



**OPINION 6**  
A TRIBUTE TO THE TWO  
GREAT SAINTS OF INDIA

**WORLD 9**  
PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY  
ANNOUNCES NEW CABINET

**MONEY 10**  
INDIAN ECONOMY CAN GROW AT 8  
PER CENT TILL 2047: SUBRAMANIAN

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CAPTAIN PANDYA:  
IN SEARCH OF A  
SOUNDING BOARD  
12 SPORTS

# Mukhtar Ansari dies of cardiac arrest in Banda hospital; Sec 144 clamped in UP

Jailed gangster-turned-politician was rushed for medical aid as health deteriorated again

PTI ■ BANDA/LUCKNOW

Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday, its principal said.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which bars large gatherings, were imposed across the state and additional security personnel were deployed in the Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi districts of the state.

Ansari was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail in "an unconscious state" and, according to its principal Suneel Kaushal, he died at the hospital following cardiac arrest.

Ansari's brother Afzal Ansari on Tuesday alleged that he was subjected to "slow poisoning" in the jail, a charge denied by the authorities.

Ansari, 63, was a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar seat and was behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005. He had over 60 criminal cases pending against him. He was sentenced in eight cases since September 2022 by



Security personnel stand guard at Government Medical College where gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was admitted, in Banda, on Thursday and Mukhtar Ansari (inset)

different courts in Uttar Pradesh and was lodged in the Banda jail. His name was on the list of 66 gangsters issued by Uttar Pradesh Police last year. Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPC were imposed across the state and teams of the Central Reserve

Police Force along with the local police deployed in Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi. Ansari, who hailed from Mau, was believed to have a strong influence in the adjoining Ghazipur and Varanasi districts as well.

The social media cell of the Uttar Pradesh Police has also been activated to keep a close

watch on unlawful elements online, the DGP said. According to a medical bulletin, Ansari was brought to the medical college around 8.25 pm on Thursday in an unconscious state after he had complained of vomiting. A team of nine doctors attended to him but he died of cardiac arrest, it stated.

The Samajwadi Party condoled Ansari's death.

"Sad demise of former MLA Shri Mukhtar Ansari. May his soul rest in peace. May the bereaved family members get the strength to bear this immense loss. Humble tribute," the party said in a post in Hindi on X. Earlier, Ansari was hospitalised

for around 14 hours on Tuesday after he complained of abdominal pain.

Afzal Ansari, who is also the Ghazipur MP, on Tuesday alleged that his brother was given slow poison in jail.

"Mukhtar said that he was given a poisonous substance in food in jail. This happened for the second time. Around 40 days ago also he was given poison. And recently on March 19 of March 22, he was again given this (poison) due to which his condition is bad," Afzal Ansari said.

Afzal Ansari also said that during the virtual hearing of a case in a Barabanki court on March 21, Mukhtar's lawyer had filed an application in the court alleging that his client had been given "slow poison" in jail due to which his condition was deteriorating. Meanwhile, according to reports, the kin of Mukhtar were scheduled to reach Banda late at night.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath convened a high-level meeting at his residence as the news trickled in.

It is learnt that an eight-member team has been formed to conduct the post-mortem examination once the family reaches Banda Hospital.

# Kejriwal in full throttle as ED keeps his custody

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday questioned the locus standi of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for arresting him in the multi-crore liquor gate scam merely on the basis of statements of some, including his former Cabinet colleague Manish

General SV Raju, who also questioned why attempts were being made to link the BJP with the excise policy case.

Raju had argued that Kejriwal's statements to the ED's questioning have been evasive.

"He (Kejriwal) wants to play to the gallery. How does he know how many documents are with ED? This is all figment of



Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal comes out of the Rouse Avenue Court after he was produced by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, in New Delhi, on Thursday

PTI

Sisodia's secretary.

Kejriwal asked the court whether these four statements are enough to arrest a sitting Chief Minister.

"I am named by four witnesses in the excise policy case. Are four statements enough to arrest a sitting CM?", alleged Kejriwal.

He was produced in a special court on Thursday where his ED custody was extended by four days till April 1. The probe agency had sought seven-day custody of the AAP chief.

Kejriwal was supposed to do an "expose" on Friday as per his wife, Sunita, statement a day earlier.

Kejriwal submitted in the open court during the proceedings that statements of witnesses recorded by the investigating agency do not in any manner connect him with the alleged offences and questioned his arrest in the matter.

Furthermore, the Chief Minister said Sarath Reddy, an approver in the case, got bail after he made a statement against him who himself donated ₹55 crore to the BJP. "I have evidence of this. Money trail is established as he donated the funds after being arrested," the Chief Minister said.

Kejriwal's submissions were strongly objected to by ED counsel Additional Solicitor

imagination ... AAP received the kickbacks which they used in Goa elections. There is a clear cut chain ... The money that they say came to BJP has nothing to do with the liquor scam. There is no quid pro quo... The CM is not above law. He is an ordinary man. We have material to show that this very person demanded 100 crore kickback," Raju contended.

In its remand application, the ED said during Kejriwal's custodial interrogation, his statements were recorded over five days but he was "giving evasive replies". Kejriwal alleged that the ED investigation had two objectives — one, to create a smokescreen in front of the country that Aam Aadmi Party was corrupt and did the scam and two, to do an "extortion racket" for collecting money.

Reddy is the director of Aurobindo Pharma Limited and one of the co-accused-turned-approvers in the case. The AAP national convener personally addressed the Delhi court today and made the submissions in Hindi after taking permission from the court despite his lawyers being present and he did not oppose the ED's remand extension request. "Ham ED ki remand oppose nahi kar rahe. Jitne din chaahe wo mujhe custody

Continued on Page 8

## Erode MP kills self over denial of ticket

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Aganeshamurthi, the 76-year-old Member of Parliament (MP) belonging to the MDMK who was representing Erode in the Lok Sabha, committed suicide over denial of ticket.

Ganeshamurthi, three-time MP representing Erode, was shattered when he was told by party founder Vaiko that he would not figure in the party's list as a candidate for the upcoming election. Instead, MDMK chief Vaiko nominated his son Durai Vaiko as the candidate from Erode.

Persons close to Ganeshamurthy said though the latter pleaded with Vaiko for one more term, the party founder remained intransigent and this upset the sitting MP.



According to police, Ganeshamurthy had allegedly tried to kill himself after consuming some poisonous tablets on March 24 at his home. He was rushed to a hospital here and later referred to another private institute in Coimbatore. Hospital authorities said Ganeshamurthy died of cardiac arrest. Vaiko who rushed to Coimbatore said, "He met me twice. We never expected him to make such a decision. He was in a good mood. I cannot believe that he took such a step and passed away. We pay our deep homage." Expressing shock over the sudden demise of Ganeshamurthy, noted film actress in Tamil and Malayalam Lalitha Sree said, "Political parties should be careful while not granting chances to sitting MPs because some of them are so obsessed with serving the people that they may not be able to withstand the snubbing they receive from the mother parties."

## India, China discuss disengagement in border areas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

India and China have agreed to sustain their efforts to resolve the boundary dispute through diplomatic and military channels during a fresh round of talks between the two sides. The parleys came in the backdrop of persisting tension at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh for the last four years.

Both sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve "complete disengagement" and resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control during the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on



Thursday.

The key meeting was held in Beijing on March 27, it said in a statement. Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the MEA led the Indian delegation. The Chinese delegation was headed by

the Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the statement said.

"In the interim, both sides agreed to maintain regular contact through

diplomatic and military channels and on the need to uphold peace and tranquility on the ground in the border areas in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols," it said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement on Thursday said, "Both sides positively evaluated the progress made in the management and control of the situation in the China-India border area, and had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on the ideas of work for the next stage."

The two sides "agreed to focus on the relevant issues on the ground along the border, reach a solution acceptable to both sides as soon as possible, and promote the transition of the border situation into a normalised phase of control and management," it said.

Continued on Page 8

## Denied ticket by the BJP, Varun Gandhi wanders down memory lane in Pilibhit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after being denied ticket to contest from his sitting Pilibhit Lok Sabha seat by the BJP, Varun Gandhi on Thursday wrote an emotional open letter to the people of Pilibhit assuring them that he will continue to serve them. Varun, the son of BJP sitting Sultanpur MP, Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, has broken his silence first time after the BJP dropped him from the list of candidates in the upcoming LS elections. Sharing the letter on X, he said, his



relationship with Pilibhit is one of love and trust which is far above any political calculations. The BJP has fielded Uttar Pradesh Public Works Minister Jitin Prasada from Pilibhit replacing Varun who has been vocal against his own Government several times on the issue of inflation and unemployment. Prasada had filed his nominations on this seat on Wednesday. "Even though I am not able to contest elections from here, I will

continue to serve the people of Pilibhit," the Pilibhit MP wrote in the open letter.

Defining himself fortunate to have served the people of Pilibhit, he wrote, "I consider myself fortunate that I got the opportunity to serve the great people of Pilibhit for years. Not only as an MP, but also as a person, the ideals, simplicity and kindness I got from Pilibhit have contributed greatly to my upbringing and development."

Continued on Page 8

## Resilient Padmarajan refuses to bow out of Elections

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ THRISSUR

As returning officer VR Krishna Teja, who is also the district collector, started accepting the nomination papers for the Lok Sabha election from Thrissur constituency on Thursday, Kunhambu Nair Padmarajan (64) was present to file the first nomination paper. Since all the papers were in order, the returning officer accepted the same and Padmarajan rushed to Thrissur Railway Station to board the train to Kannur to visit his ancestral home and worship in front of the family deity.



Thrissur hogged the national limelight thanks to film actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi who is contesting from the constituency as a BJP candidate. But for one day, people forget the star candidate and his challengers K Muraliedharan (Congress) and V S Sunil Kumar (CPI) and the focus was on Padmarajan. Padmarajan is known all over the world as "election king" and his contest from Thrissur is his 240th battle of ballot box.

It is said about BJP leaders in Kerala that they contest the election only to get defeated. But Padmarajan is a man with a mission. Last week he filed nomination papers from Dharmapuri Lok Sabha constituency in Tamil Nadu which has been accepted. Owner of a roadside tyre-retreading shop at Mettur who is also a part time homeo medical practitioner, Padmarajan is not one who wastes money on election. "I want the world to know me as one who democratised the election

process. Thanks to my efforts. Candidates not sponsored by political outfits too get dignity and respect," Padmarajan told The Pioneer after filing his nomination paper.

He has been contesting elections since 1988. "I had contested six presidential elections and an equal number of vice presidential polls. The Limca Book of Records has featured me twice while the Guinness Book of world Records featured me once," said Padmarajan who has spent more than ₹1.5 crore on election related expenses.


Continued on Page 8



# Girl thrown off terrace after gang-rape

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational incident reported from Budaun, miscreants gang-raped a girl and later threw her from the terrace to kill her. When the family reached the spot after hearing the screams, the girl was found in an unconscious state. She was admitted to the hospital and the incident was reported to the local police. The cops, however, took the incident lightly and did not register a case, the family alleged. The incident took place in Allapur police station area. The family of the girl hails from Delhi and earns their living by working as labourers in Budaun. They had returned from Delhi after Holi celebration on Tuesday morning. Late Tuesday night, when the girl went for urination, some youths forcibly took her to the terrace of a house where all of them raped her one by one after threatening her with dire consequences. Later, fearing that the girl might reveal their names, the accused threw her from the terrace and escaped. As the girl cried for help, the family members rushed out to enquire about the matter and were shocked to see her lying unconscious in a critically injured state. They took her to the hospital and after admitting her, informed the police about the incident. The local officials had so far not registered a case, claiming that the family informed them about the incident but had so far not handed over any application in this regard. The police said that action would be taken if the family lodged a report. Meanwhile, a six-year-old girl



सूचना

सूचित हो कि मेरी हाईस्कूल के प्रमाण पत्र एवं मार्कशीट पर मेरा नाम ARCHITA KUMARI है जबकि मेरे कुछ अन्य अभिलेखों जैसे आधार कार्ड में मेरा नाम ARCHITA RAI है। दोनों नाम मेरे ही हैं। भविष्य में मुझे ARCHITA RAI के नाम से ही जाना व पहचाना जाये। [ARCHITA RAI पुत्री VIJAY RAI नि. 65, आवास विकास कॉलोनी, माल एबन्यू, लखनऊ।



NOTICE

I hereby declare that I have changed my name from RAJI AHMAD KHAN to RAZI AHMAD KHAN. In future I will be known by the name RAZI AHMAD KHAN only. RAZI AHMAD KHAN S/O WASI AHMAD KHAN R/O 71, Munshiganj Colony, Thana Kotwali Sitapur



NOTICE

I have to changed my name from VADIKA ARORA to VEDIKA ARORA D/O RAJESH ARORA for future purpose. Add- S B-30 GURUDWARA RATANLAL NAGAR, KANPUR NAGAR.



NOTICE

I have to changed my name from SANJANA ARORA to SANJANA ARORA W/O RAJESH ARORA for future purpose. Add- S B-30 GURUDWARA RATANLAL NAGAR, KANPUR NAGAR.



NOTICE

I Shakeel Ahmad Ansari changed my daughter name from Shamreen Mariyam Ansari to Samreen Mariyam Ansari, for all future purpose. 105/133 Chamanganj Kanpur 208001



NOTICE

IN MY PASSPORT MY NAME WRITTEN AS ARSHINA, WHEREAS MY COMPLETE CORRECT NAME IS ARSHINA TAYYAB. PLEASE CORRECT ACCORDINGLY. ARSHINA TAYYAB D/O MOHD. TAYYAB. 458/F/17 SHIVPURI, FATIMA COLONY, HUSAINABAD, LUCKNOW-226003

# Stress on transparent, fair election process

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To ensure the smooth conduct of Lok Sabha elections, a meeting of master trainers was convened at Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Auditorium of the Collectorate. It was chaired by District Magistrate and District Election Officer Surya Pal Gangwar, who emphasised the importance of mutual coordination in conducting the elections in a free, fair, and transparent manner. He underscored the responsibility of all attendees to possess comprehensive knowledge of the election process to facilitate transparent and fair elections. He outlined the training programme for master trainers, who will subsequently educate other election personnel and train polling staff on operating EVMS. He stressed that the training of master trainers would be conducted in multiple phases, covering election procedures, polling booth setup, and other essential aspects of the electoral process. Urging prompt training for polling personnel, Gangwar emphasised the importance of quality training and instructed officials to ensure basic facilities such as water, electricity, ramps, vehicles, and sanitation facilities are in place at polling stations well in advance. The district election officer instructed master trainers to set

up training panels in every room at the venue to disseminate comprehensive information about the Lok Sabha elections to polling officers. He specified the installation of five EVMS in each room and outlined the training presentation to be divided into three phases: general, EVM operation, and common procedures. Additionally, he directed the appointment of a computer operator in each room. The meeting was attended by several officials, including the additional district magistrates (administration, east, judicial, LA1, LA2, and trans-Gomti), district development officer, basic education officer, district science officer, and representatives from relevant departments.

**496 COMPLAINTS REGISTERED ON cVIGIL: RINWA** Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said that after the announcement of Lok Sabha election schedule, 496 complaints had been registered on the cVIGIL app in Uttar Pradesh till March 26. He said while 272 complaints were found to be correct, 224 were found to be wrong. He said that all 496 complaints had been disposed of. So far, the average time for disposal of complaints on cVIGIL app in the whole of Uttar Pradesh is 80 minutes, which is

less than the stipulated time period of 100 minutes. Chief Electoral Officer of Uttar Pradesh Navdeep Rinwa said that the Election Commission of India had developed cVIGIL mobile app to complain about violation of Model Code of Conduct. Through this app, citizens can register complaints in various ways. cVIGIL mobile app can be downloaded from Google Play Store or App Store. Photographs, videos or audio related to violation of model code of conduct can be uploaded on cVIGIL mobile app. He said that action would be taken within 100 minutes of filing of complaint and there was no obligation for the complainant to give his/her name and mobile phone number to complain, but if the complainant complains with his name or mobile phone number, then he/she could see the action taken and the status of the complaint. The chief electoral officer said that usually in the cVIGIL app, apart from complaints of distribution of money, gift coupon distribution, distribution of liquor etc., complaints related to putting up of posters, banners without permission, holding meetings without permission, using vehicles for campaigning without permission, making religious and fanatical speeches are registered.



Bishop Gerald John Mathias washing the feet of believers at St Joseph Cathedral in Lucknow on the occasion of Maundy Thursday

## 2 dead, several hurt in road mishap

**Muzaffarnagar:** Two men were killed and nine others injured, some of them seriously, when a truck ran over some roadside vendors in a market in an area under Shamli district on Thursday, police said.

Thana Bhawan Police Station SHO Satish Kumar said, "One Shafiq (28) and Pradeep (24) were killed after being hit by a truck that lost control in the market area near the Bus stand. Nine others have been injured in the incident and

have been hospitalised." The driver abandoned the truck and fled after the incident. "We are investigating the matter. Efforts are being made to track the driver of the truck. An FIR into the matter will be lodged," said the SHO.

## Passenger's ear bitten off in brawl on bus

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A roadways bus passenger had his ear bitten off in a brawl allegedly with the driver, conductor and their aides. He was also deprived of his gold chain and Rs 19,600 in cash. The brawl erupted when the victim, identified as Kuldeep Kumar of Sidhauri in Sitapur, sought to get down but was refused and he confronted the conductor "I boarded a bus (UP34T9813) for Biswan in Sitapur from Kaiserbagh bus station at around 2 pm on Wednesday and bought a ticket to Atariya in Sitapur. I asked the bus conductor to drop him in Gidhana locality but he told me in a harsh tone that the bus would stop for him only at Biswan. He asked me to board another bus. When I tried to

know the reason, he lost his cool asked me to get off the bus. The driver also intervened in the matter and do did their aides. All of them pounced at me. One of them then bit off my ear and also nibbled on my little finger. My gold chain and Rs 19,600 were also looted," he alleged. A police spokesman confirmed that the brawl erupted over the issue as stated by the complainant. "Two of the accused, identified as Sharad Mishra of Bakshi-Ka-Talab and Mohammed Riaz of Wazirganj, have been arrested and efforts are on to arrest the rest," he said.

**MAN DIES IN BID TO SAVE SON FROM ATTACKERS** A 46-year old man died in a bid to save the life of his son, who was attacked by a group

of men in Para police station area on the day of Holi. A case was registered in this regard on Wednesday. The wife of the deceased also suffered injuries while trying to save her husband and she was admitted to a hospital. As per reports, Sanjay Sharma, Rahul Sharma and Vikas Sharma stormed the house of Munna Sahu (46) of Narpat Khara and started abusing his son Aman. Munna and his wife came out of their room and rushed to their son's rescue. "The accused attacked my father and mother with sticks and iron rods till both fell unconscious. I rushed them to KGMU Trauma Centre where my father died on Wednesday morning while my mother is still undergoing treatment," Aman stated in his complaint.

The bereaved family alleged negligence on the part of the police. The families of the prime accused (Rahul Sharma and Vikas Sharma) and Aman were at loggerheads after the former accused the latter of stealing a cycle parked outside their house some time ago. The bereaved family also alleged that the police outpost incharge did not take any action against the accused on the day of the incident and asked them to come after Munna Sahu's death. "We told the police officer that Munna was critical and action should be taken against the accused, but he said police did not work on allegations," a family member said. A spokesman said three of the accused had been detained and were being interrogated.

## SGPGI rehabilitates encephalitis patient

**Lucknow (PNS):** The physical medicine and rehabilitation department of Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences has scripted a success story by rehabilitating a 38-year-old patient of Japanese Encephalitis from Lucknow. Dr Siddharth Rai, associate professor at the physical medicine and rehabilitation department, while giving the details on Wednesday said this was a fine example of early intervention in a patient. "The 38-year-old patient, Sonu Sharma, from Lucknow was quite debilitated when we took him for rehabilitation," he said. Giving the history of the patient he said that the patient complained of high fever, loss of consciousness and seizures but the private hospital where he was first admitted could not identify the cause and could not manage him so he was brought to SGPGI. Dr Rai said that the critical care medicine department at the SGPGI brought him out of danger but the patient was totally bedridden and he was not able to speak or move his legs and was passing stool and urine on bed. "We took him under our care

and started a customised programme including muscle strengthening, muscle suppression using a number of devices. Despite our limited resources we did our best and gradually he showed signs of improvement and kept on growing," he said. He further informed that at the time of discharge the patient was able to walk, speak and even write letters to his wife. He said that man had now recovered and was in the process of joining his duty as an attendant at a private school. Dr Rai admitted that Japanese Encephalitis was a very debilitating disease and patients suffered from disability throughout their lives. "Rehabilitation, especially early rehabilitation, is very important to minimise disabilities of patients and to make them as much as independent as possible and to reintegrate them back into the society," he said. Explaining what rehabilitation meant he said that it means making the patient independent as much as possible and taking him to the level at which he was before the injury.

## Minister highlights MSME sector's employment contribution to state

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

During the 10th ASSOCHAM MSME Excellence Awards held in the city on Thursday, Minister for MSMEs Rakesh Sachan emphasised the significant employment contribution of the sector in the state. Highlighting the Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan project, Sachan mentioned the allocation of Rs 1,000 crore for 2024-25 in the budget to encourage youth to venture into the MSME sector. This initiative aims to link education and training with entrepreneurship, facilitating interest-free loans up to Rs 5 lakh for new business owners to create job opportunities. Sachan also discussed the MSME Loan Guarantee Scheme, designed to provide credit guarantees to MSMEs, easing their access to loans. He reiterated the importance of MSMEs in the state's economy, citing their diverse presence across manufacturing, services, and handicraft industries, and emphasised the gov-

ernment's efforts to realise the vision of Viksit Bharat. Additionally, Sachan mentioned the Durgahatna Beema Yojana, offering a support of up to Rs 5 lakh for businesses facing extreme circumstances. Awanish Awasthi, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, commended the MSME award winners and encouraged the participants to align with the prime minister's vision for 'Viksit Bharat'. With 96 lakh MSMEs in UP, Awasthi highlighted their significant contribution to the state's economy, emphasising the government's initiatives to facilitate primary sector lending and promote innovation, exports, and employment opportunities. Chairperson of ASSOCHAM National Council on Business Facilitation and Global Competitiveness Sushma Paul Berlia underscored the vital role of MSMEs in generating employment, fostering entrepreneurship, and driving industrial development in rural and semi-urban areas of UP.

## CITYBRIEFS

### RECORD SCRAP SALE

Northern Railway General Manager Shobhan Chaudhuri said that NR had made a new record in scrap sale. NR stands at number one position in scrap sale amongst all zonal railways and production units of Indian Railway by disposing of scrap worth Rs 603.79 crore in financial year 2023-24, more than the annual sale target of Rs 500 crore. NR is also the first zonal railway to achieve the milestone sale of Rs 100 crore, Rs 200 crore, Rs 300 crore and Rs 400 crore scrap sale in the current financial year.

