

6 WORLD

7 NATION

- NATO a 'sacred commitment'; Trump looks at it as a burden: Biden
- Ukrainian military says it sank a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea
- Farmers stay put at Punjab-Haryana border, tear gas shells lobbed again
- Sonia Gandhi reaches Jaipur to file nomination for RS polls

Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Assured income of ₹ 6,000 given to farmers under PM Kisan every year

₹ 2 lakh 80 thousand crore given to 11.8 crore farmers till now

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

Cong receives Kamalakhya, Basanta jolts 'My gift' to Rahul, 2 Cong MLAs supporting Assam govt: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said two Congress MLAs -- Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das -- have decided to "support the government" without leaving the grand old party now.

Purkayastha was the working president of the opposition party and Das was a minister in the Tarun Gogoi government.

Sarma, who heads a BJP-led government in the state, welcomed both the legislators at the chief minister's chamber inside the Assembly complex while the Budget Session of the House was in progress.

He termed this development as a "gift to Rahul Gandhi" from him.

Asked if the two Congress MLAs will join the BJP, Sarma said it will be decided before the Assembly elections in 2026.

Sarma also claimed that the Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' has turned into 'Congress Todo Yatra'.

Gandhi and Sarma had a series of run-ins during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' led by the Congress leader in Assam recently.

"Showing faith in the Narendra Modi-led central government, the two Congress MLAs have decided to support the government. For all public welfare programmes and constructive works, they will support both state and central governments," Sarma told reporters here.

Purkayastha, who resigned as the Working President of Congress on Tuesday, and Das will continue to remain MLAs of the opposition



party, but have lent "unconditional support" to the Government of Assam for working towards the people, he added.

The chief minister stressed that this is a "new trend" of supporting and joining the government, and other states may also follow this style.

Reacting to the development, Purkayastha said: "We will support the government for all developmental works for our constituencies and Assam. However, I will remain a Congress

MLA and work as a dedicated Congress worker."

With Das by his side, he claimed that there is no other "intention or meaning" to this move other than welfare of the people.

Purkayastha, who has been in the Congress for several decades since his NSUI days, was elected from the Karimganj North constituency in Karimganj district during Assembly polls in 2021. Das won the Assembly polls from the Mangaldoi seat. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Mizoram body urges Centre to reconsider decision to fence India-Myanmar border

AIZAWL, Feb 14: The Mizoram NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC) has urged the Centre to reconsider its decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and suspend the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country.

In a memorandum to Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday, NGOCC, a conglomerate of major civil society organisations and student bodies, including the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) and the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZIP), expressed concerns over the Centre's decisions in this regard.

"Being one of the signatories of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007, we believe that our country would have taken measures to assert the rights of indigenous peoples who are divided by international border, as stated in Article 36 of UNDRIP. "But we are astonished by the Centre's decision to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) as well as its attempt to fence the border instead of maintaining and developing relations between the peoples living on both sides of the border," the memorandum stated.

The memorandum claimed that the FMR has been a crucial mechanism in maintaining ethnic and cultural



linkages between the Mizo people residing on both sides of the border and the proposed abolition of the FMR and border fencing will have a detrimental effect on the vital ethnic and cultural connections between the Mizo communities.

The NGOCC expressed concerns that such measures could disrupt the harmonious coexistence and cultural exchanges that have been integral to the lives of the Mizo people. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

TLA leaders meet CM to discuss development of Tiwa community

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 14: Leaders of the Tiwa Liberation Army (TLA) met with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at his official chamber in Dispur to reach a political solution for development of the Tiwa community residing in the state.

The TLA is a Tiwa armed group with its presence in the Tiwa dominated areas of West Karbi Anglong, Karbi Anglong, Ribhoi district of Meghalaya, Morigaon and Kamrup (metro) districts in the state. The TLA was formed in 2014 for the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Tiwa community for a separate administrative set-up and other developments. In 2022 the TLA surrendered before the state government for a political solution.

The delegation was led by TLA chairman, Clement Lumphui, general secretary Romanoush Amsong and executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), D Upping Maslai and two social workers Manosjyoti Deka and Ananda Bordoloi.

TLA leaders on Tuesday submitted a charter of demands before the chief minister for an agreement between the state government and the organisation. The TLA in their charter of demands mentioned a territorial council for Tiwas, an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Amri and development of border

roads and installing the statue of Tiwa hero, Chutursing Raja.

The political representative, who accompanied the delegation, EM Maslai said TLA leaders have met the chief minister and placed their charter of demands.

During the meeting on Tuesday, the chief minister has assured the TLA leaders for signing of a peace agreement. The TLA demand included the Sixth Schedule provision of the Indian constitution, a separate territorial council for the Tiwas. The TLA leaders in their charter of demands have also mentioned the urgent need of the implementation of Article 244 (A) of the Indian, Maslai said.

EM Maslai said, "I don't want to go deep into the political aspects of their demand, but if the agreement is made with the state government then more development will be there for the Tiwas."

Maslai further said that the problem with the indigenous communities is of land rights. In tribal belts and blocks in Morigaon and Kamrup Metro much of the tribal lands have been snatched away by outsiders. The lands of Tiwas, Karbis and Bodos living in tribal belt and blocks are unprotected.

Maslai also informed that the TLA has mentioned in their charter of demands protection of Junbeel Mela. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two held along with suspected Heroin in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 14: In a major victory in the war against drugs, police in Guwahati seized suspected heroin during a raid in Panbazar, said an official statement on Wednesday. In this regard, the police also apprehended two persons, identified 32 year old Nurul Hoque, who hail from Nalbari district, and 32 year old Andul Hanfi Sheikh, who hails from Dhubri district.

"Based on an input a raid was conducted at near 4 No. railway gate, opposite Athgaon MS road under Panbazar police station (PS) Jurisdiction by STF, Assam this afternoon (14.02.24) and below mentioned 2 nos of habitual drugs peddlers have been apprehended," the statement added.

Both the persons have been taken into custody and necessary formalities have been initiated.

In October last year, a Crime Branch team, in collaboration with the West Guwahati Police Department, had apprehended a suspected drug smuggler in the Santipur area of Guwahati. The operation was initiated based on specific information. The police encountered a passenger van driven by Babul Dutta and found 87 vials filled with suspected heroin weighing approximately 97.8 grams during a search of the vehicle.

Nagaland CM seeks stakeholder support for quality education

KOHIMA, Feb 14: Asserting that there has been a "gradual deterioration" in the quality of education despite appointments of highly qualified teachers in all government schools, Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio on Wednesday sought the support of all stakeholders of the sector.

Despite having a literacy rate of almost 80 per cent, Naga youths are unable to get jobs because of the lack of skill-based education, he said.

Rio was speaking at a function at a school in Meriema on the outskirts of Kohima, which has recently been upgraded to a high school.

"In all government schools, highly qualified teachers are appointed. However, we have witnessed a gradual deterioration in the quality of education in government schools. It's a collective failure," the chief minister said.

He urged school education department officials and all other stakeholders to work together to improve the sector in the state.

"We must come together and take government schools to the lofty positions they used to be in the past," Rio said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Village volunteers' attempt to barge into Manipur Police Training College, one killed

IMPHAL, Feb 14: At least one person was killed as security personnel opened fire to disperse a large number of 'village volunteers' who allegedly attempted to barge into the Manipur Police Training College (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal East district, a senior official said.

It is suspected that the village volunteers tried to barge into the premises to loot firearms as they had earlier posted on social media that they needed more weapons to fight off attackers. However, officials have remained mum over the motive of their attempt to enter the police facility, which houses a large number of weapons.

One person, identified as 24-year-old Okram Sanaton, succumbed to his injuries while being taken to a state-run hospital in Imphal after sustaining gunshot wounds.

"The incident took place on Tuesday night when a large number of local youths, mostly village volunteers, gathered at the MPTC gates and tried to barge into the premises, with some even succeeding in their endeavour," the official told PTI.

Security personnel first fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the mob, but later had to fire live rounds to control the situation, he said.

A forensic team has arrived at the spot and is investigating the matter, he said.

Tension has been brewing in areas falling under Khurai and Khundrakpam assembly constituencies since Tuesday afternoon following an intense gunfight between armed groups of the two warring communities at Pukhao Shantipur in Imphal East



district and adjoining areas of Khamenlok hill range in Kangpokpi district.

The police facility houses a large number of weapons and village volunteers had earlier said in social media posts that they were running out of ammunition and needed more weapons to fight the attackers, who, they claimed, were armed with sophisticated firearms.

The term 'village volunteers' is used for armed civilian youths guarding villages along the periphery of Imphal Valley and adjoining hills to ward off attacks from the rival community.

More than 180 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kukis since May last year. (PTI)

Bajrang Dal, VHP compel puja organisers to drape Saraswati idol with saree

AGARTALA, Feb 14: A group of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal supporters on Wednesday allegedly barged into the Government College of Art and Craft at Lichubagan near here and compelled the institute authorities to drape the idol of Goddess Saraswati with a saree, eyewitnesses said.

The incident was triggered by a viral video on social media depicting the Saraswati idol without a saree. The idol had been crafted by students of the college, they added.

"As the video of Maa Saraswati without the traditional saree was circulating on social media, we rushed to the college before the puja began and forced the organisers to adorn a saree on the idol," Tutan Das, Tripura state coordinator of Bajrang Dal, told PTI.

He further expressed strong condemnation for what he described as a deviation from the cultural and traditional values expected from students of an art and craft college.

Sourabh Das, the assistant coordinator (campaign) of VHP, also condemned the students' actions. "We vehemently denounce the lack of decorum (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

World today needs govts which are inclusive, free from corruption: PM Modi

DUBAI, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the world today needs governments that are inclusive and free from corruption, as he asserted that his mantra over the years has been 'minimum government, maximum governance'.

Addressing the World Governments Summit here on the second day of his visit to the UAE, Modi said that the government should interfere as little as possible in the lives of people.

"I believe that people should neither feel the absence of a government, but at the same time, nor should there be pressure from the government," he said while stressing the mantra of 'minimum government, maximum governance'.

"In fact, I believe that the government should interfere as little as possible in the lives of people," he said. The Prime Minister noted in the last few years in India, people's trust in the government has increased. "People have trust in the intent and commitment of the Indian government. This was possible only because we prioritised public sentiments," he said. "Bharat has seen a great trans-

formation in recent times. Be it Bharat's sanitation drive, digital literacy campaign or girl education campaign, the success of each such big goal has been ensured only through people's participation," he added. Modi said that as chief minister of Gujarat and as Prime Minister he has spent 23 years in government and his principle of 'minimum government, maximum governance'.

The prime minister said his government focused on women-led development, strengthening the financial, social, and political conditions of the Indian women.

Modi said social and financial inclusion has been his government's priority and over 50 crore people were connected to the banking system. "Social and financial inclusion has remained our government's prime priorities. We have associated over 50 crore people with the banking system...these were the people who didn't have any bank account!"

"It is the result of our consistent efforts that India is shining on the global stage in the fields of fintech and digital payments, he said. The world today (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'If there is any earthquake in the region, the temple will detect it, and we will be able to study'

Abu Dhabi's first Hindu temple fuses ancient architecture with modern science

ABU DHABI, Feb 14: The first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi, which will be inaugurated on Wednesday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been built using ancient architectural methods clubbed with scientific techniques.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir has been built with over 300 high-tech sensors to measure temperature and monitor seismic activity, no metal has been used in the construction of the temple and fly ash has been used to fill up the foundation.

The grand temple has been built by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha on a 27-acre site in Abu Mreikha, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, at a cost of around ₹ 700 crore.

According to temple authorities,



the grand temple has been built as per an ancient style of construction and creation mentioned in the Shilpa and Sthapathya Shastras, Hindu scriptures which describe the art for mandir design and construction. "The architectural meth-

ods have been clubbed with scientific techniques here. Over 300 high-tech sensors have been installed at every level of the temple to measure temperature, pressure and movement (seismic activity). The sensors will provide live data

for research. If there is any earthquake in the region, the temple will detect it, and we will be able to study," Swami Brahmaviharidas, head of international relations for BAPS, told PTI.

No metal has been used in the construction of the temple and fly ash has been used to fill up the foundation, replacing 55 per cent of cement in the concrete mix, reducing the carbon footprint of the temple. Madhusudan Patel, the temple's construction manager told PTI. "We have used heat-resistant nano tiles and heavy glass panels, merging both traditional aesthetic stone structures with modern-day functionality. Considering the extreme temperatures in UAE, the tiles will be comfortable for visitors to walk (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Finance Minister to review economy at FSDC meeting on Feb 21

FSDC's 1st meeting after passage of ₹ 47.6 lakh crore budget for 2024-25, focusing on capital expenditure with outlay of ₹ 11.11 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to review the state of the economy amid global challenges at a meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on February 21.

The 28th meeting of the high-level panel to be held here will be attended by all financial sector regulators, including RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, sources said.

This would be the first meeting of the FSDC after the passage of the ₹ 47.6 lakh crore Budget for 2024-25, focusing on capital expenditure with an outlay of ₹ 11.11 lakh crore.

In the meeting, the finance minister will review the current global



and domestic economic situation and financial stability issues.

Sitharaman is likely to stress key priorities highlighted in the interim budget, the way forward for

various future policies and measures that the government has proposed to take in many sectors, sources said.

Besides, the council may also review the progress of measures approved earlier for further development of the financial sector, and to achieve inclusive economic growth with macroeconomic stability.

The FSDC meeting will also review activities undertaken by the FSDC sub-committee chaired by the RBI governor and the action taken by members on the past decisions of FSDC.

Besides RBI governor, Securities and Exchange Board of India chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch,

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) chairman Debasish Panda, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) chairman Ravi Mital and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority's newly appointed chairman Deepak Mohanty will attend the meeting.

According to sources, the FSDC meeting will also be attended by union minister of state for finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, finance secretary T V Somanathan, economic affairs secretary Ajay Seth, revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra, financial services secretary Vivek Joshi and other top officials of the finance ministry. (PTI)

New Sensodyne Mouthwash Introduced to Indian Market

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Sensodyne, a leading oral care brand under Haleon (formerly GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare), has unveiled its latest innovation in the Indian market—Sensodyne Complete Protection+ Mouthwash.

This introduction marks Sensodyne's expansion into the rapidly growing mouthwash segment, complementing its existing line of toothpaste and brushes tailored for individuals with sensitive teeth. The launch comes at a time when the mouthwash category in India is experiencing significant growth, driven by an increasing focus on health consciousness among consumers.

Sensodyne aims to educate people on the advantages of incorporating mouthwash into their daily oral care routine, emphasizing its role in enhancing overall oral health. Sensodyne Complete Protection+ Mouthwash boasts a formulation devoid of alcohol, offering protection against tooth sensitivity and enamel wear while promoting strong teeth. Its fluoride content aids in cavity prevention, while the refreshing cool mint flavour ensures a sensation of freshness without any discomfort.

Bhawna Sikka, Category Lead-Oral Healthcare, Haleon IS, expressed enthusiasm about the launch, highlighting the brand's commitment to delivering science-backed products that address consumer needs comprehensively. She emphasized the mouthwash's ability to provide holistic oral health solutions, covering sensitivity, enamel wear, and cavity protection.

The new Sensodyne mouthwash will be available at various retail outlets including grocery stores, chemists, modern trade outlets, and e-commerce platforms across India. It comes in two convenient pack sizes – 100 ml priced at ₹ 130 and 250 ml priced at ₹ 230.

SIDBI launches projects to support Nagaland's socio-economic landscape

SIDBI to carry out projects in collaboration with IDAN to nurture startups, entrepreneurs in state

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 14: The Small Industries Development Bank of India's (SIDBI) launched several projects for Nagaland at the Capital Convention Centre in Kohima to help empower the state's socio-economic landscape.

The SIDBI would carry out the projects in collaboration with the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) aimed at nurturing startups and entrepreneurs in the state.

The key features of the projects included the opening of state and district-level Swavalamban Connect Kendras (SCKs), providing essential support to budding entrepreneurs across various sectors statewide and SIDBI sports scholarships, supporting five promising sportspersons annually through the Nagaland Olympic Association.

The IDAN and SIDBI also signed an MoUs on the SIDBI startup seed fund and SIDBI cluster development fund.

Gracing the programme as the special guest, adviser to industries and commerce, Hekanti Jakhalu underscored the pivotal role of entrepreneurship in fostering economic resilience and social



empowerment. Jakhalu emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts among the government, private sector and civil society to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurs.

