan was actually not a religion but a qualification; it was like an eternal rule. Describing 'Tatvamasi' as the basic mantra, he pointed out that the youth today need to recognise their own capabilities, due to which success is certain.

Cautioning the youth to stay away from conservative thoughts, Agnihotri said that it was necessary to include scientific viewpoints in the thoughts. Quoting the Indian knowledge system, he said that the journey of attaining self from ignorance was the essence of life. Describing the concept of secular as an integral part of India's DNA, he said that merely writing or repeatedly quoting words like socialism, secular was not justice to these concepts and India. Pointing out that Kashi is not just a spiritual city but underlines its role in the freedom struggle, he said that nationalism originated from Maharashtra but it developed in Varanasi and Prayagraj.

3 Annapurna Bhawans opened in Varanasi

PNS ■ VARANASI

Three newly-constructed Annapurna Bhawans (model fair price shops) and e-POS machines with e-weighing scales were opened in the Varanasi district on Saturday.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath formally inaugurated the Annapurna Bhawans and e-POS machines with e-weighing scales in a programme organised at Lok Bhawan auditorium in Lucknow during the day which included three Annapurna Bhawans in Varanasi.

At these three Annapurna Bhawans in the district at gram panchayat Sivon (Chirgaon block), Katauna (Pindra) and Kaparforwan (Arajilina), the inauguration and address by the chief minister was telecast live. In Sivon, UP Labour and Employment Minister Anil Rajbhar was present as the chief guest while at Kaparforwan, the function was attended by MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma and MLA Dr Sunil Patel and at Katauna, the representative of Pindra MLA.

In his address, Anil Rajbhar said that food grains as well as essential items of daily consumption would be distributed free of cost from Annapurna Bhawan with a new e-weighing scale equipped e-POS machine. He said that the facility of a common service centre would also be available



UP Minister Anil Rajbhar distribution ration bags at Annapurna Bhawan in Varanasi on Saturday

and all these services would be provided under one roof, which would save people's time and labour.

Addressing the public, Anil Rajbhar said that the government was committed to the welfare of the poor and Annapurna Bhawan was an important step towards welfare

of poor. Discussing the e-POS machine with e-weighing scale, the minister said that the beneficiaries would get the full quantity of ration in a transparent manner through the e-POS machine with e-weighing scale. He distributed free bags among 10 ration card holders. Zila Panchayat

Chairperson Poonam Maurya, block pramukh Abhishek Singh 'Chanchal', ADM (City), deputy commissioner of MGNREGA, project director, district supply officer, block development officer Chirgaon, gram pradhan and many others were also present.

Man found hanging from school gate in Pratapgarh

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The body of a man was found hanging from the gate of a school in Narharpur village of Pratapgarh, police said on Saturday. His wife and children have been missing since the incident, the police said.

Additional Superintendent of Police (East) Durgesh Kumar Singh said the body of a man was found hanging from the door of Janta Junior High School in Narharpur village of Raniganj police station area. Prakash (38) lived in a rented room in the village with his wife and children, the ASP said.

The body has been sent for autopsy and investigations are on, the officer said. A search operation has also been launched for his wife and children, he added.

FIR REGISTERED

Indian Institute of Information and Technology Allahabad (IIIT-A) Registrar Satish Kumar Singh has filed a complaint against unidentified accused for the alleged conspiracy to defame the institute through fake emails. A case has been registered at the Airport Police Station under IT Act.

The registrar alleged that he received an email on January 14. "Jogendra alias Deep Prakash levelled fabricated allegations of fake appointments and other irregularities in the institute. He also used objectionable and lewd comments for women officers," he stated in the complaint. Airport police station incharge Arun Kumar Singh said a case had been registered and further probe was underway.

SLRM-24 inaugurated at BHU

Varanasi (PNS): A three-day national level workshop on 'Systematic Literature Review and Meta-analysis' (SLRM-2024) was inaugurated at Dronacharya Karan Singh Hall of the physical education department of Banaras Hindu University here on Saturday by

Director of Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University (IM-BHU), Prof Ashish Bajpai, who was the chief guest, inaugurated the workshop. Prof Gyan Prakash Singh from the statistics department of BHU was the guest of honour, and the workshop was presided over by Arts Faculty Dean Prof Shree Kishore Mishra.

Sixty shortlisted delegates from different states of the country reported for this workshop. All the dignitaries and participants of the workshop were welcomed by Prof Rajiv Vyas, head of physical education department followed by a brief

summary of the workshop by Dr Pradeep Singh Chahar (organising secretary, SLRM-2024).

In his address, Prof Bajpai highlighted the need to review the literature process and uniqueness in research for academic integration, as well as emphasising quality over quantity in order to reach a specific aim. He also emphasised the ideology of learning and practicing rather than forgetting.

Prof Gyan Prakash Singh also emphasised the importance of information and communication network trends and how they might be applied to improve research precision and accuracy. Prof Singh also underlined the importance of organising such workshops on a regular basis for the benefit of academics and teachers alike.

Prof Shree Kishore Mishra highlighted essences of literature from ancient scripts of Vedas in understanding the process of literature review.

After the inauguration, workshop resource person Prof Bhaskar Mukherjee from the library and information science department of BHU, addressed the session on performing meaningful search and data handling using artificial intelligence (AI) techniques and scientometric evaluation (impact and visibility) using state-of-art software.

Sunday's sessions would begin with developing a protocol for review system, visualisation of SLR data through tool, concept of meta analysis and developing SLR and meta-analysis manuscript.

Prof (Captain) T Onima Reddy conducted the programme while the vote of thanks was proposed by Prof Abhimanyu Singh (workshop convener). On the occasion, Prof Sushma Ghildyal, Prof BC Kapri, Dr Akhil Mehrotra, Prof Vikram Singh and Dr Binayak Kumar Dubey were also present.

Tirumurti for changes in international institutions

Varanasi (PNS): Former foreign secretary and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, TS Tirumurti, expressed concern that there were only five permanent members in the Security Council despite the representation of 193 countries, after almost 80 years of the UN.

He was addressing the inaugural function of a three-day international seminar on 'exploring the role of international organisations in addressing contemporary issues', being organised under the auspices of the law faculty of Banaras Hindu University, as the chief guest here on Friday.

He said that there was a time when only western principles were accepted as universal principles but today a different era had come so there was a need to establish new principles by bringing funda-

mental changes in international institutions.

He further said that primarily there was a need to establish universal partnership to solve global problems, underlining India's important contribution in this perspective.

Guest of honour, Prof Evva Riikka Nykanen from the University of Eastern Finland, questioned the structure established in international institutions and their functioning. Prof Nykanen said that today there was an essential need for change in global institutions on the basis of the principle of equality and global coordination. The seminar started with lighting of the lamp, garlanding the statue of Mahamana and singing of Kulgeet of BHU. Law Faculty Dean Prof Chandra Pal Upadhyay welcomed the guests.

Centre, Tripura, TIPRA Motha sign tripartite pact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A tripartite agreement between TIPRA Motha and the Governments of Tripura and India was signed on Saturday in presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to bring a lasting solution to the problems of the state's indigenous people.

Shah said that with the signing of the agreement, the government has respected history, corrected past wrongs and accepted the present reality to proceed towards a brighter future.

Under the pact, it was agreed to amicably resolve all issues of the indigenous people of Tripura related to history, land and political rights, economic development, identity, culture and language, according to an official statement.

"I assure all stakeholders of Tripura that you won't have to fight for your rights anymore. The government of India will be two steps ahead in creating mechanisms to safeguard your rights," Shah said.



The home minister said no one can change history but everyone can learn from their past mistakes and move ahead.

He said the TIPRA Motha and all tribal parties have played a constructive role and the BJP government in Tripura also worked sincerely towards this agreement.

The tripartite agreement between Tripura Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance, popularly known as TIPRA Motha, and the state and central governments was signed at

North Block here.

Shah said under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, another treaty has been signed furthering harmony in the Northeast.

"Delighted to announce the signing of a tripartite agreement resolving issues related to the economic development, land rights and the identity of the indigenous people of Tripura," he said.

Shah said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, 11 peace and bound-

ary settlement agreements in Northeastern states were signed.

In 2019, a peace pact was signed with the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the agreement with TIPRA Motha is the last for the Northeast before going to the Lok Sabha polls, he added.

TIPRA Motha supremo Pradyot Debbarma was on a 'fast-unto-death' to demand a permanent solution to the problems of the indigenous people.

Following assurance of the interlocutors of the Central government, he came to the national capital and agreed for the pact. Debbarma was one of the signatories of the agreement. Tripura Chief Minister Manik Shah was also present on the occasion.

The home minister said with this agreement, Tripura has moved forward to become a dispute-free Tripura.

As part of the agreement, it was agreed to constitute a Joint Working Group or Committee to work out and implement the

mutually agreed points on all agreed issues in a time-bound manner to ensure an honourable solution.

In order to maintain a conducive atmosphere for implementation of the pact, all stakeholders shall refrain from resorting to any form of protest or agitation, starting from the day of signing of the agreement, the statement said.

Shah said Tripura will be committed to make its contribution in realising the prime minister's dream of a 'Viksit Bharat' and also have its share and will move forward as a 'Viksit Tripura'.

He said under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, Ministry of Home Affairs has made efforts to give shape to vision of an insurgency-free, dispute-free and violence-free Northeast.

He noted that due to several agreements signed by the Modi government, around 10,000 people have given up arms and joined mainstream in the last few years, which has resulted in an atmosphere of development for the region.

Government issues advisory to label under trial AI models

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Google's AI platform's response to queries on Prime Minister Narendra Modi generated controversy, the government has issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label under-trial AI models and prevent hosting unlawful content.

In an advisory issued to intermediaries/platforms on March 1, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance. "All intermediaries or platforms to ensure that use of Artificial Intelligence model(s) /LLM/Generative AI, software(s) or algorithm(s) on or through its computer resource does not permit its users to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any unlawful content," the advisory said.

All platforms, intermedi-

aries and enabling software shall be held accountable for any breaches, it added. "Non-compliance with provisions would result in penal consequences."

The advisory comes within days of Google's AI platform Gemini making uncharitable comments about Prime Minister Modi's policies. The response of Gemini to queries about the Prime Minister led to a strong reaction from the government, with Minister of State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar calling it a violation of IT laws.

Union Minister for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Saturday said, "The episode of Google Gemini is very embarrassing, but saying that the platform was under trial and unreliable is certainly not an excuse to escape from prosecution".

"I advise all platforms to openly disclose to the consumers and seek consent from them before deploying any

under-trial, erroneous platforms on the Indian public internet. Nobody can escape accountability by apologising later. Every platform on the Indian internet is obliged to be safe and trusted," he further said. The advisory asked the entities to seek approval from the government for deploying under trial or unreliable artificial intelligence (AI) models and deploy them only after labelling them of "possible and inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated".

"Use of under-testing /unreliable Artificial Intelligence model(s) /LLM/Generative AI, software(s) or algorithm(s) and its availability to the users on Indian Internet must be done so with the explicit permission of the Government of India and be deployed only after appropriately labelling the possible and inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated," it said.

Indian Navy to upgrade Minicoy detachment, commission it as INS Jatayu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Given the strategic importance of Lakshadweep Islands, Indian Navy will upgrade naval detachment Minicoy and commission it as INS Jatayu on March 6 in the presence of Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, navy said here on Saturday. Plans are also on to have a dual-purpose airport at Minicoy capable handling fighter jet flying besides commercial aircraft operations.

Giving details about the naval base, officials said the event marks an important milestone in the Navy's resolve to incrementally augment securi-

ty infrastructure at the strategically important Lakshadweep. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited there in the first week of January.

Naval Detachment Minicoy was setup in early 1980s under the operational command of Naval Officer-in-Charge (Lakshadweep). Minicoy is the southern-most island of Lakshadweep which straddles the vital Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs).

Basing of an independent naval unit with requisite infrastructure and resources will enhance the overall operational capability of the Indian Navy in the islands. The base will enhance operational reach and

facilitate Indian Navy's operational effort towards anti-piracy and anti-narcotics operations in Western Arabian Sea.

It will also augment Indian Navy's capability as the first responder in the region and augment connectivity with the mainland. The establishment of a Naval base is in line with the government's focus towards comprehensive development of islands.

INS Jatayu is the second Naval base in Lakshadweep after INS Dweepprakash in Kavaratti. With the commissioning of INS Jatayu, the Indian Navy will strengthen its foothold in the Lakshadweep islands and along with extend-



ing operational surveillance, reach and sustenance, it will usher in a new era of capacity building and comprehensive development of the island territories.

During his visit, Prime Minister Modi said Lakshadweep is not just a group of islands; it is a timeless lega-

cy of traditions and a testament to the spirit of its people.

"My visit has been an enriching journey of learning and growing," he said. He also said the focus of his government is to uplift lives through enhanced development.