### WORLD TB DAY

On the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day on Thursday, a symposium and awareness programme was organised in the auditorium of the office of

chief medical officer, Lucknow. Additional Director and State Tuberculosis Control Programme Officer Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar, CMO Dr Manoj Aggarwal and District TB Officer Dr AK Singhal were present.

### LMC EMPLOYEES' UNION LEADER HOLDS TALKS

Lucknow Municipal Corporation Employees' Union president Anand Verma held talks with the chief finance and accounts officer regarding their demands on Thursday. Verma said that due to non-payment of provident fund to the eligible employees, they are facing difficulties. The chief finance and accounts officer said the demands would be considered soon and a decision taken in the interest of the employees.

## Plans afoot to set up green belts, wetland lakes

**Lucknow (PNS):** There are plans underway to establish green belts, wetland lakes, and social forestry in Lucknow, particularly on the outskirts, aimed at maintaining a healthy environment with hygienic surroundings, according to Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi. He mentioned that suitable locations have already been identified for these initiatives. One such project involves designing a forest at Janeshwar

Mishra Park and Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Park, while another entails the development of a lake in Gomti Nagar Extension. Tripathi said that over five sites within the city and four on its outskirts have been earmarked for green belts, along with two locations for wetland lakes and four for social forestry. Furthermore, Tripathi mentioned plans to restore several dried ponds by the summer. He acknowledged the challenge of rejuvenating these ponds after

prolonged dry spells and ensuring their water quality meets human consumption standards, considering many had become contaminated due to being used as garbage dumps. Reflecting on past oversights, Tripathi noted the authority's failure to proactively prevent pond drying or illegal encroachments driven by local interests. Chief engineer AK Singh said that the execution of plans for wetland lakes and green belts would commence within the next two weeks.



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It is to bring to your notice that your loan account has been declared as NPA by secured creditor Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited having its registered office at 608 - 609, 6th Floor, Block - C Ansal Imperial Tower, Community Center, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi - 110028, (herein after called 'SHDFCL') and you are liable to pay total outstanding against your loan to SHDFCL. You are also liable to pay future interest at the contractual rate on the aforesaid amount together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. Therefore, we hereby call upon you to discharge in full your liabilities to SHDFCL within 60 days from the date of this notice failing which SHDFCL will be empowered to exercise the power under Section 13(4) of the ACT. The details of borrowers and secured assets are as under:

S. No.	Loan Account No. Borrower(s) Name	Applicant Address	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Secured Asset
1.	OLK12112000005042318, Shalini Agarwal, Gopal Agarwal	465/23, Hata Sitarra Begum Hardoi Road, Chowk Opposite Columbia Foundation School Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226003	Rs. 13,55,038/- & 22/03/2024	Shop No. U-7 & U-8, Upper Ground Floor, House No. 308/ 046 (022) Mohalla Jauhari, Ward Ashrafabad, Atal Plaza Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226001

**PLACE: GURGAON, DATE: 29-03-2024**  
**AUTHORIZED OFFICER, SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.**



# A single vote can reshape destiny and landscape of nation: Yogi

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR/  
SHAML/ SAHARANPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Bharatiya Janata Party's star campaigner, maintained his robust engagement in western UP for the second consecutive day, emphasising the importance of every vote in elections.

Chief Minister Yogi engaged with the local intellectuals while spearheading the campaign for Sanjeev Balyan in Muzaffarnagar, Pradeep Chaudhary in Shamli, and Raghav Lakhanpal in Saharanpur.

During these interactions, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the transformation in western UP, noting that while common people migrated from the state for fear of criminals and mafia during previous governments, today criminals and gangsters were on the run and were fleeing from the state. He underscored the shift from months of curfew in the past to the grandeur surrounding the Kanwar yatra today.

In Muzaffarnagar, the chief minister engaged with the intellectual community to support Union Minister and BJP candidate Sanjeev Balyan. He emphasised the transformative power of a single vote, capable of reshaping the destiny and landscape of the nation. Reflecting on the consequences of misplaced votes, he recalled the months of curfew imposed in Muzaffarnagar.

Conversely, he highlighted the positive shift when votes align with the right candidates, citing the celebration of the Kanwar yatra as a symbol of communal harmony.

He cautioned against the dangers of anarchy that had previously plagued western Uttar Pradesh, discouraging visitors and endangering security. However, he asserted that with



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at a programme in Saharanpur on Thursday

the support of informed voters, an era of stability and reverence for faith has dawned.

Contrasting the previous administration's legacy of curfews and anarchy, he pointed towards a new era of progress. He called upon enlightened citizens to recognise their responsibility in ensuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term.

At the Prabuddha Sammelan, hosted at the Scottish International School in Shamli, Chief Minister Yogi appealed for support for Pradeep Chaudhary, the BJP-Rashtriya Lok Dal joint candidate. Reflecting on the region's historical significance, he acknowledged its rich tapestry of ups and downs. Extending his heartfelt congratulations to the intellectuals, he evoked the symbolism of the song

'Awadh me Holi khele raghuveera...' and emphasised the unique opportunity for Ram Lalla to lead Awadh after centuries.

He said, "Remarkable progress has been made in the country under Prime Minister Modi's leadership in every sphere of life. A decade ago, Indian passports lacked global recognition, whereas today, respect awaits Indians wherever they go across the globe."

Chief Minister Yogi underscored the enhanced security at the nation's borders, the effective containment of terrorism and extremism, and the new-found reverence for India's rich heritage.

During his visit to Saharanpur, the chief minister engaged with the intellectual community, urging support for Raghav Lakhanpal.

He emphasised the transformative impact of a single vote, likening it to the abolition of Article 370 in Kashmir and the resolution of extremism and terrorism.

In light of these accomplishments, he urged voters to recognise the significance of their votes.

He added, "While some politicians have historically exploited societal divisions for personal gain, Prime Minister Narendra Modi views all 1.4 billion Indians as part of his family, prioritising the nation above all else."

"His unwavering dedication to national interests contrasts with those who seek to divide society through appeasement tactics. Instead, Prime Minister Modi tirelessly works towards the advancement and welfare of all citizens."

## BJP election campaign gets 'wings'

**Lucknow (PNS):** As the electoral battleground heats up in Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party is all set to give wings to its electoral campaign with the aim of securing victories on all 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

With meticulous planning and strategic foresight, the party has embarked on a high-flying journey, booking 19 chartered planes to ferry its star campaigners across the vast expanse of Uttar Pradesh.

"We are leaving no stone unturned in our pursuit of victory. Our campaign strategy is designed to reach every corner of Uttar Pradesh," remarked a senior BJP leader, highlighting the party's commitment to a comprehensive outreach effort.

The deployment of chartered planes underscores the party's emphasis on efficient and widespread campaigning. "These planes will serve as our wings, carrying our message of progress and development to every constituency," remarked a BJP spokesperson while emphasising the importance of aerial mobility in reaching remote areas.

In addition to the chartered planes, the BJP has also secured helicopters to facilitate rapid and agile campaigning. "Helicopters provide us with the flexibility of covering multiple locations in a short span of time. They are invaluable assets in our electoral arsenal," said a member of the party's campaign team.

The BJP's extensive use of air travel reflects its determination to leave no district untouched and no voter unreached.

"Our aim is clear; to connect with the people of Uttar Pradesh at every level and address their concerns and aspirations," affirmed a key BJP strategist. As the party gears up for the intense electoral battle ahead, its ambitious campaign strategy signals a resolute determination to emerge victorious in the state's crucial Lok Sabha elections.

With chartered planes ready to take flight and helicopters poised for action, the BJP is poised to soar to new heights in Uttar Pradesh's political landscape.

## Caste, religion take centre stage in western UP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In western Uttar Pradesh, the conclusion of nominations for the first phase of parliamentary elections has set the stage for a dynamic electoral contest, with alliances, demographics and strategic manoeuvres poised to shape the outcome.

"As candidates file their nominations, the intricate interplay of caste, religion and political alliances comes into sharp focus," remarked Manoj Bhadra, a seasoned political analyst closely monitoring the unfolding developments.

The region witnesses a three-cornered contest, featuring the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance, the Samajwadi Party-led Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Each faction is eager to assert dominance and secure vital constituencies.

"The BJP's ambitious target of 80/80 seats in Uttar Pradesh adds an element of high stakes to the electoral dynamics, while the SP and BSP are determined to defend their support bases," said Surendra Chaudhary, a professor of political science at Meerut Degree College, reflecting the intensity of the electoral battle.

The alliance between the BJP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal faces scrutiny as it braces for a rigorous test of its collective strength. "The success of this alliance hinges on navigating the diverse political landscape of western Uttar Pradesh," emphasised Manish Dixit, a senior BJP official, acknowledging the challenges ahead.

Reflecting on past elections in which the BJP secured significant victories in key constituencies, the SP and BSP are steadfast in

their resolve to safeguard their traditional strongholds. However, internal dissent within the SP threatens to undermine its unity, particularly in Rampur and Moradabad.

"The BSP emerges as a potent force, leveraging its influence among Dalit communities and presenting a formidable challenge to its rivals," noted a political analyst, highlighting the party's strategic outreach and organisational prowess.

As the electoral battleground heats up, key constituencies become focal points of contention. In Muzaffarnagar, Union Minister Sanjeev Balyan's bid for a third term faces stiff competition from opponents across the political spectrum. Meanwhile, Saharanpur witnesses a battle between former Member of Parliament Raghav Lakhanpal, Imran Masood (Congress) and BSP's Majid Ali. BSP's Girish Chandra, who won the Nagina Lok Sabha seat in 2019, has been shifted to Bulandshahr. The BJP stronghold Pilibhit will witness a three-cornered contest among Jitin Prasada (BJP), Bhagwat Saran Gangwar (SP) and Anis Ahmed Khan aka Phool Babu (BSP). The BJP has replaced three-term MP Varun Gandhi with Prasada.

Rampur witnessed a drama in the SP camp on the last day of filing nominations after Asim Raza, who contested the 2022 Lok Sabha by-election on SP ticket, filed his nomination papers, claiming to be the party's official candidate.

"With each nomination, the pulse of democracy beats louder as the electorate eagerly awaits the opportunity to make their voices heard," remarked Surendra Chaudhary, summarising the anticipation and excitement surrounding the forthcoming electoral showdown in western Uttar Pradesh.

## Asim Raja's nomination from Rampur rejected

**Rampur (PTI):** The election office on Thursday rejected candidature of Asim Raja as Samajwadi Party's nominee from Rampur Lok Sabha seat on technical grounds. Muhibullah Nadvi had also filed his papers as the SP candidate on Wednesday, when the party declared him its official candidate. District Magistrate Jogender Singh said that Raja's nomination paper was rejected as some documents were not attached to it. Raja is considered close to senior SP leader and former minister Azam Khan. He had unsuccessfully contested for the state assembly in a 2022 bypoll after Azam Khan was disqualified from the House, fol-

lowing a court verdict which sent him to three years in jail in a hate speech case. Rampur Parliamentary seat saw a piquant situation for the SP as two persons claiming party's nominee filed nomination on the last day of nomination for the first phase of elections. Rampur will go to polls on April 19.

Nadvi is the imam of Parliament Street Jama Masjid in Delhi, had also filed nomination as SP candidate from Rampur on Wednesday. Raja had also claimed himself to be the official SP candidate but the party later declared Nadvi as its official candidate.

## Cong maintains suspense over Amethi, Rae Bareli candidates

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress has maintained suspense over its candidates from its bastions Rae Bareli and Amethi while announcing four more candidates for the Lok Sabha elections from Uttar Pradesh. The party had earlier announced the names of nine candidates from UP, including the name of UP Congress Committee president Ajay Rai, who will challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi.

The eighth list announced by the Congress late Wednesday night, included the names of four more candidates from Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress has given its ticket to Dolly Sharma from Ghaziabad, Nakul Dubey from Sitapur, Shivram Valmiki from Bulandshahr (SC) and Virendra Chaudhary from Maharajganj. Interestingly, party spokesperson and in-charge of social media, Supriya Shrinete, was also trying to get a ticket from

Maharajganj parliamentary constituency from where she had contested the Lok Sabha election in 2019. Sources said that her name was dropped following controversy over her statement on film actress Kangana Ranaut, who is contesting on Bharatiya Janata Party ticket from Mandi parliamentary constituency in Himachal Pradesh. Shrinete had removed the controversial statement soon after posting it but still the BJP took up the issue and the Election Commission of India even served notice to the Congress leader on the issue.

The eighth list of candidates of the Congress does not mention Amethi and Rae Bareli Lok Sabha constituencies. When asked about these two Lok Sabha seats of Uttar Pradesh, UP Congress chief Ajay Rai said there was no discussion on these parliamentary constituencies.

"We had conveyed our views on these seats (Amethi and Rae Bareli) the last time. It is up to

the leadership now to take a decision," Rai claimed before media persons.

Both these Lok Sabha constituencies are considered bastions of the Gandhi family and the local units of the Congress have demanded that the two scions of the family – Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra – should contest from there.

It may be mentioned that in the list announced earlier by Congress, the party gave ticket to Ajay Rai from Varanasi, Imran Masood from Saharanpur, Danish Ali from Amroha, Ram Nath Sikarwar from Fatehpur Sikri, Alok Mishra from Kanpur, Pradeep Jain Aditya from Jhansi, Tanuj Punia from Barabanki (SC), Akhilesh Pratap Singh from Deoria and Sadan Prasad from Bangaon (SC).

The Congress has reached an agreement on seats with its INDIA bloc partner Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and is contesting 17 Lok Sabha seats in UP.

## Won't contest Lok Sabha polls, says ST Hasan

**Moradabad (PTI):** Samajwadi Party's Moradabad MP ST Hasan, who filed his nomination from the seat despite being denied the ticket by the party, on Thursday said he will not contest the Lok Sabha polls.

However, Hasan has not officially withdrawn his nomination papers filed on Tuesday. The last date for withdrawal of nomination is March 30. Confusion prevailed for several hours Wednesday after two candidates each in Rampur and Moradabad parliamentary constituencies claimed to be the SP's official nominees. SP leaders Muhibullah Nadvi and Asim Raja filed their nominations from Rampur while party leaders Ruchi Veera and Hasan from Moradabad.

The party later clarified that Muhibullah Nadvi from Rampur and Ruchi Veera from Moradabad are its authorised candidates. Raja is considered close to jailed SP leader Azam Khan. On Thursday, the election office rejected candidature of Asim Raja as SP's

nominee from Rampur seat on technical grounds. When asked if he would campaign for SP candidate Ruchi Veera, Hasan told PTI, "I will neither contest the Lok Sabha polls nor campaign in Moradabad." However, the Moradabad MP said he will campaign in the polls wherever SP chief Akhilesh Yadav asks him. "In Rampur, as the party could not announce a candidate suggested by Azam Khan, so Ruchi Veera has been made the candidate from Moradabad at the behest of Khan," he claimed.

Earlier, speaking to reporters here, Hasan said Akhilesh Yadav might have some compulsion due to which he cancelled his candidature. "Till the last moment, the SP chief wanted me to contest the elections from Moradabad. But some of the party leaders did not allow the papers, which Akhilesh Yadav had sent for me from Lucknow to file nomination again, reach me. The papers did not reach me till 3 pm (on Wednesday)," he said.



Police officers participating in a Holi Milan function organised at the camp office of Lucknow's Commissioner of Police SB Shiradkar on Sapru Marg on Friday

Pioneer

## 4 illegal migrants on way to Delhi from Assam arrested in UP

**Lucknow (PTI):** The Anti-Terrorism Squad of the Uttar Pradesh Police have arrested four Rohingyas including three women, all of them native of Myanmar, who had entered India illegally, police said on Thursday. The four were identified as Amir Hamza, 21, Meena Jahan, 19, Sakura Begum, 22, and Onara Begum, 19.

"The Rohingyas were travelling in a train headed to New Delhi from Assam. They were intercepted when the train entered Uttar Pradesh on Mar 27 and taken to ATS headquarters in Lucknow. They were put under arrest at the headquarters," the ATS said in a statement.

"The accused said they were native of Myanmar and had entered into India illegally with an intention to settle here. Fake Indian documents were also recovered from them," it added. The ATS booked the four under IPC section 420 (cheating), 467 (Forgery of documents), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating) and 471 (using as genuine a forged document).

## Left parties accuse BJP of misusing central agencies

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Left parties accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of misusing central agencies like Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation and Income Tax Department to harass its political opponents and send them to jail and demanded the Election Commission of India intervene to ensure level playing field for the opposition in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

The Left parties also urged the ECI to stop the airing of Ramayana TV serial in view of BJP's candidate from Meerut Lok Sabha constituency as he had worked in the serial.

A meeting of the Left of Uttar Pradesh was held at the state office of the Communist Party of India in Lucknow on Wednesday. The meeting was presided over by CPI national committee member Dr Girish and attended by Communist Party of India (Marxist) state secretary Dr Hiralal Yadav,

CPI state secretary Arvindraj Swaroop and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) state standing committee member Ramesh Singh Sengar, Forward Block state general secretary Uday Nath Singh, Democratic Janata Dal's state president Zuber Ahmed and CPI(M) state secretary board member Premnath Rai.

In the meeting, the leaders of Left parties criticised the arrest of opposition leaders before the Lok Sabha elections and the BJP's misuse of central agencies. They demanded the ECI to stop the raids being conducted by the ED, CBI and IT Department, saying it was important for maintaining the fairness of elections.

The leaders alleged that issues like election bonds, inflation, unemployment, increasing poverty and losses to farmers and their poor condition had exposed the BJP government. They alleged that there was a jungle raj in Uttar Pradesh as crime had increased.

## UP model getting popular in South India: Water Woman

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's UP model is getting increasingly popular in the south Indian states too. In states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, there is considerable curiosity among the people regarding the Yogi model of governance, said Shipra Pathak, popularly known as Water Woman, after traveling 3,952 kilometres from Ayodhya to Rameshwaram.

Pathak added, "Under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath in Uttar Pradesh, there is a sense of unparalleled security among the daughters of the state. Not only within our state but across the nation, daughters of Uttar Pradesh have the confidence that their voices would be heard everywhere in case of any wrongdoing against them, owing to the fear of Maharaj ji. This is because Yogi Adityanath has become synonymous with Uttar Pradesh."

Water Woman Shipra Pathak,

India's first 'padyatri' on the Ram Janaki Van Gaman Path from 'Saryu to Sagar,' started her journey from Ayodhya on November 27, 2023, and ended it in Rameshwaram on March 11, 2024.

In the course of her journey, she passed through Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and crossed the forests of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Her route was on the Ram Van Gaman path as mentioned in epic Ramayana. Providing details about her journey, Shipra Pathak revealed that alongside her padyatra, a vehicle carrying water from various rivers, bearing the registration number of Uttar Pradesh, accompanied her.

This vehicle served as a symbol of her association with Uttar Pradesh. Everywhere she travelled, people greeted her with joy and enquired whether she hailed from Yogi Ji Maharaj's Uttar Pradesh. Shipra Pathak remarked that being associated with Uttar

Pradesh has become a source of pride nationwide.

"Uttar Pradesh and Yogi ji have become inseparable. Wherever I travelled, I was warmly welcomed and people were delighted to learn that I hailed from Yogi ji's state. From Ayodhya to Rameshwaram, there was a palpable sense of respect towards Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for his decisive leadership," she observed.

In the past, Shipra Pathak has actively promoted river conservation through various initiatives, including completing the 3,600-kilometre circumambulation of the river Narmada, Mansarovar lake, river Shipra, Saryu pad yatra and Braj Chaurasi Kosi pad yatra. Her efforts have been recognised with numerous awards and honours.

Furthermore, Shipra Pathak is renowned as a prominent motivational speaker who engages with youth nationwide, raising awareness about issues concerning national interest and environment.

## Man burned alive by in-laws in Mathura

**Lucknow (PTI):** A 22-year-old man was burned alive in Mathura, allegedly by a group of men from his in-laws' side on Thursday, police said. Superintendent of Police Arvind Kumar said the victim, Vijay, was travelling on a bike with his father Papu when he was set on fire.

According to a complaint filed by Vijay's father, some of his son's in-laws stopped their bike mid-way, pulled him aside, and beat him up, the SP said. "The men threw some liquid over him and set him on fire," he said. Papu along with some locals rushed Vijay to a nearby hospital where he was declared brought dead, Kumar said.

Vijay had gotten married over a year ago and had an estranged relationship with his in-laws, he said. The police have lodged an FIR under the charge of murder against four people, he said. "The body has been sent for post mortem investigation. We are trying to identify the accused involved in the incident and they will be arrested soon," the officer added.

Meanwhile, two truck drivers were burnt alive after their vehicles caught fire following a head-on collision in Mahoba, police said on Thursday.

Mahoba Additional Superintendent of Police Satyam said the incident occurred on Wednesday night near the Kanpur-Sagar Highway. "The truck drivers, Rajkumar Pal, 28, and Vipin Mauraya, 35, were killed in the incident. The duo were burnt alive after their vehicles caught fire following the collision," the ASP said. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, he added.

In Amethi, a 65-year-old man and his son died after being hit by a vehicle on Thursday, police said. Mohammad Atiq and his son Mohammad Saeed (35) were on a morning walk when a vehicle hit them, Furstaganj SHO Praveen Kumar Singh said. The incident happened near Nigoha village. The father-son duo was rushed to the Raebareli district hospital, where they died during treatment.



# South Asia nations discuss climate change

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Senior government officials from the agriculture departments of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal gathered at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) here on Thursday for the 7th ISARC Coordination Committee (ICC) meeting. They discussed climate change and other challenges to agriculture. The meeting was chaired by Interim Director General, IIRI Dr Ajay Kohli and co-chaired by Secretary (Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, Manoj Ahuja.

Apart from them the meeting was also attended by Joint Secretary (IC), Ministry of Agriculture, representative of Waheeda Akhtar (Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh) Paritosh Hazra, Secretary (Agriculture Development), Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, Dr Govinda Prasad Sharma, Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) Dr Mohammad Harunur



Senior officials of South Asia nations for a meeting at ISARC in Varanasi on Thursday.

Rasheed, Deputy Director General (Crop Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Government of India, New Delhi, India, Dr Tilak Raj Sharma, Dr MP Yadav, representative of Manoj Kumar, Director, National Seed Research and Training Centre (NSRTC), Varanasi, UP, India) and Director, ISARC Varanasi) Dr Sudhanshu Singh, Additional Chief Secretary of Agriculture, Agricultural Education and Research, Agricultural Marketing, International Agricultural Trade and Export Promotion, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Dr Devesh Chaturvedi and

Regional Director of IRRI Asia, Dr Jongsu Shin also participated online in the meeting. It was also attended by several other representatives of different countries and institutions. Expressing his gratitude to the members for attending this meeting, Dr Ajay Kohli said that ISARC serves as an evidence-based research centre for all studies related to transforming rice-based agri-food systems in the South Asian region. He said methane emissions are an integral part of rice cultivation, which has a direct impact on our climate. Our main objective this year is to develop short duration rice varieties capable of

producing less methane emissions. Along with this, we are also developing better agricultural practices so that farmers can get better yield even with less water and less methane emissions. Direct Sowing of Paddy (DSR) and Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) are some such agricultural methods which are being taken to the farmers by IRRI. Dr Kohli also thanked the Governments of India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and the other partners in each of these countries for their support to ISARC.