She expressed gratitude to SIDBI for its support in empowering the state's socio-economic landscape.

Sivasubramanian Ramann, chairman and managing director of SIDBI, who was the guest of honour, reiterated SIDBI's commitment to supporting the entrepreneurial aspirations of the youths in Nagaland and the Northeast region.

Ramann said through these projects,

have access to finance, mentorship and market linkages to foster a vibrant startup ecosystem.

At the programme, Ramann also introduced the alternate investment funds of SIDBI, designed to assist startups and MSMEs in the state.

He emphasised the importance of awareness programmes on the available funds and the state's educated workforce, coupled with the government's intent to promote entrepreneurship, in heralding a brighter future for Nagaland.

The event concluded with interactions between entrepreneurs, business associations, social enterprises, NGOs and SIDBI officials, laying the groundwork for future collaborations among them.

BMW Group India Announces Second Edition of JOYTOWN Festival

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: BMW Group India has unveiled plans for the second edition of its JOYTOWN festival, promising an exhilarating blend of driving thrills, electrifying music, culinary delights, and unparalleled fun.

Scheduled to take place on April 12-13, 2024, at Mahalaxmi Racecourse, Mumbai, the festival aims to provide an immersive brand experience for enthusiasts and fans. Vikram Pawah, President, BMW Group India, expressed enthusiasm about the upcoming event, emphasizing its unique fusion of driving excitement and musical entertainment.

JOYTOWN, according to Pawah, reflects the ethos of BMW, MINI, and BMW Motorrad, offering a platform where automotive innovation meets the pulsating rhythms of renowned musicians. The festival will showcase an array of BMW, MINI, and BMW Motorrad vehicles, providing attendees with the opportunity to experience their power and agility firsthand.

Expert demonstrations on a specially designed track will highlight the capabilities of BMW xDrive technology. A live performance stage will feature globally acclaimed artists, including American electronic DJ duo The Chainsmokers and popular singer-songwriter Diljit Dosanjh, alongside other prominent acts spanning various musical genres. Curated by BookMyShow Live, the festival's lineup promises to



captivate audiophiles and music enthusiasts alike. Early bird tickets are available exclusively on BookMyShow, starting at INR 3999, with free entry for children under 10 years of age.

The BMW zone will showcase the brand's entire product range, including dedicated display areas such as the city circuit, adventure trail, adrenaline alley, and BMW electric zone. The MINI zone will highlight the brand's progressive ethos, featuring iconic models like the MINI Countryman and the MINI 3-door Hatch. Meanwhile, the BMW Motorrad zone will offer a comprehensive showcase of motorcycles, along with live entertainment, accessories, and a barbecue Beer Garden, embodying the brand's "Make Life a Ride" manifesto. Patrons can also partake in driving experiences, lifestyle collections, and gastronomic delights, making JOYTOWN a multifaceted event catering to diverse interests.

Union Minister to inaugurate Digital Summit

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Over 1000 prominent participants, including thought leaders, educators, top IT firm executives, and policymakers from at least four countries, are set to convene at two consecutive future skills conferences aimed at spotlighting new opportunities for Northeastern youths in cutting-edge technologies.

Union minister for state for electronics and II, skill development and entrepreneurship, Rajeev Chandrasekar, will inaugurate the Digital India Future Skills Summit, to be held at Guwahati University on Thursday. Organized by the National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT) Guwahati, with support from the Union ministry of electronics and

IT, this summit marks the first such initiative in the Northeast. Dr. Y. Jayanta Singh, Executive Director, NIELIT Guwahati, highlighted the summit's focus on digital literacy aligned with industry demands, emphasizing its role in shaping India's digitally empowered future society.

Subhanshu Tiwari, executive director and OSD to DG, NIELIT, revealed that the summit would feature panel discussions on cyber security, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and future skills. With over 25 speakers, including four global experts, attendees will also explore innovative exhibitions and witness strategic collaborations and leading tech firms such as Intel, HCL, Microsoft, Kindryl, and academic institutions like IIM Raipur and

IITM Gwalior.

Furthermore, the International Conference on Communication, Electronics, and Digital Technologies (NICEDT-2024), scheduled for February 16 and 17, will mark the second international-level conference organized by NIELIT, the first in the Northeast. Expected to receive over 200 papers covering subjects like artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data, cyber security, and advanced computing, the conference will feature international speakers, further enriching the discourse on future technologies. Both events aim to harness the potential of Northeastern youths by providing them with insights, collaborations, and opportunities in emerging technologies, thus propelling India into a technologically advanced future.

Gunfight in Manipur's Kakching district, no injuries so far

IMPHAL, Feb 14: Armed men attacked Sugnu village in Manipur's Kakching district on Wednesday morning, triggering a gunfight with village volunteers stationed in the area, officials said.

No injuries have been reported so far, but sporadic firing is continuing, according to police.

"Several armed individuals fired shots towards Sugnu, prompting a response from the village volunteers," police said. Additional security personnel have been dispatched to the area to manage the situation.

Last May, Sugnu witnessed severe violence, resulting in the burning of numerous houses and the loss of more than five lives, which compelled hundreds of villagers to seek refuge in relief camps.

On Tuesday, a 25-year-old village volunteer was killed and two others were injured in a gunfight between two warring communities at Pukhao Shantipur in Imphal East district. He was taken to a private hospital in Imphal where he succumbed to his injuries.

An army officer also suffered gunshot injuries in a separate incident in the district when he, along with other security personnel, was going to control a situation.

More than 180 people were killed in Manipur since the ethnic violence erupted on May 3 last year after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for scheduled tribe (ST) status. (PTI)

Stock market slides in early trade; Sensex slumps over 675 points

MUMBAI, Feb 14: Equity benchmark indices plummeted in early trade on Wednesday and Sensex slumped more than 675 points tracking negative cues in the global market as higher than expected inflation numbers in the US hit investor sentiments.

The broader 50-share Nifty tumbled 187.85 points or 0.86 per cent to 21,555.40 points while the 30-share Sensex crashed 675.79 points or 0.94 per cent to 70,879.40 points.

The latest inflation data from the US has upended expectations of when the Federal Reserve might start slashing interest rates.

As many as 27 scrips in the Sensex index declined. Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, HDFC Bank and TCS were among the major losers in the early trade.

In the Nifty pack, 44 stocks were in the red.

"January's hotter-than-expected US inflation report threw the financial market into a tailspin on Tuesday and upended investors' expectations about how soon and by how much the Federal Reserve might start cutting interest rates," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities, said.

In the US, the consumer price index rose 0.3 per cent in January and the core rate -- which excludes volatile food and energy costs -- rose 0.4 per cent, a tick above Wall Street expectations.

Asian markets witnessed mixed trends on Wednesday,



with Japan's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng indices trading lower while China's SSE Composite Index gained over 1 per cent. On Tuesday, US and European stocks closed in the red.

"Asian stocks tracked a drop on Wall Street following hotter-than-expected US inflation data, while a slump in the yen past 150 per dollar triggered a warning from Japan," Jasani said.

BSE Sensex surged 482.70 points to close at 71,555.19 points on Tuesday while the broader NSE Nifty gained 127.20 points to end the day at 21,743.25 points.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net buyers on Tuesday as they purchased shares worth ₹ 376.32 crore, according to data available with BSE. (PTI)

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Cong receives Kamalakhya

Two other Congress MLAs -- Sashi Kanta Das and Siddeque Ahmed -- had earlier "joined the government" but are a part of the opposition party's legislators. Officially, the BJP's strength in the 126-member Assam Assembly is 61, while its allies UPPL has seven MLAs and AGP has nine.

In the opposition camp, the Congress' strength is 27, AIUDF has 15 members, BPF has three and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator also.

Sarma also claimed that during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Assam, Rahul Gandhi asked Congress MLAs to "tear apart" the Assam CM after an independent legislator had complained of inaction by MLAs of the grand old party.

"Rahul Gandhi told the MLAs that if you can't do that, you will be expelled from the party for 5 or 10 or 15 years. But I am happy that the Assam Assembly never witnessed a peaceful business like it has seen this time. There is not even a single walkout, forget about tearing apart."

"The MLAs are with me now. This is my gift to Rahul Gandhi... It was not Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, but Bharat Todo Anyay Yatra. However, it has become Congress Todo Yatra while it is on the move," he added.

Sarma expressed hope that after seeing the developmental works of his government, more opposition MLAs will support him. "In the last two to four days, 6-7 (opposition) MLAs met me. When the talks mature, we will present them in front of you. They may be physically with their parent party but mentally with us," he claimed.

Sarma said the BJP-led alliance will win at least 11 out of the 14 seats in Assam in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and the margins will be in the range of 1.5 lakh to 5 lakh votes.

"If we convert this into Assembly constituencies, then we will lead in 100 seats. In the 12th seat in Lok Sabha, we have a 50:50 chance," he added.

Sarma also said that he is not seeking 'Miya' votes for the next two years as a lot of welfare works like the drive against child marriage and encroachment need to be completed before that.

'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. "I will go to them after completing the developmental works. I will get all their votes. Congress and AIUDF will shut shops by then," he claimed. (PTI)

Mizoram body urges Centre

Mizos share ethnic ties with the Chin people in Myanmar. Shah had recently said that the Centre has decided to erect a fence along the India-Myanmar border and review the FMR.

In his meeting with Shah in Delhi last week, Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma had urged the Union home minister not to construct the India-Myanmar border fence in Mizoram even if it is erected in neighbouring Manipur. Four states -- Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh -- share a 1,643-km-long international border with Myanmar. The FMR allows people living on both sides of the border to travel within 16 km of each other's territory without a visa. (PTI)

TLA leaders meet CM

The Tiwa people have well preserved the age old practice of barter system, where it is not found anywhere. However, the land where Junbeel mela is organised the land has been extensively encroached. The land should be properly protected from encroachers.

The TLA has also mentioned development of border roads. The road from Anguri to Bormarjong via Karbi Hidi and road from Umswai to Tipali via Trandubi should be connected. The TLA has also demanded for unconditional release of jailed TLA cadres and withdrawal of all pending cases. The statue of Chutursing Raja, the first hero of Tiwas who in 1832 killed four British officials, should be erected in Amri and in other Tiwa dominated areas and an ITI should be established at Puma Kunchi near Oguri.

Nagaland CM seeks stakeholder

The chief minister also said that the education department is working on "rationalisation" of teachers in government schools. In the process, he said, excess teachers of a school will be transferred to where there are fewer teachers while the schools having nil enrolment will be shut. He requested village councils and leaders to extend support to the department in the process.

The newly upgraded Government High School Meriema started as a Mission School way back in the late 1920s and is recorded to be the best-maintained school in Northern Angami-II area.

The chief minister appreciated the Meriema Village Council for their contribution to the construction of additional classrooms for the school. "Such community support is the need of the hour," he said.

Rio expressed optimism that the inauguration of the new school building marks a new chapter in the history of government schools and the future of education in the state at large. (PTI)

Abu Dhabi's first Hindu

even in hot weather. Non-ferrous material has also been used in the temple." Eighteen lakh bricks, seven lakh man hours and 1.8 lakh cubic metres of sandstone directly from Rajasthan -- Abu Dhabi's first Hindu temple has been made in the Nagara style of architecture, just like the recently inaugurated Ram Temple in Ayodhya. According to Umesh Raja, a volunteer at the temple, 20,000 tonnes of sandstone pieces were carved in Rajasthan and then shipped to Abu Dhabi in 700 containers.

"Not just the stone, many labourers who helped construct the temple over five years belong to Gujarat and Rajasthan. Even the marble mined from Italy was first shipped to India for carving and then back to the UAE to be used in the interiors," he said, adding that 18 lakh bricks have been used in the construction of the temple. The work for the structure has been going on since 2019. The land for the temple was donated by the UAE government. The UAE has three other Hindu temples that are located in Dubai. The BAPS temple, spread over a large area with stone architecture, will be the largest of all in the Gulf region.

Prime Minister Modi is in the UAE on a two-day visit, his seventh visit to the UAE since 2015 and his third in the last eight months. (PTI)

Bajrang Dal, VHP compel puja

shown towards Devi Saraswati by the students of the Government College of Art and Craft. The VHP will not tolerate any disrespect towards Hindu deities," he said. Police visited the spot but no complaint was lodged by the college or the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, a senior officer said. (PTI)

World today needs govts

needs governments that are inclusive, take everyone along, and are clean and free from corruption, he asserted. "On one hand the world is progressing towards modernity, on the other, the challenges from earlier centuries are intensifying," he said. Today, technology is proving to be a key disruptor but it positive or negative, he said.

"Terrorism in various forms is bringing new challenges before humanity every day. Today, climate challenges are becoming widespread with time. On the one hand, there are domestic concerns, on the other hand, the international system seems in disarray," Modi said.

The prime minister said that people need governments today that can provide - Ease of Living, Ease of Justice, Ease of Mobility, Ease of Innovation and Ease of Doing Business. In his remarks, Modi also said Dubai is becoming the epicentre of the global economy, commerce and technology.

"The World Government Summit has become a great medium to bring together thought leaders from across the world on a common platform. The way Dubai is emerging is an epicentre of global economy, commerce and technology, it represents a splendid example before the globe," he said.

Hailing UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, Modi said he is a leader with vision and resolve.

The World Governments Summit is taking place under the theme of 'Shaping Future Governments' with the conversation involving governments, international organisations, thought leaders, and private sector leaders from around the globe. Ahead of his address at the summit, the PM met Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE. The two leaders discussed a wide range of areas of bilateral cooperation including trade and investment, technology, education and people-to-people ties.

Prime Minister Modi who began his two-day visit to the Arab nation on Tuesday arrived in Abu Dhabi and was welcomed by United Arab Emirates president Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He was also accorded the Guard of Honour. On Tuesday night, the Burj Khalifa also lit up with the words -- "Guest of Honor - the Republic of India" -- ahead of Modi's address at the World Government Summit. (PTI)

Saraswati Puja celebrated with traditional fervour

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 14: Saraswati Puja was observed in most of the educational institutions and mandirs in Sivasagar on Wednesday with traditional fervour.

However, there was not the usual rush of students and their parents at Fuleswari Girls' HS, Govt HS, Bezbaruah HS, and Thauram HS, as the HSSLC examinations have begun and the HSLC examinations are set to begin.

In the colleges and primary schools, the usual enthusiasm was observed among the students and teachers of all faiths and communities.

At Sanatan Dharma Namghar, the Saraswati Devi puja was observed with great enthusiasm among the devotees, and the puja was performed by priest Paran Sarma.

Our Biswanath Chariali correspondent adds: On Wednesday, on the auspicious occasion of Vasant Panchami, educational institutions nationwide reverently worshipped the goddess of knowledge and wisdom, Devi Saraswati. Similarly, Saraswati Puja was fervently observed across all educational institutions in the greater Biswanath area, including government, provincialised, and public



sector schools on Wednesday.

The day was marked with great fervour as educational institutions, along with the general public and students, celebrated this special occasion.

Students offered prayers, seeking the blessings of the Goddess of wisdom.

Our Demow correspondent adds: Demow and its surrounding areas witnessed the vibrant celebration of Saraswati Puja in educational institutions on Wednesday. Devotees gathered to seek divine blessings for enhanced learning skills.

Students adorned in colourful attire made their way to their respective schools in Demow, offering prayers to Goddess Saraswati. Subsequently, both boys and girls took to the streets, adorned in festive attire, to partake in the Saraswati Puja celebrations.

Following the Anjali rituals, Prasad was distributed among the students, further enhancing the festive spirit.

Concurrently, Wednesday also marked Valentine's Day, adding to the day's festivities.

Our Hojai correspondent adds: Saraswati Puja was cele-

brated with great enthusiasm across Hojai district on Wednesday.

The day, which coincides with Vasant Panchami, the first day of spring, is observed as the day of the birth of the Goddess of Learning and wisdom.

Educational institutions celebrated Saraswati Puja with great pomp and religious fervour. Since morning, students donning their best traditional clothes gathered at their respective institutions and celebrated the puja.

Small pandals were also put up in some areas, where the local people paid obeisance to the Goddess of Learning, Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai Girls' College, Gandhi Vidyapith High School, Marwari Hindi Pratham Vidyalaya, Rashtra Bhasha High School, along with other schools and educational institutions, celebrated Saraswati Puja with great enthusiasm.

Students wearing traditional dresses were seen paying obeisance during the puja.