"Our focus in Lakshadweep is to uplift lives through enhanced development. In addition to creating futuristic infrastructure, it is also about creating opportunities for better healthcare, faster internet, and drinking water, while protecting as well celebrating the vibrant local culture. The projects that were inaugurated reflect this spirit," the Prime Minister said.

With his visit leading to an increased interest of tourists in Lakshadweep, authorities have now firm up plans to develop a new dual-purpose airport at Minicoy Islands. The airbase will be able to handle military and civilian aircraft.

The proposed airbase will be capable of handling take off and landing of fighter jets besides commercial planes, it was learnt.

The airfield will be strategically important for India as it can be used as a base to keep an eye on the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean region where piracy and anti-social activities are on the rise.

The Indian Coast Guard

was the first force under the Defence Ministry to suggest the development of an airstrip in the Minicoy Islands. As per the present proposal, the Indian Air Force will take the lead in running operations from Minicoy.

The airport at Minicoy will also give defence forces the capability to expand their area of surveillance in the Arabian Sea. The airport will also provide a boost to tourism in the region, as has been planned by the government. At present, there is only one airstrip in the Union Territory at the moment, at Agatti, which only has the capacity for narrow-body aircraft.

Article 21 soul of Constitution, liberty of citizen paramount: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said that Article 21 is the soul of the Constitution as the liberty of a citizen is of paramount importance and the high court not expeditiously adjudicating matters related to it would deprive a person of this precious right.

A bench of Justice B R Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta made the observation after noting that the Bombay High Court has granted bail to one Amol Vithal Vahile, a prime accused in the murder of a corporator in Maharashtra, after a nudge from the apex court on January 29.

The bench, in its recent order, said it is thus clear that before the order was passed by this court on January 29, 2024, the high court instead of deciding the application for bail on merits shunted it on one or the other ground.

"Needless to state that Article 21 of the Constitution of India is the soul of the Constitution as the liberty of



a citizen is of paramount importance. Not deciding the matter pertaining to liberty of a citizen expeditiously and shunting away the matter on one or the other ground would deprive the party of their precious right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India," it said.

The bench said that it has come across various matters from the Bombay High Court where the bail and anticipatory bail applications were not being decided expeditiously.

Referring to one such case, the bench said in the matter the application for anticipatory bail was not decided for more than four years.

"We have also come across numerous matters wherein the judges are not deciding the matter on merits but find an excuse to shunt the case on different grounds. We, therefore, request the chief justice of the High Court of Bombay to convey our request to all judges exercising the criminal jurisdiction to decide the matter pertaining to bail/anticipatory bail as expeditiously as possible," the bench said.

It asked the Registrar (Judicial) of the apex court to communicate this order to the Registrar (Judicial) of the high court, who shall place the same before the chief justice of the Bombay High Court.

On January 29, the bench noted that on March 30, 2023, the high court had asked Vahile to approach the trial court for regular bail even though it had noted that he was languishing in jail for more than seven years.

The top court had said, "When the petitioner applied for bail on merits and also on the ground that he had been incarcerated in jail for seven and a half years, the approach of the high court in only permitting him to file an application for bail before the trial court/sessions court and not deciding the prayer for bail on merits, in our view, would amount to non-exercise of jurisdiction vested in it."

The bench had said Vahile had been languishing in prison for seven and a half

years at the time on which the order was passed by the single judge and by now he has suffered custody of more than eight years. The high court rather than asking the petitioner to take another round of litigation ought to have decided the matter on merits, it had said.

The top court had said that the approach of the high court was not in accordance with the sanctity that has been given to personal liberty in the catena of judgments.

It had then asked the high court to decide Vahile's bail afresh in view of the fact that he had served around eight years in jail.

Vahile is a prime accused in the murder of one Avinash Tekawade, a corporator of Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra.

Police had claimed that Vahile had harboured a grudge against Tekawade due to professional rivalry and committed the murder along with others on September 3, 2015. He was arrested on September 4.

Disgruntled MLAs in Delhi as Himachal crisis for Congress continues to simmer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is no respite in the strange affairs of politics in Himachal Pradesh since days after Congress proved the Government was stable, more rebellions are on the way while disgruntled lot including Vikramaditya Singh and his supporters are camping in Delhi. Amidst speculations that Singh was seeking a time from top BJP brass to joining the party with his supporters, Congress sources said Singh was to meet Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to resolve the crisis.

Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA Rajinder Rana on Saturday claimed that nine more party legislators "feeling suffocated" by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's style of functioning were in touch with them.

Rana along with five other Congress MLAs, who had cross-voted in the Rajya

Sabha polls, have been disqualified from the Assembly for abstaining from voting on the cut motion and finance bill. Rana alleged that CM Sukhu's "friends" were running the state government. He claimed that the elected representatives, especially the ministers, were feeling "suffocated and humiliated". "Besides the six Congress and three independent legislators that cross-voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha polls, nine more party MLAs are in touch with us," he said.

Rana termed Sukhu "liar number one" and alleged that he was trying to twist the facts. "Neither Public Works Department Minister Vikramaditya Singh had told the chief minister that he is meeting the Congress rebels at Panchkula nor the CM had sent him," Rana said.

"Vikramaditya Singh, who met us on his way to Delhi, did not ask us to patch up. He

has his own grievances against the government which failed to provide land for installing Virbhadra Singh's statue and interfered in his functioning," he added.

Sukhu on Friday said Vikramaditya Singh had informed him that some Congress rebels have approached him and they wish to come back following which the PWD minister was told to talk to the rebel MLAs and the Congress' central leadership.

Ruling out any possibility of returning to the Congress, Rana said, "After the observers said Sukhu would continue as the CM, there is no scope for compromise." "No rebel MLAs wish to come back. The question of working with the CM who has put Himachal Pradesh on back gear does not arise and we have also conveyed our stance to the observers who called us on phone," he added.

Shah inaugurates umbrella cooperative organisation to develop UCB in every city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday inaugurated an umbrella organisation for urban cooperative banks (UCB) — the National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NUCFDC) with the goal to establish Urban Cooperative Banks in every city.

Shah stated that the organisation was a necessity of the time, and marked a new beginning for self-regulation, which would manifold increase the development of UCBs in the country.

He called the umbrella organization for Urban Cooperative Banks as a 'security shield' for small banks, which will increase the confidence of our depositors, and in the coming days, he said, there will be further progress in our work.

"It is necessary that we upgrade ourselves and adhere to all the regulations of the Reserve Bank of India. If we fail to do so, we will not be



able to sustain the competition in the times to come, Shah said at the event in the presence of Union Minister of State for Cooperatives B.L. Verma and the Secretary of the Ministry of Cooperation, Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhutani along with other dignitaries and stakeholders.

He highlighted a major role for the umbrella organisation, which is to prepare small banks for compliance with the Banking Regulation

Act. "Our goal should be to open urban cooperative banks in every city," Shah said.

He also said urban cooperative banks should upgrade themselves to provide ATM facility, credit/debit cards, clearing system, maintain SLR (statutory liquidity ratio) limit and refinancing.

NUCFDC has received the RBI approval to function as a non-banking finance company and a self-regulatory organisation for the urban

cooperative banking sector. The umbrella organization will provide various facilities to small banks, facilitate dialogue between banks and regulators, and work on improving communication. Shah emphasized that the organization needs to work on making our boundaries broad and inclusive.

He stated that if we want to expand the cooperative movement, it is the responsibility of the umbrella organization to strengthen urban cooperative banks.

The Minister emphasized that "if we want to move forward with this concept, we need to promote youth and startups in every village and city, and there is no way other than UCBs for this."

The Cooperation Minister said that the organisation had a collective strength of 11,000 branches with 1,500 banks, deposits of Rs 5 lakh crore and loans totalling Rs 3.50 lakh crore. He added that the UCBs in the country had reduced their net non-performing assets (NPA) to 2.10% and there was a need for further improvement.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the eve of the World Birth Defects Day 2024, the World Health Organization on Saturday highlighted the need to raise awareness about birth defects and accelerate actions to prevent, detect and manage congenital anomalies which occur during intra-uterine life of infants.

"We are reminded that every journey matters and the journey of health indeed begins before birth," Saima Wazed, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia said in a statement.

A regional guidance document on screening newborns for three conditions -- hearing impairment, eye abnormalities, and neonatal hyperbilirubinaemia -- is being released on this occasion to facilitate capacity-building of member states, Wazed said. She pointed out that the contribution of congenital disorders to death is increasing globally among children aged below 5 years. Between 2000 and 2021, the



contribution of birth defects to child mortality increased in our WHO South-East Asia Region from 4 per cent to 11 per cent, and globally from 4.6 per cent to 8 per cent, she said. "Birth defects are sadly now the third most common cause of death among under-5 children in our Region, accounting for 11 per cent of the total. This is equivalent to the deaths of 300 under-5 children every single day," Wazed said. Birth defects not only have a profound impact on individuals but also place a considerable burden on

families, friends, the community and health-care systems. The WHO regional director said while genetics plays a major role in their aetiology (study of the causes of a disease), many birth defects are preventable through addressing environmental factors. These include exposure to pollutants, lifestyle choices and socioeconomic conditions that affect pregnant women and fetuses.

Since 2014, WHO has supported all our member states to drive rapid and sustained reductions in maternal, new-

born and child mortality, which includes targeted action to prevent, detect, manage and care for birth defects, Wazed said.

An integrated approach has been adopted to implement interventions for the prevention and treatment of birth defects in existing national programmes, she said. "Guided by the Regional Strategic Framework, all our member states have national plans for prevention and control of birth defects," she added.

Accelerating prevention, management and care for birth defects is a priority, and we as a region have issued a "call for action" in five key areas including at both the policy and programme levels, along with commensurate financial allocations. Finally, member states must sustain and expand surveillance of birth defects, with a focus on improving coverage and quality of surveillance with regular data analysis and application. The World Birth Defects Day, observed on March 3 every year, was launched in 2015.

Congress, RJD using Dalits as shield to justify corruption: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched a frontal attack on the Congress-RJD combine in Bihar, charging it with using Dalits and other deprived sections of the society as a "shield to justify their dynastic politics and corruption".

Addressing a rally in Begusarai district of the state, Modi also made veiled references to the land-for-jobs scam, pertaining to RJD president Lalu Prasad's tenure as the railway minister in the previous UPA government. He alleged that the Congress-RJD combine was guilty of "betrayal of social justice".

The PM also asserted that social uplift was brought about by his government which worked for the progress of all. Modi, who spoke in the presence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, hailed the JD(U) president as a true champion of social justice, like the latter's mentor Karpoori Thakur who was recently given the Bharat Ratna by the Centre.

The prime minister was speaking after the launch of development projects worth more than Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the prime minister also exuded confidence that the NDA, which was running a "double engine" government in Bihar, would sweep the elections across the country.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Governor Rajendra V



Arlekar, Deputy CMs Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, and several Union ministers were among those present at the programme. This was Modi's first visit to Bihar since the BJP-led NDA returned to power in the state after CM Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), dumped the 'Mahagathbandhan'. Earlier, the Bihar governor and the CM welcomed the prime minister on his arrival at Gaya International Airport.

Addressing the programme, Nitish Kumar told the prime minister that he would remain in the NDA forever.

Modi unveiled national highway projects worth over Rs 18,100 crore. He also laid the foundation stone for a six-lane bridge over the Ganga river, which will be constructed parallel to the existing JP Ganga Setu.

He dedicated to the nation three railway projects, which

include the doubling of the Pataliputra-Pahleja line and a 26-km-long new line between Bandhua and Paimar.

The PM also inaugurated 12 projects worth over 2,190 crore under the Namami Gange scheme. These include sewerage treatment plants in Patna, Sonapur, Naugachia and Chapra.

The prime minister also laid the foundation stone for the Amas-Darbhanga four-lane corridor, Danapur-Bihta four-lane elevated road and Sherpur-Dighwara phase of Patna Ring Road. Modi underlined that the people of Bihar, especially the citizens of Aurangabad, are eagerly waiting for the Varanasi-Kolkata Expressway as it will reduce travel time between Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to a few hours.

The PM said the road projects will change the picture of cities such as Patna, Nalanda, Jahanabad, Gaya, Vaishali,

Samastipur and Darbhanga. Places, known for tourist destinations, such as Bodhgaya, Vishnupad, Rajgir, Nalanda, Vaishali, and Pavapuri will also be connected with roads, besides the upcoming Darbhanga and Bihta airports, he said.

He laid the foundation stone of Unity Mall in Patna, which will be constructed at a cost of over Rs 200 crore, and provide a boost to the 'One District, One Product' project, and Geographical Indication (GI) products. Besides, the PM laid the foundation stone for six National Highway projects, including the construction of a 55-km-long four-lane road from Amas to Shivrampur, a 54-km-long road from Shivrampur to Ramnagar, 47 km-long four-lane access-controlled greenfield highway from Kalyanpur to Balbhadarpur.

