



# Former IAS officers named Election Commissioners

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The decks are cleared for the announcement of Lok Sabha elections schedule after former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were on Thursday appointed as Election Commissioners completing the quorum of the election watchdog which was necessitated due to the sudden resignation of Arun Goel as the lone EC last week. The Nirvachan Sadan was left with only Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar while one was already vacant and with the two appointments, now the body is complete to take the call to announce the poll schedule. Sources said general elections can be announced on Friday following which the model code of conduct will come into effect. The Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice issued a notification announcing the appointments. "In exercise of powers conferred by section 4 of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 (Act No. 49 of 2023), the President is pleased to appoint Gyanesh Kumar, IAS (Retd) and Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, IAS(Retd) as Election



Former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu

Commissioners in the Election Commission of India, with effect from the date they assume charge of their office," the Ministry of Law and Justice said in the notification. Kumar and Sandhu are 1988-batch officers of the Indian Administrative Service and belonged to the Kerala and Uttarakhand cadres, respectively. A high-level panel headed by

Prime Minister Narendra Modi picked retired IAS officers Kumar and Sandhu as new Election Commissioners. Interestingly before the official notification, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury disclosed the names of both the new appointees. Sandhu served as the Chief

Secretary of Uttarakhand while Kumar a 1988-batch Kerala cadre IAS officer, retired as Union Secretary for Cooperation, a Ministry headed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He also served in the Union Home Ministry, where he handled the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir as well as the implementation of the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict. In 2014, as the Resident Commissioner of Kerala in

Delhi, he was deputed by the State Government to evacuate 46 nurses stuck in Erbil in war-torn Iraq. The operation was successful with the evacuation of 183 Indians, 70 from Kerala, from Iraq. Kumar, an IIT-Kanpur graduate, is a postgraduate in economics from the Harvard University. Goel had abruptly resigned from his position last week and the reasons for his resignation remain unknown. Another Election Commissioners, Anup Pandey, retired on February 15. Addressing reporters at his residence soon after the meeting ended, Chowdhury said, "I was just called for formality. The names had already been decided." The Congress leader further said six names came up before the panel for the selection of the two ECs and the names of Sandhu and Kumar were finalised by a majority of members of the high-powered panel. He, however, said the Chief Justice of India should have been part of the selection panel and there was no clarity on how six names were shortlisted from 212 candidates that are said to have come before the search committee headed by the Law Minister.



Ram Nath Kovind, chairman of the High-Level Committee (HLC) on 'One Nation, One Election', presents the report to President Droupadi Murmu, in New Delhi, on Thursday. Union Ministers Amit Shah and Arjun Ram Meghwal, DPAP leader Ghulam Nabi Azad are also seen PTI

## Kovind panel bats for simultaneous polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former President Ram Nath Kovind led high-level 'One Nation, One Election' poll panel on Thursday recommended simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step followed by synchronised local body polls within 100 days. The 18,000-page report submitted to President Droupadi Murmu by Kovind and committee members said simultaneous polls will spur development and social cohesion, deepen "foundations of democratic rubric" and help realise the aspirations of "India that is Bharat". Kovind was accompanied by other panel members, including Home Minister Amit Shah, former

Finance Commission chairman NK Singh, former Lok Sabha secretary general Subhash Kashyap, former leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, when he went to submit the report to the president at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Shah termed the recommendation of the committee as "a historic day" for the country's democratic system. The report is an outcome of extensive consultations with stakeholders, experts and research work of 191 days, since its constitution on September 2, 2023, a statement said. The committee recommended that fresh elections could be held to constitute a new Lok Sabha in the event of a hung House or a no-confidence motion, or any such event.



## Maharashtra to build guest house in Srinagar

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first-ever initiative taken after the President's 2019 order abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution that gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, the Maharashtra Government has approved a proposal to construct a State guest house on a 2.5 acre plot of land in Ichgam taluka of Badgam district near Srinagar airport in the Union Territory. At its weekly meeting presided over by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, the State Cabinet approved a proposal to purchase 20 kanals (2.5 acres) worth ₹8.16 crore identified by the Union Territory administration's Revenue department for the construction of a State guest in Ichgam taluka near Srinagar Airport. The Union Territory administration on Thursday accorded sanction for the allotment of the identified 2.5 acres to the Maharashtra Government after the State Government on Wednesday go-ahead to a proposal to purchase land for the purpose from the Union Territory administration. Confirming the allocation for the allotment of land, the Jammu and Kashmir Revenue



department said on Thursday, "Sanction is hereby accorded to the transfer of Shamlat Deh (Mehfooz Kahcharie) land measuring 20 kanals under Survey No 576 min situated at estate Ichgam, Budgam, in favour of Maharashtra state in terms of Rule 310 of General Financial Rules, 2017, on payment of transfer value of ₹8.16 crore, which is ₹40.80 lakh per kanal for construction of Maharashtra Bhavan." It may be recalled that in June last year, Shinde had urged the administration of Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir to provide a plot of land for the construction of a 'Maharashtra Bhavan' to boost ties between the people

of his State and UT. Shinde, while on a tour of Kashmir during the first week of June 2023, had called on Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and made a formal proposal. In his letter, Shinde had told the Lt Governor that in view of the growing tourism and cultural exchanges, plus enhancing economic and social ties, such an institution will be beneficial to people on both sides. He had also said the Maharashtra Bhavan in Srinagar will not only provide accommodation facilities to tourists from this state, but provide a glimpse of the state, its rich arts, culture and cuisine for the people of Jammu & Kashmir.

## Electoral bonds data uploaded

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the State Bank of India (SBI) filed compliance affidavit in the Supreme Court, saying it has furnished details of electoral bonds to Election Commission of India (EC), the Election Commission on Thursday disclosed the details on their website in two parts as 'Disclosure of Electoral Bonds submitted by SBI'. The poll body has uploaded electoral bonds data as shared by the SBI, on its website "as is where is basis". According to the data uploaded by the poll panel, the buyers of electoral bonds include Grasim Industries, Megha Engineering, Piramal Enterprises Torrent Power,

Bharti Airtel, DLF Commercial Developers, Vedanta Ltd, Apollo Tyres, Lakshmi Mittal, Edelweiss, PVR, Keventer, Sula Wine, Welspun, Sun Pharma are among donors to parties using electoral bonds. The other donors include A B C India Limited, Acropolis Maintenance Services Private Limited, Arihant Enterprises, Essel Mining and Inds Ltd, Highstreet Cruises and Entertainment Pvt Ltd, Innocent Merchant Pvt Ltd, Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd, Merlin Recreation Pvt Ltd, Muthoot Finance, PHL Finvest, Piramal Capital and Housing Finance, Renuka Investment and Finance, Skyworld Developers LLP, Bellway International Co, Gujarat



Fluoro Chemical Ltd, Cavalier Transporters, Keventer Food Park Infra, Keystone Realtors and others. There was no record of Adani Group or Reliance Industries — the two major business conglomerates. According to the EC's data, the

political parties that redeemed electoral bonds include the BJP, Congress, AIADMK, BRS, Shiv Sena, TDP, YSR Congress, DMK, JDS, NCP, Trinamool Congress, JDU, RJD, AAP JDU, RJD, AAP, SP, J & K National Conference, BJD, Goa Forward Party,

Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party and the Samajwadi Party. The data showed Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, JMM, Sikkim Democratic Front, Jana Sena Party were also among recipients of electoral bonds. The data pertains to purchases of bonds of three denominations — ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore — dating back to April 12, 2019 and reveals purchases by companies as well as individuals. Details about electoral bonds purchased from April 12, 2019 to January 11 have been made public. The polling body has uploaded details of denominations of electoral bonds encashed between April 12, 2019 and January 24.

## 23 ferocious dog breeds banned amid spike in attacks

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising instances of fatal or serious pet dog attacks, at least 23 breeds of 'ferocious' dogs, including Pitbull, Rottweiler, Terrier, Wolf Dog, and Mastiff, have been shortlisted by the Centre for a complete ban on their sale, import and breeding as pets. This means that the general public is now barred from keeping these ferocious dogs. The list of banned dog breeds includes — Pitbull Terrier, Tosa Inu, American

Staffordshire Terrier, Fila Brasileiro, Dogo Argentino, American bulldog, Boerboel, Kangal, Central Asian Shepherd Dog, Caucasian Shepherd Dog, South Russian Shepherd, Tornjak, Sarplaninac, Japanese Tosa and Akita, Mastiffs, Rottweiler, Rhodesian



Ridgeback, Wolf dogs, Canario, Akbash dog, Moscow Guard dog, Cane Corso, and every dog of the type commonly known as a 'Ban Dog'. "...The above dog breeds, including crossbreeds, shall be prohibited for import, breedings, selling as pet dogs and other purposes,"

said a letter dated March 12 written by the Union Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying to Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs while directing them to sterilise these breeds of dogs, which have already been kept as pets, to prevent further breeding. The department said it has received representations from citizens, citizen forums, and Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) to ban some of the breeds of dogs from being kept as pets and other purposes.

## NEWS BREAK Petrol, diesel prices cut by ₹2

NEW DELHI: Petrol and diesel prices were cut by ₹2 per litre each as state-owned oil companies ended a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision, just hours before the general election schedule was announced. See Page 10

## Setback to Sisodia

NEW DELHI: In another setback to AAP leader Manish Sisodia, the Supreme Court on Thursday rejected his curative petition challenging the apex court's decision rejecting his bail plea in the Delhi excise policy scam case.

## Sheep missing mystery solved, leopards cleared of charges

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

An attempt by certain vested interests in Kasaragod district to portray leopards and tigers as the culprits behind sheep and goat disappearance falls flat, as it has been proven that domesticated animals are actually stolen by humans. Images from CCTV cameras have confirmed that men lure goats with biscuits, and the unsuspecting animals fall prey to this trap. Brothers Abbas and Abdul Hameed of Kumbala village in Kasaragod were in for a shock as they lost 14 goats which they sent for grazing in the periphery of a neighbouring forest. The goats disappeared over a

period of four months and their complaint to Kumbala police evoked no response other than the routine reply that the matter was being probed. But the brothers, whose livelihood depended on the income from selling goat milk and slaughterhouses, took it as a challenge and pursued the matter. Villagers were of the opinion that the goats were flicked away by the leopards from the forest. But there were no pug marks to establish the complicity of the wild animals in the robbery. Abbas and Hameed checked all the video images they could collect from the CCTVs in the region and they came across a boy feeding one of their goats with biscuits and leading it away from the group.



The brothers sent these images to the WhatsApp groups which were picked up by Muneer, a sheep owner from Uppala village. He informed the brothers that a boy

resembling the one in the CCTV image had tried to steal his sheep and he overpowered him and handed over to the local police. The Uppala Police had details of

the boy's mother who had submitted her Aadhaar and phone number to get the boy released from the police station. She had told the police that the boy had a soft corner for goats and that's why he was seen feeding the animal with biscuits. Abbas, Hameed, and Muneer, along with the Uppala Police, surrounded the residence of the boy in Karnataka's Brahmalval village. From there, they arrested the boy, his mother, and Zakka Fullah, a partner in the crime. They also took into custody 70 goats from the residence, all of which were kidnapped using biscuits as bait. Rafeek, the kidnapper of the crime is missing and a hunt is on to nab him.

"Blaming wild animals like leopards and tigers for the disappearance of domesticated animals has become a routine affair in this region. This time we could prove that the wild animals had no role in this crime because there was no evidence linking them to the kidnapping of goats," said Sukumaran Periyachoor, a former principal of Government higher secondary school and a wildlife enthusiast. But the 14 goats taken away by the boy remain a mystery as none of the animals seized from Brahmalval village belonged to the stable of the brothers. The landscape and the modus operandi remind one of the cowboy films of the 1960s sans the sheriff and bounty killers.



'Pradhan Mantri Krishak Mitra Surya Yojana' approved

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The State cabinet here on Thursday approved expansion of the Chief Minister's Solar Pump Scheme and implement it under the name 'Pradhan Mantri Krishak Mitra Surya Yojana'. The 'Pradhan Mantri Krishak Mitra Surya Yojana' will be implemented by the Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam as per the guidelines issued under the Kusum 'B' scheme of the Central Government. To provide solar agriculture pump connections to farmers/groups of farmers, solar agriculture pump connections are also being provided under the currently prevalent 'Mukhyamantri Krishak Mitra Yojana'. The Council of Ministers has granted administrative approval for work to be done in the first

and second phase of the Ken-Betwa Link Project at a cost of Rs 24 thousand 293 crore 24 lakh. The project will provide irrigation to 6,57,364 hectare drought affected area of Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh, Niwari, Panna, Damoh, Sagar, Datia and Vidisha, Shivpuri, Raisen districts of Betwa basin of Bundelkhand region and drinking water facility to about 44 lakh population. The Council of Ministers has approved the establishment of Chitrakoot Development Authority for the integrated development of Chitrakoot city, by disintegrating the existing Chitrakoot Special Area Development Authority by the Urban Development and Housing Department. With the establishment of Chitrakoot Development Authority, overall development

of this naturally, historically and religiously significant region will be possible. Besides, the implementation of the proposals of effective development plan by the Directorate of Town and Country Investment will become possible. The Council of Ministers approved a grant-in-aid amounting to Rs 20 crore for the authority. The Collector has been authorized to make other necessary arrangements. The Cabinet approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Public Works Department and National Highway Logistics Management Limited (NHLML) for the development, implementation, construction, operation and maintenance of the ropeway. The ropeway projects proposed in the National Ropeway

Development Programme 'Parvatmala' were approved. In the first phase of the project at four places, including Railway Station to Mahakal Temple, Ujjain Ropeway, Tikitoria Mata Mandir (Sagar) Funicular, Empire Stadium to Gurudara (Via Rampur Chowk and Avenue Mall), Jabalpur and Civic Center to Baldevbagh (Via Malviya Chowk, Lodganj, Barafuara), Jabalpur Cabinet approved to authorize Public Works Department to select the options for the remaining ropeway projects found feasible in future and as mentioned in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) of the proposed projects. Approval has been given to expand the 'Mukhya Mantri Solar Pump Yojana' and implement it under the name 'Pradhan Mantri Krishak Mitra Surya Yojana'. The implementation of 'Pradhan

Mantri Krishak Mitra Surya Yojana' will be done as per the guidelines issued by the Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Yojana under the Kusum 'B' scheme of the Central Government. For the entire ropeway project proposed in Madhya Pradesh, approval was given to authorize the Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Road Development Corporation on behalf of Madhya Pradesh Government for approval of alignment of the project. Approval was given to authorize the Principal Secretary, M.P. Government, Public Works Department for notifying the Geo coordinates of all ropeway project alignments in the Gazette of the State Government, approving all actions related to land acquisition, signing the Definitive Agreement and appointing NHLML as Promoter for implementing the projects.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during digital launching of Krantsurya Tantiya Bhil Vishwavidyalaya, Khargone and Krantiveer Tantiya Tope Vishwavidyalaya Guna, during a programme in Khargone on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Autorickshaw driver dies in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A 25-year-old auto driver died after auto rickshaw he was driving overturned late on Wednesday night in front of Aamra Green Garden in Kolar, the driver died in the accident while one of his aides escaped with injuries; the elder brother of the deceased raised suspicion that a blood stained screw driver was found at the spot. At the time of the incident, two men and a woman were passengers in the autorickshaw and in the accident they escaped with minor injuries. The elder brother of the deceased has raised suspicion as a blood stained screwdriver was found at the incident site. The police said that they have registered a case and have started an investigation. The real causes of death will be revealed in the post mortem report.

Ashok Kumar Ahirwar said that the deceased Manoj Ahirwar was his younger brother. We live in Phase 1 Banjari Kolar. Manoj used to work as an auto driver. He used to return home every day around 11 pm and he failed to return till 12:30 pm on Wednesday night. After some time Rahul, who is also Manoj's friend, came to the house and told them that autorickshaw had overturned in front of Amara Garden, in front of Kolar police station. Due to this, a woman and two male passengers traveling in the auto suffered minor injuries and he also sustained minor injuries. Manoj had a serious head injury and was taken to JP Hospital. When we reached the hospital, we found him dead. When we reached the spot, we saw that there were no signs of damage anywhere in the auto. No address of the pas-

sengers who were traveling in the auto was given. A screwdriver stained with blood was found at the incident site. Family suspect that something has gone wrong with him that has cost him his life. Ashok said that Rahul was driving the autorickshaw at the time of the accident. He told this during interrogation. No injury of any kind is visible on his body. There is no information about the passengers who were injured. In fact, it is not even confirmed whether there were any passengers in the auto. Kolar police station in-charge Ashutosh Upadhyay said that the case is being investigated. Initially the young man seems to have died in a road accident. The causes of death will become more clear in the post mortem report. On the basis of which further action will be decided.

BoB officers association celebrates Woman's Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

International Women's Day was organized by the Bank of Baroda Officers Association at Hotel Shree Vatika. On this occasion, all the women staff members of the bank were present. Simardeep Kaur and Namrata Maheshwari were invited as chief guests on behalf of Officers Association Bhopal Zone. The chief guest was welcomed by Bhopal Zonal Secretary Vinod Negi and Regional Secretary Manish Verma. Simardeep Kaur started her career as an officer with Bank of Baroda in 2013 and in such a short time, she has reached the post of Branch Head and Assistant General Manager of the largest branch of Madhya



Pradesh. Simardeep Kaur said that you could fulfill the dual responsibility of family and job, hence you should consider yourself superior and never consider yourself inferior to anyone. That

one should never consider oneself less than anyone. She shared awareness of health, and inspired all women to live for themselves. Namrata Maheshwari is the management head of an advertising agency named Nirvana Publicity for 24 years and is associated with many social organizations. She is the first woman ad agency business leader of Madhya Pradesh. She inspired women to empower themselves and live a free life. At the conclusion of the

program, Vinod Singh Negi congratulated all the women members and praised the working style of the women members of the bank. He told that the number of women members in Bank of Baroda across India is 30 percent and they have incomparable contribution in the progress and business of the bank. Recently, the new wage agreement of bank employees has been signed between UFBU and IBA on International Women's Day on March 8, in which Vinod Singh Negi was also invited as a witness. This historic joint note was also signed by Bhavneet Kaur, the women representative of Bank of Baroda Officers Association and represented the women.

Protest over removal of shanties

Bhopal: People protested after 84 shanties were removed from the 100 Quarter Road connecting Khajuri to Piplani in Bhopal. People took to the streets on Thursday to protest against this action. They said that forceful action was taken but people were not given houses. Due to this they are forced to live in the open. The construction work of the road connecting Piplani to Khajuri is under process. For this, about 84 shanties have been removed. Residents are protesting against the removal of slums. They gathered again on Thursday evening and protested against the action. Resident Mrinali Singh Sengar said that examinations of children are going on these days. Meanwhile this action was taken. Due to this children are not able to study. At the same time, people have not even been given houses. The officers said that the people removed during the action would be temporarily shifted to BHEL quarters. However, residents said that many people have not got homes. In such a situation, they have been living in the open. They should be given houses under PM Awas Yojana.