Saraswati idols, brought to the school and college campuses the previous evening, were worshipped in the morning hours followed by cultural programs where students, along with teachers, performed. After that, prasad was distributed.

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, Feb 14: AIUDF supremo Badruddin Ajmal took a jibe at Congress leadership, accusing them of being drowned by dictatorship across the nation, especially in Assam.

Speaking to media persons in Dalgaon on Wednesday, Ajmal criticised the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) for giving the BJP an easy win in the state, leading to multiple Congress MLAs and their leadership defect-

ing to the BJP.

Regarding the open support given to the BJP government in the state by two Congress MLAs, Kamalakhya Dey Purakayastha and Basanta Das, Ajmal expressed his belief that everyone except APCC president Bhupen Bora would eventually join the BJP.

He lamented the weakening of the Opposition against the BJP due to the arrogance of Congress leadership, stating that efforts to defeat the BJP nationwide have been in-

effective. Ajmal asserted his party's commitment to fighting BJP by projecting three candidates in the upcoming general election.

He accused the Congress party of neglecting Muslims in various sectors and highlighted several massacres that occurred during Congress rule.

Meanwhile, Dalgaon legislator Mazibur Rahman suggested that Gaurav Gogoi and Pradyut Bordoloi would also defect to the BJP if they were voted in again.

Community mourns loss of esteemed resident Binu Devi

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Feb 14: The passing of Binu Devi, an esteemed senior citizen of Morigaon town, at her residence in Rajagaon at 6:40 pm on Tuesday, has cast a pall of sorrow over the community.

Born in 1939 in Maj-Jajari gaon, Nagaon district, Binu Devi was a respected resident of Rajagaon Ward no 1.

Throughout her life, she remained actively engaged with the Morigaon district Brahmin Samaj and various religious institutions.

She is survived by three sons, two daughters-in-law, a son-in-law, granddaughters, and numerous relatives.

In the wake of her demise, Assam Sahitya Sabha president Dr Suryakant Hazarika and general secretary Dr Upendrajit Sharma expressed their heartfelt condolences, particularly to senior journalist Ajit Sharma on the loss of his mother.

Pratap Hazarika, a senior journalist and former president of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Morigaon, also expressed deep sorrow over her passing.

Additionally, district public relations officer Pompi Devi, Assam Brahmin Samaj secretary general Tutul Barthakur, former secretary general of Assam Sahitya Sabha Yadav Sharma, along with numerous organisations including Morigaon Sarvajanan Sri Sri Durga Puja Festival Celebration Committee, Sevashram Samiti, Bihutali Development Committee, Morigaon Sadar Rangali Bihu Sammelan, Morigaon District Kalita Janagoshthi Sammelan, and Sadao Assam Journalists Association (AJU), joined individuals in expressing their profound condolences to the grieving families.

Morigaon district commissioner Devashish Sharma visited the residence of the deceased woman to pay his respects and extend his condolences, wishing her eternal peace.

Workshop on women's health advocates for healthier lifestyles & gender equity

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: "We have noted a concerning trend of early menstruation onset among many young girls, which can be attributed to factors such as insufficient participation in outdoor activities, poor dietary habits including consumption of junk food and sugary beverages," stated Dr R Ravi Kannan, a distinguished surgical oncologist and recipient of the Padma Shri and the Ramon Magsaysay Award.

Speaking at a workshop on the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (BBBP) scheme held at Assam University, Silchar on Tuesday, Dr Kannan, who serves as the director of the Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, expressed apprehension over the escalating incidence of breast, ovarian, cervical, and uterine cancers among women. Stressing the significance

of sexual hygiene in cancer prevention, he urged individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles by eliminating habits such as alcohol and tobacco consumption.

The workshop, organised by Assam University, Silchar, as part of an initiative by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), drew participation from a diverse audience including academicians, researchers, government officials, social workers, and students. Madhumita Dhar Sarkar, a professor at Assam University, shared insights from her field visits to rural areas in the Barak Valley, emphasising the need to combat child marriage and promote awareness on family planning.

The 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme, launched by the Government of India, aims to address issues such as female foeticide, ensure the safety and education of girls, and empower them.

Asoke Kumar Sen, vice-chancellor in charge of Assam University, underscored the importance of such workshops in fostering collaboration to achieve the scheme's objectives and affirmed the university's commitment to gender equity. Khaleda Sultana Ahmed, additional deputy commissioner of Cachar, outlined the district administration's efforts under the scheme, including initiatives to declare villages as 'zero-child marriage' zones.

Various speakers including Prof Baby Puspa Sinha and Rashmi Ranjan Mishra from Assam University, along with Kabita Sengupta from a local school, highlighted the importance of collective action for the holistic development of girls and women in the region.

Overall, participants expressed optimism about overcoming challenges and creating a conducive environment for gender equality and empowerment.

Dhemaji Railway Station of NFR poised for remarkable upgrade

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: As part of an ongoing effort to enhance railway infrastructure in the North East and Assam, the interim Budget 2024-25 has allocated ₹ 10,369 crores for railway infrastructure projects. Among these initiatives, the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS) aims to revamp 60 stations in the North East with modern amenities and facilities.

Dhemaji Railway Station has been selected as one of the stations to undergo a significant transformation under this scheme, with an estimated cost of ₹ 6.34 crores. Dhemaji Railway Station serves as a vital transportation hub for Dhemaji town and falls under the jurisdiction of the Tinsukia division of NFR.

The redevelopment project will entail the extension and enhancement of the existing station building, featuring a modern facade and upgraded facilities such as air-conditioned waiting halls equipped with the latest amenities for passenger comfort.

Additionally, provisions will be made for free Wi-Fi access, ramps for Divyangjan (differently-abled individuals), and improved toilet facilities, including separate blocks for male and female passengers. Elevators, escalators, executive lounges, and designated spaces for business meetings will also be incorporated, along with landscaping efforts to enhance aesthetics.

Parking facilities will be improved, and the circulating area will undergo beautification, while all platforms will be equipped with shelters and resurfaced for smoother passenger movement.

Furthermore, the development of entry and exit pathways will enhance accessibility for passengers.

Tenders have already been awarded for the various aspects of the project, with foundation work for the new station building already underway.

Concurrently, efforts are being made to install coach guidance boards, train information display

systems, extend platforms, and provide easy access water booths for Divyangjan.

The anticipated upgrade of Dhemaji Railway Station is expected to

generate new employment opportunities, stimulate business growth, and facilitate smoother travel experiences for passengers across the North East region.

জাননী

মোৰ নাম শ্ৰী দিলীপ চৌহানৰ পৰিবৰ্তে বামেশ্বৰ চৌহান বুলি কোনো কোনো নথিপত্ৰ উল্লেখ হৈ আছে। এই জাননীযোগে মই স্পষ্ট কৰো যে আচলতে মোৰ মোৰ নাম দিলীপ চৌহান, পিতামৃত শংকৰ চৌহান হৈ হ'ব লাগে।

স্থায়ী ঠিকনা

সাং : গড়বাটুপ, ডাকঘৰ : গেকৰা
মৌজা : বগুৱা, থানা : মৰিগাঁও
জিলা : মৰিগাঁও (অসম)

অস্থায়ী ঠিকনা

সাং : খেৰণি পূৰ্বাবতী
থানা : ডাকঘৰ : খেৰণি
জিলা : পশ্চিম কাৰ্বি আংলং (অসম)

AFFIDAVIT

I Raiz Alam S/o Kashem Ali, Resident of Vill. Gotlong, P.S. Tezpur, P.O. Kaliabhomora, Dist. Sonitpur, Assam an Ex Service man of 11 Assam Rifles hereby declare vide affidavit dtd 08-09- 2010 before Notary, Tezpur that I have changed my name from Ramesh Alam. In all official records I was known as Ramesh Alam from 2004 till the date of affidavit. Henceforth I shall be known as Raiz Alam for all official purposes & intents hereafter.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Sri Ramesh Mahatu, S/O. Sri Jagadish Mahatu, Resident of Vill. Gotlong, P.S. Tezpur, P.O. Kaliabhomora, Dist.Sonitpur, Assam I here by declare that by an affidavit in the Court of Sub-Divisional magistrate Tezpur, on 28-6-04 that my name is Ramesh and surname is Mahatu. I have got married with a Muslim Girl whose name is Jyoshnara Begum D/O. Md. Sahed Ali. At the time of marriage got my hindu religion converted into Muslim religion. At Present my name is Ramesh and surname is Alam. Now after my marriage held on 12th February 2004 performed in accordance with Muslim religion. My name and Surname Ramesh Alam be used in all official papers and documents hereafter.

OBITUARY



Bimal Dutta Lahkar, my father breathed his last at his residence in Rehabari in Guwahati on February 5. His kindness touched every soul fortunate enough to know him. He always led an honest and an ethical life. He was a true sportsman and followed his passion for table tennis all throughout his life.

My father worked as the chief security officer in India Carbon Limited. He survived by his wife, son, daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and two grand children. He was 83 at the time of his death.

I will always cherish the tender care, love, special attention and affection he showered on me as his daughter. He always had a very deep and quiet way of showing his concern for me. He always made me feel that I had a special place in his heart.

May he find serenity in the embrace of eternal peace, and may his spirit continue to inspire us to live with the same grace, compassion and ethics that defined his remarkable existence. In our hearts, he remains an indelible presence, forever guiding and comforting us through the tapestry of life.

Karishma Lahkar

Ali-Aye-Ligang observed in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 14: "Folk culture is the foundation of our national life. The greater the influence of folk culture, the more it enriches the beauty of our nation," remarked Lurinjyoti Gogoi, president of Asom Jatiya Parishad, while attending the Ali-Aye-Ligang festival held at Milan Nagar, Muranghar in Dibrugarh on Wednesday.

The day was marked by a day-long colourful cultural program organised by the Dibrugarh Town Missing Kebang.

During the meeting presided over by Mahendra Pegu, president of Dibrugarh Town Missing Kebang, AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi further stated, "We are worshippers of nature. Our entire world revolves around agriculture. We can progress in life only with the help of crops."

A cultural competition was inaugurated by Laxminath Tay, general secretary of Missing Drirbri Kebang.

Following this, Dr Pabitra Kumar Pegu, central advisor of Missing Scholar Kebang, delivered the keynote speech, explaining the significance of the festival.

On this occasion, eminent physician Dr Garkhia Medak was formally felicitated by Dibrugarh Town Missing Kebang.

Tale of transformation under village leader Tehon Hakun

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 14: Nestled amidst the picturesque landscapes of the historical Patkai Hills, Malu Gaon I in Ledo, with its modest population of 600 Tangsa tribe members, has emerged as a prime tourist attraction, thanks to the vision and efforts of its village pradhan, Tehon Hakun.

Reflecting on the journey from adversity to acclaim, Tehon Hakun, a 60-year-old leader, shared the challenges faced by the village two decades ago. Lack of basic amenities such as electricity, proper roads, educational institutions, and water supply hindered its growth and deterred visitors.

Determined to change this



narrative, Tehon Hakun spearheaded various initiatives, including the construction of wells harnessing water from the Patkai Hills. The roots of Malu Gaon trace back two centuries when Tehon Hakun's ancestors, belonging to the Tangsa tribe, settled in the area, practicing traditional Jhum

cultivation for sustenance.

Despite the rugged terrain, the community boasts a remarkable longevity, with many individuals living beyond 90 years.

Embracing Christianity as their predominant faith, the Tangsa community of Malu Gaon adheres to strict principles, prohibiting the con-

sumption of alcohol and tobacco. Education plays a pivotal role in the village, with educated youths actively participating in agricultural endeavors and tea cultivation. Tehon Hakun's advocacy for electrification, once a contentious issue with Northeastern Coalfields Coal India Margherita, bore fruit in 2022. Through the implementation of the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) scheme by the state government, every household in Malu Gaon I now enjoys access to electricity, marking a significant milestone in the village's development journey.

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/Consultant (P&M)/741/2023/10358

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/SMO/1/2007/5421 Date : 06/06/2023, it is for general information of all concerned that the interview for the post of Expert (Consultant, Planning) under Samagra Shiksha Axom will be held on **21.02.2024 from 9.30 am onwards** in the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19.

The date-wise list of short-listed candidate is uploaded in the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axom at <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

The short-listed candidates are requested to attend in the interview as per the scheduled date in the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19 with the original testimonial relating to Educational Qualification, Experience and other documents, etc.



Sd/- Mission Director,
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/DF/2710/23/15-Feb-24

No. E-400089/60

NOTICE FOR DOCUMENT VERIFICATION FOR RECRUITMENT TO THE POST OF VFA

With reference to this office Advertisement No. E 400089/45 dated 29th December 2023 which was published on 31/12/2023, this is for information to all concerned that Document Verification for the post of **Veterinary Field Assistant (VFA)** will be held from **19/02/2024 to 20/02/2024** at the Directorate campus of the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Assam at Chenikuthi, Guwahati-03 as per the schedule given below:

Sl. No.	Roll Nos	Date	Time	Reporting Time
1	001 to 092	19/02/2024	09.00 am to 1.00 pm	08.00 am
2	093 to 184	19/02/2024	1.30 pm to 5.30 pm	12.30 noon
3	185 to 277	20/02/2024	09.00 am to 1.00 pm	08.00 am
4	278 to 365	20/02/2024	1.30 pm to 5.30 pm	12.30 noon

The candidates are requested to visit the Departmental website animalhusbandry.assam.gov.in for details.

The candidates appearing for Document Verification must bring the following testimonials in original along with self-attested photocopies in chronological order thereof for verification/scrutiny on the above mentioned dates:-

- H.S.L.C Admit/Pass Certificate as a proof of age.
- H.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
- H.S.S.L.C (Sc.) Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
- School of Veterinary Science, Ghungoor, Silchar Passed Certificate.
- Caste Certificate, if applicable.
- Permanent Residential Certificate/Employment Exchange Registration.
- Photo Identity Card (Aadhaar Card/Voter ID/PAN Card).
- Any other documents that may be relevant for their candidature.

No intimation letter to the eligible candidates shall be sent separately by post. The candidates shall have to present the Documents for verification as per the Schedule mentioned above without fail. No TA/DA will be admissible.

Sd/-
Director
A.H. & Veterinary Department, Assam
Chenikuthi, Guwahati-03

Janasanyog /D/17794/23/15-Feb-24

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If love is the answer, could you please rephrase the question? -Lily Tomlin

LS polls: BJP's Hindutva push

In the intricate game of political chess, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath seems to have crafted a masterful strategy centered around Hindutva ideology, poised to influence the 2024 general elections. The recent sequence of events, from the 'Pran Prathisthan' at the Ayodhya Ram Mandir to the opening of a Hindu temple in the Abu Dhabi desert, underscores the BJP's concerted efforts to solidify its hold on Hindu votes. Prime Minister Modi's visit to the UAE, marked by the grand reception and the unveiling of the "Bhavaya Hindu Temple," strategically harnesses Hindu symbolism to bolster the party's support base. In sync with this narrative, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's actions, including facilitating prayers at disputed sites like Kashi's Gyanvapi and Mathura's Krishna Janambhoomi, further amplify the BJP's Hindutva agenda. These moves not only energize the party's core supporters but also provoke reactions from opposition quarters, inadvertently aiding the BJP's electoral narrative. The response from figures like Tauqeer Raza and a TMC minister plays right into the BJP's hands, validating their focus on Hindutva as a central theme for the upcoming elections. The brazen remarks from these individuals, coupled with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's assertive actions, create a charged atmosphere, effectively polarizing the electorate along religious lines.

However, amidst this political manoeuvring, it's crucial to recognise the underlying implications. The BJP's emphasis on Hindutva appears to overshadow pressing issues such as the ongoing farmer protests, indicating a prioritisation of electoral optics over substantive governance concerns. The standoff on Delhi's borders seems relegated to the periphery as the BJP amplifies its achievements on the global stage, particularly in the Gulf region. Prime Minister Modi's success in securing the release of condemned Indian sailors in Qatar, coupled with the establishment of a Hindu temple in a Muslim country, serves as a testament to the BJP's ability to leverage international engagements for domestic political gains. The symbolism inherent in these achievements resonates strongly with the party's voter base, reinforcing their allegiance to the BJP. As the 2024 elections loom large, the BJP's Hindutva-centric approach is poised to dominate the political landscape. The party's relentless pursuit of religious symbolism and strategic provocations aimed at the opposition signal a calculated bid to consolidate Hindu votes. With sites like Gyanvapi and Krishna Janambhoomi becoming focal points of contention, the stage is set for a charged electoral battle revolving around identity politics.