Modi laid the foundation stone for a six-lane bridge over the Ganga river that will be developed as a part of Patna Ring Road. This will be one of the longest river bridges in the country. This project will decongest traffic through Patna city and provide faster and better connectivity between the northern and southern parts of Bihar, promoting socio-economic growth in the entire region. The PM dedicated to the nation three railway projects in Bihar -- the doubling of Patliputra-Pahleza line, a 26-km-long new line between Bandhua and Paimar and a MEMU shed in Gaya.

Modi targets TMC in Bengal, renews BJP 400 seats target

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KRISHNAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday set a 400 seat target for the BJP in the coming Lok Sabha elections saying only the saffron outfit had the integrity and courage to rid India of corrupt parties like the Trinamool Congress.

Picking up from where he left at Arambagh on Friday the Prime Minister said the TMC --- in the context of the trail of corruption that it has left in Bengal --- should stand for "Tu, Mein air Corruption" (you, me and corruption).

Hailing the "massive turnout" in the rally and seeing it as a prelude to the BJP's target of 400 seats the Prime said, "your presence in such large numbers gives me confidence to declare that BJP sarkar 400 paar (BJP government will cross the 400-seat marks in parliament)."

The Prime Minister was addressing a massive rally at the historical town of Krishnagar in Nadia district which also associated with the Bhakti saint Chatanya Mahaprabhu.

Launching a scathing attack on the TMC for perpetrating a dynastic politics coated with corruption and identified by the atrocities that they have heaped on the people of Bengal Modi said, "the TMC is synonymous with crime, corruption and dynastic politics which has left the people of Bengal in a quandary."

The Krishnagar seat was



won by TMC's expelled Lok Sabha MP Mohua Moitra in 2019 and assumes importance in that context.

Apparently raising the Sandeshkhal issue and the delayed apprehension of the TMC strongman Sheikh Shahjahan accused of large-scale land grab and sexual assault on women, Banerjee said, "this is a government which promotes the corrupt ... They failed to save the interest of distressed mother's and sisters of the area."

He said that though the TMC took voted in the name of Maa, Maati and Manush (Mother, land and humanity) they had betrayed their interest in the first instance.

Continuing to hit the Trinamool where it hurt the most post allegations that it's leaders had grabbed large swathes of land and sexually women, the Prime Minister

said that "the mothers and sisters continued to cry for help but this government looked the other way"

In an apartment reference to Shahjahan who was arrested 56 days after the commission of crime the Prime Minister said that in Bengal it were the criminals who decide when to be arrested," as they remain in protection of the police.

Modi has on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Indian National Democratic Alliance in reference to the Sandeshkhal incident saying the entire INDIA alliance watched silently as the women of the reverine island were sexually assaulted by the goons of the TMC.

Earlier the Prime Minister declared development projects worth more than Rs 15,000 crore.

Referring to the Rs 7,000 crore project unveiled on Friday from Aarambh, Modi said,

"Today again I am inaugurating projects worth Rs 15,000 crore... That will provide impetus to the economic development of Bengal," -- which was India's "gate of the East" creating job opportunities.

A large number of projects including Raghunathpur thermal power project, the inauguration of Farakka-Raiganj section of the four-lane highway --- which is also a part of the East-West corridor --- and some railway projects in Murshidabad and Birbhum districts were inaugurated by the Prime Minister.

Modi who ended his two-day visit to Bengal on Saturday is likely to return to address yet another meeting on February 8.

Bihar to promote...

From Page 1

The international roadshow will provide a platform for Bihar to showcase its cultural and historical treasures, inviting visitors to embark on a pilgrimage to sacred sites and immerse themselves in the region's spiritual legacy. Being known as the cradle of Buddhism and Buddhist related sites, Bihar holds significant appeal for international travelers, added Rajnish Kaistha (Sr. Vice President), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), an apex body of incoming tour operators in India.

He said by holding roadshows abroad, whenever it happens; Bihar will be joining the growing number of states to showcase its immense potential in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Through presentations, exhibitions, and networking events, Bihar will highlight the spiritual significance of its UNESCO World Heritage sites and promote its hospitality infrastructure, accommodations, and tourist amenities. The roadshow will aim to create awareness and generate interest among Cambodian and Vietnamese travelers, encouraging them to include Bihar in their travel itineraries, added Sushil Kumar Singh, Jatak Travels and IATO Chairman Chapter (Bihar and Jharkhand).

He said that in the past few years, the State Government has undertaken significant policy measures aimed at revitalizing the tourism sector. Central to these efforts is a strategic focus on community engagement, recognizing the invaluable role that local communities play in shaping and sustaining Bihar's tourism landscape which help boost their livelihood too.

Bihar has recognised the Buddhist Circuit comprising Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Patna, Vaishali, Lauriya,

Nandargarh, and Kesariya).

By involving communities in decision-making processes, cultural preservation efforts, and tourism-related activities, the State Government is aiming to harness their knowledge, skills, and resources to create authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. With jobs available in their native homes, this will also help curb the migration to the big cities, said Singh.

He also talked about Bihar's Tourism Policy 2023 announced last year envisaging investment of over Rs 10,000 crore over the next five years, and generation of one lakh new jobs in the tourism sector.

Moreover, the international roadshow presents an opportunity for Bihar to strengthen ties with Cambodia and Vietnam, fostering cultural exchange and collaboration in the tourism sector.

By celebrating shared Buddhist heritage and promoting cross-cultural understanding, Bihar aims to deepen its connections with these countries and pave the way for future partnerships and collaborations.

The policy incentivizes tourism units-hotels, tour operators and other tourism stakeholders. The incentives in addition to subsidies on capital investment are several and include reimbursement of all land conversion/transfer charges,

Stamp duty and registration fees of land lease, incentive of repayment of GST paid, refund of power taxes. The policy also encourages tourism units to apply for green certification by reimbursing costs of certifications to an extent, said. The costs of organising events and meetings will be subsidised too, said MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India.

India retains policy space at WTO

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

The outcome of the 13th ministerial conference of the WTO was "good" and India is "completely satisfied" as the country continues to retain its full policy space to protect the interests of farmers and fishermen in every respect, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He said that New Delhi's procurement of food grains for distribution among the poor continues uninterrupted and without any hindrance.

"India continues to retain full policy space for the benefit of our farmers, our fishermen, and in every respect, we have been able to take India's interests to the highest level possible," the minister told reporters here after the five-day meeting of the trade ministers of 166-member World Trade Organisation (WTO).

As the members were not able to reach consensus on key issues such as agriculture and fisheries subsidies, the talks that were scheduled to end on February 29 got extended for a day.

The talks at the WTO's ministerial conference ended with no decision on issues such as finding a permanent solution to public food stockpile and on curbing fisheries subsidies, but the members agreed to further extend the moratorium on imposing import duties on e-commerce trade for two more years.

The ministerial conference, the highest decision making body of the WTO, also managed to get more outcomes such as new disciplines on domestic regulation for services, formal joining of Comoros and Timor-Leste as members of the WTO, and least developing countries continuing to get the benefits

of LDC even three years after graduation.

India successfully pushed the food security issue and the country did not yield any ground on protecting the interest of poor farmers and fishermen as well as on other issues.

Goyal said that "it's a good outcome and we are completely satisfied... A lot of issues continue to make progress in terms of discussions."

"Generally through the MC13, progress was made on several contentious issues which had not been closed for many years. Forward movement is always a sign of a possible closure going forward," he said.

He added that in the proposed fisheries subsidies agreement aimed to curb subsidies that lead to over capacity and over fishing, India found several ambiguities on the proposals that were on the table.

Government pulls up Google over apps...

From Page 1

On Friday, Google said 10 companies in the country, including "many well-established" ones had avoided paying fees despite benefiting from the platform and Play Store, and proceeded to delist some apps.

It did not name the firms but a search of Play Store on android phones did not give results for matrimonial apps such as Shaadi, Matrimony.Com and Bharat Matrimony. Balaji Telefilms' Altt (formerly ALTBalaji), audio platform Kuku FM, dating service Quack Quack, Truly Madly also disappeared from Play Store. Separately, Minister of

State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said he has been flagging the concerns around dominance of Google stifling competition and startups.

The Government, he said, has to find if the current issue "trespasses" into the "abuse and misuse" of dominance category.

"I have raised concerns on the dominance of Google in the past, it controls more than 90 per cent of the app ecosystem in India, the fact that they are a vertically integrated large company, we are concerned that their dominance does stifle competitions and startups, and it can be misused against startups, and there

are some legitimate concerns that the government has," Chandrasekhar said.

The Government and court has to look whether this particular incident trespasses into that territory of abuse and misuse, he added.

The raging dispute is over Google imposing a fee of 11 to 26 per cent on in-app payments after anti-competition body CCI ordered scrapping of an earlier system of charging 15 to 30 per cent.

Google went ahead to remove the apps not paying the fee after the Supreme Court did not provide interim relief to companies

behind these apps in their battle against the search giant's app marketplace fee.

While Bharat Matrimony founder Murugavel Janakiraman described the move as "dark day" for the Internet in India, Kuku FM Co-founder Vinod Kumar Meena in a statement had said that Google was behaving like a 'monopoly'.

Quack Quack Founder Ravi Mittal said the company would comply with rules to get back on the marketplace.

Google previously sent notices of Play Store violations to Matrimony.Com, which runs app BharatMatrimony, and Info Edge, which runs a similar app, Jeevansathi.

Info Edge (India) Ltd on Saturday said its apps, including naukri.Com, 99 acres.Com, and shiksha.Com have been removed from Google Play Store but within hours stated that some of them have been restored.

"Many of the Info Edge apps are back on the play store. An effort very well led by (company MD and CEO) Hitesh and the entire Info Edge team. People were up all night for this. Great crisis management," Info Edge founder Sanjeev Bikhchandani said in a post on X. On Friday, Bikhchandani had emphasised on the need of an app store/ play store that

is a part of Digital Public Infrastructure.

"Indian companies will comply - for now. But what India needs is an App Store/ Play Store that is a part of Digital Public Infrastructure - like UPI and ONDC. The response needs to be strategic," he had said.

Bikhchandani had claimed that Info Edge had cleared all pending Google invoices in a timely manner and was compliant with its policies.

IAMAI - an industry association that represents some of the largest Indian startups as well as international firms - condemned the removal of apps and had urged Google to reinstate delisted apps.

BJP rolls out stalwarts on Lok Sabha 2024...

From Page 1

Besides Rajnath, and Yadav, the Union Ministers whose names have been announced by the BJP in the first list of candidates include Mansukh Mandavdya from Porbandar in Gujarat, Sarbananda Sonowal from Dibrugarh, Kiren Rijiju from Arunachal West, Jyotiraditya Scindia from Guna, Rajasthan, Arjun Ram Meghwal from Bikaner, G Kishan Reddy from Sikandrabad, Arjun Munda from Khunti, Jharkhand and Smriti Irani from Amethi, Purshottam Rupala from

Rajkot and Jitendra Singh from Udhampur.

Thiruvananthapuram is expected to see an interesting contest as another Rajya Sabha member and Minister, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, has been named from the seat, which is held by the Congress Shashi Tharoor. Among the other key candidates, Hema Malini will be fielded from Mathura, a constituency she has represented since 2014.

In a surprising move amid the farmers protest, Minister of State for Home Ajay

Mishra Teni will contest from the Lakhimpur Kheri constituency again. Mr Teni son, Ashish, had been jailed for his alleged involvement in mowing down four farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri in 2021 and justice for the victims has been one of the key demands in the ongoing protests against the Union government.

Of the 195 list, the BJP has fielded 52 candidates in Uttar Pradesh, including PM Modi; 24 in Madhya Pradesh; 20 in West Bengal; 15 each in Gujarat and Rajasthan; 12 in

Kerala; 11 each in Assam, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh; 9 in Telangana; 5 in Delhi; 3 in Uttarakhand; 2 each in Jammu & Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh; and 1 each in Goa, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar and Daman & Diu.

Announcing the list, BJP National General Secretary Vinod Tawde said the party is confident that it would form the government for the third term under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a much bigger mandate. Tawde said the

party has been taking efforts to increase the spread of not just the BJP, but the NDA also.

"Not just the BJP, even the people in this country wants 'fir ek baar Modi sarkar,' he said. Tawde also said the party has been working on further expanding its footprint across states and also to strengthen the ruling National Democratic Alliance. Modi has set a target for the BJP to win at least 370 seats on its own in this Lok Sabha election and more than 400 for the NDA.

Sitting MP Lallu Singh has been retained from Ayodhya; Bhojpuri singer and actor Pawan Singh has been fielded from Asansol in West Bengal. In Uttar Pradesh, the party has fielded former BSP MP Ritesh Pandey from Ambedkar Nagar Lok Sabha seat in UP, while Hema Malini, Ravi Kishan, Ajay Mishra Teni, Mahesh Sharma, SPS Baghel and Sakshi Maharaj are among those being repeated from their seats. In Jharkhand, former Congress MP Geeta Koda has been fielded from

Singhbhum (ST reserved) and Nishikant Dubey from Godda. Senior Congress leader AK Anthony's son Anil K Anthony will contest from Pathanamthitta in Kerala; CR Patil from Navsari seat

The list saw major changes for Delhi with Ramesh Bidhuri, Parvesh Verma, Meenakshi Lekhi and Harsh Vardhan being dropped from their respective seats, while Sadhvi Pragya Thakur was also dropped from her Bhopal seat. Besides Lekhi, John Barla is another Union

minister who has been dropped from their seat.

