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30 held for Haldwani violence, some people flee affected area

Uttarakhand seeks more Central forces as curbs are eased, shops start opening

AVANEESH MISHRA
HALDWANI, FEBRUARY 11

UTTARAKHAND POLICE Sunday said 30 people were arrested, including 25 in the last 24 hours, in connection with Thursday's violence in Nainital district's Haldwani city that left five people dead and dozens injured. Country-made weapons and live rounds were recovered from those arrested, police said. The state government has asked the Centre for four additional companies of paramilitary forces to be deployed in the district. On Sunday morning, normalcy returned to many parts of Haldwani as shops reopened and internet services resumed.



Policemen on guard during a curfew at Banbhoolpura area in Haldwani, Sunday. PTI RELATED REPORT, P7

However, curfew remained in place in the Banbhoolpura area, where the incident took place, and several residents of the locality were seen packing up and leaving. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Talks with farmers today, Centre going with an open mind: Agriculture Minister

KMM: Will wait for the outcome before deciding on march to Delhi

HARIKISHAN SHARMA & RAAKHI JAGGA
NEW DELHI, LUDHIANA, FEB 11

AS PUNJAB farmer unions, who have called for a protest march to Delhi on Tuesday, announced they would wait for word on the outcome of talks Monday over



Police put up barriers to thwart the march, at Faizabad near the Haryana-Punjab border. Manoj Dhaka RELATED REPORT, P7

their demands, Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda said Sunday that the Centre is always ready to talk with an "open mind". CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

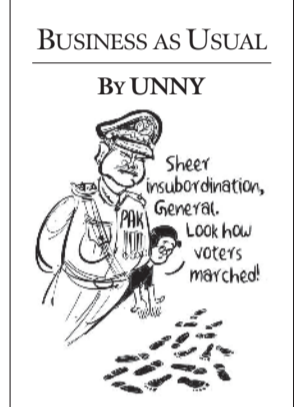
EXPLAINED **E** Two years later
PUNJAB FARM unions, who protested for a year at Delhi's borders and lifted the blockade in December 2021 after forcing the repeal of three farm laws, are threatening a return at a time when political parties are bracing for LS elections. One of the key demands is for a law guaranteeing MSP for all crops.

PAK POLL RESULTS OUT Verdict split, Nawaz leads push to form coalition govt

133 magic mark; Of 101 independents, most Imran's; PMLN wins 75, PPP 54

SAJJAD HUSSAIN & M ZULQERNAIN
ISLAMABAD, LAHORE, FEB 11

THE THREE main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections. The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests. Former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



REPORTS PAGES 11, 14

Back with BJP, Nitish to take Bihar floor test today, remove Speaker

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, FEBRUARY 11

MORE THAN two weeks after he joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and took oath as Bihar Chief Minister for a ninth term, Nitish Kumar will face a floor test in the Bihar Assembly on Monday. According to the Assembly schedule, the Budget session will commence with Governor R V Arlekar's address to both Houses of the legislature. This will be CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Bihar Dy CM Samrat Choudhary with BJP MLAs at the residence of Dy CM Vijay Kumar Sinha, in Patna, Sunday. PTI

MODI IN THE UAE ON FEBRUARY 13-14

PM visit for Abu Dhabi temple opening aligns with tolerance values: UAE envoy

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

DESCRIBING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates for the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi as a "special occasion", Abdalnasser Alshaali, UAE's Ambassador to India, has said it "aligns with the values of toler-



ABDULNASSER ALSHAALI, UAE AMBASSADOR TO INDIA

ance and acceptance that guide our bilateral ties". Prime Minister Modi's February 13-14 visit to the UAE will be his third in the last eight months and the seventh since 2015. He will hold bilateral meetings with President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and, according to the Ministry of External Affairs, the two leaders will discuss ways to further CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

IDEA EXCHANGE

'I don't care what happens to me. We'll create fear of losing OBC votes among leaders'

CHHAGAN BHUJBAL
NCP LEADER
PAGE 12

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Many nursing colleges in MP ran with no students, infra: CBI to HC

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 11

NURSING COLLEGES with neither students nor teachers, poorly equipped classrooms, and in some cases, no toilets. These are among issues flagged by the CBI in its report to the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which had ordered an investigation into alleged irregularities in the running of nursing colleges in the state. Ordering the probe on April 26, 2023, the High Court had observed that some of the colleges were recognised in a "clandestine manner", and that this was "jeopardising public health and life of innumerable patients in hospitals... at the hands of so-called students of such colleges holding certificate of qualified nurse". The CBI then prepared a list of 364 colleges affiliated with the state-run Madhya Pradesh Medical Science University, and submitted a compliance report on 25 colleges on April 28 last year. After perusing the report, the court said it was a "grave situation" CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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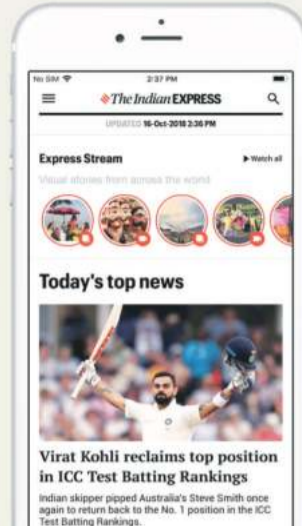
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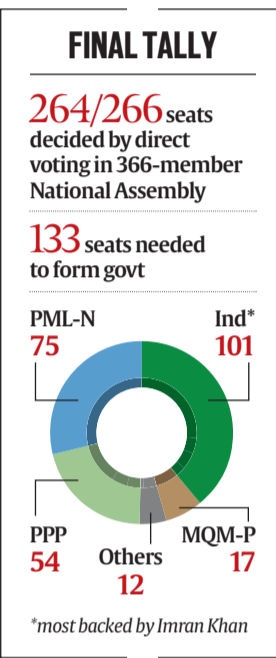
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EXPRESS AUDIO Samarth Jurel on Isha Malviya, Abhishek & more Samarth Jurel, who was evicted from Bigg Boss 17, admitted to making fun of Abhishek's mental health...

FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Verdict split, Nawaz leads push for coalition govt

(PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced the results of 264 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly...



discussed the future coalition. Shehbaz told the party leaders that former president and PPP leader Asif Zardari has demanded the prime minister's slot for PPP Chairman Bilawal and major ministerial portfolios in exchange for support for the PML-N to form the government, sources said.

was exploring but didn't want to give away the slot of prime minister. Sources claimed the meeting decided that in case the negotiations with the PPP failed, the PML-N would make a coalition government with MQM, JUI-F and other smaller parties... Meanwhile, Bilawal, the 35-year-old former foreign minister said no one could form governments in the Centre, Punjab or Balochistan without his party's support...

Talks with farmers today, Centre going with open mind

Speaking to The Indian Express, Munda said, "One round of talks has already been held. It was a good discussion. The next meeting will be held. Talks will be held again. We will resolve it through dialogue if there is any issue." Munda, along with Union Minister Piyush Goyal, and Minister of State Nityanand Rai, will hold the second round of talks with the protesting farmers in Chandigarh Monday.

Punjab and gather at Fatehgarh Sahib by Monday afternoon. Any decision to march ahead, he said, will be taken following the outcome of the talks. "Tractors in thousands will march from Punjab's different parts and reach midway by Monday afternoon itself... Farmers will sleep overnight in their tractors by the roadside and will march towards Delhi as per the outcome of the talks," Pandher said.

30 held for Haldwani violence

Violence had erupted on Thursday after the administration conducted a drive during which a mosque and a madrasa were demolished in Banbhoolpura. District authorities said both structures stood on Nazaool land - government land not officially mentioned in revenue records. As stones were pelted, cars torched and the local police station surrounded by a mob, Chief Minister Pushkar Dhami had issued shoot on sight orders.

PM visit for Abu Dhabi temple opening

deepen, expand and strengthen the strategic partnership between the countries and exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. Modi will also meet Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum who is the Vice President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister of the UAE. At his invitation, the Prime Minister will participate in the World Government Summit 2024 in Dubai as Guest of Honour and deliver a special keynote address at the Summit.

Many nursing colleges in MP had no students: CBI

that even such colleges have been given affiliation which do not conform to the requirement of rules". The report contained investigation details pertaining to 25 colleges, including 15 in Bhopal, eight in Gwalior, and one each in Bhand and Vidisha districts. As per Indian Nursing Council standards, nursing colleges should have an area of at least 23,000 sq ft, and according to the Madhya Pradesh Nurses Registration Council (MPNRC) stipulations, it should be at least 17,000 sq ft.

Nitish to take floor test today

followed by the Assembly taking up the no-confidence motion against Speaker Awadh Bihari Choudhary. Choudhary, who is from the RJD, has refused to step down despite calls from the BJP and the JD(U) and may resign before the motion is introduced. The RJD has dared Nitish to prove his majority before the no-confidence motion against the Speaker is taken up.

are comfortably placed. All our MLAs will be present inside the House where a no-confidence motion against the Speaker will precede the trust vote," he said. JD(U) national spokesperson Rajib Ranjan urged the media not to read too much into the MLAs missing the meeting. "They could not attend Sunday's meeting due to some personal engagements. We will prove our majority but will remove Speaker Choudhary before that. This will answer all doubts of the Opposition," he said.

Maharashtra ministers to visit Ayodhya soon: Fadnavis

Mumbai, Pune: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said state cabinet ministers will soon visit Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, where the idol consecration of the Ram Temple took place on January 22. The deputy CM, however, did not share further details.

4 MAHARASHTRA

Uddhav demands fair fund allocation for state in accordance to taxes it pays

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

SENA CHIEF Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday has alleged that Maharashtra only gets 7 per cent in return for the Re 1 it gives the Centre in tax, and demanded that the state gets at least 50 per cent of funds in return. The political leader was speaking at a meeting of the Sena (UBT) Sthaniya Lokadhikar Samiti.

Maharashtra must get its rightful share, Uddhav said, and that it would be the party's main agenda in upcoming elections. He said when the party comes to power it will change the law of fund distribution to the states.

Uddhav's statement comes days after Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Dy CM DK Sivakumar staged a



Uddhav Thackeray, File

protest against the Centre's tax devolution policy. They accused the Union government of meeting out injustice to Karnataka by a reduction in tax devolution, resulting in a loss of over Rs 45,000 crore to the state in the last 4 years. They alleged that while taxes paid by Karnataka have little served the state itself, it was the northern states that were

getting the benefits.

Southern states have protested against the unfair fund distribution by the Centre, Thackeray said. "Where is the money going? Maharashtra must get back 50 per cent of the taxes it pays the centre as funds. You are taking away from Maharashtra and funding your schemes and freebies. Modi must bear in mind all this is happening because of Maharashtra's hard earned money sent to Delhi. We want our rightful share. Hardly any central government offices operate in Mumbai now, and there are no jobs left. They have taken away the Air India office, too. As soon as the central govt changes, I will take the lead in asking for a change in policy," Uddhav said.

Uddhav also took a swipe at BJP, quoting Union Minister Nitin

Gadkari where the latter reportedly said that he had no place left in the party. Uddhav said the BJP leadership was eliminating opponents, allies as well as their own party leaders.

"Hitler's rule ended in a way that another Hitler can never rise again in Germany. The ruthless attitude of eliminating the other when in power has to go. You are eliminating your opponents, your allies, your own party leaders. When Nitin Gadkari went to Delhi, we hoped his work would benefit the country. But when he himself says there is no place left for him or no respect accorded to him, then what is one working for?" Uddhav said.

Uddhav also alleged that the Modi government conferred a Bharat Ratna on former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur to get votes in the LS polls. Addressing Sena

workers in Mumbai, Thackeray claimed the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was the forerunner of BJP, had opposed Thakur's decision of 26 per cent reservation to backward classes in government jobs.

"Now that BJP wants votes in Bihar, it has announced the Bharat Ratna for him posthumously. But I am happy his (Thakur's) work is being acknowledged after so many years," Thackeray said.

Even Dr MS Swaminathan was given the Bharat Ratna, Thackeray said, but they have failed to implement recommendations made by a commission he headed on increasing farm income. "Now that he has been given the award, I demand that the Swaminathan committee report be implemented," Uddhav said.

How HC took state, BMC, other civic bodies to task over MMR's polluted air

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

OVER THE past three months, Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya-led bench of the Bombay High Court passed stringent remarks against the state government authorities, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and other civic bodies over "alarming" air pollution in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Terming it as a "drastic and emergent" situation, the court even expressed that it will not hesitate to shut down polluting projects if the lives of the people have to be saved.

A bench of Chief Justice Upadhyaya and Justice Girish S Kulkarni, has been hearing a suo motu PIL and other pleas initiated and filed after noting various news reports, including the "Death by Breath" series of The Indian Express, presented an "alarming scenario" of air pollution, which began in November 2023.

The bench referred to The Indian Express report "Mumbai air turned very poor or severe, but not one health advisory from BMC" and said the same presented an "alarming scenario" which was required to be urgently tackled for the welfare of all residents.

On November 6, the bench set a limit to burst firecrackers in view of ensuring Diwali festival, among other measures for dust mitigation.

It said, "We have to make a choice. Either we have a disease-free environment or burn firecrackers to celebrate the festival. We have to take a call! The entire city is affected... We cannot completely depend on nature and have to implement it. We are living on this earth. We have created this situation."

The hearing also marked an



HC had recently flagged 'inadequate' implementation of environmental norms at several public infra project sites. File

an intense exchange between the state lawyers, judges and petitioners over the strict measures and need for developmental projects in the city.

On November 10, when Advocate General Birendra Saraf for the state government had said that AQI levels had shown great improvement, CJ Upadhyaya remarked, "Thanks to the rains! This pollution problem is not confined to this year's October and November. This will recur now and last year (2022) it happened for the first time in Mumbai. In the case of BMC, if it was proactive before the matter was taken up by the court, the situation would have been better..."

After the lawyers said that Mumbaiers should be applauded for their restraint on bursting crackers during the festival, CJ Upadhyaya said, "Let's not become Delhi. Let's remain Mumbaiers."

On December 11, the bench had said the authorities should ensure the AQI in the city should be brought down to below 50. It asked BMC and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) to carry out a joint inspection at seven project sites.

On February 6, the bench flagged "inadequate" implementation of environmental norms at several sites of public infra-

structure projects including Bullet train, Metro-3, Coastal Road, Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL). "...We may remind everyone that these are projects taken by public authorities and not by private entities and what example are they setting for others," the bench questioned.

The HC said the authorities cannot be absolved of their constitutional duty of ensuring public health. "We tell you very frankly the situation is going to become very very unhealthy. We won't survive and it should not be the concern of the citizens or the court alone. If we are not alive to this situation now we don't know what's going to happen..." the court said.

After AG Saraf had said that improvements were needed but projects of public importance cannot be shut down, CJ Upadhyaya quipped, "If the life of people in the city is to be saved by shutting down, we won't hesitate." The HC sought a rigorous air pollution audit of all industries in MMR and asked the state to have permanent statutory mechanism for air quality management in Mumbai.

Posting the next hearing to March 18, CJ Upadhyaya said in a lighter vein, "We can recommend Padma awards to your (state, civic bodies) officers if AQI levels come to a healthy level."

BRIEFLY

Firing in police station: MLA's driver arrested

Mumbai: Thane police crime branch have arrested the driver of the BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad who allegedly tried to kill former Shinde Sena corporator Mahesh Gaikwad by opening fire on him inside a Ulhasnagar police station on February 2. Ranjit Yadav was among the few others who were named as accused in the case. Ganpat's son Vaibhav is still wanted in the case, while Ganpat was arrested on the day of the incident itself. **ENS**

Drunk man held for hoax call to police

Mumbai: Police caught a man for making a hoax call. The police control room 112 Nagpur on Saturday received a call from a man who identified himself as Venkatesh Rajan Magadi. The caller said 12 bombs had been placed at Bank Of Maharashtra in Deonar Colony, Govandi. Local police caught Magadi who had made the phone call under the influence of alcohol. **ENS**

5 in Custom's net for gold smuggling

Mumbai: Airport Customs department on Sunday said that between February 9 and 11, customs officials, in five cases, seized 1.76 kg of gold worth nearly Rs 1 crore. It was smuggled by passengers from Singapore, Abi Dhabi, Dubai and Colombo, who concealed it in clothes, inner linings of baggage and sandals. **ENS**

Bhujbal should lead new OBC bloc: VBA chief

Mumbai: Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Aghadkar, now part of the opposition INDIA bloc, on Sunday advised minister Chhagan Bhujbal to join a new OBC outfit as its leader. "OBC leaders have announced a new political outfit in the state. It is my advice to Bhujbal to lead the outfit. VBA will support it socially and politically," he said on X. **PTI**

Will fast again: Jarange affirms

Mumbai: Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Sunday reaffirmed his decision to continue his indefinite fast demanding a special session of the legislature be convened to convert the draft notification on "blood relatives" of Kunbi Marathas into a law. The activist on Saturday launched his agitation in Jalna district. **PTI**



COASTAL ROAD GETS READY

Vehicles move past the coastal road project where labourers work at full throttle, ahead of its inauguration on February 19, at Marine Lines in Mumbai on 11 February 2024. *Sankhadeep Banerjee*

'Don't eat for two days if your parents don't vote for me': MLA stirs row with remark to students

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

SENA (EKNATH Shinde) leader and Kalamnuri MLA Santosh Bangar has landed in a controversy after he asked school students to refuse food for two days if their parents do not vote for him in the upcoming elections. The Opposition was quick to criticise his remarks that came days after the Election Commission's strict instructions against using children in poll-related activities.

In a viral video, the legislator from Hingoli district in Maharashtra is seen visiting a primary school run by the zilla parishad on Friday and telling the students, "If your parents don't vote for me in the upcoming elec-



Santosh Bangar

tions, don't eat for two days." "Ask your parents to vote for MLA Santosh Bangar. Otherwise, you should not eat for two days," the MLA said, adding, "You don't eat and when parents ask why, tell them that I will eat after you vote for MLA Santosh Bangar." He then asked the students to repeat the lines they would say to their parents even as teachers and other staff members at the school laughed.

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders

slammed Bangar over his remarks and sought to know if the Election Commission would take action against him for violating its directives.

Clyde Crasto, spokesperson of NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar, said, "The Election Commission has asked political parties not to use children in election campaigning 'in any form whatsoever' and asked them to adhere to Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, as amended in 2016. If violated severe disciplinary action will be taken, but Shinde group MLA Santosh Bangar can be heard in a video going against the very directive of ECL... strict action must be taken against him according to the said Act."

"He is a repeat offender and ends up scot-free as he is an ally

of the BJP. The ECI must act on him without prejudice," Crasto added.

Bangar has repeatedly stirred controversy with his statements. Recently, the MLA said that if Narendra Modi does not become the Prime Minister after the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, he would die by suicide.

After Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar delivered the verdict in the Shiv Sena MLA disqualification case, Bangar said, "We had boldly said that the disqualification and Shiv Sena verdict will be in our favour. Once again, I say boldly that Narendra Modi will become the Prime Minister after the Lok Sabha elections in April. If Narendra Modi does not become Prime Minister, I will (die by suicide) in front of the public."

'India needs to change its approach towards developmental projects

INDEPENDENT LEGISLATOR in Maharashtra Legislative Council SATYAJEET TAMBE has been voicing his concerns about the concentrated infrastructure push in areas like the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. In an interview with ALOK DESHPANDE, Tambe compares India's development with foreign countries, saying he feels the government needs to change its mechanism and approach to developmental projects. He has also been creating avenues for youth which will open employment opportunities.

You have been raising urban city planning issues within the legislative council. What is your take on large infra projects such as MTHL, Coastal Road, Virar Alibaug multimodal corridor (MMC), Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) and the Metro network? Will these help create a third and fourth

Mumbai in future? They are all well thought out and good projects, but the projects concerned were conceived between 2004 and 2015. The problem is that the time taken between ideating and executing the project is too long. On an average, almost all projects mentioned above have taken around 15 years to complete, which further creates problems. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism for timely project execution. Even the new ones like the Virar-Alibaug Multimodal Corridor, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and Sea Link extension... by the time it is implemented, new problems arise.

For example, you may reach Navi Mumbai in 20 minutes, but there will be bottlenecks at the entry and exit points of the bridge. What then? One may reach Bhiwandi in Mumbai from Nashik in 4-5 hours, but will that person be able to reach

Bhiwandi to Dadar or elsewhere within Mumbai in an hour? Did that thought occur while planning the project? There is a dire need to change the approach to planning developmental projects.

Why so?

In November 2023, a delegation of Maharashtra Legislators visited the UK for an educational tour and I was one of them. We came across an interesting thing in Wales. While implementing any project, before making any decision at the policy level, it is mandatory for the committee to align their purpose with seven future generations. The UAE even has a Ministry of Possibilities to study projects and come to a quick solution after due diligence. There is no impact analysis and quality analysis done in Maharashtra.

During our visit, we got to know of a project in Newport for a bypass road. There were dis-



MONDAY INTERVIEW

SATYAJEET TAMBE
INDEPENDENT MLC,
MAHARASHTRA

cussions on whether future generations would be burdened with debt due to the project. If BMC, with a budget of around Rs 52,000 crore executes a Rs 2-lakh crore project, they will burden future generations and al-

ways remain in debt.

Then what do you think is an ideal model of development for Mumbai or other cities in the state?

People think Mumbai is the only city where development is possible, which is not true. With Palghar and Raigad districts rapidly urbanising, an ideal model of development would be at least 10 satellite cities every 100 km with an emphasis on public transport. These should have a high-speed rail network and dedicated high-speed bus lanes.

Outside India, countries follow an inverted pyramid structure while undertaking infra projects, wherein private cars are the last priority and top priority is to public transport where people from low-income groups and high net-worth individuals also travel. It also has special walk-zones to encourage walking in cities.

Our cities should be designed

and planned in this way, too.

Will growth of urban centres lead to reducing the burden of migration on Mumbai?

There are myths which have created an irreplaceable image of Mumbai being the city of dreams and the financial capital. The real pull for youth to travel to Mumbai is its lifestyle and employment opportunities. To obtain that, they wouldn't mind travelling during rush hours and a hand-to-mouth existence.

The influx will continue in future too, which will ultimately lead to a saturation. Other cities will have to emulate and replicate Mumbai's standard of living to lift the burden off Mumbai and ensure a balance in the state.

What should the government do for employment on a policy level?

In my personal capacity, I will soon be starting 'Younnovation'

Youth Information Centres (YIC) in all five districts of the constituency. Additionally, 300 Youth Clubs at the taluka level and cluster-level villages will facilitate them.

I appealed to the government last year in the Legislative Council and accordingly, funds have been approved by the government to set up 5 such centres. The centre will be a one-stop solution for youth where they can access all information across the world regarding jobs and opportunities available as well as benefits they can avail of through central or state government schemes. The unit will also guide youth in their field of interest and help them with how and where to seek right opportunities.

The centre will also have amenities of co-working spaces, reading rooms and libraries. The effort will be to expand it across the state, and further on the country.



BJP finds itself in a bind as two allies stake claim to the same Lok Sabha seat — Shirdi

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

WHILE THE INDIA alliance of Opposition parties faces the prospects of allies walking out, the NDA in Maharashtra seems to be facing a problem of plenty as coalition partners Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the Republican Party of India (Athawale) have staked claim to the Shirdi Lok Sabha seat.

While the CM has categorically said his party will not part with seats it won in 2019, RPI(A) chief Ramdas Athawale (who belongs to the Dalit community) has thrown his hat in the ring for Shirdi, which is reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC). Shinde fears leaving the seat to allies may lead to massive unrest and defections ahead of the parliamentary polls.

"The RPI(A) is the con-

stituent of the NDA. We have our electoral base in Maharashtra and I am keen to contest from the Shirdi Lok Sabha seat," Athawale said last week. In response, a senior Cabinet minister from the Sena said each party in the coalition was entitled to contest the seats it holds and hence Shirdi was their right. "We have to accommodate our sitting MP who supported Shinde when the party split," he said.

Athawale's party believes that contesting a couple of seats is necessary to keep its cadre motivated. Athawale was also reportedly eyeing one of the six Lok Sabha seats in Mumbai. However, his hopes were dashed when the BJP said it would contest four and leave the remaining for Shinde. With no chance for his party to contest in Mumbai, the RPI(A) chief is said to have set his eyes on Shirdi in Ahmednagar district.

The RPI (A) chief contested from Shirdi in 2009 but lost to the Shiv Sena's Bhausaheb Wakchaure. After the defeat, he blamed the Congress for his loss, saying it did not support his candidature. He then quit the Congress-NCP alliance and joined the NDA ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and has been with it since.

The Sena has held Shirdi since 2009, with the coming elections set to see the Shiv Sena (UBT) also take on Shinde's party for control of the constituency. Of the six Assembly segments in the constituency, two each are held by the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of Ajit Pawar, and one each by the BJP and the Shiv Sena.

Why Athawale is important

RPI(A) insiders said Athawale would sail through as

four of the six Assembly segments were held by the ruling alliance's partners. At a time when the BJP has set an ambitious target of the NDA bagging at least 45 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra, Athawale's dedicated vote bank will play a crucial role. Though his party does not have an MLA or a Lok Sabha MP, it has influence in at least 22 Lok Sabha constituencies.

With two of its allies at loggerheads, state BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule said it was natural for every party to express its wish. "Ultimately, we have to take into account all aspects while accommodating the concerns of each party. Winnability is a major criterion which will be taken into account while deciding the seat-sharing formula," he said.

Bawankule said the BJP's role is to provide strength to its

allies. "The final decision on who contests which seat will be a collective decision of the state leadership after consultation with the Centre," he said.

Athawale has represented Pandharpur Lok Sabha seat (1999-2009) and Mumbai North Central (1998-1999). From 1990 to 1996, he was a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council and a minister in the Congress-led Maharashtra government, holding key portfolios like social justice, transport, employment guarantee, and sports and youth welfare.

He was nominated as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 2014 by the BJP and was elevated to Union Minister of State for Social Justice in the Narendra Modi Cabinet in 2016. He held the same portfolio in the Modi government's second term and was renominated to the Rajya Sabha in March 2020.

