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By UNNY

**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETS LAST TIME BEFORE ELECTION****Confident of return, Govt readies 100-day action plan after polls**

PM Modi chairs day-long meeting, will tour five states over next three days



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the meeting of the Council of Ministers in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

HARIKISHAN SHARMA & LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

MEETING IN New Delhi for the last time before the announcement of the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections, the Union Council of Ministers, confident

that the ruling alliance would be voted to power for a third consecutive term, discussed Sunday a 100-day action plan to be implemented by the new government after the polls.

The day-long meeting of the Union Council of Ministers, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saw presenta-

tions by Secretaries on a vision document for Viksit Bharat 2047 and a detailed action plan for the next five years.

In these presentations, the Prime Minister's vision for Viksit Bharat was outlined, sources said, underlining that these included zero poverty, skill to every youth, and 100 per cent

saturation of welfare schemes. Modi was quoted as having told the officers to continue their work on government projects and schemes and not treat the election period as a vacation when the political leadership will be busy with the electoral process.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BENGALURU BLAST

Looking to join dots, probe agencies speak to accused in 2022 cases

TO CONNECT WITH YOUTH**On Cong manifesto table: Germany-style apprenticeship, paper leak compensation****MANOJC G**
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

A BUNCH of cases lodged in Karnataka in 2022 involving a group of 10 youths, aged between 20 and 26 years, has come back into focus in the backdrop of the March 1 lunch-hour bomb blast at the popular Rameshwaram Cafe in Whitefield area of Bengaluru which left nine persons injured.

Investigators from multiple agencies are trying to establish the identity of a young man caught on CCTV footage at the restaurant wearing a cap, glasses and a mask — who is being treated as a suspect — by talking to the 10 youths arrested in the 2022 cases. Police sources said the probe agencies have spoken to some of the accused who are currently lodged in Bengaluru Central Prison.

The three cases from 2022, including two related to terrorism, registered in Mangaluru and Shivamogga, have gained prominence in the aftermath of the Rameshwaram Cafe blast as the IED used is similar to the IEDs and materials found in the 2022 cases.

“There are similarities (with the Mangaluru and Shivamogga cases) in the sense that they have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

praised apprenticeship model of Germany and tailoring it for Indian conditions.

The German dual education model (vocational education and training system) allows smooth education-to-work transitions with young people getting on-the-job time at a company while studying at a vocational school.

The model, Congress leaders believe, offers the youth an attractive way to enter the job market. The challenge is to tailor the model to suit Indian conditions since the private sector as

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**INSIDE****FARMERS TO TAKE BUSES, TRAINS TO DELHI ON MARCH 6: PROTEST LEADERS****NAVY MAN FROM J&K MISSING** PAGES 12 & 16

INDIA bloc leaders at the rally in Patna on Sunday. PTI

Lalu to Tejashwi, Rahul to Akhilesh: Opposition targets PM at Patna rally

INDIA bloc leaders raise BJP's 'divisive politics' and Nitish Kumar's flip-flop

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MARCH 3

THE INDIA bloc Sunday held its first joint rally since Nitish Kumar's exit as top leaders, including Congress's Rahul Gandhi, SP's Akhilesh Yadav and RJD's Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav, converged in the Bihar capital to target Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "divisive politics" ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

All the leaders touched on the key talking points upon which

they are building their party campaigns. Rahul spoke about the Congress's opposition to the Agniveer scheme, the "love-hate" binary, and representation for marginalised communities.

Tejashwi, whose 11-day statewide yatra culminated in the rally Sunday, played up his part in the state's scheme for 10 lakh jobs. His father Lalu, in signature style, launched barbs at Modi.

"Ye Modi kya hai? Modi koi cheez hai? Narendra Modi parivarvaad par bolta hai aur kitna netao"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CITIES THAT GOT MOST FUNDS

(in ₹ cr)

Released between 2019-20 and February 2024 under NCAP/15th Finance Commission

City	Funds utilised	Funds released
Lucknow*	238.74	385.83
Patna	194.26	298.6
Bhopal	178.40	183.85
Ghaziabad	114.71	136.25
Gwalior	102.64	(utilisation amount unavailable)
Kota	64.57	101.25
Ludhiana	71.39	97.75

*Allotment amount till FY24. Utilisation amount till FY23

Source: Environment Ministry, reports submitted by states to NGT

action plan...."

So far, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, Meghalaya and Delhi have submitted their reports to the green tribunal.

Here is an overview of how the funds were utilised in various cities:

Jharkhand's report on activities in Dhanbad, submitted last month, included the construction of four playgrounds (allotment of ₹9.37 crore, ₹5.1 crore spent so far) including a football ground. It also included the purchase of a "desludging machine" for ₹3.03 crore. The largest chunk of expen-

diture, ₹17.27 crore, was for "end-to-end pavement", followed by ₹9.12 crore for bituminous roads and ₹7.37 crore to set up 10 air quality monitoring systems.

The Bihar government, too, submitted its report on Patna to the NGT last month. It said funds from the 15th FC (₹184.58 crore spent) were used for activities including "construction of roads and underground drain work", "desilting of drains", renovation of old parks, procurement of CNG buses, purchase of water sprinklers and sweeping machines, and establishment of an electric crematorium. Of NCAP funds, ₹9.68 crore was spent on

activities including the establishment of a vermicompost unit, awareness through radio jingles and "development of parks".

Delhi is in the process of spending its NCAP funds on 14 mechanical road sweepers, 28 anti-smog guns, two pothole repair machines, "creation of green buffers along traffic corridors", "end-to-end paving" and construction and demolition waste management.

Faridabad's funds have been spent on end-to-end paving of roads, "regular collection, segregation and scientific disposal of waste", water-sprinkling machines and urban

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Justice Gangopadhyay of Calcutta HC says quitting to join politics, slams TMC

BJP, Cong say he is welcome; TMC calls him political party worker



IN AN UNPRECEDENTED move, Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, a sitting judge of the Calcutta High Court, said Sunday that he will resign Tuesday as a judge and join politics.

The judge, who is due to retire in August, has been at the centre of controversy for his frequent remarks against some of his own colleagues, the ruling TMC and its leader Abhishek Banerjee.

"I will enter the field of politics. I am not telling you today which party I will start with. I want to first finish the little work that is still left in court. Tomorrow, I will wrap that up. I will verbally inform the Chief Justice. And the day-after morning, I will send my resignation to the President," Justice Gangopadhyay said in an interview with Bengali TV news channel ABP Ananda.

His announcement came a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

APURVA VISHWANATH

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

A SITTING judge of a Constitutional court resigning to join politics is not new.

Former Chief Justice of India Koka Subba Rao in 1967 had resigned three months before his retirement to contest Presidential elections as the Opposition can-

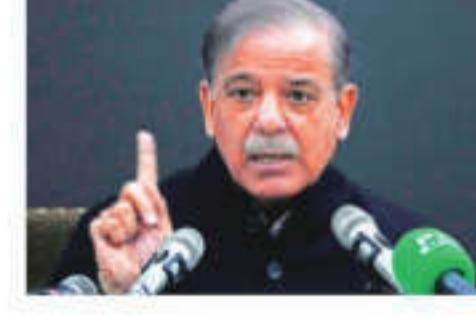
didate against Congress's Zakir Hussain.

Barely six weeks before his retirement, former SC judge

Barahul Islam resigned in 1983 to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Barpeta, Assam, as a Congress candidate.

Yet, Calcutta High Court Judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay's announcement of his resignation and that he

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In a divided Bar, judge's move raises questions on independence of judiciary**THE WORLD****SHEHZBAZ BECOMES PAK PM, VOWS TO BUILD, IMPROVE TIES WITH NEIGHBOURS****ISRAEL BOYCOTTS GAZA TRUCE TALKS, SEEKS CLARITY ON HOSTAGES**

PAGE 15

Under fire from TMC for 'vulgar' songs, BJP's Asansol pick opts out**SANTANU CHOWDHURY**

KOLKATA, MARCH 3

A DAY after the BJP announced his name as its candidate from Asansol for the Lok Sabha polls, Bhojpuri singer-actor Pawan Singh Sunday said he will not contest from the constituency in West Bengal. Although he did not give a reason, Singh's candidature had drawn criticism from TMC leaders, who claimed some of his songs had vulgar refer-

ences to Bengali women.

As the BJP came under attack, Singh in a post on X said: "I express my heartfelt gratitude to the top leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The party

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

After student death that rocked Kerala, college remains on edge**SHAJU PHILIP**

KALPETTA (WAYANAD), MAR 3

POSTERS OF Che Guevara and images of Old Monk rum bottles adorn the walls on the first floor of the men's hostel at the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences in Pookode, in Kerala's Wayanad district.

It was in the inner courtyard of

JS Sidharthan, 20, was assaulted by SFI members

this hostel that members of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) allegedly held a "trial" of 20-year-old JS Sidharthan, a second-year student, during which he was also allegedly tortured. On February 18, Sidharthan was found hanging in the hostel. The suspected suicide has rocked the state and created a political firestorm.

Since the death, the campus

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Where clean air funds allotted to states went: Drains, fountains, roads**PAGE 1
ANCHOR****ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND**
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

A FOOTBALL ground; fountains; roads; underground drains. These are among the items listed by states when questioned by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) about how they utilised funds meant for tackling air pollution.

These funds were allocated under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the 15th Finance Commission (FC) be-

tween the financial years (FY) 2019-20 and 2023-2024. According to an Environment Ministry submission in the NGT last month, 19 cities flagged by the tribunal for their deteriorating air quality received ₹1,644.40 crore in this period.

But records show that a number of states underutilised the funds and some of them spent a notable chunk on projects whose connection to air pollution may not seem readily apparent — a point brought up by the tribunal itself.

The NGT, in November 2023, had flagged the deteriorating air quality of 53 towns and cities, in-

cluding the 19 mentioned above. It told the respective states to take "remedial measures" and submit details of how they utilised the funds they received under the NCAP and 15th FC.

A month later, the tribunal noted that the states which had filed the reports until then had not fully utilised the funds and that "only few states have used it for setting up AQI monitoring stations". It said: "In some states, we have found that the funds have been utilised under the heads which may not have direct connection with improving air quality. In fact, funds are required to be utilised as per the approved

FROM PAGE ONE ■ FULL REPORTS ON
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Govt readies 100-day action plan after polls

"Aap chhutti mat samajhiye, kaam par lag jaaye (don't think you are on holiday, get down to work)... When it comes back after the elections, the government will work with new vigour and zeal," sources quoted him as having said.

Sources said, "The roadmap for Viksit Bharat is a result of more than two years of intensive preparation. It involved a whole-of-government approach involving all ministries and wide-ranging consultations with state governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations and mobilisation of youth for seeking their ideas, suggestions and inputs. More than 2700 meetings, workshops and seminars were held at various levels."

Bengaluru

used similar materials and a similar system technically. Apart from that we do not know," Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said Sunday.

Sources familiar with the technical aspects of the probe in the Mangaluru case, in which an IED exploded accidentally while being carried by Mohammed Sharique, 24, who was allegedly inspired by the ideology of IS, said that the detonation system, including the timer and shrapnel-like bolts, in the IEDs in Mangaluru and Bengaluru appeared to be similar.

The technical signatures of IEDs are considered to offer leads in investigations in blast cases and are often used as a preliminary guide to ascertain the identity of the group involved.

The presence of a group of youths allied to IS ideology and attempting to learn to make IEDs on their own with video coaching provided on encrypted communication platforms first emerged in 2022 when the Shivamogga police were investigating a stabbing incident.

A key suspect in the case, Mohammed Zabiullah, 23, was found to have received messages on encrypted applications on the IS and its ideology, from Sharique, who was eventually caught on November 19, 2022 when the IED he was transporting accidentally exploded in an autorickshaw in Mangaluru.

The Shivamogga police probe revealed that Sharique and two associates – Maaz Munee, 24, and Syed Yasin, 23 – had made IEDs and tested it in the Shivamogga region. The police arrested Munee and Yasin on September 19, 2022 while Sharique remained absconding until he popped up in Mangaluru on November 19, 2022, suffering 40 per cent burns in the autorickshaw blast.

After the Mangaluru IED blast, the NIA took over the probe in the case as well as the blast case in Mangaluru. It named 10 people as accused in the Shivamogga trial bomb blast case and two persons – Sharique and Yasin – in the Mangaluru blast case. The 10 accused in the Shivamogga blast case are Sharique, Munee and Yasin apart from Reeshan Tajuddin Sheikh, 24; Huzair Farhan Baig, 22; Mazin Abdul Rahman, 22; Nadeem Ahmed, 22; Mohammed Zabilulla, 23; Mohammed Faizal, 22; and Arafath Ali, 22.

Under fire from TMC for 'vulgar' songs, BJP's Asansol pick opts out

trusted me and declared me as the candidate from Asansol, but due to some reason, I will not be able to contest the elections from Asansol."

There was no official word from the BJP on his decision, but sources said the backlash on social media and possible repercussions on the party's poll prospects in Asansol may have led to a rethink on fielding Singh.

Incidentally, in recent weeks the BJP had appealed to have put the ruling TMC on the backfoot over allegations of sexual harassment by its local leaders in Sandeshkhali. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also targeted the TMC over the Sandeshkhali row in his address at Arambagh on Friday.

After Singh's candidature was announced, TMC leaders were quick to take to social media to target the BJP.

Sharing parts of songs featuring the Bhojpuri artiste, TMC spokesperson Riju Dutta posted on X: "PM @narendramodi was advocating for women in Bengal and shedding crocodile tears... Now, @BJP4India fields @PawanSingh909 from Asansol !! Some samples of Pawan Singh's vulgar music videos disrespecting Bengal's mothers & daughters... Bengal's 'Naari Shakti' will give him a befitting reply."

els. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youth were received."

The roadmap, the sources said, has a "comprehensive blueprint with clearly articulated national vision, aspirations, goals and action points".

The goals include economic growth, sustainable development goals (SDGs), ease of living, ease of doing business, infrastructure and social welfare.

A 100-day agenda for "immediate steps" was also worked upon for quick implementation after the formation of the new government in May, the sources said.

The Council held its meeting at a time when the Election Commission of India is expected to announce the schedule for the

Lok Sabha elections in the coming days, and parties are working on election manifestos, campaign plans and lists of candidates.

On Saturday, the BJP announced its first list of candidates for 195 seats across states and Union Territories.

Prime Minister Modi, who has already been touring states, is scheduled to visit Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar on March 4-6.

In Telangana, the Prime Minister will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of projects worth over Rs 56,000 crore in Adilabad. He will also inaugurate the Muzaaffarpur-Mothi LPG pipeline and dedicate to the nation the Indian Oil LPG bottling plant and storage terminal in Mothi.

gurate the Civil Aviation Research Organization (CARO). In Tamil Nadu, he will witness the initiation of core loading of the indigenous Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam.

In Odisha, Modi is scheduled to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 19,600 crore in Chandikhole.

He will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple connectivity projects worth Rs 15,400 crore in Kolkata, and infrastructure worth Rs 12,800 crore in Bettiah in Bihar. He will also inaugurate the Muzaaffarpur-Mothi LPG pipeline and dedicate to the nation the Indian Oil LPG bottling plant and storage terminal in Mothi.

On Cong manifesto table: Paper leak compensation

well as the public sector will have to be involved.

Sources said the Congress's manifesto committee, headed by former Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram, is in the last stages of drafting the document.

The Congress hopes the apprenticeship model that it is likely to propose can strike a chord with the aspirational India, especially the urban youth. The party is said to be working out the nitty-gritty of the proposal including details like the duration of the apprenticeship period and stipend.

The model will give the young people the headstart for a job... They will become more employable... It is also like the right to a job. Anybody can demand and get a job for a year," sources said.

The party is also said to be working on a promise to soften the blow of repeated question paper leaks which has resulted in cancellation of several examinations.

tions across states.

The Central government recently came out with a law to deal with paper leaks, putting in place harsher punishment for "organised" paper leaks, defining the offence as an "unlawful activity committed by a person or a group of persons indulging in unfair means in collusion and conspiracy to pursue or promote a shared interest for wrongful gain in respect of a public examination".

Sources in the Congress said the party is looking at a proposal which involves payment of monetary compensation to candidates affected by paper leaks and cancellation of competitive examinations. Coupled with the two, sources said, could be a promise of assistance or creation of an enabling environment to help the youth venture into startups and businesses.

The Congress has been heavily

Where clean air funds allotted to states went

greening with vertical gardens. Of the ₹19.28 crore received in 2023-24, the biggest share, ₹8.4 crore, went towards paving and black-topping roads.

In Bhopal, funds have been used for road-sweeping machines, CNC vehicles for waste collection, "construction of 110 water fountains for controlling road dust", a plant to dispose of dead animals, an "ultramodern garbage transfer station" and paving of roads. Of the ₹36 crore approved for 2023-24 under the 15th FC, the largest allocation of ₹20 crore is for collection, segregation and disposal of waste.

In Punjab, funds for Ludhiana were spent on road-sweeping machines, anti-smog guns, new roads and widening of roads. Here, roads received the largest chunk (₹46.20 crore) out of the 15th FC funds of ₹67.71 crore spent till January this year. In Amritsar, too, the largest share of the 15th Finance Commission funds (₹21.93 crore out of a total expenditure of ₹63.87 crore) went towards paving roads.

In Maharashtra spent ₹5.85 crore of NCAP funds on tree plantation, "beautification of open space", public awareness and "work on an internal road" in Navi Mumbai. It has utilised 28 per cent of the ₹58.75 crore 15th FC funds for the city on electric buses, dust suppression vehicles with sprayers and one PNG fur-

power supply to eliminate use of diesel generators, enforcement of pollution norms in industries, measures connected to electric vehicles, and measures for dealing with waste including construction and demolition waste. It also includes extending source apportionment studies to all cities, augmenting the air quality monitoring network, and air quality forecasting systems.

Operational guidelines issued by the Department of Expenditure on the implementation of the air quality component of the 15th FC say that the city's performance will be assessed on strengthening pollution monitoring mechanisms, source-wise cause analysis for air pollution, progress on action plans and quantification of air quality improvement. Environment Ministry guidelines on NCAP funds also mention the same four parameters and recommend sector-wise activities like promoting use of cleaner fuels, augmenting public transport, and dust and waste management.

In its most recent order, on February 19, the NGT that the states' reports indicate that action plans are implemented without studying pollution sources and told them to disclose these. It said the Environment Ministry "needs to ensure that assets created by expending such amounts are properly utilised".

Rajasthan, meanwhile, told the NGT last month that it utilised NCAP funds to set up six air quality monitoring stations in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kota, and two mobile monitoring stations.

NCAP was launched in January 2019 with an initial target of reducing PM10 and PM2.5 levels by 20 to 30 per cent by 2024 compared to 2017 levels. Later, the target was revised to reducing particulate matter by 40 per cent or achieving national ambient air quality standards by 2025-26.

A total of 131 cities receive funds under NCAP or grants sanctioned by the 15th FC for air quality improvement. Of these, 42 are "million-plus cities" that receive 15th FC grants for "augmenting infrastructure and other essential measures at city level to improve air quality". The funding is performance-based and meant for activities included in action plans prepared for the cities.

An NCAP strategy document prepared by the Environment Ministry in 2019 recommends a number of actions to mitigate air pollution – plantation, mechanical sweepers, water sprinkling along roads, greening, landscaping and wall-to-wall paving of roads, phasing out older coal-based power plants, introducing fountains at major traffic intersections where feasible, ensuring

power supply to eliminate use of diesel generators, enforcement of pollution norms in industries, measures connected to electric vehicles, and measures for dealing with waste including construction and demolition waste. It also includes extending source apportionment studies to all cities, augmenting the air quality monitoring network, and air quality forecasting systems.

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Justice Gangopadhyay of Calcutta HC says quitting to join politics

day after the BJP announced its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls including some from West Bengal.

Justice Gangopadhyay, whose TV interviews in the past have attracted the ire of the Supreme Court, said this about his decision: "For this, I have to congratulate our ruling party (in the state, the TMC). Whenever I have tried to do justice, if they have not liked it, they have used their various spokespersons to make insulting and taunting statements against the judge and the judiciary," he said.

In the last two years, Justice Gangopadhyay's courtroom has been witness to dramatic scenes with the judge openly sparring with lawyers representing the state government and the TMC leader.

Asked which party he is likely to join, he said, "There are many parties. There is the Congress, the Left, the BJP, many smaller parties. If they decide to offer me a ticket, I will then consider whether to become their nominee. I will not say anything definite right now. When the time comes, you will know."

"I did not mention Trinamool among the parties whose names I took. I have said that West Bengal under the Trinamool is

empire of thieves (chourya samrajya). There is no question of joining that party. I can see that the party is gradually falling behind, breaking up... The major question is the dignity (maryada) of West Bengal, which has hit rock bottom, whether it is possible to save West Bengal," he said.

Criticising the ruling TMC, he said corruption was rampant in the state. He also said that he was not able to reach out to the common people from the courtroom.

"As a Bengali, I cannot accept this. Those who emerged as rulers did not seem to be able to benefit the kingdom. I will take the challenge. I have decided to resign on Tuesday. On Monday, I will be in court as I have lots of cases on hand," he said.

In an hour-long interview to ABP Ananda in September 2022, the judge had openly questioned the finances of Abhishek Banerjee and in a separate, unrelated case made an oral remark about a "bhaino (nephew)" amassing wealth. This comment prompted TMC leader Kunal Ghosh to demand that the judge resign and contest an election against Banerjee.

In the interview Sunday, Justice Gangopadhyay said his

last day at the Calcutta High Court would be Monday, March 4, and that he would send his resignation letter to the President on Tuesday, March 5.

Criticising the ruling TMC, he said corruption was rampant in the state. He also said that he was not able to reach out to the common people from the courtroom.

"As a Bengali, I cannot accept this. Those who emerged as rulers did not seem to be able to benefit the kingdom. I will take the challenge. I have decided to resign on Tuesday. On Monday, I will be in court as I have lots of cases on hand," he said.

Reacting to the judge's announcement Sunday, TMC state spokesperson Debangshu Bhattacharya said, "We have been saying for long that he is a political party worker. We thank him today for proving us right."

State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar welcomed Justice Gangopadhyay's decision to join politics. "People like Abhijit Gangopadhyay joining politics is something that is in the coun-

try's favour. I guess the BJP would be his natural choice," he said.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said his party would welcome Justice Gangopadhyay. "He is a crusader against corruption. If he wants to join the Congress, we will give him a warm welcome. He is a fighter. If he joins the BJP, then ideologically we can't support (him)." Chowdhury had once said that he would like Justice Gangopadhyay to be the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

State Minister Firdaus Hakim said that such acts were slowly making people lose faith in the judiciary. "Judiciary has respect. We see a judge next to god. What he (Gangopadhyay) is doing is his personal choice... Slowly, people are losing trust in the judiciary," he said.

Justice Gangopadhyay was a lawyer at Calcutta High Court before he was appointed as Additional Judge in May 2018. In 2020, he was promoted as a permanent Judge of the Calcutta High Court.

In divided Bar, move raises questions on independence of judiciary

would join politics marks a telling moment in the discourse around the independence of the judiciary.

For one, it comes at a time when the bar in the state is deeply divided, reflecting – and sometimes shaped by – the fault-lines of the state's politics.

Moreover, for more than two years, both in his judicial orders and in media interviews, Justice Gangopadhyay has attacked the ruling Trinamool Congress and its leaders.

His courtroom, too, has been witness to acrimonious exchanges with lawyers questioning his propriety while the judge himself has made allegations against his senior colleagues, accusing one of them of working for "some political party."

"When a judge does this, it, of course, sends a bad message. But he was rarely neutral in court which is important for a good judge," Ghose said.

"What stands out is that, in hindsight, the judge has used the pulpit of the court to drive a political agenda," a senior advocate said.

Following the SC intervention in January, Justice Gangopadhyay's roster was changed on February 4, with some significant matters being

taken away from his Court. He was handling labour and industrial disputes. Apart from the Lok Sabha poll schedule, some in the Bar point to this "clipping of wings" to underscore the timing of his decision.

Former Meghalaya High Court Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee also criticised Justice Gangopadhyay's announcement. "If one has political ambitions, then he must have recused from political cases," Justice Banerjee said.