In this electoral calculus, the BJP appears poised to capitalize on religious sentiments while downplaying other pressing socio-economic issues. The opposition, in turn, must navigate this terrain carefully, recognising the potency of the BJP's Hindutva narrative while offering alternative visions for governance and development. As the political landscape evolves, it becomes increasingly evident that the BJP's Hindutva push is not merely a campaign strategy but a concerted effort to redefine the contours of Indian politics, with far-reaching implications for the country's secular fabric and democratic ethos. In the lead-up to 2024, the battle lines are drawn, and the stakes have never been higher.

Pakistani voters have proclaimed their faith in democracy, Election Commission has to reciprocate



By: Tirthankar Mitra

Pakistan is left sans an announced victor after its recently held elections. It is time for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to take call. In doing so, the ECP will have to look the army in the eye. For it is the army which has engineered a fractured mandate by knocking out the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) before the people queued up before the polling booth. At the moment, frantic closed door negotiations are on over the possible configuration of power in Pakistan. The results show that PTI backed 101 independents have won while PML-N with 75 seats is getting the support of the army. Pakistan military wants a coalition government led by PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif in alliance with the PPP. Imran Khan's PTI is being kept outside this coalition talks. Indications are the Pak army chief will decide the nature of the coalition.

Aspirations of the poll contestants widely differ. Some will be glad to see the election chapter closed while others are willing to see further even if it turns out to be the bitter end. But the voters are not in a mood to meekly move on. It is this feature which sets them apart from some of the personalities and political outfits seeking their votes.

The people of Pakistan have good reason to stand up and be counted. After all, these men and women before casting their votes have navigated a long voyage of intimidation. Political tragedy visited Pakistan on an occasion which should have been a dance of democracy. A stalemate has been deliberately engineered and it has to be broken.

Glaring discrepancies in the election results have surfaced. Such differences point to suspicions to poll irregularities. Huge differences in the votes polled be-

tween strong and unknown candidates top the chart if one is to start a count of irregularities. It boils down to outright theft of poll mandate in various parts of Pakistan at the instance of the officials prodded by the Pak army.

Watchdogs of democracy in Pakistan and away from it are eager to learn of the reason and remedy to the wide gulfs of differences nay discrepancies between some of the ECP's announced results and tallies maintained by candidates together with television news channels. Suspicions of anomaly are strengthened by the inordinate delays in bringing out the results.

How come results maintained by television channels tally with the same announced by ECP much later? How in many urban constituencies such differences are markedly large? Incidentally, these constituencies had significant media coverage. It led to ensuring an accurate tally of votes cast.

Instances are galore. Candidates of PTI contesting as independents in Islamabad, Multan, Lahore have been witness to comfortable and sometimes thumping victory margins turning to improbable defeats. Some have moved court challenging the results. Others will follow suit. Doubts of things going awry during the counting process cannot be set aside. This has to be probed and addressed.

Given the precedent set by the present Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) withholding the Daska by-poll results in February 2021, a principled stand is expected. One especially looks forward to such action where the Opposition candidate has a strong claim. Wherever the rules allow, the ECP must have a recount. This is an opportunity to reestablish democracy in Pakistan and the ECP should not miss it. (IPA Service)

Union Budget FY 2024-25: The path to balanced welfare and growth

The FY 2024-25 Interim Budget, recently unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, marks a departure from the typical democratic playbook observed in the weeks leading up to the Lok Sabha general election. Traditionally, this period sees a flurry of short-term welfare measures and tax concessions aimed at winning over voters. However, in a surprising twist, the budget for the upcoming year lacks any populist measures designed for short-term electoral gains.

Notably, the fiscal deficit for FY 2023-24, standing at 5.8%, is projected to be even lower than the ambitious target of 5.9%, with a further decrease anticipated to 5.1% in FY 2024-25. This reduction is accompanied by a substantial decrease in borrowings, with ₹52,000 crore less this year compared to the previous, and a planned further reduction of ₹49,000 crore for the next fiscal year.

In an unprecedented move for a growing economy, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of GDP, such reductions during an election period are highly unusual and potentially unprecedented in India's recent history. The current year has witnessed a remarkable 28.9% increase in capital expenditure over the previous year, with an additional estimated rise of 16.9% slated for the upcoming fiscal year.

Furthermore, a record-breaking allocation of ₹11,11,111 crore for the Union's capital expenditure alone in FY 2024-25 highlights a concerted effort towards growth. This budget not only refrains from succumbing to the allure of short-term populist measures but also showcases a commitment to fiscal



discipline, adhering to the roadmap of fiscal consolidation. In a political landscape where election-year budgets typically include additional welfare measures, the emphasis on growth-centric capital investments is a noteworthy achievement in the democratic context.

Maintaining a delicate equilibrium between social welfare and economic growth is a commendable feat in the intricate landscape of a tumultuous democracy, especially in the weeks leading up to seeking the electorate's mandate. Striking the right balance involves navigating the perpetual trade-off between the immediate political gains and the pursuit of sustained long-term growth.

The primary challenge in a developing nation lies in harmonizing short-term welfare initiatives with the overarching goal of long-term public well-being. In this regard, the 2024-25 Budget emerges as a success story. This budget signifies three key aspects: firstly, the quiet confidence of the Union government in the people's recognition and appreciation of their decade-long achievements; sec-

ondly, a steadfast commitment to fiscal prudence and the promotion of investments; and thirdly, a clear acknowledgment of the indispensable role of financial stability in fostering sustained investment and long-term growth.

During the peak of the pandemic in FY 2021, the Union's fiscal deficit soared to 9.2% of the GDP. Looking ahead to FY 2025, there is an estimated reduction to 5.1%, with further expectations of it falling below 4.5% in FY 2026, contingent upon the continuation of the current trajectory of fiscal consolidation and prudent management of public funds. Dispelling a prevalent misconception, it's crucial to understand that both the Union and state levels grapple with stretched public finances; the notion of the Union having abundant funds for unrestricted transfers to states is inaccurate.

In FY 2024-25, the Union's gross tax and non-tax revenues amount to ₹42.33 trillion.

However, transfers to states

alone, encompassing Finance Commission devolution, other grants, and centrally sponsored schemes, stand at ₹22.75 trillion, representing approximately 53.7% of the total revenues. When factoring in interest payments and establishment costs, expenditures surpass total gross revenues, excluding Union subsidies. This underscores the imperative need to persist on the path of fiscal consolidation for the sustenance of robust economic growth.

States bear a multitude of governance responsibilities, inevitably leading to fiscal stress. However, there exists a considerable divergence in fiscal management among states.

Surprisingly, even in some affluent states, the control over short-term welfare measures has faltered, resulting in extravagant spending on un-

productive schemes, including those categorized as capital investments. This fiscal extravagance has manifested in expanding revenue deficits, where current expenditure surpasses revenues, compelling states to borrow for day-to-day expenses.

Conversely, certain states with lower per capita income exhibit commendable fiscal restraint, achieving healthy revenue surpluses while concurrently fostering investment and growth. Uttar Pradesh, boasting a revenue surplus of ₹74,000 crore in FY 2024-25, and Odisha, with a surplus of ₹23,000 crore in FY 2023-24, exemplify instances of sound public finances and prudent management, successfully retaining public support.

The instances underscore that

effective economic management does not necessarily translate into a political liability.

It is imperative that our public discourse transcends divisive subjects and primal allegiances tied to caste, religion, and region. Instead, the focus should pivot towards tangible issues such as economic growth, employment generation, and the eradication of poverty.

Political endeavors ought to center around effective governance, with the overarching goal of propelling rapid economic expansion and fostering prosperity. At the core of this pursuit lies prudent fiscal management, serving as the indispensable cornerstone for both growth and prosperity.

To achieve these objectives, a concerted effort is needed to enhance capacities, productivity, and opportunities, with a strategic emphasis on quality education, skills development, and healthcare.

Striving for fairness, balanced growth, and fostering healthy competition can be achieved through initiatives like small-town development, in situ urbanization, expeditious and equitable dispute resolution, and a resolute crackdown on widespread corruption and harassment – both of which act as deterrents to wealth creation.

In short, our governance must center around achieving equilibrium in growth, fostering opportunities, generating employment, and actualizing genuine wealth creation. The optimistic aspiration is that the noteworthy Union budget for FY 2024-25 will serve as the catalyst for a positive trend in these crucial aspects. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewsline@gmail.com)

Russia and Iran are the two countries suffering maximum sanctions in the world

By: Girish Linganna

Sunday (February 11, 2024) marks the 45th anniversary of the overthrow of US-supported Iranian King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (commonly referred to in the Western world as Mohammed Reza Shah) by public revolt, leading to the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This event greatly changed Iran's relationship with Moscow.

Trade between Iran and Russia changed a lot in the 30 years after the erstwhile Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. It went down by 65% from 2010 to 2015 because of UN sanctions on Iran and then, rose almost four times by 2022 after the sanctions were removed, a new trade path was made and their military partnership got stronger. "We, in Iran, are fully open to improving our relationship with Russia," President Ebrahim Raisi said to Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2022. By 2023, trade got even better, particularly with secret military deals.

Tehran and Moscow both faced challenges after being cut off from the global trading system and Western markets. Iran was under international pressure because of progress in its nuclear programme starting in 2019 and Russia was criticized for attacking Ukraine in 2022.

According to Alex Vatanka, who leads the 'Iran Program' at the Middle East Institute, in May 2023, Iran and Russia have become the two countries with the most sanctions in the world. He mentions that this is the force that makes them work together economically as they do not have many other partners. They find common ground to share resources and support each other.

However, Iran has not been a big help in improving Russia's economy because their trade is still quite small. In 2022, Iran's trade with Russia was below \$5 billion, much less than its \$15-billion trade with China for non-oil products. Iran's main product sold to China is oil.

From the mid-1990s to 2023, Russia consistently had a trade advantage over Iran. Starting in 2000, Iran mostly purchased raw materials, such as iron and steel, along with such farm products as wheat, from Russia. In exchange, Russia mainly bought fruits and nuts from Iran. Both countries were leading oil and natural gas suppliers in the world and competed with each other in global markets. The biggest part of their export income came from selling oil and gas.

Before the revolution, Tehran-Moscow ties were not strong because Iran was close to the US. But, after the revolution, Iran's relationship with Moscow improved significantly. This shift occurred because the new government in Iran viewed the US as a significant enemy and sought new allies, including Moscow, to counter US influence and support its own initiatives.

On February 11, 1979, after over a year of widespread protests and unrest against the Shah, Iran's military leaders decided not to take sides, removing a major source of support for the government and ensuring

the success of the Islamic Revolution. This revolution brought together Iran's influential Shia religious leaders, Left-wing activists, liberals and regular people who were against corruption, the Shah's strict control, the push towards Western ways and Iran's role as a follower of the US. They all wanted a change that would bring social fairness, freedom and the ability for Iran to stand on its own, away from the big global conflicts between powerful countries.

The revolution was driven by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a front-ranking Shia religious leader who had been exiled from Iran by the government that the US supported. Khomeini came back to Iran on February 1, 1979, and eventually took charge as the top leader of the new government, which changed Iran from being a country ruled by a king to an Islamic Republic. This new type of government has a system where members of Parliament and the president are chosen by the people, but there is also a Supreme Leader with a lot of power. This Supreme Leader is watched over by a group of elected Islamic scholars, called the Assembly of Experts.

After the revolution in February 1979, Moscow and Tehran needed some time to adjust their relationship. The leader of the Soviet Union at the time, Leonid Brezhnev, celebrated the revolution as a big win for the people of Iran. The Soviet Union was the first country to officially recognize Iran's new government. Moscow was definitely happy to see a government that had been controlled by the US removed from such an important country located close to its borders.

They were also pleased when Tehran decided to stop its relationship with Washington and join the Non-Aligned Movement, which was a group of countries that did not side with either the US or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Relations between Iran and Moscow gradually got worse in the early 1980s. Iran cancelled parts of an old treaty from 1921 with the Soviet Union that promised that they would not allow military forces that could threaten each other on their lands.

Afghanistan a Thorn in the Flesh: Also, the Soviet Union's military action in Afghanistan to support a communist government fighting against rebels supported by the CIA and Moscow's unsuccessful efforts to make Iran and Iraq get along during the harsh Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 hurt their relationship.

Ayatollah Khomeini's comments that Islam did not mix well with communist be-

liefs made the relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union even more tense. He called the USSR the "Lesser Satan" compared to the "Great Satan", his term for America, during the Cold War, showing Iran was not going to pick a side to support in this global struggle.

Khomeini-Gorbachev Missives: In January 1989, just five months before he passed away, Ayatollah Khomeini sent his first and only letter to a leader from another country. This letter was to Mikhail Gorbachev, who was the leader of the Soviet Union at that time.

In his letter, Khomeini urged the Soviet Union to give up its communist beliefs, especially its focus on material things and its opposition to religion. He also warned against going back to capitalism. Khomeini offered Iran's Islamic system as a different way of thinking and governing.

Khomeini wrote that the main problem was not really belief in God, which caused—and would cause—the West to get stuck in a mess of bad behaviour and a dead end. He said the biggest issue was the useless, long fight against God, who was the main creator of life and everything that ex-

isted. A few days after Khomeini's letter, Gorbachev replied with a letter of his own. He talked about working together more, asked what was happening in the Middle East and about his ideas on 'New Thinking'. These ideas were about the big countries working together to solve worldwide issues.

Khomeini replied, feeling let down, in a message to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the only high-ranking foreign official he ever met as Supreme Leader. "I'm disappointed," he said. "I thought Gorbachev was a thoughtful person. My letter to him wasn't sent without a reason. It was about the role of humans in this world and the next...Regarding making our relationship normal, I'm all for it."

In the late-1980s, the relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union started to improve, with their economic connections staying strong and cultural exchanges continuing. In 1985, Iranian airlines were allowed to fly through Soviet airspace. By 1987, Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, began flying to cities in Iran again. In 1990, Iran started sending natural gas to the Soviet Union once more and they paid for it by trading goods and services, including Soviet engineers' help in big Iranian infrastructure projects. By 1990, trade between the Soviet Union and Iran had grown to be



After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, even though the government under Boris Yeltsin tried to get closer to Western countries, the relationship with Tehran also improved quickly. Both countries were having economic problems and saw that they could help each other out. Russia decided to support Iran with its nuclear programme, which they said was for peaceful purposes, and also agreed to help Iran update its military, including the Army, Navy and Air Force, with modern Soviet weapons at that time.

worth around US \$1.3 billion.

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In Moscow, some people who make foreign policy started to come up with ideas to create a strong partnership with Iran and other growing powers. They thought this could help balance out the strong influence of the US and NATO. This plan started to happen in the 2000s.

Trade between the two countries was not strong in the 1990s because neither country had enough money. However, starting in 2003, trade got better and even exceeded the levels it had been at during the time of the Soviet Union.

After the conflict started in Syria in 2011, Russia and Iran worked together to help Syria fight against what they called "terrorism". In 2015, Russia sent a small number of planes and ships to carry out strikes together with Syria against these targets. This move was reportedly encouraged by Late Qasem Soleimani, a high-ranking military officer from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force.

In 2019, for the first time, warships from Russia, Iran and China did joint exercises in the Gulf of Oman, showing that their strategic relationship was getting stronger. During this time, their economic partnership also grew, with trade reaching \$4.9 billion in 2022. It is expected to increase even more after they finish large projects, such as the North-South Transport Corridor initiative, which aims at improving the way goods are moved between these countries. In 2023, efforts to build a group focused on economy and security that includes Russia and Iran really picked up speed when Tehran joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. At the same time, the relationship between the two countries kept improving. In December 2023, Moscow said it was going to work faster to finish a "big new agreement between countries". Many people think this agreement will be about working together in such areas as the economy, security, culture, technology, science and more.

The relationship between Russia and Iran has a long history, with over 500 years of diplomatic interactions and more than a thousand years of history, starting with trade between the Persian Empire and Russian people in the 8th Century. This long history includes times of good friendship and working together, as well as times of trouble and fighting. However, as Mehdi Sanaei, a former Iranian Ambassador to Russia, mentioned in 2018, "Talks between Iran and Russia have never been as good in the past 500 years as they are now." (IPA Service)

The Moon is a tough customer

By: Ajeey Lele

From science to the space industry to geopolitics, the first month of the year 2024 was dominated by the news about the missions to the Moon. Two robotic missions headed for lunar landings during January 2024, with one ending up as a failure and the second as a 'minimum' success.