Sharad Pawar targets BJP, says its leaders don't face ED action

ENS & PTI
PUNE, FEBRUARY 11

VETERAN POLITICIAN Sharad Pawar on Sunday said no BJP leader faced action from the Enforcement Directorate since the party has been in power.

Addressing an event here, Sharad Pawar said the misuse of power becomes evident when anyone opposes the ruling BJP. "The ED has conducted investigations across the country, with 6,000 cases registered from 2005 to 2023. But, substantial findings were obtained in 25 cases, and 85 per cent of the cases involved political leaders from the opposition," he claimed.

"Since the BJP has been in power (from 2014), no leader from the party has faced action from the ED. Moreover, investigations against BJP leaders were halted after the party came to power," he further claimed at the Aarogya Doot Abhiyan organised by his party here.

On the Election Commission recently recognising the faction led by his nephew Ajit Pawar as the 'real' NCP and allotting the party's poll symbol 'clock' to his group, Sharad Pawar said he had contested his first election on the symbol of a pair of bullocks. Thoughts and ideology are more important than any symbol, he said.

"The EC's decision is surprising. The Election Commission not only took away our party but also our symbol. They handed over our party to someone else, such a situation was never witnessed in the country. I am sure people will not support such a decision. We will have a discussion on the new name and symbol on Monday," he said adding that they will be taking up the matter in the Supreme Court and are confident of getting justice.

Ajit Pawar walked away with a majority NCP MLAs in the Maharashtra assembly in July last year and joined the Eknath Shinde-led state government. The EC has allotted 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as the party name for the group led by Sharad Pawar.

To a query on whether he would contest the Lok Sabha elections from his home turf Baramati, Sharad Pawar said, "I have made it clear in the past that I will not be contesting the elections. Therefore, there is no question of making any emotional appeal. People of Baramati are wise and sensible. They



NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar leader Sharad Pawar with his nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar at the Nisarg Mangal Karyalay in Market Yard in Pune on Sunday. Pavan Khengre

ED inquiries will stop only when I am jailed: Rohit Pawar

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, JANUARY 11

NCP (SHARADCHANDRA PAWAR) MLA Rohit Pawar, who has already been questioned twice by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged Maharashtra State Central Co-operative Bank scam, said the inquiries would stop only if he is jailed.

The ED has alleged corruption in the way Baramati Agro, the company owned by Pawar, had purchased a cooperative mill in Kannad taluka of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district. The mill was auctioned by the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank after it had failed to repay its loans.

On January 24, the ED questioned Rohit Pawar in the alleged bank scam for nearly 11 hours. The second round of questioning was held on February 2 when the NCP MLA from Sharad Pawar's faction was interrogated for nine hours. "They have a set of questions which they keep asking again and again. The inquiries

would stop only if I am jailed," said Pawar while speaking to The Indian Express.

With the Ajit Pawar faction bagging both the party name and symbol, the Sharadchandra Pawar faction has to start from scratch. "Many other leaders from our faction would face the ire of central agencies before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections," warned Rohit Pawar.

Since his uncle Ajit Pawar decided to split the party and take away most of the MLAs with him, Pawar has stood by his great uncle Sharad Pawar to rebuild the party from scratch. He had taken out a long yatra to Nagpur to highlight the issues faced by youth and farmers. The present political situation, Pawar said, is ripe for change. "People are frustrated — unemployment, drought, and price rise are issues which need to be addressed," he said.

Pawar was quick to admit that as the Opposition, they have an uphill task in front of them — to reach out to the people and present a suitable alternative.

BJP's Deodhar seeks journalist Nikhil Wagle's arrest for post against PM



Nikhil Wagle.

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, FEBRUARY 11

BJP LEADER Sunil Deodhar on Sunday said journalist Nikhil Wagle should be arrested for his 'objectionable' remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani after it was announced that Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, would be conferred on the latter.

"Nikhil Wagle had made an objectionable tweet on February 6. I filed an FIR against him with Pune police," said Deodhar, an aspirant for the Pune Lok Sabha seat. He had played a key role in the BJP's victory in several states. Deodhar is also known for his closeness to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Deodhar said the Pune police told him that Wagle will be called for investigation. "The Pune police have told me that Wagle will be called for investigation on February 12, after which they will initiate necessary action in the matter," said the BJP leader.

"I am expecting his arrest in the case. The FIR has been lodged with the intent of getting Wagle arrested. I have been told by the Pune police that the FIR has been forwarded to the legal team," Deodhar added.

When contacted, Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said they are investigating the matter. A senior police officer said Wagle is not likely to be arrested in the case. "There is no plan as such so far to arrest Wagle. It will be decided only after the investigation is complete," said the police officer.

Despite repeated attempts, Wagle was not available for comment. Meanwhile, Wagle's team, including Vishwambhar Choudhary and Asim Sarode, has demanded the arrest of BJP city unit chief Dheeraj Ghate and other BJP leaders who were allegedly at the forefront of the attack on the car in which Wagle was travelling to the "Nirbhay Bano" public event in Pune on Friday evening.



Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar with Maharashtra Governor Ramesh Bais and CM Eknath Shinde after paying tribute to Manoharbhajai Patel at the Gondia Education Society, Sunday. PTI

Ayushman Bharat scheme will help in growth of medical colleges: Dhankhar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GONDIA, FEBRUARY 11

AYUSHMAN BHARAT is the world's largest health cover scheme which will help in the growth of medical and nursing colleges and paramedical institutes in the country, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Sunday. He was in Gondia city in Maharashtra to lay the foundation stone for the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH).

"There was a time when people had to travel abroad to avail of medical treatment even for minor diseases, but now we have top medical facilities in our country. We are moving towards the Bharat of 2047 which should be fit, on the health and finance

fronts," he said.

The vice-president further said Ayushman Bharat is the world's largest health cover scheme which will help in the growth of medical and nursing colleges, para-medical institutes and laboratories.

"Ancient Ayurveda therapy is comprehensive with depth of knowledge. Its promotion is needed," Dhankhar said adding Yoga is a gift of India to the world and June 21 is celebrated as the International Yoga Day. Dhankhar also said that the government was taking steps to check the cost of medicines effectively.

Maharashtra Governor Ramesh Bais, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Minister of Medical Education Hasan Mushrif, and MP Praful Patel were also present on the occasion.

Dhankhar, an alumnus of Sainik School Chittoargarh, also met another sainik school alumnus during his visit to Gondia and interacted with cadets of Manoharbhajai Patel Military School of Gondia Education Society.

Former Union minister Praful Patel is the patron of the governing council of the school, named after his late father.

At the event, Dhankhar was introduced to Sandip Patil, Inspector General, Anti-Naxal Operations. The IPS officer heads Maharashtra Police's team against Maoists, active mostly in Gadchiroli and adjoining regions.

"Dhankhar was happy when Patil told him that he was an alumnus of Sainik School Satara, India's first Sainik School," an official said.

Viral video shows leopard near Mumbai housing society; forest dept patrolling on

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

A LEOPARD was spotted strolling near the wall of a housing complex along the Jogeshwari-Vikhroli Link Road in Mumbai, triggering panic among the residents and others in the area, a forest official said on Sunday.

The big cat was captured on CCTV cameras installed at the residential society, located close to the Aarey forest, earlier this week. The footage has gone viral on social media.

"A leopard roaming next to

our society is very scary and dangerous. It can lead to a conflict situation. We are coordinating with forest officials to address this issue," said a resident of the society.

Forest staff are closely monitoring the situation followed by daily night patrolling in and around that area, the official said. Citizens should not panic and instead, contact the 1926 toll-free helpline of the forest department in case of leopard sighting, he said.

More sightings of leopards in suburban Mumbai, especially on the periphery of SGNP (Sanjay Gandhi National Park) or Aarey is not dangerous, said Pawan

Sharma, founder and president of RAWWW (Resqin Association for Wildlife Welfare).

He said wild animals often stray towards human habitats in search of easy prey due to their natural instincts.

"Citizens should avoid entering dark areas at night. They should keep their society well lit for clear visibility. Small children and pets should be accompanied with adults, while security guards should stay in their cabins and use torches at night," said Sharma, who is also the honorary wildlife warden with the forest department.

PM Modi lied about 'lazy Indians', says Sanjay Raut

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, FEBRUARY 11

STATING THAT Prime Minister Narendra Modi resorts to blatant lies in his speech in Parliament, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said on Sunday that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had given the slogan *Aaram Haram Hai* and appealed to countrymen to become independent and self-reliant.

While replying to the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address in Lok Sabha, PM Modi said on Monday former prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi believed that Indians were lazy, lacking in intelligence, and given to complacency or hopelessness.

In his weekly column Rokhthok in party mouthpiece

Saamana, Raut said, "Prime Minister Modi lied to the nation. He needs to visit Kedarnath caves and do some 'tapascharya' and self-introspection. Modi resorts to lies which spread among the citizens of this country".

Raut said while PM Modi spoke for 60 minutes in Parliament, "he sidetracked the main issues". "He devoted maximum time to attacking the Congress. In one of his statements, he said Pandit Nehru thought Indians to be lazy... This kind of statement is nothing but an insult to hard-working Indians," he said.

Raut said Nehru's message to the countrymen was to work for the nation's development through hard work. He said Nehru had coined the slogan *Aaram Haram Hai* during his speech at the Red Fort in 1959.

Right-wing group tries to disrupt screening of film on Kashmir

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, FEBRUARY 11

AROUND 30 members of a right wing group staged a protest at the National Film Archive of India, where the film 'I Am Not The River Jhelum' — revolving around the Kashmir violence — was screened on Sunday as part of the Cinemas of India event.

Police said the members belonged to the Samasta Hindu Bandhav, the same outfit which caused a ruckus at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) last month over a banner put up by the FTII Students' Association on the institute premises, which said the Babri Masjid demolition was against the Constitution.

The film was screened at 1.30pm and was followed by an audience interaction with Delhi-based director Prabhsh Chandra, who was present at the venue. The right wing activists said they staged a protest after learning that the film defamed the Indian Army. There was no disruption in the film festival on Sunday and the next film scheduled for 3:30pm was also screened. "The organisers were very supportive. I have left Pune," Chandra said late evening.

Cinemas of India featured independent cinema from across India, and was organised by NFDC-NFAI, Fipresci, the India chapter of an association of film critics and film journalists from 50 countries, and the Pune International Centre.

Released in 2022, the film 'I



Banners about the 'Cinemas of India' film festival organised by Pune International Centre was wound up abruptly on its last day after right wing organisations objected to screening of film *I am Not the River Jhelum* that deals with life amid violence in Kashmir. Pavan Khengre

Am Not The River Jhelum' has been screened at various film festivals in India and abroad. Chandra won the best debut director from India at the International Film Festival of Kerala 2022. A banner of the film's screening outside the main gate was taken down. The organisers did not want to comment on the protest but said the banners were taken down as the festival was over.

Meanwhile, due to social media posts against the alleged objectionable film, the Pune city police were alert and had deployed adequate personnel at NFAI. The police intervened and brought the protestors to the Deccan police station around 4 pm.

Senior police inspector Vipin Hasabnis said, "We detained the protestors as per sections of the Bombay Police Act. They were

released in the evening."

Ravindra Padwal, a member of the Samasta Hindu Bandhav, said they came to know from a student who saw the film that it has objectionable content against the Indian Army. "We reached the NFAI. However, by that time, the screening of the film was over. We have filed a police complaint seeking action against those who show such a film against the Indian Army at a government-run establishment," said Padwal.

Sources said police would see the film to check if it has any objectionable content.

The film scheduled for screen at 6pm at the festival was cancelled and people who had congregated for the screening were sent back. Organisers said the screening was cancelled due to a malfunctioning BluRay device.

6 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



RS Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and Dy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh with Sudhanshu Trivedi at a farewell event on Thursday for RS MPs. PTI

LONE EXCEPTION

IN ITS first list of candidates for the February 27 Rajya Sabha election released on Sunday, the BJP has renominated only one from the outgoing members — Sudhanshu Trivedi. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted most of the senior members from the Upper House to contest the Lok Sabha elections, the party seemed to have made an exception for Trivedi. Sources said one reason could be Trivedi was nominated to the seat that fell vacant after former Union Minister Arun Jaitley died in August 2019. Thus, Trivedi got just four years in the Rajya Sabha. The other reason, party leaders said, could be that Trivedi is one of the national spokespersons and the BJP wants him to be the face and voice during the campaigns ahead of the Lok Sabha elections instead of getting himself into campaigns.

JAT CONSOLIDATION

THE BJP on Sunday named former Mathura MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh for the Rajya Sabha election from Uttar Pradesh. Singh is a prominent Jat leader from western UP where the BJP is in talks with Rashtriya Lok Dal for an alliance to consolidate Jat voters. Eyeing votes from the community, the Narendra Modi government last week had announced the Bharat Ratna for former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh. BJP's UP state president Chaudhary Bhupendra Singh is also a Jat from western UP.

MONKEY SCARE

THERE'S A new problem keeping the Railways on its toes, quite literally, apart from delayed train schedules. The Ministry of Railways has written to its senior officials, asking them not to feed monkeys on the Rail Bhavan premises. It stated that it has been observed that a troop of monkeys are causing disruptions on the premises. The ministry wrote to the officials stating there have been instances of monkeys entering the building posing risks to both employees and visitors. It stated that there have been reports of employees being chased, harmed, and cars being damaged by monkeys.

Cong opposed tribal woman as President: PM in Jhabua

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 11

SPEAKING AT an event in Madhya Pradesh's tribal-dominated Jhabua district, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday that the Congress "never cared for" tribal communities. He also expressed confidence that the BJP would win more than 370 in the coming Lok Sabha elections and that the Congress would be wiped out.

At the event, the Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for development projects in Madhya Pradesh worth ₹7,550 crore. "I want to tell you that Modi has not come for the Lok Sabha election campaign. Modi has come as a servant to thank the people of MP, who are like God," Modi said.

Targeting the Congress, he said that under the party's rule, the state was counted among the BIMARU — an acronym for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, a grouping of states that have historically lagged in economic and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav (right) in Jhabua on Sunday. PTI

social indicators — states. Under the BJP, however, the state is now "running fast on the path of development", he said.

"The biggest reason behind Madhya Pradesh having been a BIMARU state was the Congress's hatred towards villages, the poor, and tribal areas... These people never cared about the development or respect for

tribal society. For them, tribal people meant only a few votes. They remembered the village, the poor and the backward only when the election was announced... For us, the tribal community is not a vote bank. For us, the tribal community is the pride of our country and the guarantee of our country's bright future. Your respect and your de-

velopment is also Modi's guarantee," the PM said.

He also brought up President Droupadi Murmu's election.

"These people (Congress) come to you to ask for votes from the tribal community, but when a woman from the tribal community contested for the first time for the post of President, the Congress stood like a wall to stop her and defeat her. The country remembers the Congress misdeeds. When elections come, they make big announcements, but when Modi builds pucca houses for every poor, Dalit, backward and tribal person, they abuse Modi," he said.

About the Assembly elections in the state last year, in which the BJP retained power, Modi said the results showed that the people have "already indicated what your mood will be for the Lok Sabha".

"A few days ago, when the Opposition said that they will win 400 seats, I said that I am also hearing that the NDA will win 400 seats, but I am also hearing that the BJP alone will win 370 seats," Modi said. He said the mood in MP was also seen in all parts of India.

Shah eyes 10% vote jump per booth in Karnataka, Siddaramaiah says ready to debate on schemes

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 11

CHAIRING A crucial meeting with Karnataka BJP leaders for the Lok Sabha elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah set a target to increase votes by 10 per cent in every poll booth.

Shah arrived in Mysuru Sunday morning. He held two meetings with BJP leaders during the day and also took part in the Suttur Jatra Mahotsava programme near Mysuru.

BJP state president B Y Vijayendra told media persons

that strategies were discussed to convert Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity into votes and increase it by 10 per cent in every booth. "Our leaders have assured Shah that BJP and JD(S) will fight all 28 Lok Sabha constituencies unitedly," Vijayendra said.

Vijayendra, however, said there was no discussion regarding candidates, and the seat-sharing terms with JD(S) will be decided by the leadership of both parties at "Delhi level."

BJP's vote share in the 2014 LS elections in Karnataka was 43.4 per cent while it was 51.38 per cent in the 2019 polls.

BJP's former national general secretary CT Ravi said the party's core committee meeting had also decided to effectively counter CM Siddaramaiah-led Congress government's allegations of Centre's "injustice" to the state.

Asked why JD(S) was not part of the meeting, JD(S) youth wing president Nikhil Kumaraswamy said JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy could not meet Shah due to health reasons and it was communicated to Shah.

Meanwhile, countering Shah's alleged claims that the state government's treasury is empty because of the guarantee

schemes, Siddaramaiah said, "If this is Amit Shah's firm opinion, he should participate in a public debate with me. I can prove that our treasury is not empty because of the guarantee schemes, and instead, there is an unfair distribution of taxes from the Centre to the state."

Siddaramaiah told media persons in Bengaluru, "Shah has come to the state empty-handed", criticising the delay in announcing relief for drought-hit Karnataka.

Congress workers also staged a protest in Mysuru during Shah's visit. (WITH PTI INPUTS)

Congress to reduce duration of Rahul yatra's UP leg, skip most of western part

Party says decision not linked to reports of RLD ditching INDIA bloc

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE UTTAR Pradesh leg of senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is likely to be curtailed by a few days, with party insiders saying the march is likely to culminate at least a week earlier than planned.

The yatra was scheduled to enter Uttar Pradesh this week and spend 11 days in the politically crucial state that has 80 Lok Sabha seats and where the Congress has failed to make a mark in the last two Lok Sabha elections.

In UP, the yatra was to pass through 28 Lok Sabha constituencies, among them Prime Minister Narendra Modi's seat Varanasi, Rae Bareilly, Amethi, Allahabad, Phulpur, and Lucknow. The original route included areas such as Chandauli, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Allahabad, Bhadohi, Pratapgarh, Amethi, Rae Bareilly, Lucknow, Hardoi,



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi resumes the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Raigarh on Sunday after a two-day break. ANI

Sitapur, Bareilly, Moradabad, Rampur, Sambal, Amroha, Aligarh, Badaun, Bulandshahr, and Agra.

Sources said the yatra could now skip most of the western UP districts and travel directly from Lucknow to Aligarh before entering Madhya Pradesh. Interestingly, the Congress's INDIA bloc partner Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) that has a

strong presence in west UP and is in talks with the BJP to join the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Sources in the Congress, however, said the decision to curtail the yatra in UP had nothing to do with the political developments involving the RLD. "We wanted to slow down the yatra to ensure that Rahul Gandhi gets

time for interactions with groups on the way," said a party leader.

The yatra that was to culminate in Mumbai by March 20 may now end between March 10 and 14, at least a week earlier than planned as it will give more time for Gandhi to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.

Sources said AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who has so far not joined the yatra, which will complete a month on February 14, might make an appearance when it enters UP.

Sources also said that the INDIA bloc has decided to hold its first joint rally later this month in Karnataka. The alliance is facing turmoil after the exit of Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), the Trinamool Congress and Aam Aadmi Party's decisions to contest alone in West Bengal and Punjab, and is staring at the possible exit of RLD. The Congress will also invite all its INDIA partners to a rally marking the culmination of the yatra in Mumbai next month.

RAJYA SABHA CANDIDATES

BJP banks on new faces, names 14 for February 27 polls

ENS & PTI
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE BJP on Sunday named 14 candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls, including former Union minister R P N Singh and party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi from Uttar Pradesh. In the list, Trivedi is the only outgoing MP renominated by the party.

Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who represents Karnataka in Rajya Sabha, and BJP chief spokesperson and media head Anil Baluni, the outgoing MP from Uttarakhand, have been replaced with fresh faces amid indications that they may contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Some new names, including Narayana K Bhandage from Karnataka and Devendra Pratap Singh from Chhattisgarh, are little known but have been rewarded for their years of hard work for the party, something the current BJP leadership has often recognised.

Singh is from the erstwhile Gond royal family and replaces Saroj Pandey.

Senior leader Sushil Kumar Modi's name did not figure as the party picked Dharmshila Gupta and Bhim Singh from Bihar having six vacancies. Both the ruling NDA and the opposition are likely to win three seats each, going by their current strengths. The JD(U), a BJP ally, is likely to name its candidate for one seat.

None of the Union ministers, whose terms are coming to an end, were named in the list amid a strong possibility that many of them will contest the Lok Sabha polls. However, the party is yet to name many candidates including from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Union ministers Mansukh Mandaviya and Parshottam Rupala from Gujarat, Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and



R P N Singh, who was a minister in UPA govt, is among the candidates

L Murugan, both of whom represent Madhya Pradesh, and Union minister Narayan Rane from Maharashtra are among those retiring from the House as members.

R P N Singh, who comes from the politically important Kurmi caste, was in the Congress before joining the BJP. He was a minister in the Congress-led UPA government.

Former Haryana BJP president Subhash Barala, a Jat, will be the party's candidate from the state and Samik Bhattacharya from West Bengal.

Besides relying on new faces, many of whom have been working in the party organisation for long, the BJP has maintained a balance of caste equation in picking its candidates.

Elections for 56 Rajya Sabha seats spread across 15 states are scheduled to be held on February 27, and the last date for filing nominations is February 15.

The name of BJP president JP Nadda, whose term from Himachal Pradesh is coming to an end, is not on the list. With the Congress in power in the state, the BJP is not in a position to get its member elected, and Nadda, sources said, may be brought to Rajya Sabha from some other state or may contest the Lok Sabha polls.

Except for Sudhanshu Trivedi, none of the nine outgoing BJP MPs from Uttar Pradesh including Anil Jain, Anil Agrawal and G V L Narasimha Rao has been renominated.

The BJP's current strength, which is less than the previous Assembly, means that it can ensure the victory of seven of its candidates for 10 vacancies.

Sushmita Dev, journalist Sagarika Ghose among four picked by TMC

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 11

THE TRINAMOOL Congress (TMC) on Sunday announced the names of four candidates from West Bengal for the February 27 Rajya Sabha elections. Besides naming party leaders Sushmita Dev, Md Nadimul Haque and Mamata Bala Thakur as its nominees, TMC sprang a surprise with the candidature of journalist-author Sagarika Ghose.

"We are pleased to announce the candidature of @sagarikaghose, @SushmitaDevAITC, @MdNadimulHaque6 and Mamata Bala Thakur for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections. We extend our heartfelt wishes to them and may they work towards upholding Trinamool's enduring legacy of indomitable spirit and advocacy for the rights of every Indian," the TMC said in a post on X.

Going by the strength of the

Bengal House, four TMC candidates and one from the BJP will be elected to the Rajya Sabha.

If elected, this will be Haque's third term in Rajya Sabha since 2012. A writer and journalist, he is the owner of the Kolkata-based Urdu daily *Akhbar-e-Mashriq*. Former All India Mahila Congress chief Sushmita Dev, who joined the TMC in 2021 and was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, represented Silchar in the Assam Assembly from 2011 to 2014 before being elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar.

Thakur belongs to the Matua community that has a strong presence in the districts of North 24 Parganas and Nadia. Ghose, a first-time nominee, has worked for prominent news publications and TV channels. In 2012, TMC chief Mamata Banerjee had stormed out of a TV show hosted by Ghose after taking offence at a question asked by a college student in the audience.

PM-SVANidhi boosted income of street vendors

Study says their annual income went up by Rs 23,460

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 10

A STUDY that evaluated the impact of the PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi), a small working capital loan scheme for street vendors, has found that the first tranche of ₹10,000 led to an additional annual income of ₹23,460 for each beneficiary, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The study, commissioned by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, was carried out between January and June

last year by the Centre for Analytical Finance of the Indian School of Business (ISB). The report will be used by the Ministry for its own assessment of PM SVANidhi and is not likely to be made public, sources said.

PM SVANidhi was launched in 2020 to help street vendors resume their livelihood impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown, by offering them affordable working capital loans. To begin with, a beneficiary can avail ₹10,000 and, upon its repayment, ₹20,000. After repaying the second loan, a beneficiary is entitled to apply for a third loan of ₹50,000.

Data on the PM-SVANidhi portal, as seen on Saturday, showed that 60.65 lakh first-term loans, 16.95 lakh second-term loans and 2.43 lakh third-term loans have been disbursed so far under the scheme.

The ISB study covered 5,141 vendors across 100 urban local bodies in 22 states, the report said. For 95% of those surveyed, the PM-SVANidhi loan was their first-ever bank loan, while for 72% of them said it was the first business loan, the report said.

According to the study, 94% of those beneficiaries who had availed the first loan of Rs 10,000 said they used it to make "business investments". It was 98% in case of those who had availed the second loan. The first loan resulted in an additional income of ₹1,955 per month, or ₹23,460 in total during the loan's one-year duration, the report said, adding this was in line with the estimates of marginal returns of small businesses in many parts of the world, it said.

The study found 13.9% of all the loans disbursed had been

classified as non-performing assets (NPAs), meaning no payments had been made for three months and more. The NPAs were the highest during Covid-19 pandemic and declined over time, with only 9% of loans disbursed in 2022 turning into NPA.

The study also found that the debt-to-income (DTI) ratio of the beneficiaries (9%) was lower than what was expected of small businesses, reflecting the "high creditworthiness" of the vendors.

On an average, a street vendor household had a monthly net saving of ₹16,424 and debt servicing expenses, including PM SVANidhi repayment of ₹1,489. As per the ISB, loan providers have different preferences for DTI of a small business, with most lenders preferring borrowers with DTI less than 35%.

Among other things, the study also found that after the

launch of PM SVANidhi, there had been no significant improvement in the street vendors getting formal credit from other sources — only 9% of the beneficiaries had loans from other financial institutions. It also said that 48% of the beneficiaries reported a decline in harassment by police after they got their street vendor registration card and certificate of vending, the supporting documents needed to avail the PM SVANidhi loans.

The ISB report also gave suggestions to improve the scheme, including using non-bank financial institutions that have lower fixed loan administration costs, increasing enrollment by introducing group liability and processing three separate loans in an automated and linked manner instead of the current system of requiring paper-work for all separately.

Kejriwal, Punjab CM and families to visit Ayodhya temple today

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will visit Ayodhya on Monday along with his family members and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann to pay obeisance at the Ram Temple.

"Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Mann and their families will go to Ayodhya to embark the visit Ram Lalla and do the darshan," party sources said.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has earlier said that he will go to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya with his family after the consecration ceremony on January 22 and that he has not got a formal invitation yet. ENS

Bihar youth who went to look for work among Haldwani dead

AVANEESH MISHRA
HALDWANI, FEBRUARY 11

AMONG THE five dead in the Haldwani violence, which followed a demolition drive at a mosque and madrasa, is a 24-year-old from Bihar who had come to the district in search of employment.

The body of Prakash Kumar Singh was found more than 2 km from the epicentre of the violence, with gunshot wounds to the head.

"The body was recovered around 2-3 km from the spot... It could be a case of personal enmity. We will investigate who killed him and why," said Nainital SSP Prahlad Narayan Meena, adding they are trying to ascertain what weapon was used in the murder.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Prakash's brother-in-law Ankit Kumar Singh said they learned of Prakash's death only on Saturday, two days after the violence. Ankit, who lives in Noida, hurriedly travelled to Haldwani on receiving the news.

"He went to Haldwani in search of work. He might have consulted someone before going. We do not have any family members there. He left Bihar on February 7 and reached next day. This was his first time there. He must have been clueless about everything. We think violence started soon after he got off the train and reached Banbhoolpura," said Ankit.

Prakash had just completed his Bachelor of Arts and was



Prakash Kumar Singh

looking for a private sector job. He is survived by his parents and a younger brother.

"His father is not in a situation to travel, so I came to collect his body. In Haldwani, the administration arranged an ambulance for me to take the body back to our hometown in Bihar. We left on Sunday around 3 pm and will reach there on Monday," he said.

SSP Meena said they will look into all deaths that took place during the violence. According to information provided by the district administration, the deceased have been identified as Singh, and Haldwani residents Faheem Qureshi (30), Zahid (45), his son Mohammad Anas (16), and Mohammad Shaban (22).

The family of Faheem Qureshi has meanwhile alleged he was shot dead by neighbours when the violence was unfolding, after he objected to his vehicle being set on fire. SSP Meena said they will look into the allegations. The family of Zahid and Anas had told *The Indian Express* they both sustained bullet injuries when they ventured out to look for each other during the violence.

After HC intervenes, 8 FIRs filed in rape case against Sirohi officials

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, FEBRUARY 11

EIGHT FIRs have been registered against the chairperson of the Sirohi Municipal Council and the former acting Municipal Commissioner, who were last year accused of raping 15-20 women, following directions by the Rajasthan High Court, police said.

Sirohi Deputy SP Paras Choudhary told *The Indian Express* that the case against the two had been sent last year to the women's police station for investigation, and that they had found the allegations to be false. However, some complainants later approached the High Court seeking the registration of FIRs.

"And in compliance with the court's order, we have lodged eight FIRs in the same case against the Municipal Council Chairperson and the former Municipal Commissioner," said

Choudhary, who is also the investigating officer for the case. "The probe is on," he added.

Chairperson of Sirohi Municipal Council Mahendra Mewara and former Sirohi Municipal Council acting commissioner Mahendra Choudhary said the allegations against them were false, and that during the police's probe last year, investigators were unable to locate any of the women or find any evidence. Mewara said a man who had been involved in a case related to the grabbing of municipal land was behind these allegations, and that the same man had got four-five FIRs registered against Mewara in the past.

In the rape complaint lodged last year, a woman had alleged that she and 15-20 other women had gone from Pali to Sirohi for recruitment for anganwadi jobs. She alleged that she met Mahendra Mewara and Mahendra Choudhary there, and

they made the women stay at the place of one of their acquaintances. It was alleged that the food served to women was spiked with drugs, and once the women passed out, Mewara and "10-15 others" raped them and recorded videos.

The complaint also claimed that the accused had blackmailed the women with videos, and demanded Rs 5 lakh from each of them.

The Final Report filed by the Sirohi police in February 2023 in the case had concluded that the case was false.

It had said that none of the women came forward when the incident happened "2-3 months" ago, that they have not specified any location of the alleged rapes, that the complainants have not given any contact number of theirs or the accused, that the complaints were sent by post and not handwritten, and that the same complaint was copied mul-

tiply times.

The police had also said that they could not find a single woman at the given addresses. Moreover, Choudhary, who was working as an executive engineer with the charge of acting municipal commissioner, had retired in August 2022, nearly four months before the allegations were levelled against him. Choudhary also said that anganwadis come under the Women and Child Development Department, and not the Municipal Council.

Mewara said one Rajendra Gandhi, who he claimed is accused of grabbing valuable Municipal Council land, had been trying to put pressure on him with the help of one Ramniwas Daga, and that they had hatched a conspiracy to malign his image.

"Gandhi gets Daga to mail fake complaints against me via post. Previously, too, he has lodged 4-5 cases against me which were all found to be false," Mewara said.

To optimise its manpower, Army outsources 'key responsibilities'

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

PREPARATIONS FOR defence training and professional development courses, security of non-sensitive military locations, repair and recovery of stores and equipment, and other facility management services are among the various essential responsibilities being outsourced by the Army at present, officials told *The Indian Express*.

While these tasks are essential in the routine functioning of the Army, they are being outsourced as part of a manpower optimisation plan in the Army, which aims to sharpen the operational edge of the force.

Some of these practices, which are being implemented by various commands, have been identified as best practices. The Army has asked other commands to replicate them in a similar manner.

According to sources, a few veterans are being taken on-board on contract as instructors for the conduct of preparatory courses for career exams, and this practice may be extended to Army training establishments as well.

Language experts are also being outsourced to train Army personnel in various foreign languages. The Indian Express had reported earlier that the Territorial Army (TA) has recruited Chinese language inter-

preters for border personnel meetings and cyber security experts to support the Army.

Facility management services, which are being outsourced, include food and catering services at military hospitals and hospital waste management services. Certain medical consultancy services such as psychologists and other specialists as well as paramedical staff such as physiotherapists, speech therapists among others are being hired where needed.

Other conservancy services in military stations, manpower and vehicles for cargo handling and transportation and relocation of stores and office assistance are being outsourced wherever required.

No core function, however, will be outsourced and any decision on outsourcing of any new services will have to be first approved by the Vice Chief of the Army.

The Indian Express had earlier reported that the exercise is aimed at sharpening the tooth-to-tail ratio of the force, scheduled for implementation in the next five years in phases, will see the chopping of the "tail" element of every arm of the force, not only the supporting arms and services.

The decision on rightsizing the Army is based on the inputs received from all arms and services and taking into account the existing shortage of manpower in the 12.8-lakh Army.

IIT-M to conduct study for campus in Sri Lanka

New Delhi: The Indian Institute of Technology Madras will soon conduct a "feasibility study" to set up a campus in Sri Lanka, institute's Director V Kamakoti said Sunday.

"Talks with the Sri Lankan authorities are in preliminary stages for IIT Madras to set up a campus in that country. A delegation from Sri Lanka visited our campus and soon a delegation will visit Sri Lanka for a feasibility study," Kamakoti told *The Indian Express*. IIT-M started its first offshore campus in Tanzania's Zanzibar with Preeti Aghalym as the director in November 2023. **ENS**



AYODHYA DARSHAN

A delegation of 430 legislators led by Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath during a visit to the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Sunday. Samajwadi Party leaders skipped the event. **PTI**

In a first, CAPFs constable exam to be held in 13 regional languages

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE MINISTRY of Home Affairs Sunday announced that for the first time, the constable recruitment examination in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) will be conducted in 13 regional languages in addition to Hindi and English to increase the participation of local youth in the force.

Around 48 lakh candidates across 128 cities will appear for the exam from February 20 to March 7. "Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the MHA had de-

vised to conduct the Constable (General Duty) examination for recruitment in CAPFs in 13 regional languages in addition to Hindi and English from January 1 this year. This historic decision has been taken on the initiative of Shah to increase the participation of local youth in CAPFs and to promote regional languages," an official statement said.

Last year, political leaders in the southern states had objected to only Hindi and English being the language options for the recruitment test.

"Question papers of Constable (General Duty) examination will now be prepared in Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Mal-

ayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Manipuri, and Konkani. Constable GD examination is one of the flagship examinations conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC). Therefore, MHA and SSC have signed a MoU to facilitate conduct of the examination in 13 regional languages," it stated.

"The decision will result in lakhs of youth taking part in the exam in their mother tongue/regional language and improve their selection prospects. As a result, the reach of this examination will increase among the candidates in the entire country and everyone will get an equal opportunity for employment," it stated.

HC orders CBI probe into 'abduction' of UP Dalit woman in 2021

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 11

THE ALLAHABAD High Court has ordered a CBI inquiry into the alleged abduction of a 25-year-old married Dalit woman from her parents' residence in Uttar Pradesh's Fatehpur district in 2021.

Three persons from an upper caste were arrested in this connection. The HC order came in response to a habeas corpus petition filed by Kalawati, mother of the victim Ritu Devi. The court expressed dissatisfaction with the state authorities, noting they failed to locate the victim despite multiple extensions sought by them.

The court said, "The CBI is directed to investigate the matter and submit a report by the next date of listing. Let the matter be listed before the appropriate court on 21.08.2024."

Ritu was living with her husband Sumit Kumar after her marriage in 2019. She visited her parents' home in Dalabarakhara village a few days before her alleged abduction. According to her brother Vikas, a neighbour na-

med Happy Singh took his sister along on February 23, 2021. "A few days later, we spotted Happy Singh and when we asked him about Ritu's whereabouts, he abused and threatened us. Later, we came to know Happy's cousin Rahi Singh and their uncle Sanjay Singh were involved. The accused are from the Thakur community and are influential," said Vikas.

Efforts to lodge an FIR against the suspects were also met with obstacles, the family alleged.

Kalawati sought help from the Fatehpur SP and the state SC/ST Commission, but no FIR was filed. After a complaint was lodged on state government's portal, a missing report was filed on March 15, 2021. Kalawati filed a habeas corpus plea in the HC in 2021.

Her lawyer, Shivakant Singh said "while the police arrested Sanjay Singh, Happy Singh, and Rahi Singh, the victim remained untraceable. Sanjay Singh obtained bail and was released."

A petition was also filed in the court the police had deliberately omitted the name of Sanjay Singh as an accused in the FIR.

CUET UG in hybrid mode this year, with fewer subject choices

DEEKSHA TERI
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

CONDUCTED ONLINE since its introduction two years ago, the Common University Entrance Test-Undergraduate (CUET UG) will now be held in a hybrid mode to allow candidates, particularly those from rural areas, to take the exam closer home, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Registration for the examination, conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on behalf of the UGC, will likely begin around February 19, it is learnt.

According to senior officials in NTA and UGC, the third edition of the exam, scheduled to be held between May 15 and 31, will see some major changes — from the format to number of subjects allowed to the difficulty level.

UGC chairman M Jagadish Kumar said that for subjects with higher registration, the test will be conducted using OMR sheets instead of the Computer Based Test (CBT) format.

"For the subjects where there will be a higher percentage of registrations, we will bring in OMR (in multiple choice question format). In this way, we will be able to

EXPLAINED Demand from students

LAST YEAR, in several parts of the country such as J&K and Jharkhand, where the number of centres were limited, candidates complained about having to travel to far-off places to sit for the exam. Many in the Northeastern states, too, demanded examination centres closer home.

conduct the exam for those specific subjects on one day and in one shift for all candidates in the country. We will be able to use several schools, colleges and educational institutes as exam halls, just like we do for other exams such as NEET. "This will be beneficial for students, specifically those who are in rural areas, as they will not have to travel to far-off places for the exam," he said.

Last year, around 28 lakh candidates sat for CUET UG, with the highest number of applications received from Uttar Pradesh. The exam will be conducted in

three shifts on each exam day: 9 am to 11 am, 12.30 pm to 2 pm, and 4 pm to 5.30 pm. According to Kumar, the hybrid format will reduce the number of "exam days" as well. When asked if this will bring down the possibility of the usage of the normalisation process for result calculation, Kumar said a decision on this will be taken as the situation arises.

Number of subjects a candidate can choose will be cut from 10 to six. According to Kumar, data by NTA showed not many students were picking all the 10 subject options. The large number of options was also posing technical difficulties in allotting exam centres for some students.

"Since few students were picking the large number of choices, allotment of centres became very complex. Since our data shows that most students were only taking 4 or 5 papers, in this CUET UG, we will permit students to take only 6 test papers, which would include three domain subjects, two languages and the general test," Kumar said.

The NTA is also working on ensuring the difficulty level of the CUET UG 2024 is kept at moderate to avoid stress among students, Kumar said.

Value addition to produce will improve farmers' quality of life: V-P

Mumbai: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar Sunday said "value addition" to farm produce will bring qualitative improvements in the lives of farmers.

Addressing an event in Gondia district of Maharashtra, Dhankhar asked CM Eknath Shinde to make a value addition to rice for its marketing. "I want to tell CM Shinde to do value addition to rice as its main marketing point. For the growth of farmers, value addition to their produce is important. Such changes would bring qualitative improvements in the life of cultivators," he said.

He recalled gold reserves had once been deposited in Switzerland-based banks to sustain our economic credibility, but India has progressed. "India is currently the fifth largest economy in the world. In next two to three years, we will move ahead of Germany and Japan," he said. **PTI**

Don't erect border between Punjab and India, talk to farmers: CM Mann to Govt

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
AMRITSAR, FEBRUARY 11

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann urged the central government not to build a border between Punjab and India, while his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal alleged that the BJP is only scared of the AAP and wants to defame and crush it. The AAP supremo also accused the Centre of withholding Rs 8,000 crore funds of Punjab.

Mann made this appeal during a rally after inaugurating the Guru Amar Das Ji power plant at Goindwal Sahib (Tarn Taran district) on Sunday. Kejriwal also participated in the rally at Sharon village.

Reacting to the Haryana government's effort to erect heavy fencing along NHs and other roads at the Punjab border, Mann said, "What is happening



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann (left) and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal in Ludhiana on Saturday. **PTI**

in Haryana? They are installing fencing on the Punjab border. I request the central government to engage in talks with farmers. Please avoid creating an India-Punjab border. Are you establishing a border?."

Haryana government sources said the fencing aims to prevent Punjab farmers from entering Haryana to reach Delhi on

February 13, as farmer unions have called for a protest in Delhi.

Mann added, "When it comes to wheat and rice, where would you go? The borders open during those times. We have been providing you with food, filling your stomachs. We have made significant contributions to the freedom struggle. Our soldiers are standing on the border.

Yet, no respect (salute) is given to some martyrs because they are Agniveers." Mann also said his party will win around 45 seats in the country.

Urging people to vote for AAP, he said, "Make it 13-0 in Punjab. I will not let them (Centre) stop a penny. We have 10 members in Rajya Sabha, '13 from Punjab', 'seven from Delhi', 'one from Chandigarh'. Then we have seats coming from Goa and Gujarat. Our tally would touch 40-45."

Addressing the gathering, Kejriwal said the AAP will win all seven seats in Delhi. "I will give you all 13 seats in Punjab to the AAP? Raise your hands. If you give us all 13 seats then they (Centre) won't be able to block funds," he said, adding "they want the AAP to be crushed and finished... arrest them (their leaders), defame the AAP."

FULL REPORT
www.indianexpress.com

100 start-ups of ₹100 crore each by 2036: IIT-BBS rolls out ambitious plan

SUJIT BISOIYI
BHUBANESWAR FEBRUARY 11

AIMING TO redefine the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar has rolled out 100-Cube Start-Up initiative under which it intends to create at least 100 start-ups worth ₹100 crore each by 2036, Odisha's centennial year of formation.

The institute will soon have an upgraded Research and Entrepreneurship Park to provide essential resources, mentorship, seed capital, and access to potential investors to the start-ups. The park is set to expand from its present 20,000 square feet area to about 80,000 square feet over the next two years with the Union Ministry of Education grant of ₹130 crore.

IIT-Bhubaneswar also signed MoUs with 15 companies to build strategic collaborations to achieve the 100-Cube objective.



Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in Bhubaneswar, Sunday. **PTI**

"It's the dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make India a developed country. To achieve the target, the new generation should be in the role of job creator instead of job seeker. We need to enable them as wealth creators. The start-up ecosystem is touching a new high in India," said Union Minister for Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan af-

ter launching the initiative. He said the number of start-ups, which was only 350 in 2014, has now touched 1.2 lakh.

"To accelerate the start-up ecosystem in Odisha and to promote entrepreneurship, IIT-Bhubaneswar has taken an ambitious project of establishing a Research and Entrepreneurship Park, which would unite all the incubation centres in and around Bhubaneswar," said Pradhan.

In his speech at the inaugural event of the initiative, Pradhan drew parallels between the proposed park and the historic Konark temple. He emphasised that Odisha's rich history of innovation is evident in the state's architectural marvels and temples.

Hailing the dynamism of youth and their potential to drive change, aligning with Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat, the Union Minister said the target of creating 100 start-ups worth ₹100 crore each can be achieved.



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THREE RATNAS

Honour to Rao, Swaminathan and Charan Singh is well-deserved and politically timed. It should also spur introspection

THE TIMING — AHEAD of Lok Sabha polls — of the Narendra Modi government's decision to confer the Bharat Ratna on Chaudhary Charan Singh and PV Narasimha Rao, both former prime ministers, may be political. While the first was a leading anti-Congress voice from the late Sixties to the mid-Eighties, the latter is someone whom the current ruling dispensation has sought to portray as having gotten a raw deal from the grand old party. But there is no doubt that both — and the third recipient of the honour, the agricultural scientist, MS Swaminathan — fully deserve the nation's highest civilian award. Narasimha Rao was the father of India's economic reforms. The success of the policy changes he unveiled in 1991 — opening up the economy to the world and private investment, both domestic and foreign — can be measured not only by the country's GDP growing some 13-fold, from \$270 billion to \$3.5 trillion, since then, but also by subsequent governments not really reversing direction.

While Rao's market-oriented liberalisation measures unleashed the "animal spirits" of entrepreneurs in India, the other two men were messiahs, no less, for the farmers of Bharat. Charan Singh's three landmark pieces of legislation in Uttar Pradesh — dismantling the zamindari system of intermediaries between the cultivator and the state, enabling consolidation of fragmented holdings, and enforcing land ceiling — transformed the agricultural economy of northern India during the 1950s and 1960s. It helped create a new socially and politically empowered middle peasant class in the region. Their economic fortunes rose with the Green Revolution, whose key architect was Swaminathan. He was the first to recognise the potential of the new high-yielding wheat and rice varieties — less tall with strong stems that responded well to more fertiliser application and didn't bend when their ears were heavy with well-filled grains — and growing them in India. He also strengthened the national agricultural research system (NARS) that has helped boost yields in other crops as well, including through breeding of varieties resistant to pests, diseases and abiotic stresses.

The awarding of Bharat Ratna to the three eminent persons should also be a moment of introspection. Reforms have delivered growth, but not lessened poverty as much as was hoped. Rao wouldn't have been happy with rising inequality and continued misallocation of resources towards inefficient producer and consumer subsidies. In today's times, he may have batted more for direct income support. Charan Singh's middle peasant has become a prisoner of past success and needs a new formula for boosting incomes through crop diversification, improved input use efficiency and cutting out intermediaries in the marketing of produce (similar to the oppressive zamindars of yore). The best tribute to Swaminathan would be to restore the NARS to its former glory. Farmer interest is better served by more money for research and infrastructure investments, not underpricing of fertiliser, electricity and water.

AFTER THE POLL

Question in Pakistan: What can army do with a pliable but politically illegitimate government vis-a-vis nation's crises?

THERE IS NO end to the political tragedy of Pakistan, with yet another election manipulated by its army ending in a deliberately engineered stalemate. As in the 2018 election — which saw a hung national assembly and the army's construction of a majority in favour of Imran Khan — Pakistan's army chief, General Asim Munir now directs the construction of a new ruling coalition. But the electoral process under Gen Munir has become an even bigger farce than before, thanks to brazen rigging before and after polling. The Pakistan army's new model of a "hybrid" government — in which the GHQ in Rawalpindi has an expansive role in governing the polity and economy — failed to deliver after the 2018 elections. This time, the puppet government installed by Gen Munir will have even less credibility.

At the heart of the problem has been the deepening contradiction between the massive popularity of Imran Khan and the army's determination to destroy his party and persona. Having built up Imran Khan as the alternative to the traditional leadership, the army was upset with Imran's attempt to strike out on his own and sought to bring him down. Despite handing him long sentences for corruption, leaking state secrets, and adultery, and barring his party (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) from contesting the elections, Imran-backed independents have gained the largest plurality of seats in the National Assembly. Without the alleged rigging during the counting of votes, it is entirely plausible that Imran Khan would have got a two-thirds majority in the Assembly. As it put down Imran Khan, the army facilitated the return of exiled Nawaz Sharif, a three-term prime minister who was ousted from power in 2017 on corruption charges. Yet, it has also been clear the army will not allow Nawaz Sharif a free hand to run the country. His Pakistan Muslim League has emerged as the largest single party, but behind the PTI-backed independents. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has also won a significant number of seats.

By engineering a fractured mandate — the PTI knocked out, and the PML cut down to size, Gen Munir will have a big say in the formation of the next government, in which no civilian leader can threaten the army's dominance over the polity and its preferences in policy-making. Nawaz Sharif has claimed the right to form the new government and has appealed to other parties to join him. The next few days will see intense bargaining between PML and PPP under the supervision of the army to structure the new coalition and the distribution of the fishes and loaves of government. But by keeping Imran Khan locked up and the PTI out of power in a rigged process, it is not clear how long the new government might last. In the near term, the big question is what Gen Munir could do with a pliable but politically illegitimate government under him in addressing the challenges facing the nation. These include unstable borders, the return of violent religious extremism, and a tottering economy. Going by the army's historical record, there is no reason to hold one's breath.

Election without winner

It could initiate churning within Pakistan army about its national role. But it is not likely to



VIVEK KATJU

THE TRUE PROTAGONISTS in the February 8 national polls in Pakistan were two individuals — Army Chief General Asim Munir and former Prime Minister and founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, Imran Khan. Munir used all levers of state power from behind the scenes and through other institutions and individuals to try to grind Khan into electoral dust. With results of all 264 general seats contested in the elections announced, it is certain, that he has failed to do so.

Khan, imprisoned since early May last year, convicted in numerous cases which prevented him from both contesting elections or campaigning, was compelled to make his party candidates stand as independents. This was because the Pakistan Election Commission suspended PTI's symbol. However, despite these steps and also pressures on Khan's leading colleagues, PTI candidates contesting as independents came through as the single largest group. They secured more seats (declared so far) in the National Assembly (93) than either the Munir favoured party, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) of the Sharifs (75) or the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) of the Bhutto-Zaradaris (54). This indicates that Khan has retained a large measure of his voter base amidst very adverse political circumstances.

As no party has secured a majority, Pakistan is necessarily heading towards a coalition government. To understand the complexities in government formation, it is essential to turn to the Pakistan constitution. It provides for a National Assembly of 342 members of which 242 (elections were held for 235 seats) are to be elected directly. At the same time, 60 seats are reserved for women which are proportionately filled, on a provincial basis, from lists provided by parties. It is mandatory for a party to secure five per cent of the vote to be eligible for women's seats. Ten seats are reserved for minorities on a national basis.

As PTI could not contest as a party, it is not eligible for the women and minorities seats. Without these seats, no party can get a major-

ity in this Assembly. The way out for PTI to be eligible for women and minority seats would be for its members to join a small party such as the one-member Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM), which is from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP). This will entitle the PTI, acting under the banner of the MWM, to women and minority seats but that will not get it into power for it will still remain distant from the presently required majority number of 168. Other parties, either on their own or under Munir's pressure, will not throw in their lot with Khan.

In the present scenario, it is the PPP which is crucial to government formation. It has retained Sindh and gained in Punjab too. Munir has no doubt urged PML(N) and PPP to join hands in another version of the pre-election Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM) government led by PML (N) leader and Nawaz Sharif's brother Shehbaz Sharif. Talks are taking place between the two on government making but negotiations will be tough for there is much at stake for both parties. It is more than probable that, in the end, Munir and his coterie of generals will make the two parties hammer out an understanding for the "good of Pakistan". It is possible that a PML(N) and PPP government may not fulfil Nawaz Sharif's aspiration to become Pakistan's Prime Minister for the fourth time but the PML(N) would fight for his cause forcefully.

How should these election results be read? Imran Khan once again swept KP. That is not surprising for his Pathan heritage has always resonated with its people. What is interesting is that Imran retained his base in Punjab, politically the country's most important province. Significantly, the country's army is largely Punjabi and on May 9 last year, Imran Khan's supporters attacked army institutions. That had led to a permanent breach between Munir and Khan. In the nine months since, the army has sought to strengthen the narrative that Khan and PTI are unpatriotic while the army is the ultimate guardian of its territorial and

ideological integrity. Clearly, the first aspect of the army's propaganda did not cut any ice with Khan's supporters but it would be wrong to read this support for Khan as a fatal weakening of the trust that the Pakistani people, on the whole, have for the army as an institution. This is especially so regarding the army's role in defending the country against its "permanent" threat, India.

The question is if Imran Khan's extraordinary performance in these elections in the most adverse circumstances will prevail on the superior judiciary to re-look at his convictions so that he can come out of prison and play an active political role. There would be pressures on the judiciary and other institutions too with the large presence of "Khans" Members of the National Assembly. While the army and the coalition that will be formed will try to wean away some of these MNAs, most, fearing adverse voter reactions, would remain loyal to Khan. It is unlikely that Khan will get judicial relief in the immediate future but it is equally unlikely that the courts will not, at some stage, let him out. If they do so, he will remain in Pakistan; he is not the kind who will agree to go into foreign exile.

It is well known that Khan had a good measure of support within the army. Munir ruthlessly dealt with pro-Imran elements, including a Corp Commander, after the May 9 incidents. These election results may revive a positive sentiment in sections of the army for Imran, which Munir and the ISI will deal with an iron hand.

There is a section within Pakistan which wishes the army to become detached from politics. They may be enthused by these results, hoping that they may initiate a churning in the army about its national role. That is unlikely to happen. The Pakistani army will remain both professional and political. And, Munir will not reduce his antipathy for Khan for his neck is on the line.