Manoj Ahuja highly appreciated the remarkable achievements and progress made by ISARC in the field of rice research and development. In his address, he said that ISARC has demonstrated its capabilities in research, extension, capacity development and technology dissemination during this year, leading to concrete solutions to address the critical challenges facing our agricultural landscape. Mentioning some of the achievements like ultra low glycemic index rice varieties, speed breeding protocol, DSR, Seeds Without Borders, he urged the national partners to replicate these innovations in their respective regions through

the technical support of ISARC. Highlighting some of the key achievements of ISARC Varanasi, Dr Sudhanshu Singh said that in the last year our centre has made significant progress in research, extension, technology dissemination and capacity development. “We have strengthened our partnership to advance rice research and development to transform rice-based agri-food systems in the region. Through Seeds Without Borders, we are helping to facilitate the exchange of improved crop varieties between neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh,” he said.

Expressing ISARC’s commitment to deal with the challenges of climate change, Dr Sudhanshu Singh said, “We are ready to deal with the imminent challenges of climate change. Along with development and promotion of agricultural practices, ISARC is also working on some short duration varieties like DRR 42, DRR 44, DRR 46, Bina Paddy 11, and Bina Paddy etc that help in reducing GHG emissions. Senior scientists from IRRI presented unit-specific progress and future plans to the delegates present.

# Shankhwar: TB can be completely cured with timely diagnosis & treatment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Due to holiday on the occasion of Holi, World Tuberculosis Day, which is on March 24, was observed on Thursday as per the guidelines received from the state level. In this sequence, programmes were organised at Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) in BHU, Heritage Institute of Medical Sciences (HIMS) at Bhadwar, SSPG Divisional Hospital at Kabirchaura and other places in the district during the day.

An awareness programme was organised under the joint aegis of Thoracic/TB & Respiratory Disease, IRL, Microbiology Department, MO TB unit and ART Centre /COE in the OPD premises of SSH, a hospital of Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS), BHU. A good number of general public participated in this programme and they were informed about the risk factors for TB infection. The awareness programme was inaugurated by IMS BHU Director Prof SN Shankhwar. The function was also attended by Dean Prof Ashok Chaudhary, Dean (Research) Prof Gopal Nath,

Medical Superintendent of SSH Prof KK Gupta, Prof JK Mishra (Department TB & Respiratory Disease), Prof Shampa Anupurva (Nodal IRL, Microbiology), Prof Sangeeta Kansal (MO TB unit) and Prof Jaya Chakravarty (Nodal Officer ART Centre BHU).

Addressing the programme as the chief guest, Prof SN Shankhwar said tuberculosis can be completely cured with timely diagnosis and treatment and appealed to patients to complete the course of medication. Prof JK Mishra and Prof Sangeeta Kansal said between January-March this year, 862 patients are undergoing treatment and 218 patients are of MDR TB.

All TB Patients have been registered on the Nikshay portal. Prof Jaya Chakravarty said HIV patients are at high risk for TB disease. Out of 27,000 HIV patients registered in the ART Centre, 6,453 patients have been diagnosed with TB. Prof Shampa Anupurva said in session 2023-24, a total of 7,080 patients were tested for TB out of which 1,224 cases were found positive. A large number of people participated in the

awareness camp, out of which sputum of 66 people were tested. Dr Manaswi Choubey, Dr Anuradha Johri, Dr Archana Singh, Dr Chanchal Jha, and employees and officers of TB Programme and ART Centre BHU were also present. The programme was conducted by Dr Manoj Tiwari and guests were welcomed by Prof Jaya Chakravarty. The vote of thanks was proposed by Prof JK Mishra.

**RANGOTSAV:** Kashi Vandan, a daily cultural evening programme being organised under the aegis of Kashi Virasat Sanrakshan Samiti for its innovative effort to keep the musical heritage of Kashi, the cultural capital of India, intact completed its two months successfully at Namo Ghat here on Wednesday evening. It is an initiative taken by the district administration to provide a platform to the musical talents of Kashi and to introduce tourists and music lovers to the music of Kashi. On the occasion a cultural programme was organised as Rangotsav. The evening programme began with the duet singing of Gaurav Mishra and Tanushree Mishra,

## Nutrition packets given to TB patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 30 tuberculosis (TB) patients were provided nutrition packets by Chief Medical Superintendent (CMS) of Shri Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Divisional Hospital, Kabirchaura Dr SP Singh and District Tuberculosis Officer (DTO) Dr Piyush Rai at a programme organised to mark World Tuberculosis Day here on Thursday. They also informed the patients about their health and treatment. A total of 150 TB patients were provided nutrition packets on the day at functions organised at different health centres in the district.

Addressing a seminar on the occasion, CMS Dr SP Singh said with collective efforts we can completely eliminate TB by the year 2025. Therefore, this year the theme of World Tuberculosis Day is ‘Yes! We Can End TB’. He

said patients coming to OPD with symptoms of TB must be tested for TB and if TB is confirmed in the test, 100 per cent notification should be given. Efforts should be made to adopt all patients. Along with this, he also talked about getting all the TB patients tested for HIV, sugar, sputum and said in case of TB of other organs (extra pulmonary) also, CB-NAAT test should be done by taking fluid, this helps in identifying the type of TB and giving accurate treatment.

DTO Dr Piyush Rai said the objective of organising World Tuberculosis Day is to provide information about TB to as many people as possible.

On the occasion Deputy DTO Dr Amit Kumar Singh, MS Dr Mukund, MOTC Dr Anvit, DPPC Sanjay Chaudhary, DPPMC Naman Gupta, STS, STLS and other health workers of NTEP were also present.

## SIIC signs CSR pact with GIL to drive innovation in healthcare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

real-world impact.”

The Startup Incubation and Innovation Centre (SIIC) at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) signed a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agreement with Gliders India Limited (GIL), a leading defence Public Sector Undertaking (PSU), to drive innovation in the healthcare sector. Under this CSR collaboration, the GIL will provide financial assistance and mentorship to startups incubated at SIIC working on advanced medical technologies, digital health solutions, telemedicine applications and healthcare infrastructure innovations. The partnership aims to leverage IIT-K’s technological prowess combined with GIL’s industry expertise to develop impactful solutions addressing critical healthcare challenges in India.

Professor-In-Charge of SIIC, IIT-K, Prof Ankush Sharma, emphasised the shared mission to drive innovation: “We are thrilled to join forces with GIL. This collaboration creates a powerful ecosystem where our incubated startups can tap into GIL’s vast industry experience to translate their innovations into

GIL will connect startups with domain experts, industry resources and market networks, thereby accelerating their growth and commercialisation journeys. The PSU’s strategic support will enable these startups to navigate the complex healthcare landscape effectively. Chairman and Managing Director of Gliders India Limited, VK Tiwari, echoed the sentiment: “As a responsible corporate citizen, Gliders India Limited is committed to positive societal change. Partnering with SIIC allows us to harness innovation’s potential and contribute to national well-being by addressing pressing healthcare challenges.” The MoU exchange ceremony at the GIL headquarters witnessed participation from key representatives of both organisations, including Piyush Mishra, CFO/COO and Animesh Mishra, Head Defence from SIIC, IIT-K and Sunil Date, Director of Operations & HR, Surenendra Dhapodkar, Director of Finance, SK Singh, General Manager/Op & HR and BL Meena, Jt GM/HR & PV from GIL, all expressing enthusiasm about the collaboration’s potential to revolutionise healthcare delivery.

## Two charred to death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Two persons were charred to death when their trucks collided head on and caught fire on the Kanpur-Sagar highway in Mahoba late on Wednesday night. The fire brigade rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control. The deceased included a driver. After the incident, there was a massive jam. The police rushed to the spot which after getting both the damaged trucks towed to the roadside, got the traffic restored. Both the bodies were sent for an autopsy.

**LOOTED:** Four armed miscreants late on Wednesday night looted about ₹1 lakh from a countrymade liquor shop situated in Naudhana village under Bakewar police station area in Etawah after firing at its salesman. The police sent the injured salesman to the CHC and launched raids to trace the miscreants with the help of CCTV footages. The four miscreants shot at the salesman Kamlesh of

Chandpura, looted the cash and escaped. Shop owner Rajvir Singh of Naudhana said Kamlesh sustained bullet injury on his arm and was sent to the CHC for treatment. He said neighbouring shopkeeper had informed him about the incident. The miscreants had looted about ₹1 lakh from the shop. Before committing the loot they had fired two rounds to create terror. On getting information senior police officers also rushed to the spot. **ESCAPES:** An undertrial escaped from police custody when he was being brought to the Gangsters Court for hearing here on Thursday. Special Public Prosecutor Ghanshyam Srivastava said the Naubasta police had arrested Sonu and sent him to jail on February 29 after an arrest warrant was issued against him in a 25 years old case under the Gangsters Act. He was to be produced in the court of Special Judge, Gangsters Act, on Thursday. But prior to being produced in the court, he escaped from police custody.

AXIS BANK LTD.		PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION OF PLEDGED ASSETS BEING GOLD ORNAMENTS							
THE BORROWERS, IN SPECIFIC AND THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL ARE HERE BUY NOTIFIED THAT PUBLIC AUCTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS PLEDGE IN THE BELOW ACCOUNTS IS PROPOSED TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE AXIS BANK AT THE BELOW MENTIONED BRANCH. THE BELOW MENTIONED BORROWERS HAS AVAILABLE THE CREDIT FACILITY FROM THE AXIS BANK LIMITED AGAINST THE PLEDGE OF GOLD ORNAMENTS ("GOLD LOAN FACILITY") IN FAVOUR OF THE BANK TOWARDS THE SECURITY. THE DEMAND NOTICES WERE ISSUED TO THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS CALLING UP THE BORROWERS/ GUARANTORS TO PAY THEIR OUTSTANDING AMOUNT TOWARDS THE GOLD LOAN FACILITY AVAILABLE. AS THE BORROWERS/ GUARANTORS HAVE FAILED TO REPAY THE OUTSTANDING LOAN AMOUNT, THE BANK IS CONSTRAINED TO INVOKE THE PLEDGE AND PROPOSED TO CONDUCT AN E-AUCTION SALE OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED IN SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY HEREUNDER ON 08.04.2024 AT 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM ON "AS IN WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS", "WHATEVER THERE IS" AND "NO RECOURSE BASIS".									
DETAILS OF BORROWERS AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT									
SR. NO.	CUSTOMER NAME	LOAN A/C NO.	AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.)	DATE OF RECALL NOTICE	GROSS WEIGHT	NET WEIGHT			
B.O.: AGRA [UP]									
1	IRSHAD GUL	XXXXXXXXXXXX0601	₹ 1,72,198.00	09-11-2023	62.700	53.700			
B.O.: ALAMBAGH, LUCKNOW [UP]									
2	SURENDRA KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX4058	₹ 60,954.00	25-08-2023	18.300	17.800			
3	RAMENDRA KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX2470	₹ 1,65,356.00	09-11-2023	50.400	49.000			
4	ASHISH SRIVASTAVA	XXXXXXXXXXXX3348	₹ 2,00,690.00	29-09-2023	58.700	57.300			
5	BAJUNATH KAUSHAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX7537	₹ 2,90,933.00	29-09-2023	76.800	75.600			
B.O.: ALLAHABAD [UP]									
6	AZIM UDDIN	XXXXXXXXXXXX2594	₹ 1,19,879.21	15-02-2024	38.800	37.300			
B.O.: ATRAULI, ALIGAR ALI UP									
7	BHURA KHAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX0525	₹ 1,51,174.22	15-02-2024	48.000	47.200			
B.O.: AZAMGARH [UP]									
8	MANISH TRIPATHI	XXXXXXXXXXXX7322	₹ 32,747.00	10-10-2023	9.900	9.400			
9	SAYED MOHD BELAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX4927	₹ 12,81,040.00	25-08-2023	373.100	352.400			
B.O.: BAGHPAT [UP]									
10	RAVI KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX0563	₹ 67,770.00	09-11-2023	21.400	21.000			
B.O.: BAHERI [UP]									
11	PREM PAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX7092	₹ 31,196.00	25-10-2023	9.900	9.900			
12	VED PRAKASH	XXXXXXXXXXXX1087	₹ 2,06,197.82	05-12-2023	89.700	89.700			
B.O.: BAHRACH [UP]									
13	KOUSHIK .	XXXXXXXXXXXX7713	₹ 36,787.00	20-11-2023	10.420	10.400			
14	BINDU JI	XXXXXXXXXXXX8004	₹ 47,130.00	10-10-2023	13.800	13.500			
15	RAKESH TIWARI	XXXXXXXXXXXX0003	₹ 2,65,727.00	10-10-2023	73.730	72.500			
16	RAKESH TIWARI	XXXXXXXXXXXX7845	₹ 4,70,453.00	10-10-2023	137.050	134.990			
B.O.: BALLIA [UP]									
17	ANISH KUMAR GIRI	XXXXXXXXXXXX6971	₹ 39,328.00	09-11-2023	13.100	11.900			
18	RAJESH RAJA	XXXXXXXXXXXX6571	₹ 41,786.00	20-11-2023	14.400	13.000			
19	VINOD KUMAR YADAV	XXXXXXXXXXXX9111	₹ 99,260.00	10-10-2023	31.600	26.200			
20	SAMARJEET BAHADUR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX2140	₹ 1,14,003.00	09-11-2023	44.500	34.500			
B.O.: BANGARMAU UP									
21	VINIT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX2609	₹ 1,79,404.00	05-12-2023	54.900	54.840			
B.O.: BARAUT BRT UP									
22	PIN KI	XXXXXXXXXXXX2378	₹ 59,530.00	05-12-2023	16.500	16.400			
23	VIKAS KUSHWAHA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7704	₹ 97,432.00	05-12-2023	28.900	28.200			
B.O.: BAREILLY [UP]									
24	KUSHPAL SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX4708	₹ 2,83,275.00	20-11-2023	100.800	87.600			
25	KUSHPAL SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX3010	₹ 4,37,000.00	20-11-2023	146.200	139.300			
B.O.: BHAIASANA,MUZAFF MUZ UP									
26	VIVEK DESHWAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX9834	₹ 58,459.00	25-08-2023	16.400	16.100			
27	MO RASHID ALI	XXXXXXXXXXXX1047	₹ 1,29,775.00	28-12-2023	42.600	42.100			
28	ANUJ .	XXXXXXXXXXXX4136	₹ 2,42,516.01	20-11-2023	76.600	74.100			
B.O.: BHARWARA LUC UP									
29	NEHA AWASTHI	XXXXXXXXXXXX9199	₹ 42,531.00	29-09-2023	12.800	12.700			
B.O.: BJUNOR [UP]									
30	NAKUL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX7148	₹ 32,826.00	29-09-2023	9.200	9.000			
31	MOHAMMAD ISRAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX4910	₹ 66,261.00	20-11-2023	19.000	18.700			
32	AYESHA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7187	₹ 6,49,954.00	25-08-2023	178.100	177.000			
B.O.: BILHAUR DEHAT KAN UP									
33	OMLATA .	XXXXXXXXXXXX8967	₹ 46,667.24	09-11-2023	55.000	53.000			
34	GAJENDRA KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX8384	₹ 1,12,566.77	09-11-2023	37.400	37.000			
B.O.: BISALPUR BISA UP									
35	MUNESH CHANDRA	XXXXXXXXXXXX4148	₹ 57,998.00	29-09-2023	20.100	19.500			
36	NAZRA BI	XXXXXXXXXXXX9038	₹ 1,57,630.00	29-09-2023	46.300	46.000			
B.O.: BISWAN SIT UP									
37	JAGPREET SINGH SANDHU	XXXXXXXXXXXX6302	₹ 64,228.00	25-10-2023	22.900	22.000			
38	MAHENDRA KAUR	XXXXXXXXXXXX7940	₹ 81,574.00	25-08-2023	137.400	135.800			
B.O.: BULANDSHAHR [UP]									
39	DHARMENDRA DAGUR	XXXXXXXXXXXX4636	₹ 1,29,320.00	20-11-2023	39.500	37.450			
B.O.: CHANDAUJI [UP]									
40	MUNSHAD ALI	XXXXXXXXXXXX6414	₹ 89,058.00	29-09-2023	26.600	26.390			
B.O.: CHOWK, ALLAHABAD [UP]									
41	MANISH PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX3774	₹ 58,592.00	09-11-2023	16.800	16.100			
42	SANJAY KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX5692	₹ 82,623.00	20-11-2023	28.100	25.900			
B.O.: CHOWK, VARANASI VAR UP									
43	INITISH KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX3922	₹ 1,40,481.00	09-11-2023	44.320	41.940			
B.O.: DEEN DAYAL PURAM, BAREILLY [UP]									
44	SHALINI SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9882	₹ 96,394.00	10-10-2023	28.100	26.500			
B.O.: DEOBAND DOB UP									
45	RAJAT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX8256	₹ 30,752.00	09-11-2023	10.800	9.400			
46	RAJAT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX5559	₹ 31,912.00	20-11-2023	11.400	10.000			
47	MOHAMMAD ASIF	XXXXXXXXXXXX5015	₹ 76,871.20	20-11-2023	29.600	21.800			
48	MOHD SAMEER	XXXXXXXXXXXX4674	₹ 80,883.00	20-11-2023	33.400	24.000			
B.O.: DEORIA [UP]									
49	GEETA DEVI	XXXXXXXXXXXX4460	₹ 82,993.00	15-02-2024	24.200	24.150			
B.O.: FAIZABAD [UP]									
50	UTKARSH SRIVASTAVA	XXXXXXXXXXXX5944	₹ 55,896.56	05-09-2023	16.700	16.400			
51	KULDEEP SONI	XXXXXXXXXXXX5504	₹ 88,694.00	20-11-2023	28.600	27.100			
52	MADAN LAL GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX0818	₹ 1,07,108.00	20-11-2023	32.000	31.000			
B.O.: FARIDPUR FARI UP									
53	GAURAV PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX0680	₹ 1,56,119.00	20-11-2023	47.700	46.100			
54	VIJAY KUMAR SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX1469	₹ 1,65,324.00	25-10-2023	48.300	46.000			
B.O.: FARRUKHABAD [UP]									
55	DHARMENDRA KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX3153	₹ 48,443.00	25-08-2023	14.000	13.900			
B.O.: FATEHPUR [UP]									
56	MOHD AMIR HASAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX2502	₹ 80,656.00	05-12-2023	19.890	19.850			
57	NAJEEB ULLA	XXXXXXXXXXXX4177	₹ 1,42,102.38	25-08-2023	41.260	39.000			
B.O.: GAJRAULA [UP]									
58	DOURAV KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX3395	₹ 55,971.19	15-02-2024	19.200	18.800			
B.O.: GARH ROAD, MEERUT [UP]									
59	AMIT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX6669	₹ 6,41,560.00	28-12-2023	195.980	191.500			
B.O.: TAJ LINK ROAD, AGRA [UP]									
60	GOVIND .	XXXXXXXXXXXX6875	₹ 2,86,113.00	20-11-2023	76.400	74.900			
B.O.: GONDA [UP]									
61	PAWAN RAJARAM MISHRA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7354	₹ 63,182.00	09-11-2023	24.620	24.120			
62	RAM GIRI	XXXXXXXXXXXX8649	₹ 1,29,492.00	29-09-2023	38.940	38.000			
63	BIRENDRA KUMAR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX4934	₹ 1,57,152.03	25-08-2023	47.570	46.970			
B.O.: HARDOI [UP]									
64	SHUBHAM TRIVEDI	XXXXXXXXXXXX0072	₹ 1,26,827.00	25-08-2023	41.000	39.500			
B.O.: JAJMAU KAN UP									
65	RAJESH KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX00509	₹ 67,421.00	20-11-2023	21.100	20.300			
B.O.: JASWANT NAGAR ETA UP									
66	SHIVAM DUBEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX00346	₹ 1,21,569.00	25-10-2023	35.600	35.300			
B.O.: JAUNPUR [UP]									
67	SAMIM .	XXXXXXXXXXXX4665	₹ 36,329.00	10-10-2023	11.000	10.500			
B.O.: JEWAR BGNAG UP									
68	VIKASH .	XXXXXXXXXXXX8106	₹ 1,15,998.00	15-02-2024	35.900	34.000			
B.O.: JHANSI [UP]									
69	MIYANK SINGHAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX4387	₹ 85,640.00	05-12-2023	25.300	23.000			
70	BEBEA RAJA	XXXXXXXXXXXX2080	₹ 4,31,723.00	25-08-2023	139.300	117.980			
B.O.: KAKADEO , KANPUR [UP]									
71	SANJEET RATHOR	XXXXXXXXXXXX007575	₹ 33,349.00	15-02-2024	10.300	10.000			
72	SAROJNI .	XXXXXXXXXXXX99993	₹ 2,52,895.00	15-02-2024	74.800	70.400			
B.O.: KHURJA [UP]									
73	SHEKHAR KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX9951	₹ 51,002.00	25-10-2023	16.300	15.000			
B.O.: LAKHIMPUR-KHERI [UP]									
74	GAURAV TIWARI	XXXXXXXXXXXX00549	₹ 33,025.00	29-09-2023	11.700	11.300			
75	ROHIT KUMAR RATHOR	XXXXXXXXXXXX02107	₹ 44,335.33	05-12-2023	14.100	14.000			
76	SARVEJEET SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX81625	₹ 45,803.00	10-10-2023	12.900	12.700			
77	SANDHYA PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX6549	₹ 62,653.00	09-11-2023	19.900	19.400			
78	KAILASH NATH	XXXXXXXXXXXX8828	₹ 68,930.00	20-11-2023	21.400	21.100			
B.O.: LALGANJ RAI UP									
79	AMERENDRA BAHADUR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX5567	₹ 83,008.00	10-10-2023	33.800	24.000			
B.O.: LUCKNOW [UP]									
80	ADNAN SUHAIL	XXXXXXXXXXXX01325	₹ 3,08,670.57	15-02-2024	91.100	90.200			
B.O.: MAHARAJGANJ [UP]									
81	NAGENDRA MORYA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7397	₹ 42,805.00	29-09-2023	13.400	12.800			
82	RAJESH .	XXXXXXXXXXXX2531	₹ 1,25,784.00	20-11-2023	40.600	39.300			
83	SAMSHER ALI	XXXXXXXXXXXX6277	₹ 1,84,514.00	20-11-2023	59.800	58.800			
B.O.: MAHOBA MHO UP									
84	GOPAL SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX00191	₹ 66,333.00	29-09-2023	18.500	18.000			
B.O.: MASOODABAD UP									
85	RAJNI AGRAWAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX11658	₹ 1,60,452.00	20-11-2023	48.990	47.990			
B.O.: MATHURA [UP]									
86	GOVIND .	XXXXXXXXXXXX8438	₹ 2,96,332.00	20-11-2023	79.800	75.800			
B.O.: MAU,MAUNATH BHANJAN [UP]									
87	SHRINARAYAN CHAUBE	XXXXXXXXXXXX3589	₹ 1,18,451.00	09-11-2023	31.700	30.800			
B.O.: MAWANA UP									
88	AMIT NAGAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX9269	₹ 1,33,197.00	09-11-2023	43.900	40.000			
B.O.: MEDICAL COLLEGE RD,GORAKHPUR									
89	PRASHANT SRIVASTAVA	XXXXXXXXXXXX33149	₹ 34,749.57	15-02-2024	10.510	10.000			
90	RAVI PRAKASH SRIVASTAVA	XXXXXXXXXXXX99644	₹ 94,880.76	29-09-2023	33.000	32.500			
B.O.: MEDICAL ROAD ALIGARH									
91	MOHAMMAD JAKI KHAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX00835	₹ 36,329.00	10-10-2023	8.750	8.650			
B.O.: MEERUT [UP]									
92	KAPIL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX5345	₹ 30,171.00	20-11-2023	9.800	9.000			
B.O.: MORADABAD [UP]									
93	SONI PARWEEN	XXXXXXXXXXXX7107	₹ 63,479.00	29-09-2023	20.500	19.200			
B.O.: NAGINA NSI UP									
94	SHABNAM .	XXXXXXXXXXXX5505	₹ 56,314.00	29-09-2023	17.800	17.300			
95	NAUSHAD AHMAD	XXXXXXXXXXXX3455	₹ 1,74,250.00	10-10-2023	50.100	49.900			
B.O.: NAJIBABAD [UP]									
96	MANAWWAR HUSAIN	XXXXXXXXXXXX90367	₹ 75,196.00	20-11-2023	23.300	23.000			
B.O.: NAUGARH UP									
97	VIPIN DUBEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX5642	₹ 1,51,012.00	25-08-2023	48.500	47.700			
98	SUNIL KUMAR YADAV	XXXXXXXXXXXX9740	₹ 1,84,856.00	20-11-2023	61.400	58.900			
B.O.: OBRA SONBHADRA UP									
99	MANISH SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX1117	₹ 3,15,508.02	28-12-2023	103.300	101.200			
B.O.: PADRAUNA [UP]									
100	MANOJ KUMAR YADAV	XXXXXXXXXXXX6074	₹ 95,318.00	29-09-2023	25.800	24.700			
B.O.: PILIBHIT [UP]									
101	VIJAY TRIVEDI	XXXXXXXXXXXX00043	₹ 64,645.00	10-10-2023	26.600	26.300			
102	KALPNA TRIVEDI	XXXXXXXXXXXX00027	₹ 86,650.00	10-10-2023	42.200	42.100			
103	PADMA NISHRA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9284	₹ 1,26,967.00	25-08-2023	32.000	31.900			
104	SRAFAAT KHAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX0707	₹ 1,29,451.00	25-08-2023	32.500	32.400			
105	SRAFAAT KHAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX1565	₹ 1,35,685.00	25-08-2023	38.300	38.100			
106	PRASHANT RAI	XXXXXXXXXXXX4141	₹ 2,02,358.85	10-10-2023	68.500	68.500			
107	SUBHASH CHANDRA SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX1240	₹ 3,10,550.00	29-09-2023	95.200	95.000			
108	MO ASHIF	XXXXXXXXXXXX0920	₹ 3,39,177.00	29-09-2023	92.000	91.800			
B.O.: PURANPUR PBT UP									
109	JAHARUL HASAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX7762	₹ 1,18,334.00	29-09-2023	38.600	34.740			
B.O.: RAI BARELI [UP]									
110	SAURABH KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX00492	₹ 30,399.00	29-09-2023	9.000	9.000			
B.O.: RAMPUR [UP]									
111	AFROJ ALI	XXXXXXXXXXXX01070	₹ 95,371.00	10-10-202					