Workers dry cow dung capsules in open fields ahead of the Holika Dahan festival in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Collector for new employment programme

PNS ■ GWALIOR

Gwalior's first woman collector Ruchika Chauhan, during discussions with journalists here on Wednesday talked about planning a new employment program for the youth. She said that a new scheduling is prepared for the youth of the city so that they are ready to work in good companies and industries in a positive direction. The collector further said that Gwalior is strategically located and industrial areas like Delhi and Noida are very close. She said that the administration will contact companies in these areas and will try to create new employment opportunities for the youth. A framework will be prepared so that the youth of the city can get better employment



She added that the administration is fully aware about the security issues and will work with all departments to see that the elections are conducted safely. On the topic of water scarcity she said that keeping in mind the coming summer, the main focus of her administration will be on improving drinking water system. She also said that special campaigns will be conducted to stop food adulteration. Before being posted in Gwalior, Ruchika Chauhan was posted as Additional Secretary in the state government. She has experience of working on important positions like Ratlam Collector, Additional Collector, Joint Election Officer of Gwalior and Bhopal and positions in other departments including urban development and administration.

opportunities. The collector further said that the administration's priority is to provide employment to the unemployed under the schemes run by the government so that the unemployment rate in Gwalior is reduced. On the topic of elections, the collector said that preparations are going on for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and the code of conduct may be announced soon.

World Kidney Day observed at Pediatrics department of AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

On the occasion of World Kidney Day, the Pediatrics Department of AIIMS Bhopal hosted a significant program on Thursday, emphasizing the importance of kidney health awareness. The event was graced by Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, who highlighted the critical need for widespread awareness regarding kidney health and timely treatment. In his address, Professor Singh underscored the necessity of dispelling misconceptions surrounding kidney transplants and urged parents to seek timely treatment for their children. Emphasizing the role of awareness in preventing the need for transplants, he stressed the importance of early intervention in curing diseases. Furthermore, Professor Singh urged the exploration of the role of AYUSH in chronic renal diseases, indicating a holistic approach towards kidney care. Earlier, Professor (Dr.) Shikha Malik, Head of the Department of Pediatrics, extended a warm welcome. Throughout the week leading

up to the event, various activities were organized, including national and undergraduate level quiz competitions, outreach programs in schools and colleges, and engaging competitions like fancy dress and drawing for children. Over 150 participants actively took part in these events. In a notable achievement, the Pediatric Nephrology branch of AIIMS Bhopal, in collaboration with McGill University of Canada, has elevated its status from Level C to Level A under the Sister Renal Program of the International Society of Nephrology. Additionally, the branch has been recognized as a Fellowship Training Centre by the International Pediatric Nephrology Association. The event concluded with Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh felicitating the winning participants, marking a successful celebration of World Kidney Day and a significant step forward in promoting kidney health awareness at AIIMS Bhopal. On this occasion, a booklet named 'Vrikankit' was also released which will have complete detail about the treatment given to the kidney patient.

Free dental check up camp organised

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

On the occasion of International Women's Day, a free dental consultation camp was organized in collaboration with Indian Dental Association Bhopal at BHEL Ladies Club Educational Welfare Wing. The program was inaugurated by Sangeeta Ramanathan, President of BHEL Ladies Club. Vice President of the wing, Pranati Rao was also present in the program. On this occasion, Vice Presidents, members of all the centres and President of Indian Dental Association Sukhda Singh, Monica Mittal, Anupama Pratima Bajpai, Alok Dewan, Neeta Marwah and Vedant Gupta were present. Employees of all the centres run by the Ladies Club, students of BHEL Ladies Club Educational Welfare Wing and computer operators working in BHEL etc. were examined in the camp. The program was conducted by the Secretary of the wing, Manju Bhauri and Treasurer, Reena Sachan.

Statue of Atal Bihari Vajpayee to be installed near Lalghati

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will be installed near Lalghati intersection of Bhopal. This decision was taken in the MIC (Mayor in Council) meeting of the Municipal Corporation. At the same time, sugarcane juice traders will have to pay Rs 257 every day to operate shop. There has been an increase of 10 percent from last time. Before the implementation of the code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections, an MIC meeting was held in the presence of Mayor Malti Rai. In this, the proposal to make the dedicated lane of BRTS corridor between Ampri to Misrod as a mixed lane was also passed. Sugarcane juice stall traders will have to pay Rs 257 as marketing fee. Last year this fee was Rs 234. This has increased by 10 percent. This amount will have to be paid for a temporary shop of a total area of 24 square feet. Under PM Awas Yojana,

In the MIC meeting, a proposal to make the dedicated lane of BRTS corridor between Ampri to Misrod as a mixed lane was also passed

approval was given for 23 houses in Kokta Transport Nagar and 2 in Bagmugalia. Permission was granted to select an agency and tender for the work of processing and disposal of solid waste in Adampur Cantonment. The time limit for completing the work of A and B Block near Neelbar Maidan was extended till December 20-24. Approval was given to extend the period of Mahamrityunjaya Go-Seva Sadan Gaushala located in Kokta till August 31.



Muslims buy eatables used to break fast during the holy fasting month of Ramadan in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Mohapani to Baragoon road in Gadarwara gets approval

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The approval for the Mohapani to Baragoon road in Gadarwara, Narsinghpur district, signals a significant development boost for the region. During today's Cabinet meeting in Bhopal, the construction of this road, estimated at a cost of Rs. 40 crore 75 lakh, was approved. School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh has been

steadfastly dedicated to the advancement of the mentioned road. Villagers have long advocated for its construction. Expressing gratitude towards Chief Minister Mohan Yadav following the approval of the proposal, Minister Singh highlighted that this road will directly link Gadarwara to Chhindwara, facilitating convenient transportation and catalyzing business activities in

the region. He assured that the sanctioned road will be completed with high quality within the designated timeframe. The length of the said road L-063 Mohapani to Baragoon (Taliaya) is 29.10 kilometers. Its cost is Rs 40 crore 75 lakh. A provision of Rs 1 crore 40 lakh per kilometer has also been made for road maintenance. This road will be built by Madhya Pradesh Rural Roads Authority.



# C'garh revives 'Khel Alankaran', 544 feted



STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday revived the Khel Alankaran Samaroh and honoured 544 talented players from various sports disciplines. The award ceremony, to be organised annually, had not been held for the past five years. The programme was held at the vDeendayal Upadhyay Auditorium in Raipur. Sai also honoured families of martyrs in the programme, names of after whom the awards were given in the state. The event was presided over by Assembly Speaker Raman Singh. Speaking on this occasion, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stressed the

importance of nurturing talent. "Talent is God's unique gift to a person. When talents flourish, society also flourishes," he said. He expressed regret over the absence of such ceremonies under the previous government. "The government did not organize any such award ceremony in the state for the last five years. "After a considerable delay, these talented players in the state are finally receiving their well-deserved awards", he said. Citing the launch of the 'Chhattisgarhia Krida Protsahan Yojana' to revive traditional sports, a move of the government to encourage sports personalities, he said the decision to construct a

modern sports stadium in Jashpur, along with indoor stadium complexes in Raigarh and Balodabazar districts will ensure the promotion of sports in Chhattisgarh. The Sports Minister said a committee has been formed to re-examine applications from players seeking recognition as outstanding players (Utkrisht Khiladi). Soon a notification would be made so that these players could apply for the government jobs, he said. In the programme, players were awarded with Shaheed Pankaj Vikram Samman, the Chief Minister's Trophy, Shaheed Rajiv Pandey Award, Shaheed Kaushal Yadav Award, Shaheed Vinod Choubey Samman and Veer Hanuman Singh Award.

## 'C'garh Vision 2047' conference today

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

With an aim to make the vision of development with environmental protection meaningful, a conference on 'Chhattisgarh Vision 2047' will be organized by the Chhattisgarh Environment Protection Board on March 15 here. The event will be inaugurated by Finance, Housing and Environment Minister O.P. Choudhary, an official statement said. Chief Secretary Abhitabh Jain will preside over the proceedings. The conference aims to advance the objectives of 'Viksit Bharat'. Representatives from various sectors including integrated steel and sponge iron plants, coal washeries, thermal power plants, coal and iron ore mines, major hospitals and sponge iron

associations will participate. Besides, state heads of the Rolling Mill Association, the Mini Steel Plant Association, the Minor Mineral Association and the Joint Solid Waste Disposal Facility along with the Municipal Commissioners of Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg and Bhilai will also attend. Chhattisgarh Environment Protection Board Member Secretary P. Arun Prasad said the conference will focus on discussions about economic development and environmental sustainability. The goal is to position Chhattisgarh as a developed state alongside India by its 100th year of Independence in 2047. 'Chhattisgarh Vision 2047' serves as an important platform for sharing ideas and suggestions to formulate a roadmap for environmental protection over the next 25 years.

## Police claims breakthrough in woman killing in police colony



STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Thursday arrested a 29-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh for killing an abandoned wife of a policeman last week. Jay Singh alias Rahul has been taken into custody, Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police

Santosh Singh said. The body of Jolly Singh was found on March 5-6 night at a police colony in Amaseoni in Raipur. The woman was living separately as her husband, Shishupal Singh, a policeman in Sukma district, had married another woman. Based on CCTV cameras and social media

sites, the accused was nabbed from a village in Bhadohi district in Uttar Pradesh. Rahul told the police that they became friends four years ago. He decided to kill Jolly Singh when she pressed him to marry her. After killing her on March 5, he boarded a train to Uttar Pradesh. A court sent him to prison.

## 'Will consider regularization of contract employees after study'

### NHM Employees Union submitted memorandum of Health Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Health Minister Shyam Bihari Jaiswal on Thursday assured the NHM (National Health Mission) contractual employees of studying the regularization process of contract employees adapted by other states. He said the announcement of the previous government of their 27 percent salary hike would be fulfilled soon. Women officials of the Chhattisgarh State NHM Employees Union met the Health Minister and submitted an 18-point memorandum. In his response, the Health Minister promised that the state government was determined to provide the 27



percent salary hike to all the contractual employees of the state including the contractual workers in the health department. Union officials said that NHM contractual workers in Tamil Nadu and Manipur were being regularized and

## Financial aid to 8 urban bodies for expediting development

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh's Urban Administration and Development Department has approved Rs 4.83 crore under the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions for eight urban bodies of the state, an official communiqué said. These include Rs 4,79,68,000 for seven urban bodies under the 15th Finance Commission and Rs 4.13 lakh for the Sarangarh Municipality under the 14th Finance Commission. The department made the sanctions following an approval by Deputy Chief Minister and Urban Administration and Development Minister Arun Sao to accelerate development works in the urban bodies. Sao has given

instructions to commence the proposed development works as soon as possible and complete the same within prescribed time limit while adhering to the quality standards. Under the 15th Finance Commission, the Urban Administration and Development Department has sanctioned Rs 1.17 crore for Narayanpur Municipality, Rs 15 lakh for Sargaon Nagar Panchayat, Rs 18 lakh for Kirori Malnagar Nagar Panchayat, Rs 18.98 lakh for Chhura Nagar Panchayat, Rs 53.97 lakh for Simga Nagar Panchayat, Rs 93.35 lakh for Khongapani Nagar Panchayat and Rs 1.63 crore have been sanctioned for Sakti Municipality. Under the 14th Finance Commission, Rs 4.13 lakh has been sanctioned for Sarangarh Municipality.



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai at the concluding ceremony of the police sports events at the Police Training School (PTS) at Mana on Thursday.

## Two Maoists among six held

STAFF REPORTER ■  
JASHPUR

Two Naxalites and their four supporters were arrested and an AK-47 rifle was recovered from them in Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Thursday. Tunesh Lakra alias Ravi and Ram Lakra (40), both members of the banned Jharkhand Jan Mukti Parishad (JJMP- a CPI-Maoist splinter group) and their supporters - Ranjeet Mahto, Herman Kumar, Gulam Sahjada and Tabassum Ahmad -- were arrested on Wednesday, Inspector General of Police (Surguja Range) Ankit Garg said. The Jharkhand Police had shared information about an area commander of JJMP, Tunesh Lakra, hiding in Jashpur with his associates following which a police team from Jashpur



and Balrampur was constituted to trace them. Jashpur and Balrampur districts border Jharkhand. A police squad led by Kunkuri (Jashpur) Sub Division Officer Vinod Mandavi and Sub Inspector Subhash Kujur (Balrampur)

### To evade arrest in Jharkhand, the accused were working as labourers in Jashpur.

Jharkhand, the accused were working as labourers in Jashpur. At least 13 cases were registered against Lakra in Balrampur (Chhattisgarh) and 18 cases in Garhwa (Jharkhand). Earlier, Lakra was arrested in May 2012 but was released on bail.

## Maoist surrenders in Dantewada



STAFF REPORTER ■  
DANTEWADA

A Maoist was surrendered to security forces in Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh, police said on Thursday. Ram Oyam (38) turned himself in on Wednesday, citing disappointment with the Maoist ideology. Dantewada Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai said. Oyam was a member of the Phoolgatta Panchayat Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Majdoor Sangh under the Bhairamgarh Area Committee of the outlawed Maoist organisation. So far, 679 Maoists, including 173 carrying cash rewards, have quit violence in the district since June 2020.

## Virtual revolution: How education will transformed by 2030

AGENCIES ■

The field of education is poised for a seismic shift as we approach 2030. The rise of the metaverse, the immersive virtual world, presents a unique opportunity to reshape the learning experience. This introduction explores the metaverse classroom's potential and how it may change access, engagement, and understanding in the coming decade. Immersing yourself in virtual and augmented reality's immersive possibilities can reveal a future where classrooms transcend physical boundaries, foster deeper connections with knowledge, and fuel a passion for lifelong learning. Education has played a crucial role in transforming human society and shaping our world. Over time, it has evolved from a traditional rote learning method to a modern online education

accompanied by virtual reality simulations. As technology innovation takes place rapidly, the education sector is at a very interesting cusp of development, which suggests the integration of the metaverse to accelerate progress in the sector. It deals with virtual reality and other immersive technologies and can elevate the entire learning and teaching experience. Nitin Vijay, the Founder and CEO of Motion Education, delves into some key transformations that the metaverse can bring in the education sector in the next five years. Personalized learning experience: Emerging technologies like Metaverse can personalize the learning experience by providing individuals with customized content and tailored pathways. Employing adaptive learning technologies can modify instruction to meet



the individual interests, learning styles, and progress of an individual. This personalized approach can enhance engagement, motivation, and student learning outcomes. Continuous learning and adapting new skills: In

today's fast-paced world, constant learning and adapting to new skills is the key to success. Technology is central to enabling individuals to continue their lifelong learning, ensuring students keep up with industry trends,

acquire new skills, and advance their careers. Technology is democratizing education by providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities in a day. Metaverse supports immersive and continuous learning and significantly contributes to skills-based education that enables individuals to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the modern workplace and thrive in today's dynamic world. Empowering teachers for resilient infrastructure: Looking at the wide range of benefits that technology offers, it can contribute immensely to revolutionizing the sector. Regular faculty training is a primary step to building a robust education infrastructure and subsequently shaping students' future. The introduction of automation of basic repetitive tasks and paperwork can reduce teachers' heavy workloads. Technology that provides

additional time to explore innovative teaching pedagogies helps improve understanding and acceptance among students. At the same time, allowing teachers to do a lot of research to identify the gaps in the industry paves the way for coming up with ingenious solutions to make the classroom more interactive and productive. Nitin concludes, "As the metaverse continues to evolve, it has the potential to reshape the educational landscape fundamentally. Harnessing the benefits of personalized education, collaboration opportunities, and immersive simulation can immensely empower students to navigate unpredictable workplace challenges with sheer ingenuity. Developing the necessary skills contributes to the students' efficiency by equipping them with the advanced technologies to excel in the digital age."

## Unaccounted cash seized

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Thursday seized unaccounted cash from a man on the outskirts of Raipur city. Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Singh said the police



intercepted a car near Mandir Hasaud toll gate and found Rs 18.62 lakhs in cash in it.

कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता, लोक निर्माण विभाग, रायपुर संभाग क्र.-1, रायपुर		
मैनअल पद्धति से द्वितीय निविदा आमत्रण सूचना		
विज्ञापन क्रमांक 4387/एन.आई.टी.-48/टी.सी./23-24/ रायपुर, दिनांक 12/03/2024		
क्र.	कार्य का विवरण	अनुमानित राशि (लाखों में)
1	Construction of Approach Road at Civil Line Raipur Length 100 Mtr.	18.59
निविदा प्रपत्र प्राप्त करने की तिथि- 02.04.2024		
2. उपरोक्त निर्माण कार्यों की निविदा की सामान्य शर्तें, धरोहर राशि, विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञापन, निविदा दस्तावेज व अन्य जानकारी कार्यालयीन अवधि में कार्यालय से प्राप्त की जा सकती है। साथ ही यह जानकारी विभागीय वेबसाईट <a href="http://www.cg.nic.in/pwdraipur/">www.cg.nic.in/pwdraipur/</a> में <a href="#">Live Tender</a> के अन्तर्गत निविदा प्रपत्र में उपलब्ध। इनका अवलोकन संबंधित सभाग कार्यालय में किया जा सकता है।		
कार्यपालन अभियंता लोक निर्माण विभाग संभाग क्र.-1 रायपुर		
G-08522/3		



# Goal to make India hub for scientific learning, says Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his goal was to make India a premier hub for scientific learning by drawing in global best practices and sharing its knowledge and experiences with the world. "The coming years until 2047 is a period that is crucial to realise our vision of building a strong, self-reliant nation, where the scientific community in particular, especially our youth, will play a defining role," the Prime Minister said in a message to a report encapsulating the scientific achievements of the last decade. The report -- "A Decade of Science: Technology Panorama for Atmanirbhar Bharat" was compiled by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Union Government and NGO Foundation for Advancing Science and Technology (FAST India) -- and released by Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh on Thursday. The report highlights India's sustained efforts in science and technology, particularly in fields such as infrastructure, defence, energy sector and



heavy industries. "Be it investing in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, deep sea and space exploration, Chandrayaan-3's landing on South Pole of the Moon, leadership in vaccine development during the pandemic, or commitment to expand renewable energy -- all such efforts showcase our continuing journey towards self-reliance," Modi said. The prime minister said India's scientists have carried out ground-breaking research across diverse spheres, while its tech ecosystem provides innovative solutions to global challenges. He said the government has also implemented far-reaching reforms in the education sec-

tor to instill a scientific temperament among the youth as well as promote inquiry-based learning. Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay Kumar Sood said the report examined the efforts in S&T across various domains such as capability-building, energy, exploration, public service, agriculture, livestock and biotechnology, and health. From development of radars and air defence systems that were deployed during the Balakot airstrikes to India's strides in vaccine development and achievements in 4G/5G telecom networks, the report seeks to capture the march of the country in the field of science and technology.