On January 9, the US space agency NASA announced the likely delay in their first crewed missions to the Moon. Now, under their Artemis program, a flyby mission is likely to happen around September 2025 and an attempted human landing on the Moon around September 2026.

More than fifty years ago, between 1969 and 1972, NASA had great success with the Apollo program and twelve men walked on the surface of the Moon during this period.

Only one of NASA's missions, Apollo 13, failed to land on the Moon, but in history this mission is known as a 'successful failure'. NASA was able to get the astronauts of Apollo 13 back to the Earth in one of the most complex recoveries ever undertaken.

Apollo 13 also set the record for the farthest flight from the Earth, having reached 401,056 km from here (the distance of the Moon from the Earth is 384,400 km).

Unfortunately, despite such an illustrious past, states and private agencies today are found struggling to undertake even robotic missions to the Moon.

For any scientific experiment, experiencing failure is not new and is always known as an important part of the learning process. The same is the case in the

space domain too. However, when it comes to missions to the Moon, it has been observed that almost 50% of missions have failed. This is what worries the various space agencies in the world that are keen to reach the Moon.

On January 8, 2024, a commercial spacecraft from the US made a bid to become the first private player to land on the Moon. Astrobot Technology's probe, the Peregrine lunar lander, was launched in partnership with NASA for landing on the Moon on February 23, 2024.

However, after the spacecraft made it off the Earth and into deep space, its propellant started to leak and it got out of control. Some attempts were made to keep the mission under control, but it was soon realised that it wouldn't achieve its aim.

Finally, the probe was made to re-enter the Earth's atmosphere in order to avoid the creation of space debris. It looks like the spacecraft entered the atmosphere and burned somewhere over the South Pacific.

Peregrine is the first of many Moon missions planned as partnerships between NASA and the US aerospace industry under the Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative. Presently, NASA is keen to engage with private players to undertake missions to the Moon.

This allows NASA to concentrate more on investing in science without spending much time, resources and money towards developing platforms to reach and operate on the Moon's surface.

With the CLPS, NASA is just required to buy rides for their scientific

equipment. There were five NASA research payloads aboard Peregrine. NASA had invested around US\$108 million towards the development of the lander. In contrast, Japan's success is noteworthy.

On January 20, 2024, it became only the fifth nation to successfully complete a soft landing on the Moon's surface. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) did a perfect touchdown.

This was a very crucial landing from the point of view of navigation. The SLIM lander has landed on a site that stretches just 100 meters across. This spacecraft is nicknamed the 'Moon Sniper' for its precision technology.

This site is near a small lunar impact crater called Shioli. This area is assumed to be formed by ancient volcanic activity. The SLIM mission is expected to help towards examining the composition of rocks in this area, which could reveal some secrets about the origins of the Moon.

The mission has two rovers to do this job and they are also believed to be operational. Unfortunately, there are some issues with the mission's solar antennae and now SLIM is not getting any power. A battery source initially provided it power after landing.

In short, Japan has been able to achieve a perfect soft-landing of its craft on the lunar surface. However, the scientific aim of its mission will remain unfulfilled.

During April 2019, Beresheet, a small robotic lunar lander and lunar probe operated by SpaceIL and Israel Aerospace Industries, failed to carry out a success-

ful soft-landing on the lunar surface.

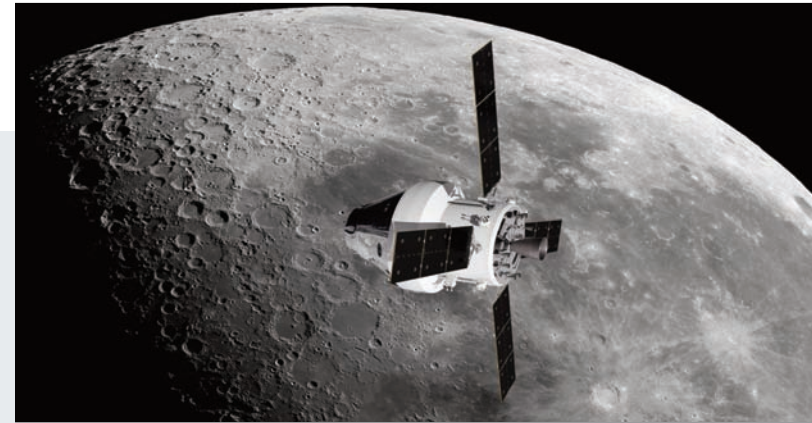
Four years later, during April 2023, a landing attempt made by the private Japanese agency ispace also failed. Communication with the lander of the Hakuto-R mission was lost during the final seconds of its descent, leading to a hard-landing.

Now, along with the Peregrine mission's failure during January 2024, it could be seen that all the three private missions to the Moon have failed. It needs to be noted that on August 11, 2023, Russia's Luna-25 mission also failed. However, there is still a need to examine why private missions are failing.

On January 17, 2024, Michael Griffin, who led NASA from 2005 to 2009, testified to a US House of Representatives subcommittee. He has argued that current projections under the Artemis program to have humans on the surface of the Moon by September 2026 are totally unrealistic.

Griffin has come down heavily on agencies like SpaceX and Blue Origin. He feels that the financial projections done by these agencies are grossly unrealistic. With very low-price projections, these agencies could be required to make a lot of compromises, which could have an adverse impact mainly on aspects of crew safety. He has challenged the US government's approach of leveraging so-called 'commercial space' for national purposes.

It needs to be noted that during the fiscal year 2023, NASA received around \$25 billion, but during the Apollo Space Program in the early 1960s, the US government spent close to \$49 billion on the project!



Today, major private players like, say, SpaceX, have earned a good reputation based on their track record. This agency is able to transport astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS).

It has already launched more than 5,000 satellites to the Low Earth Orbit as a part of its Starlink internet constellation.

But the first two missions of its uncrewed spacecraft Starship, which is eventually expected to carry astronauts to the Moon and beyond, have failed. Other major agencies are also not doing splendidly with their projects. For instance, Boeing's Starliner - meant to carry humans to the ISS - and its test flights have been delayed.

All this raises a very valid question: how much should states depend on the private sector, particularly when it comes to missions to the Moon, Mars and beyond?

There are various challenges for undertaking such missions. For example, the Moon has one-sixth of the Earth's gravity, but there is no atmosphere to slow the speed of a craft. Locating the exact landing zone is challenging since there are no space-based navigational aids available.

Basically, from engines to fuel to sensors, there are a lot of challenges.

Over the last few decades, NASA has increased its dependence on the private industry, but the issue is, will the private sector deliver in the next two or three years, when NASA will want to reach the Moon again?

Some recent examples show that even with technologically developed states like Israel and Japan, the private industry is not experiencing success with missions such as Moon landings. There could be various technical and financial reasons behind this.

Today, unfortunately, the US is getting embroiled in the same old Cold War era-game of technological one-upmanship. It is obvious that they want the US citizen to reach the Moon before the Chinese citizen, and that they are fully aware that China is systematically progressing in that direction and could even beat them.

All in all, this indicates that many states and private players could have ambitions to reach the Moon. However, this is not an easy task.

Interestingly, all this brightens the success of India's Chandrayaan-3 further. (Courtesy: The Wire)

'Heeramandi': Here's the regal history of Lahore's oldest red light district

By: Aditi Survavanshi

Filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who is known for his larger-than-life films, is all set to make his OTT debut with the upcoming web series, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar.

The first look of the multi-starrer show, which was unveiled on 1 February, has set social media ablaze with praise. The series is set in pre-Independence India and is based on the lives of courtesans in the oldest red light district of Lahore's Heera Mandi.

The origins of Heera Mandi

Heera Mandi, initially known as the Shahi Mohalla, has a rich cultural history dating back to the Mughal era.

Located in the Walled City of Lahore, the area served as a vibrant cultural centre in the 15th and 16th centuries, entertaining the nobility with its refined courtesans and performers.

Heera Mandi was originally developed as a residential neighbourhood for the Emperor and the attendants and servants of the royal court. Since the area was close to the Lahore Fort, people started referring to it as the 'Shahi Mohalla' (Royal Neighbourhood).

Soon, Shahi Mohalla became home to tawaifs, professional entertainers who were associated with the royal court. According to reports:

- The tawaf culture flourished in India during the Mughal era.

- Skilled women were reportedly 'brought' by the Mughals from mainly Afghanistan and Uzbekistan to perform Mujra and sensual royal dance forms of the mediaeval Indian court to entertain the visitors.

- The tawaifs were well-trained in music, etiquette, and dance by the best ustaads of the time.

- They made a significant contribution to the classical form of music and theatre.

- In yesteryear, tawaifs were not sex workers but instead a statement of sophistication and class for the elite. Royals would send their children to learn etiquette and worldly ways from these women.

- Interestingly, the tawaifs of Lahore were also featured in fiction and several popular narratives.

- The tale of Anarkali, a

tawaf of the Mughal court who had an illicit relationship with prince Salim, son of Emperor Akbar, is one among the many.

- It is believed that upon learning about his son's relationship with a tawaf, who were considered to be women of low class and status, furious Akbar ordered her to be enclosed in a wall of the Lahore Fort.

When sikhs occupied Shahi Mohalla

In the first half of the 18th century, invasions by Nader Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali weakened Mughal rule in Punjab.

As per a report by Peepul Tree: The royal patronage of tawaifs ended, leading many to migrate to other cities. Brothels first appeared during the Afghan attacks in Lahore.

- Two brothels were established by Abdali's troops, one in Lahore's present-day Dhoobi Mandi and the other in Mohalla Dara Shikoh.

- In 1762, the demolition of the holy shrine of Sikhs, Sri Harmandir Sahib, by Afghan forces united the Sikh community.

- Soon, Afghan forces were routed out of Punjab, creating a power vacuum that was filled with various Sikh principalities.

- The brothels set up by the Afghans were also shut down.

How 'Shahi Mohalla' became 'Heera Mandi'

In 1799, a 22-year-old Mislidar named Ranjit Singh captured Lahore from the Bhangi Misl and proclaimed himself Maharaja of Punjab in 1801. He reintroduced Mughal royal customs, including the culture of tawaifs and their court performances.

- Once again, the tawaifs of Shahi Mohalla found patronage from the royal court.

- In 1802, Singh fell in love with a Muslim tawaf named Moran, leading to a separate mansion in present-day Papad Mandi, near Shahi Mohalla.

- After Singh's death in 1839, General-turned-Prime Minister Hira Singh Dogra used Shahi Mohalla as an economic centre, constructing a food grain market in the area.

- Ever since, Shahi Mohalla became 'Hira Singh di Mandi' (Market of Hira Singh) or 'Heera Mandi'.

- The term 'Heera Mandi' is an Urdu word for 'diamond market.' According to reports, it is believed that the word 'heera' referred to the courtesans of

Shahi Mohalla, who were considered to be as beautiful as the diamonds.

Why tawaifs turned into sex workers

The fortune of Heera Mandi began to decline as colonial rule emerged in Lahore. Following the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845-1849), the Sikh Empire came to an end, and the British East India Company seized control of the region.

Despite the changing identity of the area, tawaifs still enjoyed royal patronage in Heera Mandi. However, the British weren't interested in patronising the tawaf culture, and soon the art of Mujras became associated with prostitution.

Many tawaifs, who lost their livelihoods, became sex workers for English soldiers stationed in the cantonment of Lahore's Anarkali area.

- In the early 1850s, a plague led the local British administration to move their cantonment to Dharampura.

- The British tried to shift the sex workers too, but many stayed back.

- Despite the cult of prostitution, Heera Mandi remained a centre of the performing arts, raising notable artists like Noor Jahan, Khurshid Begum, Mumtaz Shanti, and Sir Ganga Ram.

- It later earned the moniker 'Bazaar-e-Husn' (Market of Beauty).

Present-Day Heera Mandi

Even after India's independence, the dual culture of Heera Mandi continued, with tawaifs from several communities moving to the area due to poverty or illegal trafficking. According to a report by The AZB:

- Women from impoverished backgrounds that are brought to the area face abuse, social ostracization, and are prone to sexually transmitted diseases.

- Efforts to end the culture of Mujras and prostitution were unsuccessful, leading to the relocation of brothels to other parts of Lahore.

- In the age of social media, sex workers started offering online 'escort services'.

- In the present day, Heera Mandi is the busiest eating hub, with vibrant street food stalls, vintage restaurants, and sweetmeat shops during the day. However, prostitution in the region continues as night falls. (Courtesy: The Quint)

'Toxic positivity' to indulgent pettiness: Why more people are embracing complaining

By: Marina Deller

Call them pet peeves, call them petty grievances, one thing is certain - complaining about everyday irritations feels cathartic. It's also the premise of American comedy podcast I've Had It.

Hosts Jennifer Welch and Angie "Pumps" Sullivan state, tongue in cheek, that their goal is to compartmentalise complaining and be nicer in their day-to-day life. Their complaints range from pedestrian (cordless vacuums, people who clap when a plane lands, long Instagram captions) to political (the state of the education system). Eyebrow-raising complaints include, simply, "pregnant people".

Since launching in late 2022, I've Had It has topped Apple's podcast charts, become viral on both TikTok and X several times, and has led the hosts to guest-star on programs such as The Today Show. This podcast's popularity across platforms signals a cultural shift from "toxic positivity" to indulgent pettiness - but a shift away from positivity into fully embracing complaints is not without risk.

Toxic positivity, emotional influencers: As community-minded creatures who want deeply to belong we often mirror others, including on social media, where we adopt phrasing, tone and expressions of emotion. In the past few years, social media has had a focus on hyper-positivity (think cheery emojis and motivational quotes plastered over sunsets).

Some put this "good vibes only" trend down to the pandemic and a desire to avoid painful feelings when ru-

minating on difficult realities.

However, attempting to convey constant happiness is not only difficult but impossible. Research suggests prescriptive positivity can make us react poorly to unfavourable emotions and is a "goal that backfires" when people view themselves as a failure for feeling unhappy, struggle to handle their feelings, or actively avoid processing them.

But now toxic positivity has been named and shamed, people are searching for more emotionally nuanced media. The I've Had It hosts are in a new wave of content creators we can consider "emotional influencers", in this case contributing to a new media landscape where complaining is not only embraced but encouraged.

Curated closeness: By putting our "retaliation" against negative experiences into words, we experience pleasurable emotions. Complaining can feel cathartic, reduce stress, and (like gossiping) help us feel closer to others. This community aspect of complaining suits podcasting, which fosters intimacy through sharing deeply personal stories "directly into our ear" and "chosen just for you".

Listening to hosts who feel like our friends, who are friends themselves, having a chat and sharing laughter can make us feel socially fulfilled in a similar way to a video chat or virtual message with a real-life friend.

In I've Had It, the hosts and their guests share personal complaints and unfiltered stories in a curated approach for bond-forming. We know, for example, that Jennifer's husband Josh (a regular guest) has struggled

with addiction and that Jennifer has "had it" with family week at his rehab centre. We also know Pumps once tried to relieve constipation with a teaspoon. Executive producer Kiley has become a regular feature, laughing at the hosts' antics and acting as an audience surrogate. Fans are involved in the show via voice messages, reviews and as guests themselves.

These elements combine to provide a sense there is potential to become "real life" friends with Jennifer and Pumps: the promotional tagline for their live shows is "make your parasocial friendship real".

While complaining brings people together, it can also push us apart through ostracism or rejection. Although the goal of I've Had It is to compartmentalise pettiness, this may be easier for the hosts than the listeners. Jennifer and Pumps are two undeniably affluent, well-connected women who have leveraged their privilege to build a platform about complaining. They also amp-up their on-air personas, with Jennifer admitting, "I'm not as cold-hearted as I play on the podcast".

Just like prescriptive positivity can become "toxic" when it comes at the expense of other emotions, an overemphasis on grievances can breed negativity, or lead to passive-aggressive and indirect communication styles. Indulging in excessive pettiness can also make us less likeable, alienate our loved ones and worsen our mental health.

Embracing idioy
Some commenters are critical of Jennifer and Pumps' promotion of

negativity. The hosts see this as fodder. They read critical reviews, double-down on complaints and laugh together, cleverly disarming the criticism.

Jennifer and Pumps are even more eager to mock those who take issue with their political views. In response to a reviewer accusation that they're "both a couple of leftist idiots" the pair laugh. Jennifer states, "I could not agree more [...] I say thank you, we are leftist, we are idiots".