# US comments on Kejriwal unwarranted, says MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said the US State Department's recent remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is "unwarranted" and asserted the country is "proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions" and committed to protect them from any form of undue external influences.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said this in response to a query during his weekly press briefing on New Delhi's stand on the remarks made by Washington on the arrest. "Yesterday India lodged its strong objection and protest with the senior official from the US embassy with regard to the comments made by the US State Department," he said. The recent remarks by the State Department are "unwarranted," the MEA Spokesperson said. Any such external imputation on "our electoral and legal processes is completely unacceptable," he said.

"India is proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions. We are committed to protect them from any forms



of undue external influences," he added. Taking strong objection to certain remarks by a US official regarding the issue of Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, India on Wednesday here summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against Washington's remarks. On March 23, German diplomat was summoned by New Delhi for certain remarks German foreign ministry on the same issue.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials on Wednesday summoned the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berben of US at its office in South Block here. The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes.

Reports had said a US state department official had said Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal

process for Chief Minister Kejriwal".

The MEA later in a statement said, "We take strong objection to the remarks of the Spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India".

"In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others. This responsibility is even more so in case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the statement said. India's legal processes are based on "an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," the MEA said in the statement while underlining that "casting aspersions on that is unwarranted".

The development comes days after India on March 23 had summoned the German deputy chief of mission here and lodged a strong protest against that country's foreign ministry's remarks on the arrest of the Delhi chief minister. A German Foreign Ministry spokesperson had "taken note" of Kejriwal's arrest.

"We see such remarks as interfering in our judicial process and undermining the independence of our judiciary," the MEA had said.

# In a blow to BJD, its founding member and Cuttack MP joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

BJD founding member and six-time Cuttack Lok Sabha MP Bhartruhari Mahtab joined the BJP here on Thursday, dealing a big blow to the Odisha's ruling party ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Mahtab, 67, joined the BJP in the presence of senior leaders at the party headquarters here. Along with him, former BJD MP Sidhant Mohapatra and noted Santali language litterateur Damayanti Beshra, who was conferred the Padma Shri in 2020, also joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, party national vice president Bajjayant Jay Panda, party's Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal and other senior leaders.

Addressing a joint press conference here after joining the BJP, Mahtab, son of former chief minister Harekrushna Mahtab, said he will now get the opportunity to work for the development and progress of Odisha.

"Prime Minister Modi's 'shakti' (strength), Home Minister's 'vishwas' (trust) and (BJP chief) Jy Nadda ji's 'prerna' (inspiration) will help us move forward," he said.

Odisha is going to witness a change due to Prime Minister Modi's leadership. This change is going to be steered by Home



Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders of the BJP, Mahtab said. "I am going to start a new innings with a new team."

Welcoming them into the party fold, BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde said they have joined as they are "impressed" by Prime Minister Modi's leadership and his government work in various sectors.

They have joined the BJP at a time when Odisha is witnessing a change in the political scenario, Tawde said. "And I am confident that the party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, will succeed in bringing the change that people of Odisha want to see in the state."

Addressing the press conference, Mohapatra expressed gratitude towards Nadda and other senior BJP leaders for his

induction into the party and said India has transformed under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. "I want to see the same transformation happening in Odisha as well."

Beshra said she will work for the welfare of the people of Odisha and also contribute in taking forward Prime Minister Modi's 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (together with all, development for all)' slogan. "A wind of change is certainly blowing in Odisha this time. People's faith in the BJP's ideals has further strengthened," she said. "I will work for the empowerment and progress of women. I want to assure that I will fulfil any responsibility that the party would give to me," Mahtab, a six-time MP from the Cuttack Lok Sabha constituency, had resigned from the primary membership of the BJP last Friday.

# MEA: India continues to push dialogue to end Ukraine conflict



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it continues to encourage a peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict through "dialogue and diplomacy". Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said this in response to a query during a press meet on India's stand on the inaugural Peace Summit in Switzerland. "We continue to encourage peaceful resolution of Russian-Ukraine conflict through dialogue and diplomacy," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 20 had separate conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and asserted that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward for the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Modi had spoken to Putin over telephone to congratulate him for winning a fifth term in office in the recent elections and followed it up with a phone call to Zelenskyy to convey India's "consistent support" for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict.

During the telephone conversation, the Ukrainian president had thanked India for its support for his country's sovereignty and said that it would be important for Kyiv to see New Delhi attend the inaugural Peace Summit in Switzerland.

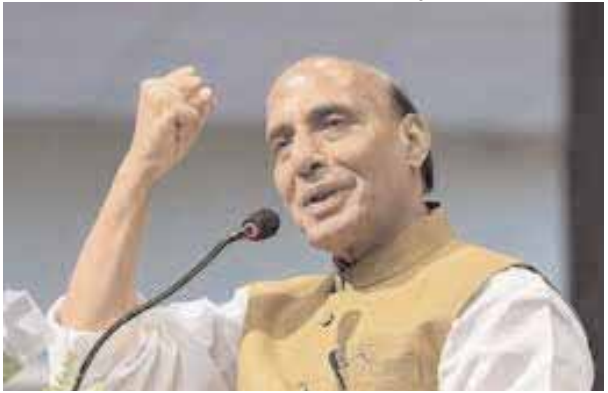
# Indian borders totally secure, says Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday assured the citizens that India and its borders are "totally secure" and the people of the country should have full faith in the armed forces.

During a fireside chat on the concluding day of a private television channel's summit here, while responding to a question on the criticism of the Agniveer scheme, the minister said such questions have "no standing" and underlined that everyone will accept that the armed forces should have a young profile. During the event, the defence minister also shared anecdotes from his nearly 50-year-long political journey. Asked how he reacted to questions raised by many, including members of the opposition, on the India-China border issue, Rajnath said they never made him uncomfortable.

"In keeping with the country's



interests, I tell them (opposition) whatever I can. But in defence, there are many things which have strategic importance and we cannot tell them publicly. We try to steer clear of telling those things, whether it is (about) northern, western or eastern sector," he said. "I want to assure the people of the country... They should have full faith in our Army and security personnel," the defence minister said.

Indian and Chinese troops are locked in an over three-and-

half-year-long confrontation at certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks. "Having been the defence minister for five years and home minister before that, I want to assure the people of the country based on what I have seen, understood and assessed that our borders and our country are totally secure," he added.

The eastern Ladakh border

standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area. The ties between India and China nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process in 2021 on the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area.

Rajnath defended the Agniveer scheme, saying recruiting youths would result in an increased risk-taking spirit and more tech-savvy armed forces. "Everyone will accept the fact that there should be youthfulness in the armed forces. Normally, 30-50 years has been the age range of our jawans. But when jawans aged 18-20 will join as Agniveers, then the risk-taking spirit will be a bit higher," he said. Senior jawans are discharging

their responsibilities well, there is no two ways about it, he said. Today is the age of technology and the Indian youth should also be tech-savvy. Such youths are being recruited under this scheme as Agniveers, he added.

The future of these youths will not be impacted by the scheme. Steps have been taken to secure their future, including making provisions for reservation for Agniveers in paramilitary forces, Rajnath said.

"And if we see any drawbacks, then we are ready to rectify them," he said. In June 2022, the Centre rolled out the Agnipath recruitment scheme for short-term induction of personnel into the armed forces with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. The scheme provides for recruiting youngsters in the age bracket of 17 years and a half to 21 years for a four-year period with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years.

# Government revises wages under MGNREGS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Government has revised wages under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for unskilled workers, with hikes ranging from four to ten per cent across different states. Though Haryana tops in terms of wage rate at Rs 374 per day, the increase is only around four per cent. Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at Rs 234 per day, according to the notification. However, the Opposition Congress has criticised the dismal wage rate increase, with party's leader Rahul Gandhi taking to social media to express his discontent. He sarcastically congratulated MGNREGS workers on what he termed as a meager increase of Rs 7 in their daily wages. Gandhi also slammed



the government, suggesting that instead of significantly improving the livelihoods of the workers, they might allocate a substantial amount towards a campaign thanking Modi for the negligible raise. The wage rate in three panchayats of Sikkim — Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen — is Rs 374 a day. The wage revision under the scheme was notified by the Union Rural Development Ministry on March 27 after

clearance from the Election Commission as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in force for the Lok Sabha polls. The increases have been made on the 2023 wage rates under a scheme that is aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

# AFSPA extended in Arunachal, Nagaland for six more months

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, under which an area is declared as "disturbed" for the convenience of security forces, has been extended in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh, eight districts of Nagaland and some other areas for six more months after a review of the law and order situation in these two northeastern states.

The AFSPA gives armed forces personnel, operating in disturbed areas, sweeping powers to search, arrest and to open fire if they deem it necessary for "the maintenance of public order". An area or district is notified as a disturbed area under the AFSPA to facilitate the operations of the armed forces.

In a notification, the Union home ministry said the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 had declared the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam as 'disturbed area' on September 26, 2023. "And whereas a further review of the law and order situation in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has been undertaken. Now, therefore, Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai,



Mahadevpur and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the State of Assam, are declared as 'disturbed area' under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a period of six months with effect from 01.04.2024, unless withdrawn earlier," the notification said.

In a separate notification, the home ministry also said that the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by AFSPA had declared eight districts and 21 police stations in five other districts of Nagaland as 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from October 1, 2023. The home ministry said a further review of the law-and-order situation in Nagaland has been undertaken and after that a decision has been taken to declare as 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA for six more months in eight districts of the state and areas falling under 21 police stations.

The districts where the imposition of 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA will continue are Dimapur, Niuland,

Chumoukedima, Mon, Kiphire, Noklak, Phek and Peren districts. The police stations where the law will be applicable are: Khuzama, Kohima North, Kohima South, Zubza and Kezocha police stations in Kohima district; Mangkolemba, Mokokchung-I, Longtho, Tuli, Longchem and Anaki 'C' police stations in Mokokchung district; Yanglok police station in Longleng district; Bhandari, Champang and Ralan police stations in Wokha district; and Ghatashi, Pughoboto, Satakha, Suruhuto, Zunheboto and Aghunato police stations in Zunheboto district.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had earlier said the AFSPA has been removed in 70 per cent areas in the northeastern states even though it is in force in Jammu and Kashmir. On March 26, Shah had said the central government would consider revoking AFSPA in Jammu and Kashmir. There have been demands from various organisations and individuals in Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern states to revoke the AFSPA.

# NET scores to be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25: UGC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The National Eligibility Test (NET) scores will be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25 eliminating the need for separate entrance tests conducted by universities and higher education institutions, according to the University Grants Commission. The NET is conducted twice a year -- June and December. Its scores are currently used to award Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and as eligibility for appointment as an assistant professor for those with a Master's degree.

According to University Grants Commission (UGC) officials, the commission had constituted an expert committee to review the provisions of the exam and based on the panel's recommendations, it has decided that from the academic session 2024-25, the score can be used for admission to PhD programmes.

"Starting from the academic session 2024-2025, universities nationwide will have the opportunity to utilise NET scores for admissions to PhD programmes, replacing the need for separate entrance tests conducted by individual universities and higher education institutions (HEIs). This marks an important step in streamlining the admission process and enhancing accessibility for aspiring doctoral candidates. "By leveraging the NET, which is conducted biannually, universities can offer greater flexibility to students, allowing them to utilise their scores from either session to apply for PhD programmes across vari-



ous institutions," UGC Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar said.

Kumar explained that the initiative is poised to benefit students in numerous ways. "Firstly, it eliminates the need for students to prepare and appear for multiple entrance tests conducted by different universities, thereby reducing the burden of exam logistics and expenses. Additionally, the biannual administration of the NET provides students with increased opportunities to secure admission to their desired PhD programmes. "We strongly encourage all universities to adopt NET exam scores for PhD admissions starting from the 2024-2025 academic session. This will undoubtedly contribute to fostering a more conducive environment for academic pursuit and scholarly advancement in our nation," he said.

In an official notification, the UGC said that from June 2024 onwards, the NET candidates will be declared eligible in three categories -- for admission to PhD with JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD

without JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD programme only and not for the award of JRF or appointment as assistant professor.

"Result of UGC NET would be declared in percentile along with the marks obtained by a candidate to utilise the marks for admission to PhD. The JRF-qualified students are admitted into the PhD programme based on an interview as per the UGC (Minimum Standards and Procedures for Award of PhD Degree) Regulations, 2022.

"For students who qualify in categories 2 and 3, 70 per cent weightage will be given for test scores and 30 per cent for the interview for admission to PhD programmes. The PhD admission will be based on the combined merit of NET marks and the marks obtained in the interview or viva voce," the notification said. The marks obtained in the NET by the candidates in categories 2 and 3 will be valid for one year for admission to PhD. The registration process for UGC NET June 2024 is expected to begin next week.

# Households wasted 1 billion meals daily in 2022: UN report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In 2022, every day, households worldwide wasted over 1 billion meals, while a heart-breaking 783 million people struggled with hunger, and a third of the global population faced food insecurity, as per a UN report published just ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste marked on March 30.

The economic toll due to waste food is estimated at roughly USD 1 trillion, highlighting the urgent need for action, said the UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024, prepared by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with the environmental charity WRAP, which has brought to attention the grave consequences of food waste while underscoring the glaring disparity between abundance and deprivation that persists worldwide.

The report has also highlighted how this issue not only hurts the global economy but also fuels climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. A detailed analysis of the data reveals an alarming scenario: In 2022, a staggering 1.05 billion tons of food waste were generated, equivalent to 132 kilograms per person and nearly one-fifth of all available food. Surprisingly, a significant portion of this waste, 60 per cent, occurred at the household level, with food services responsible for 28 per cent and retail contributing 12 per cent. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP said, "Food waste is a global tragedy. Millions go hungry as food is wasted across the world. Not only is this a major develop-

ment issue, but the impacts of such unnecessary waste are causing substantial costs to the climate and nature. If countries prioritise this issue, they can significantly reverse food loss and waste, reduce climate impacts and economic losses, and accelerate progress on global goals." At the same time, Harriet Lamb, CEO of WRAP called for more G20 countries to measure food waste and work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal. Public-private partnerships were highlighted as a key tool in addressing the complex challenges of food waste.

The report notes that despite efforts to track food waste, many low- and middle-income countries lack adequate systems to monitor progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 12.3, which aims to halve food waste by 2030. Only a few G20 countries, along with the European Union, have suitable estimates to track progress. Interestingly, the report debunked the notion that food waste is only a problem in wealthy nations. Household food waste levels varied only slightly among high-income, upper-middle, and lower-middle-income countries. Hotter countries appeared to generate more food waste per person, possibly due to higher consumption of fresh foods with inedible parts and limited cold chain infrastructure. The environmental impact of food waste is substantial, contributing 8-10 per cent of annual global greenhouse gas emissions and causing significant biodiversity loss.



## Truth travels freely

Kejriwal's arrest gets international attention; vendetta politics may boomerang on ED

Brought to the Rouse Avenue Court amid high drama, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has described his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case as a "political conspiracy." Himself making submissions in the court after taking the special judge's permission, he expressed confidence that the public will give a "fitting reply to this injustice". Seeking to establish a link between the Electoral Bond donations received by the ruling party and his arrest, the Delhi Chief Minister said that people were being turned 'approver' in the case and being forced to change their statements. "My arrest by the ED is a political conspiracy ... the approver gave the BJP Rs 55 crore," he said. As a precursor to this setting, Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, broke her silence and hinted at the impending revelation of this crucial piece of information. Kejriwal, known for his anti-corruption stance and vocal criticism of the Centre, was arrested last week on charges of being embroiled in a multi-crore liquor scam. The arrest sparked widespread outcry and protests, with supporters of Kejriwal alleging political vendetta and the BJP's bid to settle political scores with the AAP upon losing the MCD elections after 15 years. Apart from being charged with soliciting kickbacks from liquor traders in exchange for favours, the Delhi Chief Minister is also accused of being the "kingpin and key conspirator" in the now-scrapped policy. The agency has already arrested at least 14 top AAP leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Minister Sanjay Singh, in connection with the case.



Meanwhile, the international community has also been drawn into the fray, with the US making remarks regarding Kejriwal's arrest that have drawn the ire of Indian officials. The US State Department expressed concern over what it termed as "the apparent suppression of dissent" in India, calling for due process and respect for human rights. However, Indian authorities swiftly responded, asserting that the comments were unwarranted interference in the country's internal affairs. Germany was the first country to speak against Kejriwal's arrest. Whenever a politician is put behind bars, there are consequences to it. The Union Government should be doubly sure that it has a watertight case against the accused person, else there are high chances that it will boomerang. Due to the lack of information on the case in public domain, we shall assume that the authorities have a strong case against the Delhi CM and that due process of law would be followed. But if it is an exercise in haste, Kejriwal's words might prove prophetic as elections are just around the corner. The citizens are discerning enough to read any signs of political vendetta. The outcome of this legal battle and its broader implications remain uncertain, but one thing is clear – the events unfolding around Kejriwal have captured the attention of the nation and the world, highlighting the enduring struggle for transparency, accountability and justice in the corridors of power.