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The concept of simultaneous elections has been featured in many reports and studies since 1983, essentially implying a return to the previous practice of conducting polls concurrently, the high level panel on "one nation, one election" has noted. The panel led by former president Ram Nath Kovind submitted its report to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday, recommending simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and state assemblies as the first step followed by synchronised local body polls within 100 days. "The concept of simultaneous elections has been featured in many reports and studies, essentially implying a return to the previous practice of conducting elections concurrently. In its inaugural Annual Report in 1983, the Election Commission of India advocated the idea of conducting simultaneous elections for both the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies," the report said. The Law Commission studied the various issues involved in the conduct of elections and recommended in its reports of 1999, 2015 and 2018 (draft) the adoption of the practice of



simultaneous elections to free citizens, political parties and government authorities from the encumbrance of asynchronous elections. "In 2002, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution recognised the bane of separate elections and urged for the restoration of simultaneous elections. The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice made a thorough study of the issues involved in holding of elections in 2015 and recommended that simultaneous elections will be necessary to enable India to move on to the path of high economic development," the report said. "The Committee, in its report on the 'Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok

Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies," acknowledged several reasons supporting the idea of conducting elections simultaneously," it added. In January 2017, NITI Aayog formulated a working paper titled "Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The What, Why and How," exploring the prospect of holding concurrent elections for the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies. "The document examined current constitutional provisions and the financial and logistical considerations associated with simultaneous elections and formulated a framework for the implementation of such synchronized electoral processes. The desirability of conducting simultaneous elections is underscored on various grounds, as indicated in these reports," it said.

## 28 no confidence motions moved in LS

**PNS ■** NEW DELHI

A total of 28 no-confidence motions have been moved in the Lok Sabha till now, as disclosed by a high-level panel deliberating on the prospect of 'one nation, one election'. The panel's findings also shed light on the occurrence of seven instances where Lok Sabha found itself in a state of deadlock. Proposing a solution to these challenges, the high-level panel led by former president Ram Nath Kovind suggested that in scenarios of a hung House or a vote of no confidence, fresh elections should be conducted to constitute a new Lok Sabha. Historical data highlighted in the report indicates that the highest number of no-confidence motions in Lok Sabha were moved during 1961-70, totalling 12, followed by six such motions during 1971-1980. In stark contrast, from 2000 to 2023, merely three no-confidence motions were recorded. To tackle these issues, the panel has put forth a comprehensive mechanism. This proposed

framework entails a constitutional amendment fixing Lok Sabha's tenure at five years from its inaugural meeting. Should dissolution occur before the term's completion, fresh elections will be held, and new Lok Sabha will serve out the remainder of the previous term. Echoing the structure of Lok Sabha, the state legislative assemblies would also operate on a fixed five-year term from their inaugural meeting. Dissolution would prompt fresh elections, with the new legislative assembly serving until Lok Sabha's term concludes. Further, the proposal suggested conducting mid-term elections to fill vacancies in municipalities and panchayats, ensuring seamless governance until the subsequent general elections. Implementing these proposed reforms necessitates constitutional amendments and the panel proposed amendments to Article 83 and Article 172 of the Constitution would regulate the tenures of Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies, respectively.

## INDIA Bloc guided by corruption ideology, fuelling anti national agenda: Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday accused the opposition INDIA Bloc of being guided by corruption, mis-governance and fuelling anti-national agenda, asserting he stands for rooting out corruption and appeasement. His ideology is ensuring the country's welfare through people's welfare, the Prime Minister said at a programme here attended by the beneficiaries of PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi scheme, under which loan is given to street vendors. Targeting the opposition alliance which has united in the national capital to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, he said they have come together on the agenda of "abusing" him day and night. The Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress have joined hands in Delhi where all seven Lok Sabha seats are held by the BJP. Modi said the PM SVANidhi scheme has been a big boost to the lakhs of families of street vendors who were never paid any "attention" by previous governments. They used to suffer insults and ran from pillar to post as they hardly got



loans from banks and had to obtain capital at exorbitant interest rates, he said. "Modi ki guarantee" has ensured that they can get loans from banks at simple rates," he said. Over 62 lakh persons have been given loans of about Rs 11,000 crore, he said. The BJP government at the Centre has been working to improve the lives of the poor and middle class in the national capital, he said, adding that it has been making honest efforts to ease traffic and curb pollution in Indian cities. Over 1,000 electric buses have been deployed in Delhi, he said, and highlighted the expansion of expressways around the city's periphery and increase in its Metro network. The prime minister also laid the foundation stone of two additional corridors of Delhi Metro's Phase 4 during the programme.

## Centre revises flexible scheme for recruitment, promotion of scientists

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has revised a flexible complementing scheme related to the recruitment and promotion of scientists in different Central Government departments, according to an official order. The move was necessitated considering the evolving advancement in the field of science and technology, and the requests of the various central government ministries and departments in this regard. Based on the recommendations of the sixth Central Pay Commission (6th CPC), the flexible complementing scheme (FCS) for scientists, that existed in some of the scientific ministries/departments of the government of India, was modified and instructions on modified flexible complementing scheme (MFCS) were issued by the Personnel Ministry in September 2010. These guidelines are not applicable to Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Departments of Atomic Energy and Space, where the scientists are governed by another scheme called merit based promotion scheme. "Subsequent to the issue of these guidelines, a need was felt



for enhancing the educational qualifications in the MFCS by several ministries/departments in order to recruit scientists as per their work function and detailed deliberations were held on the issue," an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Keeping in view that the field of science and technology is evolving, the requests of the various ministries/ departments have been examined and suitably incorporated in the revised scheme, it said and issued a revised FCS. "Provisions of revised FCS would be effective from July 1, 2024," the order issued to all central government departments/ministries said. In order to obviate future concerns relating to interpretation regarding educational quali-

cations or inclusion of new disciplines, the revised scheme provides for setting up of an inter-ministerial committee under Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) with Secretary, Department of Science and Technology as member and secretary of the concerned ministry/department as the co-opted member, it added. All scientific ministries/departments presently implementing MFCS and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology shall initiate action for incorporating the provisions of the revised FCS by amending the provisions of relevant recruitment rules so that recruitment rules are brought in conformity with the provisions of the revised FCS, the order dated March 13 said.

## BJP targeting young, first time voters

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The BJP is targeting young and first-time voters with engaging short videos centred around the Modi government's initiatives in a variety of sectors including education, health, communication and start-ups, party leaders said on Thursday. The ruling party is using social media extensively to reach the young voters and recently launched a website (pehlaavotemodiko.Bjp.Org) as part of its campaign to engage with them and seek their support during the polls, the schedule of which is expected to be announced soon. The campaign emphasises on the message that the lives of Indian youths have improved under the 10 years of the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a party leader said. Among the campaign highlights are policies like 'Startup India' which has led to the country now having more than one lakh start-ups and over 100 unicorns; the National Education Policy that seeks to revamp educational landscape; and the establishment of 390 new

universities, seven IIMs, seven IITs and 15 AIIMs over the past 10 years. The campaign claims that India's sporting arena has been "transformed" by initiatives like 'Khelo India' and 'Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)'; while expressways, 'Vande Bharat' trains, trans-harbour links are reshaping the country's infrastructure. The nation, it says, has seen a 2,300 per cent growth in its solar power capacity in the last 10 years while the successful hosting of the G20 summit is an example of India's elevated status in global affairs. The 'Chandrayaan 3', 'Mangalyaan', and 'Aditya' L1 space missions also find a mention to highlight the country's space-tech achievements besides the advent of UPI and 5G technology which has changed India's digital landscape, party leaders associated with the campaign said. Initiatives like six-month paid maternity leave, 33 per cent reservation in Parliament and 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' have been cited as examples of the government's commitment to gender equality and women empowerment.

## Sudha Murty takes oath as Rajya Sabha MP

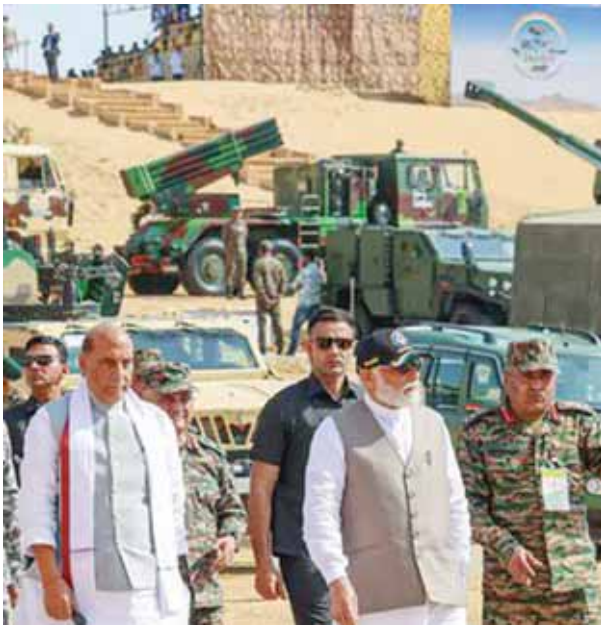
**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Engineer-turned-philanthropist Sudha Murty on Thursday took oath as Rajya Sabha MP in the presence of her husband N R Narayana Murthy. Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar administered the oath in his chamber in Parliament House. Leader of the House Piyush Goyal was also present on the occasion. Murty, 73, the former chairperson of Infosys Foundation and the author of several books, mostly for children, was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on International Women's Day last Friday. She is also renowned for her contribution to Kannada and English literature and is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar, the Padma Shri (2006) and the Padma Bhushan (2023). Murty, who was the first woman engineer to have worked with TELCO, is famously known to have provided the seed capital of Rs 10,000 from her emergency funds to her husband to start Infosys, which now has a market cap of over USD 80 billion. Her daughter Akshata is married to British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

## Bharat Shakti gives message of India strength to adversaries

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Synergised military exercise 'Bharat Shakti' at Pokhran showcasing indigenously manufactured weapons has given a "strategic message to the adversaries" about the combat potential of India's armed forces, sources in the defence establishment have said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the exercise involving the three Services and underlined country's march towards attaining self-reliance in defence and said Pokhran has become witness to the trinity of India's 'aatmanirbharta', belief and self-pride. The three Services in a 50-minute thrilling display showcased the prowess of indigenous defence equipment. Tejas light combat aircraft(LCA), Arjun main battle tank(MBT) and ALH Mk-IV besides K-9 Vajra and Sharang artillery gun systems exhibited their combat capabilities. Platforms like Pinaka satellite system and a swarm of drones left the audience spellbound. Prime Minister Modi in his address on the occasion said "the roar of aircraft mid-air, and valour displayed on ground during Bharat Shakti exercise is the call of a 'new India' (naye Bharat ka aavhan hai)". "The live fire and static dis-



play have given a strategic message to the adversaries about the combat potential of our armed forces in terms of capability and capacity," a source in the defence establishment said. The exercise was organised under the aegis of the Indian Army. The synergised demonstration of indigenous defence capabilities during 'Bharat Shakti' is a "testimony to its commitment towards modernisation through indigenisation," the sources said. Roars of LCA Tejas and ALH Mk-IV filled the air while Main Battle Tank Arjun, K-9

Vajra, and T-90 Bhisma tanks, and Dhanush and Sharang artillery gun systems ruled the firing ranges on the ground. Pinaka rocket system in action drew huge cheers from the crowd. The exercise showcased India's military prowess and integrated multi-domain operations of the three services and the "shock and awe" impact that the armed forces seek to achieve in an operational situation with manoeuvre and fighting capabilities. "Exercise 'Bharat Shakti' not only displayed the indigenous defence capability of the armed forces, it also dis-

played the integration and jointness that is being achieved in various aspects like communications, training, inter-operability and logistics," the source added. Coordinating actual fire and manoeuvre drills by various arms and services is essential requirement of such large-scale exercises, which gives "first-hand experience of dealing with such issues in actual battles". All these activities also include, move of large number of equipment and weapon pieces for firing and display, which involves "coordination with other two services at the highest level", sources in the military establishment said. While efforts are in place and extensive plans are being made to "orchestrate integration and bring jointness among the services", 'Bharat Shakti' epitomises these efforts and highlights the contributions of the Indian Army towards achieving the much-awaited integration, they said. The exercise showcased an array of indigenous weapon systems and platforms as a demonstration of the prowess of a rising India, premised on the nation's 'Atmanirbharta' initiative, the sources added. For live fire demonstration, the efforts by the Army as being the lead service, "are visible". Starting with meticulous planning in utilising the available resources in Pokhran

for integrated firing which can be attributed to "battle space management akin to actual operations", they said. Synergy in ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), firepower and communications was evident during the conduct, another source said. "Air space management in coordination with the Indian Air Force is also a critical requirement in battle where various air assets of the Army and the Air Force would be using the air space simultaneously which needs clear demarcation of boundaries, identification drills and fool proof communication systems," the source added. While live firing was "awe-inspiring", static display of various equipment and weapons in the display arena gave a "holistic view of indigenous platforms of the armed forces, they said. Equipment and weapons on display included various drone systems and counter-drone systems, simulators, communication systems, radar systems, multi-mode hand grenade (MMHG), 3D-printed bunkers, artificial intelligence-based satellite imagery analysis system, among others were on display. "Bharat Shakti" also signalled to the world military community to subscribe to the large defence manufacturing potential possessed by the India," the source said.

## Yoga Day this year with theme Yoga for Women Empowerment to help people reach full potential

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■** NEW DELHI

With the theme 'Yoga for Women Empowerment' for this International Yoga Day to be observed on June 21, India is embarking on a year long mission to empower the country's half of the population to help reach their full potential with the physical and mental benefits of the practice. "Yoga is a comprehensive instrument for empowering women, encompassing their physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being," Rajesh Kotecha said adding that "Empowered women take on roles as leaders, educators, and advocates for change, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment across society." Speaking at the Yoga Mahotsav-2024, held here to mark the 100-day countdown to the 10th edition of International Day of Yoga (IDY), Kotecha said that the aim of holding the mega event is to propel Yoga into a widespread movement with a focus on women's well-being and promoting global health and peace. The Ayush Ministry has actively supported studies on various conditions affecting women, including PCOS/PCOD, stress management, and the like, to focus on women's health irrespective of their age or condition, promoting women's empowerment through evi-



dence-based research, he said at the event, attended by Joint Secretary, Ayush, Kavita Garg, DDG Ministry of Ayush, Satyjit Paul, Advisor (Ayurveda), Ministry of Ayush, Vaidya Manoj Nesari, Chairman, National Commission of Homoeopathy, Dr. Anil Khurana, and Director Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY). Vijaylakshmi Bhardwaj among others. Hansaji Jayadeva, Director of The Yoga Institute, Mumbai emphasized the enduring value of good actions, stating that they are the best currency that sustains us forever. She highlighted the importance of accepting people as they are and finding joy in understanding them, rather than letting oneself be disturbed by the actions of others. During her address at the panel discussion on "Yoga and Women Empowerment: Different Dimensions" Dr. Tanuja Nesari, Director, All

India Institute of Ayurveda, Delhi underscored the symbiotic relationship between Yoga and Ayurveda. "While Yoga embodies the spiritual essence of Ayurveda, Ayurveda encapsulates the physical aspect of Yoga, portraying them as complementary aspects of holistic wellness..." She stressed the necessity of integrating Ayurveda and Yoga within healthcare practices to ensure comprehensive well-being and pointed out the efficacy of Yoga breathing techniques and a Sattvic diet in maintaining mood balance, managing menopausal symptoms, irregular periods, and reducing anxiety. Dr. HR Nagendra, Chancellor, SVYASA University, Bengaluru highlighted the challenges posed by modern lifestyle disorders as well as non-communicable diseases which can be effectively tackled by integrating Ayush healthcare, and particularly, yoga into our daily lives.



# Hope peace will return soon: Manipur CM

Meitei, Kuki MLAs have met twice

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said talks have been initiated to resolve the conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities in the state. Speaking at a programme here, Singh emphasised the importance of resolving conflicts through dialogue and political engagements. He mentioned that legislators from both the communities have met twice, indicating progress in the peace process. “Valley MLAs have met Kuki legislators twice. A team consisting of the chairman of the hill areas committee has also been meeting both Kuki and Naga civil societies. I



hope peace will return soon,” he said. Singh acknowledged the unfortunate loss of innocent lives since violence broke out in the state on May 3 last, but expressed optimism about achieving peace. He said deployment of state security forces in vulnerable areas has helped reduce violence. Singh also noted that displaced persons from various areas have started returning to their homes. “Deployment of state security forces in almost all vulnerable areas is almost done. With God’s grace, news of violence has subsided and displaced persons of Phoubakchao, Dolaithabi, Sugnu and Serou have started returning to their native places,” he said. Manipur has remained

gripped by recurring bouts of violence since ethnic clashes between two communities first erupted in May last year. Altogether 219 people have been killed since then. The clashes have occurred over a number of grievances that both sides have against the other, however, the flashpoint of the crisis has been a move to give Meiteis Scheduled Tribe status, which has since been rolled back and an attempt to turf out tribals living in protected forest areas. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur’s population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts.



## If they interfere with right to life of poor, they do not have right to live: Yogi on mafias

PTI ■ AMBEDKAR

Mar 14 (PTI) Mafias don’t have the “right to live” if they “interfere” with the right to life of the poor, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Thursday. Addressing a function in Ambedkar Nagar to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of projects worth Rs 2,122 crore, the chief minister alleged that before the BJP government in the state, mafias would encroach the lands of the poor and stopped them from celebrating their festivals. “Can any mafia encroach over the land of the poor today? Can anyone harass our daughters? They know that if they harass any daughter, ‘Yamraj’ will treat him at the next road intersection,” Adityanath said. “Tell me if the ongoing treatment of mafias is correct or not? Do you support it or not?” he asked the crowd gathered at the function. Adityanath said it was because of the “double engine government” that the mafias in UP were receiving this “treatment”. The mafias were “creatures reared and brought up” by previous governments that served as their leaders’ source of income, he said. “But we said that these

creatures don’t have the right to live if they interfere with the right to life of the poor. Their right to live will be snatched from them and they will be ended if they interfere,” the chief minister said. Over 180 alleged criminals were gunned down in encounters in the state in the six years of Yogi Adityanath government from 2017 to 2023, as per data by state police. According to the data, more than 10,900 police encounters have taken place in the state during this period. In these encounters, 23,300 alleged criminals were arrested and 5,046 were injured. The chief minister also targeted the Samajwadi Party in his address. “A war is going on between chacha and bhatija there. The family gets busy with ‘vasooli’ (recovery) whenever any recruitment is announced,” said Adityanath, in an indirect dig at SP president Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle and party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav. “There were governments in the country (centre) before 2014 and in UP before 2017 who thought only about themselves and their families. But PM Modi has said that all 140 crore people of the country are his family.”



## Taxi driver who robbed Dutch tourist in Odisha arrested

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha police arrested an absconding taxi driver who allegedly robbed a 72-year-old tourist from the Netherlands in January, an officer said on Thursday. Following the robbery, Anthony Von Arkel had to stay at a shelter home for beggars for over a month before the state government rescued him and provided food and accommodation. The driver, who was absconding after allegedly robbing the tourist on the way from Bhubaneswar to Bhitarkanika on January 9, was arrested on Wednesday, Puri Superintendent of Police Pinak Mishra said. With the help of the Puri administration, Anthony began his return journey from Puri on Thursday. He will go to Nagpur in Maharashtra, from where he will return to the Netherlands via Qatar on March 15, officials said. “I am very grateful to the government, media and social activists, who helped me. The government has provided me with food and accommodation,” the tourist told media persons before leaving for Maharashtra on Thursday. With help from the Puri administration, he will go to Nagpur, from where he will return to the Netherlands via Qatar on March 15, officials said.