Ultimately, I've Had It concedes there is a kind of "idiocy" to pettiness, but there is joy and charm too. Research suggests happy people can be complainers, as long as they have a good grasp of mindfulness and know when to stop.

If you, admittedly like me, enjoy a good bout of complaining now and again, but want to keep your emotions balanced and your relationships intact, there are a few things the experts recommend. It is important to differentiate when you need to enact "expressive complaining" to blow off steam or when you should complain "instrumentally" with a goal in mind. Talk about how something makes you feel, so others can empathise with you.

Ask your loved ones' permission to complain before revving up a rant. What about those who aren't keen on complaining at all? Well, as far as the hosts and fans of I've Had It are concerned, you need not tune in. And, if you do decide to leave a comment degrading their pettiness, be warned it will make for some great content in the next episode. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

The new Public Examinations Bill may put students in jail for cheating

By: Arvan Gulati

A student in India aims at becoming a successful person in life, but the consequences for which he suffers throughout his life cannot be imagined by people in the bureaucracy. Now, a new bill to prevent cheating in examinations is being introduced on February 5th. On Monday, the Central government presented a bill in the Lok Sabha aimed at addressing misconduct in government recruitment tests, such as the leaking of papers and the proliferation of fraudulent websites.

The proposed legislation includes stringent penalties, including a minimum imprisonment of three years and fines of up to Rs 1 crore. Currently, there is no specific comprehensive law targeting unfair practices or offenses committed by various entities involved in organizing public exams conducted by the central government and its affiliated bodies.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, introduced by Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, identifies actions such as the unauthorized disclosure of question papers or answer keys, providing unauthorized assistance to candidates, and tampering with computer networks, resources, or systems as offenses committed by individuals, groups, or institutions.

However, the bill is supposed to aim at preventing cheating in exams, typically including measures such as:

- Enhanced Security Measures:** Implementing stricter protocols to prevent unauthorized access to examination materials and ensuring secure transportation and storage of question papers.

- Technological Solutions:** Introducing technologies like encrypted question papers, biometric verification of students, and CCTV surveillance in examination centers to deter

cheating.

- Harsher Penalties:** Increasing penalties for those caught cheating, including potential criminal charges or disqualification from future examinations.

- Educational Programs:** Providing educational initiatives to raise awareness about the consequences of cheating and promote academic integrity among students.

- Stakeholder Collaboration:** Collaborating with educational institutions, teachers, parents, and students to develop comprehensive strategies for preventing cheating and maintaining the integrity of examinations.

In addition to these provisions, the bill includes actions such as the creation of counterfeit websites for fraudulent purposes, organizing sham examinations, issuing fake admit cards or offer letters for deceitful intentions or financial gain, and manipulating seating arrangements and scheduling to facilitate cheating during exams as punishable offenses under the proposed law.

According to the bill, individuals engaging in unfair practices and offenses outlined in the Act could face imprisonment ranging from three to five years and fines up to ten lakh rupees. Service providers contracted by public examination authorities could also be fined up to Rs 1 crore, with the cost of the examination recovered from them. Furthermore, these service providers may be prohibited from participating in any public examination activities for up to four years.

The bill defines service providers broadly to encompass various entities engaged by public examination authorities for examination conduct, including subcontractors and computer resource providers. It aims to identify and address organized criminal groups and individuals involved in malpractices, with government officials found complicit also being subject to punishment.

Threatening the life, liberty, or wrongfully restraining individuals associated with public examination authorities or obstructing examination conduct is deemed punishable under the proposed legislation.

Collusion or conspiracy to facilitate unfair means in public examinations is strictly prohibited, and unauthorized individuals are barred from entering examination centers to disrupt the testing process. The bill emphasizes the adverse impact of malpractices on the aspirations of millions of youth due to examination delays and cancellations.

Its objective is to enhance transparency, fairness, and credibility in public examination systems, ensuring that genuine efforts of candidates are duly recognized and rewarded, thereby safeguarding their futures.

The legislation aims to deter individuals, organized groups, or institutions from engaging in unfair practices that undermine public examination systems for monetary or wrongful gains. Candidates authorized by public examination authorities to participate in exams, including those using scribes, are exempt from action under the proposed law.

The bill is intended to serve as a model for states to adopt at their discretion, aiding them in preventing criminal disruptions in state-level public examinations. It mandates investigation of offenses by officers not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or Assistant Commissioner of Police and applies to recruitment examinations conducted by various entities, including UPSC, SSC, RRBs, IBPS, and NTA.

In conclusion, the bill is promising upon its measured but we have already witnessed Copyright Bill earlier which seems not so working for our education system, would this bill really helpful or not? Question mark added. Jai Hind! (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Biden slammed Donald Trump for encouraging Russia to attack certain NATO nations, calling the remarks 'dangerous' and 'un-American'

NATO a 'sacred commitment'; Trump looks at it as a burden: Biden

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: NATO is a "sacred commitment" for the US, President Joe Biden has said as he slammed his predecessor Donald Trump for his recent remarks encouraging Russia to attack certain nations of the 74-year-old military alliance by calling the comments "dangerous" and "un-American".

Biden said the remarks by Trump, his likely challenger in the November 5 Presidential polls, underscored the urgency of passing a USD 95 billion foreign aid package for US allies.

The bill just passed the Senate, but it faces political headwinds in the House. At the White House on Tuesday, Biden said a failure to pass the package - which includes USD 60bn for Ukraine - would be "playing into Putin's hands".

"When America gives its word, it means something. When we make a commitment, we keep it. And NATO is a sacred commitment. Donald Trump looks at this as if it's a burden," Biden said.

"When he looks at NATO, he doesn't see the alliance that protects America and the world. He sees a protection racket. He doesn't understand that NATO is built on the fun-



damental principles of freedom, security, and national sovereignty," he added.

Speaking at a rally in South Carolina during the weekend, Trump said he would ask NATO allies to increase their defence spending or else encourage Russian President Vladimir Putin to invade those nations. "You didn't pay? You're delinquent? 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," Trump said.

Trump, who is the frontrunner for the Republican Party's nomination, has called for NATO members to devote two per cent of their gross domestic product to defence.

In response, Biden said, "Be-

cause, for Trump, principles never matter. Everything is transactional. He doesn't understand that the sacred commitment we've given works for us as well. In fact, I would remind Trump and all those who would walk away from NATO, that Article 5 has only been invoked once, just once in our NATO history, and it was done to stand with America after we were attacked on 9/11."

"We should never forget it. You know, our adversaries have long sought to create cracks in the alliance," he added. Under Article 5 of NATO's mutual defence clause, all allies commit to help any member who comes under attack. The article has only ever been invoked once - by the US following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Biden said, "The greatest hope of

all those who wish America harm is for NATO to fall apart. And you can be sure that they all cheered when they heard Donald Trump and heard what he said. I know this. I will not walk away. I can't imagine any other president walking away. For as long as I'm president, if Putin attacks a NATO ally, the United States will defend every inch of NATO territory."

The US president also described those remarks as shameful and "un-American". "The former president (Trump) has sent a dangerous and shockingly frankly un-American signal to the world. Just a few days ago, Trump gave an invitation to Putin to invade some of our allies, NATO allies. He said if an ally didn't spend enough money on defence, he would encourage Russia to, quote, do whatever the hell they want end of quote," Biden said.

"Can you imagine a former president of the United States saying that? The whole world heard it. The worst thing is he means it. No other president in our history has ever bowed down to a Russian dictator. Let me say this as clearly as I can. I never will. For God's sake, it's dumb, it's shameful, it's dangerous, it's un-American," Biden said.

Nikki Haley, Trump's rival for the Republican presidential nomination, also slammed the former president for his comments.

"Don't take the side of a thug who kills his opponents. Don't take the side of someone who has gone in and invaded a country, and half a million people have died or been wounded because of Putin. Don't take the side of someone who continues to lie. I dealt with Russia every day. The last thing we ever want to do is side with Russia," she told CBS in an interview on Sunday. "We do want NATO allies to pull their weight but there are ways you can do that without sitting there and telling Russia, 'Have your way with these countries'. If you notice, Russia has never invaded a NATO country. They've invaded Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. They are actually very intimidated by NATO. NATO allows us to prevent war," Haley had said.

White House Spokesperson Andrew Bates said Biden has restored alliances and made the US stronger because he knows every commander-in-chief's first responsibility is to keep the American people safe and hold true to the values that unite them. (PTI)

Ukrainian military says it sank a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea

KYIV, Feb 14: Ukraine's military said on Wednesday it sank a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea using naval drones, a report that has not been confirmed by Russian authorities. The Caesar Kunikov amphibious ship sank near Alupka, a city on the southern edge of the Crimean Peninsula that Moscow annexed in 2014, Ukraine's General Staff said. It said the ship can carry 87 crew members.

Sinking the vessel would be another embarrassing blow for the Russian Black Sea fleet and a significant success for Ukraine 10 days before the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022. Ukraine has moved onto the defensive in the war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel, but has kept up its strikes behind the largely static 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line. It is the second time in two weeks that Ukrainian forces have said they sank a Russian vessel in the Black Sea. Last week, they published a video that they said showed naval drones assaulting the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence, known by its Ukrainian acronym GUR, said its special operations unit "Group 13" sank the Caesar Kunikov using Magura V5 sea drones on

Wednesday. Explosions damaged the vessel on its left side, it said, though a heavily edited video it released was unclear. The same unit also struck on Feb. 1, according to officials.

The private intelligence firm Ambrey said the video showed that at least three drones conducted the attack and that the ship likely sank after listing heavily on its port side.

The Caesar Kunikov probably was part of the Russian fleet escorting merchant vessels that call at Crimean ports, Ambrey said.

Ukrainian attacks on Russian aircraft and ships in the Black Sea have helped push Moscow's naval forces back from the coast, allowing Kyiv to increase crucial exports of grain and other goods through its southern ports. A new generation of unmanned weapons systems has become a centerpiece of the war, both at sea and on land.

The Magura V5 drone, which looks like a sleek black speedboat, was unveiled last year. It reportedly has a top speed of 42 knots (80 kph, 50 mph) and a payload of 320 kilograms (700 pounds).

The Russian military did not immediately comment on the claimed sinking, saying only that it downed six Ukrainian drones over the Black Sea overnight. (AP)

Indonesian voters choose a new president in one of the world's largest elections

JAKARTA, Feb 14: Indonesians have voted for a new president on Wednesday as the world's third-largest democracy aspires to become a global economic powerhouse a quarter-century after shaking off a brutal dictatorship.

Voting ended on Wednesday afternoon with no major problems reported across the archipelago. Early and unofficial results were expected within the day by quick-count outlets certified by the General Election Commission. Official final results will come in about a month.

The front-runner in pre-election polls, Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, was the only candidate with ties to the Suharto era. He was a Special Forces commander at the time and has been accused of human rights atrocities, which he vehemently denied.

Two former provincial governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo, were also vying to succeed the immensely popular President Joko Widodo, who is serving the final of his two terms in office. Widodo's rise from a riverside

slum to the presidency has shown the vibrancy of Indonesia's democracy in a region rife with authoritarian regimes. Widodo's successor will inherit an economy with impressive growth and ambitious infrastructure projects, including the ongoing transfer of the nation's capital from congested Jakarta to the frontier island of Borneo at a staggering cost exceeding \$30 billion. The election also has high stakes for the United States and China, since Indonesia has a huge domestic market, natural resources like nickel and palm oil, and diplomatic influence with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

The logistics of the vote across the tropical nation's 17,000 islands inhabited by 270 million people were daunting: Ballot boxes and ballots were transported by boats, motorcycles, horses and on foot in some of the more far-flung locations. A fierce thunderstorm flooded several streets of Jakarta at dawn Wednesday. Last week, damage

from heavy rains in Central Java's Demak regency prompted the postponement of the election in 10 villages.

Aside from the presidency, some 20,000 national, provincial and district parliamentary posts were contested by tens of thousands of candidates in one of the world's largest elections, which authorities said concluded with no major problems. About 10,000 aspirants from 18 political parties eyed the national parliament's 580 seats alone.

Voters interviewed by The Associated Press expressed hope their next leader would help them achieve greater prosperity in a country where nearly a tenth of the population still lives in poverty.

"I hope Indonesia can progress better and that I did not vote for the wrong person," said Indra Nurohim, a 17-year-old high school student and first-time voter. "I hope we will have a better government."

The official vote tally is a laborious process that could take about a month, but early results based on sampling from registered private polling and survey groups are considered a reliable indicator of the final results. The presidential race will go to a runoff on June 26 if no candidate gets more than 50% of the votes. (AP)

IS militants attack Syrian military barracks and kill 9 troops: War monitors

CAIRO, Feb 14: Militants from the Islamic State group attacked military barracks in central Syria this week, killing nine soldiers, an opposition war monitor said. The Syrian army and officials have not confirmed the attack. IS claimed responsibility for the attack on Monday near the town of Al-Sukhna, saying its fighters also seized weapons abandoned by fleeing soldiers and set fire to the barracks.

The militants' statement claiming responsibility was posted late on Tuesday. The attack was the latest in intensifying clashes in the desert in eastern Syria between the militants and the Syrian army, supported by Iran-backed militias.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitoring group, says IS has carried out 41 attacks so far this year there.

South Africa asks UN court to urgently examine Israel's targeting of Rafah in ongoing genocide case: The Observatory said three Syrian troops were wounded in addition to the nine killed in Al-Sukhna. IS militants have found refuge in the desert in remote areas in Syria and along the Iraqi-Syrian border, where they continue to stage attacks nearly five years after the group was defeated in Syria in 2019.

U.S. troops in northeastern Syria and U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have conducted numerous operations against the remaining IS militants. (AP)

Parliament after the elections. He also said that the new government would pull the country out of trouble.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan's tally, the total number of general seats won by the six parties -- the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP (Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) which announced their plans to form a coalition led by Shehbaz -- comes to 152. This clearly shows that these parties will easily achieve the minimum required number of 169 to form the government at the Centre after the addition of 60 women and 10 minority seats in their tally.

However, it is yet to be seen if these parties will be able to get to the next magic number of 224, which is required to obtain the elusive two-thirds majority in a 336-member National Assembly (NA).

"Now our war is against the country's challenges. The first challenge is the economy. We have to stabilise it which is a tall task. Nations move forward when their leadership unites and decides to end conflicts and take the nation forward to eliminate problems," he said. The PML-N reportedly enjoys the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army.

Reacting to the latest political developments, jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said that the best option for the PML-N is to "accept [its] defeat gracefully" and let their party founder Imran Khan "fix and heal the country". (PTI)

Shehbaz Sharif likely to become next Pak PM as coalition led by him set to cross simple majority mark

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14: Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's new prime minister as the coalition of leading political parties led by him is set to comfortably cross the simple majority mark to form the next government after elections produced a split mandate.

In a surprise move, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated Shehbaz as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supreme and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif.

Earlier, Shehbaz along with Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan Peoples Party, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui of Muttahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) met at the residence of Shujaat Hussain of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) for a consultative meeting and agreed on government formation.

"Today we have united to tell the nation that we all accept the split mandate. I am thankful to Zardari and Bilawal (Bhutto) that they decided for their party to vote for the PML-N," he said.

PML-N Information Secretary Mariyum Aurangzeb has said that party supreme Nawaz Sharif has nominated the party president and his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, 72, for the post of the country's prime minister.

She added that PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz was nominated for the post of Punjab's chief minister.

"Nawaz Sharif has thanked the political parties which provided support to the PML-N (in forming the upcoming government) and expressed hope that through such decisions Pakistan will come out of crises," she said.

Shehbaz, 72, who was prime minister after the Imran Khan-led government was ousted in April 2022, said the other parties that joined hands with the PML-N enjoyed "almost 2/3 majority" of the

Skorea: Presumed NKorean hackers breached personal emails of presidential staffer

SEOUL, Feb 14: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's office said Wednesday that presumed North Korean hackers breached the personal emails of one of his staff members ahead of Yoon's trip to Europe in November.

Yoon's office said the cyberattack only affected the personal account of the unidentified employee, who violated security protocols by partially using commercial email services to handle official duties. Officials did not specify what type of information was stolen from the staff member's personal emails but stressed that the office's overall security system was not affected.

"We detected the case in advance of (Yoon's) visit and took necessary measures," Yoon's office said in a statement to reporters. The office said it has been monitoring and defending against "constant" hacking attempts presumed to be related to North Korea but "it's not that the presidential office's security system got hacked."