The writer is a former diplomat



AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

CLASSROOM VS COACHING

Only schools can cultivate agency and impart a wholesome education

IN A significant move, the Ministry of Education last month announced several guidelines for coaching centres. This comes in response to concerns about the welfare of students, student suicides and the unregulated growth of private coaching.

The coaching industry generates a revenue of Rs 6,000 crore annually and is growing at the rate of 7-10 per cent every year. There is now coaching not only for NEET or JEE, but even for CUET, as well as tuitions across subjects taught in schools. A new malaise has crept in where children are moving out of schools after Class X in order to join dummy schools which admit them without requiring them to attend classes, so they can enrol in coaching centres to crack CUET.

This is resulting in those who have opted for science dismissing the value of school. The government needs to reconsider its earlier decision to give weightage to board exam results in applying for competitive exams. If not, we will lose the franchise of high school education completely.

Unfortunately, policy makers have not been able to provide support to students for the journey beyond school. This has allowed institutions like Kota to become parallel systems. Coaching centres, such as those in Kota, have been established over three decades and are firmly entrenched in the lives and minds of Indians.

The National Education Policy goes beyond textbooks and lays emphasis on mental health, learning and understanding. It focuses on a child's inner needs. Only a school can develop these concepts.

Children are walking away from class-

room teaching into coaching centres, often with parental support. A child in senior and high school needs to be counselled to prevent him or her from succumbing to peer pressure. This is a mandate for both parents and schools. If coaching centres are going to be the foundation of these years, then the youth of today will become directionless.

We can't measure mental health only by the number of suicides. There are many acute and chronic conditions which are unseen. Children suffer from anxiety and are unable to cope. The teenage brain is vulnerable, affecting long-term personality development. Young adults need a lot of downtime through sleep, social interaction, reflection, developing their identities and articulating their needs.

These aspects are not addressed in the coaching culture. In fact, coaching centres do not even give enough time to sleep. Children are not machines — they need communities that are nurturing, supportive, sometimes challenging but always caring.

The role of education, defines and redefines itself, particularly in our country, which is socially and economically diverse, where deprived sections are increasingly going to demand their place under the sun by asserting their own identities and aspirations. This feeds into a highly competitive environment, which has reduced learning to tuition shops, thus affecting the emotional stability and well-being of our children.

Learning is a process, where society reflects upon the needs and aspirations of its children. True education is value imparting and goal setting. If the child finds that the id-

iom he speaks is at variance with the idiom of society, he faces a dilemma. Children are natural actors. They instinctively use pretend play in order to make sense of the world. They imitate words and actions, observe and respond to the environment, create situations and assume roles. They interact with peers and arrange space and objects to bring their stories to life. They direct one another to respond to each other's dramas. They observe and internalise the needs of the society around them through which a world of false expectations is created, which leads to stress.

We need to engage, discuss, clarify, and care for the aspirations of our young. As a country, we need a shared vision, where well-being is the goal of education and co-agency is a guiding light.

Students go to school to become purposeful, reflective, and responsible. Agency helps children to act independently and make their own choices. For life to work, our young will need to innovate, be responsible and sensitive, become creators of products, services and models for the future, alert to the claims that others make on them and open to the deepest emotions.

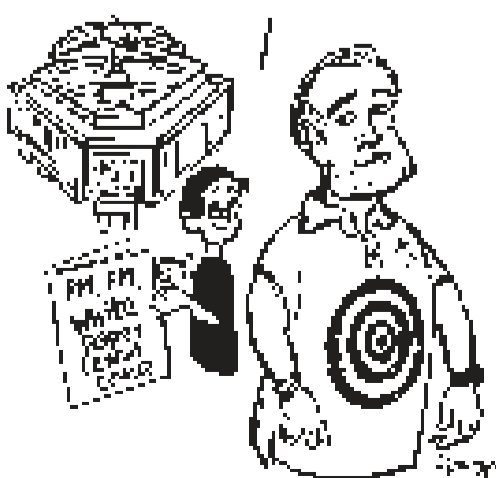
The obsession with coaching will never be able to validate and strengthen new ideas, approaches and research, required for human flourishing. Prioritising these is the need of the hour.

The writer is chairperson and executive director, Education, Innovations and Training, DLF Schools and Scholarship Programmes

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY

Family unity is the foundation of a nation.
- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



FEBRUARY 12, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

ANDROPOV'S FUNERAL

THE FUNERAL OF Soviet President, Yuri Andropov, will be held at noon in Moscow's Red Square, the organising commission announced. Andropov, 69, who died of cardiovascular insufficiency and respiratory arrest, will be buried with full state and party honours amidst Communist greats behind the Lenin Mausoleum. The Soviets have declared a four-day mourning. The body of Andropov was placed in the Hall of Columns for mourners to bid him farewell.

INSAT-1B DEDICATION

THE MULTI-PURPOSE INSAT-1B satellite took

the four corners of India in its embrace as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi dedicated it to the nation at Hassan in Karnataka. At a function held simultaneously at five centres, Mrs Gandhi, her ministerial colleagues and eminent scientists explained through Doordarshan how the satellite is being used for communication, meteorology and radio and television. She dedicated the satellite to "peace and service of the people".

P C SETHI'S LETTER

AKALI DAL PRESIDENT Harchand Singh Longowal received a letter from P C Sethi, Union Home Minister, inviting the Akali Dal to hold tripartite talks for solving the Punjab

problem. Immediately after getting the invitation, Longowal sent word to the SGPC president Gurcharan Singh Tohra and the former Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, for discussions on the proposed tripartite talks.

MAQBOOL BUTT HANGED

MAQBOOL BUTT, 50, a Pakistani national and founder of the Kashmir Liberation Front, was hanged in Tihar jail at 7:30 am, more than 15 years after he was sentenced to death for murder. The terrorist was buried inside the jail in a spot adjoining the *phansi kothi* (death row) as the authorities said, there was no one to claim the body.

The intrusive state

By formalising what had hitherto been in the realm of informal relationships between consenting adults, Uttarakhand UCC raises constitutional concerns of privacy and personal liberty



FLAVIA AGNES

THE STATE OF Uttarakhand has attained the hallowed position of being the first state to enact a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) under Article 44 of the Constitution. The UCC would apply uniformly to people across religions, not including tribal populations. The criticism against it is that there has not been sufficient discussion among communities or even in the state legislature. While many of its provisions are controversial, an issue that has raised much public debate is the provision for mandatory registration of live-in relationships. The Act has entered a totally new terrain by introducing provisions of formalising what had hitherto been in the realm of informal sexual relationships between consenting adults and raises constitutional concerns of privacy and personal liberty.

The Code requires the partners to notify the registrar within a month of entering into a live-in relationship and also while terminating it.

One fails to understand the purpose for which the provisions of registering a live-in relationship have been included in the UCC drafted by an expert committee which was headed by Justice (ret'd) Ranjana Desai of the Supreme Court. This defeats the very purpose of a live-in relationship as it renders it on par with a formal marriage, with conditions for entering into a relationship similar to a marriage contract — monogamy, prohibited degrees of relationships, etc. Also, as is the case in marriage (and divorce), one has to register the contract with the registrar at the time of entering into a relationship and also at the time of exiting from it. Non-registration has been rendered a criminal offence with a fine of Rs 10,000 and/or imprisonment of three months. In case of failure to produce a certificate of live-in relationship, a term of six months is prescribed on conviction and/or fine of Rs 25,000. These stipulations transform the entire relationship from an informal one into one governed by a draconian and rigid criminal law. The entire purpose seems to be to dissuade young couples from entering into such relationships and control their sexuality, and raises questions about individual privacy and liberty.

The Code defines this heterosexual relationship as a "relationship between a man and a woman" who "cohabit in a shared household through a relationship in the nature of marriage, provided that such relations are not prohibited."

It is reported that when asked about these provisions, an official in the state government claimed that "concerns over heinous crimes among live-in couples" was the key imperative behind this provision. He further stated: "When the expert committee went to remote areas in Uttarakhand for public consultation, incidents (of live-in crimes) were fresh in the minds of the people. During public consultation, parents and the elderly insisted that there must be something in law to protect young girls. While personal freedom is important, protection of youngsters is also important. The committee found a way to ensure that."

But young adults may not want this kind of state protection which takes away their



CR Sasikumar

freedom to not choose marriage but to stay in a consensual relationship without the intrusion of the state apparatus into their private life. This type of protectionist approach is parochial and patriarchal, as it intrudes into the domain of privacy which is recognised as a fundamental right in the *Puttaswamy* ruling.

The Code provides for maintenance for a woman "deserted" by her partner, similar to a married woman. Section 388 states: "If a woman gets deserted by her live-in partner, she shall be entitled to claim maintenance from her live-in partner, for which she may approach the competent Court having jurisdiction over the place where they last cohabited."

These relationships are already protected under the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 where they are termed as "domestic relationships". When women in relationships "in the nature of marriage" complain of domestic violence, they are entitled to claim maintenance from their partners.

The Code explicitly stipulates that a child born in a live-in relationship is a legitimate child. This is the prevailing legal position but under this UCC, it is codified as law.

The proposed law will apply to those living in Uttarakhand as well as residents of Uttarakhand living elsewhere in India. Section 378 of the Code requires submission of a statement by those in a live-in relation-

ship. "It shall be obligatory for partners to live-in relationship within the state, whether they are resident(s) of Uttarakhand or not, to submit a statement of live-in relationship under sub-section 1 of section 381 to the registrar within whose jurisdiction they are living," it further states. "Any resident(s) of Uttarakhand staying in a live-in relationship outside the territory of the state, may submit a statement of live-in relationship under sub section 1 of section 381 to the registrar within whose jurisdiction such resident ordinarily resides," it adds.

The most draconian part of this entire provision is that the registrar, with powers similar to those granted to the magistrate in the anti-conversion legislation, can conduct a "summary inquiry", summoning the live-in partners or "any other persons" for verification. This has scope for misuse by family and society at large, besides infantilising adult women. The registrar is not a judicial officer unlike the magistrate and has no training in investigation. The registrar has to then forward the record to the police station concerned and, in case either partner is less than 21 years of age, inform the parents or guardians (ironically, a girl can marry at 18 without parental permission). With such stringent stipulations, the entire purpose of a live-in relationship is totally negated.

The writer is a women's rights lawyer

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As war grinds on... and hopes of a breakthrough fade into memory, it is hardly surprising that grumbling increases, scrutiny of Kyiv's decisions grows more marked, and politicians and oligarchs look to their own interests again. Yet people are still anxious not to be exploited by Russia's propaganda mill." — THE GUARDIAN

Facing the future

Interim budget reflects political confidence to address economic challenges



SUSHIL KUMAR MODI

MORE THAN a decade ago, the world of global high finance was agog with monikers and acronyms such as the Fragile Five and PIIGS. If the latter was about the massive debt crisis faced by some European countries, the other comprised an eclectic mix of emerging market economies that had become too dependent on unreliable foreign investments to finance their growth ambitions. Amongst these was India, then under the stewardship of a pioneering economist as prime minister and an intellectual financial minister.

The journey from this state of gloom and economic stasis to the only "bright spot" in the world can without a doubt be attributed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team. As we head into the general elections in the next few months, the handling of the economy is the brightest star in the PM's report card. This economic context and political confidence reflected in the interim budget.

Against the expectations of a populist budget, the government stayed true to its mission of keeping India's long-term benefits at the heart and has not been swayed by short-term electoral gains that are often achieved with giveaways. It has strengthened the foundations on which the path to Viksit Bharat will rest.

The last 10 years have seen structural changes necessary to achieve sustainable economic growth. Among them is the focus on creating infrastructure — hard, social and digital. This has continued in the latest budget. The expenditure on infrastructure is proposed to be enhanced by another 11.11 per cent resulting in Rs 11.11 lakh crore, a tripling of the outlay in the last four years.

This time the emphasis is on railways. Economic railway corridors for port connectivity, high traffic density and energy, minerals and cement will improve logistics, reduce costs and improve passenger train operations. Upgrading of as many as 40,000 regular rail bogies to Vande Bharat standards will enhance passenger safety and convenience. There are provisions for buying new engines, laying new tracks and doubling existing ones.

To support the states in their capital expenditure, the scheme of 50-year interest-free loans to states will continue and it will have an outlay of Rs 1.3 lakh crore. Another Rs 75,000 crore, as a 50-year interest-free loan, has been proposed to support milestone-linked reforms by state governments.

The plan to enable rooftop solarisation of 1 crore households will further India's sustainability goals and offer common Indians free electricity up to 300 units. This is without being fiscally profligate. Additionally, excess solar power generated can be sold back to the grid leading to monetary gains. This is estimated to lead to savings of Rs 15,000 to Rs 18,000 per annum for every household.

While India has made remarkable strides under the Make in India programme and manufacturing activity has significantly grown in the last few years, to sustain it, India needs to build a robust innovation and research ecosystem. As a follow-up to the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023, the government has announced a corpus of Rs 1.5 lakh crore with a 50-year interest-free loan. The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing to encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains.

The government's focus on women has been further extended. Now ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers and helpers, numbering about 35 lakh, will benefit from healthcare coverage under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. A campaign to cover young girls with the cervical cancer vaccine will be an important preventive healthcare measure. Self Help Groups (SHGs) run by women are transforming our rural socio-economic landscape with empowerment and self-reliance. While nearly one crore women have become Lakhpati Didis, the government plans to enhance its target to make three crore Lakhpati Didis.

The government's "housing for all" programme addresses the needs of the poor in a big way. Under the rural programme, an additional two crore houses will be built in the next five years. It now plans to launch a scheme to help deserving sections of the middle class "living in rented houses, or slums, or chawls and unauthorised colonies" to buy or build their own houses.

While the government has not introduced any new taxes it has, in line with its vision to improve ease of living and improve taxpayer services, decided to withdraw outstanding direct tax demands up to Rs 25,000 for the period up to the financial year 2009-10 and up to Rs 10,000 for financial years 2010-11 to 2014-15. This is expected to benefit about a crore tax-payers.

The challenges of over a decade ago are now a distant nightmare — this has been possible only because of a sustained focus on the development of the country while keeping in mind every marginalised section of the society. As the PM often says, the country's progress coincides with the progress of the poor, women, youth and farmers.

Now is the time to pursue the goal of Viksit Bharat with all the vigour at the command of the nation.

The writer is Rajya Sabha MP and former deputy chief minister of Bihar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A LESS SHINY RATNA

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A political ratna' (IE, February 10). Even if the prime minister and president have the sole authority to name Bharat Ratna awardees, they must do so objectively. The days when national sentiments strongly supported the choice of recipients of the award seem long over now. The recent back-to-back conferment of the medal on a few popular figures of a bygone era reveals underlying political motives just as general elections are approaching. Following the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the BJP is now firing every cylinder to accomplish PM Modi's lofty target of 400 Lok Sabha seats for the NDA. The announcement of the Bharat Ratna on long-deceased persons may have been a masterstroke in the eyes of his followers, but it has certainly diminished the dignity of the award.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

RAO'S WISDOM

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Bharat Ratna PV Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh, M S Swaminathan' (IE, February 10). The award to the ninth prime minister of India comes too late. One wishes the award had been conferred upon him in 2014 when the BJP government came to power. I remember the radio broadcast by PM Rao in 1991 which he concluded saying, "Hum yashasvi hongee" (We will acquire fame). True to his word, he kept his trust with fame when he saved the Indian economy, which was teetering on the brink of a collapse. When the BJP criticised his policies in Parliament, he silenced them with the Sanskrit shloka which says that the wise should save half when all is in danger of being drowned. It requires uncommon courage and wisdom to think out of the box and take along with you the critics in your own party and in the Opposition. Rao displayed this courage and wisdom.

Narendra Dani, Lucknow

MORAL POLICING

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Let them live' (IE, February 10). Religious communities are free to practise their faith in their own ways in India. How, then, can they be brought under the Uniform Civil Code? The Uttarakhand Assembly has passed the UCC Bill, which may serve as a template for other BJP-run states to enact similar legislation ahead of the Lok Sabha elections this year. A UCC is expected to apply to all people and communities in the country. But exemption of tribal communities from its scope has given rise to the charge that the UCC may be specifically targeted against the minorities. Further, the government should not regulate live-in relationships, as it seems like a veiled attempt at moral policing.

SS Paul, Nadiya

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Connect, disconnect' (IE, February 9). The Closing Loopholes Bill passed in the Australian Parliament has the potential to create a favourable transformation in the workplace atmosphere. Whether it is a gig worker or an employee in the unorganised sector, everyone deserves the right to have personal time and strictly adhere to the designated working hours. It is unethical to expect employees to be available for emails and calls during their leisure time. Additionally, providing job security to workers can serve as a motivating factor that may enhance workforce productivity.

Kamia Namitha, Bengaluru

Securing the sea lanes

Without an Indian carrier force, we could be overwhelmed in home waters



RAJA MENON

IT REQUIRES 30 years to build a Navy, said a famous Royal Navy Admiral during World War II, and added that it requires 300 years to build a tradition. We are not far from India's independence centenary. The country will also be the world's third richest nation in terms of GDP. What kind of armed forces will India need in 2047? Certainly not the force structure of today conceived two or three decades ago, in the closing years of the 20th century. The Defence Acquisitions Council has approved, in principle, the need for a third aircraft carrier. How large should the carrier be and what will be its role?

Even as we write this, the vital sea lanes of the country are in peril. Shipping companies are reluctant to use the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Insurance rates for cargo have skyrocketed, making both imports and exports costlier, owing to the indiscriminate attacks on merchant shipping by the Houthis operating from Yemen. The safety of sea lanes is a general public good, and yet only the US and the UK have retaliated against the Houthis. India, after which the ocean on which all this occurring is named, is in a defensive posture with naval ships merely tasked with anti-piracy patrols. This will hardly dissuade the Houthis, much less punish them for interfering with the general world order. In the years to come, the possibilities of having to fight and win a

naval battle will gradually recede. Our two existing aircraft carriers are essentially sea control ships, built to win naval battles by conferring air dominance over the ocean. Only the US, and increasingly the Chinese, have aircraft carriers that can project power and influence political decisions ashore by operating near troublesome shores.

Today, we have the chance to build, buy or acquire a true aircraft carrier, capable of operating 70 to 80 strike aircraft or five squadrons. When a carrier of this nature is present off the shores of a country, decision-makers in the capital are constrained in their freedom to decide what options are open to them. A classic instance of this strategy is the presence of the American carrier USS Gerald Ford off Lebanon, while the Israelis were attacking Gaza. The US, without firing a shot, kept Hezbollah from interfering and at the same time deterred Tehran, at whose bidding the Hezbollah operate.

New Delhi was aware that what the Houthis were doing damaged the national vital interests of India and its maritime trade. New Delhi was also aware that the Houthis would not dare take such a major step without the blessing of the Ayatollahs in Tehran. India's External Affairs Minister quite rightly made a courageous and bold journey to discuss matters with Teheran. There, he stressed

the cooperative enterprises between Iran and India and mentioned the aggression by the Houthis. Now consider how much more effective the EAM's trip to Tehran would have been if simultaneously, a large Indian aircraft carrier was operating off Aden. That would have been a classic instance of the use of navies as instruments of state policy — mainly foreign policy.

In 2047, as the world's third most powerful nation, New Delhi will be expected to contribute to the maintenance of world order and the public good, and not merely be a consumer of the public good. This overarching formula applies to all three armed forces. No longer will they be able to cocoon themselves in a timid defensive posture, concerned only with territorial integrity. In fact, for the world's third most powerful nation, to say that they are obsessed with territorial invasion would be laughable.

There are deep issues here for the Army and Air Force. In 2047, India's GDP would be in the region of \$ 30 trillion. The defence budget of that at 2 per cent would be approximately \$600 billion or roughly what the US defence budget is today. The Army's share of that amount at the present 60 per cent would be \$360 billion. Would anyone contend that the major portion of \$360 billion is spent on keeping 6,00,000 soldiers guarding the

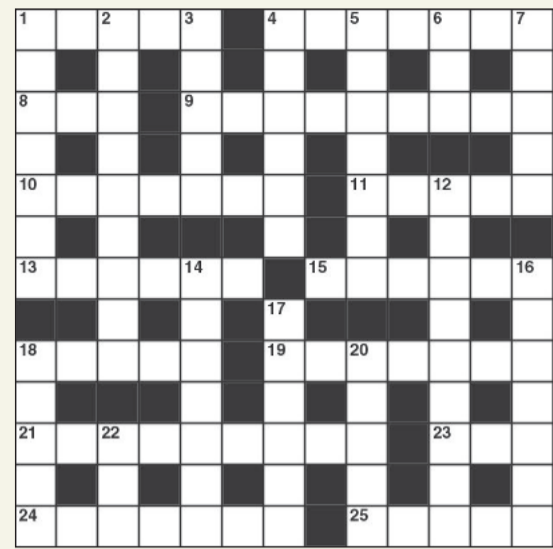
Himalayan heights? Surely the Indian army cannot be kept tied down on the border by an incompetent political class unable to come to a border settlement with China?

There are similar questions for the Air Force and Navy. Will the Air Force with a budget of \$150 billion continue to issue a doctrine that speaks of prioritising territorial air defence? Will the Navy be kept stunted by limiting it to 40,000-tonne aircraft carriers? The CDS should be tasked with some kind of forward planning. The world's third most powerful nation will be a regional power guaranteeing the safety of small nations in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. A beginning can be made by permitting the Indian Navy a true power projection aircraft carrier of about 80,000 tonnes.

The PLA Navy has just commissioned its third carrier of 80,000 tonnes with three electro-magnetic catapults. No doubt there will be more in the pipeline. Beijing is angling for a direct land route to the Bay of Bengal through Myanmar, taking advantage of the insurgency there, in which case we will lose our Malacca advantage. Without an Indian carrier force, we may well be overwhelmed in our home waters.

Menon, a former rear admiral in the navy, is the author of A Nuclear Strategy for India

CROSSWORD 5285



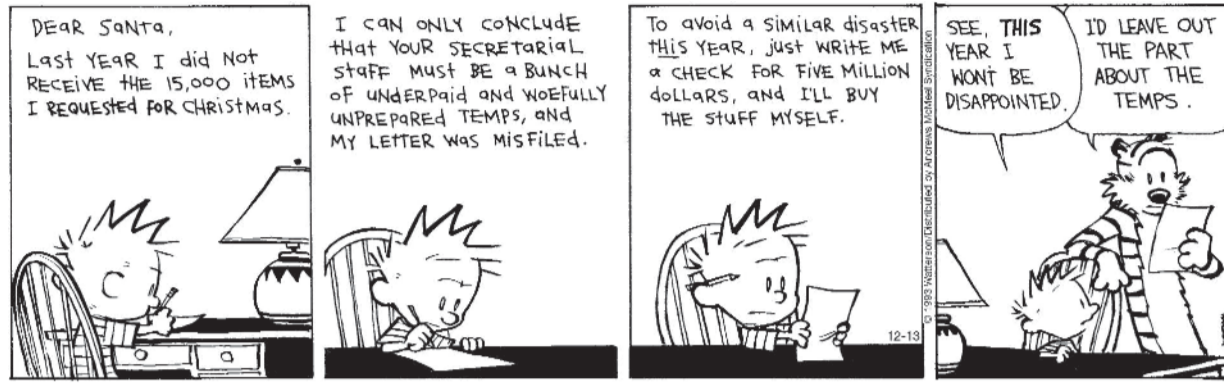
- ACROSS**
- Progress made in one month (5)
 - They're used for cleaning badly rusted bearing (7)
 - Fast runner down mountains (3)
 - Temple too elaborate as a clan symbol (5,4)
 - Free from sailor's love entanglement (7)
 - One who draws a London landmark (5)
 - Takes out of religious work (6)
 - Number after a new atom bomb explosive (6)
 - Creep around in a type of rubber sole (5)
 - It's an accomplishment with her light weight (7)
 - Barely countenanced (9)
 - A Scot's surprised expression (3)
 - A hundred cheers perhaps or one cry of terror (7)
 - They take their turns at sea (5)
- DOWN**
- A communication you'll understand when you get it (7)
 - Restore control to the country (9)
 - We are kept away from home in it (5)
 - Ill-suited for work (6)
 - Tommy's quiet; possibly a sign of illness (7)
 - Common pride in some Gothic architecture (3)
 - Box holding Eastern weapon (5)
 - Guard what one says, it's a good maxim (9)
 - It really goes if you put your foot down (7)
 - Charles is out in the forest (7)
 - He's far out once more (6)
 - They have square faces (5)
 - Like a receiver of certain property (5)
 - Inspired piece of music (3)

Solutions Crossword 5284 Across: 1 Contingent, 8 Preen, 9 Snippet, 10 Started, 11 Uncle, 12 Policy, 14 Reward, 17 Nehru, 19 Refrain, 21 Nonplus, 22 Arise, 23 Distressed
Down: 2 Overall, 3 Tenet, 4 No-side, 5 Epicure, 6 Topic, 7 Attendance, 8 Postponing, 13 Couples, 15 Avarice, 16 Eraser, 18 Honed, 20 Flags

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given 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 quip.

Painting is a source of endless pleasure, but also of _____ - Balthus (5,7)

BSAAE IITNTU
EOIRS ASYGGH

Answer: Painting is a source of endless pleasure, but also of **endless pleasure** - Balthus (5,7)

Difficulty Level 2s

SUDOKU 5470
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.

9			4	5	8			1
		3						5
4	7			3				
		6		1	9			
6	4							3
		2	3	4				
				1			7	4
	5					3		
6			8	9	7			5

Difficulty Level

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5469

5	4	3	2	1	9	7	8	6
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8	3	1	9	6	5	2	7	4
2	9	6	8	7	4	5	1	3
4	7	5	3	2	1	6	9	8

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AMIR Broiler, Small: Rs. 123/-, Big: Rs. 123/- Contact: Phone: +91-8828895000 / 8080432388 / 022-25251901 / 022-23860517 0070884942-1

FRESH Chicken Trading Big Birds 103/- kg., Small Birds 110/- kg. Turbhe Naka, Navi Mumbai. Mobile: 9769468897. 0070878216-1

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MAHARASHTRA FILM, STAGE & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.
(A Government of Maharashtra Undertaking)
Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari, Goregaon (E), Mumbai - 400 065.