Hours before the party released its first list, two of its sitting MPs- Jayant Sinha and Gautam Gambhir - have made a request to BJP President JP Nadda expressing their desire to be relieved of his electoral duties. While Sinha claimed he wanted to focus on his efforts on combating global climate change in Bharat and around the world, Gambhir expressed his desire to focus on upcoming cricket commitments.

Classical dancer from India shot dead in US

PTI ■ NEW YORK

In yet another deadly attack on Indians and Indian-Americans in the US in recent months, a 34-year-old trained classical dancer from India and a student of Washington University, was shot dead in St Louis, Missouri.

Kuchipudi and Bharatnatyam dancer Amarnath Ghosh, who migrated to the US from West Bengal last year “to follow his dancing dreams,” was shot several times near the border of St Louis’ Academy and Central West End neighbourhoods. He died on the spot. According to the St Louis Metropolitan Police Department, the shooting happened at 7:15 pm on Tuesday at Delmar Boulevard and Clarendon Avenue, news portal ‘5 On Your Side’ reported on Friday. Ghosh was pursuing his master’s in the Performing Arts Department of Washington University.

Hailing from Suri town in West Bengal’s Birbhum district,

Ghosh was an alumni of Kalakshetra, a prestigious Chennai institution that is a vital centre for the study and performance of fine arts, from 2007 to 2011.

His uncle Shyamal Ghosh said in Suri on Saturday, he is still in the dark about the details of his nephew’s death in the USA even after four days. “We had informed the district police and administration about what we had heard from various sources. But till today, we don’t have any details about his death,” he said.

Calling him “very friendly and very talented,” Ghosh’s friends Hima Kuppa and Ravi Kuppa in the US said, “He was always travelling a lot for his performances. A lot of organisations called him for performances, but he always wanted to come back to St Louis.”

Ghosh was learning ballet and dance. “I think it was a full scholarship at Wash U. His ultimate dream was to get his PhD in dance and work full-time with us at our Kuchipudi Art



Academy,” Hima was quoted as saying by ‘5 On Your Side’.

He enjoyed volunteering as a dance instructor at a local studio and also taught children between the ages 5 and 18. His friends told the news outlet that Ghosh was the only child of his parents; his mother died three years ago and his father died when he was a child.

University for investigation of the reprehensible gun attack.”

Offering deep condolences to family and friends of the deceased in St Louis, Missouri, it said, “We are following up forensic, investigation with police and providing support.”

Washington University, where Gosh was a student, has condemned his killing as “senseless violence beyond comprehension.”

“There are no words to express the pain and anguish Amarnath’s family and friends are experiencing. His death is a terrible shock to us all. This type of senseless violence is beyond comprehension and we are devastated by this loss. To have this happen in our own St. Louis community is especially heartbreaking,” Anna “Dr G” Gonzalez, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs said in a statement released to all Washington University students, faculty and staff. It was actor Devoleena Bhattacharjee, who first alerted the authorities on social

media about her friend Ghosh’s death. Taking to X, she posted, “The reason, accused details everything are not revealed yet or perhaps no one left in his family to fight for it except his few friends. He was from Kolkata. Excellent dancer, was pursuing PhD, was taking an evening walk and suddenly he was shot multiple times by an unknown.” She tagged the X handles of the Indian Embassy in the US, Prime Minister Narendra Modi among others and said, “Some friends in US are trying to claim the body but still no update about it” and requested the Embassy to look into it.

“At least we should know the reason of his murder,” she said in the post on Friday. On Saturday, Bhattacharjee said in another post on X: “Hope we get the update of this heinous crime as early as possible. If I am not wrong, this is 5th or 6th murder of Indian Students in 2 months. We all are worried here & grieving.”

Sunak pleads to protect democracy

PTI ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has issued an impassioned plea for Britain to protect its democracy as he warned that extremist forces were out to tear the country apart and undermine its multi-faith identity.

Referencing his own Hindu beliefs, the British Indian leader on Friday stressed that the enduring values of the UK are about embracing migrants of all faiths and ethnicities and urged protesters to ensure peaceful demonstrations are not hijacked by extremist forces.

“Immigrants who have come here have integrated and contributed. They have helped write the latest chapter in our island story. They have done this without being required to give up their identity,” said Sunak in a speech outside 10 Downing Street.

“You can be a practising Hindu and a proud Briton as I am, or a devout Muslim and a patriotic citizen as so many are, or a committed Jewish person and the heart of your local community, and all underpinned by the tolerance of our

established, Christian church,” he said.

“But I fear that our great achievement in building the world’s most successful multi-ethnic, multi faith democracy is being deliberately undermined.

There are forces here at home trying to tear us apart,” he added.

He was speaking soon after what he characterised as the “beyond alarming” win in a byelection on Thursday of a controversial politician, George Galloway, in Greater Manchester following a campaign dominated by the divisions of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

He said on too many occasions recently, the streets of Britain had been hijacked by small groups who are hostile to British values and have no respect for its democratic traditions.

“Islamist extremists and the far right feed off and embolden each other. They are equally desperate to pretend that their violence is somehow justified when actually these groups are two sides of the same extremist coin... both loathe the pluralist, modern country we are,” he said.



Zardari, Achakzai file papers for Pak presidential poll

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s former president Asif Ali Zardari and his rival ethnic Pashtun politician Mahmood Khan Achakzai on Saturday filed their nominations for the presidential election to be held on March 9.

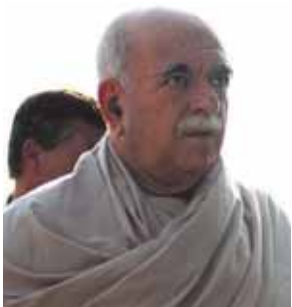
Zardari, from Sindh province, is the co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party and has the support of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz as the two leading parties joined hands to form a coalition government after the February 8 elections produced a split mandate.

Zardari, 68, is set to become the president for the second time as he is being supported by the parties that enjoy a majority in the electoral college. He also served as president from 2008 to 2013. Achakzai, 75, from Balochistan, is the chief of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party and was nominated by Imran



Khan, the jailed leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. In Parliament, Achakzai would be supported by the Sunni Ittehad Council, the new home of the PTI-backed independent lawmakers. Their nomination papers were filed for the presidential elections and the scrutiny of the nomination papers will be held on Monday. The elections will be held on March 9.

The new president will replace Dr Arif Alvi, who completed a five-year term last year.



However, in the absence of the electoral college required to elect the president, Alvi is still in office. The president is elected by an electoral college comprising members of the Senate, the National Assembly, and the four provincial assemblies. Voting is held through a secret ballot in Parliament and four provincial assemblies.

The president is the ceremonial head of the state and enjoys limited powers as he acts on the advice of the prime minister.

Ship attacked earlier by Houthi rebels sinks in Red Sea

AP ■ DUBAI

A ship attacked by Yemen’s Houthi rebels has sunk in the Red Sea after days of taking on water, officials said Saturday, the first vessel to be fully destroyed as part of their campaign over Israel’s war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The sinking of the Rubymar comes as shipping through the crucial waterway for cargo and energy shipments moving from Asia and the Middle East to Europe has been affected by the Houthi attacks.

Already, many ships have turned away from the route. The sinking could see further detours and higher insurance rates put on vessels plying the waterway — potentially driving up global inflation and affecting aid shipments to the region.

The Belize-flagged Rubymar had been drifting

northward after being attacked on Feb 18 in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial waterway linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Yemen’s internationally recognized government, as well as a regional military official, confirmed the ship sank. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as no authorisation was given to speak to journalists about the incident.

The Rubymar’s Beirut-based manager could not be immediately reached for comment.

Yemen’s exiled government, which has been backed by a Saudi-led coalition since 2015, said the Rubymar sank late Friday as stormy weather took hold over the Red Sea. The vessel had been abandoned for 12 days after the attack, though plans had been made to try and tow the ship to a safe port. The Iran-backed

Houthis, who had claimed the ship sank almost instantly after the attack, did not immediately acknowledge the ship’s sinking. The US military’s Central Command previously warned the vessel’s cargo of fertiliser, as well as fuel leaking from the ship, could cause ecological damage to the Red Sea.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis’ main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite over a month of US-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. That includes the attack on the Rubymar and the downing of an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

3 held for Dhaka mall fire

AP ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh police have arrested three persons, including two owners of a restaurant, in connection with the massive fire that broke out at a shopping mall in the capital Dhaka that killed at least 46 people.

The fire broke out around 9:50 pm on Thursday at the 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.

Two owners of an eatery called Chumuk and the manager of Kacchi Bhai restaurant were arrested on Friday, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Additional

Commissioner Kh Mahid Uddin said.

He said, “The fire started from the food shop on the ground floor of the building. The police will file a case over negligence in connection with the deaths in the fire incident.”

Besides, anyone from the victim’s family can file a case if they want, said the police official.

At least 46 people were killed, and over 20 others sustained severe injuries by a devastating fire on Thursday night. Firefighters rescued 70 people, including 42 in unconscious state, from the rooftop and different floors of the seven-storey Green Cozy Cottage.

Legal action will be taken against whoever is found responsible in this incident, he added.

He said that three people arrested in this incident are being interrogated.

The building did not have permission to house restaurants. The building had permission for office use, not restaurants and eateries, according to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk). But the building housed eight restaurants, a juice bar and a tea and coffee shop, the report said.

Ashraful Islam, Town Planner and Director of the Detailed Area Planning (DAP) project of Rajuk said commercial approval had been taken for the building from one to seven floors. But it was only for office use. There was no approval for restaurants, showrooms or anything else.

‘Mt Everest crowded and dirty

AP ■ KATHMANDU

The only surviving member of the mountaineering expedition that first conquered Mount Everest said Saturday that the world’s highest peak is too crowded and dirty, and the mountain is a god that needs to be respected.

Kanchha Sherpa, 91, was among the 35 members in the team that put New Zealander Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay atop the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) peak on May 29, 1953.

“It would be better for the mountain to reduce the number of climbers,” Kanchha said in an interview in Kathmandu on Saturday, “Right now there is always a big crowd of people at the summit.”

Since the first conquest, the peak has been climbed thousands of times, and it gets more crowded every year. During the spring climbing season in 2023, 667 climbers scaled the peak, but that brought in thousands of support staff to the base camp between the months of March and May.

There have been concerns about the number of people living on the mountain for months on end, generating trash and waste, but authorities have no plans to cut down on the number of permits they issue to climbers.

There are rules that require climbers to bring down their own trash, equipment and everything they carry to the mountain or risk losing their deposit, but monitoring has not been very effective.

“It is very dirty now. People throw tins and wrappings after eating food. Who is going to pick them up now?” Kanchha said. “Some climbers just dump their trash in the crevasse, which would be hidden at that time but eventually it will flow down to base camp as the snow melts and carries them downward.”

For the Sherpas, Everest is Qomolangma or goddess Mother of the world, and is revered by their community. They generally perform religious rituals before climbing the peak.

As Sweden joins NATO, it bids farewell to more than two centuries of neutrality

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

Sweden’s last war ended in 1814, and when the rifles and cannons it aimed at Norway fell silent, the once-warring power would not take up arms again.

For the next two centuries, Sweden embraced a policy of neutrality, refusing to take sides in wars or join any military alliance. It was a stance that kept peace at home and contributed to the country becoming a prosperous welfare state and humanitarian superpower.

This remarkably long era of nonalignment is coming to a close as Sweden joins NATO. The ceremonial formalities are expected soon, after 18 months of delays while Turkey and Hungary held up ratification and sought concessions from other members of the alliance.

“Sweden is now leaving 200 years of neutrality and nonalignment behind us,” Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said after Hungary’s Parliament gave its approval Monday, overcoming the final hurdle. “It is a big step. We must take that seriously. But it is also a very natural step that we are taking.”

Sweden, like neighbor Finland, had long ruled out seeking NATO membership. That changed practically overnight when Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The attack sparked fears across Europe of Moscow’s revived imperial ambitions — alarm that has grown as Russia gains momentum on the battlefield in Ukraine.

“It’s the right path for us,” said Jacob Frederiksen, a 24-year-old pilot, who like many Swedes has embraced NATO membership amid the breakdown of the post-World War II order that largely kept the peace for decades. “I think in this new era, it’s better to be part of an alliance than being independent and neutral.”

The invasion “had a shock effect on Swedish political life,” said Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson, a political scientist at the University of Goteborg. He analyzed polling data showing that support for NATO membership surged from 35% in 2021 to 64% after the invasion.