Justice Banerjee added that there is no mechanism to deal with judges for crossing the line between judicial discipline and entering politics, while still in office.

"Being honest is not only about monetary aspects. It is also about having a straight backbone and conducting court without political aspirations," he added.

Advocate Tarunyoti Tewari, a BJP member and Centre's counsel in the Calcutta HC, said the TMC was to blame.

"For every order he passed,

TMC could have gone in appeal but they first attacked the judge... they relentlessly attacked him," he said. "He is still a sitting judge so I won't speculate whether he will join my party. But whichever party he joins, his ability to call a spade a spade will be an asset in politics," Tewari added.



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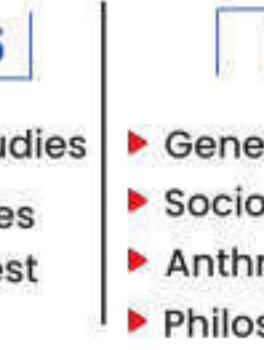
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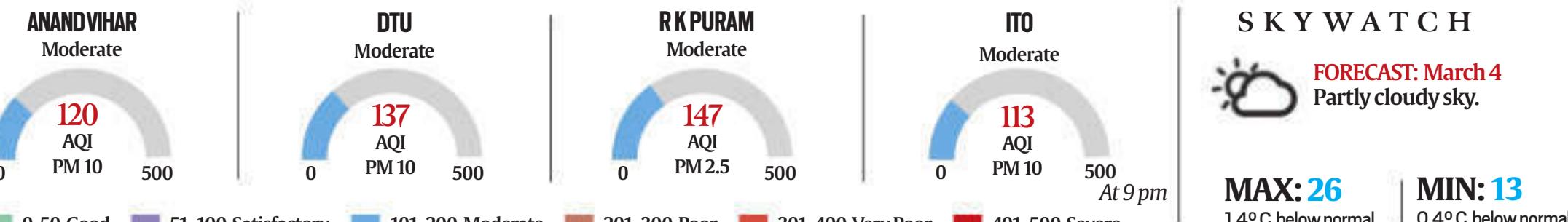
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BRIEFLY

Man flees with SUV on pretext of test drive, arrested

Noida: The Noida police Sunday arrested a man for allegedly fleeing with a Mahindra Thar on the pretext of taking it for a test drive. The incident took place on Saturday in Sector 63, police said, adding that the vehicle has been recovered. "Accused Mohit Chawla had taken the Mahindra Thar for a test drive on Saturday but did not return after which the plaintiff lodged a complaint against him at the local police station," a police spokesperson said. The accused was previously booked in similar cases in Delhi and Noida, police said.

Boy killed after bus rams into motorcycle

New Delhi: A six-year-old child died while his father and grandfather were injured Sunday when their motorcycle was hit by a bus in Northeast Delhi, police said. They were informed about the accident at 5 pm. The motorcycle had been crushed under the front left tyre of the bus, DCP (Northeast) Joy Tirkey said. The child, a resident of Brahmpuri, was rushed to Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital, where he was declared brought dead, he said. His father and grandfather are undergoing treatment, the DCP added.

Hailstorm in parts of Delhi-NCR

New Delhi: Several parts of the NCR witnessed hailstorm, high-speed winds and rain Sunday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Earlier in the day, the IMD had said thunderstorm with light-to-moderate intensity rain might occur at isolated places in Delhi. PTI

Delhi Budget to invoke Ram Rajya, focus on unauthorised colonies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

RAM RAJYA and a focus on unauthorised colonies — Delhi's budget, to be tabled in the Delhi assembly Monday, will work on these two prominent themes, government sources said. Officials added that the Budget is "likely to have something for every section of society".

This is not the first time AAP has invoked Ram Rajya. During his Republic Day speech, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said AAP had adopted 10 principles of Ram Rajya — quality education, healthcare services, free electricity and water to people and ensuring women's safety.

ANNOUNCED DURING DELHI BUDGET LAST YEAR

Revamping 1,400 km of roads, mahila clinics: Key city projects yet to take off

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

FROM CONSTRUCTION of two dozen flyovers, repair and maintenance of 1,400 km of roads for 10 years to induction of 1,600 new buses and the inauguration of women-specific mohalla clinics, many of the AAP government's key promises from last year's budget are yet to take off.

Frequent standoffs between the government and the L-G and bureaucracy, since the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act was passed, have been blamed for the slow pace of work. The Act essentially makes the L-G the head of the bureaucracy.

Before tabling the Economic Survey on Friday, Finance Minister Atishi said in the Assembly that several projects and schemes were stopped and held the L-G responsible for the hurdles.

In a letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday, however, L-G VK Saxena said work was stalled in areas directly under the control of the elected government and that "an overhyped education system... overflowing sewage lines and drains, scams in Excise Policy, Jal Board, Power Department... fake tests in Mohalla Clinics were a product of gross inefficiency and misgovernance" of the elected government.

Of nine key announcements made in last year's budget, seven were from the road and public transport sector, with both short- and long-term timelines. Work on some of the key transport-related infrastructure projects has started but the bigger ones are still hanging fire.

With the annual budget to be tabled Monday, *The Indian Express* looks at five key promises made last time and where they stand.

Redevelopment and beautification of 1,400 km of roads

Following the implementation of its streetscaping and beautification project on 16 road stretches, the Delhi government floated a similar plan for 1,400 km of roads. A hybrid annuity model was proposed — where the PWD will award maintenance work to a firm through a tender for 10 years.

The project, however, ran into hurdles after the MCD refused to



(Clockwise from above) One of the 4 mahila mohalla clinics on Kali Mata Mandir near Bangla Sahib Road; a street-scaping project, based on which the govt planned its 1,400 km road revamp; Anand Vihar, which is among the 2 ISBTs proposed to be developed as bus ports. Archive

FUNDS ALLOTTED FOR THESE PROJECTS

Revamp of 1,400 km of roads with maintenance for 10 years

Allocation: ₹19,466 crore

Electrification of all 57 bus depots

Allocation: ₹1,500 crore

Mohalla buses

Allocation for a year for all e-buses, including mohalla buses: ₹3,500 crore

For 12 years: ₹28,556 crore

Developing two ISBTs as 'bus ports'. Allocation — N/A

9 new hospitals, Mahila Mohalla Clinics, Health Information Management System Allocated budget: ₹9,742 crore for the health sector

was not able to implement it and the contract was terminated. A new tender has not been floated yet by the department."

The government said officials had suggested starting the project through NIC but the Delhi government did not agree.

No response was received regarding the status of the hospitals and the mahila mohalla clinics.

Electrification of 57 bus depots

Setting a target to convert 80% of the total buses in Delhi into electric buses by 2025, the Delhi government promised to electrify all its bus depots by December 2023. Of the total depots, three were already electrified and 17 were to be electrified by June 2023. But the project did not meet the target. Later, 16 bus depots, including new electric ones, were fully electrified — some last year and 12 this February. 320 EV chargers are now in operation.

"More than 60 bus depots are being electrified to house over 8,000 e-buses out of the 10,480 buses that Delhi will have by 2025... Work on other depots is underway," the government said.

Developing 2 ISBTs as bus ports

With the Rapid Rail Transit System (RRTS) coming up around Delhi (Meerut, Alwar and Panipat), the Delhi government had proposed to develop the inter-state bus transit points. Of these, Sarai Kale Khan and Anand Vihar see lakhs of people as they have connectivity with railway stations. To ensure multimodal integration and provide facilities at par with airports, the Delhi government, in partnership with DMRC, proposed to redevelop these two ISBTs as bus ports and build a new bus depot in Dwarka.

Bus ports, on the line of airports, aim to provide a hassle-free commute and interconnectivity to the Metro, upcoming RRTS and railway stations.

However, the project exists only on paper at present. Work was supposed to start in 2023-24.

The Delhi government said, "DMRC is in the process of redeveloping these ISBTs. E&Y has already been appointed as the consultant. The feasibility study is in progress and the DPR will be presented soon," said officials.

MP Harsh Vardhan calls it quits, day after being denied a ticket
BJP picks bizman for Chandni Chowk

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3



Former union minister Harsh Vardhan. Archive

politics following the insistence of the then RSS leadership.

Khandelwal, who is being fielded from Chandni Chowk, is a businessman and general secretary of the Confederation of All India Traders. He is a former treasurer of the BJP's Delhi unit.

Meanwhile, AAP senior leader Atishi criticised the BJP's move saying, "The BJP habitually makes a fool of Delhiites. First, they get elected for five years, make promises to the people and do not fulfil them. When people question the candidates, they replace them saying it is not the party's fault... it was the candidate. Yesterday, they announced candidates for five seats and four sitting MPs — Harsh Vardhan from Chandni Chowk, Parvesh Verma from West Delhi, Ramesh Bidhuri from South Delhi, and Meenakshi Lekhi from New Delhi — have been replaced."

On Vardhan's decision, she said his ticket was cancelled because of his honesty. "Dr Harsh Vardhan is known for his honesty and hard work for the country and constituency... He always raised issues of public interest and spoke for them. I think it has become very clear that just as he was removed from the position of Health Minister at one time for raising some issues, today it seems perhaps his ticket has been cut due to his honesty," she said.

AAP claims Bansuri defends 'anti-national forces'; she hits back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3



THE AAP Sunday demanded that BJP change its New Delhi Lok Sabha candidate, Bansuri Swaraj, and accused her of defending "anti-national forces in court".

Swaraj is a Supreme Court lawyer and daughter of former union minister and Delhi CM Sushma Swaraj. She has replaced union minister and current Lok Sabha MP Meenakshi Lekhi from the New Delhi constituency, and will be going up against AAP's Somnath Bharti, also a lawyer.

"Bansuri Swaraj has repeatedly defended fugitive Lalit Modi in court, who has fled the country after embezzling lakhs of crores of rupees... When violence occurred in Manipur and two women were stripped and paraded, Bansuri Swaraj stood for the BJP-led Centre in the Supreme Court. Now, she will ask for votes from women in the New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency. When the Chandigarh mayoral elections were held and there was an attempt to tamper with votes... Swaraj stood for the fake mayor from the BJP in the SC," said senior

AAP leader and minister Atishi.

Responding to AAP's claims, Swaraj said, "They (AAP) have named a candidate who is not liked by his own party members. They can make allegations against us but people will give them a fitting reply in the elections." (WITH PTI INPUTS)

NEAR FLAGSTAFF TOWER

In North Delhi, epitaph at British soldier's bare gravesite symbol of wife's love

PIN CODE
110001

UPASAKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

WALKING UP the steep road in the Kamla Nehru Ridge, near Delhi University's North Campus, it is hard to miss the famous Flagstaff Tower, where the families of British personnel took refuge in 1857 as they waited for help to arrive during the Sepoy Mutiny. Barely 200 metres down the line

lies another site that dates back to the same period, although not much is known about it except for a board announcing: "Grave of Lt. Edwards and Others".

Nayanjot Lahiri's research in "Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The Revolt in Delhi and Its Afterlife" reveals that during the revolt, the British found bodies of their deceased officers on a cart near the tower.

The four men were then given a suitable burial; H C Fanshawe's *Delhi Past and Present* records the inscription. It says: "Sacred to the memory of Captain R. M. Smith, Captain C. Burrowes, Lt. C. A. Edwards, Lt. W. Waterfield,



all of the 34th Regiment, B.N.I. They were killed by the mutineers of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry... opposite the church in the city of Delhi. This tribute to their mem-

ory is erected by their surviving brother officers."

Today, the graves lie within a bare brick periphery, and the inscription is barely legible.



The gravesite is around 200 metres down a steep road in Kamla Nehru Ridge, in DU's North Campus. Amit Mehra

However, in what is a truly touching show of affection, Lt. Edwards' widow, who wanted her husband to be remembered in other ways... he is memorialised not merely as a soldier... but as a son...

also as a man of 'Christian virtues' and, most poignantly, as an affectionate husband," Lahiri writes.

Miles Irving's exhaustive "A List of Inscriptions on Christian Tombs or Monuments in the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Kashmir and Afghanistan" records a bit of the background of the four deaths.

"When the rebel cavalry entered Delhi, the 54th under Colonel Ripley were ordered to march down from the cantonments with two guns. Two companies were left behind to escort the guns, and the rest of the regiment marched down to the Cashmere gate... While they were loading, Ripley was cut

Why Gambhir called time on his political career

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

HOURS BEFORE the BJP released its first list of Lok Sabha candidates on Saturday, the party's East Delhi MP and former cricketer Gautam Gambhir announced his decision to quit politics and return to the sport, stumping many including those in the BJP.

A source in the BJP said the "party was looking to repeat him as a candidate, even if not from East Delhi or a seat in the capital" and that this decision "was conveyed to him".

The source said that at an organisational meeting that preceded the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting on Thursday night, where the names for the first list were drawn up, "a senior Union Minister" described Gambhir as the "the perfect candidate" who could ensure an additional 370 votes per booth in his Lok Sabha constituency — a target the BJP leadership has set in order to win 370 seats.

The BJP insider said Gambhir was now considering taking on cricket administration duties "at least in Delhi, if not the country". It was in fact cricket administration that led Gambhir to take up a political career. Leaders in Delhi BJP said Gambhir shared a close relationship with former Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and his family. Gambhir is said to have closely observed Jaitley's tenure as the president of the Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) that began in the late 1990s. He held on to the post till he passed away in 2019. It was at Jaitley's advice, the leaders say,



Gautam Gambhir

that Gambhir made the switch to politics.

"Arun ji asked him to make the decision on the heels of the announcement of a Padma Shri for Gautam in March 2018. Gambhir agreed to join the party and followed instructions to become more active and expressive on nationalism on various media," a leader said.

Gambhir would do exactly that and joined the BJP in March 2019, also continuing as a cricket commentator. Gambhir was named the BJP's East Delhi Delhi soon after and riding the BJP wave in Delhi — the party won over 56% of the vote share in the city — he polled seven lakh votes and clinched the seat.

Though the entry into politics was smooth, Gambhir's tenure remained a turbulent one. He repeatedly took on Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal "over the promise of transforming the capital into a World Class City" and often got into heated exchanges with AAP leaders.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com



BSF personnel conduct flag march in Kolkata on Sunday for the upcoming LS elections. PTI

EC team in Bengal to meet parties today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MARCH 3

THE FULL bench of the Election Commission of India (ECI) reached West Bengal on Sunday evening to take stock of the law and order situation and to look into the state's poll preparedness ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

The 13-member team's visit comes amid the political firestorm over the Sandeshkhali issue and the BJP's allegations that there are around 16 lakh false/duplicate names in the voters' list of

the state. During the three-day visit, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Election Commissioner Arun Goel will meet representatives of all political parties in the state, and hold a meeting with district magistrates and superintendents of police, they said.

On Monday, the bench will hold a separate meeting with political parties regarding election-related issues. During the meeting, the panel will hear views of political parties related to election and law and order situation.

'Fact-finding' team visits Sandeshkhali

Kolkata: A six-member 'fact-finding' committee of an NGO Sunday visited three villages in Sandeshkhali, which had been at the centre of protests till last month over allegations of sexual harassment of local women and land grab by local TMC leaders. After seeing the court order, the police asked the members to submit written forms. Police allowed the members to proceed to Sandeshkhali in a boat. ENS

Hemant's wife Kalpana to enter 'public life' today

Ranchi: Kalpana Soren, wife of jailed former chief minister Hemant Soren, has announced her decision to enter "public life" during Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's (JMM) foundation day programme in Giridih Monday.

The party has decided to observe its 51st foundation day as Aakrosh Diwas at Jhanda ground in Giridih, a party official said. Kalpana Sunday sought blessings from her father-in-law and JMM chief Shibu Soren and mother-in-law Roopi. She also met her husband.

"Today, before attending the foundation day programme of JMM in Giridih on my birthday, I took blessings from the creator of Jharkhand state and president of JMM respected Baba Dishom."

Guruji and mother. Also, met Hemant ji this morning," Kalpana posted on X.

She announced her decision to embark on public-life journey citing the demands of the people of Jharkhand. She pledged to continue voicing Hemant Soren's thoughts and serving the people until his return. Kalpana, who holds an MTech and MBA, completed her schooling in Baripada, Odisha, and pursued her engineering and MBA degrees from institutions in Bhubaneswar.

"Today, before attending the foundation day programme of JMM in Giridih on my birthday, I took blessings from the creator of Jharkhand state and president of JMM respected Baba Dishom."

JMM executive president Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud.

PTI

Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel chief guest at States of Hope event today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 3

GUJARAT CHIEF Minister Bhupendra Patel will be the chief guest at the States of Hope series organised by *The Indian Express* here on Monday.

The States of Hope event will kick off with a panel discussion on 'Infrastructure: the promise of transformational development' by experts in the field, including Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board (GIDB) CEO Banchnandhi Pani, Vice Chairman and CEO, Gujarat Maritime Board, Rajkumar Beniwal, Prof Jigna Desai from CEPT University, Founder and MD, Savvy Group, Sameer Sinha and Prof Rachna Gangwar from Adani University. This will be followed by a keynote address by CM Patel.

With only 5 per cent population share, Gujarat accounted for 8.2 per cent of the national GDP



CM Bhupendra Patel

in 2022-23. The state has a share of more than 30 per cent of the country's aggregate exports where ports are the most important players. The cargo handled by these ports has grown exponentially from 731.80 lakh tonnes in 2000-2001 to 4,163.57 lakh tonnes in 2022-2023.

In the recently concluded budget session, the Gujarat government led by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel announced the upgrade of nine municipalities to municipal corporations, tak-

ing the total number of municipal corporations to 17 in the state, which is projected to take the urban population to 75 per cent by 2047.

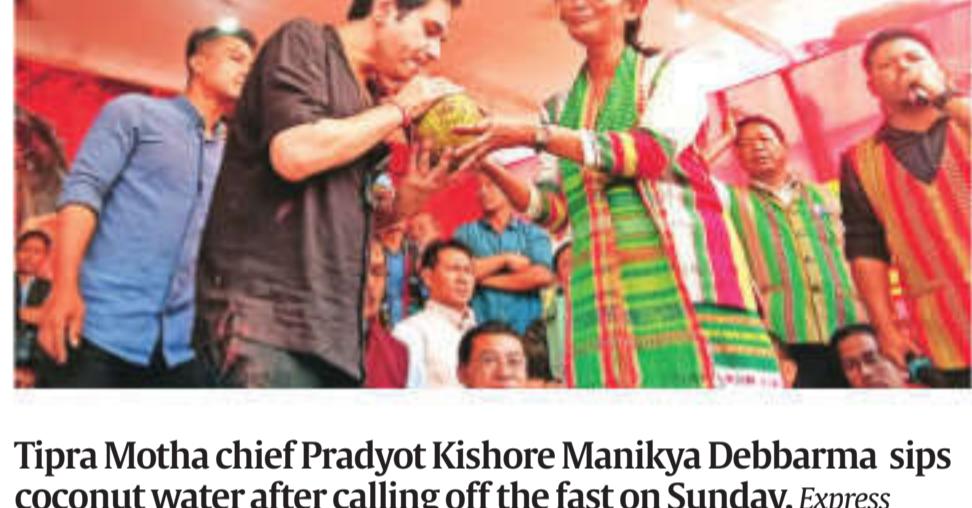
In his 2024-2025 budget speech, state Finance Minister Kanu Bhai Desai had said the growth rate of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was 14.89 per cent and the state's share in the national GDP had gone up from 5.1 per cent in 2000-2001 to 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal.

Powering this has been the

robust infrastructure in Gujarat, a state that has traditionally traded with other countries via the sea route.

If cities have been the growth engines of the state, it is the states that have been the growth and governance drivers of the country. From transport to agriculture, from amplifying digitalisation to improving infrastructural systems, states are the building blocks in shaping India's transformation.

The States of Hope series focusing on Gujarat is a compelling exploration of the transformative infra projects across Indian states. These trend-setting projects at the state level transform these regions into islands that the rest of the country and the world can emulate. Implementing these programmes are often challenging. But there are also lessons to be learnt and can be a blueprint to check how future-ready the state is.



Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma sips coconut water after calling off the fast on Sunday. Express

Pradyot calls off his fast: '60 per cent battle won... work hard for the rest'

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, MARCH 3

A DAY after the Tipra Motha signed a tripartite agreement with the Centre and the Tripura government, party founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma called off his fast unto death Sunday, saying "60 percent of the battle" had been won and urging the indigenous community to remain united to see it to the end.

"We have to work hard to get the remaining 40 percent," he told a rally at Hatai Kotor in West Tripura district. "We signed Constitutional solutions to correct them". "This victory isn't a party's victory, rather it's the victory of youths, tribal mothers, and children. Our time is gone. Now, we have to think about the next generation," he said.

Comparing the tripartite accord to a newborn baby, he said the tribal community would have to work together to raise it now. He also said he wanted academics, teachers, lawyers, and learned and honest people who know the history of the state to the next generation," he said.

Hatai Kotor is where Debbarma began his fast to demand a permanent solution to the problems of the indigenous people on February 28 before pausing it on the same day to rush to Delhi for a meeting.

In a statement after the agree-

ment was signed in presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah,

the Centre said that under the pact "it was agreed to amicably resolve all issues of indigenous people of Tripura relating to history, land and political rights, economic development, identity, culture and language". A joint working group to work out and implement "the mutually agreed points" in a time-bound manner would also be created, the Centre's statement added.

Debbarma told the rally Sunday the Government of India "has accepted in writing that mistakes were made in the past and they would make Constitutional solutions to correct them".

"This victory isn't a party's victory, rather it's the victory of youths, tribal mothers, and children. Our time is gone. Now, we have to think about the next generation," he said.

Addressing the press, Dhalal alleged that there was no democracy within the BJD and senior leaders were being neglected.

"After feeling suffocated, I left the BJD and joined the BJP, which has internal democracy," he said.

Dhalal, who resigned from the ruling BJD Saturday, went to the BJP office in Bhubaneswar, along

the next government in the state by winning more than 100 of the Assembly's 147 seats. PTI



Government of India

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- Nangal Floating Solar Project (15 MW), SJVN
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- 70 MW Solar Power Project, Assam, SJVN
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- Widening to 2 lane from km 279/150 to 290/500 (Jagannadhapuram to Cherukuru section) of NH-163 in Mulugu Tribal District, MoRTH
- Jalaun Ultra Mega Renewable Energy Power Park (1200 MW), BSUL

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- Establishment of 220/22KV GIS at UT Chandigarh along with 220KV D/C line from Chandigarh GIS to 400/220KV Panchkula (PG) Sub station, PGCIL
- Northern Region System Strengthening Scheme - XXXV, PGCIL
- Retrofitting Pollution Control System-FGD Unit-I (500 MW) of Koderma Thermal Power Station (2x500 MW), DVC
- Evacuation of Power from RE Sources in Koppal Wind Energy Zone (Karnataka) (2500MW) (SPV - Koppal-Narendra Transmission Limited), ReNew
- Kallam Transmission Limited, IndiGrid
- Northern Region System Strengthening - XI, PGCIL
- 380 MW Solar Power Project under REIA Tranche-1 in Fatehgarh, Rajasthan, O2 Power/NHPC
- System Strengthening Scheme in Northern Region - XXXVII, PGCIL
- Naitwar Mori Hydro Electric Project (60 MW), SJVN
- North Eastern Region Strengthening Scheme - XII (NERSS-XII), PGCIL

Benefits of the Projects

Providing 85% power to Telangana from high-efficiency NTPC Thermal Plant

Ensuring 24x7 reliable power supply by strengthening Grid infrastructure

Creating employment in Telangana & other states

Socio-economic development of the country

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Improving Rail and Road connectivity in Telangana region

In the august presence of

Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan
Governor, Telangana

Shri A. Revanth Reddy
Chief Minister, Telangana

Shri R. K. Singh
Union Minister of Power, New & Renewable Energy

Shri G. Kishan Reddy
Union Minister of Culture, Tourism and Development of North Eastern Region

Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar
Minister of State for Power and Heavy Industries

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WORLD OBESITY DAY



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Sweet Cravings with Diabetes



Dr. Hemi Suneja
Consultant Endocrinologist,
New Delhi

portion control to enjoy small servings without causing drastic fluctuations in blood sugar. Savor each bite, allowing yourself the pleasure of the treat without overindulging.