E-TENDER NOTICE No. 16 of 2023-2024
Corporation invites online tender for Repair work for 6 nos. of toilets and one new construction of toilet at Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari Goregaon East Mumbai.

Cost of Tender Document Rs. 11,800/- including GST (Rupees Eleven Thousand Eight Hundred Only)

Detail Tender documents are available on website: <https://mahatenders.gov.in> from dt. 12.02.2024 to 26.02.2024 till 5:30 p.m. Bid Opening will be on 28.02.2024 at 4:00 p.m. For further information please call on (022) 28497540/524 (Mob. No.: 8369966168/ 9869164517) on all working days. Sd/- Managing Director MFSCDCL

विभागीय कार्यालय, वसई
वसई, जि. ठाणे, पिन ४०१२०१.

सर्व. बांधकाम विभाग, प्रभाग समिती आय, वसई जाहीर सविस्तर ई-निविदा सूचना

वसई-विरार शहर महानगरपालिका कार्यक्षेत्रातील प्रभाग समिती आय वसई अंतर्गत खालील उल्लेखित कामांचे कोरे निविदा फॉर्म (<https://mahatenders.gov.in>) या अधिकृत संकेतस्थळावर दि. १२.०२.२०२४ पासून उपलब्ध होणार आहे. ई-टेंडरिंगवाचन अधिक माहितीसाठी ई-निविदा कक्ष, वसई विरार शहर महानगरपालिका, प्रभाग समिती आय वसई येथे संपर्क साधावा.

- प्रभाग समिती "आय" कार्यक्षेत्रातील वॉर्ड क्र. १०८ मधील जीवनवाढी क्रॉस ते अशोक कोलासी यांच्या घरापर्यंत रस्त्याचे डांबरीकरण करणे.
- प्रभाग समिती "आय" कार्यक्षेत्रातील वॉर्ड क्र. १०९ मधील किरवली येथील राजवाडा व होळे नाका येथे आर. सी. सी. क्रॉसिंग बांधणे.
- प्रभाग समिती "आय" कार्यक्षेत्रातील वॉर्ड क्र. ११० मधील जानकी टर्कीजवळ वसेच दत्ताराम नगरी प्रभुआळी येथील गटारवाढी दुरुस्ती करणे.

जा. क्र.: वसई/बांध/२०२३/२०२४
दिनांक: ०९.०२.२०२४
Please Visit our official web-site (<https://mahatenders.gov.in>)

सही- (पंकज पाटील) उप-आयुक्त वसई विरार शहर महानगरपालिका प्रभाग समिती आय

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LIMITED
(A Government of India Undertaking)

OPEN E-TENDER (TWO PACKET SYSTEM) INVITATION NOTICE
Name of Work: Contract for deployment of Manpower for Electrical Projects as and when required basis in all over India. **Notice No: KR/CO/EL/MANPOWER/17/20/23, Dated: 12.02.2024. Completion Period: 24 (Twenty Four) Months. Estimated Cost: Rs. 21,72,55,893/- including GST. Bid Security: Rs. 12,36,300/-.** Last Date & Time for Online Submission of Tender: 04.03.2024 up to 15:00 Hrs. Opening of Tender: On 04.03.2024 at 15:30 Hrs. Amendments/ Corrigendum if any, would be uploaded on IREPS website only. **Submission of Tender Documents:** Through IREPS. Manual Tender Documents shall not be accepted.

Bank of India
Head Office: Domestic Subsidiaries Management Division, 7th Floor, Star House, C-5, 'G' Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai-400051. E-mail Headoffice.SDM@bankofindia.co.in

Request for Proposal (RFP) for Empanelment of Investment Banker(s) / Merchant Banker(s) for Advising and Managing the Process of Disinvestment of Bank of India's Non-core Assets / Strategic Investments.

Last Date for submission of Bids 01.03.2024 by 4:00 p.m. Details available from 10.02.2024 on the Bank's corporate website www.bankofindia.co.in under "Tender" Section.

Telangana State Medical Services & Infrastructure Development Corporation, Director of Health Campus, Sultan Bazar, Hyderabad - 95, Telangana State
(An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Organization)

- Tender Notice No.3/2023/DIG/TMSIDC, Dt.09.02.2024
- Tender Notice No.5/2023/EQU/TMSIDC, Dt.09.02.2024
- Tender Notice No.14/2023/Medicine/MW/TMSIDC, Dt. 09.02.2024
- Tender Notice No.15/2023/Surgical/MW/TMSIDC, Dt.09.02.2024

Above mentioned tenders are invited through e-procurement platform (online) for Procurement, supply of following under Rate contract for a period of Two Years:-
T.No.3:- Diagnostic Equipment and Kits & Reagents,
T.No.5:- Equipments
T.No.14:- Medicines,
T.No.15:- Materials & Supplies (Surgical) and Any other items related to Covid-19, Managing Director, TMSIDC reserves the right to cancel the tender at any time without assigning any reason. For complete details, please visit Web site: <https://tender.telangana.gov.in> from 12.2.2024 onwards. Sd/- Managing Director
DIPR No: 926-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2023-24

CIDCO WE MAKE CITIES

NOTICE INVITING BID
Development of land in Sector-29 (Part-I-A) at Pushpak Node, Navi Mumbai

CIDCO of Maharashtra Limited through the process of e-tendering invites "ON LINE" Item Rate Bids from Quarry / Crusher Owners / Contractors from the experienced potential bidders fulfilling the mandatory eligibility criteria, who have completed work of similar nature like extraction of rock by controlled blasting or wedging & chiselling or by line drilling for the work mentioned below:

- Name of Work: Development of land in Sector-29 (Part-I-A) at Pushpak Node, Navi Mumbai 2. C. A. NO.: 11/CIDCO/EE(AP-II)/2023.24
- Quantity of rock to be extracted from designated area: 14,27,502.73 M.T.
- Contractor's offer: Contractor has to quote his premium for the extraction of rock / earth being contractor's property.
- E.M.D.: ₹18,25,000.00
- Completion Period: 365 (Three Hundred Sixty Five) Days (including Monsoon)
- Tender Processing Fee: ₹29,500.00 including 18% GST. (Non-Refundable)

Bid Document along with bidding programme will be available on the website mahatenders.gov.in from 13/02/2024 at 17.01 Hrs. **Superintending Engineer (Airport) CIDCO/PR/569/2023-24**

CIN - U99999 MH 1970 SGC-014574
www.cidco.maharashtra.gov.in

CIDCO WE MAKE CITIES

NOTICE INVITING BID
Development of land in Sector-27 at Pushpak Node, Navi Mumbai

CIDCO of Maharashtra Limited through the process of e-tendering invites "ON LINE" Item Rate Bids from Quarry / Crusher Owners / Contractors from the experienced potential bidders fulfilling the mandatory eligibility criteria, who have completed work of similar nature like extraction of rock by controlled blasting or wedging & chiselling or by line drilling for the work mentioned below:

- Name of Work: Development of land in Sector-27 at Pushpak Node, Navi Mumbai 2. C. A. NO.: 18/CIDCO/EE(AP-II)/2023.24
- Quantity of rock to be extracted from designated area: 12,79,719.47 M.T.
- Contractor's offer: Contractor has to quote his premium for the extraction of rock / earth being contractor's property.
- E.M.D.: ₹16,36,000.00
- Completion Period: 365 (Three Hundred Sixty Five) Days (including Monsoon)
- Tender Processing Fee: ₹29,500.00 including 18% GST. (Non-Refundable)

Bid Document along with bidding programme will be available on the website mahatenders.gov.in from 13/02/2024 at 17.01 Hrs. **Superintending Engineer (Airport) CIDCO/PR/569/2023-24**

CIN - U99999 MH 1970 SGC-014574
www.cidco.maharashtra.gov.in

DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
Mercury, planet of communication, is about to take a hand in your finances. The moment is fast coming when you should lay firm plans for your future prosperity so it's time to get the facts and figures straight.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
Current challenging planetary aspects may put your nose out of joint but, then, you're such a perfectionist that it doesn't take much to disturb your equilibrium. The Sun's passage through a challenging region of your chart shows the truth.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
There seems to be some sort of muddle, possibly triggered by the Moon's uncertain relationship to other significant planets. You may either postpone important engagements or, alternatively, approach them with considerably more determination than usual.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
You're heading for a pleasant romantic phase. Relations with children and younger family members are set to improve and cultural pursuits are likely to take up more of your time. You're still unwilling to show your feelings. Your secrecy could be the cause of occasional misunderstandings.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
You should keep your options open this week and do everything you can to bring underlying tensions into the fresh air. As a matter of interest, it does seem essential that you make it a priority to deal with financial issues.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
In spite of your open and chatty reputation you are about to enter a more secretive phase, one when peace, quiet and seclusion will be of increasing importance to your general well-being. But, just for now, you still need to indulge your creative or pleasurable instincts.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
You've got a long memory, a very long one indeed. In many ways you are still dealing with the legacy of the distant past. Yet, although it's inevitable that you should feel nostalgic for what has been, you would be advised to get on with planning the future.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
The odds may be stacked against you today. Yet do not despair, all is not lost. It may be time for one of those clever tactical retreats that results in your position being stronger than ever. Perhaps it's also the right moment to call somebody's bluff.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
There seems to be a great deal going on which is difficult, if not downright impossible, to explain. You may have to accept the fact that it may be another few days before a number of questions can be answered. Still, you've got the time, so be patient.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Even if you're an ambitious professional Aquarian, family and domestic affairs will assume a high priority. At work you'll find other people looking to you for security, irritating as it may be to feel that you're being depended upon by people who should know better.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
You should now be back on form and determined to alter the pattern of your life. Lunar aspects may be raising stress levels but they also offer you the opportunity to form new relationships and emphasise the neglected social dimension. Besides which, there are many steps you can take to reduce tension.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
There is not long to go before emotional secrets are brought into the open. It will be a great relief all round when what was once unspoken can be discussed in an atmosphere of happiness and harmony. Until then, make sure that your position is as secure as possible.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER
HAV BALJEET, SM* (POSTHUMOUS)
Our salutation to a brave and motivated soldier who made supreme sacrifice on 12 Feb 2019 while fighting with tourist in an encounter at Ratanpur, Pulwama (J & K), on this day today, THE ROYAL JATS' proudly remember him and his supreme sacrifice. The tale of your valor will still motivate all of us and the paltan is proud of you.
Colonel Bhisam Chauhan and all Ranks 2 MECH INF [1 JAT (LI)]

WESTERN RAILWAY-AHMEDABAD DIVISION
VARIOUS ENGINEERING WORKS
E-tender notice No. 37 of 2023-2024 dated 06.02.2024; (01) e-Tender No.: DRM-ADI-169-2023-24; Name of work- Structural improvement of 80 staff quarters, repairs / improvement toilets, leaky roofs & road of staff colony under the jurisdictions of Senior Divisional Engineer (West) Ahmedabad (Composite Tender); Approximate NIT Cost: ₹ 2,30,50,363.28; EMD Cost: ₹ 2,65,300.00; (02) e-Tender No.: DRM-ADI-170-2023-24; Name of work- Improvement of road, drainage & provision of sumps and OH tank of staff colony under the jurisdictions of Senior Divisional Engineer (West) Ahmedabad; Approximate NIT Cost: ₹ 2,17,73,410.48; EMD Cost: ₹ 2,58,900.00; Closing date & time of e-tender: Date 12.03.2024 at 15:00 hrs; Office Address: Sr. Divisional Engineer, (Coordination), Ahmedabad, DPM Office, Near Chanda Bridge, Opp. New Swadeshi Mill, Naroda Road, Amdapura, Ahmedabad - 382 345. Website for participating e-tender: www.ireps.gov.in

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM-1
Corrigendum has been issued for the following tender. Please visit website of West Central Railway <http://wcrp.gov.in>. S.M.: Corrigendum No. 1 Tender No.: WCRPT2023510 Description of Items: Manufacturing and Supplying of Switch Expansion Joints for use with 60E1/60kg U1C Rail Laid on PSC Sleepers along with Rails, Sleepers & all fittings/ fastenings and their connections etc. complete for Indian Railways (IR) System (Trial Item) Revised Date of Opening of Tender: 28.02.2024, 11:30 AM. For above Tender No. WCRPT2023510, corrigendum-1 revised date of opening has been uploaded on IREPS website: www.ireps.gov.in
Deputy Chief Engineer, Rail Track Supply WCR, Jabalpur
स्वच्छ भारत अभियान एक कदम स्वच्छता की ओर

भारत के शत्रु संपत्ति अभिरक्षक का कार्यालय
Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property for India
प्रथम तल, पूर्वी विंग, शिवाजी स्टेडियम, कनॉट प्लेस, नई दिल्ली-110001
First Floor, East Wing, Shivaji Stadium, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001

NOTICE FOR DISPOSAL OF 59 ENEMY PROPERTIES THROUGH E-AUCTION
The Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property for India (CEPI) is a Statutory Authority under the provisions of the Enemy Property Act, 1968. The Head Office is at Delhi with Branch Offices at Mumbai, Kolkata and Lucknow.
The O/o CEPI is undertaking E-Auction of 59 Enemy Properties located in Amroha, Ayodhya, Bijoor, Sitapur, Sultanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Budaun, Etah and Sonbhadra Districts of Uttar Pradesh. Details of properties and other conditions/details are available on <https://enemyproperty.mha.gov.in> <https://www.mstcindia.co.in/> Tender/EntryLot_Item_Details_AucId.aspx?ARID=420376
The details can be downloaded/viewed from above websites / by scanning QR Code. The E-Auction notice/inspection period is from 31.01.2024 till 20.02.2024. The E-Auction will take place on 21.02.2024 from 11.00 Hrs to 16.00 Hrs. All interested persons are advised to see Amendments/Changes in the Bid Document, if any, which will be uploaded on the website.

Date and Time of E-Auction 21.02.2024 11:00 Hrs. to 16:00 Hrs.
Custodian of Enemy Property for India

BHARATIYA RESERVE BANK NOTE MUDRAN (P) LIMITED
(Wholly owned subsidiary of Reserve Bank of India)
P.O.: BRNMPL, Salboni - 721132, Paschim Medinipur Dt., West Bengal.
Phone No.: 03227-280176 / 280317; Fax No.: 03227-280744 / 280222

OPEN TENDER ENQUIRY (OTE)/NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (NCB)
Bids are invited under Two-Part bidding system for the following e-Tenders through MISC Portal:-
1. SUPPLY OF AIR CARGO CHARTER SERVICES FOR TRANSPORTATION OF HIGHLY SENSITIVE SECURITY MATERIAL; MISC EVENT NO. BRNMPL/SALBONI TENDER/ MMD/29/23-24/ET45 [AIR CARGO CHARTER SERVICES]; BRNMPL/PRESS NO. 030/SAL/PUR/2023-24; [ESTIMATED COST - ₹65.08 LAKH]
2. DESIGN, SUPPLY, INSTALLATION AND TESTING OF 5 NOS. AIR HANDLING UNIT AT BRNMPL, SALBONI; MISC EVENT NO. BRNMPL/SALBONI PRESS/MMD/24/ 23-24/ET13 [AIR HANDLING UNIT]; BRNMPL TENDER NO. 019/SAL/MMD-MAINT/2023-24; [ESTIMATED COST - ₹75.50 LAKH]
3. RENOVATION OF FLOORING WORKS AT OLD AND NEW CISF BARRACKS AT BRNMPL, SALBONI; MISC EVENT NO. BRNMPL/SALBONI PRESS/MMD/30/ 23-24/ET46 [FLOORING WORKS AT CISF BARRACKS]; BRNMPL TENDER NO. 020/SAL/MMD-CIVIL/2023-24; [ESTIMATED COST - ₹72.00 LAKH]
Last date of tender submission - 15.03.2024 by 11:00 Hrs. For downloading tender documents and other details, kindly visit website www.mstccommerce.com. Tender details are also available at our website www.brnmpl.co.in. Further extension or amendments, if any, shall be uploaded on the above websites.
Senior General Manager

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

What Charan Singh did for farmers' welfare

Singh's land reform laws created a new socially and politically empowered middle peasantry, which saw its economic fortunes rise with the Green Revolution.



HARISH DAMODARAN

"THERE ARE officers in the Agriculture Department who cannot distinguish between a barley plant and a wheat plant and those in the [Irrigation] Department who do not know how many waterings and at what time a certain crop required". That was Chaudhary Charan Singh in a document dated March 21, 1947, titled 'Why 60% of Services Should Be Reserved for Sons of Cultivators'. It was the clearest articulation of his position on guaranteeing representation for the "sons or dependents of the actual tillers of the soil" in government jobs and seats in publicly funded educational institutions.

Singh was Union home minister in the Morarji Desai-headed Janata Party government that appointed the Backward Classes Commission under BP Mandal in January 1979. Its report led to the announcement of 27% reservations for OBC (other backward classes) communities, in addition to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST).

Town versus Village

Although he backed the setting up of the

Mandal Commission, Singh insisted that reservations for farmers had nothing to do with caste, which "has had its day" and "must be abolished". Except in regard to SC/STs, the caste of a candidate "should not be inquired into while seeking admission into an educational institution or public service".

For Singh, the principal line of division in Indian society was between cultivators and city-dwellers. The latter "lord it over the poor peasantry and... have little sympathy with the troubles of the agriculturalists". The town-bred non-agriculturalist "calls his poor countryman from the village a 'dehati', 'ganwar' or 'dahqani' in the same contemptuous tone in which a heaven-born European flings... 'native'... [at all] Indians without distinction". This was despite agriculture employing nearly 70% of India's workforce and generating 54% of its GDP in 1950-51.

Singh saw reservations as a means "to set right the principle on which privileges of entering government service are enjoyed by one class of town dwellers, businessmen, traders and profession followers..."

Singh was struck by a 1961 survey that showed only 11.5% of Indian Administrative Service officers had agricultural family backgrounds, while 45.8% had fathers who were government servants. He, therefore, not only proposed 60% reservations for farmers' children, but also ineligibility for government jobs to those whose parents had already benefited from public employment.

Reservations, Singh argued, would actu-

ally improve efficiency in government departments: The agriculturalist's son "by reason of the surroundings in which he is brought up, possesses strong nerves, an internal stability, a robustness of spirit and a capacity for administration... his hands and heart will not tremble in a crisis as those of a soft person from the city".

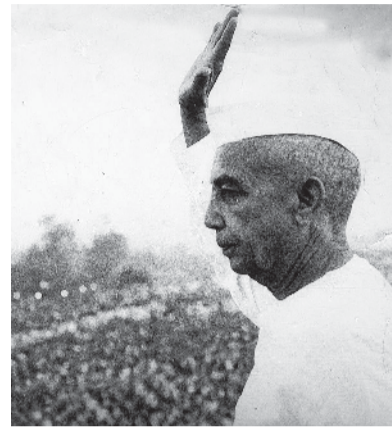
He would react differently to the farmer whose crop has been destroyed by hailstorm than the normal Tahsildar or Deputy Collector who "fixes a dozen dates for hearing a petty suit of [even Rs 100]".

Criticism, relevance

The 60% quota — Singh had proposed it first at 50% before the executive committee of the Uttar Pradesh (then United Provinces) Congress Legislature Party in April 1939 — was criticised not for being excessive as much as for covering only the "sons of cultivators". Landless labourers, constituting 28.1% of the total agricultural workforce in the 1951 Census, were excluded. Singh's response was he had no objection to including agricultural labourers, "but in that case I would put the percentage at 75 instead of 60".

Singh was clear his proposal wasn't about caste reservations but about representation to tillers of the soil. That would have, perhaps, appealed today to landowning peasant castes such as Jats, Marathas, Patidars and Kapus, who are demanding OBC status.

Singh was a Jat, but sought to speak for the entire class of cultivators, particularly the



Singh was a Jat, but sought to speak for the entire class of cultivators. Archive

middle peasantry drawn from the so-called MAJGAR complex of Muslim, Ahir (Yadav), Jat, Gujjar and Rajput. He endeared himself to farmers from all these castes.

Game-changing laws

There was a reason for that popularity: His pushing through three major legislations that transformed the agricultural economy of UP.

The first was the UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 (ZALR). It did away with zamindars who paid taxes to the government, from lands that they them-

selves owned and also from those cultivated by others, including as tenant farmers.

ZALR granted all verified tenant-cultivators permanent and heritable interest in their holdings. The zamindars ceased to be tax-farmers or intermediaries between the cultivator and the state, while having ownership rights only on the lands they could demonstrate were their own, self-cultivated holdings.

ZALR basically replaced the zamindari agrarian system with a new rural social order based on peasant-proprietors owning and cultivating family-sized farms. Its beneficiaries were the erstwhile hereditary tenant-cultivators, mainly from the Muslim, Yadav, Gujjar, Kurmi and other OBC castes.

The second was the UP Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1953. Singh wanted the peasant-proprietor to be not just independent, but also an efficient cultivator. The new law enabled every landowner to have his scattered plots consolidated by swapping parcels of equivalent quality with other farmers in the same village. The idea was to provide every owner-cultivator with a single tract of land making it a more productive holding.

By 1976-77, about 14.2 million hectares (mh) out of a targeted 14.6 mh area in UP had been "brought under consolidation operation", with actual "transfer and possession" taking place in over 11.5 mh. The scheme was implemented with relatively minimal corruption, which probably had to do with Singh taking personal interest in its success as revenue minister through the 1950s.

The last was the UP Imposition of Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1960. It established a cap of 40 acres of "fair quality land" per family of five members. Singh, in fact, envisaged both a minimum and maximum landholding size — his ideal range was 2.5-27.5 acres — which a cultivator and his family could viably farm with little outside labour. Consolidated holdings of a certain minimum size were necessary to also allow use of tractors and other productivity-enhancing farm machinery.

The legacy

Charan Singh's three transformative land reform laws helped in creating a socially and politically empowered middle peasantry. This new rural middle class saw its economic fortunes rise with the Green Revolution that entailed the introduction of high-yielding crop varieties, chemical fertilisers and labour-cum-time saving mechanisation technologies.

That roughly four-decade spell of economic prosperity from the early 1970s is practically history. Plateauing yields, crop prices not keeping pace with rising production costs, re-fragmentation of holdings and growing weather aberrations from climate change have made agriculture less rewarding than before. It has also eroded the socio-economic status of a once-proud peasant-proprietor class.

The takers for reservations in government jobs for farmers' children would arguably be more now than when Singh first mooted it.

LONGER VERSION
indianexpress.com/explained

EXPLAINED LAW

Haldwani violence: what is Nazool land



Police check documents of commuters during a curfew at Banbhoolpura area in Haldwani on Sunday. PTI

ASAD REHMAN
 LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 11

VIOLENCE ERUPTED in Uttarakhand's Haldwani district Thursday (February 8) after the administration conducted a demolition drive at the site of a mosque and madrasa, allegedly on Nazool land, killing five and injuring at least 12.

What is Nazool land? How is such land used? And was the land where the demolition drive took place, Nazool land?

What is this land?

Nazool land is owned by the government but most often not directly administered as state property. The state generally allots such land to any entity on lease for a fixed period, generally between 15 and 99 years.

In case the lease term is expiring, one can approach the authority to renew the lease by submitting a written application to the Revenue Department of the local development authority. The government is free to either renew the lease or cancel it — taking back the Nazool land.

In almost all major cities of India, Nazool land has been allotted to different entities for a variety of different purposes.

How did Nazool land emerge?

During British rule, kings and kingdoms which opposed the British frequently revolted against them, leading to several battles between them and the British Army. Upon defeating these kings in battle, the British would often take their land away from them.

After India got Independence, the British vacated these lands. But with kings and royals often lacking proper documentation to prove prior ownership, these lands were marked as Nazool land — to be owned by the respective state

governments.

How does the government use Nazool land?

The government generally uses Nazool land for public purposes like building schools, hospitals, Gram Panchayat buildings, etc. Several cities in India have also seen large tracts of land denoted as Nazool land used for housing societies, generally on lease.

How is Nazool land governed?

While several states have brought in government orders for the purpose of framing rules for Nazool land, the Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956 is the law mostly used for Nazool land adjudication.

Is the Uttarakhand land where the mosque and madrasa were located registered as Nazool land?

As per the Haldwani district administration, the property where the two structures are situated is registered as the Nagar Nigam's (Municipal Council's) Nazool land. The administration says that for the last 15-20 days, a demolition drive has been underway in connection with Nagar Nigam properties to free roads from traffic congestion.

"A notice, issued on January 30, requested the encroachment to be removed within three days or for ownership documents to be provided. On February 3, several locals visited the Nagar Nigam to discuss with our team. They submitted an application and requested time to appeal to the High Court, agreeing to abide by the court's decision," the DM said, insisting that the demolition took place after the court's go ahead.

However, Shakeel Ahmad, Councillor of Ward Number 31, where the incident took place, said that the locals had requested the administration to wait till the next date of hearing in the High Court on February 14.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

After Pakistan's fractured mandate



Supporters of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf block the Peshawar-Islamabad motorway, demanding free and fair election results, in Peshawar Sunday. Reuters

The key question for India: whom does New Delhi talk to

SHUBHAJIT ROY
 NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE JAILED Imran Khan scored a century without a bat, as independent candidates backed by his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), won a high number of seats in Pakistan's parliament, the National Assembly. Of the 101 independents elected, many are backed by PTI.

Despite being barred from contesting under its name and symbol (a cricket bat), PTI got more seats than the two main established parties that have the backing of the Pakistan Army. Pakistan Muslim League (N), led by three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, got 75 seats, while the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led by the Bhutto-Zardari family got 54 seats, according to the final tally released by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Independently, none of the three parties can prove a simple majority in the National Assembly when it is called in a few days.

Such an outcome poses a vexed question: whom does New Delhi talk to in Pakistan? It may be futile to engage with the civilian government. In realpolitik terms, this means the most effective person to talk to is Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir — who wields influence over the political actors.

A new government in Delhi in May will have to take a long and hard look at whether it should continue with the doctrine of indifference or reopen channels of communication with the GHQ in Rawalpindi.

So, what are the key takeaways?

With Imran's independents in the lead, what next?