“It was the largest and fastest shift in opinion that has so far been measured in

Swedish political history,” Ekengren Oscarsson wrote.

Still, new anxieties come amid rising tensions between Russia and the West.

Ulrika Eklund, a 55-year-bank employee in Stockholm, said she feels uncertainty about being in NATO and the effect it will have on Sweden. But she understands why the step has been taken with “so much going on in the world and in Europe.”

The country’s neutrality has its roots in the early 19th century, when Europe was engulfed in the Napoleonic wars.

Though Sweden ended up on the winning side of battles against France’s warrior-emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, the loss of territorial possession in Finland to Russia years earlier put an end to any illusions of Sweden continuing in a big-power role.

“After having gained Norway, the policy was aimed at staying outside the quarrels of the big powers and instead developing Sweden as a country. And that we did,” said Robert Dalsjö, senior analyst with the Swedish Defence

Research Agency.

The policy allowed Sweden to grow, Dalsjö said, putting it on the path to a modern state after being “one of the poorest and most backward countries in Europe in the early 19th century.”

As Sweden adjusted to its new status, King Karl XIV John declared the country’s neutrality in 1834. In a letter to the courts of Britain and Russia, he urged respect for Sweden’s wish to stay out of their conflicts.

Preserved in the Swedish National Archives and considered the oldest document on Sweden’s neutrality, the text reads: “We will request, as we do now, to stay totally outside of this struggle, and that Sweden and Norway, by keeping a strict neutrality towards the warring parties, can deserve, by our impartial conduct, respect and the appreciation of our system.”

Along the way, Sweden’s neutrality was tested — particularly during World War II, when it made concessions to Germany to stay out of war.

“The Second World War was a near-death experience for Sweden,” Dalsjö said.

Grammy-winning singer gets 3-year prison term in Iran

AP ■ DUBAI

An Iranian singer who won a Grammy presented by US first lady Jill Biden has been sentenced to more than three years in prison over his anthem supporting the 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini.

Shervin Hajipour posted on Instagram on Friday, the same day that Iran held its parliamentary election, what appeared to be part of the judgment against him.

It said Hajipour received a three-year, eight-month sentence on charges of “propaganda against the system” and “encouraging people to protest.”

The court issued its sentence in part because it found he hadn’t properly expressed regret over publishing the song.

It also imposed a two-year travel ban and ordered him to create a song about “US crimes,” as well as make posts about those crimes online.

Hajipour thanked his lawyers and his agent for their support. “I will not mention the name of the judge and the prosecutor so that they don’t get insulted and threatened, because insults and threats are not in the religion of humanity,” he wrote. “Finally, one day we will understand each other. Until then.” Hajipour already had served some prison time, but was out on bail pending the court’s decision. It was unclear if he had already reported to serve his sentence. Iranian state-run media,

Hardliners leading in Iran polls

AP ■ DUBAI

A day after parliamentary election concluded in Iran, hard-liners are leading in initial vote counting in the capital of Tehran, state media reported on Saturday.

State-run IRNA news agency and state TV said 1,960 from 5,000 ballots in Tehran have been counted so far, based on an interior ministry report which is updated hourly.

Officials have not yet released the total voter turnout. However, IRNA said it was 41 per cent, based on unofficial reports.

In the last parliamentary election in 2019, only 42 per cent of eligible voters headed to the ballot stations. It was considered the lowest turnout since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Hard-liners have controlled the parliament for the past two decades — with chants of “Death to America” often heard while in session. Under Iranian law, the parliament has a variety of roles, including overseeing the executive branch and voting on treaties. In practice, absolute power in Iran rests with its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Friday’s election was the first since the bloody crackdown on the 2022 nationwide protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody. Amini, 22, died on September 16, 2022, after her arrest by Iran’s morality police for allegedly violating the country’s strict headscarf law forcing women to cover their hair and entire bodies. The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran’s clerical rulers.

focused on the election on Friday, didn’t note Hajipour’s sentence. Iran’s mission to the United Nations in New York didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Hajipour’s song “Baraye,” or “For” in English, begins with: “For dancing in the streets,” “for the fear we feel when we kiss.”

The lyrics list reasons that young Iranians posted online for why they had

protested against Iran’s ruling theocracy after Amini’s death in September 2022, allegedly for not wearing her mandated headscarf to the liking of security forces.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran’s clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed more than 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained.

"I really believe that what I do as an actress is my God-given talent. This is my calling, not my career!"
— Angela Bassett



HUMA QURESHI, the acclaimed Indian actress, has carved her niche in the film industry with her remarkable talent and versatile performances. Her breakthrough role in Anurag Kashyap's crime thriller *Gangs of Wasseypur* garnered widespread acclaim, establishing her as a force to reckon with in Bollywood. Known for her ability to portray complex characters with nuance and authenticity, Qureshi has since delivered captivating performances in web series like *Laila Maharani*. Beyond her acting prowess, she advocates for social causes and gender equality, using her platform to address important issues. Huma Qureshi continues to captivate audiences with her talent, proving herself as one of the most compelling actresses of her generation. She spoke to the **PIONEER** about her craft and career

ACTRESS OF DEPTH AND VERSATILITY



CAN YOU share a bit about your journey into the film industry and how you got your start as an actress?

I was into theatre in college and that's where I discovered my love for acting. I moved to Mumbai with the intention of becoming an actor. In my initial days in the industry, I did a commercial which was directed by Anurag Kashyap and he offered me *Gangs of Wasseypur*. That's how my journey in cinema was kickstarted.

What motivated you to pursue a career in acting?

In school I used to keenly participate in extra-curricular activities. Whether it was elocution, debates or plays. When I went to college, I was deeply attracted to theatre and was bitten by the acting bug. I moved to Mumbai with the dream of becoming an actor.

Of all the roles you've played so far, which one has been the most challenging, and why?

I have played roles which have challenged me as an actor and made me push myself out of my comfort zone. It's difficult to choose any one role. I thoroughly enjoyed playing both *Mohsina* and *Jhilmil* even though they belong to completely different worlds. In the recent past, whether it was *Tarla*, *Monica*, *Shalini* or *Rani Bharti* - they are all strong women who will not be deterred by society or it's norms and will rise above their circumstances with sheer will power and be unapologetic about their ambitions.

Can you tell us about any upcoming projects that you are excited about?

The third season of *Maharani* will be streaming soon. I think this is one of the only shows which has a female protagonist and has been commissioned for the third season. I am really looking forward to how people receive it.

How do you think the film industry has evolved during your career, especially in terms of roles for women and what changes would you like to see in the entertainment industry, particularly in Bollywood?

It's important for every actor to figure out their own path. There always will be a plethora of roles to play and actors must

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choose roles that work for them. The parameters for choosing roles are one's own. The sets have more women in all departments of filmmaking. Even though it's still not a level playing field, for example, the pay gap between male and female actors is still an issue, the industry has space for everyone and is constantly evolving

How do you approach preparing for a new role? Are there any specific methods you follow?

Not really. For me, reading the script multiple times helps. I just follow the script and the director's vision. Of course as an actor I improvise where it makes sense. But, essentially, I rely on the script for shaping my role.

Balancing personal and professional life can be challenging. How do you manage to maintain that balance? What are your favorite ways to unwind and relax when you're not working? I love sleeping. On days when I am not shooting, I am usually catching up on my sleep or hang out with my friends and family.

In recent years, many actors have become advocates for social issues. Are there any causes that you are particularly passionate about? How do you see your platform as an actress contributing to social change or awareness? I made a film which addressed body shaming called *Double XL*. As an actor one is expected to fit a mould but I have never adhered to that. My film was about how the skills a person has is far superior and what matters more than the looks or the how much they weigh. There has always been a lot of pressure on women to look a certain way and I have always advocated against that thought process.

What advice would you give to aspiring actors who are looking to enter the film industry?

Every individual's journey is different and they have to write their own story. What worked for me might not work for someone else. Focus, determination and resilience are key qualities.

Are there any lessons you've learned in your career that you wish someone had told you earlier?

I am glad that I got the opportunity to be on the journey and experience it for myself.



I LOVE SLEEPING. ON DAYS WHEN I AM NOT SHOOTING, I AM USUALLY CATCHING UP ON MY SLEEP OR HANG OUT WITH MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY





Jewellery

THAT REFLECTS YOUR STYLE



Recognised for its enduring value and cultural significance, handcrafted jewellery continues to be a preferred choice among discerning individuals looking to make meaningful and lasting investments in precious metals and stones. As the wedding season approaches, we speak to jewellery expert **GUNJAN SONI** about the latest trends. By **NIVI SHRIVASTAVA**



BRIDAL BLING

KNOWN for its stunning bridal pieces and intricate sets, the House of MBJ is famous for designing statement necklaces, traditional mangalsutras, chandbalis, jhumkas and chandelier earrings, and beautifully crafted maang tikkas. Speaking about the latest trends for brides, Gunjan informs, "We understand the importance of making every bride's special day even more magical. We offer a curated selection of bridal jewellery that captures the essence of timeless elegance and contemporary flair. In terms of specific styles, we specialize in traditional, antique, and modern designs, ensuring that there's something for every bride's taste and preference. Whether

you're looking for a classic Kundan or Gold set, a regal Polki ensemble, or a modern diamond-studded piece, our bridal collection is designed to cater to diverse style sensibilities. Each piece is meticulously crafted to complement the bride's attire and enhance her natural beauty on her wedding day."

As for the latest trends in bridal jewellery, the market is currently witnessing a surge in demand for contemporary yet traditional designs. Brides are gravitating towards statement pieces that blend cultural aesthetics with a modern twist. Adding further, Gunjan says, "Personalized and customizable jewellery is gaining popularity, allowing brides to add a personal touch to their bridal ensembles. For brides who

appreciate versatility, convertible jewellery is a trend to watch. Pieces that can be worn in multiple ways, such as detachable necklace pendants or convertible earrings, provide brides with the flexibility to create different looks throughout their wedding festivities. This year, we have launched the AZRA bridal collection, which aims to transport wearers to a world of timeless charm and magical allure. Each piece in this collection is meticulously crafted to capture the essence of elegance, sophistication, and grace. The collection showcases an array of exquisite gemstones, including radiant diamonds, lustrous pearls, and vibrant colored gemstones, each carefully selected for its exceptional brilliance and symbolic significance."



EVERYDAY ELEGANCE

APART from bridal sets, contemporary jewellery with modern aesthetics is also a huge hit among young buyers, who love sporting layered necklaces for both festive and daily occasions. For festive styling, Gunjan recommends, "Consider mixing various lengths and styles of layered neckpieces with Indian wear, while delicate and dainty options work seamlessly for daily wear. Statement earrings with intricate details and vibrant gemstones are perfect for adding glamour to festive attire, while smaller, more subtle statement earrings can elevate daily outfits. Stackable rings and bracelet stacks remain en vogue, allowing for creative expression in both festive and daily ensembles. Choker necklaces, especially those with unique detailing, effortlessly enhance traditional outfits for celebrations, while simpler versions make for stylish daily accessories. Personalized jewellery, such as pieces with initials or significant dates, adds a sentimental touch suitable for both special occasions and everyday wear."

A BLEND OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Currently, young jewellery buyers in India reveal a strong affinity for contemporary designs that seamlessly merge tradition with modernity. Brands have noticed a particular fondness for minimalist pieces that effortlessly complement everyday wear. Versatility is paramount, as youngsters look for designs that effortlessly transition



from casual to formal settings, meeting diverse lifestyle needs. Gunjan reveals, "Our customization options allow for personalization with initials or birthstones and resonate deeply with this dynamic demographic seeking self-expression. We prioritize ethical and sustainable practices in jewellery production, aligning with the heightened environmental consciousness among young consumers. Collaborations



with influencers and celebrities, along with our commitment to affordability and technology integration such as virtual try-ons, enrich the shopping experience for our patrons. While embracing contemporary trends, we also honour the cultural significance of jewelry, offering pieces that celebrate India's rich heritage."