### PICTALK



A shepherd with his sheep near a mustard field on the outskirts of Srinagar

PTI

## Dandi March: Salt, soul and satyagraha

The Dandi March serves as a reminder that peaceful protest can be a potent weapon against injustice and oppression

The 1980s film 'Mard' immortalised a poignant scene that encapsulates the essence of patriotism, rebellion, and sacrifice in Indian cinematic history. In this scene, the protagonist, amidst relentless flogging by the heroine armed with chains, whispers with unyielding spirit, "For this salt, our Mahatma led a revolution." This homage vividly captures the spirit of the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, a pivotal moment in India's quest for independence, led by Mahatma Gandhi. The Salt Satyagraha, which took place from March 12 to April 6, 1930, galvanised a nation against British colonial rule. Gandhi's symbolic act of picking up salt at Dandi defiantly challenged the salt taxes imposed by the British, symbolising defiance and resilience in India's freedom struggle. Over 90,000 brave souls willingly embraced brutality in their pledge for non-violence, standing as a beacon of hope against tyranny. The genesis of the Dandi March was rooted in the momentum established by the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, led by Sardar



Vallabhbhai Patel. This successful movement unified farmers and nationalists against oppressive British taxation, revitalising the spirit of the freedom struggle. By 1930, the Indian National Congress boldly articulated its aspiration for independence, setting the stage for Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi's letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, articulated the grievances of millions and announced his intention to lead a nonviolent protest against British atrocities. Despite Gandhi's emphasis on dialogue and peaceful resolution, the Viceroy's inadequate response led to the commencement of the Dandi March on March 12, 1930. Accompanied by 78 dedicated followers, Gandhi embarked on a significant march covering nearly 241 miles from Sabarmati

Ashram to Dandi. This symbolic journey aimed at challenging the oppressive salt tax and British monopolistic control over salt production. The disciplined resolve of the satyagrahis exemplified unity amidst diversity, embodying the nation's aspirations for liberation. On April 6, 1930, Gandhi's defiance of the Salt Laws at Dandi marked a pivotal moment in India's struggle for independence. His call to civil disobedience catalysed a mass boycott of British goods, prompting a harsh crackdown from British authorities. Despite brutal repression, the spirit of nonviolent resistance persisted, revealing the resilience of the Indian populace. The Salt Satyagraha showcased resolute collective action, with over 60,000 willingly imprisoned and thou-

sands more participating in peaceful protests. Despite Government reprisals, the 'satyagrahis' maintained remarkable restraint and non-violent discipline. This non-violent resistance ultimately led to negotiations with Congress leadership and Gandhi's release after a year of imprisonment. The Dandi March culminated in the historic breaking of the salt laws, a symbolic act of defiance that reverberated globally. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. drew inspiration from Gandhi's example, recognising the power of nonviolent resistance in confronting injustice. The Dandi March was not just a chapter in history but a transformative moment in India's fight for independence, marking Gandhi's emergence as a spiritual force. Through unwavering dedication to love and nonviolence, Gandhi wielded a potent weapon against oppression, demonstrating the profound impact of spirituality in challenging times. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the grand festival of Lok Sabha elections, the news of the demise of Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj brought my mind to a standstill for a few moments. Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj was a pioneer of India's spiritual consciousness and his demise is like a personal loss. A few years ago, the demise of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and now the departure of Swami Smaranananda Ji on his eternal journey has left many people bereaved. My heart, like that of crores of devotees, saints and followers of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, is deeply saddened. During my visit to Kolkata earlier this month, I had gone to the hospital to enquire about Swami Smaranananda Ji's health. Just like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji too dedicated his entire life for spreading the ideas of Acharya Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mata Sharada Devi and Swami Vivekananda across the world. While writing this article, the memories of meetings and conversations with him are getting refreshed in my mind. In January 2020, during my stay at Belur Math, I meditated in the room of Swami

Vivekananda. During that visit, I had a long conversation about Swami Atmasthananda Ji with Swami Smaranananda Ji. It is widely known that I had a close relationship with Ramakrishna Mission and Belur Math. As a seeker of spirituality, I have met different saints and mahatmas and been to many places over the period of more than five decades. Even in Ramakrishna Math, I got to know about the saints who dedicated their lives to spirituality, among whom personalities like Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji were prominent. Their sacred thoughts and knowledge provided contentment to my mind. In the most important period of my life, such saints taught me the true principle of Jan Seva hi Prabhu Seva. The lives of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission 'Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha'. We all are inspired by the work being done by Ramakrishna Mission for the promotion of education and

THEIR SACRED THOUGHTS AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED CONTENTMENT TO MY MIND. IN THE MOST IMPORTANT PERIOD OF MY LIFE, SUCH SAINTS TAUGHT ME THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF JAN SEVA HI PRABHU SEVA

## A tribute to the two great saints of India

The lives of Swami Atmasthananda ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission 'Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha'



NARENDRA MODI

rural development. Ramakrishna Mission is working on India's spiritual enlightenment, educational empowerment and humanitarian service. In 1978, when the disastrous flood struck Bengal, Ramakrishna Mission won the hearts of everyone with its selfless service. I remember, when an earthquake ravaged Kutch in 2001, Swami Atmasthananda Ji was among the first people to call me and offer all possible assistance for disaster management on behalf of the Ramakrishna Mission. Under his direction, Ramakrishna Mission helped many people who were affected by the earthquake. Over the past years, while holding various positions, Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji laid great emphasis on social empowerment. Those who know the lives of these great personalities will definitely remember how serious these saints were towards modern education, skilling and women empowerment. Among his many inspiring traits, one thing that impressed me the most was Swami Atmasthananda Ji's love and respect for every culture and every tradition.

The reason for this was that he used to travel continuously and had spent a long time in different parts of India. He learned to speak Gujarati while living in Gujarat. He used to even speak with me in the language and I loved listening to his Gujarati! At different points in India's development journey, our motherland has been blessed by many saints and seers like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji who have ignited the spark of societal change. They have motivated us to work with a collective spirit and address all the challenges our society faces. These principles are eternal and will act as our source of strength as we embark on developing a Viksit Bharat during the Amrit Kaal. Once again, on behalf of the entire nation, I pay homage to such saintly souls. I am confident that all the people associated with the Ramakrishna Mission will further move ahead on the path shown by them. Om Shanti.

(This is a tribute to Smaranananda ji Maharaj and Swami Atmasthananda Ji by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### POLITICIANS HITTING BELOW THE BELT

Madam — Apropos editorial "Political zealotry," published on March 28, this is my response. It pains one to note that exchanges amongst political rivals are getting too personal and downright abusive. Recent examples are Supriya Srinate of the GOP and Dilip Ghose of the BJP. Wish our "netas," spokespersons and candidates were more accommodating and tolerant, instead of hissing at one another like venomous snakes. I cite here a witty remark by MP Pilo Mody that turned the tables on his opponent. Mody, a big roly-poly man, showed his back to a minister because he felt outraged at some point. The minister took strong objection to Mody's gesture and interpreted it to be an insult to the House itself. Pilo Mody replied - "Mr. Speaker Sir, I have no front, no back, no flanks. I am round all over. So how could I have shown my back to the minister?" The House exploded in loud laughter. Our (generally) ill-tempered politicians should take a leave from the above incident and shun vituperative language while attacking their political opponents.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

#### INEQUALITY RISES IN INDIA

Madam — Apropos news article "Mumbai surpasses Beijing as billionaire hub," published on March 27, this is my response. Paris-based World Inequality Lab has recently published a report titled, 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India 1992 - 2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj'. As per the report, inequality in India declined till the early 1980s. Thereafter, it started rising sharply. The rise of top-end inequality gained tremendous momentum during the last 10 years. The top 1 per cent of Indians earn 22.6 per cent of the national income and their wealth share has risen to 40.1 per cent. The income share of the top 1 per cent of Indians is among the very highest in the world. The report says that India is now more unequal than during the time of the British Raj. Thanks to rising inequality, the tentacles

### Mechanisation is needed



Apropos news article "Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues," published on March 28, this is my response. Recurring drought, and scarcity of water for irrigation, combined with a lack of modern farming equipment, have all contributed to a steep fall in productivity and income, forcing our farmers to take huge loans, without being able to repay them. Farmers' income has not been able to keep pace, such as to cater to increasing production costs, including rising labour wages. Hence, agricultural machinery

becomes the need of the hour to alleviate farmers' problems. It is also important to note that in farming several activities are highly time-bound and unless executed as per schedule, a farmer will suffer financial loss. Agriculture mechanisation, is, therefore, an appropriate answer to such challenges faced by farmers. Farm mechanisation and crop productivity have a direct correlation as they save time and labour, reduce drudgery, cut down production costs in the long run, reduce post-harvest losses, and boost crop output and farm income. Mechanisation is crucial in the agriculture sector, as it contributes towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the inputs used in crop production. Increasing the rate of farm mechanisation is critical for India to sustainably meet production demand and develop value chains and modernised food systems.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

of VIP culture are spreading rapidly with each passing day. My local SBI branch has opened a special counter where customers can withdraw or deposit money with ease avoiding long queues at the general counter. Standing at the end of a serpentine queue at the general counter, an old man leaning on his stick asked if the special counter was for differently-abled persons and senior citizens. Immediately, he was provided enlightenment with the information that the counter was only for the VIPs who would transact a minimum amount of Rs 50 thousand!

Sujit De | Kolkata

#### INDIA-SINGAPORE TIES

Madam — Apropos news article "India-Singapore to further deepen bilateral ties," published on March 26, this is my response. The friendship between India and Singapore has stood the test of time for five decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had rightly emphasised the fact that Singapore was India's "gateway" to the east. The phenomenal rise of Singapore from a small nation to a dream country for oth-

ers to emulate is in itself an achievement of sorts. Both India and Singapore have mutually beneficial cultural exchanges, defence relations, economic cooperation and skill building. Defence, sea and space, commerce and infrastructure, too, are areas of bilateral interest. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's recent Singapore visit saw him discussing wide-ranging issues with that country's ministers including his counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan. Singapore is a destination much sought after by tourists. Besides, terror and security — very significant considering the deadlock over the South China Sea — could not escape the attention of the two leaders. India-Singapore have had a long relationship without a tinge of bitterness. That Modi himself has visited Singapore four times after he took over in 2014, underscores the importance attached by New Delhi to the bilateral relations.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

IMPACT AND DUALITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media often promotes formation of echo chambers and spread of false news



SHAINY SHARMA

Social media, a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society, has revolutionised the way people communicate, share information and interact with one another. From its humble beginnings as online forums to the expansive platforms of today like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, Snapchat and many more, the term ‘social media’ has reshaped human interaction and societal norms to a large extent. Today, it has become an integral part of everyone’s life, especially Generation Z and the impact is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Social media has fundamentally transformed communication dynamics, making it easier for individuals to connect with others globally. It has transcended geographical barriers, enabled real-time interaction and fostered virtual communities based on shared interests, identities and ideologies. Moreover, social media platforms have become instrumental in political discourse, activism and social movements, empowering voices that were previously marginalised and amplifying diverse perspectives. Millennials and Generation Z rely heavily on social media as a primary source of news and information which at times can lead to issues such as the spread of misinformation, echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are only exposed to viewpoints that align with their own beliefs. Various studies have also shown that spending too much time on social media, especially before bedtime, disrupts the sleep pattern. Blue light suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep, making it more difficult to fall asleep and reducing the overall quality of sleep. Studies also reveal that constant exposure to short-form content and distractions on social media platforms can lead to a decrease in attention span and difficulty concentrating on tasks that require sustained focus. Another major role of social media platforms which is responsible for various disruptions is promoting of unrealistic beauty standards through the use of filters, photo editing tools and the prevalence of influencers with idealised appearances, leading to body dissatisfaction and negative body image among Generation Z.




Such platforms are designed to be addictive, with features such as likes, comments, and notifications triggering dopamine release in the brain and can lead to compulsive use and dependency which is no less like other forms of addiction. Moreover, the constant exposure to carefully curated images and posts can create unrealistic expectations and foster feelings of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) among users. To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO irrespective of the generation gap, it becomes important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences such as practicing mindfulness, setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can also help alleviate feelings by emphasising authenticity, empathy and acceptance. There is no denying the fact that social media has brought about numerous benefits for Millennials and Generation Z in terms of connectivity, self-expression, and access to information, but at the same time it also poses challenges and risks that require careful consideration and management. Despite its transformative potential, social media presents a myriad of challenges that warrant attention. The addictive nature of social media and its impact on mental health, particularly among young people, raise concerns about excessive screen time, cyberbullying, and negative self-comparison. Balancing the advantages and drawbacks of social media usage is essential to harness its potential while mitigating its negative impacts on their well-being and society as a whole.

*(The writer is an educator, views are personal)*

# Navigating the legal and ethical implications of AI

In a world increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence, the discourse shifts from its capabilities to the imperative question of its ethical boundaries



MANEESHA DHIR

jurisprudence in the face of AI’s rapid development is a topic of paramount importance, dealing with issues ranging from privacy and data protection to intellectual property and employment. The Indian Government’s embrace of AI through initiatives like “Digital India” and a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence reflects a visionary stance on harnessing technology for societal benefit.

However, the journey toward realising AI’s full promise is fraught with challenges that demand vigilant oversight and a principled approach to regulation and ethics. On a global scale, AI raises questions that transcend national boundaries, presenting legal and ethical dilemmas that must be addressed comprehensively. The capacity of AI to analyse and utilise vast amounts of personal data has challenged existing privacy laws, sparking a worldwide reassessment of how we protect individual rights in the digital age. Countries are adopting comprehensive data protection regulations, such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation and India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, to



safeguard personal information while fostering digital innovation. The implications of AI on the job market also warrant serious consideration. The potential for automation to displace jobs creates a pressing need for legal frameworks that can mitigate adverse effects and prepare the workforce for an AI-driven future. Similarly, the intersection of AI with intellectual property rights challenges

conventional notions of creativity and authorship, calling for legal innovations that recognise and protect the contributions of all stakeholders, including those of AI. The issues of bias and discrimination in AI highlight the critical need for our technological systems to be as impartial and inclusive as possible. The development and deployment of AI must be guided by anti-discrimination laws adapted to the digital age, ensuring fairness and equity in the application of AI. Internationally, the regulatory approach to AI varies significantly, with entities like the European Union adopting comprehensive frameworks while others pursue more sector-specific guidelines. This diversity reflects the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and societal factors that influence AI governance, emphasising the need for a globally coordinated dialogue on AI ethics and regulation. Integrating AI into the legal profession offers a glimpse into the future, showcasing AI’s potential to enhance legal analysis, predict outcomes, and even assist in judicial decision-making. However, these advancements under-

score the imperative for stringent ethical standards to uphold the integrity of the legal system. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, it becomes crucial for societies, especially within the diverse context of India, to engage in proactive discourse. We must anticipate future developments and craft legal frameworks that are flexible enough to adapt to the unpredictable technological landscape. This includes ensuring that the benefits of AI extend to all and democratising access to services like healthcare and education. In conclusion, as we chart the course of AI within the legal domain, our focus must steadfastly remain on enacting and refining laws that protect human rights and dignity. Achieving harmony between

emerging technology and legal norms requires a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, where laws are designed not just to respond to the challenges posed by AI but to foresee and embrace its vast possibilities. With India at the forefront of AI innovation, buoyed by progressive policies and a wealth of intellectual capital, we stand on the brink of leading the global conversation on ethical AI. As we venture deeper into this new frontier, our collective aim should be a future where technology amplifies the noblest goals of law and justice, and in return, legal frameworks foster the responsible growth of Artificial Intelligence.

*(The author is a legal expert. Views expressed are personal)*

# Quantifying happiness is perplexing



The World Happiness Report places India at 126<sup>th</sup> rank, raising legitimate concerns about the methodology and biases inherent in such assessments



Happiness is complex and difficult to define, but this in no way implies that we do not know when we are happy. Happiness cannot be a permanent state of euphoria as the mind constantly changes its contours and shades and, by and large, remains an individual experience. Hence any exercise that seeks to generalise the impressions of a large number of individuals like those living within a country and brand them as happy or unhappy people is bound to be fraught with controversies. It will also inevitably reflect the biases of the measurers. When the definition of a variable cannot be agreed upon, its measurement will raise more controversies, but when such rankings are internationally publicised for branding countries and peoples which may influence the decisions of investors and donors, it is no longer a benign exercise without any accountability. On March 20 every year for the last seven years, which date has been marked by the UN as the International Day of Happiness, a New York-based agency called Sustainable Development Solutions Network has been bringing out an annual World Happiness Report, whose 2024 edition has placed India at 126th rank among 143 countries, much below countries like Saudi Arabia (28), China (60), Russia (72), Venezuela (79), Senegal (99), Iran (100), Palestine (103), Ukraine (105), Pakistan (108) even Myanmar (118). These countries are either strife-torn or war-ravaged, where the basic security of human life is not guaranteed, or ruled by autocrats and dictators who ruthlessly suppress the civil liberties of their people, especially of women, countries which are reeling under relentless crises in their democracy, polity and economy. This raises legitimate questions about the methodology used in the exercise that can produce such weird results. Finland has topped the ranking in each year so far, and the top 10 countries have also remained more or less the same, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Australia. A common thread runs through all of them - high per capita income. Other higher-capita income countries also rank higher in the list, like New Zealand (21), UK



WE DO NOT NEED TO FEEL DEPRESSED AT OUR 126TH RANKING. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD IGNORE SUCH A PHONEY INDEX AND GO ABOUT OUR LIVES AND BUSINESS AS USUAL

(20), USA (23), Germany (24), or France (27). This is no surprise, because to the materialistic West hung on a culture of conspicuous overconsumption, money remains the primary and often the only source of happiness, unlike in Asian and other continental cultures. The only Asian country to feature in the list is Kuwait at 13th position, and the next one is Saudi Arabia at 28th. While Singapore features in 30th position, Japan, which has the largest concentration of longest-living people in the world, at 51st position, below Uzbekistan (47) and Kazakhstan (49). This raises natural questions about whether the index also reflects the inherent civilizational bias of the West against Asia, most of which used to be their colonies once—to treat them as superior or even equal would be an anathema to the West. Bhutan which reckons happiness as a core responsibility of Government and has adopted its Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index as a development indicator in its 2008 Constitution, was ranked 95th in 2019 and has not been ranked this year. GNH was the first such index and is far broader - having nine parameters, all non-income. Trying to measure the immeasurable will have its inherent contradictions. Happiness is a state of being, rather than a fixed state like a goal to be achieved that can be quantified and measured. Such measures therefore confuse happiness with “well-being” which is produced by the interplay of numerous extraneous factors like income, health, education, liberties, choices, relationships, physical and social security, etc. But even then, it is a subjective sense of well-being, which is neither measurable nor quantifiable. The rankings used in the World Happiness Report are based on six parameters of “subjective well-being”: (1) per capita income, (2) healthy life expectancy at birth, (3) social support, (4) freedom to make

life choices, (5) generosity, and (6) perceptions of corruption. The happiness rankings are based on what the authors say are “life evaluations”, on which Gallup World Poll (GWP) provides the data by asking respondents to evaluate their current life on a scale of 0 to 10 (happiest), using a typical sample size of 1000 for each country regardless of its population, and using a three-year average. The sample size is too small for a country like India to represent all its diversity and complexity. Data for per capita GDP on purchasing power parity (PPP) are taken from the World Development Indicators (WDI) of the World Bank, and then a natural log that fits the observations better. Data for healthy life expectancy at birth is provided by the WHO Global Health Observatory data repository. Social support is the national average of the binary responses (0=no, 1=yes) to the GWP question: “If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?” Freedom to make life choices is again the national average of binary responses to the GWP question: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?” Generosity is the residual of regressing the national average of GWP responses to the question: “Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?” on log GDP per capita, while perceptions of corruption are the average of binary answers to two GWP questions: “Is corruption widespread throughout the Government or not?” and “Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?” It does not require superlative intelligence to divine that all these parameters are derivatives of a single parameter, i.e., income or wealth of a nation, and hence will always favour rich nations over the poorer ones.

So, the richer you are, the happier you are; in other words, income is synonymous with happiness, an assumption not validated by facts, just as happiness cannot be equated with success in material terms. The mind is influenced by social and cultural factors; hence how we perceive happiness also depends on these factors. It also depends on the questions asked and the way they have been framed: Just ask “How much time you spend with your parents every week”, or “For how long you have been married to your present spouse”, and see how the scales turn against the rich western nations. In collectivist societies in Asia, people reckon happiness more as a shared experience rather than individual satisfaction with life, whereas in individualistic societies, people perceive happiness more in terms of individual satisfaction. Happy people increase the happiness of others around them; hence bonding within social groups and families contributes positively to happiness. Individualistic Western nations would score higher given the way the GWP questions have been framed. As every Indian knows from experience, we are not unhappy people, having been brought up to regard values and relationships as more important than wealth and to be content to live a simple life with few material possessions, with strong bonds with our extended families and the community. Even though perceptions are changing in a growing economy, these basic values have remained intact. We do not need to feel depressed at our 126th ranking. Instead, we should ignore such a phoney index and go about our lives and business as usual.

*(The author, an ex-bureaucrat, is currently a Professor at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management; views are personal)*





# Congress LS pick caste certificate gets rejected

TN RAGHUNATHA ■  
MUMBAI

The Opposition Congress on Thursday suffered a setback on Thursday as the Social Justice Department's Caste Certificate Scrutiny Committee rejected the caste certificate of Rashmi S Barve, its Lok Sabha candidate from the Ramtek (SC) constituency. The Social Justice Department's order came after a person logged a complaint with it recently, challenging the caste certificate issued to Rashmi by alleging that she had not followed the due legal process to obtain the certificate. The controversy over Rashmi's caste certificate erupted after the Election Commission of India (ECI) initiated the process of nomination papers filed by all the candidates for the five Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. In an effort to seek relief, Rashmi's team moved the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court. The Nagpur HC bench is likely to hear the petition on Friday. Undeterred by the rejection of Rashmi's caste certificate, the



Congress has readied the plan-B in the event of the ECI rejecting Rashmi's nomination on the ground that the caste certificate is not valid. "If our candidate Rashmi Barve's nomination gets rejected on the ground of her caste certificate not being proper, we will field her husband Shyamlal Barve will file his nomination to contest the polls from Ramtek (SC) constituency. Shyamlal has already filed his nomination as a dummy candidate," a senior Congress leader said. Hitting out at the at the Eknath

Shinde-led MahaYuti government, Rashmi said that the move to cancel her caste certificate at the last minute was 'politically motivated' "I have decided to challenge the rejection of my caste certificate in the Bombay High Court," he said. On its part, the MahaYuti has fielded a ruling Shiv Sena candidate Raju Parwe as its candidate from Ramtek-SC constituency in place of sitting two-time MP Krupal Tumané. The BJP, which had staked claim for Ramtek (SC) seat, may give up its claim over the seat.

# Govinda joins Shinde Sena, may contest LS polls from Mumbai

T N RAGHUNATHA ■  
MUMBAI

After he returned to active politics after a gap of one and a half decades and joined the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, yesteryear actor-turned-politician Govinda on Thursday appeared poised to be put up as a Shinde Sena candidate from Mumbai north-west Lok Sabha constituency. On a day when 60-year-old Govind Arun Ahuja – better known as Govinda – formally joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of chief minister Eknath Shinde, available indications within the Shinde-led ruling party suggested that he might be put up a candidate from Mumbai north-west Constituency where the Shiv Sena (UBT) named Amol Kirtikar as its candidate for the Lok Sabha polls. An actor who has featured in more than 150 Hindi films, Govinda was a Congress MP from Mumbai north constituency from 2004 and 2009. With film "Hero No 1" having emerged as a big success at the box success, Govinda had come to be dubbed as "gaint killer" after he defeat-



ed veteran BJP leader Ram Naik in the 2004 LS polls from Mumbai north constituency. He however refused to re-contest the LS polls in 2009 polls and exited from active politics. Expressing his happiness over his decision to join the Shinde Sena, Govinda said: "am back (in politics) after a 14-year-long 'vanvas' (exile)". Welcoming the actor to his party fold, Shinde said: "Govinda is a popular figure in all sections of the society". "Govinda stands for progress. He is impressed with Modi's development policies. He wants to do something for the welfare and progress of the

film industry. I am sure he will be the link between the government and the film industry. He has joined our party without any pre-conditions," the chief minister said. Heaping praise on Shinde, Govinda said: "Mumbai looks more beautiful and developed since Shinde has become the chief minister". Govinda said that the country had seen unbelievable development under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The actor said that if given an opportunity, he would work in the art and culture field if given a chance.

# India, Armenia have common ideas of governance: Harivansh



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Parliamentary delegation led by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh held bilateral meeting with the Parliamentary delegation of Armenia on the sidelines of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva, Switzerland. "India and Armenia have common ideas of governance which gives an opportunity to collaborate and share experience on the journey of the two countries. India and Armenia have rich cultural heritages and the two countries could further enhance focus on promoting cultural exchanges, such as art exhibitions, film festivals, and academic collaborations," said Harivansh who is attending the 148th Assembly of IPU. The RS Deputy Chairman also

met the president of IPU Dr. Tulia Ackson, Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania. The delegation is comprised of five members from Rajya Sabha, namely, S. Niranjan Reddy, Sujet Kumar, Dr. Ashok Mittal, Dr. Prashanta Nanda and Smt. Sumitra Balmik. Indian parliamentary delegation also held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of IPU with the parliamentary delegation of Armenia led by Hakob Arshakyan, Vice President of the National Assembly of Armenia. Appreciating Armenia's valuable support extended to India in all its multilateral initiatives, Harivansh said that the strong partnership between two countries continues to grow and expand into multiple areas of cooperation.