# Defamation complaints filed against Palaniswami, Annamalai

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Defamation complaints have been filed before a sessions court, against AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and BJP state president K Annamalai for their statements against Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin relating to alleged distribution of drugs in TN. In his complaints filed separately on Thursday, City Public Prosecutor G Devarajan sought to punish the duo for offences under section 499 and 500 IPC (Defamation). Devarajan, in his complaint submitted that Palaniswami, the state Leader of Opposition in a recent press meet made

defamatory statements against the CM, intending to harm the reputation of Stalin in respect of his conduct in the discharge of his public functions. He said while the chief minister has taken various steps towards ‘Drug-free Tamil Nadu’, the present defaming statement of the accused falsely links him to the alleged distribution of contrabands by aiding drug peddlers. Devarajan said in fact, the Chief Minister, in course of discharging his public function, gave the call to eliminate narcotic drugs from the state at a meeting in 2022, pursuant to which numerous measures were taken, as was evident from the Policy Note



2023-2024 of the Department of Home, Prohibition and Excise, Government of Tamil Nadu. He said the defamatory statements of the accused strike

at the very core of ethical governance and public trust, tarnishing the reputation of the esteemed office and undermining the principles of justice and integrity.

# Houses of those who tampered with recruitment exams raided: UP CM

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said those involved in recruitment exams leaks have been given a “fitting lesson” and their “houses were raided and properties confiscated”. Distributing appointment letters to 39 sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs), 41 deputy superintendents of police (DSPs) and 16 treasurer/account officers selected by the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission at his official residence, Adityanath said that the selection was completed in record time. “For the first time, any commission and board has completed the selection process in just nine months. The selection process was completely fair and transparent without any recommendation or interference. “Those who tried to tamper with the integrity of the examination suffered the



consequences. Their houses were raided and properties confiscated. The government has decided to teach all those who play with the future of the youth a fitting lesson,” the chief minister was quoted as saying in an official statement. Adityanath said the overall perception of the state changes when the government works with honesty. “You must have seen that those who faced an identity crisis in the state earlier, proudly say today that they belong to Uttar Pradesh. The transformation

has been facilitated by the government’s decision-making process,” he said. Addressing the newly selected candidates, the chief minister said, “You have 30 to 35 years to serve the public and to seek their blessings for a bright future.” He urged the newly selected candidates to discharge their role as the engine of the government. “Today, technology has improved a lot. By the time you come to the field, we will have succeeded in digitising all the

revenue functions. Even after this, cases of revenue-related disputes will arise. In such a situation, to settle these matters, you will have to stay in your tehsil and focus. Also, the pendency of such matters will have to be resolved in a time-bound manner,” he said. The chief minister added, “Our responsibility should be to provide justice to the underprivileged people. We should stand with them. The role of deputy SP is essential in maintaining law and order and resolving revenue-related matters. They must regularly visit the police station and watch every activity including preparation of the charge sheet. Expressing confidence in the newly selected candidates, he said, “You will take forward the pace of work of the state government with honesty. Also, keep in mind the interests of the public and make quick decisions so that you come out with an image of an officer of good administration.”

## Uplift of youth, women, workers, farmers key for happy society: Gadkari

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said that youth, women, workers and farmers are essential for a happy society, and stressed the need for their uplift. He was speaking after inaugurating a Multi-Modal Logistics Park at Sindi dry port in Maharashtra’s Wardha district and flagging off the trial of rail terminal services there. The Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways said thousands of trucks will arrive at the Sindi dry port and goods will be sent on rakes to Bangladesh via Haldia in West Bengal. “They will not go to JNPT (Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust), Mumbai,” he said. The minister said the dry port, located in the state’s Vidarbha region, will generate nearly 1 lakh jobs and several employment and business opportunities. The Maharashtra government has given Rs 1,200 crore for

the project, while JNPT has given Rs 600 crore, he said. This will help create industrial clusters, cold storages, godowns and pre-cooling plants. Gadkari, whom the BJP has renominated from Nagpur for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, said the government is working to make Sindi dry port the logistics capital of the country. Highlighting the various development works done by the central and state governments, he said, “If we want to make our society happy, then uplift of youth, women, workers and farmers is important.” Youth should get employment, women should be empowered and get equal rights, workers should get proper wages, while farmers should get good prices for their produce, said Gadkari. “All this requires value addition,” he said, urging entrepreneurs in Vidarbha to come forward and invest in the region.

## Nitish, Rabri among 11 elected unopposed to Bihar Legislative Council

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was on Thursday declared elected unopposed to the state legislative council for a fourth consecutive term. Besides Kumar, 10 candidates from different parties, who had stood in the biennial polls to 11 seats of the legislative council, were declared elected unopposed on the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers. Kumar reached the Vidhan Sabha secretariat to collect his certificate, accompanied by close aide Rajiv Ranjan Singh ‘Lalan’, whom he succeeded as JD(U) president, and Deputy CMs Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, both from ally BJP. Others who got elected to the Upper House include former chief minister Rabri Devi (RJD), state minister Santosh Suman (HAM) and former minister Mangal Pandey (BJP).

## BANGALURU WATER WOES

# Citizens in tech capital get innovative to tackle worst crisis

PTI ■ BENGALURU

From exploring work from home (WFH) option and shifting to a place with better water facilities and taking bath on alternate days--citizens of India’s tech capital are trying every possible thing to deal with an unprecedented water crisis that has gripped the city. The woes have become a serious issue of concern for Bengealureans , especially in Whitefield, KR Puram, Electronic City, RR Nagar, Kengeri and CV Raman Nagar. Those staying in high rise apartments with water harvesting facilities are also now dependent on tankers for drinking water and many restrictions have been imposed. Eateries in Bengaluru are mulling over use of disposable cups, glasses and plates to avoid excess use of water. Posters with catchy slogans -- “no rain no water,” “water

water everywhere but not a drop to drink”, “conserve water”, among others have been put up at many schools and building associations. Educational institutions are also feeling the pinch. Recently, a coaching centre in the city asked its students to attend classes online due to an ‘emergency’ for a week. Similarly, a school on Bannerghatta Road was also closed, asking students to attend classes online just like they did during the covid pandemic. Meanwhile, some residents of a layout in KR Puram have come up with plans to take bath on alternate days, order food twice a week instead of cooking at home, and restricting water supply to their tenants. People say they are forced to pay more for the tanker water, although the rates have been capped by the government. With temperature rising, it is difficult to avoid a daily shower but they are left with no option but to take bath on

alternative days, said Sujatha, also a resident of KR Puram. “What to do? I have two school going children, plus we have to manage household chores. Clean vessels, cook food, wash clothes....So, we have started using paper plates, that way we have cut down on our water usage. And we order food twice a week. Since we can afford to do that, we are doing it and we are using the washing machine only once in a week now,” she said. Deficit rains last year is being blamed for people’s plight. “We do have facilities for rain water harvesting in our apartment but then we hardly got any rains last year. So, despite having facilities, we could hardly store any water. Now we have been asked by the building association to use water judiciously and one way of doing it was, we have been restricted to water supply at specified intervals,” Shobha, a homemaker living in an high end apartment in Kengeri, said.



Lakshmi V, an IT professional living in Singasandra, has been requesting her firm to allow WFH option so that she and her family can temporarily shift to her native place in Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu until the situation becomes better. “Since the past few weeks we have been experiencing severe water shortage in our area. I have two kids and since

we require more water, we have bought a drum to store water. Our apartment is providing water twice a day. There are four borewells in the premises but water is available only from two of them.” Last week, it became a huge problem for her as even the water tanker suppliers weren’t taking the apartment manager’s call and it further

led to commotion with residents struggling for water. This led to arguments with the building association. “If the situation persists, we are thinking of seeking a work from home option. We are planning to move to our native place in Tamil Nadu temporarily till rain arrives here,” she said. To create awareness and educate children about the water crisis, building associations and schools have started putting up posters in their premises explaining them about the urgent measures to conserve water. “We have started having more discussions about water crisis, climate change, what can be done to curb global warming and carefree usage of water. Lakes and borewells drying up is a major issue of concern and we discuss that...We need to have such discussions from early on in classes so that students are aware and become responsible citizens. We need to catch them young,” said

Rekha Sharma, a science teacher at a private school in the Whitefield area. Some residents in areas of KR Puram and Whitefield said they have already started looking to shift to a place with 24 hour water availability. Krishna, a software engineer living in KR Puram for the last few years said he has never faced such a water crisis. The apartment maintenance charge has gone up by Rs 1,000 due to dependence on water tankers. “I have started looking for a new house; might have to pay more rent but anything for better water supply,” he said. Some malls in the city have also given access to employees of high end shops and buildings in the water affected areas to use their toilets in case of emergency, according to locals. “Most of our borewells have gone dry and we are dependent on water tankers. If there is no rain around Ugadi festival (next month), then we will have to make

alternative arrangements,” Karnataka State Hoteliers Association president Chandrashekar Hebbar told PTI. The government is taking a slew of measures to address the situation. Civic authorities have decided to fill up the drying lakes with 1,300 million litres per day of treated water to replenish groundwater sources in the city, where about 50 per cent of the borewells have dried up. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) will also install filter borewells and construct water plants using an innovative technology near the restored lake beds to supply water after testing, the civic agency officials said. This initiative has been taken up in association with Indian Institute of Science (IISc), BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasanth Manohar said. This is expected to add about 20-30 MLD of water into the system.



# Synchronising polls

The Kovind panel report will spur governance and deepen the democratic rubric

The submission of a much-awaited report on the feasibility and practicality of simultaneous elections across the nation has reignited discussions across the political spectrum. The 18,626-page report, finalised by a committee under the chairpersonship of former President Ram Nath Kovind, has recommended simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, followed within 100 days by concurrent local body elections. To this end, at least five Articles of the Constitution would need amendment. While simultaneous elections offer potential benefits, several considerations and challenges merit attention. The main proposals make it clear that in cases of a hung House or no-confidence motion sailing through, fresh polls may be held for the remainder of the five-year term. The first simultaneous polls would entail Assembly tenures aligning with the Lok Sabha elections, and the Election Commission would create a unified electoral roll and voter ID cards in collaboration with State Election Commissions for all polls. The concept of ‘One Nation, One Election’ has been a subject of debate for quite some time now. Its backers feel it is necessary to reduce the frequency of polls, and that it will spawn several other advantages, including enhanced and continued governance, decreased expenditure, minimal life disruptions and social cohesion, besides providing stability. By aligning the electoral cycles, the Governments can focus more on policymaking and implementation rather than perpetually being in campaign mode. However, the opponents are concerned about logistical challenges, constitutional implications and potential dilution of regional issues in electoral discourse.



Addressing concerns related to federalism and democratic principles while ensuring the synchronisation of electoral cycles poses a formidable challenge. Even if the recommendations are accepted, it would be a long road to actualisation of ‘One Nation, One Election.’ Besides, simultaneous elections might dilute the regional narrative, leading to a focus primarily on national issues. The Kovind panel’s report provides insights into mitigating this risk and preserving the essence of federalism within the framework of simultaneous elections. Also, elections incur substantial costs for the exchequer; simultaneous elections could potentially reduce this financial burden. However, the initial investment required for synchronisation, including infrastructure development and voter education, needs careful consideration. The analysis of financial implications will influence the decision regarding the feasibility of this reform. It would indeed be a good idea to reach a political consensus as every party is a stakeholder. The implications of this report extend beyond administrative efficiency to encompass constitutional, political and financial dimensions. As stakeholders await the findings and recommendations, it is imperative to engage in constructive dialogue to address concerns and chart a path forward that upholds the democratic ethos while enhancing the effectiveness of governance.

## PICTALK



Members of Toda tribal community during the celebrations of temple festival at Mallikorai Mund, in Ooty

# Scientists play key role in a nation’s progress

In times of crisis, society instinctively turns its gaze towards the scientific community, seeking solace and solutions amid turmoil

The public always looks at the scientific community whenever they are in dire straits. Farmers seek help from agriculture scientists when serious pests affect their crops, or there is a drastic decline in productivity. Similarly, the public looks to medical scientists for help whenever a pathogen attacks humans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how, every day, the ordinary person eagerly looked at research work from various labs. Covid-19 reinstated the common man’s confidence in scientists. The current generation that has overcome the COVID-19 catastrophe is deeply indebted to scientists for their lives. Even though there are hundreds of scientific fields, agriculture and health care are close to the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people, and hence, scientists working in these areas need to communicate directly to the public. Scientists working in other fields like communication engineering, space research, civil engineering etc, though highly relevant to the day-to-day life of commoners, never come in direct contact with



them. Whenever humanity is in disarray, scientists bring glee and a ray of hope through their discoveries. In many parts of the world, scientists also create confusion because of conflicts of interest and interference from policymakers. It’s an open secret that most of the food products available in our market are adulterated, and in some cases, they contain toxic substances. Even scientists working in industries will secretly admit it, but they are not allowed to publish the results or speak publicly. Most of the scientific work related to pesticides, drugs etc is linked with industry, and none of the industries will support a genuine scientist. Industries may influence the design of research studies to ensure outcomes align with their objectives. There is always a conflict between proponents of mod-

ern medicine and traditional systems of medicine. Many scientists blatantly state that Ayurvedic or Homeopathic drugs have side effects, forgetting the fact that all modern medicines have severe side effects. Scientists should strive to be impartial in pursuing knowledge and understanding of the natural world. This dedication to objectivity is fundamental to the scientific method, which relies on systematic observation, experimentation, and analysis to uncover truths about the universe. However, scientists, like all humans, are susceptible to personal beliefs and biases that may subtly influence their work. These biases can affect everything from the questions scientists choose to investigate to the interpretation of their findings. Furthermore, external factors such as funding sources, societal pressures, and political climates can also influence scientific research. Research funding, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping the scientific agenda, as scientists often rely on grants from government agencies, private foundations, or industry sponsors

to support their work. The priorities of these funding sources may align with particular agendas or interests, potentially influencing the direction and focus of research. Societal pressures and political influence can also distort scientific results. Despite these challenges, the scientific community is committed to upholding certain principles of objectivity, transparency, and peer review to ensure the integrity of scientific research. While scientists may not always be entirely free from bias, these principles help to minimise the impact of personal beliefs and external influences on the scientific process. The scientific community can maintain public trust and credibility by upholding these standards. Moreover, scientists should proactively engage with societal concerns, prioritising research that tackles urgent issues like public health, and social inequality. If scientists lose public trust, society will be in disarray.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

# Presidential choices make veterans rueful

The United States finds itself in a peculiar predicament where the choice between Biden and Trump feels more like picking the ‘less bad’ option

The United States of America has a strange conundrum of choosing the ‘less bad’ Presidential option amongst geriatrics in Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump. One concerned set of constituents is the fraternity of retired service personnel (from US Armed Forces) or simply, Veterans. Given the size and scale of the standing US Armed Forces and the accompanying global deployments, it is unsurprising that the Veterans community is over 18 million strong. As the US has had a consistent history of ongoing combat duties, Veterans evoke an emotional and hallowed position in the American consciousness. The longstanding American norm of walking up and shaking the hands of a Veteran by saying, “Thank you for your services” is a sacred culture that exemplifies the hallowed position afforded to Veterans, across the partisan and societal divide.

Of the 46 US Presidents to date, an unprecedented 31 had done military service testifying to the image of the ‘Uniform’, in public reverence. At one time, ‘Uniform’ was considered a political millstone for prospective Presidency. Sadly, it is a normalcy on the decline. Today neither of the two Presidential candidates i.e., Trump or Biden, fit the bill on this score. On the contrary, Biden does himself no good by defending his five-student draft deferments, whereas Donald Trump is infamous for his five conscription deferments, during the Vietnam War. In recent times, even the likes of Bill Clinton and George W Bush (with his specious service with the Air National Guard) were criticised for lack of experience. The implicit fear was that as the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, a President bereft of Military Service would be unversed and unempathetic to the institutional realities and Veteran concerns. George H.W. Bush was the last US President to serve in combat. While the campaign spiel and competitive claims by both the contesting candidates towards Veterans in the 2024 Presidential Elections will bear prominence,

the fact is that neither of the two is seen as genuine representative of the realm. While Biden has routinely invoked the Military Service of his late son, Beau Biden, to burnish his militaristic association, it remains an artful contextualization as Beau’s service was that of Judge Advocate General in Iraq for a year – later, Beau had died owing to brain cancer. Many Veterans have questioned Biden’s sincerity like the incident of the Air Force Veteran accosting Biden at an event, “I’m an Air Force veteran. I’m here with an Army veteran. We are just wondering why we should vote for someone who voted for a war and enabled a war that killed thousands of our brothers and sisters, countless Iraqi civilians.” However, even though Republicans always enjoyed a historical bias in terms of Veteran traction, given its conservative and overtly ‘nationalistic’ moorings, Trump is not exactly in the mould of Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, George HW Bush etc., Trump’s Republicanism is more anchored in the commercial sensibilities of its affluent elites, as opposed to martial traditions of Military families that breed reserves of selfless character. Therefore, Trump has had to appropriate the apolitical institution of the Armed Forces with his misplaced



AMERICA’S FUTURE AS A SUPERPOWER IS PREDICATED ON ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ‘ARMED FORCES’ AND THEIR ASSOCIATED DOMAIN OF VETERAN AFFAIRS, YET NEITHER OF THE CONTESTANTS DEMONSTRATES A FAMILIAL OR TOPICAL URGENCY TOWARDS THE VETERANS



BHOPINDER SINGH

commentary of ‘My Generals, walk at Lafayette Square etc., and suchlike unwarranted usurpations. Ironically, he has even poooh-pooohed the Veterans with utter disdain whenever his instincts have taken over. Trump’s former Chief of Staff, John Kelley, has confirmed Trump’s apathy, “A person that thinks those who defend their country in uniform, or are shot down or seriously wounded in combat, or spend years being tortured as POWs are all ‘suckers’ because ‘there is nothing in it for them.’ A person who did not want to be seen in the presence of military amputees because ‘It doesn’t look good for me’. Even Trump’s contempt for ‘Gold Star’ Military families owing to their faith or dislike for rivals like the revered Senator John McCain (distinguished Veteran) or even his purported query about a wounded Army Captain at an event with a query, “Why do you bring people like that here?” and added for the measure, “No one wants to see that, the wounded” reflects the real amorality of Trump. Even Trump’s Defence Secretary and legendary warrior, General James Mattis who was eventually, ‘the last adult in the room’, testified to the inadvertent bluster that was postured as faux ‘muscularity’ in Trump’s drumming

and demeanour. Mattis the proud and apolitical Veteran had mustered all the correctness that he could manage in his resignation note when he suggested that Trump needed a Defense Secretary ‘whose views are better aligned to yours’ – suggesting that no professional, balanced or self-respecting individual could align with an unhinged Trump. Veterans who served partisan governments, couldn’t possibly see individual leaders as bigger entities, than the Constitutional morality of the land. Today both Biden and Trump attempt to profess more sensitivity, care, and concern for the Veterans, and like the choice generally, it is yet another case of a ‘less bad’, rather than ‘good’ choice. America’s future as a Superpower is predicated on its commitment to the ‘Armed Forces’ and their associated domain of Veteran Affairs, yet neither of the contestants demonstrates a familial or topical urgency towards the Veterans. Therefore, partisanship aside, many Veterans feel that their service has been taken for granted and they have no better choice. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BIDEN AND TRUMP FACE OFF