YASHEE
 NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

WITH INDEPENDENTS backed by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) winning the highest number of seats in Pakistan, the election results — released after much delay amid accusations of rigging — have thrown up an unprecedented outcome.

How do numbers stack up in the National Assembly?

Pakistan's National Assembly consists of 336 seats. As many as 266 members are elected through direct voting, while 70 seats are reserved — 60 for women and 10 for non-Muslims. PML-N and PPP have run a coalition government before this, but even if they join hands this time, they won't reach the half-way mark.

The reserved seats present an added complication, as they are filled on the basis of each party's numerical strength in the Assembly, but this time, the highest number is that of independents.

What are the rules for independents?

Under Rule 92(6) of Pakistan's election regulations, once their win is announced, independent candidates have three days to join a political party. The independent candidate has to apply to the head of the political party, who then informs the Election Commission. The independents can also choose to band together.

How are reserved seats filled?

The reservation for women and non-Muslims flows from Article 51(2A) of Pakistan's Constitution. Political parties can fill these 70 seats in proportion to their win-

ning candidates. Among women, the 60 seats are divided as: 32 for Punjab, 14 for Sindh, 10 for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and four for Balochistan. The 10 non-Muslim candidates are not sub-divided among provinces.

"All political parties submit a list of their choice of candidates for reserved seats at the time of filing nominations, and this list undergoes the Election Commission's scrutiny. After the results, the party with the highest number of winning representatives will see the highest number of reserved candidates from their list get elected," explained Yaqoob Khan Bangash, Pakistani author and fellow, Harvard University's South Asia Institute.

If the PTI-backed independent candidates join any political party, they will get to submit a list now and fill the reserved seats based on their combined strength.

What will the independents do?

There's no clarity. PTI as of now is staging protests, alleging its actual tally is higher and the poll results have been rigged. It has also filed a number of petitions in court, alleging election malpractices. There's a possibility that some of the 101 winners will join hands with parties opposed to the PTI. However, this is likely to vary according to provinces — while in Punjab, such a crossover might be easier, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which PTI-backed candidates swept, such defection might not be forgiven by voters.

In the 1985 elections, no political party was permitted to participate, and thus every candidate, though with party allegiance and backing, had contested in his or her individual name. This time, while the PTI candidates fought as independents, others contested under the name and symbol of their parties.

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12 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

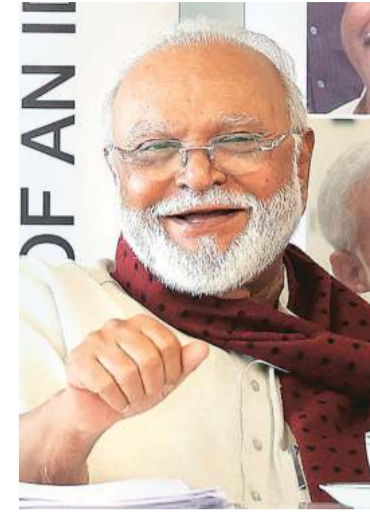
I raise my voice, wherever I think he (Eknath Shinde) is doing it wrong. All the documents pertaining to the court's judgements are on record, which showed how false certificates pertaining to Maratha reservation were issued by the state



WHY CHHAGAN BHUJBAL

Chhagan Bhujbal, senior leader of the Nationalist Congress Party, Minister of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection in the Maharashtra government, and one of the tallest OBC leaders, is on a mission to safeguard OBC reservation in the backdrop of the ongoing Maratha reservation agitation led by social activist Manoj

Jarange-Patil and CM Eknath Shinde-led state government's moves. Known for his pro-Mandal stance, which led him to quit the Shiv Sena in the early '90s, Bhujbal has maintained his identity as an OBC leader. In the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, a party primarily dominated by the Marathas, Bhujbal is aggressively taking on his own government



I am not bothered about my ministership or MLA chair. But take it from me, I'd be elected by the people with a thumping majority, for the fifth time, on the basis of the work I've done. Marathas would also vote for me as they want development

Alok Deshpande: The Election Commission of India has officially handed the NCP to your side led by Ajit Pawar. As a senior leader of the party, who worked with Sharad Pawar for decades, are you happy today?

It has been 30 years since I left Shiv Sena. People still ask me the reason. I am happy to say that I have not left the NCP. The party is with me. Nobody will ask me those questions now. Yes, I am happy. We got what we wanted.

Sandeep Singh: What are your thoughts on Sharad Pawar, with whom you had a long association?

I don't want to comment on that. We have already said why we shifted. All 54 MLAs had signed to shift and join the BJP government. It was not one person. That letter was shown to Pawar *saheb*. After that he resigned as party president. The idea was that he will resign and Supriya Sule will take over and all of us will be part of the government. All of a sudden, in three days, the decision was changed. If you did not want to do it, then why did you consider the signatures? But that's past now.

Alok Deshpande: NCP was known as a Maratha party but you never left your identity as an OBC leader.

I left Shiv Sena on the Mandal issue. It was not easy to leave the Sena at that time. There was a Sena leader in Thane named Khopkar, who was murdered on the suspicion of cross voting. There was a saying that if you left the Sena, you'd meet the same fate. I left at that time. Eventually, 18 others left with me. I could not roam freely then as there was fear of attacks. I was twice the Mayor of Mumbai along with being an MLA. All over Maharashtra, except in Mumbai, Nashik, Pune, all the district and *taluka*-level parties were formed by me for the Sena. I was a senior leader of the Sena and left it despite these conditions on the Mandal issue. In 1994, there was a meeting in Jalna of the Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad, which I had founded. There were over a lakh assembled, demanding implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. I was the Housing Minister with the Congress then and Sharad Pawarji was also present. Pawar *saheb* announced to implement the recommendations and to execute those within a month. I am grateful to him for that. Though it is sad that now that the reservations for OBCs are in trouble, nobody is talking. Pawar *saheb* should have said that it is wrong.

Shubhangi Khapre: Ajit Pawar projects himself as a Maratha leader while you are following the OBC line. Many are saying that Mr Fadnavis is behind this protest by the OBCs.

You know that I don't do *popatgiri* (puppetry) for anyone. Not even when I gave speeches with Balasaheb Thackeray at Shivaji Park. I always give my own speeches and make my own decisions. I am not that new nor small, that somebody will have to tell me what to do. If there has been anything fishy, then I am speaking about it.

Sandeep Singh: But is there no dilemma in your party?

See, Ajit Pawar is a Maratha by caste. I, myself, by caste, am an OBC. Some of them are Dalits, Muslims... but what does that mean? Ajit Pawar has not spoken against me. He didn't ask me to refrain from speaking on this issue. Whatever is coming in the papers, he reads. As a Maratha worker or a leader, if he wants to say something on their issues, he can say it.

Sandeep Singh: What is your party's stance on the same?

Every party has one stance. 'Will the Marathas vote go away from us? So whatever has to happen, let it happen. But our votes should be secure.' But they are not understanding that Marathas don't account for more than 16 to 20 per cent of the total vote share. Because 54 per cent vote is OBC. We say only 54 per cent, then 20 per cent is SC/ST and three per cent at least are Brahmins, so that takes the tally to 77 per cent. Then you take others such as Jains, among others. According to my study, Marathas are 16 per cent. But the political power, muscle power, money power, all of it rests with them. And now our (OBC) people are scared of them. They fear 'Will they take away my sugarcane?' They have sugar factories and then my sugarcane will dry up. 'They have the banks, they think 'will they not give me my money?' In politics, if one Banjara stands up, then another Dhangar may stand up against him and they may end up fighting. In the meantime, these united Marathas will watch and rule. But slowly, this is changing. We are organising rallies, explaining what is happening and telling them that because of reservation, some of your people have become doc-

'I don't care what happens to me. We'll create fear of losing OBC votes among leaders'

NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on being kept in the dark about the government's notification on Maratha reservation and why politicians are scared of speaking the truth to Marathas. This session was moderated by Alok Deshpande, Special Correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai



Chhagan Bhujbal, senior NCP Leader and Minister of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, in conversation with Alok Deshpande, Special Correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai. Amit Chakravarty

tors, engineers, and gone to Zila Parishad. And now, if this really big powerful group comes, then it's all over. We will get nothing. This is the fear.

We are not against Maratha reservation. When Prithviraj Chavan made an act, I supported it. Give it to them separately. Fadnavis made another act. I said don't push us. Do it for them, but do it separately and not make a backdoor entry. This is our grievance. You should fill the gaps or cure discrepancies as SC has asked you to and give a separate reservation.

The CM said that Manoj Jarange-Patil and others are saying that they are Kunbis and the old records during Nizam period are in Telangana, therefore the committee should be formed and scrutinise if the records are available. We said, in that case the reservation should be given if Kunbi records are found as they automatically become part of OBCs. Later they said only 5,000 such records were found. But the number kept on increasing to 13,000 and 15,000 in a span of two days. Then Jarange-Patil made a demand that all Marathas in Marathwada should be given Kunbi certificates. Then they demanded all Marathas be given Kunbi certificates. Then the three-judge committee went to several villages to decide modalities. Now they are saying 57 lakh records were found of which 30 lakh were old ones. Then they added the *Sage-soyare* (extended family) clause. It is affecting the OBCs. I am of the opinion that of the 10 per cent EWS quota, 8.5 per cent is availed by persons from the Maratha community. They are also part of the 40 per cent open category. Some of the Marathas have got Kunbi certificates by giving bribes. OBCs could not avail reservation through EWS. You are leaving the sea and want to enter the well where people from nearly 374 castes are seeking reservation. Marathas are not getting any special benefit but it is *satyanash* (endgame) for the OBCs

Omkar Gokhale: OBC Mahasangh President Babanrao Taywade said that the notification is not going to affect the OBCs.

There are 374 castes in OBCs and there are several leaders who will put forth their say. The other day some people said they are forming a party (for the OBCs). They think no loss is caused to OBCs. How is that possible? Once they get reservation, it will be difficult for us to file cases for each wrong certificate being awarded.

Omkar Gokhale: Was there was no consensus within the government?

Nobody asked us. Now there is a sub-

committee of Marathas under the leadership of minister Chandrakant Patil. I'm not a part of that committee. The first time they conveyed about decisions related to Kunbi certificates, it was in a gist and Justice (retired) Sandeep K Shinde Committee's report has not been given to us yet.

Vallabh Ozarkar: You've tendered your resignation from the Ministry. Why?

I resigned on November 16, 2023, even though no one had demanded my resignation. I made a conscious decision since I was going to address a rally in Ambad (in Jalna district) for OBCs and was going to put my views, maybe against the government decision. That is why I thought I should resign. While on my way to the rally, I received several calls from my party to not announce the same in public. In the Ambad rally, I said I do not bother about my ministership or MLA ship and I will fight for the OBCs. When I returned from the rally, CM and two Deputy CMs confronted me. Ajit Pawar said I have forwarded your resignation to the CM. He said you can talk about the OBCs but do not reveal that you have tendered your resignation. I agreed and didn't announce it. But when a ruling party MLA from the Shinde group commented that I should be kicked out of the ministry, I felt enough is enough. And I talked about my resignation.

Zeeshan Shaikh: In the '90s, Sharad Pawar was standing in your support during your rallies. Are you satisfied with the support that you are getting from the current party leadership?

There are several leaders who are not speaking. Elections are around the corner and everybody wants Maratha votes. Everybody is scared because of votes. But I want to tell them that those votes are not

more than 20 per cent, which are also divided in several parties. If you go to the villages, you will know something is very wrong about this.

Zeeshan Shaikh: There are talks that you will join the BJP.

As a leader I am connected with OBCs alone. And if something is coming against that, I will fight. I am not unhappy with my party. They have not asked me to stop.

Zeeshan Shaikh: Manoj Jarange-Patil hasn't received any backlash from the NCP against the kind of language used against you. Why?

Our whip Anil Patil, and spokesperson Amol Mitkari, have come out on record and said that he cannot speak like that.

Vallabh Ozarkar: Your allies also haven't supported you so far.

There are three parties that are part of the ruling alliance and each one of them require support from the Marathas.

Vallabh Ozarkar: Despite this, you still want to be in the government?

I have already given my resignation. Ask the Chief Minister to throw me out.

Mihir Vasavda: The current chief minister, Eknath Shinde, is at his position after several political developments. Does he have the authority on this subject?

Whether he has an authority or mandate to make decisions in concern with this matter, should be asked to him. I raise my voice wherever I think he is doing it wrong. All the documents pertaining to the court's judgements are on record, which showed how false certificates pertaining to Maratha

reservation were issued by the state.

Alok Deshpande: Many people have raised questions based on the legality of this ordinance. What's your opinion?

The notification at the end clearly said that it is applied not only to OBCs, but also to Scheduled Castes, de-notified tribes, nomadic tribes and special backward category. Secondly, all the reports submitted by various commissions' reports including Kakasaheb Kalelkar, BD Deshmukh, then BP Mandal Report, Mutatkar committee, and Khatri Committee have said that the Marathas are not backward. M G Gaikwad Commission approved but Supreme Court rejected. The word 'Sage-Soyare' has no mention in any religious or legal texts or any constitutional debates. How can government committees find out and decide the family tree, which this government is allowing? If the SC has said that the previous CMs belonging to the Maratha community did not include them in backward classes list, does it not mean that what is currently being done is wrong?

Alok Deshpande: If there are so many decisions by the courts, how is the government granting reservations, according to you?

The Chief Minister on January 25 said that he had taken the oath of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj that he will give Maratha reservation and now he has fulfilled the promise. How has he given the reservation when the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission is still working on Maratha reservation? The curative petition is before the Supreme Court. When the matter is before the Commission and Supreme Court how can anybody declare Maratha reservation? Also, if Maratha reservation is done, why is Jarange-Patil going on fast again.

Omkar Gokhale: Do you think Marathas have been misled?

I really don't know. Once you set the process of issuance of Kunbi certificates, to all Marathas, then anybody can procure the certificates misusing the lacuna and claim reservation under OBC.

Vijay Yadav: Are you going to court?

Yes definitely.

Sandeep Singh: How has your communication been with the CM, and the two Deputy CMs on this issue?

If they don't want to discuss, what can I do. I am putting across my views through public rallies and public forums.

Sandeep Singh: Will this be the biggest poll plank in Maharashtra?

It will certainly be an issue.

Shubhangi Khapre: Do you think the CM wanted to project himself as a leader of Marathas?

It is possible. Messiah of Marathas.

Zeeshan Shaikh: Congress has asked for 50 per cent reservation to be removed. Is that something that needs to be done?

Yes. I've been saying from the start about undertaking a caste census, and then it will be revealed how untrue are things that all the political parties feel. Especially that the Marathas are 60 per cent. Second, increase EWS by more 10 per cent. Before EWS, many agitations of Jat, Patidar, Kapu were going on. From the day EWS was announced, all those people turned silent.

Alok Deshpande: Do you see a national role as an OBC leader?

My only concern is to save the OBC quota first. What would I do with the national role?

Shubhangi Khapre: Do you think there was politics within the government? Did Eknath Shinde want to undermine Mr Fadnavis or Ajit Pawar?

What I can see, you can also see. I am going to rallies and openly saying things.

Sandeep Singh: You will become politically the most important person to consolidate these castes.

I don't care about what happens to me. I am only concerned about the OBCs. We will consolidate these castes and will create fear of losing OBC votes among leaders.

Mohamed Thaver: Do you fear any action for speaking out?

I am not scared of anything.

Shubhangi Khapre: Why do you think Devendra Fadnavis is not speaking on this issue?

He is kind of helpless. Maybe, he feels that he will be targeted for being a Brahmin. Also, there is an election ahead.

Zeeshan Shaikh: Do you fear backlash from Maratha voters?

I'm not bothered about my ministership or MLA chair. But take it from me, I would be elected with a thumping majority, for the fifth time, on the basis of my work. And Marathas would also vote for me as they want development.



-Immy.

There are several leaders who are not speaking. Elections are around the corner and everybody wants Maratha votes and is scared. But those votes are not more than 20 per cent, which are also divided in several parties

13 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH

4 HIGH VALUE FIRMS SEE RISE IN MCAP

FOUR OF the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 2.18 lakh crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) and State Bank of India (SBI) emerging as the biggest gainers. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, LIC and SBI were the gainers. **PTI**

'Don't see govt role (in enforcing tech laws) expanding... it will diminish'

IN THE next decade or so, India will be "significantly ahead" of China in semiconductor design, research and manufacturing, according to **RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR**, Minister of State for Electronics and IT. He also feels that the government will give way to a number of independent regulators and its role in enforcing technology laws will reduce. In an interview with **SOUAMYARENDRA BARIK**, he spoke about China's influence on the Indian tech ecosystem, the future of AI regulations and how the government plans to deal with misinformation ahead of this year's Lok Sabha election. Edited excerpts:

tent takedowns, the government's role will diminish. Either there will be independent regulators like the data protection board, or there will be the court of law. My own assessment is that competition issues will be dealt with over time by the competition commission. The issues of privacy, data protection will be dealt with by the data protection board. Then there will be harms that will be dealt with by laws and provisions under law, which will be adjudicated by the judicial system.

AI has become this big buzzword. The government has indicated that it largely views the technology favourably. But in the next decade or so, what do you think our regulatory approach towards AI should be?

AI existed 35 years ago. It is like the perfect storm has happened in the last five years, which is why we have this breakthrough of generative AI. You now have availability of GPUs, and the ability to scrape the internet and create trillions of parameters that you can use to train a model, which was never there before. AI, without any ambiguity and without overstating it, is the greatest invention in our lifetimes. It has tremendous power to transform the way we look at health, governance, education, security etc. But we also understand that if we don't put the guardrails in place, AI can also go off and explode into areas that will cause harm. That is why we need a global framework for AI that we are pushing for through the GPAL.

So far non-state actors did not have access to cutting edge hardware tech which gave governments an upper hand over them. But that could change with AI. One doesn't need to pass on a fighter plane to a terrorist anymore, but a simple algorithm could be weaponised...

There is commoditisation of electronics. The Houthis in the Middle East today are dealing with big navies with drones,



THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW
WITH **RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR**
MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND I.T.

if they violate the terms of use... In the future, platforms will be accountable for the conduct of their users. If a crime is being committed on their platform, companies will have to help law enforcement reach the user or face consequences themselves.

How do you see China's influence, or presence in India's tech space going ahead?

Given the policies of our government, I will safely bet with you that we will be significantly ahead of China in semiconductors, in design, research and manufacturing. I'm giving you a goal post, this will happen in the next 10 years. In the global value chain of electronics manufacturing, we were almost zero and absent a decade ago, we are at where we are today at around 8 per cent. We want to get to 20 per cent by about 2027-29. The consumption and demand for electronics is going up in double digits. While China today has 70 plus per cent of the \$1.5 trillion value chain for electronics, going ahead, the market will grow to \$2 trillion, of which China's share will come down to about 50 to 54 percent and that balance 20-25 percent would be hopefully divided amongst India, Vietnam and some other countries.

Internally, many hardware companies have expressed concerns about the predictability around their business with their suppliers

from China. They fear a discriminatory behaviour from the government towards such suppliers. How do you respond to those concerns?

We anticipate that as product manufacturing grows in India, for IT hardware, servers, smartphones, the natural consequence will be that the vendors, the supply chain will also look to start their capacities in India. Some of them will be Chinese. Do we think we are going to prohibit all Chinese companies? There is no policy to that account, as long as we make sure that these companies are open, transparent, and work under Indian law.

On semiconductors, we have had the Micron deal, but it has been relatively quiet since then. Is there any update?

I have an update, which is that on the back of the Micron plant, we have got two very exciting and credible companies. One of them is Tata, the second one is a name I can't really quote till I get their permission, but it is a big name in the foundry business. We also have a number of packaging plant proposals. After some of those missteps that we made in the early days with the Vedanta Foxconn proposal, we are at a place where India is developing as an investment destination for semiconductor manufacturing, packaging, research, design and talent.

We are heading towards this year's general election, which is when a lot of objectionable activity on social media platforms escalates. Are you equipped to deal with that?

The Election Commission is determined to make sure there is no intervention of any kind on social media in our democratic process. The rules today are very clear. It gives the appropriate authority, the powers to do the right thing in terms of prosecuting those who proliferate misinformation or fake information or anything that is detrimental to the electoral process. Certainly, before the elections, we will sensitise platforms.

MEITY TO PREPARE GUIDELINES SOON

Proposals for industry body rejected, Centre to regulate e-gaming

JATING GROVER
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE GOVERNMENT will act as a regulator for the online gaming sector rather than an industry-led self-regulatory organisation (SRO). The ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) will now prepare a framework for permitting and certifying online games which involve money, officials said.

Earlier, MeitY had proposed an SRO and asked the industry to submit proposals to this effect. However, officials said that the proposals received were heavily dominated by gaming companies and their industry associations, and therefore would not have been able to act as a neutral regulatory body.

As per IT rules, online real money games need to be approved by a regulatory body. Online games, which do not involve real money, do not require any regulatory nod.

The government had notified the online gaming rules on April 6, 2023 and had given three-months to the industry to come up with proposals for SROs. It had planned to notify three SROs.

"The SRO applications we are getting are too industry domi-

GOVT STEPS IN

■ Ministry had proposed an SRO, asked industry for proposals

■ Officials say the proposals were heavily dominated by gaming companies and their industry associations.

■ As per IT Rules, online real money games need to be approved by a regulatory body

nated. So we are rejecting them," Rajeev Chandrasekhar, minister of state for electronics and IT said. "We have said very clearly, we don't want SROs that will be controlled by industry. We wanted it to be representative of a wider base and we didn't receive any application like that," Chandrasekhar said, adding that in absence of SRO, by default the government continues to regulate the space.

Chandrasekhar, however, did not share further details on the framework the government is coming up with.

It was expected that apart from people with experience in online gaming, SROs will also in-

clude educationists, psychologists, individuals dealing with protection of child rights and information & communication technology experts.

Officials said that government analysed four proposals submitted by All India Gaming Federation (AIGF), Esports Players Welfare Association (EPWA), All India Gaming Regulator (AIGR) Foundation & from a consortium of the E-Gaming Federation (EGF) and the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports (FIFS). But, none of them met the stated requirements.

The government has recently set up a group of ministers to discuss the regulatory framework for the industry but it's likely that a clear regulatory structure will emerge only after the general elections. In December, companies such as Dream Sports, Games 24x7, as well as industry associations had sought clarity from the government on a code of conduct for the sector. This was related to actual implementation of notified rules, framework on responsible gaming and player protection, financial frauds, gaming certification, among other aspects. These aspects need to be defined by the regulator.

Among other things, the industry has sought a Sebi-like regulator for the sector. **FE**

While you managed to pass the data protection Act and made some changes to the IT Rules, there are concerns that in the last two years, we are seeing a greater degree of centralisation in the laws. The government seems to be exerting ever greater control over it. How do you respond to those concerns?

Having the government regulate the internet is a concern, but it is not based on the reality of what the government wants to do. We are trying to create a framework of laws that will ensure a balanced relationship between consumers and the platforms based on accountability, safety and trust. Any disputes arising between them will be adjudicated by either an independent regulator or the court system. The government does not want to be the arbiter of any such disputes. Unfortunately, we have been dragged into this for several years now because of Section 79 of the IT Act. For a long time, consumers have looked to the government to resolve disputes and when platforms behave like they are not accountable, because they have this free pass and immunity, it becomes the government of India's problem.

Going ahead, will the government's role in enforcing tech regulations increase?

I don't see the government's role in any way expanding. In fact, for some things, like for con-

Glare on Chinese firms unnerving smartphone parts suppliers: Xiaomi to govt

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

CHINA'S XIAOMI has told New Delhi that smartphone component suppliers are wary about setting up operations in India amid heavy scrutiny of Chinese companies by the government, according to a letter and a source with direct knowledge of the matter.

Xiaomi, which has the biggest share in India's smartphone market at 18%, also asks in the letter dated Feb. 6 that India consider offering manufacturing incentives and lowering import tariffs for certain smartphone components.

The Chinese company assembles smartphones in India with mostly local components and the rest imported from China and elsewhere. The letter is Xiaomi's response to a query from India's information technology ministry asking how New Delhi can further develop the country's component manufacturing sector.

In the letter, Xiaomi India President Muralikrishnan B. said India needed to work on "confidence building" measures to encourage component suppliers to setup operations locally.

ONGC Q3 profit declines 14% on lower oil prices

New Delhi: State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Sunday reported a 14 per cent drop in net profit for the third quarter as oil and gas prices fell.

The company posted stand-alone net profit of ₹9,536 crore in October-December, 13.7 per cent lower than ₹11,045 crore posted in the same period last year. **PTI**

Govt panel examining FDI flow from China into Paytm Payments Services

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE GOVERNMENT is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said. In November 2020, PPSL had applied for a licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways.

However, in November 2022, RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to re-submit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co.

Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022 with Government of India for past



Paytm Payments Services is the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd

downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines.

An inter-ministerial committee is examining investments from China in PPSL and a decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and comprehensive examination, sources said.

Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

A Paytm spokesperson said PPSL applied for an online Payment Aggregator (PA) application for online merchants and the regulator subsequently asked PPSL to seek necessary approvals for past downward investment and resubmit the application. "This is part of the regular process where everybody applying for a payment aggregator licence has to get FDI approval," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said PPSL followed the relevant guidelines and submitted all relevant docu-

ments to the regulator within the stipulated time. During the pending process, PPSL was allowed to continue with its online payment aggregation business for existing partners without onboarding any new merchants.

"Since then the ownership structure has changed. The Paytm founder remains the largest stakeholder in the company. Ant Financial reduced its stake in OCL to less than 10 per cent in July 2023. Subsequently, it does not qualify for beneficial company ownership. OCL founding promoter now holds a 24.3 per cent stake. Therefore, your understanding of FDI from China in PPSL is incorrect and misleading," the spokesperson said.

The Reserve Bank last month barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, an associate company of OCL, from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after February 29, 2024.

FMCG companies turn to AI, tech for consumer behaviour insights

VIVEAT SUSAN PINTO
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 11

SCEPTICAL BUYERS of dairy products such as milk and ghee have a ready solution from Kolkata-based ITC to ensure safety: Scan a QR code and get a virtual tour of the dairy farm where the products are made. The virtual tour promises a peak into the health of the cows, the food they eat, the quality of milk produced and the chemical-free manufacturing process of dairy products.