ARTIST'S TRIBUTE TO AMBASSADOR OF HOPE

75 Portraits of Prime Minister NARENDRA MODI Unveiled in Delhi



DR Avinash Kate, the Dean of Shantamani Kala Kendra at Jain University, has embarked on an extraordinary artistic endeavour by creating 75 emotion-filled portraits of Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India. These diverse portraits, capturing various facets of Shri Modi's work, emotions, and devotion to 'Bharat Mata', have been meticulously crafted on canvas using acrylic colors. The exhibition, which also includes a compilation detailing Modi's journey as the Prime Minister, was unveiled to

commemorate his leadership and representational role in shaping the modern India. This unparalleled artistic feat marks a global first, with no other artist having created such an extensive series of portraits of a single individual in various forms. Dr. Avinash Kate dedicated three months of tireless effort to this meditative process, indirectly guided by spiritual influences, adding a profound dimension to the creation of these soulful portraits. Reflecting on the exhibition, Dr. Avinash Kate expressed, "The inspiring leadership

and unwavering commitment of our esteemed Prime Minister have been a constant source of motivation for me. This collection serves as a depiction of his emotional journey, portraying him as a true ambassador of hope." Acknowledging the support received, Dr. Chenraj Roychand, Chancellor of JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), stated, "The collection provides a unique glimpse into Dr. Kate's inner imagination, capturing the essence of Shri Modi's emotions, whose leadership has not only shaped the

present but is paving the way for a future where India stands tall on the global stage." The exhibition, held at the Constitution Club, New Delhi, attracted a significant number of art enthusiasts and prominent figures directly involved in the project, including Dr. Chainraj Roychand (Chairman of Jain University) and Dr. Gani Rajendra Vijay Maharaj (Founder of Sukhi Foundation Parivar, tribal Jain saint), among others. For his commitment and dedication, Dr. Avinash Kate has received numerous prestigious

awards and honors, including recognition in world records, international records, and the Limca Book of Records. Shantamani Kala Kendra, where the exhibition took place, stands as a testament to the university's commitment to promoting various art forms, including Fine Arts and Performing Arts, while JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) continues to be recognized among the top educational institutions in India, fostering a learner-centric environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship.

NOTA: THE SILENT REVOLUTION OR THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE?



ASTHA RANJAN

NOTA CONTINUES TO BE A TOOL OF DISSENT IN THE ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY. IT EMPOWERS THE ELECTORS TO REGISTER THEIR DISCONTENT WITH THE POOL OF CANDIDATES WHILE MAINTAINING SECRECY, THUS PERSUADING PARTIES TO FIELD BETTER CANDIDATES



It's impeccable to christen the word as the 'Sankat Mochan' of democracy in political Lanka, as each vote deserves a political Ayodhya, not a chaotic Lanka. With the 2013 judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India (PUCL v. Union of India), a firm position was set that in an exceedingly legal system, electors must be given the right to reject, which owes its genesis to freedom of speech and expression (Art. 19(1)(a)). However, this was substantially necessitated on account that secrecy of casting a vote was duly recognised under the provisions of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, as being fundamental to free and fair elections. The 170th Report of the Law Commission, 1999, while laying down the chassis of NOTA,

recommended a method to ensure the purity of elections, keep out criminals and other undesirable elements, and minimise the role and importance of caste and religion. Pursuant to this, no candidate could be declared returned unless he obtains at least 50% of the votes cast, and to determine such a percentage, even the negative vote would be treated as votes cast. The report also recommends a 'run-off' and fresh election if candidates fail to secure the requisite percentage. This was endorsed by the Background Paper on Electoral Reforms, 2010. Even in Columbia, blank votes are considered to be valid ones and there stands similar provision to this effect. However, in its press release dated October 28th, 2013, the Election Commission of India clarified while referring to provisions of the Conduct of

Elections Rules, 1961 (clause (a) of Rule 64) read with the Representation of the People's Act, 1951 (Section 65), that even if the number of electors opting for NOTA option is more than the number of votes polled by any of the candidates, the candidate who secures the largest number of votes has to be declared elected. This implies that even if 99% of the electors rejected the candidature of all the candidates, conversely, in defiance of their mandate, the candidate who managed to secure just 1% of the votes could be declared to be returned. This serves as a testimony of NOTA having no electoral value in India, ergo, there's no wrong in deeming it nothing more than a protest vote. Be that as it may, to justify the forthcoming quote "Not all battles are fought for victory. Some are fought simply to tell the world that someone was there on the battlefield"

(Ravish Kumar) in an electoral democracy could set the stage for catalysing NOTA as just a token of gesture which is bound to be unjust. Nevertheless, NOTA continues to be a tool of dissent in the electoral democracy. It empowers the electors to register their discontent with the pool of candidates while maintaining secrecy, thus persuading parties to field better candidates. In the 2018 Assembly election of Madhya Pradesh, NOTA bagged fifth largest tally of votes polled (1.42%) which was more than SP (1.3%) and AAP (0.66%). Similarly, in Karnataka, NOTA secured more votes than BSP and CPI (M) which are national parties. The figures are indicative of the significant usage of NOTA in numeric sense, however, its impact still remains insignificant. The State Election Commission of Haryana deviated from the

practice of Election Commission of India during the Municipal Elections. A notification dated November 22nd, 2018 by the SEC, Haryana deemed NOTA to be a 'Fictional Electoral Candidate'. It further went on to state that if a situation arises where NOTA receives the highest number of votes, then a fresh election would be conducted. All candidates who received lesser vote than NOTA would become ineligible from contesting the re-election. Similar notification was also published by the SEC, Maharashtra in the same year. In yet another development from the past, the Supreme Court issued a notice to the Centre and the ECI on March 15th, 2021 on a PIL which sought a direction to the poll panel to nullify an election result and conduct a fresh poll if the maximum votes in a particular constituency were for NOTA.

For a democracy to survive in its true form it is essential that the best available men should be chosen as people's representative and if electors find none from the roster to be suitable enough, negative voting is necessitated. However, the rationale behind the 2013 judgement of the Apex Court has failed to bear fruits. In a vibrant democracy, voter's choice must be of paramount and if they palpably reject all the contesting candidates, their choice should be empowered by way of a fresh election. In the existing scenario, if we picture the electoral stage as a grand theatre; NOTA plays the role of a silent spectator, leaving no tangible mark on the political drama. Thus, even with the popularity of NOTA among the electors experiencing a significant rise over the years, the question of whether it is 'revolutionary' or mere 'illusory' lingers.

Adaptability is key in today's ever-changing business landscape, and many businesses struggle to keep up with rapid changes. That's where composable architecture steps in as the game-changer. Composable architecture is like the Lego bricks of digital transformation. Brands can create independent, reusable, and scalable building blocks, mixing and matching them to fit their needs. The best part? It's fast. Brands can try new solutions, make changes, fail fast, and learn from failures quickly, making their business more agile. Take the Netflix vs Blockbuster case. Netflix embraced change early on, initially delivering DVDs by mail and then swiftly transitioning to a streaming platform. On the contrary, Blockbuster failed to adapt promptly. Even though they understood that Netflix's approach was the future, they didn't evolve quickly enough. As a result, Blockbuster couldn't keep pace and eventually faced failure. It's a lesson that being late to adjust can lead to significant consequences. The result? Blockbuster went bankrupt, while Netflix became a leader in online entertainment. The lesson? Digital transformation is no longer a choice; it's a necessity. To stay ahead, brands need a flexible and agile architecture, making composable architecture the future of digital transformation. And it comes with benefits:

The Role of Composable Architecture in Your Digital Transformation Journey

VELOCITY

One big plus of composable systems is how quickly you can get things done. Gartner predicts that by 2024, 70% of big and medium-sized companies will focus on composable to make their apps easy to put together. Teams using composable web setups show real business benefits, like faster go-to-market time.

AGILITY:

Composable architecture involves assembling systems through loosely coupled components, creating a modular structure with easily combinable, detachable, and reusable parts. Furthermore, composable architecture minimizes vendor lock-in to a great extent, allowing brands to build piece by piece. If one vendor doesn't have the required technology, a brand can get it from another, creating a customized structure using best-of-breed technologies.

SECURITY

Maintaining and updating codebases in monolithic



MAYANK MISHRA

Brands can create independent, reusable, and scalable building blocks, mixing and matching them to fit their needs. The best part? It's fast. Brands can try new solutions, make changes, fail fast, and learn from failures quickly, making their business more agile



structures affects the entire system. However, composable architectures allow alteration in each component independently, making the process far less cumbersome and risky to deploy.

REUSABILITY

The key benefit of composable architecture is the ability to reuse components. The modular

system reuses and connects standards and patterns through APIs. With reusability as a central focus, any existing modules can be reused or serve as the foundation for a new application or service. Furthermore, reusability of components lowers the development costs to a great extent.

QUICKER INNOVATION

Legacy systems are complex to handle and need lots of time and resources to change, keep up, and improve. Besides, multiple teams have to be involved in the entire process. Composable architecture offers a more manageable IT upgrade setup, allowing seamless integration and feature launches. With composable architecture, IT can focus on developing new ideas and giving customers a better experience instead of dealing with routine tasks like marketing and maintenance.

OMNICHANNEL CAPABILITIES

A flexible digital experience platform (DXP) combined with a headless content management system (CMS) makes creating and sharing content smooth. This allows marketers to keep a consistent presence on various digital platforms and devices, all from one central place. They can quickly and easily improve and send out campaigns to reach their target audience wherever they are. While the many benefits of composable make it desirable

for significant brands, they must first check if they have the proper framework to adopt a composable architecture. This can be done using MACH.

MACH

- M — Microservices: Independent services connected via APIs.
- A — API-First: APIs linking applications or services.
- C — Cloud-Native: Applications designed for the cloud, ensuring scalability.
- H — Headless: Decoupling front-end and back-end for flexibility.

As the business ecosystem changes, companies are figuring out that composable architecture is not only the future for business continuation but also a smart move as it makes everything work better.

Companies like Walmart, Asics, Mantel, and Shell have adopted composable architecture for efficient operations. It's not just a trend; it's the usual way of doing things now. Digital transformation is not a one-time destination; it's an ongoing journey. The process is similar to building a stack of blocks- each piece added on-demand as your business grows. Composable architecture is the foundation of your digital transformation journey. So adopt it now and make the transformation agile and enjoyable.

(The writer is VP of Engineering, Contentstack)



YOUR
WEEK
AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

You possess a knack for innovation and hard work, always striving to ensure that tasks are executed flawlessly and efficiently. This week, prepare yourself for significant responsibilities that will demand your attention and dedication. Your commitment to diligence and leadership will not go unnoticed; expect to see a tangible return on your efforts, particularly in financial terms. However, it's essential to seek balance in your personal connections, as stability there might require some nurturing. Opportunities for professional advancement, including new projects or job offers, are likely to emerge. While you may encounter a mix of support and disappointment from those around you, and a family member might be on the move, rest assured that your initiatives are set to flourish. Patience will be your ally as you await the fruits of your labor, amidst a backdrop of meaningful friendships.

Lucky number 16 | Lucky colour Orange
Lucky day Friday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

As the week unfolds, a journey begins. Embrace this path with confidence and positivity, aware that the road ahead is lengthy but promising. Your efforts and dedication are on the verge of being celebrated, bringing a sense of accomplishment that fuels your drive and ambition. This recognition not only uplifts your spirit but also inspires you to continue striving for excellence. You'll find yourself empowered, with renewed vigor and determination guiding your steps along a smoother route. However, as the week draws to a close, it's crucial to remain humble. There's a risk of losing touch with your humility, which could hinder your creative flow. Stay grounded and focused on your inner development to navigate through these challenges.

Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Monday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you're enveloped in a wave of romance, marking an auspicious period for new beginnings in love. As the days unfold, there's a significant chance of meeting someone who deeply resonates with your soul, signaling the blossoming of a promising connection. This budding romance holds immense potential, paving the way for enduring joy and deep, mutual affection. Your adventurous spirit shines brightly, fueling your actions with boldness and a fearless approach to life's challenges. An opportunity for a journey presents itself, inviting excitement and new experiences. However, it's wise to stay vigilant during your travels, ensuring the safety and security of your personal possessions. This period is ripe with possibilities, urging you to embrace the adventures of the heart and the world around you.

Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour See Green
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This period marks a promising shift towards prosperity and financial gain. Expect unexpected gains or generous offerings from loved ones. During this season of affection, some may find themselves on the receiving end of significant romantic gestures, potentially solidifying relationships. However, a few might navigate through intense emotional challenges, grappling with feelings of remorse and unease that disrupt sleep and peace of mind. This internal turmoil may amplify concerns, leading to a heightened sense of stress. Yet, as the week progresses, a surge of self-assurance regarding personal capabilities will emerge, inspiring a proactive stance towards life's endeavors. It's a moment ripe for transforming aspirations into tangible plans, channeling thoughts into purposeful action, and realizing ambitions with determination and effort.

Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Tuesday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you'll navigate through a mix of trials and triumphs with unwavering determination. Your path is illuminated by a lucid purpose, equipping you with the readiness to embrace the myriad of experiences life throws at you. Your strength and valor are at their peak, enabling you to surmount any hurdles with grace. Embodying the essence of a valiant champion, you stand prepared to conquer every challenge with resilience. Your journey this week is marked by your heroic spirit, showcasing your ability to push through adversities with an indomitable resolve. This period is a testament to your enduring spirit and tenacity, as you march forward with an unshakable confidence in your quest for success.

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour White
Lucky day Thursday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you may experience a sense of unease and disappointment, feeling as though your efforts have yet to yield the desired results. You're on the brink of overcoming the final challenge that stands between you and your goals. As the week progresses, a shift occurs, leading to the fulfillment of your aspirations. Joy, contentment, and the realization of positive outcomes, including significant personal achievements, become apparent. This phase brings a much-needed respite and lightness, offering you a chance to truly revel in your accomplishments. Success is within reach, thanks to your confidence and the dynamic application of your creative talents. Embrace this period of completion and the rewards it brings.

Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour Black
Lucky day Thursday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

You embody the essence of freedom, allowing your emotions to flourish and your creativity to soar. At your core lies a deep-seated romanticism, paired with a gentle, compassionate nature that cherishes serenity and calm. Your emotional landscape, however, is not without its fluctuations, driving a desire to leave a mark on the world through your insightful perspectives. Integrating practices such as meditation and yoga into your daily life, you navigate the spiritual realm with a sense of liberty and empowerment. Resistant to outdated perspectives, you're a fountain of innovation and imaginative prowess, maintaining a balance between your physical and mental well-being. As the week winds down, your spirit thrives in social gatherings, where the joy of success is shared amongst friends and family, reminding you of the value and warmth found in togetherness.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Off-white
Lucky day Sunday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week kicks off with a wave of joyous occasions! Prepare to indulge in festive gatherings, whether it be intimate ceremonies or grand celebrations, each moment promises to be unforgettable. Surrounding yourself with cherished companions or family members, you'll find yourself immersed in meaningful contemplation. Revel in the delights of fine dining and the pleasure of indulgence, embracing the finer aspects of existence. This period is marked by a harmonious blend of communal warmth and personal reflection, offering a perfect balance of enjoyment and introspection. Amidst the laughter and conversations, you'll discover insights that enrich your inner world, subtly guiding your path forward. The experiences shared during these gatherings will not only strengthen bonds but also leave lasting impressions, fueling your spirit with a sense of fulfillment and connection.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Saturday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

Embrace gratitude and cherish every moment of joy and accomplishment. Your journey is enriched by sharing these milestones with others, leading to moments filled with joyous gatherings, from heartfelt reunions to significant celebrations that mark the passage of time. These occasions offer a respite from the daily grind, allowing you to immerse yourself in the warmth of companionship and shared happiness. As you navigate through these gatherings, remember to pause and appreciate the simple pleasures that come from being surrounded by those who matter most. This approach not only fosters a sense of community but also reminds us of the importance of setting aside our routine challenges to bask in the collective joy of togetherness.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Maroon
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22

At the beginning of the week, you may encounter challenges in your romantic relationships that leave you feeling let down and wounded, especially when the hurt comes from an unexpected source. This emotional turmoil might temporarily obscure your outlook. However, as the week progresses, you'll find clarity and a renewed sense of resilience. You'll discover an inner strength and capacity for love that surpasses your previous experiences, pushing aside any confusion and negativity. This newfound clarity enhances communication and sets positive changes in motion. For some, this period also brings opportunities for professional advancement through overseas engagements, enriching your growth prospects. Additionally, you might experience a profound shift in your spiritual perspective. Any significant barriers that previously stood in your way now seem surmountable, empowering you to overcome them with newfound determination.

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Red
Lucky day Wednesday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week finds you riding a wave of heightened feelings and sensitivity. Your creative impulses are set to soar, painting your thoughts with vivid strokes of imagination. However, there's a gentle reminder to balance your heartfelt decisions with a dose of practicality, as your aspirations could stretch beyond the grasp of reality. Some may experience fluctuations in their natural rhythms, leading to moments of frustration. Yet, this very sensitivity can be channeled into artistic or spiritual endeavors, offering a soothing balm for the soul. Beware, though, as the week also carries a whisper of caution against being misled. Stay alert to the possibility of deceit, safeguarding yourself against those who might wish to exploit your generous spirit.

Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Lavender
Lucky day Saturday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

You're entering a period of genuine joy and fulfillment, having successfully navigated through previous challenges and rivalries. This phase marks the celebration of your achievements, with your efforts gaining widespread appreciation. Whether the acknowledgment is grand or understated, it will undoubtedly be present. This moment also serves as an affirmation that you're moving in the correct direction, though the journey ahead remains extensive. Embark on this path with optimism and assurance. It's also a time to practice financial prudence, ensuring that your expenditures are well-considered and aligned with your long-term objectives. Additionally, embrace the opportunity for personal growth and learning that comes with this new chapter. Let your experiences sharpen your wisdom and guide your decisions, paving the way for continued success and stability.

Lucky number 21 | Lucky colour Mustard
Lucky day Saturday

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ASTROTURF

BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Detoxify the negatives to optimise the potential

Past influences our run of life in a big way. In fact, life takes off on the premise set by the Karmic carry-over from the past, which invariably is a bag full of both positive and negative thought seeds. These thought seeds hold the key to our inherent potential as well as limiting tendencies. As and when they get a congenial ground, they come into play. When the potential side gets suitable exposure, it leads to creativity. And, given an unpleasant trigger, the indwelling negatives overtake mind's drive and then makes you crazy, which also stands in way of positives bloom out in full. The question now is: Are we totally bound by the past with no scope for reinventing our course of life afresh? Here a look into the premise on which the theory of Karma stands. Human mind is driven by a sense of duality, which offers you with the opportunity to make choices over the same

issue. But whenever choice comes into play, the probability of its use and misuse remains equal. And there is no free lunch in this life. You are to own up responsibility for the choices made and bear with consequences thereof, whether pleasant or painful. That runs in succession. It implies that the learning had, skillsets acquired, virtues and attributes acquired, will get carried over as seed potential to the succeeding life. The habits and attitudes cultivated will get carried over as limiting tendencies. What you give to others, will come back to you. And unfulfilled task if any, will offer ground to work upon them. But they are just indicative and will not play out unless suitable ground is available. Here again, the choice option also enjoins upon you with the capacity to self-reflect upon own thought trends and make necessary amends. For, we are also armed with an exclusive privilege of the faculty of dis-



criminate intelligence, applying which, you can dispassionately analyse and pick up right lead. Following which, you can make conscientious choice to redefine your destiny indicators. The irony, however, is that seldom do we remain con-

scious about using our empowerment tool in time. The other day a worried mother concerned about unwanted challenge faced by her son came asking: "What is in store of my son's destiny. He is a very well-meaning, talented, and a hard-working person. For no fault of his, he was shabbily treated by his employer and is now without a job. He seems to have lost his spirit and is directionless. Please guide." Well, it's not his fault that he lost his job. He carries immense potential and should look for another job. Mind signifying Moon, which being the lord of career indicating 10th house is very well aligned to benevolent Jupiter as well as his lagna lord Venus. Also, the Sun is beautifully aligned to Jupiter. It implies that he has a fertile mind. His value system is high, qualified to hold responsible positions. Mercury well aligned to Uranus makes him a talented guy. Karmic Saturn

favourably aligned with Uranus means that he is inventive and thorough in his work, having eye on even minor detail. The problem with him is that instead of making best use of his potential side, this unpleasant happening has triggered indwelling negative tendencies, which has overtaken his mind's drive. Moon is placed adverse to mischievous Neptune, which makes him stuck to his fanciful dream perception, distanced from ground reality. If things do not happen on expected lines, it will be difficult for him to digest. Consequently, instead of being in look out for a fresh job, he is unnecessarily mulling on impressions of what has already happened, which is now just the past. He, thus, has been burning his own blood for no fault of his. Saturn is conjunct Ketu, which means that given an unpleasant situation, instead of facing the challenge ahead in stride, he will begin sulking, as is hap-

pening now. He will thus fail to take timely initiative. Mercury opposite Saturn brings in fixated one track mind. Mercury also placed adverse to Jupiter makes him impatient, and which accounts for his insensible reasoning and judgment. "Will you suggest some puja or remedial measure that may ward of these negative tendencies." Asked the lady. Well, no puja or remedial measure could strike upon his mind space to make necessary correction. What will really work is to first acknowledge his short comings and then address them by following the mind detoxification process suggested. Periodic counselling may further help. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

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NEW ZEALAND BOWL OUT AUSTRALIA, CHASES 369

AP ■ WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND)

Part-time off-spinner Glenn Phillips took 5-45 as New Zealand bowled out Australia for 164 in its second innings Saturday on the third day of the first cricket test. Phillips' maiden five-wicket total comprised the wickets of Usman Khawaja (28), first-innings century-maker Cameron Green (34), Travis Head (29), Mitch Marsh for a first-ball duck and Alex Carey (3). Matt Henry took 3-36 as Australia was bowled in less than four hours.

Australia still increased its overall lead to 368 after leading by 204 on the first innings. At stumps New Zealand was 111-3 and 257 runs behind.

Rachin Ravindra reached a half century from 77 balls just before stumps and was 56 not out at the close of play and Daryl Mitchell was 12.

Australia struck a major blow when it dismissed Kane Williamson for 9 in the last session. Williamson fell to Nathan Lyon, the off-spinner who likely holds the key to the match.

After being run out for 0 in the first innings, Williamson was caught by Steve Smith at leg slip from a ball that bounced more than he expected. Smith moved to first slip and caught Will Young (15) off Head as New Zealand's hopes of winning began to melt away.

Ravindra revived those hopes a little before stumps with his first half century in his first match against Australia. The only previous time he passed 50 in his test career, he made 240.

A New Zealand win remained unlikely and of the three possible results still in play an Australia win is most probable. A draw also looms as a possibility as rain is

forecast for most of the fourth day.

New Zealand's highest successful fourth-innings run chase in New Zealand is 324 and the current target would represent the 10th-highest successful chase in the history of test cricket. Still, Phillips' incredible contribution in the middle session when four of his five wickets fell helped save some face for New Zealand after it was bowled out for 179 in reply to Australia's 383.

New Zealand captain Tim Southee threw the ball to Phillips as his first spin option of the second innings. New Zealand didn't take a specialist spinner into the match but relied on Ravindra who took 1-24 in the first innings.

Southee then backed Phillips who bowled his 16 overs without a break.

"It's a dream come true absolutely," Phillips said. "Tim (Southee) is an incredible captain and he really gives me



the confidence to go out there and stick to my plan and also gives you the chance to be able to miss every now and then. As a spinner you really need that. "The bowling unit today really stuck to the things we wanted to stick to. Partnership bowling all the way."

Phillips has a reputation in the New Zealand team as a player who can make things happen in all three formats: a hard-hitting middle-order batsman, an athletic fielder and now as a serious bowling option. He had taken only 11 wickets in his five previous tests with a best of 4-53.

When Green became his fifth victim, brilliantly caught by Will Young under the helmet at short leg, Phillips set off on a long, jubilant run around the Basin Reserve, finally ending the Henry's arms. "I've got a six-year-old daughter and any celebration a six-year-old girl would do, that's probably me," Phillips

said. "I've never really thought what to do if I got a five-for but the emotion, the way the crowd went up. It was just an unbelievable moment."

Phillips acknowledged New Zealand's chance of winning the test is slight but happy to be able to give his team a chance.

"I understand we've got to combat the situations that are out there," he said. "Obviously there's a bit of turn so it's a matter of how we go about combating (Nathan) Lyon. The way their big fast bowlers bowl as well is going to be a challenge. "I definitely think we've got the time on our hands to be able to pull this off." Australia resumed Saturday at 13-2 after losing Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne late on the second day. Nathan Lyon was once again a useful nightwatchman and he made 41 before he fell in the first session and Khawaja also was out stumped before lunch.



CSK training camp ahead of IPL 2024 gets underway

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings' pre-season camp got underway here on Saturday in the presence of pacer Deepak Chahar, who will be eyeing a national comeback through a consistent run for his franchise in the IPL beginning March 22.

"The first batch of local (Indian) players arrived on Friday and more are expected to arrive in the coming days," a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) official told PTI.

On Friday, CSK confirmed the arrival of the first batch of players in the city and they included Simarjeet Singh (pacer), Rajvardhan Hangargekar (all-rounder), Mukesh Choudhary (pacer), Prashant Solanki (spinner), Ajay Mandal (all-rounder) and Deepak Chahar (seamer).

Notably, Chahar has not played any form of cricket

since last December when he pulled out of the T20 series against Australia midway before skipping the tour of South Africa due to his father's illness.

However, he declared himself fully fit last month while training at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru. The injury-prone pacer is eyeing a comeback to the national side for the T20 World Cup scheduled in the Caribbean and the USA in June.

Fan-favourite and team skipper MS Dhoni's arrival is yet to be confirmed. He was spotted with his wife Sakshi in Jamnagar on Friday when he attended the pre-wedding function of Anant Ambani, the youngest son of Indian business tycoon Mukesh Ambani. CSK open their IPL 2024 campaign versus Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) here on March 22.

CA chief Hockley denies reports Big Three ignored study to save Test cricket

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley on Saturday rebutted reports that India, England and his organisation had not paid attention to a draft presented to the International Cricket Council to save Test cricket.

A report in the Sydney Morning Herald said that the three powerful boards were dismissive of a document compiled by New Zealand Cricket chair Martin Snedden, who proposed an overhaul of the future tours program (FTP) to save the longest version of the game.

"Categorically, I think there was some misreporting around that. Certainly, the discussions I'm in at the moment are very much thinking about how we can optimise the calendar and how we can continue to grow cricket around the world," Hockley told SEN Cricket.