# TMC targets Modi on MCC violations

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has strongly criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for breaking model code of conduct by announcing his intention to return Rs 3,000 crore confiscated by the Enforcement Directorate in its different raids to the people of Bengal. "The Prime Minister knows that model code of conduct is in vogue after the declaration of elections by the Election Commission of India ... any promise made by him in his official capacity that can influence voters amounts to breaking of model code of conduct ... and he did so by promising to return Rs 3,000 crore confiscated by the ED to the people of Bengal," TMC MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy said on Thursday. In a telephonic conversation with Rajmata Amrita Roy of Krishnagar the Prime on



Wednesday said that he was considering ways to return the looted money confiscated by the ED. More than "Rs 3,000 crore of the people have been looted and the ED has confiscated that money ... this money should go back to the poor people of Bengal from whom this money has been extracted ... we are thinking to device some plan after the

elections to return this money to the people," the Prime Minister told Roy asking her to tell the people about the Government's plans. The said amount mentioned by the Prime Minister was taken from the poor people of the State as bribes for different works including giving jobs as school teachers, clerks etc. Roy a scion is the BJP candi-

date from Krishnagar and has been pitched against Trinamool Congress heavy-duty nominee Mohua Moitra who was last year expelled from Parliament for his alleged involvement in the cash-for-query scam. Referring to the Prime Ministerial conversation TMC minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said that it was the duty of the Election Commission to keep a leash on such statements. "MCC applies to all and does not target people selectively ... had a lesser person made such statement the ECI would definitely have called for his explanation ... but we hope the Commission will take cognizance of the statement made by the Prime Minister too ... it has been made clearly to influence the voters ahead of the elections ... it amounts to bribing the voters," she said. The Prime Minister had ear-

lier pep-talked Rekha Patra, another first-time candidate from Basirhat. She is one of the rebel faces who fought against arrested TMC leader Sheikh Shahjahan's oppression at Sandeshkhali which hit the national headlines last month after women of the village revolted against sexual exploitation and land-grab by Shahjahan's henchmen. Incidentally speaking about the Prime Minister's talks with Roy where he reportedly referred to Krishnachandra Roy's contribution to Bengal's social awakening, TMC nominee Mohua Moitra said, "the Prime Minister should have come with a better home work ... as far as my knowledge goes it was not Krishnachandra Roy but Raja Rammohan Roy who led the renaissance movement ... and I as a person know about only one Raja that is Raja Rammohan Roy and only one Rani that is Rani Rashmoni."

# Mohua skips appearance at ED office

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress candidate from Krishnagar Parliamentary constituency MP Mohua Moitra skipped appearance before the Enforcement Directorate officials in Delhi citing her preoccupation in election campaigns. She was asked by the Agency to appear at its Delhi office on Thursday in a Foreign Exchange Maintenance Act (FEMA) related case. Moitra a sitting MP who was expelled from Parliament last year for her alleged involvement in cash-for-query case said that she could not go to Delhi as she was preoccupied with election campaign and would appear virtually if the ED officials wanted her to do so. Moitra was called by the Agency in a foreign remittance and fund transfer case. According to sources some transactions related to a non-resident external account are being investigated by the



Agency which earlier interrogated her associate Suhan Mukherjee. Apart from Moitra a corporate honcho and a friend of the TMC MP had also been summoned for questioning by the ED, sources said. On whether she was apprehensive of her fate considering what happened to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who was arrested by the agencies earlier this month Moitra said, "ED is doing its work and I am doing mine ... I will ask all the lawful questions that are put to me ... but is it the time to ask the questions ... it is time for

campaigning and everyone knows that I am a candidate from Krishnagar for which I have to go campaigning which is part of my job ... presently I am going to Kaliganj Assembly area ... I have other areas to visit too ... It is difficult for me to go to Delhi now ... so I am not going today." Moitra said that she had communicated through her lawyers that she could appear virtually if she was allowed to do so. Earlier she had called the ED summons an act of vendetta when the agencies raided her Kolkata houses last week.

# India, China discuss disengagement in...

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The 28th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs was held on November 30 last year. Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, Hong Liang, and Joint Secretary of the East Asia Division of Ministry of External Affairs of India, Gourangalal Das, co-chaired the 29th meeting, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in the statement. Representatives from the foreign affairs, defense, immigration and other departments of the two countries attended the meeting, it said. "Both sides agreed to continue to maintain communication through diplomatic and military channels, improve the mechanism for negotiation and consultation, and hold a new round of corps commander-level talks at an early date. "The two sides agreed to strictly abide by the agreements and guiding principles of the relevant common understandings reached between the two

sides, avoid flare-ups in the situation on the ground, and continue to consolidate the previous disengagement outcomes, in a bid to safeguard peace and tranquility in the border area," the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in the statement. The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area. Ties between the two countries nose-dived significantly following the clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. At an event in New Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on March 11 had said India remains committed to finding a "fair and reasonable outcome" on this issue but one that is respectful of agreements and recognises the Line of Actual Control. He also said, "I think it is in our common interest that "we should not have that many forces on the Line of Actual Control." Jaishankar also said this tension that "we have seen for the last four years has not served either of us well."

# Denied ticket by the BJP, Varun Gandhi wanders down memory lane in...

From Page 1

The Pilibhit MP reminisced how he came to the city in 1983 as a three-year-old and how the people of Pilibhit have now become his family. He also stated that representing the people of Pilibhit was the biggest honour of his life and that he served the people and fought for their rights by utilising his potential to the fullest. Varun is a two-time MP from Pilibhit, which has been a family affair since 1989, when it was won by his mother, Maneka. According to BJP sources, Varun took an anti-party stand on several issues.

Moreover, he was non-committal in promoting the party's programmes and activities. After he was replaced by Prasada, reports did the rounds that Varun might contest from the seat as an Independent candidate. The suspense ended on Wednesday when he did not turn up before the nominations ended. His mother Maneka, the sitting MP from Sultanpur, was, however, given another chance from the same seat by the BJP. The Pilibhit seat has remained with Maneka or her son Varun Gandhi since 1996.

Maneka won the seat on a Janata Dal ticket in 1989, lost in 1991 and won again in 1996. She won from the constituency in 1998 and 1999 as an Independent candidate. She won the seat in 2004 and 2014 as a BJP candidate. Varun won the seat in 2009 and 2019 as a BJP candidate. However, in recent years Varun has been critical of his own party's Government and policies. In September last year, for example, he slammed the BJP over the import of cheetahs from Africa. The remarks came after nine cheetahs died in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno

National Park in just five months. On X, he tagged a news report on more cheetahs being brought to India and said, "Importing cheetahs from Africa and allowing nine to die in a foreign land is... an appalling display of negligence." Earlier on Tuesday, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury had asked Varun to join the Congress after he did not get a Lok Sabha ticket from the saffron party. The Congress leader also alleged that Varun was snubbed by BJP due to his "connection with the Gandhi family."

# Resilient Padmarajan refuses to bow out of...

From Page 1

His papers for the presidential and vice-presidential elections were rejected during scrutiny as there were no MPs to propose his name. It is not without reasons that Padmarajan files nominations and gets defeated in the polls. "It is because of me that the Election Commission introduced the provision to postpone the polls if an

independent candidate dies or gets killed during electioneering. Till then the elections used to get countermanded only if the candidate happened to be from recognised political parties," explained Padmarajan. In the 1996 general election, Padmarajan set a record of sorts by filing nomination papers from five Lok Sabha constituencies and three Assembly constituencies

spread across five States in the country. "This made the ECI to legislate a law limiting the number of States from where a candidate could contest elections," Padmarajan recounted with a chuckle. His only obsession is that he wants to be the first candidate to file the nomination paper. "In 1997 I went to the office of the Lok Sabha secretary general to file the nomination

papers for the presidential election. The officials were not aware that filing of nomination papers begins on that day. When I told them that I had come to file the nomination papers for the presidential election, they were taken aback. It was only after checking the office records that they came to know about the significance of the day," he said. He is unlikely to campaign

at Thrissur or Dharmapuri. But his name figures in the EVMs and his invisible image is hovering all over the office of the returning officers. In addition to the 6 presidential and 6 vice presidential elections, Padmarajan has contested 32 Lok Sabha polls (excluding Thrissur and Dharmapuri), 51 Rajya Sabha elections, 76 Assembly polls, four MLC elections and one Mayoral

election. He has also contested for the post of Municipal Chairman's post, and district councils. Padmarajan has contested against P V Narasimha Rao, A B Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. Those who leave their parties and switch over loyalties when they are denied tickets by the mother party should take a cue from this soft spoken man, a true Gandhian.

# Kejriwal in full throttle as ED...

From Page 1

mein rakh le. Par ye ghotala hai (loose translation: I am not opposing the ED's plea for remand. They can keep

me in custody for as long as they want. But this is all a scam)," Kejriwal told the court. "So far, the CBI has filed 31,000 pages in this case in the court and 294 witnesses have been examined in this case. The ED has investigated 162 people and filed a 25,000-page report so far. By combining all these documents and reports, why have I been arrested? My name figures only in four

statements," he said in a jam-packed courtroom. Elaborating on the four statements mentioning his name, Kejriwal said C Arvind, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's secretary gave a statement. According to it, Sisodia handed over some excise policy-related documents to C Arvind in his (Kejriwal's) presence, in the Chief Minister's official residence. "He has only stated that

Sisodia gave some documents to C Arvind. Madam, several MLAs, Ministers and dignitaries come with their secretaries to my house. "They do side-talks and hand over documents to each other. How do I know who is giving what to whom? Is this statement a sufficient reason to arrest the sitting chief minister?" Kejriwal said. Giving details of the second statement in which his name appeared, Kejriwal said

Magunta Srinivas Reddy is an MP from (Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister) Jagan Mohan Reddy's party (YSRCP). "Magunta Srinivas Reddy came to my office at 4.30 pm on March 16, 2021. He had sent an e-mail to my office that he is an MP and wanted to meet me. My office gave him an appointment to meet me after 10 days. He came over and said I want to open my family's charitable trust in Delhi. I told him that the land

does not come under us, it comes under the Lieutenant Governor (LG)," Kejriwal said. The Delhi Chief Minister further said Magunta Srinivas Reddy gave three statements to the agency but only one was considered. "Why the only statement that is against Kejriwal has been included in the 25,000 pages of ED report and the other two statements were not considered? All the three

statements should have been brought to the notice of the court, so that it could decide the truth in the case," he said. He said Sarath Chandra Reddy, who was the fourth person to make a statement mentioning his name, stated nothing against the Chief Minister in his two statements before his arrest and nine statements after being arrested. "After he was kept in jail for six months, he (Sarath

Chandra Reddy) finally succumbed and gave another statement on April 25, 2023. The only thing he said against me was that he had gone to meet the CM along with Vijay Nair," he said. Minutes before being produced in a city court on Thursday, Kejriwal was asked about Saxena's statement. In his response, the Chief Minister said, "This is a political conspiracy. The people will give a reply."



# Palestinian Authority announces new Cabinet

AP ■ RAMALLAH

The Palestinian Authority has announced the formation of a new Cabinet as it faces international pressure to reform. President Mahmoud Abbas, who has led the PA for nearly two decades and remains in overall control, announced the new government in a presidential decree on Thursday. None of the incoming ministers is a well-known figure. Abbas tapped Mohammad Mustafa, a longtime adviser, to be prime minister earlier this month. Mustafa, a politically independent US-educated economist, had vowed to form a technocratic government and create an independent trust fund to help rebuild Gaza. Mustafa will also serve as foreign minister.

Interior Minister Ziad Hab al-Rih is a member of Abbas' secular Fatah movement and held the same portfolio in the previous government. The Interior Ministry oversees the security forces. The incoming minister for Jerusalem affairs, Ashraf al-Awar, registered to run as a Fatah candidate in elections in 2021 that were indefinitely delayed. At least five of the incoming 23 ministers are from Gaza, but it was not immediately clear if they are still in the territory. The PA administrators parts of the Israeli-occupied West

Bank. Its forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power in 2007, and it has no power there. It has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians, in part because it has not held elections in 18 years. Its policy of cooperating with Israel on security matters is extremely unpopular and has led many Palestinians to view it as a subcontractor of the occupation. Opinion polls in recent years have consistently found that a vast majority of Palestinians want the 88-year-old Abbas to resign. The United States has called for a revitalised PA to administer postwar Gaza ahead of eventual statehood. Israel has rejected that idea, saying it will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza and partner with Palestinians who are not affiliated with the PA or Hamas. It's unclear who in Gaza would be willing to take on such a role.

Hamas has rejected the formation of the new government as illegitimate, calling instead for all Palestinian factions, including Fatah, to form a power-sharing government ahead of national elections. It has warned Palestinians in Gaza against cooperating with Israel to administer the territory, saying anyone who does will be treated as a collaborator, which is understood as a death threat.

## US SANCTIONS ONLINE MEDIA SITE GAZA NOW

The US on Wednesday imposed sanctions on online media site Gaza Now and its founder Mustafa Ayash for allegedly supporting Hamas. US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control says that after the October 7 attack by Hamas against Israel — the online entity began a fundraising effort in support of the militant organisation. Gaza Now's Arabic channel has more than 300,000 followers on social media channel X, formerly known as Twitter, and a large following on the encrypted chat platform Telegram. Included in the sanctions are firms Al-Qureshi Executives and Aakhirah Ltd., and their director Aozma Sultana, who are alleged to have partnered on multiple fundraising efforts alongside Gaza Now. The sanctions were imposed in collaboration with the UK's Office of Foreign Sanctions Implementation. Treasury Under Secretary Brian Nelson said in a statement that the US and its partners "will continue to leverage our tools to disrupt Hamas' ability to facilitate further attacks." A representative for Gaza Now and Ayash were not immediately available. The sanctions block access to US property and bank accounts and prevent those designated from doing business with Americans.

# Doctors stunned by war's toll on Palestinian children

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

An international team of doctors visiting a hospital in central Gaza was prepared for the worst. But the gruesome impact Israel's war against Hamas is having on Palestinian children still left them stunned. One toddler died from a brain injury caused by an Israeli strike that fractured his skull. His cousin, an infant, is still fighting for her life with part of her face blown off by the same strike.

An unrelated 10-year-old boy screamed out in pain for his parents, not knowing that they were killed in the strike. Beside him was his sister, but he didn't recognise her because burns covered almost her entire body. These gut-wrenching casualties were described to The Associated Press by Tanya Haj-Hassan, a pediatric intensive-care doctor from Jordan, following a 10-hour overnight shift at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the town of Deir al-Balah.

Haj-Hassan, who has extensive experience in Gaza and regu-



larly speaks out about the war's devastating effects, was part of a team that recently finished a two-week stint there. After nearly six months of war, Gaza's health sector has been decimated. Roughly a dozen of Gaza's 36 hospitals are only partially functioning. The rest have either shut down or are barely functioning after they ran out of fuel and medicine, were surrounded and raided by Israeli troops, or were damaged in fighting.

That leaves hospitals such as Al-Aqsa Martyrs caring for an

overwhelming number of patients with limited supplies and staff. The majority of its intensive care unit beds are occupied by children, including infants wrapped in bandages and wearing oxygen masks. "I spend most of my time here resuscitating children," Haj-Hassan said after a recent shift. "What does that tell you about every other hospital in the Gaza Strip?"

A different team of international doctors working at Al-Aqsa Martyrs in January stayed at a nearby guesthouse.

## 4 killed, 7 hurt in Illinois stabbings, suspect in custody

Rockford (Illinois) (AP) Four people were killed and seven hurt in stabbings in northern Illinois on Wednesday, authorities said. A 22-year-old man is in police custody and was being questioned Wednesday afternoon, according to Rockford Police Chief Carla Redd. She said one of the people who was wounded remained in critical condition. "My heart goes out to the families right now that are suffering a loss," Redd told reporters.

She said the Rockford Police received a medical call at 1:14 pm, followed by additional calls for police and paramedics. "We don't believe there's any other suspects that are on the run or at large at this particular time," Redd said. "Right now, we don't have a clear motive as to what caused this individual to commit such a heinous crime."

Not all of the victims found at multiple addresses in the city had stab wounds and none were shot, according to Redd. Rockford Police initially said five people had been injured. Cori Hilliard, a public information officer with the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, told AP Wednesday evening that two more victims were among those hurt. Three people died at the scenes. The fourth died at a hospital. Police later identified those victims as a 15-year-old girl, a 63-year-old woman, a 49-year-old man and a 22-year-old man. Their names were not released.

Redd said residents in the area were being asked to review their home surveillance camera footage for anything related to the attacks.

Rockford's population is about 150,000 and it's 144.84 kilometres northwest of Chicago. The violence Wednesday came days after a teenage employee of a Walmart in Rockford was stabbed and killed inside the store.

# 'Cargo ship underwent maintenance prior collision'

AP ■ BALTIMORE

The cargo ship that lost power and crashed into a bridge in Baltimore underwent "routine engine maintenance" in port beforehand, the US Coast Guard said Wednesday, as divers recovered the bodies of two of six workers who plunged into the water when it collapsed.

The others were presumed dead, and officials said search efforts had been exhausted. Investigators began collecting evidence from the vessel a day after it struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge. The bodies of the two men were located in the morning inside a red pickup submerged in about 25 feet (7.6 metres) of water near the bridge's middle span, Col. Roland L. Butler Jr, superintendent of Maryland State Police, announced at an evening news conference.

He identified the men as Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes, 35, who was from Mexico and living in Baltimore, and Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera, 26, who was from Guatemala and living in Dundalk, Maryland. The victims, who were part of a construction crew fixing potholes on the bridge, were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Butler said. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore addressed their families in Spanish during the news conference, saying, "Estamos contigo, ahora y siempre," which means, "we are with you, now and always." All search efforts have been exhausted, and based on sonar scans, authorities "firmly" believe the other vehicles with victims are encased in material from the collapsed bridge, Butler said. Divers are to resume searching once the debris is cleared.

Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath said at the news conference that authorities were informed that the ship was going to undergo the maintenance. "As far as the engine goes, we were not informed of any problems with the vessel," he said. The Baltimore region has reeled from the sudden loss of a major transportation link that's part of the highway loop around the city. The disaster also closed the port, which is vital to the city's shipping industry.

National Transportation Safety Board officials boarded the ship to recover information from its electronics and paperwork and to interview the captain and other crew members, NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said during a separate news conference.

Twenty-three people, including two pilots, were on the ship

when it crashed, she said. The vessel was also carrying 56 containers of hazardous materials including corrosives, flammables and lithium ion batteries, Homendy said. She added that some containers were breached, and that a sheen on the water from those materials would be handled by authorities.

Marcel Muise, NTSB investigator in charge, laid out a preliminary timeline assembled from the voyage data recorder comprising audio from the bridge and VHF radio ahead of the crash, which federal and state officials have said appeared to be an accident.

The vessel, the Dali, left port at 12:39 a.m. Tuesday and, after it entered the channel, signs of trouble came at about 1:25 a.m. when numerous alarms sounded, according to the NTSB. About a minute later, steering commands and rudder

orders were issued, and at 1:26 a.m. and 39 seconds, a pilot made a general radio call for nearby tug boats. Maryland Transportation Authority data from about the same time shows the pilot association dispatcher called the transportation authority's officer on duty about the black-out, the NTSB said.

Just after 1:27 a.m., the pilot commanded the ship to drop an anchor on the left side of the ship and issued added steering commands. About 20 seconds later, the pilot issued a radio call reporting that the Dali had lost all power approaching the bridge.

At about that time, the state transportation officer on duty radioed two of its units already stationed at each end of the bridge saying to close the bridge to vehicle traffic. They were already there because of the construction.

## Airstrip being built on Yemeni island

Dubai (AP): As Yemen's Houthi rebels continue to target ships in a Mideast waterway, satellite pictures analysed by The Associated Press show what appears to be a new airstrip being built at an entrance to that crucial maritime route.

No country has publicly claimed the construction taking place on Abd al-Kuri Island, a stretch of land rising out of the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden. However, satellite images shot for the AP appear to show workers have spelled out "I LOVE UAE" with piles of dirt next to the runway, using an abbreviation for the United Arab Emirates.

Both the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea to which it leads have become a battleground between the Houthis and US-led forces in the region as Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages — potentially allowing a nation to

project its power into the area. The construction comes as the presence of troops from the Emirates in the Socotra island chain to which Abd al-Kuri belongs — and that of the separatist force it backs in southern Yemen — have sparked clashes in the past.

In response to questions from the AP, the United Arab Emirates said on Thursday that "any presence of the UAE on Socotra island is based on humanitarian grounds that is carried out in cooperation with the Yemeni government and local authorities."

"The UAE remains steadfast in its commitment to all international endeavours aimed at facilitating the resumption of the Yemeni political process, thereby advancing the security, stability, and prosperity sought by the Yemeni populace," it added, without elaborating.

# Rishi Sunak shares 'hard balance' of being good dad and UK PM

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has admitted it is a hard balance for him to strike as the father of two young children and holding the top job of leading the country through various crises.

In a friendly podcast interview for "The Times" with former Conservative Party leader William Hague, the 43-year-old British Indian leader was asked about some of the challenges of taking charge at 10 Downing Street in the wake of intense political turmoil.

He shared his concerns about not being able to find as much time as he would like to focus on his daughters Krishna, 12, and Anoushka, 11.

"I've got two young girls who mean the world to me and it's



hard to balance being a good dad and doing the job well," said Sunak.

"You have to prioritise this job because it's an important job and you're doing it on behalf of the whole country. So not being

there for them as much as any dad would like to be is a challenge. There are particular moments where you feel that acutely because there's something very difficult going on. That's tough, but that's the job," he said.

Further, on a personal note about his Indian heritage, Sunak said he would like to "understand a bit more about" his grandparents who migrated from East Africa via India. "My grandparents largely went from India to east Africa and then my parents and grandparents came from east Africa to the UK as immigrants and when my grandmother made that journey, I think it was probably one of the first times she had been on a plane. I think she didn't know when she was going to see her family again,"

he said.

Southampton-born Sunak pointed out that while his grandmother had come to the UK "not quite knowing how that would all work," within a couple of generations he was sitting in former prime minister Margaret Thatcher's study in Downing Street for the newspaper's "The Story" podcast.

"That is an incredible journey. I'm inspired by that, and that's something that speaks to our country's story of openness and tolerance. I think there are very few countries in the world where my story would be possible... my family's story is one of hard work, loving family and service to a community; those were the values I was raised with and I would like to understand where all that came from," he said.