Sir — This is concerning the article “The US presidential race intensifies” (March 13, 2024). The process of presidential elections in America in November has progressed to the point where it is almost clear that President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will face off again. The Super Tuesday results showed them to be far ahead of their opponents, and the next day, Nikki Haley eliminated all questions by stating that she was postponing the campaign to become the Republican nominee. The US presidential elections will feature only the same candidates for the second time in a row, a first since 1956. Second, both candidates are elderly. Two-thirds of those polled in February believed Biden was no longer old enough to work for the government. Nearly half of the respondents expressed the same way about Trump. The serious allegations against former President Trump are also making these elections unique. It is unclear when the court will rule on these charges. Everyone’s attention is focused on what will happen if the court rules against Trump before the election. These claims are also fueling intense resentment on both sides during a presidential race. While Biden has branded Trump as a threat to America’s very survival, Trump continues to claim victory in the 2020 elections. Leaving aside these internal challenges, neither candidate’s victory would result in a significant shift in America’s foreign policy. Aside from modest efforts to balance the Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, America now has few options. On the other hand, America’s future posture will be heavily influenced by the desire to contain China’s growing aggression.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

### PROTECTING RIVERS

Sir — Though rivers are national assets, there is little awareness among the people about ways to preserve their purity and utility. Besides being indispensable for day-to-day use, including agricultural purposes, they serve as a great inland mode of trans-

### China’s hollow claims



China’s protest against PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh is a continuation of its desperate attempts to lay illegal claim on Arunachal Pradesh, the integral and inalienable part of India. China can’t stomach Modi’s inauguration of strategically significant Sela Tunnel

portation that can bolster trade and commerce. Biodiversity would have been a thing of the past but for the rivers. The river system, of course, is Earth’s highest biological diversity zone. International Day of Action for Rivers aims at spreading awareness through campaigns on the importance of rivers and their protection. Only about ten per cent of the river basins in the world are protected. Dams, encroachments and deforestation have threatened their very existence. Therefore, saving and celebrating rivers cannot be overstated. Campaign against the construction of dams is an integral part of “saving rivers” because preserving free-flowing rivers is the key. It is indisputable that “water is for all.” That said, it is every citizen’s responsibility to keep the nation’s rivers clean and pollution-free devoid of dump and industrial wastage. A country’s rivers cannot be allowed to become sites for garbage and sewage disposal. River management, river pollution and river conservation are three areas that have seized the attention of experts. More than thirty countries come together on the International Day of Action for Rivers to take stock of the international rivers, and ways to upkeep them.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in India’s territory. The world’s longest twin-lane tunnel will ease pressure on the existing infrastructure, specifically the Balipara-Chariduar-Tawang road, which faces issues from landslides, snow, and heavy rainfall. The road link is expected to help India shore up defence along the nuclear-armed neighbours’ 3,500-kilometer Line of Actual Control (LAC). India and China have also been locked in a border stand-off in the eastern Ladakh region since 2020 when a deadly hand-to-hand clash broke out. China’s tactic of laying illegal claims on the territories of its neighbours is a well-known fact. Thus, objections raised by it are hollow as long as India develops the regions well within its boundaries.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

### ENFORCE LAWS ON PLASTIC MISUSE

Sir — Despite knowing the harmful effects of plastic, the government is not serious about enforcing laws against its rampant use. People also turn a blind eye to the plastic menace. They have become accustomed to the use-and-throw culture, and don’t bother to carry shopping bags. Users don’t even think twice before throwing a plastic bag perhaps because it comes cheap. Do we ever think about how thick the plastic bag given to us in shopping malls is? About 15 per cent of all garbage is plastic; only 50 per cent of it is recycled. Despite being long-lasting, plastic bags are thrown away after a single use. Plastic remains in the earth for a long time, cutting air and water supply to the soil, and tremendously affecting the growth of plants. It reduces the water-retaining capacity of the soil. In the monsoon, plastic gets collected in drains and blocks the passage of water which causes waterlogging and floods, which in turn give rise to water-borne diseases.

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TEPA DEAL IS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement is a game changer



India signing a low-hanging trade agreement with four European countries, earlier this week, marks a new chapter in the policy outlook going forward. For starters the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), India managed to close with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member countries (comprising of Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein) is a first of its kind with developed countries from the Western world.

It would be worth mentioning that India has been trying to sign trade agreements (FTAs) with the Western world, particularly the larger European Union, the UK and in the long run with the US for several years. However, all of these negotiations, which tend to get extremely complex, when dealing with Western nations, due to divergences in priorities, failed to fructify into something meaningful, in decades. India's external economic policy outlook, for a very long, including the early years of PM Narendra Modi's government, prioritised the domestic sector, over a more integrated new world trade-based economy. This had also raised concerns about the current government's priorities being too protectionist, which in plain English meant providing artificial government shield to, often, inefficient domestic manufacturing, leading to high-cost, low-quality products and services for the domestic market.

India had also walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (one of the largest multilateral trade agreements among ASEAN members and Australia, China, Japan, South Korea etc) after multiple rounds of negotiations, citing a disproportionate advantage to China in the agreement. This left little room for the Indian economy to grow and get more investments, create fresh employment and provide the necessary fillip to exports, however, things began to change during the second term of PM Modi beginning in 2019.



At a time when the global chorus started shifting to being more protectionist, i.e. trying to save their domestic industry, as a result of the Covid Pandemic, the Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia, India managed to sign two early harvest trade agreements with UAE and Australia in record time. This was a signal to the world that India is willing to negotiate at the trade table (being the fifth largest economy serves as a good bait) and get further integrated with the global economy, of course, on terms that are mutually beneficial for all participating partners. India is currently in deep negotiations with the UK for signing an FTA, whose final signing was being tuned up as another feather in the current government's economic successes, however, it will have to wait longer for eco-political reasons.

The UAE trade agreement had also opened doors for India to negotiate a similar deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council (where UAE is also an influential member) but the West Asian crisis may delay the negotiations. It may be mentioned here, that, the Oman FTA has a definite stellar output record from the commerce ministry. Coming back to the TEPA, commerce minister Piyush Goyal during the announcement underscored "The agreement will give a boost to Make in India and provide opportunities to young & talented workforce. The FTA will provide a window to Indian exporters to access large European and global markets."

TEPA heavily relies on a nearly \$100 billion investment commitment from the EFTA members in a fifteen-year window, which could serve as an important benchmark and a template for signing similar deals with other developed nations. India and the EU have taken several steps to arrive at some sort of a free trade agreement, albeit, negotiating with 27 member countries' union may be slightly more complex. The message from India, which has tasted high growth years, despite several setbacks from global headwinds, is clear, the domestic market is open for business and Indian exporters are confident to win the world.

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

# India, Mauritius forge strategic ties

The joint inauguration of India-assisted projects on the Agalega island of Mauritius marks a significant milestone in the strategic partnership between the nations



The joint inauguration of India-assisted projects such as an airstrip, community development projects and a jetty in the Agalega island of Mauritius shows the increasing concern over the need to change the existing — and also evolve a new — strategic approach to not only enhance economic and commercial cooperation but also ensure strategic surveillance and security of Indian Ocean Area. The virtual Conference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritius PM Pravind Jugnauth is a new cornerstone in building up close cooperation through multiple projects such as the India-assisted Aushadhi scheme (providing high-quality medicines) commercial and economic cooperation, humanitarian relief assistance and joint patrolling. This also fulfils the main thrust of the Indian Foreign Policy principle: "Neighbourhood First Policy" and Mauritius's multiple needs in health, security and economic areas. The Indo-Mauritius coordination is a step forward to add a new country to India's new strategic vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in Region) Besides, it also brings an important fact to light that India and Mauritius need to diversify their strategies to counter the challenges both face from Pakistan and China.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, the spreading tentacles of transnational terrorism and the over-ambitious mission of Chinese dominance across the globe have created serious problems for international security. While the world is still grappling with the deadly spikes of war and terror, the issue of sea security is taking the forefront of global politics. The Leading Realist in IR John Mearsheimer once conceded that states always seek to maximise their power and prowess to achieve security. Realism also contends that states prioritise maintaining their security and status quo power over aggressive expansion, focusing on balancing against threats rather than seeking dominance. It provides a theoretical rationale for comprehending the complex rigmarole in the fluid power equations and how the changing dynamics of Asia particularly around IOA shape India's defence strategies. There is an increasing tendency of actors in International relations to cluster around the powerful one in the system. China's expansionist mission has vindicated Raymond Aron's observation correctly. Aron once conceded that "The two most typical models are called multipolar and bipolar: either the chief actors, whose forces are not too unequal, are relatively numerous, or, on the contrary, two actors dominate their rivals to such a degree that both become the centre of a coalition and the secondary actors are obliged to situate themselves about the two "blocs", thus joining one or another, unless they have the opportunity to abstain. Intermediary models are possible, depending on the number of chief actors and the degree of equality or inequality of forces among the chief actors". These are changing times and many changes have occurred in International relations recently. Sharing and working on a common strategic vision and a combined approach to ensure mutual economic prosperity and approaching through a multi-layered and multilateral strategy if the situation demands is going to dominate the world order in the coming days. What is required is to develop a fresh perspective for a more mature reliance on international cooperation between nations to



enunciate a new strategy of retaliation, threatening a severe response to any attempt to destabilise the order.

In this direction To counter the increasing tentacles of Chinese aggressiveness endangering India's Maritime Security through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), deployment of Naval bases in the IOC areas, Naval base in Djibouti, construction of Gwadar Port to help Pakistan, its policy of Strings of Pearls through which China is encircling India by enhancing strategic partnerships with IOR countries India has reached out to its neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius and had a defence strategy of developing coastal Radar System between these countries. Besides, it has already started a Fusion system to provide information related to the security of the Indian Ocean Region. The recent procurement of an India-Russia Joint Venture BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile for the Indian Navy and aero-engine for MIG-29 Jets for the Indian Air Force are major initiatives to enhance India's defence capabilities.

India has also developed a Necklace of Diamonds Strategy and is establishing a Changi Naval Service Base in Singapore, CHABAHAR PORT IN IRAN AND PORTS IN MYANMAR AND OMAN

ty and protecting economic interests.

The increasing support and agreement about limiting climate change issues and opening up gateways for renewable energy and development in technological know-how along with channelising the sources of power generation and creating a mechanism to withstand any sudden threat posed by BRI (Belt and Road Initiatives) augur well for peace and prosperity of all the member countries. There has always been a series of extremely good relationships between India and its neighbouring countries about trade share having crossed a decent landmark during the last half a decade which was way more than expected.

The recent efforts by India to protect IOA's security through cooperation with Mauritius would further boost and cement their ties and create a genuine environment for stabilising economic growth, (along with ensuring the free flow of goods and services) strategic security, prosperity, stability and combating sudden challenges arising due to climate change and maritime and border threat. Further, the panel discussion focusing on "The Quad Squad: Power and Purpose of the Polygon," during early 2023 provided another step towards solving the expansionist plans.

The member countries showed their commitment to support Pacific Island countries with regional institutions through cooperation in several areas along with the terror such as climate change, resilient infrastructure, and maritime security to strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The role of India's leadership in finalising the IORA in India-Pacific areas was greatly appreciated and became even more important due to its impeccable reputation. Further negotiation may lead to the creation of a strategic mechanism to provide a shield against maritime security,

piracy, drug trafficking, armed robbery, terrorism, international crime, smuggling and cyber threats unleashed by any non-state actor as well. This may also accelerate maritime-friendly ties and bolster security around the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific areas which have lately become areas of concern.

Hence, a collaborative partnership among the nations around the Indian Ocean Area through equity and access to those who are in need at the time of unprecedented crisis may show the level of insight in empowering and motivating people across the board towards extending a helping hand and saving lives. Besides, the pursuit towards the promotion of their well-being would lead to tremendous effort towards enhancement of the overall development scenario in India and neighbouring countries. The sum and substance of the idea is to ensure that the New structural Thinking and orientation changes through a fresh perspective and a framework for key demands while maintaining a synergy among various stakeholders to negotiate even on the issues of different perspectives.

Since then, cooperation among Quad Group countries has set a new road map through diplomatic endeavours towards building a new apparatus for the management of terrorism. Foreign relations are operated through efficient diplomacy and diplomacy is all about the right gestures cooperation and coordination at times of crisis. India is indeed a leading partner in this regard. India is a mature democracy and its leaders are capable of cashing in on any opportunity and strategy that's a combination of tactful strength and resilience.

*(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award, is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)*

# Remembering Johan Galtung: A pioneer in peace research

## A visionary thinker and dedicated peace activist, Galtung has left an indelible mark on our understanding of conflict resolution

The world of peace research and conflict resolution mourns the loss of one of its most influential figures, Johan Galtung, who passed away on February 17, 2024. Johan Galtung, born in Oslo, Norway, in 1930, was not just a visionary thinker but also a prolific writer and dedicated peace activist whose legacy continues to reverberate within the field today.

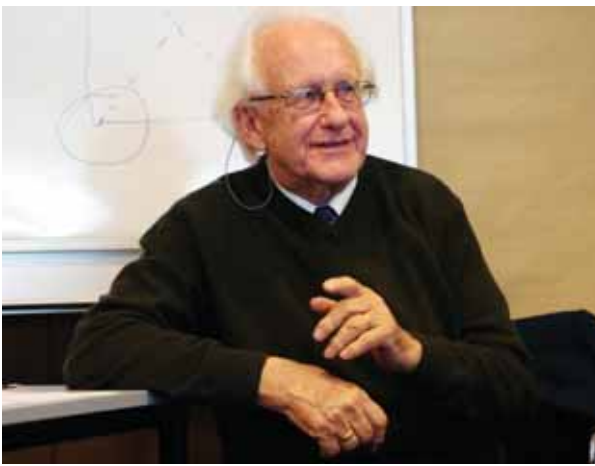
Growing up amidst the turmoil of World War II, Galtung's experiences deeply influenced his worldview and spurred his lifelong dedication to understanding and resolving conflicts. He devoted his career to exploring innovative approaches to peacebuilding, drawing from



diverse disciplines such as sociology, psychology, political science, and economics. Galtung's pivotal contributions to peace research led to the establishment of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) in 1959. PRIO served as a pioneering interdisciplinary hub, fostering collaborative research endeavours aimed at comprehensively understanding conflict origins and

developing effective strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. His leadership at PRIO facilitated the exchange of methodologies and ideas among scholars globally, nurturing a vibrant intellectual community dedicated to advancing peace. Initiatives like the Transcend Network for Peace, Development, and Environment exemplified Galtung's commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation among scholars, policymakers, and grassroots activists worldwide. Throughout history, leaders and activists have emphasised the transformative power of collaborative efforts in promoting peace and non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-

violent resistance mobilised millions during India's independence movement, showcasing the potential for collective action to bring about profound social and political change. Similarly, Nelson Mandela's emphasis on reconciliation and collaboration across racial divides in South Africa led to initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, aimed at healing past wounds through dialogue and understanding. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's advocacy for the African philosophy of Ubuntu further emphasised the importance of recognising our shared humanity in promoting peace and justice. More recently, figures like Malala Yousafzai have cham-



pioned education as a tool for peace, inspiring a global movement to ensure every child's right to education and opportunity. One of Galtung's enduring

contributions is his concept of "structural violence," which highlights the underlying structural causes of violence such as poverty, inequality, and discrimina-

tion embedded within societal structures. This concept remains relevant today, as issues like racism and global economic disparities continue to fuel conflicts worldwide. Galtung's advocacy for non-violent conflict resolution continues to inspire peacebuilders and activists worldwide. His emphasis on dialogue, empathy, and cooperation offers practical tools for building sustainable peace in today's conflicted world.

Contemporary movements for social justice and human rights, such as Black Lives Matter, draw inspiration from Galtung's ideas about the power of non-violent resistance and grassroots mobilisation to challenge

systemic injustice. In reflecting on Galtung's legacy, we must draw upon his teachings to develop innovative approaches that promote peace, justice, and human dignity for all.

His profound impact on education and social transformation persists beyond his passing, serving as a guiding light for future endeavours in the pursuit of a more peaceful and just world. As Galtung himself said, "Peace is not a fixed state, but a process that requires constant attention and effort." It is up to each of us to contribute to this ongoing work.

*(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Sansthan, views are personal)*



# US soil being used for terrorist activities against India: Community leaders tell DOJ and FBI

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A group of eminent Indian Americans in Silicon Valley has held a special meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, FBI and police and told that the US soil is being used for terrorist activities against India. The group held the meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, FBI and local police this week on increasing hate crimes against Hindus in California. During the meeting, Indian Americans expressed their displeasure and dissatisfaction that the law enforcement agencies in the US have not been able to take any action against those who are espousing terrorism activities in India, according to multiple persons present in the meeting. The meeting to address the challenging issue of the rise in

hate crimes against Hindu and Jain places of worship was held at the initiative of community leader Ajai Jain Bhutoria. It was attended by about two dozen eminent Indian Americans. Vincent Plair and Harpreet Singh Mokha from the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service along with FBI officials and those from the police departments of San Francisco, Milpitas, Fremont and Newark attended the meeting. The sudden increase in hate crimes against Indian Americans in general and the Hindus in particular is causing a lot of fear and anxiety in the community, said the Indian Americans after the meeting which was closed to the press. There is a fear in the community right now. The Khalistan people park trucks outside schools, and Indian grocery stores and intimidate young

Indian Americans. Several community members expressed their anger that the law enforcement agencies have not been able to take any action against those people, including those who tried to burn the Indian consulate in San Francisco, and are openly threatening Indian diplomats and giving open calls for terrorist incidents in India. Some of the members present in the meeting told PTI that senior law enforcement officials said that they were not aware of the Khalistan movement in the US and wanted the Indian Americans to help them raise awareness about these terrorist groups in the US. They also said that they have not been able to take action because of a lack of resources and funds and that they have other top priorities. This meeting was a crucial moment as we united to con-

front the recent surge in hate crimes targeting Hindu places of worship. I brought together Indian community leaders, DOJ, FBI, and law enforcement officials from Milpitas, SF, Fremont, and Newark. In the last four months, over 11 temples in the Bay Area alone have been attacked, vandalised, and defaced with hateful graffiti. The fear in our community is palpable, but our collective resolve is stronger than ever," Bhutoria said. "We delved into safeguarding places of worship and tackling hate crimes, notably those involving Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) Khalistani supporters targeting Hindu Temples, displaying disturbing banners in front of schools and corporate establishments. In our discourse, we explored the prospect of organising a Protecting all Places of Worship Forum (PPOW) with the DOJ," said Sikh leader

Sukhi Chahal. Chahal said he personally underscored the significance of addressing the provocative and threatening video messages from SFJ pro-Khalistan separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannu. "I urged FBI and DOJ officials to earnestly consider the potential repercussions of Mr Pannu's statements on peace, harmony, and India-US relations. It is paramount that we collectively work to mitigate the impact of such hateful messages, which have the potential to disturb societal tranquility and radicalise the youth," he said. Following the meeting, it was agreed that a working group will be formed under the guidance of the US Department of Justice that will actively pursue safety measures at places of worship and systemic reporting of any unwanted act. The working group would have

representations from various sections of the Indian community. The community leaders expressed concerns that the police were not of much help to them in either addressing this increasing fear or stopping terror activities from the US against India. When pressed on the issue of Khalistan, the law enforcement officials said that they don't understand the context and they need to be educated on this matter. One of the Indian Americans told the FBI that the Khalistan leaders are openly threatening to blow up Air India planes and they openly carry messages around targeting Hindus. Another Indian American said that the FBI is not contradicting the claims by some of the Khalistan leaders that the FBI is supporting them, one of the participants said.