Healthy Sweet Foods:

Natural sweetness found in fruits like berries, apples, and citrus fruits can satisfy your sweet cravings while providing essential vitamins and fiber.

Smart Snacks:

Being prepared with diabetes-friendly snacks is essential. Keep a stash of nuts, seeds, or Greek yogurt with a drizzle of honey for those moments when craving strike. Having nutritious options readily available ensures you make healthy choices even when tempted by sugary options.

Stay Hydrated:

Sometimes, what may seem like a sweet craving could be a sign of dehydration. Drinking an adequate amount of water throughout the day can help curb unnecessary cravings.

Consult with a Dietitian:

Seeking guidance from a registered dietitian specialized in diabetes can provide personalized strategies for handling sweet cravings. A dietary plan that aligns with your health goals will make the journey to manage sweet cravings more sustainable.

Managing sweet cravings with diabetes is about finding a balance that works for you. Remember it's not about deprivation but making informed choices that support a healthier and happier life with diabetes.

Mindful Portion Control:

Choose Smart Sweeteners:

Opting for sugar or sweeteners can be a good option. Stevia, erythritol, and monk fruit are excellent alternatives that provide sweetness without causing significant spikes in blood sugar levels.

Indulge in your favorite sweet treats is not off-limits, but moderation is key. Practice mindful

living with diabetes presents its own set of challenges, and managing sweet cravings is a common dilemma. Striking a balance between satisfying your sweet tooth and maintaining blood sugar levels is crucial. In this article, we explore practical strategies to handle sweet cravings while keeping diabetes in check.

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Obesity: The Silent Heart Threat



Dr. Arif Wahab
Consultant & Interventional
Cardiologist, New Delhi

higher BMIs, particularly those classified as obese (BMI of 30 or higher), showed elevated troponin levels and were more likely to develop heart failure. Those with both obesity and high troponin levels were nine times more likely to develop heart failure compared to normal-weight individuals with undetectable troponin.

The study underscores the alarming prevalence of heart failure, projected to affect one in five adults by 2030, with obesity as a significant contributing factor. Even overweight individuals were shown to be at increased risk, with heart risk severity rising with higher BMI levels.

This research marks a paradigm shift in understanding obesity's relationship with heart health, indicating that excess weight can directly lead to heart muscle injury and subsequent failure, independent of other cardiovascular risk factors. Early intervention facilitated by highly sensitive lab tests detecting troponin at lower levels can aid in tackling the obesity epidemic and its cardiac complications.

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Obesity complicates the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease



Dr. Manish Aggarwal
Senior Consultant and Head
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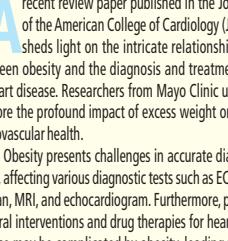
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Consultant Endocrinologist,
Gurgaon

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THE BANGALORE BLAST

State and Central agencies have their task cut out. Parties should let probe take its course free of politics

INITIAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO Friday's blast at Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Café that injured nine, including a 45-year-old woman who is battling burn injuries, have revealed that an unidentified man kept a bag at the popular eatery minutes before the explosion. Police are scanning CCTV footage to pick up leads on the suspect who may have left behind an improvised explosive device in the bag. Eight teams have been set up to crack the case and police are exploring possible links with terror cases from 2022 where the explosive used was similar. Karnataka's Deputy CM, DK Shivakumar, has promised investigators a free hand and said that the incident "should not be politicised". The Opposition BJP has rightly called out the government for the law-and-order failure but in an election year both sides need to ensure that the investigation is insulated from politics. Senior BJP leader and former CM Basavaraj Bommai has linked the blast to alleged "pro-Pakistan" slogans raised in the Karnataka Assembly last week. The ruling Congress, too, has contributed to raising the heat. Shivakumar, also the state Congress chief, has referred to the blast in the same breath as the 2022 Mangalore explosion on the watch of the BJP government in the state. All parties should let the probe take its due course and follow where the facts lead.

Rameshwaram Café is located at a junction close to Bengaluru's technology hub that houses top IT companies like IBM, SAP and Accenture as well as several startups. Celebrated for its culinary offerings, the café is a popular haunt for professionals of these firms. The blast happened around 1 pm on Friday when many of them were having lunch, including the 45-year-old accountant from a multinational semiconductor firm who bore the brunt of the explosion. Among the injured are blue-collar migrant workers.

Bengaluru's restaurant sector has also recognised the need to step up vigil, including training its staff to recognise suspicious behaviour and developing standard operating procedures to evacuate customers during an emergency. The city's hotel association has reportedly said that it will chalk out a plan to improve the security system at eateries across the city. It is planning to hold a meeting between its members and police officials this week. The political class, too, must participate in these conversations to make Bengaluru more secure. What will help is: a thorough probe that leads to the guilty, a heightened vigil, and a public discourse that puts citizen security over political point-scoring.

MACRON VS PUTIN

Caught between an aggressive Russia and an isolationist America, Europe's moment of reckoning has come

FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL Macron's suggestion that NATO should consider sending troops to Ukraine to bolster Kyiv's defences against Russian occupation forces generated a chorus of protests within the alliance, including from Europe's most influential nation, Germany. But it was the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, unsurprisingly, who came out all guns blazing against the idea. He issued a dire warning: Any NATO troop deployment in Ukraine would not only lead to massive military escalation but also to Russian use of nuclear weapons.

The European controversy over Macron's remarks reflects the deepening dilemmas of NATO in addressing the current stalemate in the Ukraine war that entered its third year last month. A year ago, Europe was betting on a successful military counter-offensive by Kyiv to push Russian troops out of Ukraine. Those hopes have dissipated as Russia got its defences together and is now taking offensive actions. Without enough weapons and ammunition, Ukraine has had one arm tied behind its back. Meanwhile, the pressure from the Republican Party across the Atlantic insists Europe must take responsibility for the Ukraine war. Caught between an aggressive Russia and an isolationist America, Europe's moment of reckoning has come. France's Macron, who leads the only serious military power in Western Europe, was responding to that challenge when he said NATO should not rule out the possibility of sending troops to defend Ukraine. Much of Europe is paralysed by the fear of escalation and is not prepared to confront the geopolitical consequences of a Russian victory, whichever way you define it, in Ukraine.

The debate initiated by Macron is unlikely to subside, for Europe and NATO have to find a way of preventing further losses for Ukraine. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has mercilessly exposed European illusions about a post-conflict continent and revealed its unpreparedness to defend its territory. European measures to ramp up the production of weapons and munitions, like the Russian mobilisation of its industry for a war economy, will not only take time but is also deeply unpopular in a continent reared in the lap of a generous welfare state. Meanwhile, NATO has to come to terms with Putin's nuclear threats that have succeeded in deterring the West from deploying the full range of military means to counter Russian aggression. Even as he threatens nuclear escalation, Putin is inviting NATO for talks on nuclear arms control. He is also calling for negotiations to end the war and setting the terms for peace that demand a pro-Russian regime in Kyiv and a neutralised Ukraine. By simultaneous military and political moves, Putin hopes to deepen European political divisions. Can Europe hang together? As Macron reminded the Europeans, "This is a war on our soil and our continent".

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI AND MANISH KUMAR PRASAD

PROTESTING FARMERS have put forward 12 demands. Of these, at least two have large economic implications. The first is the legalisation and increase of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) at C2+50 per cent profit for 23 crops for which the government announces the MSP. The second is the assurance of minimum 200 days of employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with a daily wage rate of Rs 700. Let us look at their economic implications, if at all the government is willing to consider these.

The comprehensive cost (C2) includes, besides paid out costs and imputed wage for family labour (A2+FL), imputed rent on owned land, and imputed interest on owned capital. If the government accepts this formula of Cost C2+50 per cent, then our calculations show that the MSP levels for 23 crops will go up, on an average, by 25 per cent over the 2023-24 MSPs. Within this basket of 23 commodities, MSP increase will vary across crops. While safflower MSP will go up by 40 per cent, sugarcane's FRP will go up only by 3 per cent, wheat by 9 per cent, and mustard by 8 per cent, as their existing MSPs are already well above cost A2+FL plus 50 per cent margin. For other crops, MSP increases would be: Sesamum (37 per cent), sunflower (32 per cent), soybean (31 per cent), groundnut (26 per cent), paddy (31 per cent), jowar (33 per cent), maize (29 per cent), ragi (30 per cent), tur (28 per cent), moong (27 per cent), urad (35 per cent), gram (25 per cent), and lentil (14 per cent). Commercial crops' MSP will also go up: Cotton (24 per cent), copra (31 per cent), and jute (21 per cent). These MSP hikes would change the relative prices of these crops and could prompt shifts in cropping patterns. Wheat and sugarcane are likely to lose area, while paddy surpluses may go up significantly. This may force higher MSP hikes in wheat and sugarcane than indicated by C2+50 per cent formula.

Price hikes in commodities like soybean and maize, which are basic feed material for poultry, fishery and dairy, will push the prices of livestock and fishery products, thus leading

Their demands pose fiscal challenges. Government must focus on correction, not intervention

to high food inflation. Additionally, the magnetic pull of stable and legal MSPs of 23 crops may attract many producers of horticulture, which can create shortages of fruits and vegetables. This would lead to higher inflation in fruits and vegetables too. Thus, overall, it seems that food inflation may go up by 20 to 30 per cent.

Making MSPs legal will be more problematic for farmers. Take the case of rice whose MSP will go up by 31 per cent under the new MSP formula. All exports of rice, about 22 MT, would become unviable adding to domestic supplies. When MSP of paddy goes up by 31 per cent and sugarcane by only 3 per cent, paddy will start substituting even sugarcane and many other crops in kharif season, creating a glut in the domestic market. And when supplies may far exceed demand, traders will not touch the excess supplies for fear of being harassed and fined. How much can the government buy and then distribute in PDS, and at what cost? How much fiscal cost it can inflict on the government if deficiency payments are paid is hard to estimate as it will depend upon the difference between market price and MSP, and at what price these commodities are unloaded in the market.

In any case, it is worth reiterating that the value of the MSP segment (23 crops) constitutes less than 28 per cent of agricultural output. More than 72 per cent of agricultural produce faces market prices and is performing much better than rice, wheat and sugarcane, in which MSP/FRP is most effective today. The average annual growth rates during 2010-11 to 2021-22 have been 9.1 per cent for poultry meat, 6.3 per cent for eggs, while combined poultry (meat and eggs) has grown by 8.3 per cent per annum. Fisheries have grown at 7.7 per cent, milk at 5.5 per cent, and horticulture at 4.5 per cent. These are all non-MSP segments of agriculture. Even within the MSP crops, pulses grew at 6.6 per cent, and oilseeds at 3.8 per cent, where government intervention is very meagre. Slowest growth is in sugarcane (2.9 per cent), paddy (3.1 per cent), and wheat (2.4 per cent), where the government inter-

venes heavily. These trends clearly indicate that agriculture is moving where the demand is surging fast.

The other demand of farmers for 200 minimum days of employment under MNREGA at a wage rate of Rs 700 per day poses a significant fiscal cost to the government. Currently, the budgeted amount for MNREGA stands at Rs 86,000 crore (Revised estimates 2022-24), which is based on an average of 48.7 days of employment per household at a weighted average daily wage of Rs 236.6. If we consider a minimum daily wage of Rs 700, and for 200 days, the estimated budgeted amount would be more than Rs 104 lakh crore. This will be a huge fiscal burden for a central budget that hovers around Rs 47 lakh crore. If one adds to this the demand for pensions and loan waivers, it will simply blow out the budget. So, all these demands seem to be asking for the moon, which is not feasible for any government to agree to.

However, our sympathies are with the farmers who deserve a better deal for prices of their produce. The first policy change that is needed to give them a fair deal is to remove export controls, stocking limits on traders, and stop unloading rice and wheat below the economic cost of FCI. Second, the government must strengthen and free up futures markets, options, warehouse receipt systems, and encourage FPOs to be part of organised value chains on digital commerce. In brief, "get the markets right". Government should intervene only when there is a sudden price crash. For that, an augmented stabilisation fund could be used as a last resort, and not the first instrument.

What this means is eliminating the urban consumer bias, that always wants lower and lower prices, often at the cost of farmers. This mindset in policy making must change. Hopefully, one can talk rationally about it after the elections.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor and Prasad, research associate at ICRIER. Views are personal



POOJA PILLAI

NEARLY SEVEN years ago, a comic titled *Fallait Demander* (in English, *You Should've Asked*) by French artist Emma went viral. It explained the concept of the "mental load" that women, seen by the men in their lives as the "manager of household chores", are always expected to carry. This results in an overburdening, as women are also seen as the natural executors of these chores by men, who argue that should the women feel the work weighing them down, all they need to do is "assign" tasks ("You should've asked"). Perfectly articulating the crushing pressure of this invisible labour most women in heterosexual relationships perform, it's no wonder that Emma's comic became one of the crucial internet-era texts of feminism. Among other things, it put in the dock the idea of the "liberated" 21st-century woman, who "has it all" — a family and a career — by showing that even when she works outside the home, the assumption that the job of running a household is naturally the woman's remit, is very much alive.

It is a clever inversion of this notion of the "mental load" that makes one of the pivotal scenes in Justine Trier's film *Anatomy of a Fall* — winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes and a Best Picture contender at this year's Academy Awards — so powerful. Sandra Voynier (played by Sandra Huller) is a well-known novelist, on trial for the alleged murder of her husband. A key piece of evidence used against her is a recording of an argument, in which her husband Samuel (Samuel Theis) can be heard ac-

SHE IS ON TRIAL

'Anatomy of a Fall' shows what it takes to humanise an ambitious woman

The woman who is punished for being ambitious is an old trope in cinema, one which has, admittedly, evolved in response to feminist criticism. Yet, even films which tend to view such women in a sympathetic light, such as 'Black Swan' (2011) or 'The Devil Wears Prada' (2006), serve more as cautionary tales for women, focusing more on how ambition can distort them, turning them into grotesque, unnatural beings — monsters, in other words.

cusing Sandra of placing the entire burden of managing their lives — particularly caring for and homeschooling their son — on him, thus leaving her free to pursue her writerly ambitions. Samuel himself has had to shelve his dreams of a career as a novelist, because, he says, he's the one bearing the "burden" in the marriage, leaving him no time for anything else. The recording builds an image of a woman unfettered by the usual — the expected — sense of responsibility for running a house, being a child's primary caretaker and putting her own life and dreams on hold for the sake of others. In other words, this is a woman who behaves "like a man".

The film forces viewers to wonder whether this is the real reason that Sandra goes on trial. There is no physical evidence connecting her to her husband's death and the only "witness" is their son Daniel (Milo Machado-Graner), who was blinded in an accident years ago. Everything that makes Sandra the obvious villain in the eyes of the prosecution emerges from her refusal to conform to the traditional role of a wife and mother, particularly her ability to wall herself off from the demands of family in order to write and be successful (building a "room of her own", as Virginia Woolf might have put it). Were the roles to be reversed — if, for example, Samuel was the successful novelist, and Sandra the harried spouse struggling to keep it all together at the cost of her own aspirations — would she have so easily been demonised?

It is these double standards that Trier sought to draw attention to in the film. In an interview to The New York Times, she said, "I wanted to show how a woman might come under attack precisely because of her intelligence, ambition and her mental fortitude... [Sandra] was broken down by a moralistic society that intensely scrutinises the way women choose to lead their lives."

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Anatomy of a Fall refuses to do this. It refuses to make a monster out of Sandra and does not allow her ambition to become a weapon in the hands of a society that cannot understand her. That it pulls this off by giving her the role which, in real life, is often played by men, is the richly ironic takeaway. Sometimes, that's what it takes to humanise an ambitious woman.

pooja.pillai@gmail.com

MARCH 4, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ACCUSES OPPN

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said in Jagdishpur that the opposition parties were collaborating with disruptive, divisive and separatist forces. She cautioned countrymen against their "nefarious" designs. Mrs Gandhi said that the growing communalism, sectarianism, casteism and mounting atrocities on Harijans and women were part of a conspiracy to weaken her government by them, though they themselves could not remain united.

ZIA RETIRES GENERALS

PAKISTAN PRESIDENT ZIAUL Haq blunted a

possible challenge to his authority by deciding to retire top army generals, Mohammad Iqbal Khan and Sawar Khan, at the end of their extended tenure of service on March 22. They were considered to be strongmen of the army and possible successors to Zia. The unexpected but swift move by Zia is significant as he prepares to meet the March 1985 deadline to hold the twice postponed elections.

INDO-PAK TALKS

THE JUST-CONCLUDED UDAIPUR talks between the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan — M K Rasgotra and Niaz A Naik — have led the two countries to agree to resume their dialogue on Pakistan's offer of a no-war

pact and India's offer of a treaty of friendship, peace and co-operation. The two foreign secretaries will meet on May 12 in Islamabad. The talks in Udaipur were informal but have reportedly gone off rather well.

LAWYERS' STRIKES

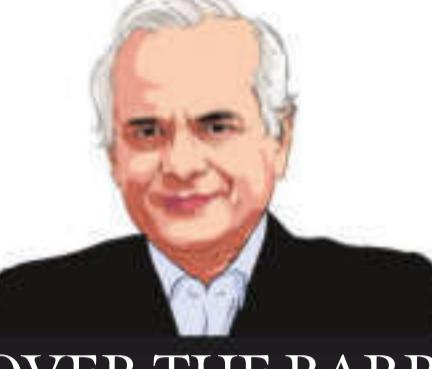
THE WEEK-OLD STRIKE by lawyers on the issue of creating five judicial districts in the capital took a new turn. While the lawyers at New Delhi and Shahdara courts — who are in favour of shifting the civil courts from Tiz Hazari and creating five judicial districts — have been on strike for the last 10 days, their counterparts at Tiz Hazari began an indefinite boycott of courts to oppose the move.



THE IDEAS PAGE

The Third Energy Transition

It will not be achieved if, on the back of numbers produced by economists, corporates look to sustain the dominance of oil and gas



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

I RECENTLY PERUSED the projections made by the energy economists of ExxonMobil, Chevron Corp, Shell plc, BP and TotalEnergies – the five largest private international petroleum companies – on the prospects for oil and gas in 2050. What struck me was not so much the differences between these projections but their possible adverse consequences on the attainment of the net-zero carbon emission targets.

The US companies ExxonMobil (XOM) and Chevron do not see a material decline in the consumption of oil and gas between now and 2050. XOM is the most "pessimistic". It expects consumption in 2050 to be the same as it is today, that is, 100 million barrels of oil per day (mbd). Chevron's projections are more nuanced – a consumption range of 75–112 mbd.

The European companies build their projections around possible scenarios. In Shell's "archipelago" scenario, the transition towards the electrification of transport, industry and residential areas is slow and episodic. As a result, oil demand hardly drops. This scenario projects a demand of around 90 mbd. In the "Sky 50" scenario, however, the electrification process is faster and more complete and oil demand falls to around 40 mbd. BP and Total also have scenarios which foresee a demand ranging between 50 to 70 mbd.

Now, in and of itself, I am not concerned about the differences in projections. For, as is often said, "Put three economists in a room and you can be assured of receiving four different opinions". Or, to quote the late Harvard Professor of Economics, John Kenneth Galbraith (and former US Ambassador to India), "the only function of economic forecasting is to make astrology look respectable". But I am concerned. And that is because of the impact, possibly unintended, of these projections on the pace of the clean energy transition and the attainment of the net-zero carbon emission targets.

Were these companies to base their investment decisions and strategies around the message that oil and gas will remain the dominant fuels in the energy basket in 2050, they would embed more deeply the structural dependence of the global economic system on fossil fuels. And that, in turn, would make the energy transition that much more difficult and expensive.

This is not an abstract concern.

Already, in October last year, the US companies spent over \$100 billion in two mega acquisitions of oil and gas assets. XOM acquired Pioneer Natural Resources, one of the largest producers of shale oil and gas in an all-stock transaction valued at almost \$60 billion. Chevron purchased Hess Corporation for \$53 billion primarily to secure Hess's equity interest in the Stabroek Block in Guyana which is slated to produce up to 1.2 mbd of oil from 2027.

The European companies have made no such dramatic moves, at least not yet. But



CR Sasikumar

their CEOs are also showing signs of restiveness with the clean energy play. The relatively new CEOs of Shell and BP have already indicated that they will leverage their existing petroleum portfolio to improve the return on shareholder equity capital. Clearly, they are concerned that their share price has lagged behind their US peers. The veteran CEO of Total has also said he will be looking to consolidate and perhaps even double down on the company's assets in Africa and elsewhere.

I do not want to suggest that these companies are insensitive to the challenge of global warming. All of their public pronouncements acknowledge it is a major issue and that investment dollars must flow to develop low-carbon technologies and accelerate electrification. But, they also doff their hats to economic and social realities. And therein lies the rub. They make clear, for instance, that the world economic system is embedded in fossil fuels and it will take decades and trillions of dollars to wean it off them; they also offer a reminder that economic development and energy consumption are inseparable and that as population and prosperity increase (reflected in higher per capita GDP), the absolute demand for energy will rise. This rise will be particularly sharp in the so-called Global South. Finally, they point out that because the infrastructure in most countries in the Global South to produce, transmit, distribute and store, at scale, clean energy, is inadequate, the bulk of this demand will have to be met by traditional fossil fuels. More so because despite the dramatic fall in costs,

I do not want to suggest that these companies are insensitive to the challenge of global warming. All of their public pronouncements acknowledge it is a major issue and that investment dollars must flow to develop low-carbon technologies and accelerate electrification. But, they also doff their hats to economic and social realities. And therein lies the rub. They make clear, for instance, that the world economic system is embedded in fossil fuels and it will take decades and trillions of dollars to wean it off them; they also offer a reminder that economic development and energy consumption are inseparable and that as population and prosperity increase (reflected in higher per capita GDP), the absolute demand for energy will rise. This rise will be particularly sharp in the so-called Global South. Finally, they point out that because the infrastructure in most countries in the Global South to produce, transmit, distribute and store, at scale, clean energy, is inadequate, the bulk of this demand will have to be met by traditional fossil fuels. More so because despite the dramatic fall in costs,

clean energy is still not competitive against fossil fuels and to render it so, governments would have to impose a carbon tax equivalent to the value of the pollution caused by fossil fuels. Unfortunately, the consumers in these countries would not be prepared to pay such a premium, even if they could afford to do so. Such a tax would be politically and socially infeasible.

It is this deference to economic and political reality that is the source of my concern. I understand the logic but I ask whether one should let it drive actions that might trigger an existential crisis.

There have been two energy transitions in the past. The first was in the early 18th century. It resulted in the shift from wood and biomass to coal. The second was in the early 20th century. This heralded the move to oil and gas. Both of these transitions were, to use Daniel Yergin's word, "additive". They led to the addition of a fuel to the energy basket. The clean energy transition has to be different. It must be "substitutive". It should result in the near or complete displacement of fossil fuels by clean energy. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has calculated that the oil demand must fall by at least 75 per cent from its current level for the world to meet its net zero target. This will not be achieved if, on the back of the numbers produced by economists, corporates look to sustain the dominance of oil and gas.

The writer is chairman and distinguished fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)

Strongman of Sandeshkhali

Events in West Bengal are symptoms of a malaise that is spread across states



PRAKASH SINGH

SANDESHKHALI, A small island in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, has been in the eye of a storm since the beginning of the year. It all started with the Enforcement Directorate's raid on January 5 at the premises of Sheikh Shahjahan, TMC zilla parishad member, to investigate the alleged irregularities in the state's public distribution system. The central agency's officers were attacked while Shahjahan managed to escape; it is said that along with his henchmen and with the support of the ruling party, he was grabbing farmers' land and converting them into lucrative fish farms. Local women also accused the men of sexual abuse and harassment.

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose, who visited the area, described the situation in words which echoed across the country: "What I saw was ghastly, shocking, shattering to my senses. I saw something which I shall never have seen. I heard many things which I should never have heard."