The changes proposed in the blueprint document include additional windows for T20 leagues other than the Indian Premier League, alteration in the World Test Championship points system, 40-over ODIs, apprehensions about T20Is and an effort towards pooling of broadcast rights revenue for bilateral series.

Hockley, when asked about the report, denied suggestions that the powerful nations were turning a blind eye to Test cricket, saying he had met



Snedden during the New Zealand-Australia first Test in Wellington and conveyed to him that Australia was very much committed to help ICC ensure all the three formats flourish. "We had a great catch-up with Martin (Snedden) here yesterday (Friday in Wellington)," Hockley said.

"We're very much involved with that piece of work. I think at Cricket Australia we've got good influence and I think we've got a really important role to play around the ICC in terms of driving strategy."

"I think that Cricket Australia has been behind many of the developments. Whether that's the introduction of the World Test Championship. I'm on the FTP working group with the ICC, and making sure that we're keeping all three formats healthy and strong, that we're growing the game in all territories," he added.

Pointing out the growth of cricket across the world, Hockley

said countries like the United States too had embraced the game and would be co-hosting the T20 World Cup with the West Indies later this year.

"It's just brilliant to see the way that the T20 World Cup in the US has been embraced. I understand that ticket sales were 20 times oversubscribed when they were when they were released."

"So, I think cricket has a great opportunity to have a format strategy where all the formats play a role and all fit together. That is really the essence of the work that Martin has started. It's incumbent on all of us as members working together to make sure that we continue to take it forward," he added.

Hockley added that Australia had great respect for the World Test Championship and that its men's Test cricket was its prized property. "Practically, it is making sure that the World Test Championship is given greater prominence so each Test series has context."

"I think it's looking at the economic viability in different territories and how we make sure that it is economically viable for those countries where it isn't (currently). Still for Australia... Men's Test cricket is the most valuable property. So, it's really working together."

"Then on the calendar, it's trying to configure the calendar in a way that there's space for all three formats," he concluded.

RANJI TROPHY SEMIFINAL

Deshpande, Thakur shine as Mumbai thrash Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tushar Deshpande (3/24) and Shardul Thakur (2/48) starred with the ball to put Mumbai on top following a meek display from Tamil Nadu on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Saturday.

Tamil Nadu skipper B Sai Kishore's decision to bat first backfired as the visitors were shot out for a mere 146 in the first innings with Deshpande and Thakur making life miserable for the visiting batters at the BKC Ground.

If it was any consolation, Tamil Nadu struck twice with the ball but Mumbai shaved off a significant chunk of first-innings deficit, reaching 45/2 at stumps to trail by another 101 runs. Musheer Khan (24 not out) and nightwatchman Mohit Avasthi (1) were at the crease with Mumbai losing openers Prithvi Shaw (5) and Bhupen Palwani (15).

Shaw fell early against Kuldeep Sen while Sai Kishore trapped Lalvani for the second wicket, but Mumbai remained on top.

On a track which had movement off the surface as well as turn for spinners, Mumbai proved to be the superior side given their bowlers extracted more

support and their batters did not find getting runs as tough as the visitors.

Tamil Nadu, shellshocked by a disastrous start to their first semifinal in seven years, could not muster the courage to stage a fightback and folded shortly after tea despite Vijay Shankar (44) and Washington Sundar's (43) rearguard act.

The horror began when B Sai Sudharsan was trapped leg-before on the fourth ball of the match by Shardul Thakur and it did not take long for the Mumbai bowlers to get all over the Tamil Nadu side in the first hour.

Mumbai bowlers exploited the early moisture with the new ball to perfection as Mohit Avasthi had TN's leading run-maker N Jagadeesan (4) caught at short leg by Musheer Khan.

Coming in as first change, Deshpande remained unplayable throughout the innings for the Tamil Nadu batters. Pradosh Ranjan Paul's bat curled in his hands as he hit one straight to Deshpande, who took a fine return catch for the third wicket.

It was a brave call for skipper R Sai Kishore to promote himself ahead of the dependable Baba Indrajith but one that did not work.

Sai Kishore's footwork was all over the place when

Deshpande pitched one in line of the stumps to move the ball back in, pegging back the middle-stump as Tamil Nadu slumped to 17/4.

Tamil Nadu's hopes of a revival took a body blow when Indrajith (11) was caught at short midwicket with Tanush Kotian (2/10) taking a sharp diving catch in front of him to leave the visitors reeling.

Shankar and Sundar fought well on either side of the lunch break but the pitch did not relent in giving support to the Mumbai bowlers.

Shankar, who began well with a flurry of fours, was tested consistently outside the off-stump by Deshpande, who kept moving the ball away from the right-hander.

Deshpande's hard work resulted in a breakthrough for Thakur who had Shankar caught at the second slip by Shams Mulani for a 109-ball 44 which featured eight fours.

Having shown a little interest in getting runs, Shankar's departure forced Sundar to get a move on.

While he was mostly resolute in defence, Sundar also had luck favouring him twice. An outside edge off Shwetal had Shreyas Iyer spilling a tough chance on 11 and when he reached 37, Musheer spilled a catch at cover.

Bayern Munich drops points against Freiburg

AP ■ BERLIN

Bayern Munich's title hopes have suffered another blow.

Lucas Holer scored late for Freiburg to frustrate Bayern with a 2-2 draw in the Bavarian powerhouse's 2,000th Bundesliga game on Friday.

Bayern, the 11-time defending champion, was on the verge of cutting the gap to league leader Bayer Leverkusen to five points until the 87th minute, when Holer struck a fine volley with his left boot inside the far post after the visitors failed to clear the ball. Leverkusen can move 10 points clear at the top with a win at Cologne in their derby on Sunday. Ten rounds remain after this weekend.

"It's really annoying how things are going right now. For me personally, for

everyone," said Jamal Musiala, who put Bayern in front. "We all want to win and be champions. We want to get titles and we just have to stay as positive as possible and push through, and play as well as possible to maybe (win) something still." Bayern next hosts Lazio on Tuesday for the second leg of their Champions League round of 16 tie, needing to overcome a 1-0 loss from the first leg in Rome.

All four goals on Friday were spectacular. Freiburg made a better start and Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer made a fine save to stop Roland Sallai's header, then Sallai hit the crossbar with an overhead kick, and Christian Günter struck the ball perfectly to send it inside the far post in the 12th.

Tel equalized in the 35th with a strike as sweet as Günter's inside the right post.



The 18-year-old French forward, making a rare start because of Leroy Sané's injury, flicked the ball inside with his first touch and dispatched it past Freiburg 'keeper Noah Atubolu with his next.

Bayern was better after the break, when Atubolu saved from Musiala and Holer needed to clear Harry Kane's header off

the line. Musiala scored in the 75th when he weaved through three Freiburg defenders and curled his shot inside the far post.

"It's just instinct," Musiala said. "You look to see what possibilities arise, with dribbling, with head, a change of movement, and see what you can create. Everything is seeing in the moment, what can I do."

But Höler had the final say to cost Bayern potentially decisive points in the league title race.

"Mindlessly played first half hour and punished for it. Came back with an individual action. Nothing else was possible at the time and the second half was OK then. But sure, in the end, one half is not enough," Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel said after his second game since his end-of-season departure was announced.

Messi, Inter Miami to skip US Open Cup

AP ■ CHICAGO

Lionel Messi and Inter Miami won't compete in this year's U.S. Open Cup and just eight of Major League Soccer's 26 American teams will enter the competition. Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles FC, Salt Lake, San Jose and Seattle will enter the 96-team competition, the U.S. Soccer Federation said Friday.

Houston is the defending tournament champion and the others were among the top seven teams from last year's regular-season Supporters' Shield standings who are not in this year's CONCACAF Champions Cup. MLS teams will enter in the fourth round and face only lower tier squads until a head-to-head MLS matchup is unavoidable. Last year, 18 MLS teams entered in the third round and eight in the fourth.

Houston beat Miami 2-1 in last year's final. Messi missed the game because of an injury.

Since the start of MLS in 1996, the only team not from the first tier to win the competition was the 1999 Rochester Raging Rhinos of the USL's second-tier A-League, which beat the Colorado



Rapids 2-0 in the final.

MLS announced Dec. 15 it was pulling all its teams from the nation's oldest soccer competition, which started in 1914, and was replacing them with third-tier developmental sides from MLS Next Pro.

The USSF said five days later it was treating MLS's decision as a request that it was turning down.

In its announcement, the USSF said it improved financial incentives, increased travel reimbursement and added new commercial partners.

MLS said it will enter 11 teams from its third tier: Austin, Carolina, Chattanooga, Chicago, Colorado, Crown Legacy, Minnesota, LA Galaxy, New York City, New York Red Bulls and Portland.

The second-tier United Soccer League Championship is entering all 24 teams.

First-round matches will be scheduled for March 19-21, followed by the second round on April 2 and 3, the third round on April 16 and 17, the fourth round on May 7 and 8 and the fifth round on May 21 and 22. Quarterfinals will be July 9 and 10, semifinals on Aug.

Defending champion Alex de Minaur in Mexican Open final

AP ■ ACAPULCO (MEXICO)

Defending champion Alex de Minaur advanced to the final of the Mexican Open when Jack Draper retired in the third set Friday. The third-seeded Australian won the first set 6-3, dropped the second 6-2 and was leading 4-0 in the third when Draper, who was visibly diminished physically, called it quits.

De Minaur will face Casper Ruud, who pulled off an upset by beating second-seeded Holger Rune 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the late match. "I'm happy to be in the final, but I'm hoping that Jack is doing fine. He has a tremendous talent and hopefully he can recover for the upcoming tournaments," de Minaur said. "It's hard to play when your opponent is not OK physically, but you need to remain focused."

The 25-year-old de Minaur won his ninth straight match in Mexico and became the first

defending champion to reach the Acapulco final since David Ferrer in 2013.

De Minaur has seven career ATP titles, with last year at Acapulco his most recent.

Draper, from England, was playing in his first semifinal of an ATP 500 tournament.

Later, in the other semifinals, Ruud lost the first set and then was down 3-1 in the third with Rune serving, but he managed a couple of breaks and held his serve to take the win.

"I did not get the best start, and the third set looked really bad, I just tried to stay in there and it seemed like Holger was struggling and at the end it worked for me," said Ruud.

The 25-year-old Norwegian will try to win his 10th career title, the first one on an ATP 500.

Rune, who is the seventh player on the ATP rankings, lost in the Acapulco semifinals for the second year in a row.

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Avesh Khan-led Madhya Pradesh pace bowling unit hit right lengths on a pitch that offered enough carry to bowl out Vidarbha for a meagre 170 on day one to gain control of their Ranji Trophy semifinal match here on Saturday.

Avesh (4/49) was the pick of MP bowlers, while receiving good support from Kulwant Khejroliya (2/38) and Venkatesh Iyer (2/28).

Madhya Pradesh reached 47 for one in their first innings at close, and trail by 123 runs.

The VCA Stadium deck wore such fine green tinge as MP employed spin for just 2.4 overs in a total of 56.4 overs they bowled on the day.

Left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya, who dismissed last man Umesh Yadav, did the spinner's duty for a brief period.

Other spinners in their ranks like offie Saransh Jain remained spectators of the proceedings.

Vidarbha's feeble fight came through Karun Nair, who made 63 (105 balls, 9x4).

India pacer Avesh gave MP a fine start to the match when he uprooted the stumps of opener Dhruv Shorey (13).

Vidarbha lost wickets at regular intervals from that point and their biggest partnership was a 36 between Atharva Taide (39, 63b, 8x4) and Aman Mokhadhe (13, 75 balls) for the second wicket.

It came in almost 16 overs but the home side failed to capitalise on all the hard work. Taide, who made a gritty hundred against Karnataka in the quarterfinals, snicked Iyer to stumper Himanshu Mantri who took a lovely tumbling catch behind the first slip.

It brought Karun, Vidarbha's highest run-getter so far this season, to the middle and he

played a fine innings filled with those typical drives and cuts.

But the right-hander did not find support from the other end as Avesh dismissed a stubborn Mokhadhe. The hosts soon lost Yash Rathod, bowled by Iyer, and skipper Akshay Wadkar in the space of five runs to slip to 106 for five. The catch Yash Dubey took at gully off pacer Khejroliya to oust Wadkar was a stunning one. He made a low-

dive to his left to pouch a screamer as Wadkar tried to steer the ball from outside the off-stump. Vidarbha's hopes of reaching at least 200 was dashed when Karun dragged a Khejroliya delivery to his stumps while attempting a pull. However, the Vidarbha bowlers were not as accurate as their MP counterparts as the visiting batters saw off the day without any alarm.

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SSA-12/3/2023-MIS-Sec/SSA/1/482035/2024 Dated 02.03.2024

Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites bids vide GEM/2024/B/4693414 Dated : 01-03-2024 for supply of Tablet Computers through GeM portal.

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