# Hinduphobia on the rise in the US, says Congressman

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US of late has seen a rise in Hinduphobia which needs to be fought because there is no place for hatred in this country, Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar has said, as he joined a group of Hindu leaders and organisations seeking to fight this growing hate crime against the community. Representatives of various Indian American groups met on Wednesday at the US Capitol during a meeting organised by HinduAction. "We see a lot of Hindu phobia. We see California SB403 (the bill banning caste discrimination), and that's just the beginning. The attacks on our temples and attacks on Hindus all over the world. That is one of the reasons why I decided to form the Hindu Caucus," Thanedar said. "For the first time in the United States Congress, we have a Hindu Caucus. Number of initiatives we are taking to ensure that people have religious freedom to practice their religion the way they want to and not be, we need to fight this phobia, bigotry, and hatred. Because there should be no place for hatred in America, no place for hatred against people's religious rights. And so that's what we are focusing on in Congress," Thanedar, a Democrat, said. Suhag Shukla from the Hindu American Foundation said that college campuses in particular are experiencing rampant anti-Hindu bias and hate. She also listed out some of the major incidents of hate crime against the Hindu community in the US. "Just in the past two years we've seen a spike in anti-Hindu incidents," she said. There's unfamiliarity and there is complacency amongst law enforcement, she said. "The perpetrators that have been caught on video with all the temple attacks that I've

mentioned, all of the street attacks that I've mentioned, the statements that are made during the commission of the attacks, the nature and content of the graffiti all point to the Khalistan movement," she said. "When there are people from within the Sikh community who are speaking out against this movement, they've been physically attacked," Shukla said. Referring to SB403, she said there is institutionalised discrimination. Silicon Valley-based entrepreneur Sunder Iyer, a victim of targeted hate, told the participants that he learned that a civil rights agency can racially profile and violently stereotype Indian Americans. "I respectfully ask the members of Congress to allocate a budget within the Department of Justice to investigate the California Civil Rights Department and for the greater good of America. An agency that does not represent the truth harms all Americans. Several of my colleagues at Cisco and many other companies across California will be willing to give testimony. They must not live their lives in fear and their voices must not be suppressed," Iyer said. An increase in recent attacks on the temples is emotionally very disturbing to the executives of the temple and community at large, said Tejal Shah of the Hindu Temple Empowerment Council. Temple Priests face mental anguish, shock and trauma, she said. Observing that perpetrators of many of those attacks have not been found, Shah said in one case the police resisted registering a report. She listed out attacks on some of the temples. Later a joint declaration by HinduAction and Namaste-Shalom Multifaith Alliance urged the Congress to formally recognise rising anti-Hindu hate through a resolution.

# Zardari assures Xi of closer ties

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's newly-elected President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday promised his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that he would work closely with him to deepen the all-weather strategic partnership with Beijing and in the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Zardari, the husband of late Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto was elected as the 14th President of Pakistan on Saturday, becoming the only civilian president of the coup-prone country for a second time. Responding to Xi's congratulatory message to him on his re-election as the President of Pakistan, Zardari said, "Our solid friendship serves as an anchor for regional peace, stability and development." He emphasised that Pakistan and China shared a unique bond forged in the crucible of history and nurtured by mutual respect, understanding, and

common views on all global issues. Zardari expressed his commitment to "working closely with the Chinese President to deepen practical cooperation, strengthen the all-weather partnership, and foster a shared community for the benefit of the two countries." "Pakistan and China were not merely neighbours, but iron-clad brothers fully committed to the success of our All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership." Zardari noted with satisfaction that Pakistan and China had made significant progress in the diverse fields of bilateral cooperation, particularly in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He said President Xi's support would remain instrumental in achieving the CPEC's continued development and meeting the two peoples' shared objectives of progress and prosperity. In his message to Zardari on Sunday, soon after his re-election, Xi said "China and

Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers, adding that the two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples." President Xi said that "the two countries have in recent years maintained close high-level exchanges, supported each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations." The USD 60 billion CPEC is a 3,000-km Chinese infrastructure network project under construction in Pakistan. It connects strategic Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, giving Beijing an opening to the Arabian Sea. India is opposed to the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

## Arrest warrants of Nawaz Sharif's sons cancelled

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a major relief to ex-Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif's family, an anti-corruption court on Thursday cancelled the permanent arrest warrants against his two sons, who recently returned from the UK after a seven-year self-imposed exile. Hassan Nawaz and Hussain Nawaz left the country in 2018 after they were named in the 2016 Panama Papers scandal. They faced charges in cases related to the Panama Papers but never appeared before the courts, which declared them absconders. The brothers returned to Pakistan on Tuesday after an Islamabad anti-corruption court suspended the perpetual arrest warrants against the two until Thursday, clearing the last hurdle for their safe return to the country.

# PPP wins four of the six seats in Senate bypoll

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) got the lion's share in the Senate by-elections on Thursday by winning four of the six seats in the polls held to fill the vacant seats in the upper house of Parliament. The polling for the six Senate seats in the National Assembly, Sindh and Balochistan provincial assemblies began at 9 am and ended at 4 pm. The seats had fallen vacant when the senators were elected as members of National or provincial assemblies in the general elections held on February 8. Article 223 of the Constitution bars dual membership. The National Assembly lawmakers voted to elect one senator while the members of Balochistan and Sindh elected three and two senators respectively. Former prime minister Yusuf

Raza Gilani, who was a joint candidate of the newly-formed eight-party ruling coalition, won in the National Assembly, polling 204 of the 301 votes cast, while his rival Sunni Ittehad Council's Ilyas Mehrban got only 88 votes. Nine votes were rejected during the vote count. Gilani is expected to become the Senate Chairman of the ruling coalition.

The PPP also won two seats from Sindh for which polling was held in the Sindh Assembly. Jam Saifullah Khan Dharejo and Muhammad Aslam Abro were elected by obtaining 58 and 57 votes respectively. Nazeerullah and Shazia Sohail of the Sunni Ittehad Council got four votes each. One vote was rejected.

The total strength of the Senate is 100, including 23 members each from the four federating units, and four each from the erstwhile tribal region and Islamabad.

# Israel says it plans to direct Palestinians out of Rafah

AP ■ TEL AVIV

The Israeli military said on Wednesday it plans to direct a significant portion of the 1.4 million displaced Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip's southernmost town of Rafah toward "humanitarian islands" in the centre of the territory ahead of its planned offensive in the area. The fate of the people in Rafah has been a major area of concern of Israel's allies — including the United States — and humanitarian groups, worried an offensive in the region densely crowded with so many displaced people would be a catastrophe. Rafah is also Gaza's main entry point for desperately needed aid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a Rafah offensive is crucial to achieve Israel's stated aim of destroying Hamas following the militants' October 7 attack in which about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and around 250 taken hostage and brought into Gaza. Israel's invasion of Gaza has killed more than 31,000, according to Gaza health officials, left much of the enclave in ruins and displaced some 80 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people. Israel's chief military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said moving those in



Rafah to the designated areas, which he said would be done in coordination with international actors, was a key part of the military's preparations for its anticipated invasion of Rafah, where Israel says Hamas maintains four battalions it wants to destroy. Rafah has swelled in size in the last months as Palestinians in Gaza have fled fighting in nearly every other corner of the territory. The town is covered in tents. "We need to make sure that 1.4 million people or at least a significant amount of the 1.4 million will move. Where? To humanitarian islands that we will create with the international community," Hagari told reporters at a briefing. Hagari said those islands would provide temporary housing, food, water and other necessities

to evacuated Palestinians. He did not say when Rafah's evacuation would occur, nor when the Rafah offensive would begin, saying that Israel wanted the timing to be right operationally and to be coordinated with neighbouring Egypt, which has said it does not want an influx of displaced Palestinians crossing its border. The US has been firm with Israel over its concerns about Rafah, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that Washington had yet to receive from Israel its plans for civilians there. "We need to see a plan that will get civilians out of harm's way if there's a military operation in Rafah," he told reporters in Washington after convening a virtual ministerial meeting on Gaza aid with officials from the UN, the EU, Britain. Cyprus,

Qatar and the UAE. "We've not yet seen such a plan." At the start of the war, Israel directed evacuees to a slice of undeveloped land along Gaza's Mediterranean coast that it designated as a safe zone. But aid groups said there were no real plans in place to receive large numbers of displaced there. Israeli strikes also targeted the area. More than 31,270 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and most of its 2.3 million people forced from their homes, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. Israel blames the civilian death toll on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, residential areas. The military has said it has killed 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence. Meanwhile, fighting continued across Gaza. An Israeli strike on Wednesday hit a food distribution site in southern Gaza run by UNRWA, the UN agency that works with Palestinian refugees, killing one staff member from the agency and wounding 22 others. The death brings to 165 the number of workers for the agency killed during the past five months of fighting, according to UNRWA.

# UK tightens definition of extremism to counter right-wing, Islamist extremists

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government on Thursday issued a new "more precise" definition of extremism in response to increased threats since the October 2023 Hamas terror attacks in Israel and to protect liberal democratic principles against extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists. Extremism in the UK is now defined as the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to: negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in the first two categories. The previous definition, introduced in 2011 under the government's Prevent strategy, defined extremism as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and belief". UK Levelling Up and Communities Secretary Michael Gove said the update was needed to safeguard the UK as a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy

"success story", which is stronger because of its diversity. "But our democracy and our values of inclusivity and tolerance are under challenge from extremists. In order to protect our democratic values, it is important both to reinforce what we have in common and to be clear and precise in identifying the dangers posed by extremism," said Gove. "The pervasiveness of extremist ideologies has become increasingly clear in the aftermath of the 7 October (2023) attacks and poses a real risk to the security of our citizens and our democracy. This is the work of extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists who are seeking to separate Muslims from the rest of society and create division within Muslim communities," he said. "They seek to radicalise individuals, deny people their full rights, suppress freedom of expression, incite hatred, and undermine our democratic institutions," he added. The minister said the new measures will ensure that the government does not inadvertently provide a platform to those setting out to subvert democracy and deny other people's fundamental rights. He also indicated it marks the first in a series of measures to tackle extremism and protect British democracy.

The new definition is not statutory, does not create new powers and has no effect on the existing criminal law of the country, but instead applies to the operations of the government itself. It will be used by ministerial departments and officials alongside a set of engagement principles to ensure they are not "inadvertently" funding or legitimising groups or individuals who attempt to advance extremist ideologies. Since the October 2023 Hamas terror attacks in Israel, the government said concerns have been raised about the "wideranging risk of radicalisation". The Community Security Trust recorded 4,103 antisemitic incidents in the UK since the attacks in 2023, an increase of 147 per cent compared to 2022, and Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) recorded a 335 per cent increase in anti-Muslim hate cases in the last four months. As indicated by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Parliament on Wednesday, the aim is to ensure the government has the tools it needs to effectively counter extremism. A new counter-extremism centre of excellence has been established in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to provide leadership for the cross-government counter-extremism community, ensure

consistent application of the definition and engagement standards, and take the lead on producing strategic assessments of extremism. The government said the new unit will draw on the expertise of the Commission for Countering Extremism as well as counter extremism policy fellows to ensure the "very best academic insight" in shaping the anti-extremism approach. The new definition, which draws on independent reviews, clarifies extremism involves advancing or promoting an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, a high bar that only captures the most concerning of activities. It is not about silencing those with private and peaceful beliefs and will it affect free speech, which will always be protected, the government reiterated. "The threat to Britain from extremists includes those who may not use violence directly yet target our core values, so it is welcome that this updated definition includes those who seek to undermine or replace liberal democracy. Greater clarity in defining extremism can underpin a concerted approach across civil society to protect our country," said Lord John Walney, UK's Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption.

# Indian tourists shun Maldives; industry feels the pinch: Reports

PTI ■ MALE

Indian tourists, who used to flock to the Maldives, are now shunning the island nation and its tourism industry is already feeling the pinch of declined revenue, prompting calls for mending the fence with New Delhi. India has slipped to sixth position in 2024 compared to being a topper in visitor numbers in 2023, prompting voices from the local tourism industry to flag the danger for the tourism-dependent economy of the archipelagic country in the Indian Ocean.

A full-blown backlash was directed at the Maldives following derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian officials after Modi posted photos and video of the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast on January 6 on his X handle. According to the Maldives Tourism Ministry statistics, over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, out of which more than 2,09,198 visitors were Indians followed by Russians (2,09,146) and China (1,87,118). The number of Indian visitors

was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period. India occupied the sixth spot in tourist arrivals in 2024, the Ministry's statistics showed, compared to the consistent first spot since 2020 with Indian tourists visiting the island nation even during the pandemic time. Till about 10 days ago, the Ministry data showed that

tourist arrivals from India as of March 2 was 27,224, which is a 33 per cent decline compared to last year when the corresponding number stood at 41,224. The local tourism industry is worried about the development and already flagged caution. Explaining how India plays a vital role in sustaining tourism-related receipts to the state during off-peak season, a news portal Sun.mv said: "Indian travellers have a counter-travel pattern to European travellers; meaning Indian visitors frequent to the Maldives during hot seasons, which coincides with a

drop in European market arrivals. In other words, India is the most significant 'filler' for the Maldives tourism off-peak season." It further reported on Tuesday, how, tourism industry experts and analysts have highlighted the adverse impacts of dwindling Indian arrivals to the Maldives, while some have forecast estimated losses north of USD 1.8 billion to USD 2 billion. "Travel agencies and operators relying on Indian arrivals report a revenue decline of 80 per cent — a dangerous prospect," the report said.

Quoting an official from 'Let's Go Maldives', a prominent travel agency, the portal said, the Indian traveller market consists of multiple demographics and segments from affluent to budget travellers and India is a large summer market. "Without India, the occupancy rate is impacted negatively. This makes it a crucial market for us," the official added. It is not just the Indian passport holders that have boycotted the Maldives but "the arrival of affluent and wealthy Indian-origin travellers from other nations as well has declined, which too

indicated the contribution of the Indian market in Maldives tourism, the news report said quoting a prominent travel agency, Travel Connection Maldives' CEO Mohamed Mirshad. Authorities are hoping that the resumption of direct flights between Hanimaadhoo International Airport in Maldives and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala state of India would bring back some more visitors from India. "This is the most opportune moment for the island nation to mend fences with its ally. It is

also logical that the smaller countries are in need of security and safety ensured by their larger allies. Any conduct to the contrary would not result fortuitously for the Maldives, as evident with the current tourism industry statistics and revenues," Sun.mv said. "Arrogance will not benefit us, it would damage the sensitive economy of the country even further. True wisdom lies in accepting one's own weaknesses and strengths, and the reality that we live in to avoid any future brunt," it added.



# Seven more Nepalese citizens serving Russian Army killed

Total number of deaths 19, says Nepal's foreign ministry

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Seven more Nepalese citizens serving the Russian Army in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have died in the last week, taking the total number of deaths to 19, the foreign ministry said on Thursday. Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs latest update on the toll came two days after Deputy Prime Minister Kaji Shrestha asked Russia to share a list of Nepalese citizens serving the Russian Army in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war but stressed that complications remained in bringing them back from the war zone. He also met the Russian Ambassador to Nepal Aleksei

Novikov on Tuesday over the matter when the latter called on him. In a statement issued on Thursday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the deaths of seven more Nepali nationals who were fighting from the Russian side in the Russia-Ukraine war. "With the deaths of 7 more Nepalese citizens with the Russian Army, the total number of such cases have touched 19," said the statement. The ministry said that the deaths of Nepali nationals in the Russian Army come even as the Nepal government has banned the recruitment of Nepali nationals in foreign armies except for those coun-

tries with whom Nepal has signed a traditional agreement. The ministry has extended heartfelt condolences to the families of those killed in Ukraine. The ministry said it has once again requested the Russian government to provide compensation to the kin of deceased soldiers, to provide treatment to those injured in the war and to repatriate those recruited illegally into the Russian Army. Nepal government has placed top priority on the works relating to repatriating those Nepalese nationals who have been recruited into the Russian Army, the ministry said. Hundreds of Nepali citizens are

reported fighting for the Russians against Ukraine. A small number of Nepali citizens are serving in the Ukrainian Army too, but both conflicting nations have not shared the details with the government of Nepal. On March 7, Shrestha held a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and raised the concerns of the Nepali side. Shrestha also reportedly said that he wants to visit Russia and take stock of the condition of the Nepali nationals in Russia. He said he is keen to know how Nepali nationals were duped and brought to Russia and talk to Russian officials to resolve the issue.

# Report claims Yemen's Houthis have a hypersonic missile

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim to have a new, hypersonic missile in their arsenal, Russia's state media reported on Thursday, potentially raising the stakes in their ongoing attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The report by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency cited an unnamed official but provided no evidence for the claim. It comes as Moscow maintains an aggressively counter-Western foreign policy amid its grinding war on Ukraine. However, the Houthis have for weeks hinted about "surprises" they plan for the battles at sea to counter the United States and its allies, which have so far been able to down any missile or bomb-carrying drone that comes near their warships in Mideast waters. The Houthis' main benefactor, Iran, claims to have a hypersonic missile and has widely armed the rebels with the missiles they now use. Adding a hypersonic missile to their arsenal could pose a more-for-



midable challenge to the air defense systems employed by America and its allies, including Israel. "The group's missile forces have successfully tested a missile that is capable of reaching speeds of up to Mach 8 and runs on solid fuel," a military official close to the Houthis said, according to the RIA report. The Houthis "intend to begin manufacturing it for use during attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as against targets in Israel." Mach 8 is eight times the speed of sound. Russia has maintained close ties with Iran, relying on Iranian bomb-carrying drones to target Ukraine. Russian state media, particularly its Arabic-language services, have closely reported on Yemen's yearslong

civil war that pits the Iran-backed Houthis against forces of the internationally backed Yemeni government, supported by a Saudi-led coalition. Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds higher than Mach 5, could pose crucial challenges to missile defence systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

The danger from a hypersonic missile depends on how maneuverable it is. Ballistic missiles fly on a trajectory in which anti-missile systems like the US-made Patriot can anticipate their path and intercept them. The more irregular the missile's flight path, such as a hypersonic missile with the ability to change directions, the more difficult it becomes to intercept. China is believed to be pursuing the weapons, as is America. Russia claims it has already used them on the battlefield in Ukraine. However, speed and maneuverability isn't a guarantee the missile will successfully strike a target. Ukraine's air force in May said it shot down a Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missile with a Patriot battery.