## 'King Charles III continuing to serve whole-heartedly'

London (PTI): A pre-recorded audio message by Britain's King Charles III was broadcast on Thursday for a traditional Easter service at Worcester Cathedral in central England, in which the 75-year-old monarch undergoing cancer treatment spoke of continuing to serve the nation with his "whole heart".

The King, who has taken a back seat from large-scale public-facing duties since his cancer diagnosis was made public last month, spoke of saying a "special prayer" this Easter as he expressed "great sadness" at being unable to attend the annual Royal Maundy Service in person.

Buckingham Palace said the audio was recorded in mid-March and included a reading from the 'Bible' from the 'Gospel according to John'. "The Maundy Service has a very special place in my heart. It has its origin in the life of Our Lord who knelt before his disciples and, to their great surprise, washed their travel-worn feet," said King Charles in his message.

"In this country we are blessed by all the different services that exist for our welfare. But over and above these organisations and their selfless staff, we need and benefit greatly from those who extend the hand of friendship to us, especially in a time of need," he said.

The monarch added: "This act of worship, here in Worcester Cathedral, reminds me of the pledge I made at the beginning of the Coronation Service — to follow Christ's example 'not to be served but to serve'. That I have always tried to do and continue to do, with my whole heart.

"It is my special prayer today that Our Lord's example of serving one another might continue to inspire us and to strengthen all our communities."

# Pope issues marching orders to priests during Holy Thursday Mass

AP ■ ROME/ NORWEGIA

Pope Francis urged his priests Thursday to avoid "clerical hypocrisy" and treat their flocks with mercy as he delivered a lengthy set of marching orders to Rome-based priests at the start of a busy few days leading to Easter. A strong-looking Francis presided over a Holy Thursday Mass in St Peter's Basilica during which the oils for church services are blessed. Later in the afternoon, he travels to Rome's main women's prison for the annual Holy Week ritual in which he washes the feet of inmates in a symbol of humility and service.

The 87-year-old Francis, who has been hobbled by a long bout of respiratory problems this winter, appeared in good form for the morning Mass. He read aloud a long homily, after skipping his text at the last minute during Palm Sunday Mass last weekend.

In his remarks, Francis warned



priests against "sliding into clerical hypocrisy," or preaching one thing to their flocks but doing differently in their own spiritual lives. Rather, he urged them to always show mercy to the faithful and not judge them,

and weep instead for their own sins. Doing so, he said, "means looking within and repenting of our ingratitude and inconstancy, and acknowledging with sorrow our duplicity, dishonesty and hypocrisy," he said.

The Mass was the first major papal liturgy in St Peter's since Bernini's great columned canopy over the altar, known as a baldacchino, was covered in scaffolding for a months-long

renovation and cleaning. Francis has a busy few days coming up that will test his stamina.

On Friday, he is due to travel at night to the Colosseum for the Way of the Cross procession re-enacting Christ's crucifixion.

On Saturday, he presides over an evening Easter Vigil in St Peter's Basilica followed a few hours later by Easter Sunday Mass in the piazza and his big noontime Urbi et Orbi (to the city and the world) speech highlighting global conflicts and disasters afflicting humanity.

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**NORWEGIANS FACING A SHORTAGE**

A shortage of eggs in shops during Holy Week has led Norwegians to flock to supermarkets across the border in Sweden and hoard the traditional Easter food.

Norwegian news outlet Nettavisen said on Thursday that the Nordby shopping centre in Sweden, located just off

the border about 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of the capital, Oslo, has been filled by "desperate" Norwegians trying stock up on eggs.

The centre's Maxi-Mat food store ran out of eggs Tuesday, while the adjacent Nordby Supermarket has had to limit the number of eggs purchased to three 20-packs per household, the news outlet reported. Not only are the Swedish stores better stocked with eggs, a traditional Easter treat needed for many dishes, but the product is also more affordable in Sweden, Nettavisen said.

"It's far cheaper than you get in Norway — if you can get eggs in Norway at all, that is," Stale Lovheim, the head of the Nordby shopping centre, told Nettavisen. "The last time I was in Norway, the store was empty" of eggs.

A pack of 20 eggs in Sweden sells for a price equivalent to 39.90 Norwegian kroner (USD 3.70), about 30 per cent less than the price in Norway.

Concerns about overproduction of eggs in Norway led to farmers being offered compensation to reduce egg production. That and the effects of bird flu have led to a shortage, according to news reports.

Egg prices are at near-historic highs in many parts of the world as Easter approaches, reflecting a market battered by disease, high demand and growing costs for farmers.

Ranked consistently among the most expensive countries in the world, Norway is known for its substantially high cost of living, especially in regards to food products and alcohol, which are heavily taxed even when compared to well-to-do Nordic neighbours.

Many residents living in southern Norway regularly make shopping trips across the border to Sweden, where products and services enjoy a lower value-added tax, a phenomenon that has evolved into a lucrative business for Swedish store owners.



# Indian economy can grow at 8 per cent till 2047: Subramanian

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian economy can grow at 8 per cent till 2047, if the country can redouble the good policies that it has implemented over the last 10 years and accelerate reforms, India's executive director at International Monetary Fund (IMF) Krishnamurthy Venkata Subramanian said on Thursday. Subramanian further said that clearly 8 per cent growth target is ambitious, because India has not grown consistently at 8 per cent before, but it is achievable. "So, the basic idea is that with the kind of growth that India has registered in the last 10 years, if we can redouble the good policies that we have implemented over the last 10 years and accelerate the reforms, then India can grow at 8 per cent from here on till 2047," he said at the Times Now Summit. India's economy grew at better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023, logging the fastest pace in the past one-and-a-half years. The growth rate in October-December helped take the estimate for the current fiscal to 7.6 per cent. "And if India grows at 8 per cent, India can be a USD 55 trillion economy by 2047," Subramanian added.



He pointed out that historically from 1991 onwards, India's average growth has been slightly more than 7 per cent. Subramanian emphasised that India needs to strengthen its domestic economy as about 58 per cent of the country's GDP comes from domestic consumption. "Therefore, you know, we do have the potential if we can create enough jobs, you know, that will lead to much higher consumption," he said.

India's IMF executive director stressed on need of encouraging manufacturing sector for job creation. He also pointed out that reforms are required in land, labour, capital, and logistics sector. "Reforms are required in the manufacturing sector, but at the same time, we also need reforms in our banking sector to provide credit for manufacturing sector," Subramanian noted.

# Domestic drug firms to witness 8, 10 per cent revenue growth in FY25: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Revenue growth of leading 25 domestic drug firms is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent in the next fiscal year, rating agency Icria said on Thursday. The revenue of the companies, which account for 60 per cent of the overall Indian pharmaceutical industry, witnessed an increase of 13-14 per cent in the current fiscal year. Following the high base of 2023-24, the revenue growth momentum from the US and Europe markets is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent and 7-9 per cent, respectively, Icria said. The markets are expected to witness a year-on-year expansion of 18-20 per cent and 16-18 per cent, respectively, in the current fiscal year, it added. The domestic market, on the other hand, is expected to see a stable growth of 6-8 per cent, while the emerging markets may log an 8-10 per cent rise in FY25, against 16-18 per cent in FY24, the rating agency said. The revenue growth of the



sample set companies in the US market in FY24 has been supported by increased new product launches, product shortages in select therapeutic segments, and healthy performance of complex generics (first to file), it stated. "However, as the base effect

plays out, growth is expected to taper in FY25. While low-single digit pricing pressure in the US market is likely to sustain, Indian pharmaceutical companies remain focused on enhancing their revenue contribution from the complex generics in the US market," it

stated. Commenting on key risks being faced by the industry, Icria Assistant Vice President and Sector Head Mythri Macherla said the number of warning letters and import alerts issued by the USFDA to Indian drug firms have increased in the past year. This has led to delays in product launches, translating into failure to supply penalties and entailing significant cost burden towards remedial measures like hiring consultants and consuming additional management bandwidth, thus impacting the profit margins, she added. "Further, while the ongoing Red Sea crisis has not had an impact on the Indian pharmaceutical companies as of now, any adverse impact in the form of supply chain disruptions or increase in logistics costs will be a key monitorable," Macherla stated. Besides, since price growth has been a key revenue driver, any developments favouring genericisation and inclusion of more products under the NLEM remain key risks for the industry players, she added.



## Gold climbs ₹350; silver jumps ₹200

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price climbed Rs 350 to Rs 67,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. Extending its gains for the second straight session, the price of the precious metal had settled at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also jumped Rs 200 to Rs 77,450 per kg. In the previous close, it had ended at Rs 77,250 per kg. "Gold prices advanced on Thursday before the outcome of crucial US macro data. Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 350 taking positive global cues," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,194 per ounce, up by

USD 14 from the previous close. "Gold prices were trading higher amidst positive sentiment regarding interest rates, but the rise in the dollar index could exert pressure on the yellow metal prices. "Strong resistance is observed around the USD 2,200-2,215 range," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said. Silver was also marginally higher at USD 24.55 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had finished at USD 24.50 per ounce. "Gold is seen trading steady to positive, but gains are capped by a firm dollar against major currencies, while some caution is seen ahead of the US GDP and the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) inflation data, due on Thursday and Friday," Pranav Mer, VP, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research at JM Financial Services Ltd, said.

## Market extend winning momentum for second day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices climbed in early trade on Thursday, extending their previous day's rally, on foreign fund inflows and positive trend in the US markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 342.48 points to 73,338.79 in early trade. The NSE Nifty went up by 96.25 points to 22,199.00. From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Power Grid and Infosys were the major gainers. HCL Technologies, Maruti, Tech Mahindra and Asian Paints were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong traded in the positive territory while Tokyo



and Seoul quoted lower. Wall Street ended higher on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,170.32 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. "In the final trading session of the week, month, and fiscal year 2023-24, heightened volatility is expected, driven by

the March F&O expiry. Investors are poised for bargain hunting as optimism pervades Dalal Street, with positive catalysts including significant FII buying and a global stock market rally," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. Global oil benchmark Brent

crude climbed 0.24 per cent to USD 86.30 a barrel. The BSE benchmark climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty went up by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to 22,123.65. Equity markets would remain closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'.

## Over 44 per cent respondents of survey say they paid extra for flight seats

PTI ■ MUMBAI

As much as 44 per cent respondents in a survey complained that they had to pay extra charges to get a seat at the time of purchase of a flight ticket. Many of the respondents also reported paying between Rs 200 and Rs 2,000 as seat allocation fee, which can amount to 5-40 per cent of the air fare, LocalCircles, which carried out the survey, said in a statement. It also said there has been a very marginal improvement in the last 12 months in the ability of consumers to get a free seat when booking their flight. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs and consumer regulator CCPA late last year convened a meeting of the airlines on the issue



and questioned them about the alleged unfair trade practices and misleading claims of "free" web check-in, it said. The new survey, which received over 41,000 responses from consumers across 339 districts of the country, has focused on fliers' problems when booking for travel with family members, particularly young children,

LocalCircles said. According to the survey, if the family wants to sit together, per se they end up spending more than what the actual ticket costs as most of the seats are available on extra payment of Rs 200-Rs 2,000 on many airlines. Else the family members must sit in separate rows as in some airlines only the middle seat requires no extra payment, it added. As per the survey estimates, nearly 80 per cent seats for some airlines now require payment of a seat allocation fee. About 65 per cent of fliers who booked a flight in the last 12 months, paid extra fee for reserving a seat once or more, the survey added.



## ICICI Securities gets shareholder nod for delisting, retail investors oppose

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ICICI Securities on Thursday said about 72 per cent of its shareholders have voted in favour of delisting and subsequent merger with parent firm ICICI Bank, even as the majority of retail investors opposed the scheme. In a regulatory filing, ICICI Securities said 83.8 per cent of institutional investors voted in favour of the scheme, while 67.8 per cent of non-institutional investors voted against it. Overall, 72 per cent of public shareholders voted in favour of the delisting scheme. The shareholders of the broking firm on March 27 voted on the proposal to delist the company and make it a wholly-owned subsidiary of parent entity ICICI Bank. Following the announcement, shares of ICICI Securities plunged 4.2 per cent to Rs 710 in the intra-day trade on the BSE. The stock later recovered some of the losses and settled at Rs 729, down 1.63 per cent over the previous close. "...The outcome of votes cast by public shareholders of ICICI Securities at the NCLT convened equity shareholders meeting in favour of the resolution was approximately 71.9 per cent of

the public shareholders of our company, which is in excess of the requisite majority of two-thirds of the public shareholders' votes required under applicable SEBI regulations," ICICI Securities said. As per the scheme, shareholders of ICICI Securities would receive 67 shares of ICICI Bank for every 100 equity shares held in ICICI Securities. Last year, the boards of both entities approved the delisting and merger scheme. There were reports that some investors in ICICI Securities were against the scheme over valuation concerns. On Wednesday, the stock exchanges sought clarification from the brokerage firm over reports that employees of ICICI Bank were contacting retail shareholders of ICICI Securities in connection with the delisting of its unit. ICICI Securities said a concerted campaign against the proposal, using social media and involving extensive outreach to retail shareholders, was undertaken by those opposed to the proposed scheme. "...We are of the considered view that the proposed scheme is in the best interests of shareholders of both ICICI Securities and ICICI Bank.

## Smart TV prices to go up this year, says report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prices of smart TVs are likely to increase in the first half of the ongoing calendar year as prices of panels have gone up in the international market, according to a report on Thursday. The brands are likely to pass on the increase in rates, resulting in a hike in smart TV prices, according to the latest research from Counterpoint's IoT Service. However, the report also expects "smart TV shipments to increase by 9 per cent" this year, as the demand for premium models will increase and consumers will likely upgrade to a larger screen. "The push towards online purchases is set to increase as consumers' confidence in online platforms is increasing, which will encourage them to buy premium models from these platforms. The increasing preference for premium TVs

will drive the overall market's average selling price (ASP) further," it said. In 2023, India's smart TV shipments declined 16 per cent, impacted by a hit in the first half due to macroeconomic challenges and excess inventory, according to a Counterpoint Research report on Thursday. The year also witnessed the premiumisation of the TV market, where consumers moved towards premium devices and large-screen smart TVs. Now, smart TV penetration reached its highest level of 93 per cent of the overall TV shipments during the year and the share is expected to continue rising, it added. "QLED TVs are gaining popularity as leading brands such as TCL, Hisense, Acer, Kodak, Thomson, and other long-tail brands have started offering them in 43," screen size variants and at lower prices (sub-Rs 30,000), due to which its shipments more than doubled in 2023, it said.

## Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday due to a strengthening greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices in the international markets. However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets and recent foreign fund inflows supported the domestic currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.32 and oscillated between the intra-day peak of 83.30 and the lowest level of

83.40 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.39 (provisional), registering a loss of 6 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee declined 4 paise to close at 83.33 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.34 per cent higher at 104.42. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee depreciated on Thursday on strong US dollar and dollar demand from oil marketing companies (OMCs). Weak Asian



currencies and a rise in crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee. However, the surge in domestic markets and FII inflows cushioned the downside. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak Asian currencies. Demand for dollars from importers and OMCs towards the end of the financial year may put downside pressure also weigh on the rupee. "However, strong domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from final GDP, weekly unemployment claims, pending home sales and revised

consumer sentiment data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.70," Choudhary said. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.52 per cent to USD 86.54 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex surged 655.04 points, or 0.90 per cent, to settle at 73,651.35 points. The Nifty rose 203.25 points, or 0.92 per cent, to close at 22,326.90 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 2,170.32 crore, according to exchange data.

## Less than 5 per cent companies in India prepared to tackle cybersecurity risks: Cisco

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Less than 5 per cent of companies in India are ready to deal with cybersecurity risks even though an overwhelming number of them said their businesses are likely to be impacted by such threats in the next 12-24 months, according to a study. The 2024 Cisco Cybersecurity Readiness Index, which was released on Thursday, found that only 4 per cent of companies in India are ready

to tackle today's threats, with 59 per cent of organisations falling into the "beginner or formative stages of readiness". Globally, 3 per cent of companies are at a "mature stage", meaning they are prepared to handle cybersecurity risks, it said. Cisco said while companies are building defences against these attacks, they are slowed down by their own overly complex security postures that are dominated by multiple-point solutions. The study is based on a survey



of 8,136 private sector business leaders — over 1,000 of them from India — who have cybersecurity responsibilities in their organisations. The study revealed that 82 per cent of the participants surveyed expect a

cybersecurity incident to disrupt their business in the next 12-24 months. "The cost of being unprepared can be substantial, as 74 per cent of respondents said they experienced a cybersecurity incident in the last 12 months,

and 55 per cent of those affected said it cost them at least USD 300,000," it said. It further said the traditional approach of adopting multiple cybersecurity point solutions has not delivered effective results, as 88 per cent of respondents admitted that having multiple point solutions slowed down their team's ability to detect, respond, and recover from incidents. While companies are aware of cybersecurity risks, talent gap further intensifies the issue, it said.

"Progress is being further hampered by critical talent shortages, with 91 per cent of companies highlighting it as an issue. In fact, 59 per cent of companies said they had more than 10 roles related to cyberorganisation unfilled in their organisation at the time of the survey," the study noted. However, businesses are increasing their investments to tackle the issue with 71 per cent planning to significantly upgrade their IT infrastructure in the next 12-24 months, the study added.



# Sindhu advances to Madrid Masters quarters

PTI ■ MADRID

Star Indian shuttler P V Sindhu continued her impressive run at the Madrid Spain Masters, advancing to the quarterfinals with a comfortable straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun here on Thursday.

It was a smooth performance from Sindhu as she was hardly tested by the Taiwanese qualifier, ranked world no. 63, resulting in a 21-14 21-12 win in 36 minutes.

The former world champion, who finished runner-up in the last edition, will take on either sixth seed Supanida Katethong of Thailand or Japan's Natsuki Nidaira.

In the opening game, Sindhu was 3-0 up initially but then entered a phase where she often found the net or went long, while her rival



produced some precise returns to grab a 7-6 lead before taking a one-point advantage with a straight

down-the-line smash. The Indian, however, produced a better show after resumption, taking a 18-12

cushion with Yu-Hsun making errors. She soon grabbed eight game points, wasted two of them before

sealing the opening game with her trademark smash. After the change of sides, Yu-Hsun struggled to control the

shuttle as her lifts repeatedly went long. The Taiwanese shuttler tried to use her drops and placements but she didn't have power in her smashes. The result was Sindhu quietly waited for her opponent to commit errors. Soon she had a five-point advantage at the break. Every time Yu-Hsun tried to extend the rallies, she ended up with unforced errors.

Soon a smash handed another eight match points to Sindhu and she wrapped it up when her opponent sprayed into net again.

With top seed Carolina Marin of Spain pulling out of the tournament after her title-winning run at the All England Championships and Swiss Open in the last two weeks, Sindhu is now the favourite to claim the crown and end a long wait.

Sindhu won her last BWF tour title at the 2022 Singapore Open Super 500.

# Man City hosts Arsenal in last clash of EPL

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Win against Arsenal on Sunday and Manchester City's path to a record fourth straight English Premier League title becomes clearer. Lose, and Arsenal takes a giant step towards becoming league champion for the first time in 20 years.

Draw, and the big winner this weekend could be Liverpool. With 10 rounds to go, the clash at Etihad Stadium is the last time any of the three title rivals will go head to head.

Arsenal leads the league. Liverpool is second on goal difference. City is a point behind both of them. Just five goals separate the top two.

An element of risk and reward hangs over City and Arsenal. History is clearly on City's side, having won its last eight home games against the Gunners. City's last home loss in this fixture was in 2015. But Arsenal has been better this season after beating City in a penalty shootout to win the Community Shield in August, followed by a 1-0 victory at Emirates Stadium in October.

City manager Pep Guardiola's preparations haven't been helped by injuries to key defenders Kyle Walker and John Stones during the international break.



games to the end of the league. Arsenal and Liverpool both have to travel to Manchester United and face respective derbies against Tottenham and Everton.

All three teams still have to face Aston Villa and Spurs, who are competing for fourth spot and Champions League qualification. Liverpool plays Brighton on Sunday with the chance to go to the top of the standings before City and Arsenal kick off.

## FORM GUIDE

There is little to choose between the challengers. City is on an ominous 22-game unbeaten run in all competitions, dating to the start of December.

Liverpool has lost two of its last 23 games and already has its first trophy of the season after winning the English League Cup in February.

One of those defeats was Manchester United's extra time winner in the FA Cup final this month. The other was 3-1 to Arsenal in the league in February. Arsenal, meanwhile, has risen to the top of the league on the back of an eight-game winning streak.

## DISTRACTIONS

All three teams are battling on multiple fronts.

City is defending its Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup treble of last season. Liverpool is no longer competing for a quadruple, but after winning the League Cup it is also still in contention for the Europa League.

Arsenal is in the Champions League quarters, where it faces Bayern Munich.

City was given the toughest draw of all against Real Madrid.

## MASTER AND APPRENTICE

Mikel Arteta was once Guardiola's trusted lieutenant at City. Arteta was spoken of as a future City manager but is working on creating his own legacy at Arsenal after transforming the club's fortunes since taking charge in 2019. He has been backed with money and time, and that faith has paid off with Arsenal leading the league and advancing to the Champions League quarterfinals. After falling away badly at the end of last season to allow City to take the English title, it remains to be seen if Arteta and his players have learned from that experience.

Those two wins against City this season suggest Arsenal is more prepared to go head to head against the champion.

## RUN-IN

Arsenal stands as the last major test for City. It has arguably the smoothest run of



# Marseille hit by injuries

AP ■ MARSEILLE (FRANCE)

For Jonathan Clauss, the France friendly against Chile this week was meant to be pure joy in front of his home crowd.

It ended up as a sour 11-minute experience concluded by an injury that ruled out the defender from French soccer's biggest game this weekend.

Clauss, who plays for Marseille, left the pitch with a torn left hamstring and was forced to watch his teammates' 3-2 win from the sidelines.

The former Lens player is expected to be out of action for up to four weeks at a crucial moment of the season for Marseille, which has big matches lined up against Lille then Benfica in the Europa League following the clash with bitter rival Paris Saint-Germain on Sunday.

Marseille was already hit by an injury crisis ahead of hosting PSG at a sold-out Stade Velodrome in a match known as "Le Classique."

The confrontation became popular during the 1990s when the arrival of prominent players such as Rudi Voller and George Weah ignited the rivalry. Marseille, the only French team to win the Champions League back in 1993, has fallen well behind since PSG was taken over by

Qatari investors in 2011, but the game continues to stir up passion.

PSG has won 11 of the last 14 matches against Marseille. Marseille has failed to score in the last four. Clauss is just the latest name to join Marseille's injury list. The defense has been severely hit, and it's a big blow before PSG's attacking armada led by Kylian Mbappe sets foot in town.

Alongside Clauss, Bamo Meité and Amir Murillo have already been ruled out, while Samuel Gigot and Leonardo Balerdi are doubtful. Building a solid backline should give a real headache to interim coach Jean-Louis Gasset, who has managed to put the club back on track since he replaced Gennaro Gattuso last month. With eight league matches left, seventh-placed Marseille is lagging 20 points behind PSG but can still qualify for next season's Champions League. At the top, PSG has a 12-point lead over Brest and looks all but guaranteed a record-extending 12th league title.