Sheikh Shahjahan has since been arrested – 55 days after the issue came to light. The state government's plea for belated police action is that there was "legal obstruction" insofar as the court had put a stay on the investigation. The argument is farcical as the court clarified that its February 7 order only stayed the formation of a CBI-state police joint special investigation team (SIT), and that any agency – state police, CBI or ED – could arrest Shahjahan. The state police had no option but to arrest Shahjahan when they

realised that it would be embarrassing if a central agency intervened before them. In any case, why could Shahjahan not be arrested during the one-month period after the January 5 incident when the ED team was assaulted? A picture is worth a thousand words, it is said. The manner in which Shahjahan walked into the police station gave the impression as if some minister was being escorted by the police rather than a criminal being taken to a police station.

Earlier, the National Commission for Women's team had visited Sandeshkhali and found negligence and complicity on part of the West Bengal government and law enforcement officers. The chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, Arun Halder, stated that they were confronted by a non-cooperative administration and that there was an atmosphere of fear in the village.

Calcutta High Court Chief Justice T S Sivagnanam had on February 20 expressed his dismay that "one person is holding the entire population to ransom and defying law" and deplored that Sheikh Shahjahan had not been arrested so far. "Either the state police don't have the wherewithal (to arrest him) or the absconding person is outside their jurisdiction," the court had observed.

The National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC), taking *suo motu* cognisance of reports appearing in the media about the incidents in Sandeshkhali, stated that these indicate "prima facie violation of human

rights shocking the conscience".

The critical observations of these individuals and institutions – the governor of West Bengal, the National Commission for Women, National Commission for Scheduled Castes, the State high court and the NHRC – unfortunately made no impact on the government of West Bengal. The state government and its law enforcement agencies were, on the face of it, derelict and negligent in the performance of their duties. The chief justice was very charitable in his remarks on the police. The police definitely had all the resources to apprehend the accused and there was no question of jurisdictional constraint. It is just that they were not prepared to arrest a notorious criminal for fear of offending the TMC leaders. This is inexcusable, to say the least.

It is quite possible that the BJP is trying to make political capital out of the incident, but that does not exonerate the state government from the fact that it did not uphold the rule of law and allowed a criminal to abscond just because he is a member of the ruling party – until the outburst of popular anger and judicial intervention forced its hand.

The role of the local administration and especially the police in the entire sequence of events has been pathetic. Their excuse would be that they are under pressure from the ruling party. That would be true, but there should be a Lakshman rekha for that. Are they going to barter away their souls to

the devil just to be on the right side of the powers that be? There should be a threshold for tolerance of political interference in administrative matters.

The Supreme Court had, in 2006, given a set of directions to state governments for police reforms. One of these related to the setting up of state security commissions with a view to insulate the police from outside pressures. The commission in most of the states has either not been set up or, if set up, its composition has been diluted and its powers truncated with the result that there is hardly any change in the ground situation. Politicians of all shades like to keep the police under their thumb and use its powers to promote their political agenda and, at the same time, trouble the opposition. When is this going to change?

Sandeshkhali is merely a symptom, the malaise is much deeper. If the apex court's directions are not implemented in letter and spirit, such incidents would continue to happen again and again. Yesterday, it was the strongman of Gonda; today, it is the strongman of Sandeshkhali; tomorrow there will be another rogue in some other part of the country. And so, the charade will go on. We talk of Ram rajya and we revere Sita. But, unfortunately, women's honour has today become a commodity which is traded for political advantage.

The writer, a former police chief, has been campaigning for police reforms

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Many of the Muslim states that have established relations with Israel have refused to sever them, while the Zionist state sources much of its oil and gas from Muslim-majority states. Until these double standards end, the massacre in Palestine will continue."

—DAWN, PAKISTAN

Going places by train

What makes the growth quadrangle of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal stand out is the railway story



M JAMSHED

ncts Northeastern states of India with Bangladesh is the most crucial for potential rerouting of cargo and passenger trains between eastern India and its Northeastern states. Broadly, a rail route of 1,600 km between Kolkata to Agartala via New Jalpaiguri-Guwahati could be effectively reduced to 500 km by transiting or rerouting rail traffic on the Kolkata-Tongi-Akhaura-Agartala route. A passenger train between Agartala and Kolkata currently takes 36 hours which would reduce to less than 10 hours. The more significant gains will be lowering of freight charges by two-third, a net gain of revenue to industries in India, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and substantive revenue generation for Bangladesh Railway.

How fast can this be achieved? Technically, Agartala is now connected to Akhaura railway station on the Chattogram-Dhaka meter gauge line. Broad-gauge/DG rail exists between Gede/Petrapole to Dhaka via Tongi. Reaching Agartala would involve switching to meter gauge from Tongi to Akhaura. Broad gauging/dual gauging of the Tongi-Akhaura section and early completion of Bangabandhu Bridge are the low-hanging fruit to ensure seamless operations for any rerouted traffic. Similarly, a future shorter BG rail route from Agartala to Kolkata via Dhaka would be available on completion of the ongoing work this year.

Between India and Nepal there is currently only one cross-border rail link – Jayanagar to Bijalpura. Its extension to Bardibas in Nepal is planned. In June 2023, the prime ministers of India and Nepal witnessed the inaugural run of the cross-border freight rail operation between Bathnaha and the Nepal Custom Yard on the Jognani-Biratnagar railway link. Several other potential rail connectivity projects are being surveyed, the most important being the 140 km Raxaul-Kathmandu link.

Providing rail connectivity between India and Bhutan is a focus area of both governments. As many as six potential rail connectivity projects are at the survey stage. A joint India-Bhutan statement issued in November 2023 underscored the importance of a rail link from Gelephu (Bhutan) to Kokrajhar (India). This 58 km railway line will connect Gelephu to India by the Indian Railway network and between Bhutan and Bangladesh through the Haldibari (India)-Chilahati (Bangladesh) rail interchange point.

In a departure from traditional ways of financing by individual countries, most of these regional rail connectivity projects are being jointly funded and executed – the government of India has extended its line of credit, provided assistance from the MDONER budget, and is helping in meeting rolling stock requirements. The governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and the Nepal Custom Yard on the Jognani-Biratnagar railway link. Several other potential rail connectivity projects are being surveyed, the most important being the 140 km Raxaul-Kathmandu link.

The India-Bangladesh joint statement in September 2022 welcomed specific initiatives, including the dual gauging of the Tongi-Akhaura line, the Kaunia-Lalmorhat-Mogalghat-New Gitaldaha link, the link between Hilli and Birampur, upgrading of track and signaling, container depot at Sirajganj and supply of BG locomotives to BR. In November last year, two important rail connectivity projects were inaugurated – the Agartala-Akhaura rail link and railway line from Khulna to Mongla port in Bangladesh, connecting west, north Bangladesh with India and Bhutan.

At present, Indian Railways is connected to the Bangladesh Railway network at five operational interchange points: Petrapole-Benapole, Gede-Darshana, Singhadab-Rohanpur, Radhikapur-Birpol, and Haldibari-Chilahati. In addition, trial runs have taken place between Agartala and Akhaura. Four more rail projects are in the survey stages: Belonia-Feni, Bogra-Sirajganj, Mahisasan Zero point, and Balurhat-Hilli.

The Akhaura-Agartala rail link that con-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BIG WIN FOR INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'On the upside' (IE, March 2). It's heartening that the Indian economy has beaten all estimates to grow by 8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter in 2023. The higher growth in the third quarter means the country's economy is expected to grow faster than expected in the current financial year. Achieving this when the global economy was expected to slow down to 3.1 per cent is indeed a miracle. The Modi government must be congratulated for this.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

FOR THE DREAM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Betting big' (IE, March 2). To realise its dream of making India a semiconductor nation, the Modi government is taking small but important steps in the right direction. 2024 will be a break-out year for this sector in India. India has taken a giant leap in gaining a foothold in the coveted chip manufacturing ecosystem. This will also accelerate the country's progress towards providing high-tech employment opportunities for the youth.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Death of a US airman' (IE, March 2). Aaron Bushnell's death holds a vital lesson for us. People grow desensitised to violence over time. The pictures of the deaths of innocent Palestinians in air bombing by Israel will soon cease to upset us. This immunity to violence among the public is alarming. It strengthens the culture that enables offenders. If Bushnell's death stirs the world out of this apathy, then it will not have been a waste.



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



BOOK BREAK

UNION HEALTH Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has taken up a new passion — writing books. After the publication of his first book on India becoming self-sufficient in fertiliser manufacturing, he is now working on a couple of other books based on his experience in the health and pharmaceutical sectors as the minister. The minister makes time to dictate for the books and looks at the drafts during his travel time.

PARIS PROMOTION

WHEN THE BJP in Uttarakhand recently declared the convener and co-convenor for different departments of the party, a name from Tehri Garhwal district — Uttam Rawat — took many by surprise as the person is settled in Paris, France, for over the last two decades after doing MBA from there. Rawan runs Indian cuisine-based restaurants in Paris. While the convener and the other two co-convenors are from Uttarakhand, Rawat — a former ABVP member — will work to reach out to people from Uttarakhand based in France and will appeal to them to ask their relatives in Uttarakhand to vote for the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls.

WORDS OF CAUTION

OVER THE weekend, CJI DY Chandrachud spoke at the All-India District Judges Conference. In his address, the CJI also brought up the issue of dealing with social media criticism. Drawing from his personal experience, he said every word he utters on the bench is reported faster than a bullet hits the target. He cautioned fellow judges that social media criticism must not affect them.

Patanjali institute gets second project under clean Ganga mission

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

THE CENTRE has awarded the Haridwar-based Patanjali Organic Research Institute (PORI) a project for conducting a study to prepare standard operating procedures for transforming sludge generated from Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) into bio-solids for natural farming.

The project proposal titled "Study for Management of Sludge and Transformation into Biosolids" has been approved by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) which comes under the Ministry of Jal Shakti and implements the Centre's ambitious Namami Gange programme. The NMCG's executive committee (EC), which met under the chairmanship of NMCG Director General G Asok Kumar, approved the proposal on February 13, shows the records of the meeting.

This is the second project the NMCG has awarded to PORI under the Namami Gange scheme. In December 2022, the NMCG had awarded a project worth Rs 4.32 crore to Haridwar-based Patanjali Research Institute (PRI) and PORI for "scientific exploration" of floral diversity near the banks of Ganga.

The latest project awarded to PORI is significant as NMCG has sanctioned 198 STPs with a targeted capacity of 6,208 million litres per day (MLD), which can

generate an estimated 1,570 metric tonnes of sludge.

"Disposal of sludge is a growing concern and MCCG is making efforts to address the issue of sludge management," noted the minutes of discussion of the executive committee meeting.

As per the minutes, PORI made a detailed presentation on the proposal "Study for Management of Sludge and Transformation into Bio-solids" in the executive committee meeting on February 13.

The proposal was conceptualised to conduct a study to prepare standard operation procedures for transforming sludge generated from sewage treatment plants into bio-solids for natural farming..." it said.

"Total cost of [Rs] 50,00,000 (fifty lakh only) for the research proposal was proposed over the 12-month duration," it said.

"After detailed discussions, the Executive Committee decided to approve the proposal for according administrative approval and expenditure sanction (AA&ES) for Study for Management of Sludge and Transformation into Big-solids in Ganga river basin under Namami Gange Programme at an amount of Rs 50 lakh," stated the minutes.

"The project has been considered to be funded under National Ganga Plan (NGP) - Component Non-EAP Component of Namami Gange Program II," it said.

The latest project awarded to PORI is significant as NMCG has sanctioned 198 STPs with a targeted capacity of 6,208 million litres per day (MLD), which can

the TDP and JSP." Vijaysai Reddy told *The Indian Express*.

Vijaysai Reddy is likely to face his former party and Rajya Sabha colleague V Prabhakar Reddy who is now in the TDP. The Nellore seat has seven Assembly constituencies under it while Nellore district has 10 Assembly segments in total. In 2019, the YSRCP swept the district, winning all the seats. However, sources said the party now senses anti-incumbency in many of these constituencies and hence it was decided to replace sitting MP A Prabhakara Reddy as his chances of victory seem slim.

Meanwhile, Vijaysai Reddy exuded confidence that the YSRCP would trounce the TDP-JSP combine. "Chandrababu Naidu and Pawan Kalyan are waiting for the BJP to join them but I am not sure if that will happen. The

PROTEST AT PUNJAB-HARYANA BORDER TO CONTINUE

Farmers to take buses, trains to Delhi on March 6: Protest leaders

RAAKHI JAGGA
LUDHIANA, MARCH 3

PROTESTING FARMERS from Punjab, who have been stopped from marching to Delhi at the Haryana border since February 13, Sunday appealed to farmers from across the nation to take buses and trains to the national capital on March 6. The farmer leaders also called a countrywide "rail roko" protest for four hours on March 10 if the government did not agree to their demands.

The Punjab farmers have been demanding a legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP) for their crops. Talks with the government so far have failed to find a breakthrough.

Speaking at the last prayer meeting of Shubhkaran Singh, who was killed at the Khanauri border on February 21 when Haryana police allegedly used force to disperse the farmers, Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) coordinator Sarvan Singh Pandher said: "On February 13, the Haryana government used teargas shells, rubber bullets on us... when we wanted to march

Youth Congress members hold a tractor march to support the farmers' protest, in Patiala on Sunday. *Harmeet Sodhi*

ahead. On February 21, they killed our youngster Shubhkaran."

"They (the Centre) are telling us repeatedly that we can go by train or buses to lodge our protests in Delhi instead of tractors... So on March 6, farmers from states other than Punjab and Haryana will head to Delhi in buses or trains. Let us see if they allow them to reach or not," said Pandher in Balloch, Shubhkaran's native village in Bathinda district.

"Farmers of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu had tried to reach Delhi on

February 13 but they were stopped midway or detained in their houses... Let us see yet again. The Union government's claims will be exposed," he said.

Pandher said the protests at Shambhu and Khanauri borders will continue while at Dabwali border it will be strengthened. "We will not lift it till our demands are met," he said.

"Not only this, on March 10, a nationwide rail roko will be enforced from noon till 4 pm. The Union government is repeatedly trying to set a narrative that only

two farmer unions led by me and Jagjit Singh Dallewalji are behind this protest. The protests on March 6 and March 10 will tell them this is a nationwide protest and more than 200 farmer unions are part of it," said Pandher, reiterating that MSP legal guarantee, calculation of MSP as per Swaminathan report, punishment to the Lakhimpur Kheri accused and pension for farmers and labourers aged 60 and above were among their demands.

Referring to the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri case, in which Union minister Ajay Mishra's son Ashish Mishra is the prime accused, Pandher said: "In the first list of candidates, the BJP gave ticket to Ajay Mishra Teni from Lakhimpur Kheri, whose son was responsible for killing farmers and he too is involved in conspiracy. This shows the seriousness of the BJP government towards farmers."

Jagjit Singh Dallewal, coordinator, SKM (non-political), said, "The day we lifted the dharna from Delhi borders in December 2021... farmers of other states had said their demand for the MSP remained unheard. So now we are back with that demand."

BJP's Sanjay Mayukh, Baijayant Jay Panda, Vinod Tawde and Anil Baluni after announcing the list in Delhi, Saturday. *File*

BJP's first list: Why party made major line-up changes in Delhi, Chhattisgarh

VIKAS PATHAK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

THE BJP in its first list for the Lok Sabha elections has chosen to retain many of its candidates from crucial states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, keeping it more conventional in the two Hindi heartland states, even as it made major replacements in Delhi and Chhattisgarh. Some sitting MPs were dropped in Rajasthan and Assam.

All other candidates have been replaced on grounds of anti-incumbency, inactivity, and the perceived lack of connection with voters and party workers. Eight-time MLA and minister Brijmohan Agrawal, however, made the cut because of his stature in state politics while Rajya Sabha member Saroj Pandey, who had been Lok Sabha MP from Durg earlier, has been fielded from Korba because of a significant migrant population in Korba. The constituency is part of an industrial belt where, apart from a significant tribal population, there are many migrants from UP and Bihar, where she has had family connections.

Rajasthan and Assam

In Rajasthan, of the 15 candidates announced, seven are new faces. Churu, Jalore, Alwar, Bharatpur, Nagaur, Udaipur and Banswara-Dungarpur are the seats that have new candidates. The constituencies that fell vacant after their representatives moved to the Assembly are Jaipur (Rural), where Rajavardhan Singh Rathore was MP; Alwar, which was represented by Balak Nath before he became MLA; and Rajasamand, which Deputy CM Diya Kumari used to represent in the Lok Sabha before her move to state politics.

A state BJP leader said the performance of candidates and their image among voters were taken into account. From Churu, para-athlete Devendra Jhajharia has been fielded. Jhajharia belongs to the Jat community, which has a significant presence in the region.

The decision to field Bansuri Swaraj, the daughter of former Union Minister Sushma Swaraj who died in 2019, from the New Delhi seat is being attributed to major support among party workers as she is known to have been very active in connecting with them in recent times. "She is very approachable and party workers see the image of her late mother Sushma Swaraj in her," said a senior Delhi BJP leader.

The extent of change in five seats in the national Capital declared till now is such that only Manoj Tiwari has retained his constituency. Even former Union Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, who lost his ministerial berth in 2021, has been overlooked. On Sunday, Harsh Vardhan announced that he was quitting active politics.

In Chhattisgarh, only two candidates have been retained, with the rest either dropped or having moved to the Assembly during last year's state elections. The seats of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Arun Rao, and Renuka Singh fell vacant when they became MLAs. Former CM and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel's nephew Vijay Baghel has been rewarded for giving a tough fight to his uncle in the Assembly elections from Patan. He agreed to be fielded from a tough seat despite having won the last Lok Sabha election by a huge margin. In Rajnandgaon, the party chose sitting MP Santosh Pandey, an organisational man, ignoring the claims of former CM Raman Singh's son Abhishek Singh, who was not known to have been very active.

In Assam, the party has replaced three candidates on grounds of performance and one

after a constituency was reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs). Sitting Gauhati MP Queen Oja has been replaced because there were complaints about her performance, said sources. The party has replaced her with former Guwahati Deputy Mayor Bijuli Kalita. The BJP has also replaced Union Minister Rameshwar Teli with former CM Sarbananda Sonowal, currently a

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after a constituency was reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs). Sitting Gauhati MP Queen Oja has been replaced because there were complaints about her performance.

"I haven't asked for any seat (to contest). But even NDA leaders in Pathanamthitta looked forward to my candidature from the constituency. They have even communicated their desire to the BJP leadership. I could not do justice to those who recommended me as a candidate. Still, we can make an attempt for Anil Antony," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP state president K Surendran said: "The party would give due consideration to George. List of candidates in a few seats is yet to come out."

SEAHAWK SQUADRON

US-manufactured MH 60R Seahawk multi-role helicopters fly ahead of their commissioning into the Indian Navy, on Sunday. The Navy has announced it will raise the first squadron of MH-60R Seahawk, a maritime variant of Blackhawk helicopter at INS Garuda on March 6. *PTI*

LS polls battle between supporters of dictatorship and democracy: Uddhav

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray

cause we are the real patriots only to answer this dictatorial behaviour," said Thackeray.

"I appeal to the people of the state to keep caste, religion aside and come together to save the country. Because only if the country is saved, we can save the religion. Right now, our only religion is to save the country," said Thackeray.

Attacking ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Thackeray said, "During Emergency, Bihar's Gandhi maidan shown us the beginning. This time it will be the Maharashtra of Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj who will bury

dictatorship and make them taste their first defeat... BJP says 'ab ki baar 400 paar'. We say 'ab ki baar BJP tadipaa'."

Thackeray slammed the BJP over not declaring the Lok Sabha ticket to "RSS loyalist" Union minister Nitin Gadkari in its first list and instead choosing former Mumbai Congress chief Kripashankar Singh.

"In the first list of BJP, Modiji and Shah were named. Maharashtra didn't know them earlier. We knew Nitin Gadkari, who is someone who worked hard on road construction in the country. He is a hardcore RSS leader. He is not in the first list of the BJP because they claim the list is not for Maharashtra. But, Mumbai's Kripashankar Singh whom BJP alleged to be involved in corruption is in the first list of the BJP. Which guarantee is this," he said.

'No one knows him': P C George slams Antony's LS candidature

SHAJU PHILIP

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR 3

A DAY after BJP announced its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala, P C George, a recently inducted Christian face in the party, has openly come out against the candidature of Anil Antony.

Vijaysai Reddy told *The Indian Express*.

George said Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, SNDP Yogam (Hindu Ezava community outfit) general secretary Vellappally Natesan and BDJS (an NDA ally) president Thushar Vellappally were against his candidature.

"I haven't asked for any seat (to contest). But even NDA leaders in Pathanamthitta looked forward to my candidature from the constituency. They have even communicated their desire to the BJP leadership. I could not do justice to those who recommended me as a candidate. Still, we can make an attempt for Anil Antony," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP state president K Surendran said: "The party would give due consideration to George. List of candidates in a few seats is yet to come out."

Party insiders said the TDP-JS alliance, coupled with anti-incumbency, was in a position to wean away a major chunk of the YSRCP's votes. "Party president and Andhra Pradesh CM Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has asked me to contest from Nellore Lok Sabha seat. The party made its intention clear by appointing V. Vijaysai Reddy its Nellore constituency in-charge on Saturday.

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YSRCP leader V. Vijaysai Reddy (left) with party chief and Andhra Pradesh CM Jagan Mohan Reddy. *X/Vijaysai Reddy*

results (of the simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha polls) will show that they are just spreading propaganda.

A former chartered accountant with a flourishing career, Vijaysai Reddy (66) is a sitting Rajya Sabha MP and the Parliamentary Party leader of the YSRCP. Known to be close to the

YSRCP postponed the fourth and

final leg of its "Siddham (ready for elections)" meeting, which was scheduled to be held on Sunday in Addanki in Bapatla district. Sources said the meeting would now be held on March 10 as the party feels elections may be announced anytime between March 13 and 15. Vijaysai Reddy said lakhs of people were expected to attend the meeting.

Vijaysai Reddy's appointment comes in the backdrop of five party MPs quitting in the recent past,

Gill's mindset that sets him on path to greatness

SANDIP G
MARCH 3

THE SILK of Shubman Gill was ever-evident. The angular grace when he drove on the rise, the sound skin to the crisp roll of a drum, the insouciance when he short-arm jabbed or pulled, and the warm smile that spread over his face when he winked in a milestone, India's latest batting scion exuded charm.

In the ongoing series against England, the steel of Gill too became ever-evident. It was a series that could have broken him, instead ended up defining his understated virtues, the grit and resolve, that make him.

So much so that the images that define him are not the usual ones. It's not so much about his flowing strokes, as it is about the durt on his shirt, or the sweat on his brow, or a four-less half-century. He came into the series with question marks on his game against spin bowling. Eight innings later, he would admit he is not yet flawless against spinners even on semi-turners. But by registering a hundred and two half-centuries of immeasurable value, Gill has displayed that he has the flexibility of mind and technique to subdue them.

He is not invulnerable against seamers either—the sturdiness of his technique would be tested in chilly Dharamsala and could be a precursor to the series Down Under later this year—but he would stride out with the belief that he can conquer any glitch or adversity if he sets his mind on it. Such a mindset often makes a good player a great one.

In that vein, this has been a series wherein Gill's problem-solving traits surfaced. He wouldn't miss even an optional practice session, on the eve of the game, when most regulars conserve themselves for the rigours of the next five days. But Gill is constantly working on some crack in his technique or the other. Much of the attention is shed on his often leaden front foot. For someone of his height, he doesn't have a pronounced stride. The front foot doesn't flow into the drive. He struggles to transfer his weight onto the shots when driving on the front foot. It's an unusual quandary for Indian batsmen, who often tend to struggle when switching the weight onto the back foot.

To smoothen the weight-transfer, he could be seen adopting a variety of methods. One of them was shortening the length of his first

stride and then adding a second one. A short forward press and then depending on the length, a longer second step. He would practice this till his teammates were almost inside the bus. He would then inspect the exact spot of the front foot when he played the shot. He would then advise the throw-downer to pull the length back a bit, and see if he could get his front foot further forward.

Work in progress

In Rajkot too, Gill was spotted working on his forward stride. If not this, he could be seen chewing the ears of batting coach Vikram Rathour. Or doing sprint drills on his home-ground, the PCA Stadium in Mohali, when he is on a break. His muscles have not yet internalised those movements. So he has not tried them in Tests. But this series, his footwork against spinners has been more fluid and precise. From a minimised trigger movement, he has been stepping out of the crease more frequently to work the ball through the on-side if it's the off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, and bunt them on the off-side with the turn against left-arm spinner Tom Hartley.