# 50 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean Sea

AP ■ MILAN

Survivors rescued from a deflating rubber dinghy in the central Mediterranean Sea have reported that some 50 people who departed Libya with them a week ago perished during the journey, the humanitarian rescue group SOS Mediterranee said Thursday. The European charity's ship Ocean Viking spotted the dinghy with 25 people on board Wednesday. Two were unconscious, and were evacuated by the Italian military for treatment. The other 23 were in serious condition, exhausted, dehydrated

and with burns from fuel on board the boat. SOS Mediterranee spokesman Francesco Creazzo said that the survivors were all male, 12 of them minors with two of those not yet teenagers. They were from Senegal, Mali and The Gambia. Creazzo said the survivors were traumatised and unable to give full accounts of what had transpired during the voyage. Humanitarian organisations often rely on accounts of survivors when pulling together the numbers of dead and missing at sea, presumed to have died. The UN International

Organisation for Migration says 227 people have died along the perilous central Mediterranean route this year through March 11, not counting the new reported missing and presumed dead. That's out of a total 279 deaths in the Mediterranean since January 1. A total of 19,562 people arrived in Italy using that route in the period. The survivors said the boat departed Zawiya, Libya with 75 people on board, including some women and at least one small child. The motor broke sometime after departure, and they had been adrift.

# Rare protest by Chinese official media against police crackdown

PTI ■ BEIJING

In a rare show of defiance, Chinese media on Thursday protested against the attempts by police to block the coverage of a suspected gas leak explosion at an eatery in the country's north, which killed seven people and injured 27 others. The blast that rocked a fried chicken shop in Yanjiao township in the city of Sanhe, near Beijing, on Wednesday is suspected to have been caused by a gas leak. As Chinese official media and foreign journalists rushed to cover the explosion, which killed two people and injured 27 others, they were forcibly prevented by local authorities from the scene, raising a rare controversy over the country's press restrictions. A journalist with state broadcaster CCTV was interrupted while reporting live from the scene of the blast. The journalist was seen surrounded by several uniformed police officers who blocked the camera and shouted about the potential danger at the scene, according to a video that circulated online. The video of the report was no longer available on CCTV's website as of Thursday, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper reported. In another video, reporters were seen surrounded by a group of uniformed police officers asking them to leave the scene. A reporter with state-run China Media Group — of which CCTV is a division — was heard saying, "We three reporters are shoved by a dozen people". The state-run All China Journalists Association objected to the official crackdown, saying that officials should not "simply and brutally obstruct journalists in the normal performance of their duties for the sake of controlling public opinion". The association urged officials to make it easier for media to conduct on-site

interviews when reporting emergencies. The police crackdown against media was seen as an attempt by the local officials to downplay the coverage, fearing reprisals as last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered steps to curb occurrences of recurring incidents of burning fires due to various causes and protect people's lives and property and social stability. As the videos of media protests went viral on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, akin to X, local authorities on Thursday issued a statement saying they were "deeply remorseful" and apologised to the journalists, the Post report said. The media protest against the official crackdown also figured in the Chinese foreign ministry briefing, as many foreign journalists were reportedly prevented from covering the evening. When questioned on restrictions imposed on journalists, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said local officials have issued a statement on the incident. China welcomes foreign journalists conducting reporting activities under the law and is willing to facilitate if the media faces any problems, Wang said. Fire and gas explosions have been taking place almost every month, prompting President Xi to order the concerned agencies to take pre-emptive measures. Fifteen people were killed and 44 others injured in a building fire in Nanning city in China last month, while 39 were killed and nine others injured in a building fire that broke out in Xinyu city in east China's Jiangxi Province on January 24. Fatal fires in China are not uncommon due to lax enforcement of building and safety standards.

# Denmark plans to expand military draft to women

AP ■ COPENHAGEN (DENMARK)

Denmark wants to increase the number of young people doing military service by extending conscription to women and increasing the time of service from 4 months to 11 months for both genders, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Wednesday. "We do not rearm because we want war. We are rearming because we want to avoid it," Frederiksen told a press conference. She said the government wants "full equality between the sexes". Denmark currently has up to 9,000 professional troops on top of the 4,700 conscripts undergoing basic training, according to official figures. The government wants to increase the number of conscripts by 300 to reach a total of 5,000. The country is a member of the NATO alliance and a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion. Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen stressed that "Russia does not pose a threat

to Denmark". "But we will not bring ourselves to a place where they could come to do that," Lokke Rasmussen said. All physically fit men over the age of 18 are called up for military service, which lasts roughly four months. However, because there are enough volunteers, there is a lottery system, meaning not all young men serve. In 2023, there were 4,717 conscripts in Denmark. Women who volunteered for military service accounted for 25.1 per cent of the cohort, according to official figures. Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said the new system would require a change in the law, which he said will happen in 2025 and take effect in 2026. The security policy situation in Europe "has become more and more serious, and we have to take that into account when we look at future defence", Lund Poulsen said. "A broader basis for recruiting that includes all genders is needed," he said, adding it will create "a more versatile and more complete defence".

# Denying same-sex marriage is unconstitutional: Japanese HC

AP ■ TOKYO

A Japanese high court ruled Thursday that denying same-sex marriage is unconstitutional and called for urgent government action to address the lack of any law allowing for such unions. The court does not have the power to overturn the current marriage law, which has been interpreted to restrict marriage as between a man and a woman. Government offices

may continue to deny marriage status to same-sex couples unless the existing law is revised to include LGBTQ+ couples, or a new law is enacted that allows for other types of unions. The Sapporo High Court ruling said that not allowing same-sex couples to marry and enjoy the same benefits as straight couples violates their fundamental right to have a family. A lower court issued a similar ruling earlier Thursday, becoming

the sixth district court to do so. But the Tokyo District Court ruling was only a partial victory for Japan's LGBTQ+ community calling for equal marriage rights, as it doesn't change or overturn the current civil union law that describes marriage as between a man and a woman. Five previous court decisions in various districts said Japan's policy of denying same-sex marriage is either unconstitutional or nearly so.

# Four, including three Indians, arrested trying to enter US illegally from Canada

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Three Indian nationals are among four people arrested in Upstate New York after they jumped off a moving freight train coming from Canada in their bid to enter the US illegally. US Border Patrol agents arrested the four, including a woman, on March 12. The investigation concluded that all four people were undocumented non-citizens. Border Patrol

agents assigned to the Buffalo Station spotted four people jumping off a moving freight train on the International Railroad Bridge in the city of Buffalo. The men left the woman who became immobile due to an injury and were caught shortly after a foot pursuit. The injured woman received first aid from Erie County Sheriff's deputies and U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers (CBP). After treatment, the woman was trans-

ported by ambulance to a local medical centre. Border Patrol agents were able to identify that the woman and two men were from India and the third man was from the Dominican Republic. The three men are being processed for removal and detained in Batavia Federal Detention Facility awaiting a deportation hearing for charges under Sections 212 and 237 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, a media release said.

**BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT**

BFU-24/08

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Online applications are invited upto **15/04/2024** from eligible candidates through University website i.e **www.bfuhs.ac.in** for the recruitment of 01 post of Law Officer under Deptt. of Medical Education & Research, Govt. of Punjab. For Eligibility, terms & conditions & other information visit university website i.e **www.bfuhs.ac.in**

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- Online applications are invited for the post of Chief Coach (14), Psychologist (2) in the Punjab State Institute of Sports (PIS) Mohali.
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- For further details visit University Website **http://pisrecruitmentpsu.com/**

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2.	For Verka Mohali Dairy Renovation/ UP gradation of electrical sub-station.	Job work
3.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy i. Supply of Laptops Complete in all respects. ii. Supply and Installation of server system complete in all respects.	15 No's 01 No.
4.	For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy Hiring of:- i. Car required for procurement activities at Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy. ii. Vehicles for Transportation of milk products to Punjab & other states.	01 No. Annual
5.	For Verka Patiala Dairy Hiring of:- i. 1.5 MT insulated vehicles for transportation of fresh milk and Milk Products for Mandi Gobindgarh/surrounding area. ii. Vehicles for transportation of Plo, Ghee and Cheese/ Dairy products etc. for different stations. iii. Insulated vehicles for transportation of Cheese for Ahmedabad and Delhi. iv. Leasing out Verka Milkbooth situated at PRTO Old Bus stand, near Railway station Patiala.	Annual Annual Annual 03 years
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2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

**Dy. General Manager (Purchase)**

# NKorea's Kim test drives new tank, orders troops to prepare for war

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un joined troops training on a new tank model and drove one himself, state media reported on Thursday, as his rivals South Korea and the US wrapped up their annual military exercises. It's the third time Kim was reported to have observed military exercises since the start of the 11-day South Korean-US drills, which he views as rehearsals for an invasion. That's a less provocative option than missile tests. North Korea has intensified launches since 2022 and ramped up belligerent rhetoric this year. At the tank drills Wednesday, Kim praised the country's latest tank as "the world's most powerful" and told his troops to bolster their "fighting spirits" and complete "preparations for war", according to the official Korean Central News

Agency. The other two drills he inspected recently were dedicated to artillery firing and maneuvering exercises. The tank was first unveiled during a military parade in 2020, and its rolling during Wednesday's drill indicates that it's ready to be deployed, South Korean experts say. Photos of the tank released by North Korea shows it has a launch tube for missiles, a weapons systems the former Soviet Union already operated in the 1970s. The new tank could pose a threat to South Korea, said Yang Uk, an analyst at Asan Institute for Policy Studies, but it remains to be seen whether it can be mass produced. The North's Defense Ministry last week threatened "responsible military activities" in reaction to the South Korea-US military drills, which involved a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the num-

ber conducted last spring. The US and South Korea have been expanding their training exercises in a tit-for-tat response to the North's weapons testing spree. Concerns about North Korea's military preparations have deepened since Kim vowed in a speech in January to rewrite the constitution to eliminate the country's long-standing goal to seek peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula and cement South Korea as its "invariable principal enemy". He said the new constitution must specify North Korea would annex and subjugate the South if another war breaks out. Kim's moves signal "North Korea's fundamental change on its South Korea policy, beyond just rhetoric," as the North's previous push for inter-Korean unity had allowed it to make a steadfast call for the removal of US troops in South Korea, a senior South Korean presidential official said.

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The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam invites bids for "Supply & installation of chairs for conference hall & Vidya Samiksha Kendra at State Mission Office, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19", from authorized dealers of reputed furniture brand.  
Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 15-03-2024 upto 22-03-2024 (1400 hrs).  
The bidder must be enrolled in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in)

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Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/ICF/6555/23/15-March-2024

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Indira Gandhi University, Meerpur (Rewari) invites online applications from the eligible candidates for recruitment of Teaching and Non-Teaching Posts on regular basis and deputation/contractual basis (Librarian). The detailed instructions, requisite qualifications, pay scales and modalities for selection are given on the university website [www.igu.ac.in](http://www.igu.ac.in). The link for submission of online application shall be available on the university website w.e.f. **13.03.2024**. In case of deputation/contractual appointment, application form is available on the university website. The candidates who had applied against the post of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor vide **advt. No. 10/2023 to 55/2023 and 04/2024 to 28/2024** need not to apply again. The candidates who have already applied for the post of Steno Typist vide **advt. No. 30/2024** need not to apply again. However, candidates can submit their latest updates if any through hard copy by **12.04.2024 (5:00 p.m.)**.

**REGISTRAR**

**RO 25885 Dated 14-03-2024**



# Petrol, diesel prices cut by ₹2 per litre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol and diesel prices were cut by Rs 2 per litre each as state-owned oil companies ended a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision, just hours before the general election schedule is announced. The revised price will be applicable from 6 am on Friday, March 15, the oil ministry said on Thursday evening. Petrol in the national capital will now cost Rs 94.72 a litre compared to Rs 96.72 per litre currently while diesel prices will be Rs 87.62 against Rs 89.62 at present. The government had nearly a decade back freed petrol and diesel prices from its control and the rates till now were fixed and announced by oil companies. But on Thursday, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas took to X to announce the rate revision that came just hours before the schedule for the general elections was due to be announced that would set in motion a poll code, which bars making announcements that could lure voters. The price cut came a week after a Rs 100 per cylinder reduction in cooking gas LPG price was



announced. That reduction brought down the rates of LPG for common users to Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder and that for the poor, who got free connections under the Ujjwala scheme, to Rs 503 after accounting for Rs 300 per bottle subsidy that the government gives. Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have informed that they have revised Petrol and Diesel Prices across the country. New prices would be effective from 15th March 2024, 06:00 AM,” the ministry said. Petrol in Mumbai will cost Rs 104.21 a litre from Friday, Rs 103.94 in Kolkata and Rs 100.75 in Chennai. A litre of diesel will be priced at Rs 92.15 in Mumbai, Rs 90.76 in Kolkata and Rs 92.34 in Chennai.

Rates differ from state to state, depending on the incidence of local taxes. Local sales tax or VAT is the highest among metros in BJP-ruled Maharashtra and lowest in Delhi. “Reduction in petrol and diesel prices will boost consumer spending and reduce operating costs for over 58 lakh heavy goods vehicles running on diesel, 6 crore cars and 27 crore two-wheelers,” the ministry said. Reduced petrol and diesel prices will benefit the citizens through more disposable income, boost for tourism and travel industries, control over inflation, increased consumer confidence and spending, reduced expenses for businesses dependent on transportation, enhanced profitability for logistics,

manufacturing, and retail sectors, and reduced outgo for farmers on tractor operations and pump sets, it added. International oil prices have been turbulent in the last couple of years. It dipped into the negative zone at the start of the pandemic in 2020 and swung wildly in 2022 - climbing to a 14-year high of nearly USD 140 per barrel in March 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine, before sliding on weaker demand from top importer China and worries of an economic contraction. But for a nation that is 85 per cent dependent on imports, the spike meant adding to already elevated levels of inflation and derailing the economic recovery from the pandemic. So, the three state-owned fuel

Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) froze petrol and diesel prices for the longest duration in the last two decades. They stopped daily price revision in early November 2021 when rates across the country hit an all-time high, prompting the government to roll back a part of the excise duty hike it had effected during the pandemic to take advantage of low oil prices. The freeze continued into 2022 but the Russia-Ukraine war-led spike in international oil prices prompted a Rs 10 a litre hike in petrol and diesel prices from mid-March 2022 before another round of excise duty cut rolled back all of the Rs 13 a litre and Rs 16 a litre increase in taxes on petrol and diesel done during the pandemic. That followed the current price freeze, which began on April 6, 2022, and will end with a revision in rates effective Friday. The three firms had till now resisted calls to revert to daily price revision and pass on softening in rates to consumers on grounds that prices continue to be extremely volatile — rising on one day

and falling on the other — and that their past losses have not been fully recouped. The three companies, which control roughly 90 per cent of India's fuel market, ‘voluntarily’ have not changed petrol, diesel and cooking gas (LPG) prices for almost two years now, resulting in losses when input costs were higher and profits when raw material prices were lower. But the financial numbers of the first three quarters showed them reporting bumper profit totalling over Rs 69,000 crore. The combined net profit of IOC, BPCL and HPCL in April-December FY24 was better than their annual earning of Rs 39,356 crore in pre-oil crisis year, regulatory filings by them showed. They posted a combined net loss of Rs 21,201.18 crore during April-September 2022 despite accounting for Rs 22,000 crore announced but not paid LPG subsidy for the previous two years. Subsequent softening of international prices and government giving out LPG subsidies helped IOC and BPCL post annualised profit for 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) but HPCL was in the red.



## Wholesale inflation declines to 0.2 per cent in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale inflation rate declined marginally to 0.2 per cent in February compared to 0.27 per cent in the preceding month despite a slight uptick in the food basket. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per cent. The inflation in February 2023 was 3.85 per cent. “The annual rate of inflation based on all India WPI number is 0.20 per cent (provisional) for the month of February 2024 (over February 2023),” the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.95 per cent in February from 6.85 per cent in January, data showed. Inflation in vegetables was 19.78 per cent, up from 19.71 in January. The WPI inflation in pulses was at 18.48 per cent in February compared to 16.06 in January.

The data showed that inflation in the “fuel and power” segment contracted further by 1.59 per cent in February against a deflation of 0.51 per cent in January. The prices of manufactured products, too, declined 1.27 per cent compared to 1.13 per cent in January. While WPI is a key macro data suggesting the price producers get in the wholesale market, the inflation measured by movement in Consumer Price Index (CPI) reflects retail prices and forms the basis for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy actions. Earlier in the week, the government had released CPI data, which showed that retail inflation in February stood at 5.09 per cent and remained within the RBI's comfort zone of 6 per cent for the sixth month in a row. The February, WPI print, too, was almost unchanged compared to the January number of 5.1 per cent, though the data showed prices of certain items in the food basket had firmed up.

# Markets rebound on buying in IT stocks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rebounded 335 points and Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Thursday on the back of buying in IT shares and metal shares as broader markets recovered from previous day's sharp losses. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 335.39 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 73,097.28. During the day, it jumped 602.41 points or 0.82 per cent to 73,364.30.

The NSE Nifty gained 148.95 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,146.65. From the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Wipro, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Asian Paints were the major gainers. Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, JSW Steel, State Bank of India and Tata Steel were among the major laggards. The broader markets also staged a smart recovery, with



the BSE Smallcap gauge jumping 3.11 per cent and midcap index climbing 2.28 per cent. Wholesale inflation rate declined marginally to 0.2 per cent in February compared to 0.27 per cent in the preceding

month despite a slight uptick in the food basket. “The market was able to recover half of last trading day's sell-off as leverage based square-off neutralised it, while institutional buying sustained the buoyancy. “Domestic economic data Wholesale Price Inflation (WPI) eased to four-month low at 0.2% YoY in February, bringing ease to upcoming CPI trajectory, a relief for future rate cuts. The broader market is outperforming the headline indices, taking

advantage of mid and smallcap as a bargaining strategy,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Fitch Ratings raised India's economic growth forecast to 7 per cent for the next fiscal year on the back of strong domestic demand and sustained level of business and consumer confidence. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,595.06 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the green while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday. The BSE benchmark index tanked 906.07 points, or 1.23 per cent, to settle at 72,761.89 on Wednesday. The Nifty plummeted 338 points, or 1.51 per cent, to 21,997.70. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.76 per cent to USD 84.67 a barrel.