As B Sumant, executive director at ITC explains, the effort is part of the firm's wider "Mission

DigiArc" initiative, which has seen the company deploy its "Sixth Sense", basically its marketing and digital command centre and data hub, to map consumer behaviour, craft personalised brand communication messages and use artificial intelligence for product development.

"We have accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence applications across different nodes of our business. The aim is to mainstream the digital-first culture to create new sources of competitive advantage," Sumant said.

ITC is not alone on this digital journey. From Marico to Dabur

GAINING A COMPETITIVE EDGE

■ FMCG companies are using AI, machine learning and predictive analysis to glean consumer insights.

■ They are using this to launch new products,

understand market trends & improve manufacturing and distribution processes.

■ ITC, Dabur, Marico and HUL are among the firms using such technology

and Hindustan Unilever (HUL), fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies are using AI, machine learning and predictive analysis to get real-time consumer insights for launching new

products, understanding market trends and improving manufacturing and distribution processes.

Take another case in point. Mumbai-based Marico, maker of the Parachute and Saffola

brands, for instance, launched an onion hair oil under Parachute Advanced a few quarters ago using Google search trends. The aim was to tap into the growing interest in onion hair oils that kept coming up in search trends, the company said.

In premium personal care, for instance, Marico has launched skin analyser tools using AI and machine learning capabilities to analyse different parameters of the skin and make personalised recommendations to consumers.

These initiatives have seen the company surpass the ₹400-crore run rate in terms of topline for its digital-first brands within

the premium personal care portfolio in Q3FY24, Saugata Gupta, MD & CEO, Marico said in a recent investor call.

Dabur has taken digital technology to the next level, CEO Mohit Malhotra said, by adopting a cloud-only approach that will help improve its services to retailers, consumers, trade partners and employees. "The creation of a digital core with enablement of real-time data insights and adapt to evolving customer and market needs," Malhotra said.

At HUL's post-results media interaction last month, CEO & MD Rohit Jawa said the firm was

building its digital capabilities apart from stepping up investments in its beauty portfolio for the future. This thought process at HUL has taken shape with the speed with which product launches have been unveiled, Jawa said, taking consumer learnings quickly to the factory floor. In beauty, for instance, HUL is using tools such as virtual try-ons with brands such as Lakme.

In food, HUL's move to quickly introduce the Korean Meal Pot under Knorr last year to tap into the K-food trend in the country was backed up by launching Korean noodles in Q3FY24, Jawa said. **FE**

Direct tax mop-up rises 20%, at 80% of FY24 goal

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE CENTRE'S direct tax collections, net of refunds, stood at ₹15.6 trillion as on February 10 in the current financial year, which is 20.3% higher on year, a release issued by the finance ministry said.

The collections accounted for 80.2% of the revised estimate (RE) target for FY24.

The RE has pegged the government's direct tax mop-up at ₹19.5 trillion, higher than ₹18.2 trillion pegged in the Budget estimate (BE) of FY24.

At 20.3%, the direct tax collections so far exceeds the 17.2% year-on-year growth projected in the RE of FY24, indicating a possibility of actual mop-up surpassing the RE.

Of the total collections, the corporate income tax (CIT) mop-up registered 13.6% growth on year, and PIT mop-up grew by 26.9%.

The PIT collections including Securities Transactions Tax (STT) rose 27.2% on year between April 1 and February 10.

Also, refunds amounting to ₹2.77 trillion crore have been issued during the period, the finance ministry said.

The gross (pre-refunds) direct tax collections between April 1 and February 10 stood at ₹18.28 trillion, up 17.3% on year. Within this, gross CIT and PIT mop-up rose by 9.2% and 25.7%, year-on-year, respectively. **FE**

CPSE CAPEX	
(Apr-Jan)	
FY23	₹5,05,880 crore
	78% of full-year target
FY24	₹6,09,254 crore
	83% of full-year target

PRASANTA SAHU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

LARGE CENTRAL public-sector entities — companies and undertakings (CPSEs) — achieved 83% of their combined capital expenditure target for FY24 in April-January by spending ₹6.09 trillion, supporting the public capex-led economic growth revival.

On an annual basis, these entities' capex grew by 20% on year in the first ten months of the current financial year compared with ₹5.06 trillion in the year-ago period (78% of the FY23 target).

The capex target for the CPSEs and other agencies was set at ₹7.33 trillion for FY24, 13% higher than the achievement of ₹6.48 trillion in FY23.

Railways and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) with large budgetary support as well as petroleum/energy CPSEs are the largest public-sector investors that play a key catalytic role in crowding capex from other entities.

In April-January 2024, the Railway Board invested ₹2.03 trillion in projects or 83% of its annual target of ₹2.44 trillion. The achievement till January in the current financial year was 34% higher on year. The Railways have been investing heavily in capacity improvement works such as doubling/quadrupling, electrification and introducing an array of high-speed trains.

In April-January of FY24, NHAI invested ₹1.44 trillion or 89% of its



63 PEOPLE MISSING PHILIPPINES LANDSLIDE TOLL RISES TO 54

The death toll from a massive landslide that hit a gold-mining village in the southern Philippines has risen to 54 with 63 people still missing, authorities said Sunday. The landslide hit the mountain village of Masara in Davao de Oro province Tuesday. AP

TOP OF THE WORLD



Britains King Charles III and Queen Camilla in Norfolk, Sunday. AP

UNITED KINGDOM King Charles thanks public for support after cancer diagnosis

London: Britain's King Charles III Sunday expressed his "heartfelt thanks" to the British public for their messages of support ever since his cancer diagnosis was revealed by Buckingham Palace this week. The 75-year-old monarch wrote the message from his royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk, eastern England, in which he also expressed his "lifelong admiration" for the work done by cancer charities. On Sunday, a smiling King Charles also attended church on the estate — the first time since his diagnosis. He briefly waved at photographers as he walked up to St. Mary Magdalene's church, accompanied by Queen Camilla. PTI

UNITED STATES Judge orders Musk to testify in panel probe

New York: A federal judge ordered Elon Musk to testify again in the US Securities and Exchange Commission's probe of his \$44 billion takeover of Twitter, giving the regulator and the billionaire a week to agree on a date and location for the interview. US Magistrate Judge Laurel Beeler's order formalised a tentative ruling she made in December that sided with the regulator. The SEC sued Musk in October to compel him to testify as part of a probe into his 2022 purchase of Twitter. Musk refused to attend it. REUTERS

UNITED KINGDOM Indian pleads guilty to killing 19-year-old wife

London: A 24-year-old Indian man charged with the murder of his 19-year-old wife at a home in south London last year has pleaded guilty to the crime. Sahil Sharma was arrested at the scene at Ash Tree Way in Croydon, the couple's residential address, on suspicion of the murder of Mehak Sharma on October 29 evening. When he appeared in custody at Kingston Crown Court on Thursday, he pleaded guilty to the murder of Mehak. Both are Indian nationals. PTI

SOMALIA Attack kills 3 Emirati troops, 1 Bahrain officer

Dubai: The al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab claimed an attack that killed three Emirati troops and a Bahraini military officer on a training mission at a military base in the Somalia capital, authorities said on Sunday. The attack on Saturday targeted the troops at the General Gordon Military Base in Mogadishu. Details about the attack and whether it killed others remained scarce on Sunday, though Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud offered his condolences to the UAE for the loss of troops. AP

PETITIONS ALSO AGAINST VICTORIES OF NAWAZ SHARIF, HIS DAUGHTER MARYAM

Pleas flood Pak courts as candidates backed by Imran challenge poll results

Results were manipulated to deprive PTI of its majority: Party

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 11

PAKISTAN COURTS have been flooded with petitions by losing candidates who challenged the provisional results in their constituencies within days after the highly polarised general elections, it emerged on Sunday.

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party claimed that its supported candidates have won the maximum number of seats but the results were manipulated to deprive it of the majority, and in order to turn the tide, its losing candidates have thronged the courts.

According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, a vast majority of those filing challenges against results are PTI-backed independents, including high-profile politicians such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) finance minister Taimoor Jhagra and ex-KP speaker Mahmood Jan, Islamabad-based lawyer Shuaib Shaheen, former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid, as well as Rehana Dar, mother of Usman Dar who was in-charge youth affairs in the PTI government.



Supporters of former PM Imran Khan's party block Peshawar-Islamabad motorway as part of their protest demanding free and fair results of the polls, in Peshawar on Sunday. Reuters

In Lahore, the victories of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, PML-N Attaullah Tarar and former defence minister Khawaja Asif were assailed in separate petitions before the high court alleging manipulation of Form 47s, which showed consolidated results of every constituency. The petitioners claim that they were successful against their opponents as per the Form 45, showing results of individual polling stations, handed to them. However, in their absence, their victories were allegedly turned

into defeats in the Form 47.

In PP 146 Sialkot, Omar Dar's wife, Ruba Omar, has challenged the election results. According to Form 45, Ruba Omar has won, but she was evidently defeated in Form 47 due to collusion.

Maryam's victory from NA-119 has been challenged by independent candidate Shahzad Farooq, alleging that the presiding officers did not provide Form 45, and the returning officer issued the result in his absence. Farooq claims to have won against Maryam but was defeated due to rigging.

PML-N's Atta Tarar's victory from NA-127 has been challenged by Zahir Abbas Khokhar, who claimed that Tarar has lost according to Form 45 but declared himself victorious in Form 47 with evident collusion.

In Karachi, three PTI candidates moved the Sindh High Court, arguing that the election watchdog, Returning Officer (ROs), those who compiled Form 47, and others flouted electoral laws and rigged the entire process.

The challengers include PTI provincial chief Haleem Adil

VOTERS SHOUTED LOUD, RESPECT THEIR MANDATE: PRESIDENT

Islamabad: Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi Sunday said the voters, particularly women and youth, have "not only spoken but shouted out loud their will" in the general elections and urged all political parties and institutions to "respect and recognise" the huge mandate of the citizens. Alvi was a senior member of the PTI party before former PM Imran Khan made him the President in 2018. "I must congratulate the people of Pakistan, especially the women for coming out in huge numbers, withstanding all pressures and standing up for democracy," PTI

Sheikh, Arsalan Khalid and advocate Khalid Mehmood, who contested in NA-238 (East-IV), NA-248 (Central-II) and NA-231 (Malir-III), respectively.

The PTI Sindh president argued that as per the Form 45 obtained by his election agents from all polling stations, he had a clear lead of around 65,000 votes, but MQM-P's Sadiq Iftikhar was shown as the winner from NA-238 with over 54,000 in the impugned Form 47, while the petitioner was placed on second position with over 36,800 votes. PTI



Donald Trump speaks at a Get Out The Vote rally at Coastal Carolina University in Conway on Saturday. AP

Trump says warned NATO allies: Pay up or will tell Russia to do whatever it wants

AGENCIES NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 11

REPUBLICAN FRONT-RUNNER Donald Trump said Saturday that, as president, he warned NATO allies that he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that are "delinquent" as he ramped up his attacks on foreign aid and longstanding international alliances.

Speaking at a rally in Conway, South Carolina, Trump recounted a story he has told before about an unidentified NATO member who confronted him over his threat not to defend members who fail to meet NATO's defense spending targets. But this time, Trump went further, saying had told the member that he would, in fact, "encourage" Russia to do as it wishes in that case. "You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" Trump recounted saying. "No I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills."

Unhinged, says White House; allies react

The White House rejected comments made by Trump about not protecting NATO allies from a potential Russian invasion as "appalling and unhinged." White House spokesperson Andrew Bates, asked about Trump's comments, said, "Encouraging invasions of our closest allies by murderous regimes is appalling and unhelpful - and it endangers American national security, global stability and our economy at home." Top western officials criticised Trump's remark. "Any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the US, and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk", said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a written statement. "Any attack on NATO will be met with a united and forceful response," he added.

Polish Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz wrote on X: "NATO's motto 'one for all, all for one' is a concrete commitment. Undermining the credibility of allied countries means weakening the entire NATO." "No election campaign is an excuse for playing with the security of the Alliance."

Germany's foreign ministry posted the message 'One for all and all for one' with the hashtag #StrongerTogether on its English language X account. EU Council President Charles Michel said: "Reckless statements on #NATO's security and Art 5 solidarity serve only Putin's interest."



Sunak: Totally up for the fight to win polls

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, FEBRUARY 11

BRITISH PRIME Minister Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year.

In an interview with The Times this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better".

"Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are

starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes. I do believe those pressures are starting to ease and that hopefully over the course of this year, we can continue to make even more progress," he said.

In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hard-working people of the country.

"It's because those are my values, those are the values of my party. It's one where hard work should be rewarded. Actually, the best way to express that through the tax system is to cut people's taxes so when they are working hard they get to enjoy more of the rewards of that for themselves and their family," he said. PTI



A displaced Palestinian man gets a haircut in Rafah on Sunday. Reuters

Pushed into a corner, people in Rafah fear Israeli ground assault

AGENCIES RAFAH, DOHA, FEBRUARY 11

THE ABU Mustafa family's tent is hard against the high concrete and metal fence separating Gaza from Egypt in Rafah, the last relatively safe place in an enclave devastated by Israel's military offensive, but one that may now also come under attack.

The family is among more than a million Palestinians now crammed into the area around Rafah. "Every day, we're on the run. Being displaced is tough because I have two daughters with disabilities. I can't carry them around. I don't have a car or a cart," said Laila Abu Mustafa. "If there will be more displacement, I'm not moving," she said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview aired on Sunday that "enough" of the 132 remaining Israeli hostages held in Gaza are alive to justify Israel's war.

"We're going to try to do our best to get all those who are alive back and, frankly, also the bodies of the dead," he said. Netanyahu also said that one Palestinian civilian has been killed for every Hamas fighter killed in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Egypt is threatening to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if Israeli troops are sent into Rafah, where it says fighting could force the closure of Gaza's main aid supply route, two Egyptian officials.

Missing 6-yr-old girl found dead

Gaza: A 6-year-old Palestinian girl and the two rescuers who went looking for her nearly two weeks ago were found dead on Saturday, the Palestine Red Crescent said.

Two rescuers with the Red Crescent were dispatched in an ambulance on the evening of Jan. 29 to find Hind Rajab, who was believed to be trapped in a vehicle in Gaza City with six dead family members. NYT



Hind Rajab

Hungarian President quits over sex abuse case pardon

Budapest: The president of Hungary, a loyal and largely powerlessly ally of the country's authoritarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, resigned on Saturday amid a public outcry over her pardoning of a man implicated in a sex abuse scandal at a children's home. President Katalin Novak, an outspoken champion of traditional values and Hungary's former minister of family affairs, announced her resignation on television, the latest in a series of prominent figures in Orban's conservative governing Fidesz party felled by sex scandals.



Katalin Novak

She quit as president, a mostly ceremonial office she has held since 2022, in response to widespread outrage, including within Fidesz, over revelations that a man she pardoned last year had been convicted of covering up sexual abuse at a state-run children's home. The man was among more than 20 people pardoned by Novak last April. NYT

Russia launches 45 drones as Zelenskyy continues war cabinet reshuffle

ASSOCIATED PRESS KYIV, FEBRUARY 11

RUSSIAN FORCES launched 45 drones over Ukraine Sunday in a five-and-a-half-hour barrage, officials said, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continued the reshuffle of his war cabinet as the war enters its third year.

In a statement, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 40 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over nine different regions, including on the outskirts of the country's capital, Kyiv.

The five-and-a-half-hour attack targeted agricultural facilities and coastal infrastructure, officials for Ukraine's southern defense forces wrote on Telegram. They said that a strike in the Mykolaiv region had injured one person, sparking a fire and damaging nearby residential buildings.

Kyiv announced Sunday that former deputy defense minister Lt. Gen. Alexander Pavlyuk would



Alexander Pavlyuk, the new commander of Ukraine ground forces

become the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. The post was previously held by Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was named on Thursday as the replacement for Ukraine's outgoing military chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

New presidential decrees also named Yurii Sodom, the former head of Ukraine's marine corps, as the new commander of Ukraine's combined forces; Brig. Gen. Ihor Skibniuk as commander of Ukraine's air assault forces; and Maj. Gen. Ihor Plahuta as commander of Ukraine's territorial defense forces.

AT A TIME OF TURMOIL FOR BRITAIN'S ROYAL FAMILY, EXHIBITION PROVIDES INSIGHT INTO LIVES OF A FORMER KING & QUEEN

'Feel a bit like Gulliver': Peek into a 100-year-old royal dolls' house

MEGAN SPECIA LONDON, FEBRUARY 11

THE SILVER crown is set with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds and seed pearls are peppered through the design. And the red velvet cap inside would be fit to cushion the head of a monarch.

Except that the whole thing is only an inch tall.

The jeweled miniature, a copy of Britain's Imperial State Crown, is part of Queen Mary's Dolls' House, on display at Windsor Castle outside London, where the everyday objects, luxuries and cu-

riosities of royal life in the early 20th century are reproduced at one-twelfth scale.

Scrutiny of Britain's royal family was supercharged this past week by the announcement of King Charles III's cancer diagnosis, which followed the hospitalisation of Catherine, Princess of Wales, in January.

But while the modern monarchy finds itself under a sometimes unwelcome microscope, the dolls' house has for a century allowed visitors to peer inside the rooms of a palace — albeit at a tiny scale.

The house was given to Queen Mary, the wife of King George V,



Queen Camilla views Queen Mary's Dolls' House, which is on display in Windsor, England. NYT

in 1924, not as a child's toy, but as a carefully constructed depiction of the best of British craftsmanship for a royal who loved all things miniature.

A January 1924 report in The Times of London described how Queen Mary, then 57, had inspected her gift "and expressed the keenest appreciation of its wonders," which included running water and electric lifts.

To celebrate the centenary, visitors can now get closer to items normally housed inside, like the famed miniature crown, with a selection presented in a special display outside its walls.

"It's got this instant charm," said Kathryn Jones, a senior curator at the Royal Collection Trust. "But also as you dig into it, I think you find it's quite layered."

Windsor Castle's steady stream of guests often gaze upward: at the impressively large Round Tower fortress that looms over the palace grounds, at the ornate ceilings of the formal banquet hall, and at the murals hung high on imposing walls.

But now they are also being encouraged to gaze down at the painstaking details of the dolls' house, with some of its tiniest artifacts placed in low cases to

benefit close inspection. On a recent winter afternoon, two women crouched to look at the miniatures, which are on display in the Waterloo Chamber. There is a tiny grand piano, complete with working keys; a Singer sewing machine with small reels of thread; and a Hoover vacuum cleaner, its cord carefully wrapped around its handle.

As Jones, the curator, noted: "You start to see the world in a very different way because you are looming over these tiny little things."

"You do feel a bit like Gulliver," she added. NYT

RYBAKINA TRIUMPHS IN ABU DHABI
Abu Dhabi: Top seed Elena Rybakina powered to a 6-1 6-4 win over Russian Daria Kasatkina in the final of the Abu Dhabi Open on Sunday to lift her second trophy of the season and seventh overall. **REUTERS**

Leach ruled out of India Tests with knee injury



Jack Leach injured his knee while fielding during the first Test. *Reuters*

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
 FEBRUARY 11

IN A major blow to England, left-arm spinner Jack Leach has been ruled out of the remaining three Tests against India with a knee injury. Leach, who featured in the first Test at Hyderabad, hurt his left knee while fielding on Day 1 and subsequently because of the excess swelling, bowled mostly four-over spells before missing the second Test at Vizag.

As England left for Abu Dhabi to enjoy the break period, it was expected that Leach would come back fit. However, following further scans in Abu Dhabi Leach has decided to head back to London for further treatment. "He will fly home from Abu Dhabi in the next 24 hours, where the England team have been staying ahead of the third Test in Rajkot, which starts on Thursday. Leach will work closely with the England and Somerset medical teams in respect of his rehabilitation," the ECB said in a statement.

Leach's unavailability means, England will have a re-look at their bowling combination as the ECB confirmed that they will not name any replacement for the series.

In both the Tests so far, they have taken the field with just one seamer and three spinners. However, with Leach now not in the fray, it remains to be seen if England will stick to the inexperienced trio of Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir. Out of the three, Hartley made his debut in Hyderabad, while Bashir played his maiden Test at Vizag. With all three being on the expensive side, and with India's batsmen looking to unsettle them, England may be tempted to play another seamer at Rajkot as they can always rely on Joe Root to deliver a few overs of off-spin.

England, who headed to Abu Dhabi from Vizag, to enjoy a short break with their families, are scheduled to arrive in Rajkot on Monday.

'Real show stealer was Boomball'

PTI adds: Lavishing praise on teammate Jasprit Bumrah, senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said "Boomball" stole the show in the second Test against England and the pacer reaching top of the ICC rankings across three formats is a "Himalayan feat".

Bumrah displayed brilliance with the ball to play a key role in the team's series-leveling 106-run win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

"The real show stealer was Boomball. Jasprit Bumrah has bowled extraordinarily," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"He is the leading wicket-taker with 14 wickets and also the No.1 ranked Test bowler. The first India fast bowler to achieve number one across all formats. I am a big fan of his and this is a Himalayan feat." Ashwin said

Yellow fever
 For the third time in seven months, Australia upstage India in the summit clash, this time their U-19s cruise to 79-run victory

PRATYUSH RAJ
 NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

THE ENGLAND football legend Gary Lineker once enviously said about the German side of the late 1980s and 90s: "Football is a simple game. Twenty-two men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win." In the context of cricket, the same could be said about Australia. They always win the big final, and of late at the expense of India. In the last seven months alone, they have beaten India thrice in the final of a global tournament—first in the World Test Championship (WTC) final at The Oval, then the ODI World Cup final in Ahmedabad and now in the U-19 World Cup summit clash in Benoni.

Unlike India, Australia had stuttered to the final, enduring a close shave against Pakistan in the semifinal, but when it mattered they produced a ruthless performance reminiscent of their seniors to crush India by 79 runs to claim their fourth U-19 title. Piling 253 for 7, the highest total ever in an U-19 final, on what commentator Ian Bishop described as "one of the fastest surfaces I have ever seen for a U-19 World Cup, with significant lateral movement, bounce and carry", they bowled out India for 174 runs.

Needless to say, Australia's medium pacers thrived on the surface. Callum Vidler and Mahli Beardman troubled India's batsmen with pace;

Charlie Anderson and Tom Straker sustained the pressure with tight bowling, before off-spinner Raf MacMillan reaped the harvest by grabbing three wickets.

Vidler, who politely refused to answer the broadcaster's question on who is the fastest bowler among, produced the first jolt for India by removing opener Arshin Kulkarni cheaply. Adarsh Singh and Musheer Khan somehow managed to survive the powerplay. But Beardman, who came as second change, ran through the top order. The pacer from Dunsborough, West Australia, who has already played for his state ratcheted up the pace. The terrorized batsmen of India looked timid.

As with most pacers from the region, the legendary Dennis Lillee had a decisive



Australia scored 253-7, which was the highest total ever in an U-19 World Cup final. *AP*

influence on him. Three years ago, he pleaded with the Australian legend to take him under his wings, but Lillee initially refused. "DK (Lillee) had a rule that he wouldn't work with anyone until they were 16. I had to do a little bit of waiting and a little bit of work but when I was about 15 I convinced him to finally have a look," Beardman had told reporters ahead of their semifinal clash against Pakistan.

"We went down to the south Perth nets and had a bowl down there and I got along really well with him. Ever since then, he's just been a massive mentor for me. He's such a great man to have in my corner."

Quick-gun Beardman

Beardman, one of the quickest in the tournament, struck in his first over dismissing Musheer Khan, who again struggled against quality pace. Musheer, who was dropped at slips by Harry Dixon, never looked at ease during his 33-ball stay. Beardman's second victim was India's captain and tournament's leading run-getter Uday Saharan, who slashed one straight to his counterpart Hugh Weibgen at backward point. Adarsh Singh, who fought the lone battle with a fine 47, eventually succumbed to Beardman's bouncer.

The strapping bowler would thank Lillee

at the post-match presentation as well. "I backed my short balls and tried to smash it into the wicket. Through DK, I've learnt a lot of mental stuff. Thinking about my bowling, thinking about field settings. He's been incredible, always a pleasure to bowl alongside him," he said.

What would really hurt India is that they let MacMillan grab three wickets. It was like a question that came out of the syllabus. The part-timer struck with his first ball and removed Sachin Dhas, who had looked unfazed against the pacers. A faint edge ended Dhas' World Cup campaign. Aravely Avani chipped one straight back to the bowler for a

NUMBER PLATE
4
 This was Australia's fourth U-19 title, and the first since 2010. This was also their 14th men's ICC title.
397 India's captain Uday Saharan emerged as the highest run-getter in the tournament, with a hundred and three fifty-plus scores.

duck. Raj Limbani yorked himself to end India's last lingering hopes.

While batting was catastrophic, the bowlers would rue in letting Australia put on 253 for 7. After getting rid of Sam Konstas with the team score on 16 in 2.3 overs, they let Harry Dixon (42) and Hugh Weibgen (48) put on 78 runs for the second wicket. Though they lost two wickets in the space of adding five runs, Harjas Singh sprung to the occasion. He had managed only 49 runs in the tournament, but top-scored with a valuable 55 of 64 balls. The southpaw was at his imperious best against the spinners, hitting three sixes. Though Australia lost a cluster of wickets in the middle overs Oliver Peake's 43-ball 46 not out gave them the final flourish. Medium pacer Raj Limbani (3/38) apart, none made a decisive impact, costing heavily.

India's captain Saharan blamed his batsmen's inability to execute plans against Australia's pacers. "We played a few rash shots today, didn't spend time in the middle. We were prepared but couldn't execute the plans," he lamented. Or it could be that they were facing Australia, the Germany of world cricket, the ultimate tournament team. They always win.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 253-7 in 50 overs (Harjas Singh 55, Hugh Weibgen 48, Harry Dixon 42, Oliver Peake 46*; Raj Limbani 3-38) beat India 174 all out in 43.5 overs (Adarsh Singh 47; Mahli Beardman 3-15, Raf MacMillan 3-43)

Inswing: Limbani masters new weapon to star on big stage

PRATYUSH RAJ
 NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11

RAJ LIMBANI'S in-swing bowling caught everyone's attention at the U-19 World Cup. In the final, the right-arm quick was India's best bowler, picking up three for 38, though it wasn't enough to get the desired result.