Gill, on the evidence of this series, was not an all-conquering batting virtuoso, but a mortal batsman ploughing his path to greatness, conscious of his strengths and weaknesses and aware of how to overcome the deficiencies.

Maturity belies his words too. "If I'm not doing well, I don't expect someone to tell me that. I know myself if I'm not doing well. More than anything else, it was my own personal disappointment," he would say after his Visakhapatnam ton.

Gill would know all too well that there would always be some challenge or the other in his eye-line. So far this series, he has negotiated the spinning ball. In Dharamsala, the hooping ball could interrogate him. Whether or not his technique is ready for it, his mind certainly would be. If he tames the moving ball, the next big question would be if he could douse the bounce Down Under. He has already produced a coming-of-age knock in Brisbane. But can he do it again? One question will follow another. It's the burden of being touted a great in the nascence of a career, an inheritor of a rich batting legacy. Gill would know this, and in this series he has demonstrated he has the inner steel to ride his flaws, soak the inhuman pressure and ploughing the path to greatness.

As the veteran off-spinner gears up for his special game in Dharamsala, a statistical breakdown of his remarkable career

LALITH KALIDAS

ASHWIN RAVICHANDRAN has a fondness for scaling rare peaks. Come Thursday, India's premier spinner will walk into another ballroom of legends during the fifth Test against England at the HPCA Stadium in Dharamsala.

Ashwin is set to become the 14th Indian and the first Tamil Nadu cricketer to feature in 100 Test matches, a remarkable milestone for a man who loves every facet associated with his sport to the hilt.

A constant pathbreaker across his 13-year journey in whites, Ashwin could also be joined by three more of his contemporaries—Jonny Bairstow, Kane Williamson and Tim Southee—to be featuring in their respective 100th Tests at the same time on the cricketing calendar—a first in Test history.

Emerging on the scene during the void left by Anil Kumble's retirement and the waning powers of senior off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, Ashwin grew into the space effortlessly.

Only bettered by Murali

And now, heading into his 100th Test, Ashwin's bowling record ranks among the best of all 22 players (bowlers/all-rounders) who have played as many matches and claimed at least 100 wickets in the format.

■ Only Muthiah Muralidaran (584) had more wickets heading into their 100th Test match than Ashwin's 507.

■ Ashwin's career strike-rate (51.3) is also the best among all players in their first 99 Test matches.

■ Ashwin's career strike-rate is also the best among all spinners in Test history, min. 150 wickets, which includes 40 bowlers.

That Ashwin has maintained the brilliance of his craft so incredibly well over 13 years is suggested by his overall graph ahead of his milestone Test. Ashwin's career bowling average (23.91) and strike-rate are at the best they have ever been over his career—a testament to his durability.

Master of the subcontinent

A key man in the engine room of India's home dominance in Tests over the last decade, Ashwin has commanded authority at almost every venue he has played in the country.

The best bowlers in the game have all had their favourite hunting grounds at home. Muralidaran amassed 100-plus wickets at three venues (Colombo, Kandy and Galle) in Sri Lanka. James Anderson and Stuart Broad are other bowlers to have earned over 100 wickets at a single venue (both at Lord's),

ASHWIN'S 100TH TEST

Numbers maketh milestone man



Only Muthiah Muralidaran (584) had more wickets heading into their 100th Test match than Ashwin's 507. Reuters

WILL ASHWIN JOIN THE CLUB?

Only three bowlers have managed a five-for in their 100th Test

Muralidaran vs Bangladesh
(9 WICKETS WITH 6/54 IN FEBRUARY 2006)

Shane Warne vs South Africa
(8 WICKETS WITH 6/151 IN MARCH 2002)

Anil Kumble vs Sri Lanka
(7 WICKETS WITH 5/89 IN DECEMBER 2005).

■ Ashwin could, therefore, forge his way into another exclusive, spin-loaded pantheon while operating on the spur of the Dhaula Dhar range.

venue, his best coming at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. That his wickets have come across varying turfs in India impresses his expertise over the sub-continent conditions.

Most wickets via bowled, LBW

■ Ashwin is the oldest Indian bowler to record a 10-wicket match haul (360 3000 v WI, 2023) and the second-oldest Indian to take a Test five-for (370 1590 v England, 2024) behind Vinoo Mankad (370 3060).

■ Ashwin has the most wickets bowled and leg-before (214; bowled - 101, lbw - 113) by a spinner and second-most overall, behind Anderson (233).

■ Ashwin has recorded 74 dismissals of batters for a duck—the second-best aggregate for an Indian bowler in Tests behind Kumble (77).

■ Ashwin has bowled only 10 no-balls in his career, all coming within five consecutive series between 2021 and 2022.

Ashwin has bagged 170 Test wickets (33.5 percent of his career wickets) opening the bowling (as No. 1 or No. 2 bowler) in 44 matches. It is by far the best among spinners, with Rangana Herath (104) being the only other bowler to manage 100-plus wickets.

Greatest asset with ball

Ashwin has stamped his mark as India's greatest asset with the ball in an era of their

LA FOND WINS GOLD

Glasgow: Thea LaFond needed just two attempts to win triple jump gold at the world indoor championships on Sunday and become Dominica's first global champion in athletics. The 29-year-old soared 15.01 metres on her second attempt, the best jump in the world this year, and with victory all but locked up was able to pass on her remaining four jumps. REUTERS



Shubman Gill has fought his way to two fifties and a ton in this series. PTI

RANJI TROPHY

Shardul slams attacking ton as Mumbai recover

MIHIR VASAVDA
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

'LET'S GET them under 120!' screamed a voice running in from the deep, in the earshot of Shardul Thakur as he walked out into the middle. And one or two maidan old-timers, sitting beneath the palm trees square of the wicket, allowed themselves a slight chuckle. They knew something that the Tamil Nadu player didn't.

For the first time in two days of the Ranji Trophy semifinals, the visitors were enjoying Mumbai's hospitality. They'd sent Shreyas Iyer's stumps cartwheeling, caught Musheer Khan marginally out of the crease, and castled Shama Mulani. The best half hour or so they have had so far. They had Mumbai seven down, still 40 runs behind their tally of 146 and exposed the tail to R Sai Kishore's sorcery.

Or so Tamil Nadu believed. How naive. For, there is no such thing as the Mumbai tail. Last time they batted, Mumbai's No. 10 and 11 scored a century each. On Sunday, it was the turn of No. 9—Shardul Thakur. In his 11th year of first-class cricket and playing his 81st match, the pacer scored his first-ever century. His brisk 109 (104 balls, 13x4, 4x6) ensured Mumbai's 'tail' once again bailed them out.

On the ropes at lunch, the last three wickets added 247 runs and counting, as the 41-time Ranji champions ended Day 2 with a commanding 207-run lead. At stumps, Mumbai were 353/9.



Shardul Thakur came in as Mumbai's No. 9 batsman and scored 109 runs off a mere 104 balls to rescue Mumbai's poor batting display. BCCI Domestic

At different times during this campaign, Mumbai have found different heroes. Against Bengal, it was Royston Dias and Atharva Ankolekar's 46 each to take the total from 346 to 412.

Tanush Kotian and Mohit Avasthi scored half-centuries to take Mumbai from 224/6 to 395 in the first innings against Andhra. And in the quarterfinals vs Baroda, the last three wickets scored 273 runs, with Kotian and Tushar Deshpande scoring a century each.

Thakur rains on Sai's parade

On Sunday, it was Thakur, with support from Tamore (35) and Kotian (74 batting), who rained on Sai Kishore's parade.

The Tamil Nadu captain, who embarks on temple runs at the slightest of opportunities, must have hoped for some sort of divine intervention when his side left the field on Day 1. At least, he ensured there was no lack of trying.

Sai Kishore opened the day's proceed-

ings, a decision that raised a few eyebrows because it was windy and overcast. He bowled 25 overs in a row and by the end of the tireless marathon spell, the left-arm spinner was vindicated.

He sent half of Mumbai's batting line-up back to the pavilion by bowling slower through the air, getting the ball to grip and bounce while extracting a vicious turn on a pitch that had, until then, assisted seamers. He drew Ajinkya Rahane and Musheer Khan forward with balls that were beautifully flighted and had them beat with turn and bounce.

Rahane was caught at slips and Khan was stumped. Mulani, the batsman who masquerades as a tailender, was done in by a delivery that spun back sharply.

Sai Kishore's heroics had reduced Mumbai to 106/7 when Thakur walked in. And it was only after he launched an all-out assault that the TN skipper took himself out of the attack.

Test discards on radar

For Thakur, who seemingly has hit a dead-end with his India career after being dropped from the Test side earlier in the year, it was an innings with which he can make a strong case to succeed Rahane as Mumbai's captain. It was also a reminder to a couple of selectors, watching from the grandstand, of his all-round abilities.

Safe to say, it wasn't Thakur who was on selectors and the sparse crowd's radar when the day began. Between the two India discards, the focus was on Iyer but from the moment he walked in, Thakur

seemed to be batting on a different surface. Rahane was careful, Iyer never looked settled and Khan was restrained in his shot-making, something the conditions demanded. Thakur, however, was in a counter-attacking mode from the get-go. He cut and pulled, flicked and drove straight as well through the covers.

Suddenly, the TN players who circled the pitch like a pack of hounds when Thakur walked in were now scattered across the field, silenced by his fireworks. Even R Ashwin began feeling sorry for his Tamil Nadu teammates. "Dey lord beefy! Enough da," Ashwin tweeted.

Lord Beefy, though, was in no mood to relent. He brought up his 50 in 57 balls and needed only 32 more deliveries to reach his hundred. The shot that brought up his maiden ton personified authority—stepping down the track and lofting Ajith Ram over the long-off. It wasn't a shot—no, innings—of a tailender. Then again, do Mumbai even have a tail?

BRIEF SCORES: Tamil Nadu 146 trail Mumbai 353/9 in 100 overs (Shardul Thakur 109, Tanush Kotian 74 not out; R Sai Kishore 6/97) by 207 runs.

PTI adds: Himanshu Mantri constructed a fine hundred to single-handedly guide Madhya Pradesh to 252 in their first innings against Vidarbha on the second day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal in Nagpur. Mantri's 126 off 265 balls (13x4, 1x6) helped Madhya Pradesh to gain a significant 82-run lead after beginning the day at 47 for one.

The second highest score of the MP innings was 30, such was Mantri's contribution. In their second innings, Vidarbha reached 13/1, with the loss of Atharva Taide at stumps, trailing by 69 runs.

BRIEF SCORES: Vidarbha: 170 and 13/1 vs Madhya Pradesh 1st innings: 252 all out in 94.3 overs (Himanshu Mantri 126, Saransh Jain 30; Umesh Yadav 3/40, Yash Thakur 3/51, Akshay Wakhare 2/68).

MIHIR VASAVDA

MUMBAI, MARCH 3

IT CAME 11 years after he made his debut, in his 81st match and a couple of months after being dropped from Team India. It's a 'big, big relief', admitted Shardul Thakur after scoring a counter-attacking century on Day 2 of the Ranji Trophy semifinals against Tamil Nadu on Sunday.

But the Mumbai pacer is conscious the ton might not immediately open the doors for him to get back into the Test squad. After being axed from the ODI and T20 squad last year, Thakur was dropped from the Test team during India's tour to South Africa in January.

"I think an international comeback is far from now because the Test team is out already for the fifth game and after this, we are going into the IPL so it's far," Thakur said after the second day's play at the MCA-BKC ground. "I am not thinking that far. But yes, scoring a century is a big, big relief and it was very important for the team at that point of time."

His knock of 109 came when Mumbai were in a precarious situation. Batting at number 9, he walked in when Mumbai were reduced to 106/7 largely due to Tamil Nadu left-arm spinner Sai Kishore's heroics. Kishore bowled a marathon spell and ended the day with figures of 6/97. The century helped Mumbai recover and race to a massive 207-run lead with the last pair still batting.

Thakur heaped praise on the opposition skipper. "He (Kishore) was bowling really well. After a long, long time I could see a quality left-arm spinner who is coming up after Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja)," he said.

Thakur, Sai Kishore warn of injuries

Thakur also urged the cricket board to revise the Ranji Trophy schedule. If the situation isn't rectified, he warned players across the countries will start getting injured.

"I don't think it has ever happened. When

When I started playing Ranji Trophy, the first three games used to have a three-day break, then four-day break, and knockouts had a five-day break. It is extremely tough for domestic players to expect them to play 10 games in a row with just a three-day gap."

SHARDUL THAKUR

-ON RANJI SCHEDULE

I started playing Ranji Trophy, the first three games used to have a three-day break, then four-day break, and knockouts had a five-day break. It is extremely tough for domestic players to expect them to play 10 games in a

WPL: Giants fall short again as Capitals extend winning run

NAMIT KUMAR
MARCH 3

AS DELHI Capitals cantered to a 25-run win over Gujarat Giants despite a wobble with the bat in their Women's Premier League (WPL) fixture on Sunday, the difference between a top-level franchise at the top of the league table and a messily-assembled, inexperienced squad had never been clearer.

Giants had done well to take wickets through the middle overs in the first innings but even as their bowling delivered, sloppy batting, careless fielding – which included dropping a few sitters – allowed Meg Lanning's side reach 163. And by staying sharp in the field and not allowing their opponents any gifts, Capitals' par total proved beyond Giants' flailing batting order.

Lanning's 41-ball 55 was crucial in avoiding a collapse for her side, especially on a day the depth of their batting order was tested in the absence of the big-hitting Marizanne Kapp. But she was given a helping hand by the fielders. Kathryn Bryce dropped a sitter when the Aussie had scored 30. Nine balls later, she raised her bat for a half-century.

"It's a lot more than cricket. When he rang me and told me I need you at Multan Sultans, I just couldn't turn it down," says Hartley.

Her family and partner too were excited once they were assured that she would be safe in Pakistan.

"As long as I am safe, they (my family) are happy, and I genuinely couldn't be safer. My partner is super-excited that I am having such a good time. I have never been to this part of the world before. My parents are thinking whether I will be going into coaching full-time or sticking to commentating. This role has opened a new door for me, which I am grateful for," says Hartley who had earlier coached in Lancashire age-group cricket.

Once skipper Beth Mooney and Phoebe Litchfield were building momentum, a key bowling change from Lanning, bringing Jonassen's left-arm spin into the picture inside the Powerplay, delivered immediately. Jonassen took out both batters to reduce Gujarat to 35/3 inside five overs. It was too high a hill to climb from there.

The middle-order squeeze from Capitals was thanks to their spinners, particularly Jonassen and Radha Yadav, the latter's 3-20 spell giving her the purple patch.

Capitals' sharpness with the ball and in the field, as well as the effectiveness of their skipper's key decisions, made all the difference.

Giants remain winless this season, and look like the worst of the five teams in this league just like they had looked midway through the first season – when they won only one of their first five games.

BRIEF SCORES: Delhi Capitals 163/8 in 20 overs (Meg L 55, Alice C 27; Meghna S 4-37) beat Gujarat Giants: 138/8 in 20 overs (Ashleigh G 40; J Jonassen 3-22, Radha Y 3-20) by 25 runs



Delhi Capitals' Meg Lanning played a crucial 41-ball 55. PTI

'A lot more than cricket'

Ex-England spinner Hartley is spin bowling coach in PSL, one of the first women coaches of a men's team

PRATYUSH RAJ
MARCH 3

FORMER ENGLAND spinner Alex Hartley was apprehensive when she entered the environment of Pakistan Super League (PSL) team Multan Sultans. She and former Ireland player Catherine Dalton, a fast-bowling coach, are the first female coaches in the league's history. Issues of respect and understanding from the players and her own internal adjustment to a culturally-alien world were at the top of her mind.

"The apprehension was about how I would be taken by the team. Would everybody not necessarily respect me but understand where I am coming from and the job I want to do," she tells The Indian Express.

However, Hartley, who played 28 ODIs and four T20Is between 2016 and 2019, and dismissed Harmanpreet Kaur in the 2017 World Cup final, says the experience has been incredible.

She had said yes to the offer immediately when Ali Tareen, the franchise's owner, had called her asking to be the team's spin-bowling coach. She sensed, as a woman player, it was more than just a job.

"It's a lot more than cricket. When he rang me and told me I need you at Multan Sultans, I just couldn't turn it down," says Hartley.

Her family and partner too were excited once they were assured that she would be safe in Pakistan.

"As long as I am safe, they (my family) are happy, and I genuinely couldn't be safer. My partner is super-excited that I am having such a good time. I have never been to this part of the world before. My parents are thinking whether I will be going into coaching full-time or sticking to commentating. This role has opened a new door for me, which I am grateful for," says Hartley who had earlier coached in Lancashire age-group cricket.

Something in the way Tareen introduced her to the players immediately put her at ease. "Ali sat down everyone and said this is your bowling coach, this is your fielding coach, and so on. I instantly felt at home," she says.

The players too have been welcoming. "Mostly everything I have advised them has been taken on board. There are times in the meeting when they ask 'so Alex, what's the plan?'" she says. "Everyone is so welcoming, so understanding. Ali (Tareen) has broken boundaries. He has got two female coaches here in the PSL."

Communication hasn't been an issue, though Hartley admits "I need to learn at least a few words of Hindi and Urdu." She has an in-



Alex Hartley says she's trying to learn a few words in Urdu and Hindi to communicate with the players better. Special Arrangement

Everyone is welcoming and understanding. Ali (Tareen, the franchise owner) has broken boundaries. When he rang me and told me I need you at Multan Sultans, I just couldn't turn it down. It's a lot more than cricket.

ALEX HARTLEY
ON TAKING UP THE ROLE

It is a groundbreaking development and hopefully will open the doors for more female coaches to take up roles like this. Obviously being a female coach, I didn't know how it would go down but they accepted me instantly.

CATHERINE DALTON
MULTANS' FAST-BOWLING COACH

preterer to ensure her "communication is spot on".

She doesn't find a massive difference between the dressing room of men and women cricketers. However, she prefers not to be inside the dressing room purely for cricketing reasons. "I try to stay out of the dressing room. I sit in the dugout, because during the tactical timeout you have to go and talk to the players. But in my experience, the dressing room remains the same."

Breaking boundaries

While this is Hartley's first time in Pakistan, Dalton had been to pre-season camps of the Sultans earlier before being appointed fast-

bowling coach ahead of this season.

"I have got a lot of support... I have been to Pakistan twice before as well. This is just an icing on the cake. It is a groundbreaking development and hopefully will open the doors for more female coaches to take up roles like this. Obviously being a female coach, I didn't know how it would go down but they accepted me instantly," Dalton said.

The season has gone well for the two pioneering coaches and their team. Multan Sultans are leading the points table with five wins in six matches.

Tareen says he wanted to spread the net wide when hiring coaches. "At Multan Sultans, we look at skills and

what someone can bring to the table rather than their gender," Tareen said.

The biggest cricketing learning for Hartley has been the craze for tape-ball cricket in Pakistan and how she has started using it in her coaching style. The biggest achievement was helping leg-spinner Usama Mir, who became the first spinner in PSL to grab a six-wicket haul, rediscover his form. Mir, who endured a terrible ODI World Cup, has picked up 13 wickets in six outings, including 6/40 against defending champions Lahore Qalandars.

Hartley and other coaches asked him about the technical help he required. He said he was struggling to go through with his action at the crease. The exchange of ideas worked, and Mir returned to form. "He has been so consistent with his line and length, I couldn't be prouder, he is putting in a lot of hard work," she adds.

While being busy watching endless videos, Hartley has also kept an eye on the Women's Premier League (WPL) in India. "It's probably one of the best tournaments in the world, just behind The Hundred," she says, laughing. She though would love more teams and more travelling, like in the IPL. "It's been played only in Bengaluru and Delhi. That's a lot of games. Showing women's cricket is accessible to everyone. I would love to see WPL getting extended."

Foden double fires Man City to comeback win

REUTERS
MANCHESTER, MARCH 3

PHIL FODEN kept Manchester City's Premier League title challenge on track with a superb second-half double as his side hit back to clinch a 3-1 home victory over Manchester United on Sunday.

Marcus Rashford's eighth-minute thunderbolt gave United the lead against the run of play and it looked like the visitors might put a dent in City's hopes of a fourth successive crown.

But Pep Guardiola's side remained patient, dominated possession and were eventually rewarded with Foden again proving that he is indispensable he is for City.

Foden arrowed a sublime effort into the top corner in the 56th minute and the England forward then produced a clinical finish with 10 minutes of normal time remaining.

Erling Haaland, who missed a golden first-half chance, secured the points with a late strike.

Reigning champions City, whose unbeaten run in all competitions now stands at 19, moved to 62 points, one behind leaders Liverpool who they visit next weekend. United remain in sixth place with 44 points.

Rashford's bolt from the blue might have floored lesser sides but Erik Ten Hag's United could have few complaints at the way City turned things around.

City had 74% possession and 27 efforts on goal compared to United's three but it was Foden who found the key to the lock.

He was given a standing ovation as he walked off after taking a knock in stoppage time -- City's fans in buoyant mood at keeping the pressure right on Liverpool and Arsenal.

City camped in United's half in the opening minutes but were stunned when from United's first foray forward Bruno Fernandes rolled a pass towards Rashford who launched a 25-metre effort that crashed off the underside of the bar and into the net.

Rashford had other chances too, mis-controlling after being sent clear and later failing to connect with a volley.

City probed United's defence continually and eventually opened it up only for Haaland to somehow sidefoot over from Foden's headed cross with halftime approaching.

There was no sense of panic though and the pattern continued after the break. There was nothing United keeper Andre Onana could do about Foden's equaliser.

Cutting in from the right he struck a fierce left-foot shot that was equally as spectacular as Rashford's effort.

Lyon takes six as Australia thrash New Zealand in first Test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MARCH 3

NATHAN LYON took ten wickets for the match and brought New Zealand's attempted fight back in the first test to a shuddering halt as Australia completed a 172-run win on Sunday and took a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

New Zealand resumed at 111-3 on the fourth day in its second innings and collapsed in the face of superb spin bowling from Lyon (6-64) to be all out for 196 a few minutes after the scheduled lunch break.

Lyon completed match figures of 10-108, his fifth 10-wicket bag, which went along with his 41 as nightwatchman in Australia's second innings.

The Black Caps were unable to sustain the stubborn fight back they had begun to produce on day three when Australia was bowled out for 164 in its second innings for

an overall lead of 368.

Glenn Phillips took 5-43 to limit Australia as it tried to build on its first innings lead of 204. Rachin Ravindra's unbeaten 56 before stumps on day three fanned New Zealand's faint hope that it might be able to head off defeat.

But Ravindra was out for 59 in only the seventh over of the morning and with his departure New Zealand's resistance appeared to falter, then break.

Ravindra was Lyon's first victim on the final day, tempted into the cut shot at a ball turning away from off stump. With the extra bounce he was unable to keep the shot down and was caught by Cameron Green.

Tom Blundell lasted three balls and was caught by Travis Head at short leg off Lyon, undone by the bounce as the ball hit the bat and thigh pad before looping to the fielder.

Phillips fell lbw to Lyon for 1 and the last sparks of resistance were blown out when Scott Kuggeleijn (26), Matt Henry (14) and



Nathan Lyon had match figures of 10-108, his fifth 10-wicket haul. File

Tim Southee (7) all fell before lunch. Daryl Mitchell was the last man out for 38.

"It was a really good game overall I think," Australia captain Pat Cummins said. "We never felt we were too far ahead on that wicket."

It was Cameron Green's unbeaten 174 and his 116-run last wicket partnership with Josh Hazlewood that really turned the game towards the Australians.

"The pitch was really bouncy and had a bit of pace in it but more bounce than I've seen in any wicket for a long time. Fortunately it spun which with Nathan Lyon in our side is a good thing," Lyon completed his 24th five-wicket bag in tests with Phillips' wicket, providing an odd symmetry as the Australian off-spinner dismissed his New Zealand counterpart who also had taken five wickets in the match.