A N T I - R A C I S T C A M P A I G N

"Let's end racism!" Following incidents earlier this season, that's the message the league will be hammering at matches in the top two divisions this weekend.

# HI congratulates Sreejesh

## On being appointed co chair of FIH Athletes Committee

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey on Thursday congratulated PR Sreejesh on being appointed as co-chair of the FIH Athletes Committee, stating that the veteran goalkeeper can play a big role in directly impacting the lives of fellow players.

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) on Wednesday named its new Athletes Committee, to be led by co-chairs Chilean women's hockey team defender Camila Caram and Sreejesh.

While Caram has been appointed as co-chair and Athletes Committee Representative in the Executive Board, Sreejesh is the co-chair and will lead the planning and meetings along with Caram.

"It is heartening to see PR Sreejesh assume a role with the FIH that would directly impact the lives of hockey players. A veteran like him



will have the experience and perspective to advise on the betterment of athletes who have picked up hockey sticks around the world," Tirkey said in a HI release.

"We are looking forward to witnessing the positive impact Sreejesh will have on

the youth in this role." HI secretary general Bhola Nath Singh added: "We would like to congratulate PR Sreejesh on being appointed the co-chair in the new FIH Athletes Committee. "Sreejesh is an empathetic

# Sinner advances to third Miami semifinal

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA)

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner won his 20th match of 2024 to reach the Miami Open semifinals for the third time in the past four years with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Tomas Machac on Wednesday.

Sinner, seeded second, will take on No. 3 seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of last year's Miami Open final. Medvedev won that, but has lost four straight matchups since.

Medvedev advanced to the latest meeting with a 6-2, 7-6 (7) win over No. 22 seed Nicolas Jarry in a late match. Sinner reached his fourth final four of the season and moved to 20-1 overall. He reached the finals of this event in 2021 and 2023, losing both times.

"It was a really tough match, but I was happy about the performance," Sinner said. Sinner, 22, said Machac served well early on and his aggressiveness kept things close for a while. But Sinner continued his fabulous run,



breaking his opponent's serve four times, to move on to the next round.

"I always say when it all feels good on the court, it's easy to play tennis," he said. "But it has to start off in a practice session when you don't feel well, but you still have to practice and this can make the difference. "At the moment, I feel really good on the court," he continued.

On the women's side, 14th-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova followed up her win over No. 1 seed Iga Swiatek with another top-10

victory, taking down No. 5 seed Jessica Pegula 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Alexandrova earned her first trip to a Miami Open semifinal.

"I think it's like the biggest achievement for me today on this court, and semifinal is a big bonus," Alexandrova said. Alexandrova will face Danielle Collins, who defeated No. 23 seed Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-2. Collins will play in the Miami semifinal round on Thursday for the first time since she made it as a qualifier six years ago.

# Juan says he is bitter about Italian league not punishing Acerbi

AP ■ MILAN

Napoli defender Juan Jesus says he has been left feeling "very bitter" and "crestfallen" by the Italian league's decision not to punish Inter Milan player Francesco Acerbi for an allegedly racist remark toward him.

The Italian league's sporting judge announced on Tuesday that there wasn't enough proof that Acerbi's insult to Juan Jesus was racist to impose what would have been a lengthy ban on the Italy defender.

The alleged incident happened during a match between Inter and Napoli on March 17 and the match was halted for about 90 seconds when Juan Jesus, who is Black, told the referee that Acerbi directed a racial slur at him.

"I have read several times and with great disappointment the decision of the sports judge, who felt there was no evidence that I was the victim of a racist insult during the match," Juan Jesus said in a statement on Wednesday. "While respecting the decision, it is one I find difficult to comprehend and it leaves me feeling very bitter. "Quite honestly I am



crestfallen by such a serious incident in which my only mistake was that I dealt with it as a gentleman, deciding not to interrupt an important game, with all the inconvenience that would have caused the spectators watching the match. I did so believing that such an attitude would have been respected, and perhaps taken as an example."

Juan Jesus was visibly upset when he approached the referee during the second half at San Siro and was also pointing at his shirt sleeve which had a Keep Racism Out badge - as part of the league's anti-racism

campaign.

The 32-year-old Brazilian said after the match that Acerbi apologized and seemed to wish to put the matter behind him, adding, "What happens on the field, stays on the field ... he is a good guy."

The Italian soccer federation prosecutor questioned the players and witnesses last week and a report was sent to the Italian league sporting judge, who also studied images from the match, as well as audio from the referee and VAR before making the decision not to sanction Acerbi.

"Following this decision, I imagine that anyone else finding themselves in a similar situation to mine will act in a very different manner, in order to protect themselves and to curb the disgrace of racism, which, sadly, we are struggling to rid ourselves of," Juan Jesus' statement continued.

"I do not feel in any way protected by a decision which both admits that there was certainly evidence of the insult' and maintains there is no certainty that it was of a discriminatory nature, which only I perceived in good faith."

# Chelsea, Lyon advance to Women Champions League semifinals

AP ■ LONDON,

Emma Hayes' hopes of going out on the ultimate high at Chelsea moved a step closer on Wednesday as the London club reached the Women's Champions League semifinals after a 1-1 draw with Ajax. Chelsea advanced 4-1 on aggregate after winning the first leg in Amsterdam 3-0.

Hayes takes over the U.S. Women's national team at the end of the season, when she will lead its bid to win Olympic gold in Paris.

Before that, she is aiming to win a quadruple of trophies with Chelsea - including the Champions League for the first time.

The Women's Super League champion had effectively secured its place in the next round after a dominant performance in the first leg of the quarterfinals at Ajax. And it extended its overall advantage to 4-0 on aggregate after Mayra Ramirez's goal in the 33rd minute at Stamford Bridge. Chasity Grant scored in the

65th to give Ajax some consolation and a 1-1 draw on the night. While Chelsea is searching for its first Women's Champions League trophy, Lyon is hunting a record-extending ninth.

The French champion advanced to the semifinals for a record 13th time after a 4-1 win over Benfica. Delphine Cascarino and Kadidiatou Diani scored two goals each as record eight-time champion Lyon won 6-2 on aggregate at Groupama Stadium after a 2-1 first leg win in Portugal.

Cascarino's goal in the first leg had set up Lyon's comeback win after trailing 1-0 at halftime of that match. And she tightened the French champions' control of the tie when she opened the scoring in the 43rd of the second leg with a long-range chip to put Lyon ahead on the night.

Marie-Yasmine Alidou evened the score two minutes later, but Cascarino restored the home team's lead with a powerful effort from distance in the 51st.

# Ukraine soccer victory provides welcome distraction from tragedy of war

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

Ukrainians have expressed pride and gratitude toward their men's national soccer team for qualifying for the European Championship, a rare bit of good news and a welcome distraction from the war with Russia.

Though celebrations after Ukraine's 2-1 win over Iceland were muted as Russian missiles kept raining down on the country, the team's success gives Ukrainians something to cheer for this summer when the tournament kicks off in Germany.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday night's victory in the decisive playoff stirred emotions throughout the country and proved that "whenever Ukrainians face difficulties but do not give up and continue to fight, Ukrainians certainly win."

Mykhailo Mudryk scored the winning goal as Ukraine came back from a goal down to beat Iceland in Poland. The



team had to play its qualifying matches outside Ukraine because of the war. Youth players at the Sporting Kyiv football academy in the Ukrainian capital on Wednesday said they were inspired.

"(It) shows that war does not stop us from pursuing sports, and we can qualify for the European Championship and compete in it," said 12-year-old Hlib Kochetov.

Artem Mykhailenko, 15, said

that seeing Ukraine compete at Euro 2024 will be a moment of pride for the entire nation.

"We need to show what we are truly worth, who we are, and that we are Ukraine, that Ukraine is a great, united, and strong country in many respects," he said.

Trying to live life as normally as possible has become a way for Ukrainians to show defiance amid Russian missile strikes and drone attacks.

Keeping youth active in sports and other activities is also a way to keep their minds off a war that has deeply traumatized families across the country, said Anatolii Kartashov, a coach at Sporting Kyiv. "They have dreams, they set goals for themselves. Many of them want to become professional footballers, so this is a very positive event," the 36-year-old Kartashov said.

Ukraine will face Belgium, Slovakia and Romania in the group stage of the Euro 2024 tournament.



# CAPTAIN PANDYA: IN SEARCH OF A SOUNDING BOARD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's just two games into the tournament but Hardik Pandya already seems to have loads to worry about in his second stint with Mumbai Indians, the leadership part not quite falling in place thus far. The exuberant all-rounder, arguably one of the biggest match-winners in the current national set-up, has been, to put it mildly, struggling in the IPL despite being back in the team that shaped him, the one he considers his home. It's been anything but homely ever since Pandya was named captain, replacing the much-loved Rohit Sharma. The results have only made matters worse. Two matches, two losses, some baffling tactics, his own form not being the brightest spot and Pandya has his back against the wall within the first week of the tournament.

There is no imminent threat to the 30-year-old's captaincy as the MI owners, after bringing him on board in IPL's biggest one way transfer, would not want to take any decision in haste. After all, MI have always been slow starters, who take a while to find their rhythm, and it would be a bit presumptive to dismiss Pandya this early in the tournament given that he is, after all, leading a five-time champion side. But a team that is so desperate for success after three barren seasons perhaps cannot also look away from the fact that Pandya is making mistakes and he doesn't seem to have a sounding board for course correction. He had a solid one during his time as Gujarat Titans skipper when Ashish Nehra would always be in his ears. "I didn't try to convince Hardik to stay back," Nehra had said



with a dead pan expression in Ahmedabad in the pre-season press conference when Shubman Gill formally took charge as captain. Nehra is widely seen as the back-room strategist, the one who actually calls the shot

through the captain. He is often seen pacing along the boundary line like an overzealous football manager, trying to grab the attention of his captain and players, and shouting down instructions when he gets it.

"It was an open secret in Gujarat Titans camp that Ashu (that's how old teammates address Nehra) was the strategist and Hardik was the executor," a former India teammate, who has played with Nehra, tried to dissect one of

the most interesting characters in Indian cricket. "Hardik was good at implementing Ashu's vision. Ashu is more of a football manager in the garb of a cricket coach. He is constantly hovering around the boundary line with some advice. He believes, if a skipper is willing to commit, he can prepare the recipe for success. "Now, the same Ashu worked for RCB with Virat Kohli but it didn't work. Shubman Gill is also a new skipper, who like Hardik, needs a mentor at the start of his leadership journey and who better than Ashu," the notable player of yesteryears said. So, leading Gujarat to the title was a relatively less complicated task for Pandya but MI is a different beast where there are multiple points of leadership. For Pandya, return to Mumbai has been like coming from a nuclear family to a joint set-up,

where one needs to adjust with queries, demands and suggestions of a number of people. While a big think-tank helps to close ranks off the field when the campaign is going haywire but on field, no one quite knows who to make eye contact with in the dug-out. It would have helped when Pandya made some rather baffling calls like the one to let Tim David, who finds it difficult to hit when pace is taken off deliveries, to go ahead of him in the match against GT. And then none can decipher just why he delayed Jasprit Bumrah's introduction for three overs when SRH batters went on a rampage on Wednesday night. The argument can be that Pandya wanted to save Bumrah for Heinrich Klaasen but but the South African was already set by the time Bumrah was brought into the attack.

To be fair to Pandya, not having an enforcer like Suryakumar Yadav, who is injured, at number three and missing two international bowlers in Dilshan Madushanka and Jason Behrendorff have affected the team's balance. But what has baffled everyone is Pandya's own batting approach. In the years 2015, 17, 19 and 20, the four editions when he won the IPL with MI, Pandya's strike rates were 180.64, 156.25, 191.42 and 178.98 respectively. He would come at the back-end and traumatised bowlers with his aggressive strokes. But moment he became Gujarat Titans skipper, his strike-rate dropped to 131.27 and 136.76 in two seasons. During the first season (2022), when his team won, David Miller and Rahul Tewatia were finishing games and last season, Gill alone did the heavy lifting with 890 runs in 2023.



## Foreign players were frustrated by KKR coach style of functioning: Wiese

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several foreign cricketers in Kolkata Knight Riders were frustrated by head coach Chandrakant Pandit's "militant" style of functioning during the previous edition of the IPL, former South Africa and Namibia all-rounder David Wiese, who played for the franchise last year, has claimed. The 38-year-old all-rounder, who played three IPL games for KKR in 2023, said foreign cricketers weren't happy at being tutored on how to behave or what to wear by the coach. "He (Pandit) is known in India as a very militant type of coach. He is very strict, very disciplinarian that type of stuff. Sometimes in franchise cricket, when you have overseas guys, who've played all over the world, they don't need anyone coming and telling them how they need to behave, what they need to wear and what they need to do the whole time. So, that was tough," said Wiese on the podcast 'Hitman for Hire: A year in the life of a franchise cricketer' recently. Pandit took charge as KKR's head coach after New Zealander Brendon McCullum quit the job in 2022. The much-admired coach, who played five Tests for India, coached Vidarbha to successive Ranji Trophy titles in 2018 and 2019. He later guided Madhya Pradesh to its maiden Ranji title in 2022. Wiese, who was part of the Namibia side that played the 2022 T20 World Cup, said he saw players unhappy with

Pandit's style of coaching. "...He liked to do things a certain way and that didn't sit well with certain players. It caused a little bit of tension in the changing room. "Guys were frustrated, there was a lot that changed over the last couple of years (when McCullum was around) and the new coach brought in some new things that he thought would bring success to us," Wiese, who first played the IPL in 2015, said. Wiese added he wasn't too bothered about the environment around him. "I'm like 'listen it's your circus, you run the show. End of the day, I am here just to play. If you tell me to do this, I'll do it. I'm not the guy who's going to bump heads or anything. But there are certain players who are a bit more stubborn than me," he said. Two-time champions KKR had a disappointing season last year finishing seventh and Wiese said he felt frustrated because he didn't get more opportunities to showcase his talent. "...That frustration was more because of the fact that I played those games. I didn't really get the opportunity to do much. "I did hit a couple of sixes but didn't really get the opportunity to showcase my skills there, and never got picked again in the team that was struggling with players," he added. "I think if I hadn't played a single game it would've been fine but the fact that I played three games, had a taste, did relatively well and then didn't get another chance in a team that is struggling, that was the more frustrating part."

# Parag's magnificent 84 sets up RR's 12-run win over DC

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Young Riyan Parag showed why he is considered a precocious talent as he struck a stunning 84 not out off 45 balls to set up a 12-run win for Rajasthan Royals against Delhi Capitals in their IPL match here on Thursday. Sent in to bat, RR were reduced to 36 for 3 in the eighth over but the 22-year-old Parag single-handedly took the home side to 185 for 5 with a magnificent unbeaten knock studded with seven fours and six sixes. Parag, who was promoted to number 4 by the team management this season and made 43 in the previous match, took 25 runs off veteran South African pacer Anrich Nortje with scores of 4, 4, 6, 4, 6, 1 in the final over to hit his highest T20 score. Chasing 186 for a win, DC could only manage 173 for 5 in 20 overs though South African youngster Tristan Stubbs (44 not out off 23 balls) kept them in the hunt till the final over from which they needed 17 runs. Avesh Khan conceded just four runs to help RR win their second consecutive match. South African pacer Nandre Burger and Yuzvendra Chahal took two wickets apiece to also contribute in the RR win. "Definitely disappointed. The best thing to do from here is to learn from it. The bowlers did

well through the 15-16 overs. But the batters did well at the death, hopefully we do better in the next game," DC skipper Rishabh Pant said. DC were reduced to 34 for 2 in the fourth over with Burger taking two wickets in three balls in a fine display of fast bowling. Burger, who was brought in as Impact Sub for Shimron Hetmyer, dismissed opener Mitchell Marsh (23 off 12 balls) and Ricky Bhui (0) in the fourth over. DC captain Rishabh Pant came out to bat at the fall of Bhui's wicket and along with senior batter David Warner built the innings without taking too much risk. Delhi were 89 for 2 at the halfway stage. Warner was the more aggressive one as he got the boundaries to keep DC in the hunt. The senior Australian batter fell one run short of his fifty courtesy a brilliant diving catch by Sandeep Sharma off the bowling of Avesh in the 12th over. Warner and Pant were involved in a crucial 67-run partnership for the third wicket. Playing in his 100th IPL match and 14 months after a horrible car crash, Pant tried to build the innings with occasional boundaries. But he got out for a 26-ball 28 as Chahal induced a faint lower edge for Sanju Samson to do the rest behind the stumps in the 14th over. The asking rate shot up to more than 13 runs an over and DC



needed 66 from the last five overs. Stubbs kept DC in the game

with two consecutive sixes off Ravichandran Ashwin in the 17th over, but in the end the

Delhi side were short by 12 runs. They needed 34 runs from the final two overs which they could not get. It was DC's second consecutive loss. Earlier, Parag shared 54 and 52 runs respectively with Ravichandran Ashwin (29) and Dhruv Jurel (20) after RR made a shaky start. Royals captain Samson struck three consecutive boundaries in the fourth over bowled by pacer Mukesh Kumar before nicking a Khaleel Ahmed delivery two overs later to Pant to get out for 15. RR were 30 for 2 by then as Mukesh had given DC their first breakthrough with the wicket of Yashasvi Jaiswal (5). The Royals were in more trouble after wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav literally forced his captain Pant to take a review, which later proved to be successful, to dismiss Englishman Jos Buttler for an LBW decision. Ashwin came out to bat at number five and he lofted a Kuldeep delivery for a six to help RR reach 58 for 3 at halfway stage. He gave Nortje even a harsher treatment with two sixes in the next over that yielded 15 runs. Ashwin, however, holed out to Tristan Stubbs near the boundary ropes for a 19-ball 29. Parag then made his presence felt, striking two boundaries and a six off Ahmed to take RR past 100 in the 15th over.

## Surya might take a few more days to get match fit: BCCI source

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World's number one T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav will skip a few more IPL matches as he continues to recover from a sports hernia surgery with the National Cricket Academy (NCA) keeping a watch on his progress. Yadav, who plays for Mumbai Indians, has been missing in action in the league and his team has lost both its matches so far. "Surya is making very good progress and very soon he will be back playing for MI. However, he might have to sit out for a few more games, having missed the first two," a BCCI source said. While MI is missing Yadav, the BCCI doesn't want to take any chances with the big-hitter's fitness as he is expected to play a huge role in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the USA and the West Indies in June. "For BCCI, the main concern is if he is on course for World T20 which he is. Obviously he will play for MI but after a sports hernia surgery, he can't be rushed," the source said. The 33-year-old often draws comparisons with retired South African superstar A B de Villiers for his range of shots. He has a superb strike rate of 171.55 in the format. Yadav has appeared in 60 T20 Internationals for India and has 2141 runs, including four hundreds.

# Team management message to go out and express yourself worked wonders: Abhishek

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Being given the freedom to "go out and express" was the key factor in Sunrisers Hyderabad's record-shattering batting performance against Mumbai Indians, said the home side's batter Abhishek Sharma. Records tumbled as SRH batters went on the rampage against Mumbai Indians to post the highest IPL total of 277 for 3 and then winning the match by 31 runs on

Wednesday night. It was scintillating exhibition of power-hitting from SRH opener Travis Head (62 off 24) and number three Sharma (63 off 23) with the latter registering his team's record for the fastest fifty in IPL. Heinrich Klaasen (80 not out off 34 balls) provided the fireworks towards the end to help SRH break an 11-year-old record. The previous highest total in IPL was 263 for 5 scored by Royal Challengers Bangalore in



2013. "To be honest I didn't realise that it was the fastest fifty for SRH and for this year. I just wanted to go and express myself and after getting out I realised that it was the quickest. I enjoyed it," said 'Man of the Match' Sharma. "I think the message was pretty much simple for all the batters in the meeting we had before this match. 'Everyone just go and express yourself'. That's a very positive message if you get it from your captain

and coach. That's really supportive for all the batters." Sharma and Head stitched 68 runs off just 22 balls for the second wicket for SRH. "I was batting with Travis and he is one of my favourite batters. I really enjoyed batting with him," Sharma said. Sharma said despite putting a mammoth total on the board, it wasn't a cakewalk for SRH as MI came pretty close. Tilak Varma (64 off 34 balls) took the game deep with a

high-quality knock, comprising half-a-dozen sixes and, towards the end, Tim David (42 not out off 22) tried his best but it was not enough. "When Tilak Varma, Hardik bhai and even Tim David were batting, we were still a bit, I won't say worried but concerned. The way they were playing it was very good but we knew our bowlers were very much prepared for this kind of situation and they executed really well," Sharma said.

# RCB, KKR eye course correction to add momentum to campaign

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Victory in their respective previous games might have eased the initial nerves but imperfections remain, hence Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders will eye a quick course correction to add steam to their campaign in an IPL 2024 match here on Friday. The Royal Challengers defeated Punjab Kings by four wickets, while the Knight Riders elbowing out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs to

garner some early points. But entering the points table has not really eased some of the worries -- particularly pertaining to the top and middle-order batting. The Bengaluru dugout might be a happy space after star batter Virat Kohli made a classy fifty on an unusually gripping Chinnaswamy pitch while chasing 177 against Punjab the other night, but that's only one part of the story. Skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar are yet to hit



the overdrive, and for the win against PBKS they had to rely on the last-minute cameos of Dinesh Karthik and 'Impact Player' Mahipal Lomror. The Kolkatans have a much more capable bowling unit, at least on paper, and such a collectively underwhelming effort by frontline batters might push RCB into deep troubles against them. Once they iron out that rough edges, RCB can look at their bowling unit that still needs to fill a couple of unticked boxes despite good outings by pacers

Mohammed Siraj and Yash Dayal against Punjab. Pacer Alzarri Joseph continues to be profligate and his figures -- 0/38, 1/43 -- might prompt the RCB think-tank to bring in England left-arm quick Reece Topley, who has impressive white-ball skills, in place of the West Indian for this match. The Knight Riders offer a strikingly similar plot. Their top and middle-order consisting of captain Shreyas Iyer, Venkatesh Iyer, Sunil Narine and Nitish Rana malfunctioned against SRH at

the Eden Gardens. It required a combined effort from impact sub Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell -- the 6, 7, 8 -- for them to post a competitive total. Shreyas, who is central to their batting plans, was dismissed for a two-ball duck, but the return to Chinnaswamy might give him a sense of relief as he had fruitful outings here in white-ball cricket in his last two innings. The elegant right-hander made an unbeaten 128 against the Netherlands in last year's World Cup before

making a 53 against Australia in the fifth T20i in December. In bowling, Narine redeemed himself with a frugal spell (1/19) after a modest effort with the bat, but pacer Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravarty failed to impress, leaking over 50 runs in their four overs. The KKR think-tank might not be unduly worried as their campaign is still at a nascent stage, but they would like to see the first-choice pacer and spinner finding their range at the earliest.