## Blue Star to invest ₹250 crore in next fiscal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Leading home appliances company Blue Star will invest Rs 250 crore in the next financial year to raise the manufacturing capacity of room air conditioners at its Sri City facility in Andhra Pradesh, an official said here on Thursday. The company now has a production capacity of 10 lakh room air conditioners across its various manufacturing facilities, including the Sri City unit. “Plans are there to raise the manufacturing capacity to 1.8 million units in the near future,” Blue Star Managing Director B Thiagarajan told reporters here. “The present manufacturing capacity at Sri City will be added by three lakh units next fiscal, for which an amount of Rs 250 crore will be spent,” he said.

## Cyber attack, data breach among top risks for businesses in India: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber attacks and data breaches are the top business risks for organisations in India, according to the 2023 Global Risk Management Survey. Cyber attacks and data breaches were placed seventh in the 2021 business risks survey. Global professional services firm Aon collected inputs from around 3,000 risk managers, c-suite leaders, treasurers, talent professionals, and other executives from 61 countries and territories to identify the most pressing business challenges. The biennial survey said that India's dependency on technology is likely to increase with the widespread adoption of digital infrastructure like the Unified Payments Interface, Aadhaar, and Open Network for Digital Commerce.



“With increasing digitisation, cybercrimes continue to become rampant with costs and complexities associated with such breaches forcing organisations to look at risk mitigation and transfer mechanisms to better manage cyber risks,” the survey noted. Business interruption and failure to attract or retain top talent were marked as the second and third biggest risks facing organisations in India, respectively. “There is a compelling need

for Indian businesses to leverage advanced data analytics and experts to understand and manage the dynamics of integrated risks,” said Nitin Sethi, Chief Executive Officer of Talent Solutions in India at Aon. Failure to meet customer needs, rapidly changing market trends, supply chain disruptions, and personal liabilities were marked down the list as other critical challenges for businesses in India.

## Rupee falls 1 paisa, ends at 82.82 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 1 paisa to settle at 82.82 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strong greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices. However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets supported the local currency and restricted the fall, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened slightly weak at 82.84 and witnessed an intra-day low of 82.89 and a high of 82.82 against the greenback during the session. The local unit finally settled at 82.82 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of just 1 paisa from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee declined 1 paisa to settle at 82.81 against the US dollar.

## Electric mobility scheme shows Government thrust on EV: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Rs 500 crore Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme 2024 shows the government's continued thrust on vehicle electrification as it is indispensable on a long-term basis to fortify the case for an EV ecosystem, industry experts said on Thursday. Ministry of Heavy Industries has announced the new scheme to promote e-mobility in the country with an outlay of Rs 500 crore for four months beginning April 2024. The new scheme is for 2-wheelers and 3-wheelers. Commenting on the government's decision, Srikumar Krishnamurthy, Senior Vice President and Co-Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA said the scheme is a favourable move towards the acceleration of the electrification pace in the

country. “The EMP scheme reflects the government's continued thrust on vehicle electrification, although the quantum of subsidy is seen lower in line with expectations,” he said. ICRA expects the penetration levels of e-2w and e-3w (excluding e-rickshaws) to reach 6-8 per cent and 14-16 per cent, respectively in fiscal 2024-25, he added. Ayush Lohia, CEO, Lohia opined that the scheme offers a significant opportunity to expand the market and contribute to the growth of the electric vehicle industry. “With subsidies of up to Rs 25,000 for small three-wheelers and Rs 50,000 for large ones, the scheme is expected to drive increased demand for three-wheelers and two-wheelers,” he said.

## R2R to launch IPO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Routes 2 Roots (R2R), a Delhi-based non-profit NGO with a global reach, is launching its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on the NSE's Social Stock Exchange. This will be an important entry in the newly created Social Stock Exchange (SSE) where Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) instruments, have been introduced for Non-Profit Organizations (NPO's). As part of its commitment to social impact, Routes 2 Roots extends an invitation to investors to participate in this unique IPO. The primary objective of this offering is to aid the recovery of two critical Border States, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, which have recently faced the brunt of floods and landslides. The funds raised will be utilized to install smart panels, NGO's cultural digital interactive program and K12 educational e-books, in hundred schools across these states, in all the 25 districts. This will benefit lakhs of students in getting quality educational tools at par with any other public school. With an initial issue size of Rs. One crore, the IPO invites a minimum subscription of Rs. Two lakhs (and then in multiples of Rs. 50,000) from corporates, business houses, firms and institutions. This IPO is not for individuals. Founded in 2004, Routes 2 Roots has established itself as a leader in the non-profit sector, diligently working to disseminate culture, art, and heritage across India and beyond. The NGO's commitment to digital education is evident through its ‘Digital Learning of Performing Arts’ program, initiated in 2016, providing free live interactive classes encompassing 20 disciplines of Indian art, culture, and heritage. It stands out as the largest provider of Art and Culture education in digital and hybrid modes, setting up smart classrooms equipped with digital panels and e-books in rural India.

# Iconic Air India building with numerous firsts gets new owner

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Standing on the land reclaimed from sea for more than five decades now, Air India building in the country's commercial capital in the 1970s had people queuing up just to have the experience of using an elevator. Designed by New York-based architect John Burgee matching the aspirations of J R D Tata, the 23-storey building was among the first in those days to have elevators, neon signage on top and two levels of basement parking to name a few facilities. The building had “numerous firsts” is how a retired senior official of erstwhile Air India put it on Thursday as he recalled his more than two decade-long stint there. And the neon signage on top of the building that displayed Centaur, the logo of Air India which was later replaced after the merger of Indian Airlines,

was also a key attraction in the 1970s as not many structures boasted of such an element. The building, constructed on the state government's land, is among the many commercial high-rises to come up on the Southern tip of the land reclaimed from sea that was developed as the city's business district Nariman Point. With its central location, the iconic building, which completed 50 years in June 2020, also provides an expansive view of the Marine Drive from Nariman Point up to Malabar Hill. On Thursday, the central government announced approving the transfer of the Air India building in Mumbai to the Maharashtra government for a consideration of Rs 1,601 crore. Former executive director of erstwhile Air India Jitender Bhargava, who had worked out of the building for over 20

years, on Thursday told PTI that the building had “numerous firsts” and added that the board room was on the 23rd floor. Centralised air conditioning facilities and elevators with piped music were among the other attractions. When Burgee designed the building, it was one of its kind at that time in 1970. Bhargava, whose office was on the 20th floor of the building during the period from 1989 to 2010, said that when the building was opened, people used to come to have the experience of taking the elevator from the ground floor to the first floor, which housed the airline's booking office at that time. There is also an auditorium and cafeteria, among other facilities at the building, where around eight floors were occupied by Air India, he recalled. During the Gulf boom in the 80s, job seekers used to flock to the Air India booking



counter. As many as 400 people would be visiting the place to book flight tickets to various Gulf countries, a retired airline official told PTI. According to Godrej archives, the Air India building was among the first few high-rises to be constructed on the new stretch of the reclaimed land. The building had its share of cinematic moments as many Bollywood movies have featured it in various scenes.

During its more than five-decade-long existence, the building, also earthquake-resistant, was rocked by a bomb blast in 1993. The iconic building in many aspects also reflects the development journey of Mumbai and even as a link between the past and the present. In its archive Volume 2, Issue 1 dated April-May 2014, Godrej said that back in the 1920s, when the post-war

boom put great stress on land, the Development Directorate proposed the Backbay Reclamation Scheme. “The pier at the southern end of Block II, near Colaba, was completed in 1960 and named Nariman Point, after the firebrand Khurshheed Framji Nariman, a whistle-blower who brought to light financial misappropriation by the British Government,” it added. It also said that a construction boom in the following decade saw this region spurting many commercial high-rises. Some of the first few high-rises to be constructed on this new stretch of land were the headquarters of Air India and Indian Express. “Interestingly, Godrej fabrications can be found on both these buildings. While 1,502 windows were supplied and fitted in the Air India building, at the Express Towers, false ceilings with trapezoid perforations made possible by the skills of the

Panchals were installed, along with aluminium frame,” as per the archive. While Tata Group took over Air India in January 2022, the airline's non-core assets, including land and buildings, were transferred to AI Assets Holding Company Ltd (AIAHL). The non-core assets valued at Rs 14,718 crore were transferred to AIAHL after it was set up in 2019 by the government as a precursor to the sale of Air India for holding the debt and non-core assets of the then national carrier. “GoI has approved transfer of Air India building, Mumbai of AI Assets Holding Company Ltd (AIAHL) to Government of Maharashtra (GoM) at consideration of Rs 1,601 cr. GoM has agreed to waive dues of Rs 298.42 cr, which would have been otherwise payable by AIAHL to GoM for this transaction,” DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said in a post on X.







# Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy for 42nd time

## BEAT VIDARBHA BY 169 RUNS IN FINAL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic heavyweights Mumbai ended their eight-year barren run to lift a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title here on Thursday, beating a resolute Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of a thoroughly engrossing summit clash.

The fate of the final — Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history — here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

Wadkar led the fight for his side with his first century of the year which also helped him cross the 600-run mark this season. Dubey brought up only the second fifty of his



first-class career. Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings, consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of

the second session on the final day. Wadkar fell shortly after play resumed — leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) — and once the pair was broken, it all

ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final for a third time after winning two titles. Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to

dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the majority of the game owing to a back spasm. While Kotian cleaned up Yash

Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending.

Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised Vidarbha for their gritty display before lifting the trophy and rightly so. For a team which paid a heavy price for a poor first-innings score — 105 to concede a 119-run lead in response to Mumbai's 224 — Vidarbha showed resilience to give a fine account of themselves in the second innings.

Mumbai began the final day hoping to break the sixth-wicket stand between Wadkar and Dubey early but their wait only extended since the batters overcame all challenges that the hosts threw at them.

With the pace bowlers not being able to trouble the batters, Mumbai hopes were pinned on their spinners but their own error cost Rahane's side early on.

Kotian appealed for a bat-pad catch at silly point against Dubey in the 101st over of the innings but the appeal was turned down.

In a show of desperation, Mumbai went for the DRS intervention which confirmed the ball had not grazed the bat and was also going to miss the leg stump.

Kotian then found an outside

edge off Wadkar's bat which fell close to Rahane.

Mumbai's frustration was evident when Kulkarni held his ground at the end of his follow through after being declined a leg-before appeal against Dubey.

Kulkarni made some gestures and even exchanged a few words with the umpire but replays confirmed that the ball had pitched outside the leg-stump.

Dubey was also lucky when Kotian pinned him in front of the wickets but Mumbai could not get it overturned since they had no reviews left.

The Vidarbha batter continued to ride his luck, getting another decision in his favour when replays showed the ball had missed his bat and gloves off Shams Mulani.

Wadkar completed his century shortly after lunch but once he was dismissed, the rest of the batting collapsed soon after.

**Brief scores**  
**Mumbai:** 224 & 418  
**Vidarbha:** 105 & 368 in 134.4 overs (Atharva Taide 32, Aman Mokhadde 32, Karun Nair 74, Akshay Wadkar 102; Tanush Kotian 4/95) by 169 runs.

## Pant resilience, mental strength was quite something: Medical staff that worked with

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The medical staff that nursed Rishabh Pant back to full fitness after the horrifying car crash in 2022 has raved about the resilience and mental strength shown by the cricketer, saying he persevered through a "frustrating" recovery process.

Pant is set for his cricketing return in the IPL on March 23 when he will captain Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings in Mohali.

"I feel very close to normal," Pant told 'bcci.Tv' with a radiant smile.

It seemed far fetched 15 months ago when he suffered multiple injuries in the crash. However, it has come true thanks to the expert care he got from the likes of Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, Director, Centre for Sports Medicine, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai, and some dedicated staff at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

Pardiwala remembered how arduous Pant's recovery journey was.

"As surgeons and as doctors, it's very important for us to inform our patients, their family and all the stakeholders of the actual status of the injury. Rishabh's mother was with him. She was very concerned whether he would ever be able to walk again," Pardiwala said.

"I told her that this is such a critical injury and we will definitely aim for him to get back to competitive cricket. But that's going to be a long-drawn process."

However, Pardiwala was left astonished when he saw Pant's confidence as he



entered the recovery phase.

"When I told Rishabh 18 months, he said 'okay, I am going to show you I can do it in 12 months,'" he said.

Pant stayed true to his words as he put in the hard yards at the NCA during his recuperation.

"When I started walking without crutches, that was a high point. Then started jogging a little bit, that was a high for me, then started batting, then started keeping as I took joy in everything," said the 26-year-old.

But each of those baby steps had to be taken with utmost care because of multi-level complexities.

Pardiwala said the complex knee injury, the trauma following the accident and Pant's own frustration at being away from the cricket field had to be dealt with in an effective manner.

"For any surgeon, knee dislocation is one of the worst injuries because everything breaks. You need to get back the stability, you need to get back the shock absorption capability," he said.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The triumphant Mumbai team will receive an additional Rs 5 crore for its unprecedented 42nd Ranji Trophy title after the state cricket association doubled the prize purse on Thursday.

Mumbai won a record-extending 42nd Ranji title after beating Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of the summit showdown at the Wankhede Stadium.

"MCA President Amol Kale and Apex Council has decided to double the Ranji Trophy prize money. The MCA will pay additional sum of Rs 5 crore to the winning Mumbai Ranji Trophy team," a statement from MCA secretary Ajinkya Naik read.

"It has been a great year for the MCA as the association has won 7 titles and we have made it to knockout stage in all age groups in BCCI tournaments."

Mumbai ended an eight-year wait to lift a record-extending title here, getting the better of a resolute Vidarbha.

The fate of the final -- Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history -- here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Mumbai head coach Omkar Salvi, who was appointed to the post last year, lauded MCA's move to double the prize money considering that lot of players don't have full-time jobs these days.

"For all the players, nowadays, there



are very less institutions which provide jobs. For youngsters, there is also a lot of lure towards franchise cricket (where) there is also a lot of

money," Salvi said.

"The BCCI is taking that step and raising that money along with that, the MCA taking that step forward

to equal that amount is a great help for the players who don't have some jobs or some earnings.

"It is definitely an inspiration (and) it should be intrinsic -- the monetary help will give them that security and it will definitely stabilise them mentally and financially so that they can give more to the game," he added.

On the final day, Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

## RCB kick starts pre tournament camp, Kohli expected to join in next few days

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore began their pre-tournament camp without their numero uno Virat Kohli, who might take a few more days to join before the team starts its IPL campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on March 22.

Most of the domestic players joined the camp under the guidance of new head coach Andy Flower and Director of Cricket Mo Bobat and they went through the paces on the opening day of the camp on Wednesday.

While skipper Faf du Plessis was in attendance along with West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, Kohli, easily



the biggest 'Box Office' in Indian cricket, is yet to hit the straps after a paternity break that ruled him out of the marquee five-Test series

against England.

"Kohli is expected to join in the next few days," a BCCI source, who is tracking developments within IPL

teams, told PTI.

Kohli might make his first appearance for the franchise during 'RCB Unbox', a high-profile annual event held at the Garden City in which fans get a glimpse of their favourite stars.

As RCB started their training session, skipper Du Plessis told the team it was lucky to have Flower as its coach.

"I think he's an incredible coach. So I feel team is very lucky to have him, kind and big hearted man," Du Plessis was quoted as saying on RCB 'Bold Diaries'.

Flower, on his part, said: "New chapter to write in RCB story, we have been given the chance to write and it is a privilege, something to be very excited about."

## Former Lankan cricketer Lahiru injured in accident

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former Sri Lanka cricketer Lahiru Thirimanne sustained minor injuries after a road accident, leading to his hospitalisation in Trippane, Anuradapura, local media reported on Thursday.

According to a report in 'Ada Derana', the 34-year-old Thirimanne was admitted to Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital "with minor injuries sustained in the accident".

Anuradapura is a major city, located about 205km from national capital Colombo.

"Police mentioned that the car in which Thirimanne was travelling had collided with a

lorry arriving from the opposite direction at around 07.45 a.m. This morning," it stated.

"Three other individuals travelling in the car, the driver of the lorry and another person have been injured and hospitalised."

Thirimanne appeared in 44 Tests for Sri Lanka, scoring 2088 runs, including three hundreds.

He played 127 ODI for the island nation, scoring 3164 runs in all. He also played 26 T20 Internationals for Sri Lanka.

Thirimanne last played for Sri Lanka in 2022 before announcing his retirement the next year.

## Domestic umpiring standards under scanner after CK Nayudu Trophy howler

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The dubious dismissal of Karnataka opener Prakhar Chaturvedi in the recent Col. CK Nayudu Trophy U23 final against Uttar Pradesh has raised concerns about the standards of umpiring in domestic matches.

The unsavoury incident happened in Karnataka's first innings after Chaturvedi played a pull against UP pacer Kunal Tyagi well away from his body.

The ball, which took a rather healthy edge off Chaturvedi's bat, moved further away from stumper Aaradhya Yadav who had to make a full-length dive to his left to make the collection.

But the ball rolled out of Yadav's gloves before he could complete the catch even as the wicketkeeper thudded on to the ground.

However, the on-field umpire upheld the appeal for caught behind much to the dismay of batter Chaturvedi, who made 33

and 86 in Karnataka's maiden victory in the tournament which came by virtue of their first innings lead here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"Yes, it was a clear case of not out as I later saw the clippings. The ball came out of UP wicketkeeper's hands before he completed the catch. The umpire should not have given it out," a former First-Class umpire told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"It is important to maintain top standards because these junior tournaments are stepping stones for several budding cricketers. Imagine how bad that boy (Chaturvedi) would have felt after spending close to an hour at the crease, only to get out like that.

"Also, umpiring standards have a direct relation with the overall quality of a match," he said.

So, how can one ensure consistency and high level of accuracy in domestic umpiring?

"The BCCI has laid out some



strict parameters in the umpires' selection process and many state associations themselves have umpires associations working hard to ensure a good level of officiating.

"But I feel former cricketers should be encouraged to take up umpiring as they know the game closer than anyone else. We have had S Venkataraghavan, Peter Willey, David Shepherd and Dickie Bird who were excellent umpires as they leaned on their experience from their playing days," he added.

Recently, former India batter Manoj Tiwary had lashed out at poor standards of umpiring in domestic cricket.

Another former First-Class batter said instances of umpires making childish mistakes were quite common in domestic circuit.

"It is quite common, especially in junior cricket. But in one Ranji (Trophy) match, I was hit on my hips and the umpire gave that out leg before. I was 48 then. I

brushed it aside, thinking that mistakes can happen to anyone.

"But in the next innings, when I was batting on 45, the same umpire gave me out caught behind off a left-arm spinner when my bat was tucked safely behind my pads while leaving the ball. Even the silly point fielder could not hide his surprise," he noted.

There have been initiatives like the umpiring academy in Nagpur to better the standards but the lack of continuity has been the bane.

"Those were good ideas but somehow did not take off as expected. There is an ICC online course too for the umpires.

"But beyond all these, the board should increase remuneration for umpires and should also ensure that First-Class umpires officiate at state level or even some local matches so that there is no gap between the assignments and they remain sharp," the umpire detailed.