With the pitch at the Basin Reserve still providing bounce for the spinner and with a steady breeze assisting his drift, Lyon was al-

most unplayable at times in the morning Sunday. He became most effective when he switched from the northern to the southern end and began to find the bounce which made him so difficult to handle.

His contribution to the match was enormous both with bat and ball and he played a major part in turning the match in Australia's favor.

Australia now commands the series which continues with the second test in Christchurch from Friday.

Australia's win in Wellington was set up by its first innings of 383 after it had been sent in on a greenish pitch. But it was Cameron Green's unbeaten 174 and his 116-run last wicket partnership with Josh Hazlewood that really turned the game towards the tourists.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 383 & 164 beat New Zealand 179 & (o/n 111-3) 196 all out in 64.4 overs (R Ravindra 59; Lyon 6-65) by 172 runs

Pragg checkmates Gujrathi, Gukesh loses

Navara Prague: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa crashed through the defenses of compatriot Vinit Gujrathi but D Gukesh suffered a shock defeat from a position of strength against Czech Republic's David Navara in the fifth round of the Prague Masters here. Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattarov continued with his dream run and ran over Mateusz Bartel of Poland to emerge as the sole leader ahead of Parham Maghsoudloo of Iran, who played out a draw with Hungarian turned Romanian Richard Rapport. PTI



Leverkusen's Alejandro Grimaldo scores his team's second goal. Reuters

Leverkusen go 10 points clear

Cologne: Bayer Leverkusen went 10 points clear at the top of the Bundesliga and continued their unbeaten run with a 2-0 win over struggling neighbours Cologne, who went down to 10-men in the first half of a hotly-contested Rhein derby on Sunday. Leverkusen, who have now gone 34 games without defeat in all competitions this season, are on 64 points. They extended their lead over second placed Bayern Munich after the champions drew 2-2 at Freiburg on Friday. Cologne remain 16th on 17 points. Cologne had Jan Thielmann sent off after 14 minutes and Leverkusen took the lead through Jeremie Frimpong in the 37th minute. REUTERS

Niemann wins LIV Jeddah by 4 strokes

Jeddah: Joaquin Niemann captured his second LIV Golf title in three outings on Sunday after cruising to a four-stroke victory at LIV Golf Jeddah Invitational in King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia. Niemann carded a 4-under-par 66 on Sunday and finished at 17-under 193 at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club. For his efforts, the 25-year-old Chilean earned \$4 million, boosting his season total after three events to \$8,162,000. "I'm more than happy about the way I'm playing," Niemann said. "I just want to keep on the same path. I'm pretty proud of the way I played all week." Niemann has posted three wins in his last three months. REUTERS

Aditi hits 2-under to finish 21st in Singapore

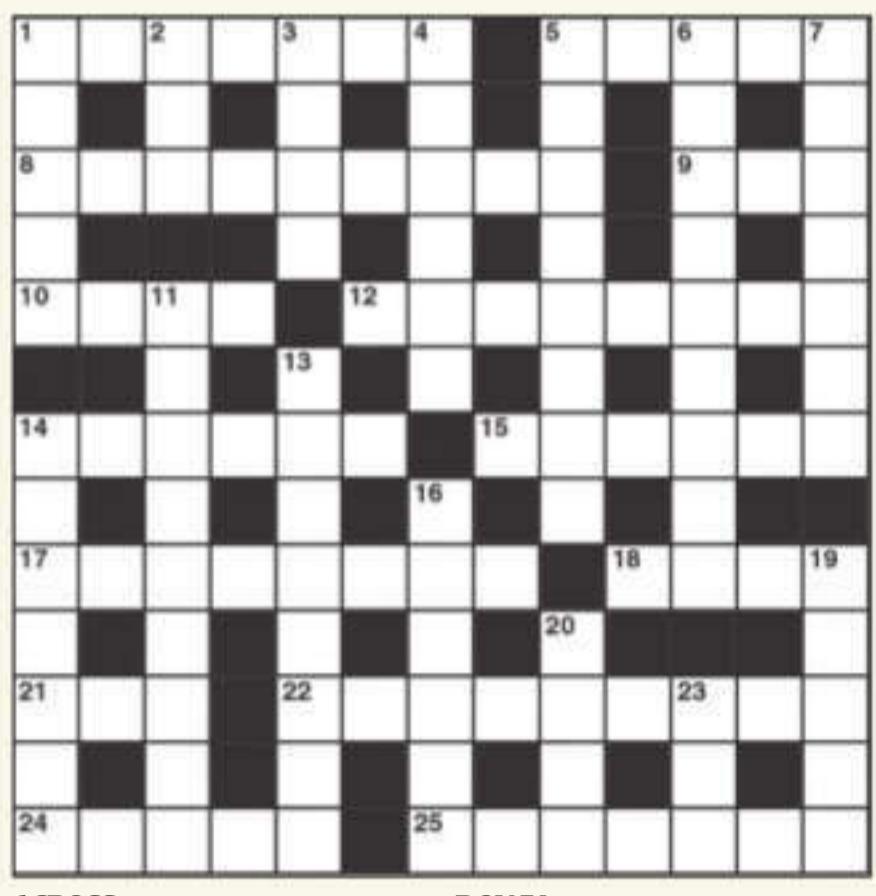
Singapore: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok finished 21st at the women's World Championship with a final card of 2-under 70 here on Sunday after being in top-10 in the first two days. Aditi had an early bogey, but recovered well with three birdies on the Par-5s on the fifth, eighth and 13th and another one on Par-4 ninth. She dropped a bogey on the closing 18th. PTI



Advani downs Chawla to retain CCI crown

Mumbai: Multiple time world champion Pankaj Advani was up and dominating as he retained his crown during the CCI Snooker Classic, handing challenger Kamal Chawla an 8-3 defeat in the best-of-15-frame final here on Sunday. Advani displayed his prowess, potting with the utmost accuracy and consistency, besides using some clever tactical play to brush aside Chawla, who put up a bold show trying to match him. "It

CROSSWORD 5303



ACROSS

- Snake to stop surfacing (7)
- They may be raised if he's taking in work (5)
- Arrangement for viewing (9)
- It has a strong pull in the port trade (3)
- Chief part of the monarchy (4)
- Misgivings about the foreign garments (8)
- Followed a soundly simple design (6)
- It may make a sheet of heavy weight on a bed (6)
- Rife perhaps and it spreads rapidly (8)
- Not Stevenson's better half (4)
- Little swimmer that can also do the crawl? (3)
- Simple departure is without formality (4-5)
- Suit oneself (5)
- To break up requires determination (7)

DOWN

- A first-class letter in Greek (5)
- One in favour of being paid? (3)
- A soccer team's turning point (4)
- Follower or man of the cloth (6)
- Palmistry manual? (8)
- Type Latin translation with great composure (9)
- Nominally commits oneself to work? (5,2)
- She makes hot claret (9)
- They're not bound to be distributed (8)
- A tender for some transferable stock? (7)
- It enables a writer to get rid of unwanted characters (6)
- Unusual glee about a good golf score (5)
- A wise man changes as he grows older (4)
- Fifty is under forty-nine? Well, no! (3)

Solutions Crossword 5302 Across: 1 Purchase, 5 Pate, 9 Wrong, 10 Educate, 11 Belligerence, 13 Instal, 14 In fact, 17 Circular tour, 20 Possess, 21 Elite, 22 Erne, 23 Dead heat, Down: 1 Paws, 2 Rioters, 3 Highly amused, 4 Sledge, 5 Again, 7 Elements, 8 Current trend, 12 Disciple, 15 Abusive, 16 Lassie, 18 Risen, 19 Nest

JUMBLED WORDS

Below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given query.

If we don't stand up for much, then we don't stand for much. - Marian Wright Edelman (8)

CEHER



AEOTCN



BEELDH



Answers will be sent up for children, then we don't stand for much. - Marian Wright Edelman

SOLUTION: CHEERLTHE-OCTANE-BEHELDH

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



Difficulty Level 2s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.



Difficulty Level

1s = Very Easy; 2s = Easy;
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;
5s = Very Hard;
6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5490



NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY

No. - Commr/E-auction/2024/83 Date 01.03.2024
इंडो-आशन आमतिकरने की सूचना
इसके सहर में विभिन्न गाड़ियों के एसएलआर और वीपीयू लोडिंग सर्व स्ट्रेसों पर रेल को चर्चारेट (RCR) / एस.पी.एस (MPS) / विभाग (विनाइल शेपिंग) / विभाग (आउट ऑफ होम) के ठेके होते हैं इंडो-आशन आमतिकरने की गई है। केंद्रीय रेप्युलिंग वेस्ट एसएलआर पर प्रभावात्मक विषय जो था कि

1. कार्य का नाम
(1) जोधपुर मंडल से संचालित गाड़ियों के एसएलआर और वीपीयू लोडिंग में स्थान लोज पर बाल पार्सल के लोडिंग होते हैं-आशन
(2) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्ट्रेसों पर रेल को चर्चारेट (RCR) के ठेके होते हैं-आशन
(3) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्ट्रेसों पर एम.पी.एस (MPS) के ठेके होते हैं-आशन
(4) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्ट्रेसों पर वाणिज्यिक विभाग (विनाइल शेपिंग, रेल डिप्लो नेटवर्क - डिजिटल, नॉन डिजिटल आउट ऑफ होम) के ठेके होते हैं आप कि इंडो-आशन

2. कार्य की अवधि
(1) एसएलआर और वीपीयू लोडिंग - 2 वर्ष
(2) रेल को चर्चारेट (RCR) - 5 वर्ष
(3) एम.पी.एस (MPS) - 5 वर्ष
(4) विभाग (विनाइल शेपिंग) - 3 वर्ष
(5) विभाग (रेल डिप्लो नेटवर्क - डिजिटल, नॉन डिजिटल आउट ऑफ होम) - 3 वर्ष
(6) विभाग (आउट ऑफ होम) - 3 वर्ष

3. लोड के इं-आशन प्रारम्भ की तिथि व समय
(1) SLRS & VPU:
(1) Parcel-JU 66 दिनांक 11.03.2024 को 13:00 बजे से
(2) Rail Coach Restaurant (RCR):
(1) RCR-JU-08 दिनांक 11.03.2024 को 15:00 बजे से
(3) MPS:
(1) MPS-JU-24-09 दिनांक 14.03.2024 को 11:00 बजे से
(4) ADVT:
(1) Vinyl-JU-18 दिनांक 12.03.2024 को 15:00 बजे से
(2) RDN-D-ND-JU-22 दिनांक 13.03.2024 को 11:00 बजे से
(3) OOH-JU-28 दिनांक 14.03.2024 को 11:00 बजे से

4. वेबसाइट जहाँ से लोड वाइफी के सम्बन्ध में जानकारी प्राप्त की जा सकती है: www.reps.gov.in

Follow us on

281-AN/24

SUDOKU 5491

Difficulty Level

1s = Very Easy; 2s = Easy;
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;
5s = Very Hard;
6s = Genius



SOLUTION

FORM NO. 14
(See Regulation 33(2)]

By Regd. A/D. Dasti failing which by Publication.

OFFICE OF THE RECOVERY OFFICER - I/II

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL HYDERABAD(DRT 2)

1st Floor, Triveni Complex Abids, Hyderabad 500001

DEMAND NOTICE

NOTICE UNDER SECTIONS 25 TO 28 OF THE RECOVERY OF DEBTS & BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1993 AND RULE 2 OF SECOND SCHEDULE TO THE INCOME TAX ACT, 1961.

RC/49/2018 Asset Reconstruction Company India Limited Versus Stemcor Alloys Limited To,

(CD 1) Stemcor Alloys Limited

8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

Also At: Sy.No. 307, Parigi Road, Farooqnagar Village & Mandal Shadnagar, Mahboob Nagar District-500 216.

(CD 2) Mr. Akash Garg (Managing Director)

Flat No. 202, Block B, Fortune Enclave, Road No. 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad-500 034.

Also At: Shri Akash Garg (MD), 35-Prem Vihar, Jasanth Road, New Mandi, Muzaffar Nagar-251 001 (U.P.)

Also At: Shri Akash Garg (MD), 610, Padma Tower-II, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110 008.

Also At: Shri Akash Garg (MD), Plot No. N-10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 034.

Also At: Shri Akash Garg (MD), B-8, Trendset Ville, Road No.3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad-500 034.

(CD 3) Shri Sharad Garg, 103, Aditya Hill Top Residency, HUDA Heights, MLA Colony, Road No.12, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad-500 034.

Also At: Shri Sharad Garg, 85-A, Flat No. 52, Samaskriti Palace, Road No. 12, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad-500 034.

Also At: Shri Sharad Garg, 610, Padma Towers-II, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110 008.

Also At: Shri Sharad Garg, 301, Madhusha Street No.5, Hapsiguda, Hyderabad-500 007.

(CD 4) Shri Devender Garg, 103-Prem Vihar, Jasanth Road, New Mandi, Muzaffar Nagar-251 001 (U.P.)

Also At: Shri Devender Garg, Plot no 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 034.

Also At: Shri Devender Garg, 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

Also At: Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 6) M/s. Divya Infrastructure And Projects Ltd 301, Madhusha, Street No. 5, Hapsiguda Hyderabad-500 007.

Also At: 610, Padma Towers-II, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110 008.

Also At: Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 8) M/s. Anu Akash Capital Pvt Ltd, Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

Also At: 301, Madhusha, Street No. 5, Hapsiguda Hyderabad-500 007.

Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 9) M/s. Anu Akash Capital Pvt Ltd, Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

Also At: 301, Madhusha, Street No. 5, Hapsiguda Hyderabad-500 007.

Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 10) M/s. Anu Akash Capital Pvt Ltd, Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

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Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 14) M/s. Anu Akash Capital Pvt Ltd, Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

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Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers, Nagarjuna Circle, Punjagutta, Hyderabad-500 082.

(CD 15) M/s. Anu Akash Capital Pvt Ltd, Plot No. 10/A, Block 43, Auto Nagar, Hayathnagar, Hyderabad-500 070.

Also At: 301, Madhusha, Street No. 5, Hapsiguda Hyderabad-500 007.

Also At: 8-2-248/1/775/405, G.S. Chambers,

BRIEFLY

UTTAR PRADESH
Three arrested
for abducting
2-year-old

Kanpur: KANPUR police on Sunday said they have arrested three persons, including a woman, and rescued a two-year-old boy who was allegedly kidnapped by them. Police said the accused abducted the child for their sister, who faced constant taunts from her in-laws for not having a child. Those arrested have been identified as Rajan (22), his sister Neetu (24), and Rajan's friend Pankaj (19). ENS

MAHARASHTRA
SIT arrests 2
cops over 2018
'fake encounter'

Palghar: Two policemen have been arrested by the Special Investigation Team for the alleged fake encounter of a man wanted in theft cases in 2018 in Nalasopara area of Palghar district, an official said on Sunday. Mira Bhayandar Vasai Virar Police personnel, identified as Mangesh Chavan and Manoj Sakpal, were arrested on Saturday, he said. Notably, the Bombay High Court had ordered the setting up of an SIT to probe the alleged fake encounter of Joginder Rana, a wanted accused in several theft cases. PTI

MADHYA PRADESH
Tech varsity
V-C among five
held over 'fraud'

Bhopal: An FIR was registered on Sunday against the vice chancellor of state technological university of Madhya Pradesh and four others over alleged financial irregularities after an inquiry was ordered by CM Mohan Yadav. Case was registered against Rajiv Gandhi Proudyogiki Vishwavidyalaya's vice-chancellor Sunil Kumar, who is on leave, financial controller Rishikesh Verma, former registrar RS Rajput, a purported beneficiary of the fraud, and an organisation. PTI

TRIPURA
82-yr-old found
living with dead
son's body

Agartala: An 82-year-old bed-ridden woman was found living with the body of his dead son in a house in Agartala for eight days, police said Sunday. Kalyani Sur Chowdhury lived with her son Sudhir, 54, after her daughter-in-law left the house about three years back. Neighbours informed the police after getting a foul smell from the house, and the woman, who is paralysed, was taken to a nearby health facility. PTI

SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, MARCH 3

THE FAMILY and friends of 34-year-old classical dancer Amarnath Ghosh, who was shot dead in St Louis, Missouri, US, last week, said they have no information about his body and how to bring it back for cremation. They have also started crowdfunding to gather money for bringing back his body.

Amarnath, who hailed from Suri in West Bengal's Birbhum district, was pursuing Masters in Performing Arts from Washington University.

"I have been told that Rs 10 to 12 lakh will be required to bring back the body... We don't have that much money. I don't know how the body will be cremated



Amarnath
was pursuing
Master's from
Washington
University

there," said Amarnath's uncle Shyamal Ghosh. "One of my relatives from Delhi called me and informed me about it (Amarnath's murder)," the uncle told *The Indian Express*. Amarnath lost his parents a few years ago. Being the lone child of his parents, uncle Shyamal and his family were the closest relatives he had.

According to the St Louis Metropolitan Police Department, the shooting happened at 7:15 pm (local time) on Tuesday at Delmar Boulevard and Clarendon Avenue.

I have written to the district administration and police seeking the government's help to bring back Amarnath's mortal remains. The officials here have

assured me that the letter will be sent to the Chief Minister's Office. I am hopeful that they will contact Delhi," Shyamal added.

Amarnath had moved to Washington around six years ago. "He was trained in Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and Kathak," said one of his friends.

The Indian consulate in Chicago said they had taken up the matter with the local police and authorities. Washington University, where Ghosh was a student, has condemned his killing as "senseless violence beyond comprehension."

Over the years, beach shacks – typically built from eco-friendly material such as bamboo, wooden poles and thatched palm leaves – have become a popular attraction for domestic and international tourists visiting Goa.

The owners of these temporary beach shacks, several of whom received showcause notices in recent months for operating without permissions.

The government allows un-

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, MARCH 3

WITH THEIR business already struggling this season due to delays in setting up and a decrease in the number of foreign tourists, owners of shacks in Goa's popular beach belt now fear closure in the aftermath of a recent order of the Bombay High Court at Goa directing action against 175 unauthorised structures conducting commercial activities in Anjuna.

The court had directed the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) and Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) to take action against the structures for violating Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms and operating without permissions.

The owners of these temporary beach shacks, several of whom received showcause notices in recent months for oper-

ating without permission.

A recent representation from the Goa Shack Owners Welfare Society (GSOWS) to the Tourism Department, said, "These shacks have been allotted with due permissions from your department, GCZMA, panchayats and the GSPCB. The GSPCB has granted a blanket permission to your office under section 100 to establish shacks on the beaches of Goa."

Over the years, beach shacks – typically built from eco-friendly material such as bamboo, wooden poles and thatched palm leaves – have become a popular attraction for domestic and international tourists visiting Goa.

The government allows un-

employed persons of Goan domi-

cances for operating beach shacks have been allotted through a draw of lots. We only have permission to run the shacks till May 31, following which they have to be mandatorily dismantled due to monsoons. How can these temporary shacks be included in the list of 'unauthorised' constructions? There has to be an exception for shacks."

John Lobo, secretary of Goa Shack Owners Welfare Society, said, "The shacks have applied for all the requisite permissions and licences from the authorities. A majority of applications for 'consent to operate' from the Pollution Control Board remain pending. Only 50-60 shacks have been granted the 'consent to operate'. We could be looking at a scenario, where the remaining shacks will be issued a closure notice."

Shreedhar, who runs a shack on the Vagator beach, said, "The li-

175, have so far been sealed. "We are just complying with the orders of the Court," he said.

Dwindling business

Shack owners have also been affected by dwindling business this tourist season, partly due to delays in allotment of shacks and fewer foreign tourists visiting the coastal state. The allotment of shacks was delayed this season after the state government approved a new beach shack policy, with some "contentious" clauses.

"The shacks are running at half occupancy on most weekends. Due to the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, there are fewer flights to Goa now and hence, the number of tourists has declined. Many travellers, who earlier visited Goa, now prefer going to Vietnam, Thailand and Sri Lanka," Shreedhar said.

FULL REPORT ON

www.indianexpress.com

SPANISH WOMAN'S GANGRAPE IN JHARKHAND'S DUMKA: SIT FORMED

I thought we were going to die, says Spanish travel vlogger as police look for other accused

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, MARCH 3

MORE THAN 40 hours since a Spanish national was allegedly gangraped in Jharkhand's Dumka, following which four people were arrested, police said on Sunday that they were looking for the remaining accused and that a special investigation team had been formed to nab them.

According to the woman, she was raped by seven men after on Friday night after she and her partner stopped in Dumka for the night while on a biking trip.

Jharkhand Director General of Police Ajay Kumar Singh had earlier told *The Indian Express* that all seven accused had been identified



A police team at the spot where a Spanish national was allegedly gangraped in Dumka, Jharkhand, Sunday. PTI

and that four had been arrested.

On Sunday, the woman, a 28-year-old travel vlogger, pointed out bruise marks on her face in a

post on social media. "My face looks like this, but it's not what hurts me the most. I thought we were going to die. Thank God we

are alive," she said in the post.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Dumka Superintendent of Police Pitamber Kherwar said, "The statements of all the arrested accused are being recorded." Police did not give any information regarding the accused. According to police sources, at around 11 pm on Friday, a patrol team came across a couple who were unable to speak Hindi or English.

"Looking at them, it seemed that something unpleasant had happened to them. While taking him to the hospital, it was revealed that (they were) on their way to Nepal from West Bengal, and had reached Kurumhat village of Hansdihia police station at 5 pm and spent the night in a

forest near Kunji Basti, about 2 kilometres from Kurumhat village," the source said.

The couple had then set up a temporary camp to rest, but a group of "anti-social elements" then reached their camp, the source said.

"It is noteworthy that the couple had not informed the local police or administration that they were setting up camp in Kurumhat forest. As soon as information about the incident was received, immediate action was taken... An SIT has been formed under the leadership of Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Jarmundi. All the accused will be arrested soon. Evidence is being collected scientifically by the FSL team," the police source added.

The Bastar Fighters is a specialised force formed in 2022 to fight Naxals. A total of 2,100 personnel were recruited from villages and trained by the Chhattisgarh Police to fight Maoists. In each of the seven districts in Bastar range, 300 Bastar Fighters personnel have been deployed.

A resident of Sangam village in Palkhanjhi tehsil in Kanker, Ramesh Kureti, 23, is the first Bastar Fighters constable killed in an encounter with the Maoists. The Maoist has been identified as Partapur Local Guerrilla Squad (LGS) commander Nagesh, a resident of Kohkameta in Narayanpur district. Also an area committee member, Nagesh had a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh on him. "The encounter, which

started at 6.30 am, went on for an hour. During search operations, we found the body of a Maoist, an AK47 rifle and a bullet," said Avinash Thakur, the Additional Superintendent of Police of Kanker.

The police said the Maoist was dressed in the uniform of People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) formed by the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). A case is to be registered at Chhotebethiya police station. The encounter took place in Hidur forest about 200 km from the Kanker district headquarters. A joint team of Border Security Force (BSF), District Reserve Guards (DRG) and Bastar Fighters had set out on the operation on receiving information about the presence of Maoists near the Narayanpur border in Abujhmad, an unsurveyed land of the size of Goa, which is still a Naxal stronghold.

On February 25, in another encounter, three Maoists were killed and their family members said they were not Maoists but villagers who had gone into the jungle to get forest produce. Anti-Naxal operations have been stepped up in the past few months and an additional heavy deployment of security personnel has been made in the Naxal-affected Bastar region. Work is going on to make new police camps to take over areas under Naxal control.

Missing Navy sailor's

kin seek CBI probe

to unravel mystery



Sahil Verma has been missing from a naval ship while on deployment since February 27. PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

JAMMU, MARCH 3

THE PARENTS of Indian Navy sailor Sahil Verma, who has been missing for a week, on Sunday demanded a CBI probe into the circumstances leading to his "mysterious disappearance" at sea from an Indian naval ship while on deployment.

Verma, a seaman, went missing from a naval ship on February 27 and a massive search operation has been launched to trace him.

His father Bashab Chander and mother Rama Kumari – who live in the Ghous Manhasan area of Jammu – have sought the intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha to ensure the safe return of their missing son.

"It is astonishing that a soldier went missing from his naval ship and is not traceable. I have been told that the CCTV cameras installed on the ship did not find anyone falling into the sea. Then where is my son?" Chander said.

Relatives and neighbours of

the family are making regular visits to express their support and praying for Verma's safe return.