Yoon in November made a three-day visit to Britain, where he met King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and followed it with a trip to France.

North Korea runs a huge, government-backed hacking program that has been accused of stealing large sums of money, often in cryptocurrency, to finance its illicit nuclear weapons and missile program in defiance of U.S.-led international sanctions. North Korea-backed hackers have also been accused of stealing information from outside governments, businesses and think tanks.

According to a report obtained by The Associated Press last week, a U.N. panel of experts said they are investigating 58 suspected North Korean cyberattacks between 2017 and 2023 valued at approximately \$3 billion, with the money reportedly being used to help fund its development of weapons of mass destruction. (AP)

Blasts hit a natural gas pipeline in Iran that an official says was an act of sabotage

DUBAI, Feb 14: Explosions struck a natural gas pipeline in Iran early on Wednesday, with an official blaming the blasts on a "sabotage and terrorist action" in the country as tensions remain high in the Middle East amid Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Details were scarce, though the blasts hit a natural gas pipeline running from Iran's western Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province up north to cities on the Caspian Sea. The roughly 1,270-kilometer (790-mile) pipeline begins in Asaluyeh, a hub for Iran's offshore South Pars gas field.

Saeed Aghili, the manager of Iran's gas network control center, told Iranian state television that a "sabotage and terrorist" action caused explosions along several areas of the line.

There are no known insurgent groups operating in that province, home to the Bakhtiari, a branch of Iran's Lur ethnic group. Aghili did not name any suspects in the blasts.

In the past, Arab separatists in southwestern Iran have claimed attacks against oil pipelines. However, attacks against such infrastructure are rare elsewhere. Iran has faced low-level separatist unrest from Kurds in its northwest, the Baluch in its east and Arabs in its southwest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

However, tensions have risen in recent years as Iran faces an economy hobbled by international sanctions over its nuclear program. The country has faced years of mass demonstrations, most recently in 2022 over the death of Mahsa Amini after

her arrest allegedly over how she wore her mandatory headscarf. Meanwhile, Israel has carried out attacks in Iran, but have predominantly targeted its nuclear program. On Tuesday, the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog warned that Iran is "not entirely transparent" regarding its atomic program, particularly after an official who once led Tehran's program announced the Islamic Republic has all the pieces for a weapon "in our hands."

Tensions over Iran's nuclear program comes as militias it arms in the region -- Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels -- have launched attacks targeting Israel during the war in Gaza. The Houthis continue to attack commercial shipping in the region, sparking repeated airstrikes from the U.S. and the United Kingdom. (AP)

Imran Khan's party says its mandate has been stolen in dark of night

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD, Feb 14: As major political parties in Pakistan backed the formation of a coalition government led by PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party on Wednesday alleged that its mandate has been "stolen in the dark of the night".

In a surprise move, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated Shehbaz, 72, as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supreme and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif.

Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan said that Imran's "mandate has been stolen in the dark of the night". In a post on X, Hasan said, "Pakistan is being put on [the] road to further destabilisation." Referring to a possible coalition government led by the PML-N, he said, "The decision to induct a bunch of criminals to form governments, who have been rejected by the people, reflects a myopic view of the grave challenges the country is beset with." Independent candidates backed by Khan's PTI sprang a surprise by winning the most seats in Parliament in the February 8 general elections. They have won 92 seats in the 266-member National Assembly. To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

While Khan, the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician is in jail after being convicted in corruption cases, the PTI-backed candidates ran as independents due to the party losing the election symbol of 'bat' following controversy surrounding its organisational elections. The PTI spokesperson said the current situation was "striking at the very essence of democratic principles and norms", as well as reflected a "disdain for the national interests and the welfare of its people". "Forces of dark must be stopped and power must pass on to those whom the people have chosen as their leaders," Hasan added.

He said PTI founder Khan is the only hope that could steer the country out of crises. (PTI)

Indian-American couple, twin sons found dead at their home in US

NEW YORK, Feb 14: An Indian-origin family, including their 4-year-old twin boys, has been found dead at their home in California with the police investigating the case as a murder-suicide, the second such incident in less than two months that has shocked the community in the US.

The victims, hailing from Kerala, have been identified by the friends as Anand Sujith Henry, his wife Alice Priyanka, and their 4-year-old twin boys, NBC Bay Area reported.

However, the victims' identities have not yet been released, police said. The incident took place in San Mateo on Monday, police were quoted as saying by the report. On Monday, Police said a 911 call spurred a welfare check at the location after someone reported they hadn't heard from the residents for some time. They arrived and checked the exits of the home and found no signs of forced entry.

"Unfortunately, we located four deceased people inside the home. One adult male. One adult female and two children," said Jerami Surratt, public information officer with the San Mateo Police Department.

The case is being investigated as a murder-suicide, police said on Tuesday.

According to court records, the husband



filed for divorce in December 2016 but apparently did not go through with it.

The two young children were found inside a bedroom, police said.

"The children did not have any gunshot wounds. Unfortunately, they were found deceased, so that will be part of the autopsy, to figure out the cause of (the children's) death," Surratt said at a Tuesday afternoon press conference. Sources with direct knowledge of the investigation said police believe the boys were smothered, strangled, or given a lethal overdose because there was no sign of trauma on their bodies.

The man and woman were found inside a bathroom, according to police. They both had gunshot wounds.

A 9-millimeter pistol and a loaded magazine were found in the bathroom, police said.

The deaths appear to be an isolated incident, and there is no danger to the public, police said. "We are confident the person responsible was located within the home," police said in a statement.

"This is not a normal call for anyone. It's tragic for the family, the community, the officers..." said Surratt. At the State of the City address on Monday night, San Mateo Mayor Lisa Diaz Nash held a moment of silence for the four people found dead in the home.

"It was horrific, it was devastating to all of us, to the community as well as to our San Mateo Police officers." Neighbors were shaken up by the tragedy. Matthew Sheldon and his daughter, Marianne, have both lived in San Mateo their entire lives and they say they've never seen anything like this.

"There's hardly any deaths in this area ever," Matthew said.

Other neighbors noted that San Mateo, despite how relatively safe and quiet, isn't immune to death or tragedy.

This incident is similar to the December 28 case where a wealthy Indian-origin couple and their teenage daughter were found dead in their USD 5 million mansion in Massachu-

setts. Rakesh Kamal, 57, his wife, Teena, 54, and their 18-year-old daughter, Ariana, were found dead in their 11-bedroom and 13-bathroom mansion last month.

There have been seven deaths of an Indian or Indian-American in the country in recent months. On February 10, a 41-year-old Indian-origin IT executive died after suffering life-threatening injuries during an assault outside a restaurant in Washington.

Before that, Syed Mazahir Ali, an Indian student was attacked by robbers in Chicago.

Earlier, 25-year-old Indian student Vivek Saini was fatally attacked in Georgia state's Lithonia city by a homeless drug addict.

Another student identified as 19-year-old Shreyas Reddy Beniger was found dead in Ohio. However, local authorities have ruled out foul play. Sameer Kamath, a 23-year-old Indian-American student at Purdue University, was found dead in a nature preserve in Indiana on February 5.

Another Indian student, identified as Neel Acharya at Purdue University, Indiana, was confirmed dead days after being reported missing on January 28. Akul B Dhawan, an 18-year-old at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, was found dead last month with signs of hypothermia. (PTI)

Farmers stay put at Punjab-Haryana border, tear gas shells lobbed again

CHANDIGARH, Feb 14: Haryana Police lobbed tear gas shells at farmers from Punjab at Shambhu border between the two states as thousands of protesters stayed put there on Wednesday, the second day of their 'Delhi Chalo' march.

There was a similar standoff at Data Singhwala-Khanauri border in Haryana's Jind district, with Haryana Police barricades stopping farmers from travelling to Delhi on their tractor-trolleys.

With the farmers from several places in Punjab continuing to pour in at the Shambhu border to participate in the 'Delhi Chalo' march, a large number of tractor-trolleys could be seen parked along the national highway on the Punjab side. The protesting farmers, who are demanding a guaranteed minimum support price (MSP), planned to make a fresh attempt to break past the multiple layers of barricades at the border with Haryana.

The Haryana security personnel lobbed a few tear gas shells on Wednesday morning after some farmers gathered near the barricades at the Shambhu border, the protesters claimed. But there was no further attempt by the farmers to breach the barriers till late in the day.

On Tuesday, the first day of the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation, several



Protesters and policemen were injured in clashes at Shambhu and Data Singhwala-Khanauri borders.

While the protesting farmers said on Wednesday that they were determined to march towards the national capital, many young farmers have made their tractors ready for removing the multi-layered cemented blocks at the Shambhu border. They have also made arrangements of water tankers in order to minimise the impact of any tear gas shell lobbed by the Haryana security personnel.

The farmers were also carrying water bottles and wet clothes to limit the impact of tear gas shells.

One of the protesters was seen wearing body protective gears along with eye protective safety

goggles at the Shambhu border.

Many farmers said they sustained injuries and faced difficulties in breathing and irritation in eyes because of the tear gas shells lobbed by the Haryana security personnel on Tuesday.

A protesting farmer at the Shambhu border slammed the BJP-led Centre for writing off huge corporate debts but not giving what the farmers wanted.

The farmers just wanted the government to give a legal guarantee to MSP, he said.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher criticised the Centre for its police action against the protesting farmers, saying many cultivators were injured.

"We urge the government to

stop all this and ensure a positive atmosphere. We were ready for talks yesterday and we are ready for it even today," said Pandher.

The farmers appeal to the prime minister to give a law to guarantee MSP as he has a big heart, he said.

Pandher said neither the government was accepting their demands nor was it letting them head towards Delhi to put-forth their issues. Asked whether the farmers have received any invitation for holding talks, Pandher said it was being said the Centre was inviting them for a dialogue.

"We will consider that invitation," said Pandher while speaking to reporters at the Shambhu border.

He said the objective of their agitation was that their demands are accepted. "We have not come for any confrontation with the government," he asserted.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has inquired about the health of a farmer who sustained injuries during a police action at the Shambhu border.

During his visit to Rajpura hospital, Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring arranged a conversation between Gandhi and the farmers over a mobile phone.

The Punjab authorities have raised an objection with the Haryana authorities for the use of a drone for dropping tear gas shells

inside the Punjab territory, said a senior official on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the farmers had clashed with Haryana Police personnel at two border points between the states, facing tear gas shells and water cannons as they tried to break the barricades blocking their protest march to the national capital.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation to put pressure on the Centre for their demands, including a law on MSP for crops and loan waivers.

During their protest on February 13 at the Shambhu border, the farmers, with the help of tractors, managed to remove some of the cemented barricades and iron nails which were part of the elaborate arrangements made by the Haryana authorities to prevent protesters from heading to Delhi.

Twenty-four police personnel, including a deputy superintendent of police, were injured as protesters hurled stones at them, officials said.

The Haryana government on Tuesday had extended the suspension of mobile internet services, bulk SMS and dogle services in seven districts - Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa till February 15. (PTI)

Sonia Gandhi reaches Jaipur to file nomination for RS polls

NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, Feb 14: Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi reached Jaipur Wednesday morning to file her nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls from Rajasthan.

She is likely to file her nomination papers at 11 am, sources said. The party is certain to win one Rajya Sabha seat from the state, and it will be the 77-year-old leader's first term in the Upper House after serving five terms as a Lok Sabha MP.

Gandhi, who represented Rae Bareilly in Lok Sabha, will not contest the next general elections. She was first elected as an MP in 1999 after taking over as the Congress president.

Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot said on X, "We heartily welcome the announcement of respected Smt. Sonia Gandhi ji as the Rajya Sabha candidate from the Congress Party, who renounced the post of Prime Minister."

"Today her announcement as Rajya Sabha candidate from Rajasthan is a matter of happiness for the entire state and with this announcement all the old memories have been refreshed," he added.

A total of 56 members of Rajya Sabha from 15 states are retiring in April and the election to the

seats will be held on February 27. The last date for filing nominations is February 15.

The Congress is comfortably placed to win one of the three Rajya Sabha seats from Rajasthan for which elections will be held. The seat will fall vacant after former prime minister Manmohan Singh completes his six-year tenure in April.

She will be the second member of the Gandhi family to enter Rajya Sabha after former prime minister Indira Gandhi, who was a member of the Upper House from August 1964 to February 1967.

The party has not formally declared any candidate for the biennial Rajya Sabha elections.

Gandhi had announced in 2019 that it would be her last Lok Sabha election.

Speculation is rife that her daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra could contest from Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency after Sonia Gandhi opted out this time.

That Sonia Gandhi chose to contest from Rajasthan and not from a southern state like Telangana or Karnataka, where the party is also comfortably placed to win, is also a signal that the Congress' first family is not abandoning the Hindi-heartland. (PTI)

Ex-JNU scholar Umar Khalid withdraws bail plea from SC in UAPA case

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Former JNU scholar and activist Umar Khalid on Wednesday withdrew his bail plea from the Supreme Court in a case lodged against him under anti-terror law UAPA over his alleged involvement in the conspiracy behind the northeast Delhi riots of February 2020, saying he will try his luck before the trial court. Khalid's bail application was pending in the top court since April 6, 2023 and the proceedings were adjourned 13 times because of a variety of reasons.

As soon as the matter was taken up on Wednesday, a bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mishra was told by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Khalid, that he wishes to withdraw the application due to "change in circumstances".

The bench accepted Sibal's request and allowed the application to be withdrawn. Khalid had appealed against the October 18, 2022 order of the Delhi High Court by which his bail application was rejected.

He also filed a separate plea chal-



Khalid, activist Sharjeel Imam, and several others have been booked under the anti-terror law and several provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

The violence had erupted during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Khalid, arrested by the Delhi Police in September 2020, had sought bail on grounds that he neither had any criminal role in the violence nor any "conspiratorial connect" with any other accused in the case.

The Delhi Police had opposed Khalid's bail plea in the high court, saying the speech delivered by him was "very calculated" and he brought up contentious issues like Babri Masjid, triple talaq, Kashmir, the alleged suppression of Muslims, the CAA and NRC. (PTI)

lenging the constitutional validity of various provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The high court declined him bail, saying he was in constant touch with other co-accused and the allegations against him were prima facie true.

The high court had also said the actions of the accused prima facie qualified as "terrorist act" under the UAPA.

Mamata Banerjee 'mute spectator' to violence against women in West Bengal: BJP

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: The BJP on Wednesday charged that 'jungle raj' prevailed in West Bengal and demanded resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee after the state was rocked by protests and clashes over the claims of sexual harassment of women in the state's Sandeshkhali area.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed there is "complete anarchy and lawlessness" in West Bengal under the TMC rule with Chief Minister Banerjee allegedly providing protection to her party goons who allegedly raped and exploited tribal women in Sandeshkhali.

"There is jungle raj in West Bengal. Our sisters who belong to the scheduled tribes are being raped and assaulted by the TMC goons and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is a mute spectator," he charged.

Bhatia said it is clear to every citizen that the rule of law doesn't exist in West Bengal.

"Rather it is the law of anarchic ruler Mamata Banerjee which prevails there," he said.

Banerjee has no right to remain in the post and, "If she had even a little bit of shame left, she should immediately tender her resignation," she said.

"If you do not resign, don't underestimate people. You will be uprooted, that is for sure," the BJP spokesperson added.



Bhatia said the BJP will stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims of alleged sexual assault and take their fight for justice forward.

The BJP leader alleged that West Bengal government is giving "protection to rapists and weakening police."

"The situation is so bad that the Calcutta High Court had to take cognisance of it and issue a notice to the state government," he said.

"Mamata Banerjee has become a 'bhakshak' (predator) from a 'rakshak' (protector)," Bhatia charged, asking her to step down as chief minister. (PTI)

Ex-PM Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson resigns from Congress, joins BJP

NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, Feb 14: Former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Vibhakar Shastri on Wednesday quit the Congress and joined the BJP.

Vibhakar Shastri joined the BJP in Lucknow in the presence of party state president Bhupinder Singh and Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak.

In a post on X, Shastri said, "Hon'ble Congress President Shri Kharge ji! Respected Sir, I hereby tender my resignation from the primary membership of Indian National Congress. Regards, Vibhakar Shastri."

Vibhakar Shastri, who is the grandson of former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and son of Hari Krishna Shastri, has unsuccessfully contested Lok Sabha polls in the past from Fatehpur Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh.