Limbani cleaned up Sam Konstas through the gate, before pinning Ryan Hicks and Charlie Anderson with nip-backers. Most of his 11 wickets in the tournament came courtesy deliveries that came into the batsmen.

However, Limbani's long-time coach Digvijay Singh Rathwa says he never had a natural in-swing and had to work to master it last year.

"His strength has always been the outswinger. Irfan (Pathan) was really impressed with his pace but he wanted him to work on his inswing as well to be more unpredictable," Rathwa tells *The Indian Express*.

Rathwa knew at 18, it was going to be very difficult for someone to learn a new

art. But he recalled a quote from former India bowling coach Bharat Arun, while doing his level 1 course at the National Cricket Academy (NCA). "Bharat Arun sir used to say that one had to be very patient with fast bowlers."

Limbani was in two minds and a bit worried about whether he would be the same bowler or not if he worked on the in-swing. But in Rathwa, he had a mentor who had endured many swings of misfortunes in his career. The 28-year-old, a batch-mate of Hardik Pandya and Deepak Hooda, was on ventilator for a year.

"I used to open for Baroda in U-16 and U-19 cricket. In 2015, I had GBS (Guillain-Barre Syndrome), a very rare disease in India. I was just 19 and on a ventilator at Mahavir Hospital in Surat for a year. I told Raj 'look at me, I fought death and came back, and here you are worrying about your bowling. At least give it a try,'" says Rathwa.

With Rathwa's assurance, Limbani was ready to take up the challenge and for the next eight months, worked on his inswing.

"We started it in May. For the first 40 days,



Raj Limbani was India's best bowler in the final, returning impressive figures of 3-38. *AP*

he bowled from his crease without any run-up. Then for the next 60, he bowled from five paces. It took time because in the meantime, he was playing Cooch Behar Trophy and Vinoo Mankad Trophy, then the U-19 challengers as well. Before the Asia Cup, he started bowling

from his full run-up. He was glad that without losing pace, he had learned a new art and I was relieved as a coach as well," laughs Rathwa.

Strong mind

He lauds Raj's mentality as well and says apart from his pace, Pathan was impressed with his attitude as well.

"Irfan bhai said he has got potential and a good head on his shoulders and with a little bit of guidance, he can become a good end product in a couple of years. Before going to the World Cup, Irfan bhai spent a week with him. He gave him tips on how to ball in South African conditions, and the importance of hitting a good length there. I think he has ticked most of the boxes, including the six that he hit in the semi-final at a very crucial time," says Rathwa.

"He clocks 135 kmp/h consistently and at the National Cricket Academy, he has clocked 141 twice. Pace is something that we will work along with his batting once he returns home," he says.

Rathwa feels Limbani wants to play first-class cricket and right from his U-16 days,

would talk about workload management.

"He loves bowling with the red ball. Even before going to the World Cup, he used to bowl with the red ball. During his U-16 days, he used to talk about workload management. He is aware of this aspect. He bowled around 200 overs in six matches in the Cooch Behar Trophy in the 2022-23 season. It was the most by any fast bowler.

He also enjoys bowling long spells. He is from the IPL generation but is very old-fashioned when it comes to cricket," the coach says.

Back in Dayapar in Kachchh, Vasantbhai Patel took the day off, and watched his son play the U-19 World Cup final with 50-odd people at his home. There was some concern when Raj felt his hamstring while bowling his eighth over.

"Final hai, mujhe maloom the ek pair pe bhi bowling daalega (This is the final and I knew he would bowl even on one leg)," says Raj's father.

"This is what he has lived for. I don't think he ever had any other plans barring cricket. I am happy that he is living his dream," he says.

RANJI ROUND-UP

Yadav stars for Haryana

JAYANT YADAV'S 10-wicket match haul earned Haryana a massive innings victory over hosts Jharkhand in Jamshedpur on Sunday. The off-spinner snared five victims in each innings as Jharkhand were bowled out for 119 and 185 following on, after Haryana amassed 509 batting first. There was only one fifty-plus score for Jharkhand across the two innings. Left-arm spinner Nishant Sindhu chipped in with three wickets in the second innings. **BRIEF SCORES:** Haryana 509 beat Jharkhand 119 (Jayant Yadav 5/35, Sumit Kumar 3/9) & 185 (Utkarsh Singh 53; Jayant Yadav 5/55, Nishant Sindhu 3/39) by an innings and 205 runs

Deshpande comes to Mumbai's rescue

SEAMER TUSHAR Deshpande came to Mumbai's rescue as he dismissed centurion and Chhattisgarh captain Amandeep Khare to not only notch up a five-wicket haul, but also secure a slim but vital 1-run first-innings lead.

Deshpande trapped Khare in front for 143 as the hosts were bowled out for 350, one short of Mumbai's total.

Chhattisgarh were reduced to 265/7 at one stage before Khare put on important stands with the lower order, but they fell just short. Mumbai took control of proceedings with a solid start to their second innings.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai 351 & 97/1 lead Chhattisgarh 350 (Amandeep Khare 143; Tushar Deshpande 5/121) by 98 runs



Jayant Yadav's 10-wicket match haul (five wickets in each innings) gave Haryana an innings victory over hosts Jharkhand. *File*

Delhi fight back

AFTER CONCEDED the first-innings lead, Delhi fought back on the third day through a century by Ayush Badoni and half-centuries by openers Yash Dhull and Anuj Rawat. There were important contributions by skipper Himmat Singh and Jonty Sidhu as well, which helped Delhi set a victory target of 327 for hosts Himachal Pradesh at Dharamsala. The visitors had taken one second-innings wicket in pursuit of a come-from-behind win.

BRIEF SCORES: Delhi 264 & 381/6 declared (Ayush Badoni 111, Yash Dhull 82, Anuj Rawat 54) vs Himachal Pradesh 319

(Rishi Dhawan 95; Siddhant Sharma 5/103, Himanshu Chauhan 3/72) & 31/1

TN fighting

AJITH RAM'S five-wicket haul kept Tamil Nadu alive against Karnataka, but the hosts still faced a stiff task to secure an unlikely win over Karnataka. After conceding a 215-run first-innings deficit, Tamil Nadu bundled out the visitors for 139, courtesy Ajith's left-arm spin, that left them chasing 355 in the fourth innings. Karnataka had got the important wicket of Narayan Jagadeesan by the close of play.

BRIEF SCORES: Karnataka 366 & 139

(Ajith Ram 5/61) vs Tamil Nadu 151 (Vijaykumar Vyshak 4/26, Shashi Kumar 3/41) & 36/1

Saxena's one-man show

HOSTS KERALA were in a strong position to claim full points against Bengal at Thumba, courtesy a remarkable all-round performance from Jalaj Saxena. The veteran off-spinner ran through the Bengal order with nine wickets in the first innings before claiming one in the second as well. Opening the batting, Saxena also scored 40 and 37 and has another day to add to his 10-wicket match haul, as Bengal need 372 more runs with eight wickets in hand.

BRIEF SCORES: Kerala 363 & 365/6 declared (Rohan Kunnummal 51, Sachin Baby 51, Shreyas Gopal 50; Shahbaz Ahmed 3/80) vs Bengal 180 (Jalaj Saxena 9/68) & 77/2

Saurashtra in control

SAURASHTRA'S STRONG bowling attack helped them dominate hosts Rajasthan to take a sizeable lead going into the final day. Left-arm spinner Dharmendrasinh Jadeja's five-wicket haul and off-spinner Yuvrajsinh Dodiya's four scalps helped the visitors take control in Jaipur. Cheteshwar Pujara had a rare modest score in the second innings but Arpit Vasavada and Sheldon Jackson put on an unbeaten century partnership to put Saurashtra 245 ahead.

BRIEF SCORES: Saurashtra 328 & 174/4 (Arpit Vasavada 53 batting) vs Rajasthan 257 (Dharmendrasinh Jadeja 5/99, Yuvrajsinh Dodiya 4/88)

Aus vs WI: Maxwell smashes 5th T20I ton, equals Rohit's feat

ASSOCIATED PRESS
 FEBRUARY 11

GLENN MAXWELL blasted a record-equaling century as Australia beat West Indies by 34 runs on Sunday and took an unassailable 2-0 lead in its three-match Twenty20 series. Maxwell smashed an unbeaten 120 off 55 balls, with eight sixes and 12 fours, and shared a 92-run stand with Tim David (31 off 14 balls) to propel Australia to 241-4 and the highest T20 international score at Adelaide Oval.

"We're extremely lucky to have (Maxwell) in our team," Australia captain Mitch Marsh said. "He's a match winner, game changer and people come to watch him." The West Indies chase was derailed by the loss of five wickets in the first seven overs, but a rally led by captain Rovman Powell (63 off 36 balls) and Andre Russell (37 off 16 balls) briefly gave the tourists hope of reeling in the mammoth target.

But the weight of the chase ultimately proved too much as Marcus Stoinis (3-36) and debutant Spencer Johnson (2-39) led Australia's bowlers in restricting the West Indies chase to 207-9 in its 20 overs.

"Yeah, I think the boys show courage, you know, that we would just start aggressive but we kept losing wickets," Powell said. "We also need to get big partnerships just as the Aussies did." Earlier, Australia slipped to a precarious 64-3 after 6.4 overs after being asked to bat first, with Josh Inglis (four), Marsh (29 off 12 balls) and David Warner (22 off 19 balls) all holding-out playing expansive shots. Maxwell started slowly with his first four

We're extremely lucky to have (Maxwell) in our team. He's a match winner, game changer and people come to watch him.

—MITCH MARSH
 AUSTRALIA SKIPPER

runs coming off five balls, before his innings exploded into life with a rush of boundaries.

He shared an 82-run stand with Stoinis (16 off 15 balls) and then a 92-run partnership with Tim David, which reaped 25 runs from the final over bowled by Russell.

Maxwell's century came off 50 balls and was the fastest hundred in a T20 international in Australia — beating South African Rilee Rossouw's 52-ball effort against Bangladesh during the 2022 World Cup.

It was also Maxwell's fifth T20 international century, equalling the record held by India's Rohit Sharma. "I feel really comfortable in this format. I think over the last probably 18 months, I've felt really good about my batting and really good about my game," Maxwell said.

Australia beat West Indies by 11 runs in the first match in Hobart on Friday. The third game of the three-match series will be played on Tuesday at Perth. Australia, which is playing six T20s over the next three weeks, routed West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 241-4 in 20 overs (Maxwell 120*) bt West Indies 207-9 in 20 overs (Powell 63, A Russell 37; Stoinis 3-36) by 34 runs

BRIEFLY

Nagal wins Chennai Open, set to enter men's top 100

Chennai: India's top singles player Sumit Nagal on Sunday won his fifth Challenger-level singles title, outplaying Italian Luca Nardi in the final of the Chennai Open -- an achievement which will propel him into the top-100 for the first time in his career. Nagal's 6-1 6-4 win is likely to take him to 98 when the fresh rankings will be issued on Monday. Nagal has been in tremendous form as he won the Chennai Open without dropping a set. Nagal will be first Indian to feature in singles top-100 since Prajesh Gunneswaran made the cut in 2019. "I'm very emotional (today). You know, every tennis player's dream is to be top 100 at least. And like I said earlier, to win this match in front of the home crowd in your own country, I don't think I could have asked for a better place," Nagal said afterwards. **PTI**

PKL: Paltan hammer Thalaivas, reach semis

Kolkata: The Puneri Paltan thrashed Tamil Thalaivas 56-29 to enter the semifinals of the Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 on Sunday. Aslam Inamdar picked up a few raid points as the Puneri Paltan raced away with a six-point lead within the third minute. However, Mohammadreza Kaboudrahangi helped the Tamil Thalaivas get on board through a super tackle on Pankaj Mohite. But Mohit Goyat effected a raid and Abinash Nadarajan tackled Vishal Chahal as the Pune side inflicted the first all out of the match to take a big lead at 12-2. The Pune outfit inflicted another all out to lead 28-10 and never relinquished their lead. **PTI**

Tejaswin wins season-opening meet

New Delhi: National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres. Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday. The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m. Shankar has trained his eyes on a Paris Olympics berth but for that he will have to achieve a qualifying standard of 2.33 metres. **PTI**

Gukesh loses three rounds, finishes sixth

Wangels (Germany): India's Grandmaster D Gukesh had to be content with a sixth place finish in the rapid play-offs of the Weissenhaus Freestyle Chess challenge after losing the last three rounds here. Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan dominated the rapid event that was mainly done to determine the pairings for the knockout stage. The young Uzbek ended with an impressive 5.5 points out of a possible seven and finished a half point clear of Vincent Keymer of Germany. Fabiano American Levon Aronian ended seventh ahead of the struggling reigning world champion Ding Liren who made just a draw with six losses in the event. **PTI**

Standard bearer

After 2-2 draw in regulation time thanks to Hardik's exploits, India get the better of Netherlands in shootout

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
FEBRUARY 11

THAT HARDIK Singh is the heartbeat of the Indian men's hockey team couldn't have been more evident than on Sunday in Bhubaneswar. The vice-captain was at the centre of most things good his side did in the FIH Hockey Pro League match against world No. 1 Netherlands. In a riveting game between two top sides, India took the lead through Hardik and scored an equaliser late on thanks to captain Harmanpreet Singh, from a PC that his deputy won. A 2-2 draw saw the teams share a point each before PRSreejesh showed in class in the shootout as India won an additional bonus point.

It wasn't quite two teams going all-out attacking throughout the game, it was a bit of 'cat-and-mouse' as Dutch coach Jeroen Delmee put it at half time. But the match built up into a nice crescendo before India edged it in the end. Speaking before the match, India head coach Craig Fulton hoped that India would match themselves well up against the world No. 1 and, while there were a few worrying mistakes, the South African would have been pleased with what he saw overall.

A year back, Hardik's injury in the middle of the World Cup proved to be a tough one to overcome for India. Having started the tournament so well, he was heartbroken and eventually, so were India, after a pre-quarterfinal defeat against New Zealand.

Sunday was another reminder of how much India missed him then, as he ran the show from the centre of midfield. The Dutch started the match brilliantly, looking to catch the Indian defence off guard with long passes -- both aerial and on the ground. The ball was pinged off their sticks with impressive rhythm and for most of the opening quarter, India had to hang in, with some sharp deep defending.

It was one of those long passes that India managed to break down that led to the opening goal. Hardik ran with the ball for more than half the length of the field to find Sukhjeet Singh. The forward held the ball and slid a pass back to Hardik.

One of Fulton's mantras is to play with control and the finish from Hardik was all about that. He took a touch and then guided the ball into the net as if he was gently passing a ball to his teammate, only this one beat the Dutch goalkeeper Maurits Visser, who seemed to be surprised that the ball came at him from an acute angle.



Hardik Singh (R) celebrates after scoring a goal against the Netherlands on Sunday. Hockey India

SCORELINE	
India	Netherlands
2	2
Hardik Singh 13'	Jip Janssen 30'
Harmanpreet 58'	Koen Bijen 39'

A combination of good defence and one moment of brilliance from Hardik gave India the lead against the run of play. Hardik then produced a superb steal five minutes into the second quarter as he read a Dutch long pass well. A couple of minutes later, he came up with a fine dribble to win a penalty corner for India with clever direction change and 3D skills.

But the Dutch are the world's top side for a reason and they found goals on either side of the half time to go into the lead. At the very end of Q2, Manpreet Singh's diving interception was deemed to be deliberately sending the ball behind the byline and Jip Janssen fired

it in from the Penalty Corner.

With Fulton saying his team had to get better at avoiding turnover of possessions, the start of Q3 saw India lose the ball more often. From one such turnover at midfield, the Netherlands had a spell of possession that resulted in a PC. This time Koen Bijen reacted sharpest among those in the circle to score off a rebound. Even when India had an ordinary third quarter, it was Hardik who drove the team forward. The final quarter saw India start things off in top gear, and their bravery would be rewarded late on. Hardik reacted quickest to a loose ball in the Netherlands' attacking third and drew a push from the Dutch defence. Harmanpreet was quick to refer this to the video umpire and India had a PC with two minutes left.

Sreejesh delivers again

Coach Delmee's one wish before the match was that his side would have to keep India away from penalty corner situations, but after defending well till then, it would prove to be the decisive moment. After a good night from

set pieces against Spain, India's drag flickers didn't have the best of times... until this instance. Hardik stepped up to inject, and Harmanpreet fired in his best drag flick of the night, scoring the equaliser on his 200th appearance for India.

India had taken their goalkeeper off with 2:43 left in the match and scored the equaliser. But shortly after, their talisman PR Sreejesh was back on the pitch and produced a fine save in the dying moments to take his side to a shootout. And there, he'd shine again, starting with a stunning reflex save before preventing another Dutch goal by holding his ground. No stranger to last-minute interventions, Sreejesh ensured India would stay unbeaten over the weekend (after an impressive outing against Spain too) to send out a timely reminder at the start of the Olympic year that he is still the main man between the posts.

In the end, winning the player-of-the-match award, Hardik said: "We showed the standard where we want to be." Five points from two matches to start the Pro League is a good reflection of that sentiment.

Arsenal smash six past woeful West Ham to send title message

MARTYN HERMAN
LONDON, FEBRUARY 11

ARSENAL EXACTED sweet revenge on West Ham United with a 6-0 away thrashing to stay right in the thick of the Premier League title race on Sunday, obliterating their hosts before halftime.

Mikel Arteta's side had lost twice against their London rivals this season but were 4-0 ahead by halftime with goals by William Saliba, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel and Leandro Trossard.

The punishment continued in the second half with Saka making it 5-0 before former West Ham midfielder Declan Rice, who assisted two goals in the opening period, thumped his team's sixth on a day of abject humiliation for the hosts.

It was a sublime display by Arsenal who equalled their highest away league win and wiped off a goal difference deficit to champions Manchester City who they joined on 52

points, although they stay in third place courtesy of scoring fewer goals. Leaders Liverpool have 54 points.

Arsenal were defeated by West Ham in the League Cup although the bigger blow was a 2-0 home defeat in December when they were guilty of squandering a host of chances.

This time they were lethal as they tore eighth placed West Ham to shreds at the London Stadium. Thousands of home fans who streamed out of the exits before half-time were spared the rest of West Ham's worst home league defeat since an 8-2 loss by Blackburn Rovers in 1963.

"It was a brilliant performance from the start to the end, we dominated and controlled everything and today we were really sharp in front of goal as well," Arsenal skipper Martin Odegaard said. "We backed up a big win last week (against Liverpool) with another great performance."

Victories for Liverpool and Manchester City on Saturday had cranked up the pres-



Bukayo Saka celebrates after scoring Arsenal's fifth goal of the game against West Ham United on Sunday. Reuters

KEY RESULTS			
West Ham	0	6	Arsenal
Aston Villa	1	2	Man Utd

sure on Arsenal to follow suit.

And how they responded. Arteta's side dominated the opening exchanges with Trossard's ferocious volley tipped over by home keeper Alphonse Areola and Martin Odegaard's shot deflecting just wide.

The away fans might had a sense of déjà-vu from the clash at The Emirates on Dec. 28 when Arsenal were stunned by West Ham despite their superiority. But they need not have worried.

Once Saliba was allowed a simple header at the far post from a Rice corner in the 32nd minute, West Ham disintegrated.

Saka was then played clean through and was taken out by Areola who was shown a yellow card before the young England for-

Nikhat Zareen goes down in close bout; Panghal, Sachin clinch gold

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 11

FOR A brief moment at the end of the women's 50kg final, there was confusion. The announcer read out that the boxer in blue had won, but the referee lifted the arm of the boxer in red. But Nikhat Zareen knew by then that it wasn't her day. She had a wry smile as the referee quickly changed the decision to point to the right winner as per the judges.

It was a silver for the two-time world champion at the 75th Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria on Sunday as Nikhat (50kg) went down 2-3 against Uzbekistan's Sabina Bobokulova. On another day, the decision to raise Nikhat's hand could well have been the right one because there wasn't much to choose between the two.

Halfway into the opening round, Bobokulova threw both her arms up in the air as if celebrating a good punch on the Indian, but in effect, those were in response to a big punch that Nikhat had landed moments before.

Over those three minutes, there was a good case to be made that Nikhat landed more meaningful punches than her opponent but Bobokulova exuded more confidence and energy. A 1-4 decision on the scorecard was harsh on Nikhat and it would prove to be tough to overcome after she also lost a tough second round 2-3. The Indian did dominate the final stages to take it 5-0 but the damage had been done early on, meaning Nikhat has now gone two international tournaments without gold after a streak of titles leading into the Asian Games.

There was very little emotion on Amit Panghal's (51 kg) face as well but he produced a masterful display against reigning world champion (albeit in a lower division) Kazakhstan's Sanzhar Tashkenbay to win 5-0. The second gold medal of the day for India came from Sachin (57kg) as he prevailed over Uzbekistan's Shakhzod Muzafarov.

That Amit's celebration was muted could perhaps be down to the fact that he is not in India's squad for the Olympic qualifiers in Busto Arsizio, Italy, later this month, with Deepak Bhorla selected for that already. But it was a week when Amit showed he is still a force to be reckoned with, barely breaking sweat in the semifinal and coming out aggressively in the final to down a reputed opponent.

ward dispatched the penalty for his 50th goal for the club.

Rice swung in a free kick that was met by Gabriel with another close-range header and with West Ham resembling rabbits frozen in the headlights, Trossard engineered some space before curling a sublime right-footed shot into the top corner.

West Ham were booted off by their fans at halftime and the exodus continued after the break as Saka fired a clinical shot past Areola to make it 5-0 before Rice, who got a mixed reception from the home fans, produced a stunning finish.

Rice refused to celebrate but the party was in full swing amongst the away fans who left the ground dreaming of going one step further than last season's runner-up finish.

It was a traumatic afternoon for West Ham manager David Moyes who saw one of his teams concede six goals in a home league game for the second time in his career -- the other occasion in 2009 when his Everton lost 6-1, also to Arsenal. **REUTERS**

PREMIER LEAGUE

11th in PL with 39 goals conceded, Chelsea not able to douse any fires

SAYAK DUTTA
FEBRUARY 11

MAURICIO POCCHETTINO was on a rambling roll after Chelsea's loss to Wolves last week. His stream of thought went like this: "To be focused on playing football, you need to be free in your mind. You can't be affected because of the stock market in New York or Tokyo, or the weather in I don't know where because the farms cannot grow the cereals. That is why I keep my hair like this. It's because I do not suffer for things that I am not in charge of. I only suffer for sport, for football, to try to improve the players, to give them good things. A good platform to win games. If there is no rain at my farm, I cannot grow the crops. You kill the business of my family on the farm and they need money. That is stress. With that, you can lose your hair. But I cannot lose my hair because the opponent was better than us."

Pochettino was trying desperately to get the point across that The Blues need to be patient and, on the night, their opponents were better than them. While pointing out that his thick mop at 51 wasn't particularly thinning because of Chelsea's wretched run.

The mind-mangled managerial musings might not have made much sense but it is the perfect metaphor for the mess Chelsea are in at

the moment in the Premier League.

Except for a midweek win against Aston Villa in the FA Cup, Chelsea have conceded 8 goals in their last two Premier League matches with 4-1 and 4-2 losses to Liverpool and Wolves respectively.

These strings of results have even led to player Thiago Silva's wife taking to social media and demanding the manager's sacking. This does not exactly paint a harmonious picture of a locker room united.

The club which was once revered as a powerhouse and won the Champions League just 3 years ago, look like a shadow of their former selves. They are 11th in the league table at the moment and have conceded 39 goals, losing 10 of their 23 matches. That too after spending more than £1 billion in transfers since 2023.

The huge record signings of Moises Caicedo from Brighton and Enzo Fernandez from Benfica have fallen flat with opponents easily outrunning them in the midfield while Pochettino looks for a way to implement his tactics. Another big signing, the £58 million Romeo Lavia from Southampton has spent more time on the treatment table than on the pitch. Goalkeeper Robert Sanchez who was bought from Brighton with much fanfare has also been ruled out with a knee injury while captain Reece James is out again



Except for a midweek win against Aston Villa in the FA Cup, Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea have conceded 8 goals in their last two Premier League matches. Reuters

with a thigh problem.

Granted these are some of the big misses that the club has had to contend with but they should have the squad depth to cover it. With big names like Thiago Silva, Raheem Sterling,

Fernandez and Caicedo all flopping, players like Christopher Nkunku, Malo Gusto, Conor Gallagher, Mykhailo Mudryk and the versatile Nicolas Jackson needed to step up but they have failed to provide a spark thus far. Only 21-

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If this was any normal time, Pochettino would be out of the door by now but due to the Premier League's Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR), they can't. The Argentine manager has over 18 months left in his current contract and will cost Todd Boehly and Co over £10m to get rid of. With the club being very close to breaching the PSR due to their blind splurge in the market last year, they will have to raise £100 million through player sales in the summer in order to balance their books. Failing to do so, they might have to face points deduction like Everton.

This is a far cry from the empire Chelsea had built under former owner Roman Abramovich who was a shrewd businessman

and knew how the club functions. In Boehly, Chelsea has an owner who quite literally throws a wad full of cash at the problem. As soon as the American took over from Abramovich, the cardinal sin he made was to sack the then coach Thomas Tuchel, the very man who had guided them to a second Champions League. In his place, Graham Potter from Brighton was appointed and subsequently sacked after 7 months.

Chelsea then went on to give the job to club legend Frank Lampard on an interim basis, a man who had already failed at Stamford Bridge once before. After that, the owners brought in Pochettino who was himself coming off an underwhelming coaching stint at Paris Saint Germain. However, this signing was hailed as a sensible one due to the Argentine's propensity to work magic with younger players as he had done in Tottenham, a club which he coached to a Champions League final in 2019.

But it hasn't worked out thus far with the manager still struggling to get the best out of the players under him, with the Blues having just 31 points at this point of the season. Immune to the sack at the moment, Pochettino still has time to imprint his mark on this young side but looking at the way Chelsea play as a unit right now, he has his work cut out for him.