Terming the seaman's disappearance as "unfortunate", the Mumbai-headquartered Western Naval Command has said a high-level board of inquiry has been ordered.

"In an unfortunate incident, Sahil Verma, Seaman II, has been reported missing at sea from an Indian Naval Ship whilst on deployment since February 27, 2024. The Navy immediately launched a massive search operation with ships and aircraft, which is still continuing," it said in a post on X.

Verma's mother said something is being concealed. "There were 400 people and only my son went missing," she said.

Manipur: CBI files chargesheet against seven in Bishnupur armoury loot case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
IMPHAL, MARCH 3

THE CBI Sunday filed a chargesheet before the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Kamrup (Metro), Guwahati, against seven accused in a case related to loot of arms and ammunition from the Bishnupur police armoury during the Manipur ethnic violence last year, officials said on Sunday.

Those named in the chargesheet are Laishram Prem Singh, Khumukcham Dhiren alias Thakpa, Moirangthem Anand Singh, Athokpam Kajit alias Kishorjit, Loukrakpam Michael Mangangcha alias Michael, Konthoujam Romojit Meitei alias Romojit, and

Keisham Johnson alias Johnson.

Barring Laishram Prem Singh and Khumukcham Dhiren, the remaining five have been earlier charged by the CBI in looting of police armoury at the Manipur Police Training Centre (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal.

This incident took place on May 4 last year, the day ethnic clashes broke out in the state.

Moirangthem Anand Singh is alleged to be a former member of the proscribed People's Liberation Army of Manipur and

Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon), while the remaining

are believed to be underground workers of valley-based banned terror outfits. They had earlier been arrested in September last year when they were allegedly extorting money. The five were released following a court order but Singh was arrested and brought to Delhi by the NIA.

While Singh is in judicial custody, the fate of the other six was not immediately known.

(WITH PTI INPUTS)

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cl

MINISTRY MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM COMPANIES

Indian cos eye critical minerals mining in Lanka, Aus as govt expands search

AGGAM WALIA

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

THE MINISTRY of Mines hosted two meetings with industry stakeholders in January to discuss opportunities for the mining of critical minerals by Indian companies in Sri Lanka and Australia. These meetings were organised in line with the ministry's broader push to strengthen India's critical minerals supply chain through the acquisition of overseas mineral assets.

The ministry met with representatives from companies including Ola Electric, Hindalco Industries, and Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation to discuss the prospects of graphite mining in Sri Lanka on January 5. Three days later, it organised a luncheon meeting to explore avenues for mining opportunities in Australia, which was attended by the Indian High Commissioner-designate to Australia, Gopal Bagley, and various industry representatives from companies including Coal India, Steel Authority of India, Vedanta, Tata Steel, Adani Group, and JSW Steel. Sri Lanka holds significant reserves of vein graphite, a highly pure form of natural graphite that is only found on the island nation.

Graphite is a critical mineral that is extensively used as the anode material in lithium-ion batteries. By weight, graphite is typically the largest component in lithium-ion batteries, with up to 70 kilograms of graphite used in an average electric vehicle (EV). Graphite's vital application in EVs explains the participation of Ola Electric in the ministry meeting. Ola has previously shown interest in entering the critical minerals supply chain by participating in the ministry's ongoing first tranche of critical minerals auction. It had also attended a ministry meeting in October on opportunities in Zambia for the mining of copper, which is used as the cathode material in EV batteries.



Sri Lanka holds significant reserves of vein graphite whereas Australia produces almost half of the world's lithium and is the second-largest producer of cobalt. File

India's interest in Sri Lanka's graphite coincides with the Sri Lankan government's active pursuit of Indian companies for graphite mining in the country. "We have the best graphite in the world. Now, Indian companies will be manufacturing electric vehicles. One of the large components for electric batteries is graphite. We used to have about 30,000 graphite mines. So there's a lot of opportunity with the expertise and the technology these Indian companies have. I think they should seriously look at Sri Lanka," the Sri Lankan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Tharaka Balasuriya said in an interview to ANI on February 22.

Graphite mining in Sri Lanka

peaked during the two World Wars in the 20th century, hitting over 30,000 tonnes in annual exports. In 2023, however, the country only exported graphite weighing around 2,500 tonnes and valuing roughly \$6 million. Sri Lanka has graphite reserves of around 1.3 million tonnes, as per data with the US Geological Survey.

Graphite in India is largely concentrated in Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Jharkhand, with these three states collectively accounting for 74 per cent of India's graphite resources. However, only Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, and Odisha have graphite reserves, which are measured resources that are economically viable to extract.

In FY22, India produced 57,264 tonnes of graphite and imported 54,052 tonnes from countries like China, Madagascar, and Mozambique.

As per the National Mineral Inventory, India has graphite reserves of 8,56 million tonnes. In the mines ministry's second tranche of critical minerals auction, which was announced on February 29, six out of 18 blocks up for auction contain graphite, with 3 blocks each in Arunachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The meeting on mining opportunities in Australia followed a meeting between V L Kantha Rao, the mines secretary, and Philip Green, the Australian High

Commissioner to India, on December 12. Australia produces almost half of the world's lithium and is the second-largest producer of cobalt. Both lithium and cobalt are used in EVs and consumer electronics.

In March, 2022, Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), a joint venture company formed by the mines ministry, and Australia's Critical Minerals Office (CMO) signed an MoU to jointly fund mineral explorations and support potential investments by Indian companies in critical minerals projects in Australia. In March, 2023, KABIL and the CMO identified 2 lithium and 3 cobalt target projects for due diligence studies, which are currently under progress.

The Indian Express had previously reported that the mines ministry plans to support central PSUs like Coal India, NTPC, and Steel Authority of India in the acquisition of critical mineral assets overseas by sharing proposals received through partner countries in the US-led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), of which Australia is also a part. PM Prasad, the chairperson of Coal India, representatives of which were present in the luncheon meeting in January, shared that a company team has visited mining sites in Australia and that talks are in the "preliminary stage only", in the Q3FY24 earnings call.

MARKET WATCH

MCAP FIRMS UP BY ₹65,302 CR

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of seven of the top 10 most valued firms climbed Rs 65,302.5 crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services and ICICI Bank emerging as the biggest gainers. PTI

'Level playing field on tax outgo in rupee terms should be created for hybrid variants'



BEV, a hydrogen fuel cell car, an electrified flex fuel car etc. The only difference is where you are getting your energy from — electricity, gasoline, ethanol, hydrogen or any other form. So, given the flexibility of options it provides, I believe it is here to co-exist.

Besides, it also helps you build the ecosystem without suddenly disrupting the existing ecosystem. We must also consider the car sales data and future projections. Today, the market size is 4.1-4.2 million cars and EVs form 2% of that. The remaining 98% will stay on for 15 years. While this 2% percent may become 20% by 2030, 80% will still be non-EVs. And by 2030, if car sales go up from 4.1 million to 6 million, 80 percent of that would be 4.8 million. That is higher than the internal combustion engine cars sold today.

How can hybrids change that?

Hybrids can make the adoption happen much faster. It would be complementing EVs because you need a certain volume to localise. To hit scale you need to get into the mass segment but there the price sensitivity is very high. So if you try to introduce any sustainable technology, which does not make economic sense for the consumer then you will hit a roadblock.

transparent and workable way is to base the GST taxation on Carbon and it removes all complexities as it even distinguishes between a large car and a small car because of the fuel efficiency element.

While transitioning to carbon based taxation is something that may take some time as it would need some examination and convincing in the council, what we are saying is that for the immediate, maybe a level playing field can be created in taxation in rupee terms for the hybrid vehicle. If the customer pays the same level of tax in rupee terms, there is no loss to the government and without any outgo the government will be supporting something that is better. It can be done by tweaking the tax in a manner that takes care of additional tax outgo on account of the powertrain cost in the hybrid variant of the car model.

There is a view that hybrids are transitory, what is your view?

I must say that it is not EVs vs hybrids and to my mind it is not transitory. If it were transitory, in markets like China, Europe etc it would be disappearing, however, it is growing. Consumer needs are diverse and the technology that caters to them are also different. It should also be seen as a mother technology to various other technologies as it has the same electrified parts that can be used in a

It is important, in our opinion, for us to make sure that all green technology in our country is at a level playing field vis-a-vis the incumbent. If you can just make the tax outgo same in rupee terms with no money outgo for the government then you are enabling all this virtuous cycle to play out.

Where are we on the commercial deployment of hydrogen cell fuel and flex fuel?

Hydrogen is pilot as of now and it is a study and so it is a fair distance away from getting commercial.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Fix hospital treatment charges for entire country: SC asks Centre

GEORGE MATHEW

MUMBAI, MARCH 3

IN A development that could lead to faster adoption of 'cashless' health insurance across the country, the Supreme Court (SC) has directed the central government to expeditiously fix the hospital treatment charges to be paid by patients within the next six weeks.

Currently, different hospitals charge different rates for treatment, making it difficult to implement the cashless health insurance system in the country.

"We, direct the Secretary, Department of Health, Union of India to hold a meeting with his counterparts in the State Governments/Union Territories and come with a concrete proposal by the next date of hearing (in the next six weeks)," said a two-judge division bench of the Supreme Court while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by an NGO.

The general insurance industry, where the health portfolio almost contributes around Rs 1 lakh crore of premium, is now keenly watching the development and expect a positive outcome on the hospital charges.

Guidelines for this would be unveiled after the new government assumes power along with other reforms to be mandated under the Rs 75,000 crore tied component to make India a developed nation by 2047. FE

standardised rates for providing similar treatments.

"In the event the central government does not come out with a concrete proposal by the next date of hearing, we will consider issuing appropriate directions in this regard," ruled a bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta last week.

The bench was hearing a PIL filed by an NGO -- Veterans Forum for Transparency in Public Life, through its general secretary Wing Commander (Retd) Bishwanath Prasad Singh -- praying for the SC's direction to determine the rate of fee chargeable by hospitals across the country from the patients in terms of Rule 9 of the Clinical Establishment (Central Government) Rules, 2012.

The NGO had submitted that the central government itself has notified the rates which are applicable to the CGHS (Central Government Health Scheme)

empanelled hospitals and had suggested that till a solution is found, the Central Government can always notify the said rates as an interim measure.

The NGO has provided an example that the cost of cataract surgery in a private hospital can range from Rs 30,000 to Rs 140,000 per eye, whereas the rates in a government in a government hospital are up to Rs 10,000 per eye. The government's counsel informed the SC that the rules framed in Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010 has been adopted by 12 state governments and seven union territories and in view of the provisions of Rule 9 of the Rules, of 2012, the rates cannot be determined by the central government unless there is a response from the state governments/union territories.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com



The general insurance industry is now keenly watching the development. File

India Inc revamp: 900 NSE-listed firms to recruit 2,000 independent directors in 2024

RAJESH KURUP

MUMBAI, MARCH 3

INDIA INC is all set to refresh its boards with 900 NSE-listed companies looking to recruit nearly 2,000 independent directors in 2024. As many as 23 Nifty-50 companies will need to recruit 47 independent directors between them. They include Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Ultratech Cement, L&T and Tata Consultancy Services. This high turnover is a fallout of the regulatory guidelines imposed in 2013 after the

Satyam Computers scam. All independent directors appointed prior to 2014 were reappointed in 2014 as per the new act. The new Companies Act mandates that independent directors can hold up to two consecutive five-year terms — a maximum of 10 years — in a firm.

Hetal Dalal, President & COO of Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IIAS) noted companies have been steadily refreshing their boards to meet the 2024 deadline when previous tenures of independent directors stop being grandfathered.

Shriram Subramanian,

founder and MD, InGovern, believes the challenges to recruit qualified independent directors are more to do with companies planning ahead of time and initiating the search process, rather than dearth of suitable candidates. "It is not difficult to recruit 20,000-25,000 independent directors in such a populous country," Subramanian said.

Among the top 200 NSE companies, the term of six independent directors at MRF and five each of Dabur India and GMR Airports Infrastructure will expire in 2024. FE

States must follow branding norms for central schemes to get interest-free loans

PRASANTA SAHU

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

TO RECEIVE interest-free capital expenditure loans from the Centre under the "untied" category, states will have to comply with the branding norms for centrally sponsored schemes (CSSs) and deposit interest accrued on the unutilised central-schemes funds lying with the state-level single nodal agencies (SNA) by March 31.

The scheme for providing financial assistance to the states for capital expenditure, introduced in FY21, was extended to FY25 in the interim Budget with an outlay of Rs 1.3 trillion as against the

revised estimate of Rs 1.05 trillion for FY24.

Of the Rs 1.3 trillion for FY25, Rs 55,000 crore in untied capex loans would be rolled out from April 1, 2024. The reform/project linked Rs 75,000 crore would be rolled out after the new government is formed in May-June.

With many states tweaking the names of CSSs, the Centre has made it mandatory that to avail of the capex loan, they would have to retain the official name of all schemes and any guidelines/instructions issued in this regard. Further, the SNA model requires states to notify an SNA for each CSS to receive funds from both the Centre and from state budgets. The Centre has

now mandated that states have to deposit the central share of interest earned in SNA accounts till March 31, 2024, in the Consolidated Fund of India and submit a certificate in this regard to benefit from the loan facility.

Funds provided under the 50-year interest loan scheme would be over and above the normal borrowing ceiling allowed to the states for FY25, during which the loan amount has to be spent.

The untied loans would be released to states in two instalments with the first instalment of 66 per cent of the approved amount on meeting the mandatory conditions and the second instalment of 34 per cent will be released on utilization of at least

75 per cent of the amount released in the first installment.

Separately, the government would also release Rs 5,000 crore tied loans approved in FY24 under the component for housing for police personnel or as part of police stations in urban areas, construction of Unity Malls and libraries/digital infrastructure.

It has also earmarked another Rs 5,000 crore for the development of iconic tourist centres to a global scale.

Guidelines for this would be unveiled after the new government assumes power along with other reforms to be mandated under the Rs 75,000 crore tied component to make India a developed nation by 2047. FE

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FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com



SHE LEAVES FOR CHINA NEXT MONTH

S KOREA BIDS FAREWELL TO ITS FIRST PANDA

A South Korean zoo on Sunday threw a farewell party for Fu Bao, the first giant panda born in the country, ahead of her scheduled return to China. *Fu Bao*, which means lucky treasure, has attracted a huge fan base ever since she was born in 2020 at the Everland amusement park just south of Seoul. The panda is set to return to China's Sichuan province next month after spending a month in quarantine. **REUTERS**

TOP OF THE WORLD



PM Anthony Albanese

AUSTRALIA

Govt candidate wins bypoll amid cost-of-life crisis

Sydney: A candidate from Australia's government claimed victory late on Saturday in a by-election in Victoria state seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's handling of cost-of-living pressures across the country. Candidate Jodie Bylea of the centre-left Labor Party defeated Nathan Conroy of the conservative Liberal party in the by-election in the electorate of Dunkley, in Victoria's capital Melbourne, sparked by the death of the sitting Labor member. The win is a boost for the government as Australians experience financial pressure from high inflation, which although recently easing has prompted the nation's central bank to hike interest rates. **REUTERS**

SWITZERLAND

Teen held for 'stabbing' Orthodox Jew

Warsaw: A teenager has been arrested on suspicion of stabbing and critically wounding an Orthodox Jewish man on the streets of Zurich, Swiss police said Sunday. Zurich police said in a statement that they suspect antisemitism as the motive in the stabbing attack that occurred Saturday evening. Police said they received a report of an argument involving several people at 9:35 p.m. According to their initial findings, the perpetrator attacked the 50-year-old man "and critically injured him with a stabbing weapon." **AP**

FRANCE

Farmers can hold more protests, says Union head

Paris: French farmers could stage more protests and blockades in the coming weeks to push the government to deliver on its promises to help the sector, the head of France's largest farming union FNSEA said on Sunday. Farmers across Europe have been protesting for weeks over excessively restrictive environmental rules, competition from cheap imports from outside European Union. Union head Arnaud Rousseau was speaking ahead of a meeting between President Macron and farmers' representatives in March. **REUTERS**

SRI LANKA

Tourism grows by 122% in Jan, says minister

Colombo: A Sri Lankan minister on Sunday said the country's external sector performance has seen a marked improvement year on year with tourism fetching USD 342 million in January 2024, an impressive 122 per cent jump from last year. Speaking in Ruwanwella, his home constituency, Minister of State for Finance Ranjith Siyambalapitiya was delving into the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's external sector indicators issued mid-week. **PTI**

RAKES UP KASHMIR ISSUE, AIMS AT G20 MEMBERSHIP BY 2030

Shehbaz becomes Pak PM, vows to build, improve ties with neighbours

Focus on rebuilding economy amid huge budgetary deficit

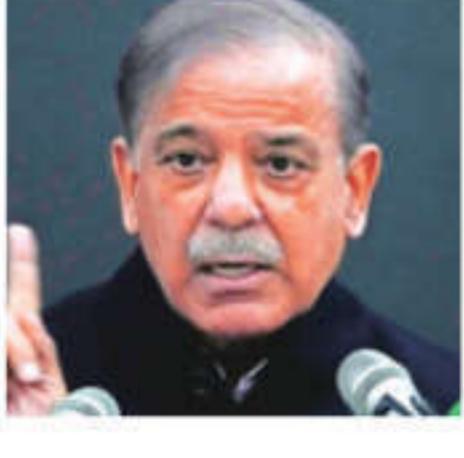
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 3

PAKISTAN'S NEWLY-ELECTED Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday raked up the Kashmir issue in his maiden address but pledged to improve ties with all leading nations, including the country's neighbours.

Shehbaz said that Pakistan would not become part of any "great game" and his government would increase the number of friends. He pledged to build and improve ties with all leading nations, including neighbours.

"We will keep ties with neighbours on the basis of equality," Shehbaz, 72, said as he easily won the election in the National Assembly to become Pakistan's prime minister for a second time.

He said that his government would work hard and set a goal to become a member of G20 coun-



Shehbaz Sharif. File

tries by 2030. The G20 or Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum of the world's major developed and developing economies.

He, however, raked up the Kashmir issue and equated it with Palestine. "Let's all come together [...] and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of Kashmiris and Palestinians," he added.

Shehbaz, who was the consensus candidate of the PML-N

and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), received 201 votes in the 336-member house.

Shehbaz said that the country was facing challenges primarily due to the fragile economy. He said that he was starting his tenure when the country was facing a budgetary deficit of more than one trillion rupees.

"How we will pay the salaries

for armed forces and how to pay the civil servants," he wondered and added that reforming the economy was the biggest challenge faced by the country. He promised to bring investment into the country and create economic conditions that would spur economic growth. He highlighted that the energy sector was crumbling due to the accumulating debt owed by the country to the power-producing companies.

The session of the new parliament was convened amid ruckus and sloganizing by PTI-backed lawmakers.

Police crackdown on Imran party workers protesting 'rigged' polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE, MARCH 3

MORE THAN 100 supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party have been arrested from different parts of Punjab province of Pakistan for staging rallies against alleged vote rigging, police said on Sunday.

On the call of party founder Imran Khan, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party held protests across Pakistan on Saturday against the alleged "massive rigging" in the February 8 general elections.

Most arrests took place in Lahore where newly elected CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz ordered

PTI RE-ELECTS GOHAR KHAN AS CHAIRMAN

Islamabad: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party on Sunday announced that Barrister Gohar Ali Khan was elected as its chairman in fresh intra-party polls. It was forced by the poll body to hold new party polls after last year's polls were deemed illegal. **REUTERS**

a clamp down on the protesters.

"Mian Shahzad Farooq and Afzaal Azeem Pahat, who contested... against Maryam Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif, were also arrested," a party spokesperson said.

Left alliance likely to take over Nepal govt after 17-month gap

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MARCH 3



Nepal PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda

IN WHAT appears like a fast shift in political equations, Nepal is likely to witness a take over of the Federal government by the left alliance after a gap of 17 months, as a series of parleys between Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and leader of the Opposition KP Oli seems to have brought the two major parties closer to a coalition arrangement.

According to top brass political sources, Prachanda, leader of the Maoist Center with just 32 members in parliament will continue to lead the government backed by the Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist Leninist, which has 79 members in the 275-member House of Representatives.

The new deal between the two biggest left parties will be the third such exercise after their experiments broke down in bitter note, first in 2020 and then again in 2023 January.

The Nepali Congress, the

bigs party in the coalition government as well as in Parliament appears prepared as party chief Sher Bahadur Deuba Sunday asked his ministers to be ready to quit. A formal decision will be taken Monday, party sources said.

Oli and Prachanda have also been making efforts to have the transitional justice bill to deal with cases of rights violations and forced disappearances during the decade-long armed Maoist insurgency that ended in 2006.

"The two communist parties coming together is a natural event that we have been waiting to see materialize," Minendra Rijal, a member of the NC central committee told *The Indian Express*.

Previous such experiments had the open and visible support from China whereas both India and the US were against it.



DOCTORS PROTEST IN SOUTH KOREA

A doctor in a mask attends a rally against the government's medical policy in Seoul, Sunday. AP

■ Thousands of senior doctors rallied in Seoul to express their support for junior doctors who have been on strike for nearly two weeks over a government plan to sharply increase medical school admissions.

■ The rally came as the government said it would begin to take steps Monday to suspend the doctors' licences of nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents for defying government orders.

■ The government's absurd medical policy has triggered immense resistance by trainee doctors... and we doctors have become one," Park Sung-min, said a senior member of the Korea Medical Association.

Infighting-riven Michigan, Idaho to Missouri: Support for Trump soars as he wins caucuses

RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

REUTERS
MICHIGAN, MARCH 3

DONALD TRUMP on Saturday easily won the Republican caucuses in Michigan, where the party has been riven by infighting that some Republicans fear



Former US President Donald Trump

could hurt his campaign in the key battleground state as he gears up for the general election in November. He also won the Missouri and Idaho Republican caucuses on Saturday, according to Edison Research.

In all three states Trump trounced Nikki Haley, his last remaining rival for the Republican presidential nomination, moving him closer to becoming the White House standard-bearer and a likely general election rematch with President Joe Biden.

In Michigan, Trump beat Haley in all 13 districts taking part in the nominating caucuses. Overall, Trump won with nearly

98 percent support: 1,575 votes to just 36 for Haley.

Pete Hoekstra, the Michigan Republican Party's chair, called it an "overwhelming, dominating victory." More than 1,600 party insiders participated in the presidential caucus in the Michigan city of Grand Rapids, where they chose delegates for the party's national nominating convention in July. He said he was confident the

Michigan Republican Party would unite around the aims of winning the White House and a Senate seat up for grabs and retaking the state House of Representatives.

With victories in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, the US Virgin Islands, South Carolina, and now Michigan, Missouri and Idaho under his belt, Trump is far and away the frontrunner in the race.

At one of the caucus meetings, the participants decided to save time by simply asking anyone who backed Haley to stand up. In a room of 185 delegates, 25-year-old Carter Houtman was the only person who stood up. "It was a little lonely," Houtman told Reuters.

Malaysia to renew search for flight MH370 that went missing 10 yrs ago

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia is pushing for a renewed search for Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, the transport minister said on Sunday, as the 10th anniversary of its disappearance in one of the world's greatest aviation mysteries approaches.

Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke said US seabed exploration firm Ocean Infinity had been invited to discuss its latest search proposal after two previous failed attempts. He said Malaysia would talk to Australia about cooperation in resuming the search once the proposal is cleared by the cabinet.

The review of the unfortunate incident," said Hagar.

Health authorities in Gaza said Israeli forces had killed more than 100 people trying to reach a relief convoy near Gaza City.

The review, he said, which gathered information from commanders and troops in the

15 CHILDREN DIE FROM MALNUTRITION IN GAZA

Cairo: At least 15 children have died over the past few days from malnutrition and dehydration at Gaza's Kamal Adwan hospital, health ministry in Gaza said. "We fear for lives of 6 (other) children suffering from malnutrition... at the hospital". **REUTERS**

In past negotiations Hamas had sought to avoid discussing the wellbeing of hostages until after terms for their release are set.

A US official told reporters on Saturday: "The path to a ceasefire right now literally at this hour is straightforward. And there's a deal on the table." Israel had agreed to the framework and it was now up to Hamas to respond, the US official said.

Meanwhile, in the latest reported attack on aid, Gaza authorities said at least eight people were killed Sunday when a Kuwaiti charity food aid truck was hit by an air strike. There was no immediate Israeli comment. Residents also described heavy bombing overnight at Khan Younis in south Gaza.

One source briefed on the talks had said Saturday that Israel could stay away from Cairo unless Hamas first presented its full list of hostages who are still alive. A Palestinian source told Reuters Hamas had so far rejected this.

Israel's review of Gaza aid convoy deaths says most died in stampede

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, MARCH 3

ISRAEL'S MILITARY has completed a preliminary review of civilian deaths at a Gaza aid convoy last week, which determined that forces did not strike the convoy and that most Palestinians died in a stampede, a military spokesperson said Sunday.

It has also launched a more thorough examination of the incident to be handled by "an independent, professional and expert body" which will share its findings, said spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagar.

"The IDF has concluded an initial review of the unfortunate incident," said Hagar.

Health authorities in Gaza said Israeli forces had killed more than 100 people trying to reach a relief convoy near Gaza City.

The review, he said, which gathered information from commanders and troops in the

field, determined that no strike was carried out towards the aid convoy.

"The majority of Palestinians were killed or injured as a result of the stampede," Hagar said.

"Following the warning shots fired to disperse the stampede and after our forces had started retreating, several looters approached our forces and posed an immediate threat to them. According to the initial review, the soldiers responded toward several individuals," he said.

Muataseen Salah, a member of the Emergency Committee at the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said there were more than 1,000 casualties, dead and wounded, among the stampede victims.

"Any attempt to claim that people were martyred due to overcrowding or being run over is incorrect. The wounded and martyrs are the result of being shot with heavy-calibre bullets," he told Reuters.

GRASSROOTS CANDIDATES FACE MOST THREAT FROM CARTELS EYEING LOCAL POWER

Attacks on candidates raise fears of Mexico's bloodiest polls ever

FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ
MEXICO CITY, MARCH 3

AS MEXICO prepares for the largest elections in its history, organized crime is once again preying on local candidates across swaths of the country dominated by cartels, raising concerns among experts that these could be Mexico's bloodiest elections ever.

Julián López, coordinator for the Citizen Movement party in the southern state of Guerrero, experienced it first hand when rifle-toting gunmen abducted him and two colleagues while they were driving on Feb. 7. The 43-year-old López was beaten,



Mourners at the wake of mayoral candidate Armando Perez in Maravatio, Michoacan state, Tuesday. AP

in the street alongside his brother. He had allegedly received threats from a local union.

López, the candidate in Guerrero, has refused to travel in armored vehicles with armed security since his abduction. "I don't think that's the way to get closer to the people."

Thousands of local candidates find themselves in a similar quandary ahead of the June 2 elections, which will occur in all 32 jurisdictions, with over 20,000 positions up for grabs, making it Mexico's largest election, as per the National Electoral Institute.

The group Data Civica had tallied 30 attacks on political hopefuls and party officials from

those local candidates have become more vulnerable under the security regime of the current president. López Obrador created the quasi-military National Guard, disbanded the federal police and what remains of local police can put up little resistance. He said the federal government would protect candidates for President, Governor and Congress, asking state, local governments to provide security for local candidates.

Guillermo Valencia, president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Michoacan said Saturday, "Four candidates have already resigned on me and I'm struggling to find candidates in other (races)," he said.

AP

19



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Why Thailand slammed India's farm subsidies at the WTO

RAVI DUTT MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

THAILAND HAS replaced its Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after New Delhi protested her comments on India's Public Stockholding (PSH) programme, PTI reported last Friday.

Pimchanok Vonkorpon Pitfield had targeted India's rice procurement programme. She said that its Public Distribution System (PDS), under which the government procures essential food items from producers and sells them to the public at low rates, is not for the people but for "capturing" the export market. PTI cited a senior government official as stating that the language and behaviour of the Thai ambassador were "not in good taste".

After India, Thailand is the second largest rice exporter in the world.

However, India has put temporary restrictions on rice exports to arrest domestic prices.

What were Thailand's concerns?

Thailand is a member of the 20-nation Cairns Group, which has time and again questioned India's PSH programme at WTO. It has argued that the programme is "highly subsidised" and India's farm support is "distorting" global food prices and "hurting" the food security of other countries.

Trade distortion is a situation where prices and production are higher or lower than levels that would usually exist in a competitive market. According to the WTO, nearly all domestic support measures are considered to distort such trade, but they are permitted to a certain limit called the '*de minimis*' limit.

Under the provisions of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the aggre-



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal at the WTO gathering of ministers in Abu Dhabi on March 1. Reuters

gate value of the product-specific support should not exceed 5% of the total value of production of the agricultural product in question. In the case of developing countries such

as India, the *de minimis* ceiling is 10%.

India has breached the *de minimis* limit in the case of rice. This has angered other exporters such as Thailand, as they are finding it difficult to compete with Indian rice and losing the global export market share to India.

The Cairns group comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, Uruguay, and Vietnam. It has been lobbying for agricultural trade liberalisation.

Trade experts say that the grouping is trying to get India to dismantle or reduce the scope of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme. Through the scheme, the government gives an assured price to farmers for certain major crops to ensure price stability and secure farmers' income.

Why are India's rice subsidies being

questioned?

The WTO norms say that the support given should be within the 10% *de minimis* limit. India informed the WTO that the value of its rice production in 2019–20 was \$46.0 billion while it gave subsidies worth \$6.31 billion or 13.7%, as against the permitted 10%.

However, India has questioned the way subsidies are calculated at the WTO, saying the calculation is done at a fixed and outdated 1986–88 price, which overestimates the subsidy. India is seeking to change this at the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

What is India's argument and demand at the WTO?

The Cairns Group is also attacking the 'peace clause', triggered after India breached the *de minimis* limit.

The interim peace clause was put in place

in 2013 under the Bali Agreement to protect developing countries from being challenged for breach of subsidy levels. However, it comes with onerous conditions, including a host of notification requirements, making it difficult to use.

Therefore, India and a group of developing nations are seeking a permanent solution for public stockholding for food grains. This will give India better flexibility in providing farm support. India has been arguing that the subsidy it provides is far less than what the US and EU give.

The Indian government's subsidy to farmers comes in at \$300 per farmer, compared with \$40,000 per farmer in the US. However, the recent conference, the 13th Ministerial Conference of WTO, ended without any decision on a permanent solution for public stockholding of food.

EXPLAINED
BUSINESS

THIS WORD MEANS

GREY ZONE WARFARE

The term was recently used by Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan at the Raisina Dialogue

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

ON THE last day of the 2024 Raisina Dialogue (on February 24), India's Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan said "grey-zone warfare" was the latest in informal warfare.

During a discussion titled 'The New Wars: Policies, Practices, and Preparation', he gave an example of the situation in the South China Sea, where several countries have extended competing territorial claims, and where occasional confrontations involving small boats have been reported.

In commentaries on China and Taiwan too, the term crops up in descriptions of Chinese actions around the island that it claims as its own.

What is grey zone warfare?

Grey zone warfare generally means a middle space between the black and white of direct conflict and peace.

A blog from the thinktank Atlantic Council quotes Clementine G Starling, a resident fellow in the Transatlantic Security Initiative, as saying, "A multitude of activities fall into this murky in-between – from nefarious economic activities, influence operations and cyberattacks to mercenary operations, assassinations, and disinformation campaigns."

Other experts include economic actions too, such as debt traps and economic sanctions.

Tactics of grey zone warfare became more popular during the Cold War, the phase of intense US-USSR rivalry for ideological and economic dominance after the Second World War in 1945. Since both powers were nuclear-armed, direct conflict could not be risked.

Experts told the thinktank that such methods can also be employed by parties who have not had access to massive resources or power traditionally. Such tactics, thus, can help them gain an advantage over a technically superior adversary more used to conventional warfare.

What can it look like?

Experts from the US and Europe have characterised certain Russian and



Taiwan's Lion Islet, with China's Xiamen in the background. China's actions around Taiwan have been termed grey zone warfare. Reuters

Chinese actions of late as examples of grey zone warfare.

This includes the Chinese military's presence in the South China Sea. The Philippines is one of the countries which has challenged China's territorial claims extending to over 80 per cent of the region. In December 2023, it termed the presence of more than 135 Chinese maritime militia vessels near a disputed reef as "illegal". It accused China of firing water cannons at its boats and ramming into others, while the Chinese coast guard blamed the Philippines for hitting Chinese boats.

Another example can be found in a recent Reuters report, which said, "Taiwan has complained for four years of stepped-up Chinese military action, such as fighters regularly flying over the strait as part of a 'grey zone' strategy to wear down Taiwan with activities that stop short of a full-blown conflict."

In a paper from the foreign policy research institute Pacific Forum, titled 'The Gray Zone Issue: Implications for US-China Relations', a researcher argued that the US has also engaged in similar tactics. These include economic sanctions against China and imposition of duties on Chinese imports to the US, along with maritime reconnaissance.

What risks does it pose?

A country could be indulging in grey zone warfare only as bait, getting its rival to react in a way that then legitimises military reprisal from its side.

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We (US and India) are so much stronger together than being apart. It's hard... and where there are areas of alignment, you're going to have friction... In the end, it goes back to trust and a common win-win opportunity



WHY JOHN CHAMBERS

John Chambers is chairman of US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. At a time when India-US relations are growing strong, he brings leaders, both from the government and business side, together. He was CEO of Cisco and under his leadership, its revenue grew from \$1.2 billion in 1995 to \$47 billion, when he stepped down in 2015. A



Technology shouldn't be tied to politics... you ought to watch out in the elections... make no mistake what's going to happen with interference from rogue nation states or parties. That's why you've got to have guidelines

Sandeep Singh: What makes you believe that India is going to become a superpower?

You have got all things going for you. Millions of engineers are educated per year. You have an entrepreneurship attitude. The future is going to be about startups and small businesses getting bigger. So, if you're going to employ 1.2 million more people a month, you better lead in innovation and startups or your future is in a tough spot... What Prime Minister Modi has done is outline the vision and strategy. If the policies he's putting in place stay strong for the next decade, then you've locked yourself into being the No. 1 economy. You will, at that time, probably be 30 per cent greater than the US, and you'll move probably 90 per cent greater than China. Whether that happens in 40 years or 70 years is purely a function of math: How fast do you grow and how inclusive are you? If you do it across all states, if you give everybody a chance to share in this, be it agriculture or healthcare, then I think the future is one of excitement.

Anant Goenka: Do you see this as the beginning of the end of China's political regime?

They have a tight control over society and it clearly is being run by one person. I think the extent to which their decline occurs versus what is possible depends on their leadership. The US has not done a good job of working through some of the relationships with China. The Chinese leadership, in terms of trust, win-win mentality, intellectual property protection and the ability to empower entrepreneurship and startups, had a very good hand. But, I think the issues are largely self-inflicted... Can that be correct? Yes, but now, what's going against it is its demographics. When you have a population that is shrinking from 1.4 billion to 800 million, are citizens optimistic about their future versus are they concerned about having more than one child? Tough hand to play. That's one of the things we, the US and India, have to be very careful of. Just because things are going our way now, don't assume that if we don't continue to take risk and make mistakes occasionally, that we'll be able to lead again.

Anant Goenka: We know that China's going to win this but is there something we're missing?

If you follow their five-year plan, they say exactly what they're going to do. However, the market is moving too fast for state planning to occur. Their leadership for four generations came out of the Beijing and Shanghai architecture, and those leaders understood business and the changes that are going on in the world. Current leadership comes out of western China where there is a concern about losing control, not as much exposure to the global area. I think China can be, and should be, a major global player and will be. It's just that I think they missed the opportunity here and it's going to be hard to regain. They are trying to get Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Venture Capital in. They're trying to be more predictable and develop a win-win type approach. So, this is not a total win-lose.

Anant Goenka: Has China got the imitation right, better than the innovation?

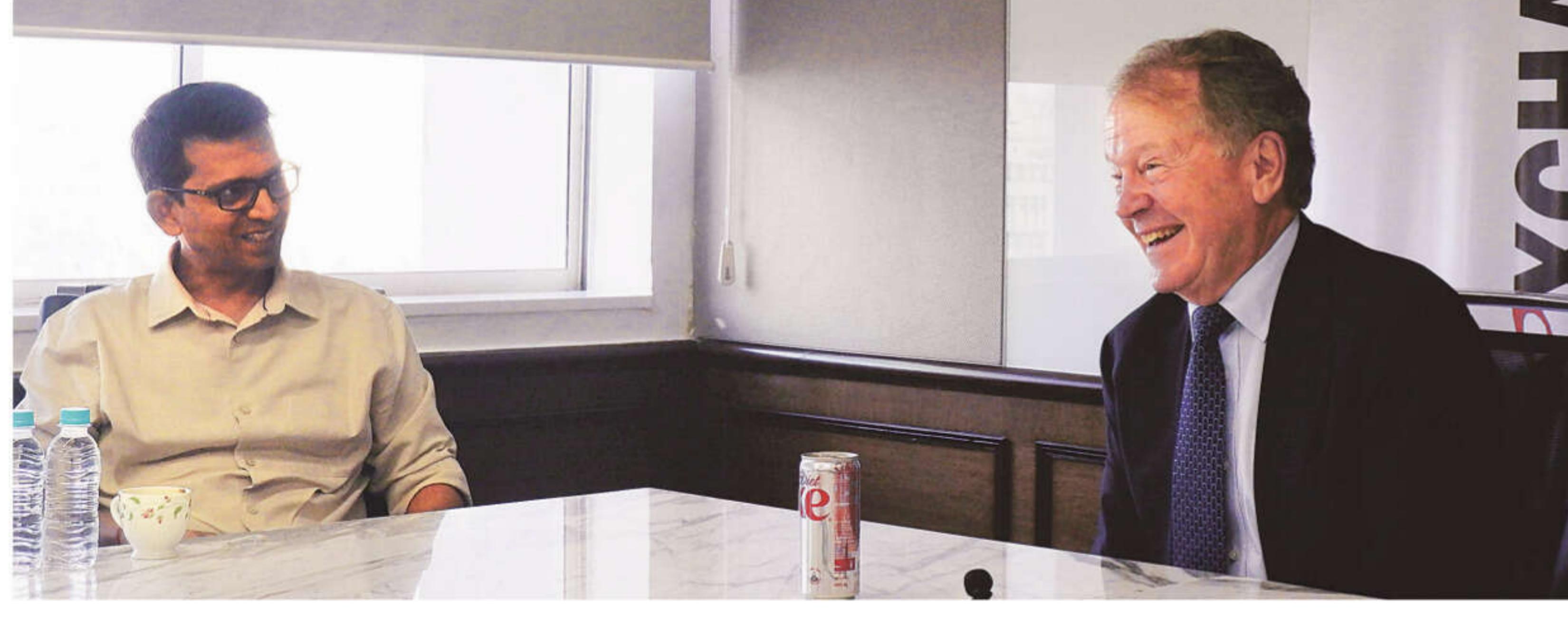
If you look at where they were running with Jack Ma and others – they are innovative leaders. But they have really pulled their feathers. Part of innovation is about people who are comfortable operating outside the general guidelines within reason and have the ability to make it happen.

Zeehan Shaikh: You say that AI will drive the next phase of the India-US relationship. Recently, India had an issue with Google and its new AI platform, Gemini. There have been some issues with social media companies too in the past. How do you think the Indian government needs to handle such issues?

I think some of the things, the social media companies brought it upon themselves. There are fair areas that the government should hold the major technology companies accountable. So it's fair to say there have to be guidelines and regulations as well as people spending time understanding them. But understanding what is possible and how you observe the fair requirements of the government and its process are key. Now you're going to say that slows down innovation. I disagree. If you watch what we did at Cisco with the internet – we were one of four key players, then No. 1 by ourselves. But we had no major regulation issues with any country. Now we gave nobody our code, including our own government. We tried when government had legitimate needs, we said there's a win-win here, let's sit down and say, how do you do it? So with regulators

'India will outgrow the rest of the world, if it continues on the path of inclusion'

John Chambers, Chairman, US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, on India's future growth, power of AI and challenges for startups. The session was moderated by Sandeep Singh, Editor (Mumbai)



John Chambers, Chairman, USISPF, in conversation with Sandeep Singh, Editor (Mumbai) Pradip Das

in Europe and Asia, it didn't matter whether you were India or China or the Middle East, we got along very well.

Zeehan Shaikh: Do you think the government is trying to control these companies?

The ability to say what are the common issues and how do we get the guardrails in place and how do you learn (is important). Even though I considered myself an expert in AI two years ago, I am learning new things about AI, every day, especially from the new startups. The speed is scary and breathtaking. Deepfakes are going to be the biggest issue in cybersecurity... You saw what happened with Biden in New Hampshire with the robocalls, et cetera... Now leaders in the US on all sides – the Democrats and Republicans – are stepping up. Technology should never be tied to politics. You need to be able to quickly determine where this occurs. At the core of our society is: can you trust? If you lose trust, especially in communication, then that has huge societal implications. It's something that you ought to watch out for in elections because we have four billion people going into elections this year and make no mistake what's going to happen with interference from rogue nation states or parties. This is why you've got to have guidelines.

Rajesh Kurup: Will AI create jobs or take them away?

Every new technology has always destroyed jobs – mainframes, minicomputers, PCs, client servers, Internet and cloud. However, because you enabled so much more capability, job creation outpaced job destruction. My worry this time is that it's going to happen at such speed, it's very possible that 50 per cent of what consultancy companies do today will be handled by AI five years from now. It's very possible that well-run companies might be able to drive productivity at 10 per cent per year. And the math only comes out one or two ways. You make a lot more money, or you don't need as many people, and I think you want to learn how to do both... But if you want to look at an example that is fascinating, look at Le Post in France. Basically, it's a postal service, they reinvented themselves, and basically said: What are the new areas we can move into? They moved into package delivery, which is a logical extension, then into pharmaceutical delivery and checking on elderly and things of that type. Out of 250,000 employees and seven unions, they trained 230,000 on AI over a year ago. So that there wouldn't be a fear of its coming... So the point is, this is a time where you better disrupt yourself or you're going to get disrupted... Getting

your data in the format your processors can make decisions is key. You've got to be careful not to build in bias into the information in how you write the programmes. This is where working together is key... America and India can lead in AI. If we miss this opportunity, we have nobody to blame but ourselves.

Sandeep Singh: Do the biggest of the companies also run the risk of getting irrelevant if they don't adapt to AI?

Absolutely. Completely... Which was the first country to move on digitisation? India. I went to the US and begged (them) to come up with a digital strategy... If you miss a certain wave, you've got to jump to the next wave. China's probably going to have to skip a generation. If you were to look back, five years ago, in the US Defense Departments, among the top 20 technologies, China was leading in 15. They were good at innovation. I think they've really operated with one hand behind their back and it's hard to pick up momentum once you lose it. How many technology companies, once they started down, have ever come back to true leadership? Apple? Maybe Microsoft. It's hard.

Anant Goenka: We don't see any major business model from any AI company now, unless you're in the infra, right?

No, it's the reverse. You can move with such speed and productivity on the business model. If I can show customers how they can increase their productivity by even five per cent a year, I can sell them a lot of products... The issue is how do you make it easy to use and consume. And it's too early to say who the winners are. I disagree that people say the winners on the large modules have already been determined, the winners in AI have already

been determined. Are you going to see the current leaders in cloud and social media be one or two of the leaders for AI? I think you will. If that's true, that's the first time it's ever occurred in the industry. Never has IBM become the leader of the mini-computer, the leader in PCs, the leader in client servers, etc. But they have huge economic wealth. And guess what? They are paranoid and only the paranoid survive. Those large companies know disruption. In fact, if you watch the unicorns that reset, they're going to basically get back to how quickly you can get to profitability and free cash flow, which is even more important than growth.

George Mathew: What is your forecast for the US and India for 2024?

It is subjected to how your next government leads. I think you've locked this in for quite a while. No country is immune to global economies. What happens in the US or India is also affected by what happens in China, Africa, Europe etc. I have never seen a more unstable political environment in my life. Geopolitics can affect economic growth. I think the people who said the US innovation engine is over, clearly, were wrong. Probably innovation has never been faster in recent times than it is right now in the US... I think the people who said India is just going to be a slow follower, maybe not a copier like China, in terms of intellectual property, but a copier in the business models, were all so wrong. Now, it's a matter of strategy and vision. You've got to operationalise it and you've got to execute.

This is where I worry that India and the US will take the foot off the pedal. This is one of the things that I believe strongly – we're so much stronger together than either one of us apart. It's hard... where there's natural areas of alignment and

there will be times where you're going to have friction. And among friends, you've got to be able to navigate through that friction, because we're going to have some. But in the end, it goes back to trust and a common win-win opportunity. I think India will outgrow the rest of the world, especially if you continue on the path of inclusion. But you've got to lead on AI. You don't have to be the dominant player, but you've got to lead for the economy to do well, 10 years from now. I think the US will grow a couple of points slower than India.

Soft landings only occurred one time in 60 years. We probably are in one, and I'm amazed, because we've been six months away from economic downturn for three-and-a-half years. Now, government policy or mis-executed by the Fed could absolutely put us in the slowdown again. And I worry about the US being so divided. But I think for India, you see the numbers, six to seven per cent... You could do the math on when India becomes the number one economy... 2024 will be the decade of AI. We are entering a decade of revolutionary technology change combined with business change that will affect every life.

Joydeep Ghosh: You have been bullish about the startup ecosystem. However, in the recent times, we have seen investors being wary of the sector.

They should be nervous; 90 per cent of startups fail. So, investors shouldn't be putting all their money into a single startup. VCs never do that. The VCs make probably 80 per cent of their funds pay back from five per cent of the companies they invest in that fund. So, if you're investing in startups, you've got to spread them.

Joydeep Ghosh: Ideas going wrong is one thing. On the other hand, we are talking about indiscretions in terms of profitability.

You have to hold them accountable, put them in jail. If you don't make examples, things continue. If you make too many examples, you freeze the system. Governments have to say if you cross the line, if you deliberately mislead your investors, you have to be held accountable.

Piyush Shukla: With what's happening with Israel and the Middle East, do you think it's a time to be optimistic for 2024?

If you look at CEOs, what's on their mind, geopolitics is probably on the top. Inflation has got to be in the top three. AI is second and I am starting to see security to be the third. About geopolitical issues, there's more occurring at one time...

There's US-China friction, Taiwan, Iran, the rapidly changing Middle East, North Korea... This is the new norm we live in. I don't think it's necessarily good... but you can't run your life saying what if. You've got to be prepared and maintain a balance.

Anant Goenka: The four biggest startups in India are in trouble. They had investments from all over the world.

If you raised money in 2021, you are probably really struggling... In that era, what the market rewarded was purely growth at any cost. So many of these companies do not have a design on profitable cash flow and growth... The risk involvement is the hard part and this is why I think as an individual investor, people have to be careful and sophisticated in this area... Startups will be the majority of your job creation, 10 and 15 years out. For a startup going public, in the US, it's now 13 to 15 years, it used to be seven. So, if you don't do investment in parallel with the startups, you're not going to create the jobs we need.

Hitesh Vyas: How do you rate India in terms of ease of doing business?

In terms of improvement? 100... The good news is, there's so much progress. But with India's supply chain manufacturing, we aren't moving fast enough. We've got to be able to manufacture here in India for a cost below than what other parts of the world are going to do...

Sandeep Singh: How do you think India is positioned right now in terms of engagement of business and investments with the US?

It's very good. Modi crossed the chasm on the relationship with the US and the US crossed the chasm the other way – that's Republicans and Democrats. Both sides got to it.

Sandeep Singh: But we're not seeing those multi-billion dollar investments happening.

Money is tight right now. Almost every fund raise I do is a little bit below than what I thought I would get. And I can usually get money from multiple places in the world. So, money is really tight...

Anant Goenka: If Modi were to lose the election in 2024, will it hurt India's economic progress and growth?

I think you have the best leader in the world at present on economic growth and inclusion. My worry is more on the reverse. What happens after Modi? And can whoever comes, follow him and maintain the same momentum and growth?



You have to hold them (defaulting startup companies) accountable, put them in jail. If you don't make examples, things continue. If you make too many examples, you freeze the system