The Congress has witnessed a series of exits in the last few years with the likes of Ashok Chavan, Milind Deora,

Baba Siddiqui, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Jitin Prasad, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Sushmita Dev, R P N Singh and Jaiveer Shergill among others joining other parties.

Pathak told PTI that Vibhakar Shastri joining the BJP is a welcome message for the social workers.

He said as Vibhakar Shastri hails from the former prime minister's family, it is natural that the party would benefit from the development.

Siddharth Nath Singh, another brother of Shastri, welcomed the decision. Singh is presently a BJP MLA from Allahabad West seat.

Vibhakar Shastri said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Sabka saath sabka vikas' slogan, the guiding spirit of the BJP governments at the Centre and in the states, is attracting everybody. (PTI)

Firing on Sena leader: BJP MLA Gaikwad, 4 others remanded to 14-day judicial custody

THANE, Feb 14: BJP legislator Ganpat Gaikwad and four accomplices, arrested for an assassination attempt on a Shiv Sena leader within a police station, have been remanded to a 14-day judicial custody by a local court.

Besides Gaikwad, Harshal Kene, Sandeep Sarvankar, Divyesh alias Vicky Ganatra, and driver Ranjit Yadav, were presented before the court on Wednesday at the conclusion

of their police custody amidst tight security measures surrounding the court premises.

The MLA is accused of firing upon Mahesh Gaikwad, the Kalyan unit head of Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, inside the room of the senior inspector's office at Hill Line police station in Ulhasnagar earlier this month.

The accused face charges of attempted murder and other related of-

fences.

Following the incident, the injured Sena leader was shifted to a private hospital in Thane, where he is presently recuperating.

Lawyers Nilesh Pandey and Umar Kazi, representing the accused, told reporters outside the court that the police requested for extension of remand for interrogation which the court declined and remanded them to judicial custody. (PTI)

International Energy Agency will gain from India's increased involvement: PM Modi

'India has surpassed its Paris climate targets ahead of schedule and remains firmly committed to addressing the global issue'

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said India brings talent and innovation to the table and the International Energy Agency (IEA) will benefit if the world's fastest growing major economy plays a bigger role in the Paris-based organisation. In a recorded message for the ministerial meeting of the IEA, he said India has surpassed its Paris climate targets ahead of schedule and remains firmly committed to addressing the global issue.



scale and speed, quantity and quality to every mission," Modi said.

Noting that India is the world's fastest growing major economy, he said sustained growth needs energy security and sustainability.

"In one decade, we went from the 11th largest economy to the fifth largest. In the same period, our solar energy capacity grew twenty-six fold. Our renewable energy capacity also doubled. We exceeded our Paris commitments in this regard, ahead of timelines," the prime minister said.

"However, we are firmly committed to combating climate change," he said. India achieved its emissions

choices. He thanked the IEA for supporting initiatives such as the Global Biofuels Alliance, launched during India's G20 Presidency.

Energy and climate ministers from around the world met in Paris on February 13-14 for the IEA's 2024 ministerial meeting to take stock of the latest developments in energy markets, policies and transitions, and to set the agency's strategic direction for the coming years.

The IEA was founded in 1974 to ensure the security of oil supplies. Since then, its role has evolved and expanded to put it at the heart of the global dialogue on energy security and clean energy transitions.

The IEA ministerial meeting comes at a crucial time for energy markets and clean energy transitions globally.

Major issues include the risks to energy security linked to the Russia-Ukraine war, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and beyond, and international efforts to deliver on the outcomes of the UN climate change conference in Dubai (COP28). (PTI)

No. CHR/PWD(R&B)/N-14/P/2017-18/4109 Dated: 14/12/2024

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors under PWD of Class-III (Three), Class-II (Two) & Class-I (A, B & C) (R&B) category according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the work stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon on 22/02/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.15 P.M.

Sl No	Name of Work	Tender Amount (in Rs.) (including GST LWC & Agency charges)	Earnest Money (in Rs.) (ST, SC, OBC-1% & GEN-2%)	Cost of Tender Papers (in Rs.)	Time of Completion in day
1	Constriction of RCC Box Culvert at No.NC Hills under Dangtal VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC, for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
2	Constriction of RCC Box Culvert at Shyamthaibari village near Tukaram house under Bangaloda VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
3	Constriction of Foot Bridge at West Bilashpur Boro Basti near Janaul house under Paddapur VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
4	Installation of Hume pipe at Monglaogan Bengali Basti near Gwanga Mandir (Const. of RCC Box Culvert) under Bangaloda VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
5	Installation of Hume Pipe at Gendergaon vill (Const. of RCC Box Culvert) under Bangaloda VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC, for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
6	Constriction of Foot Bridge at South Kajalgaon village near Prem Brahma house under Bangaloda VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
7	Constriction of RCC Box Culvert at Middle Khamarpara village near Community Hall under Rowmari VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
8	Constriction of West Padampur Adiasi village under Paddapur VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 5,00,000/-	1% -Rs.5,000/- 2% -Rs.10,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months
9	Constriction of RCC Box culvert at New Dimapur village near Sombam Basumatary house under Rowman VCDC in Chirang District, Assam under SOPD, PWD, BTC for the year 2023-2024	Rs. 10,00,000/-	1% -Rs.10,000/- 2% -Rs.20,000/-	Rs.500.00	04(Four) months

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up-to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 16/02/2024 to 22/02/2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Bank Draft/ Demand Draft, duly pledged to the Executive Engineer, PWD Chirang (R&B) Division, Kajalgaon, Payable at Kokrajhar, SBI main Branch. The contractor should submit attested copy of Registration Certificate for the year 2023-24, GST, Labour Licence, PAN along with the tenders. In case the office remain closed on the tender receiving/ opening the same will be received/ opened on the next working day.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer, PWD,
Chirang(R&B) Division, Kajalgaon

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1380

SA bowl out NZ for 211, leads by 31 in the 2nd cricket test

HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND), Feb 14: Dane Piedt took a career-best 5-89 as South Africa bowled out New Zealand for 211 to take an unexpected first-innings lead Wednesday on the second day of the second cricket test.

South Africa was bowled out for 242 after resuming Day 2 at 220-6 and New Zealand conceded a 31 run lead as bowlers dominated and 14 wickets fell in the day.

New Zealand had been 183-9 and the deficit might have been greater but for a late innings of

33 by the redoubtable Neil Wagner.

Piedt reached the high point of a checkered test career as he captured the wickets of Tom Latham, Kane Williamson, Will Young and Glenn Phillips to highlight an excellent bowling performance by the Proteas. Dane Paterson took the wicket of Devon Conway (0) in the first over of the New Zealand innings and finished with 3-39.

"My test career has been ups and downs with injuries and I'm seriously proud of the way we fought today," Piedt said. "We

had a nice talk out in the middle, reflecting on the first test (which New Zealand won by 281 runs) and I'm glad everyone stood up today and put something forward for the public."

Four batters, two from each team, were out bowled off an inside edge and another was caught behind off an inside edge onto the pad on a day of inconsistent bounce at Seddon Park. There were signs the usually seamer-friendly pitch wasn't performing to character when part-time spinner Rachin Ravindra bowled 21 overs for New

Zealand on the first day.

Off-spinner Piedt came into his own in the middle session when the ball turned sharply and he asked questions even the best New Zealand batters couldn't answer.

The 33-year-old made his test debut against Zimbabwe in 2014 and played another six tests over the next two years. He dropped out of the team but was recalled for two tests in India in 2019 but took only two wickets in two tests appearances.

Piedt had begun to explore changing his allegiance to the

United States when he received his latest recall for the current series.

Ruan de Swardt in his second test and Shaun von Berg, on debut at 37, shared an unbroken partnership of 70 for South Africa's seventh wicket before stumps on Day 1 in what is proving to be a rare display of batting fortitude.

Their defiance didn't last long on the second morning. Von Berg was out in the third over of the day for 38 and de Swardt followed soon after for 64 after reaching his maiden test half

century on Tuesday.

Both de Swardt and von Berg chopped balls from Will O'Rourke back onto their stumps. O'Rourke also took the last two wickets of the innings with consecutive balls and finished with 4-59 on his test debut.

The South Africa innings crumbled and its last three wickets fell for eight runs including Piedt for 4.

New Zealand got an early taste of the difficulty of batting on a pitch which was livelier on the second day than the first when Conway continued a run

of poor form and was out to the fourth ball of the innings.

Paterson angled a ball into Conway from around the wicket and it straightened late, catching the edge and going on to wicketkeeper Clyde Fortuin. Conway now has gone seven innings and almost a year without a test 50.

Latham and Williamson steadied the innings in a partnership of 74 for the second wicket but they had to be constantly watchful and scoring was difficult. Neither team has scored above three runs per over so far in the test. (AP)

SARFARAZ MIGHT DEBUT IN THE LONGEST FORMAT

India seek quick middle-order solutions against fearless England



RAJKOT, Feb 14: India will need to be ruthless and tactful in equal measure while dealing with an unpredictable England when the third chapter of a riveting Test series begins here on Thursday.

After England shocked India in the series opener at Hyderabad, the hosts came back strong in Vizag to get on level footing, leaving the five-match series perfectly poised.

The brilliance of Yashasvi Jaiswal (321 runs) and Jasprit Bumrah (15) allowed India to make a comeback in the series but concerns remain over a misfiring middle-order, which will now be relying on the young talent to deliver the goods.

Skipper Rohit Sharma's form with the bat before the eight-day break only added to the growing concern surrounding the Indian batting, which will be without K L Rahul in this game and Virat Kohli for the entirety of the series. Over the last one year or so, Rohit's aggressive approach with the bat has not yielded him big scores and the current situation demands the Indian skipper to perhaps contemplate changing gears.

Rahul's unavailability for the third Test has put through the possibil-

ity of Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan getting his long awaited debut in the longest format. The domestic run machine could be teaming up with one-Test old Rajat Patidar to occupy two of the most coveted batting spots in the middle order.

India's glaring inexperience in the middle-order would have been well noted by the English camp, whose robust research on opponents and aggressive play has time and again delivered results. Wicketkeeper KS Bharat's persistent failures with the bat has raised the possibility of India turning to Uttar Pradesh's 23-year-old Dhruv Jurel, who is known for his aggressive batting.

With an average of 46.47 in 15 First-Class matches, Jurel has given a fine account of himself. With the pitch here at Rajkot not expected to be a rank turner, a debut here would only help Jurel ease into the world of top flight cricket.

With local hero Cheteshwar Pujara no more in the plans of the selectors, there will be a high anticipation from the local hero Ravindra Jadeja to get back into the ring and deliver for India, whose spinners were outmatched by England in the first two Tests.

Numbers tell only one side of the

story and India's think tank will not be overly concerned with how their spinners have averaged collectively (38.39) compared to England's (33.90).

Unlike in the past where spinners would rule the roost and fast bowling reduced to mere formalities, this series has witnessed a stunning turnaround which has, fortunately for India, coincided with Bumrah being at his absolute best. Bumrah's brilliance in the first two Tests has stood tall and to some extent saved the blushes for the celebrated spinners who have not thrived in the absence of rank turners.

With the pitch at Rajkot being traditionally friendly to the batters, India will have to pick one among chinaman Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel, with the latter winning the vote purely on his batting credentials. Sitting on 499 wickets, India's premier spinner R Ashwin will be expected to enter the elite 500-club over the course of the game. England too are expecting the pitch to be batting friendly at least in the initial phase of the game, prompting one change to their playing eleven. They have brought in a second pacer in Mark Wood in place of spinner Shoab Bashir. (PTI)

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 14: Their confidence boosted after back-to-back wins, India will fancy their chances against formidable Australia in their third match of the men's FIH Pro League hockey here on Thursday.

India outplayed Spain 4-1 before registering a thrilling 4-2 shootout win -- after 2-2 scoreline in regulation time -- over defending champions and world number one the Netherlands to begin their season with a bang.

Historically, the head-to-head record between the two teams is heavily skewed in favour of Australia but the Indians have done better in recent times, especially in the last season of the FIH Pro League.

India had beaten Australia 5-4 and 4-3 in shootout (after 2-2 in regulation time) in the two-legged tie in Rourkela last season, and the Harmanpreet Singh-led home side would look to continue their rare winning run against their mighty opponents.

Australia are also coming into Thursday match at the Kalinga Stadium after two wins -- 4-3 against Spain and 5-0 against Ireland -- and they would be hoping to make amends of their two-match defeat to the Indians in the previous edition of FIH Pro League.

Reflecting on the performance of his players so far, Indian team chief coach Craig Fulton said, "It's been a good performance so far from the team, but there's a lot to improve."

"Playing back-to-back matches against top teams is always tough, but we got a good break to recover and now the focus is on the last two games of the Bhubaneswar leg."

Fulton knows how strong is the Australian team but he said his players are ready for the match on Thursday.

"It is surely going to be a tough match. They (Australia) are coming off solid back-to-back wins. For us, there were a few learnings from the first two games, and our focus will be to improve and better our performance. We are up for the challenge and look to keep the momentum going."

The good news for India is that captain Harmanpreet Singh has been among goals with three strikes so far, and he would be looking for more.

In the Indian goal, veteran PR Sreejesh turned was going strong as he turned out to be the saviour in India's 4-2 shootout win over the Netherlands.

India will then take on Ireland in their last match of the Bhubaneswar leg on Friday before moving to Rourkela for the return fixtures. (PTI)



Assam Tennis team shine; Hakim Ali clinches double



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Assam's tennis team, represented by Hakim Ali, Purna Jyoti Phukan, Dhruva Jyoti Hazarika and Diganta Borpatra Gohain (all from Duliajan) shines in the 6th National Masters Games -2024 held at Goa from February 06-12, 2024. In the Men's Singles (above 55 years) category Hakim Ali clinched double crowns by winning gold medal in the singles and

also won gold in the doubles categories respectively partnering Purna Jyoti Phukan.

In the Men's Singles (above 55 years) category Purna Jyoti Phukan won a bronze medal.

In the Men's Singles (above 50 years) category Dhruva Jyoti Hazarika won bronze medal and while partnering Diganta Borpatra Gohain in the doubles in the same category also won the bronze medal.

Top-100 dream realised, Sumit Nagal eyes Olympic glory next

BENGALURU, Feb 14: His dream of being inside the global top-100 has been realised but Sumit Nagal is nowhere close to being a content man as the Indian tennis ace says he now faces the challenge of improving or holding on to his standing for direct entry into Grand Slams and the Paris Olympics. Nagal's victory in the recent Chennai Open propelled him to a career-high world No. 98, and he is the first Indian to achieve the feat since Prajnesh Gunneswaran did that in 2019.

"Every tennis player dreams about being in the top 100. I have dreamt about being in the top 100 from a very young age and it felt very good when it happened. It was certainly an emotional day after working for years," Nagal told PTI in an interview after his first-round win in the Bengaluru Open on Tuesday night.

The 26-year-old, who is seeded second here, entered the second round of the tournament with a breezy 6-2, 6-2 win over Frenchman Jeff Blancaneux.

But he is not ready to rest on his laurels and has set his eyes on bigger achievements.

"Yes, it was a big moment (entering top 100). But now I am in a new tournament, you know, tennis, you need to take it week by week. So, emotions have come down now. While in Bangalore I am focusing on this tournament.

"But the real goal is to go and represent my country in the Olympics. It's one of my goals, and it really motivates me and I really want to play the Olympics, and take a medal back for the country," he said.

Top 56 players in the ATP (men) and WTA (women) rankings, as on June 10 this year, will get direct qualification for the July-August Paris Games provided the number per country does not exceed four.

Entries would be permitted from outside the top-56 for countries who have less than four automatic qualifiers.

The remaining eight slots of the 64-strong draw would be reserved for continental champions (4), previous Olympic gold-medallists

or Grand Slam champions (2), host nation (1) and Universality (1). Nagal would have a good chance of making it if he can add some more good results to his record.

Staying inside the top 100 will have another benefit for the Haryana-born lad as he would no longer need to wait for qualifiers or wildcards to enter the main draw of Grand Slams.

Last month, he had made the Australian Open main draw through qualifiers and defeated the then world No. 31 Alexander Bublik 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (5) in the first round. "Yeah, that's a big positive (being in the top 100). That's why every player wants to be inside the top 100 because you want to play in the Grand Slams," he said.

"So, if I can do that, and keep my ranking up and inside the top 100, that will be very good for me as we are fast approaching the French Open season," he added.

Not long ago, Nagal was struggling to attract sponsors and was left with a meagre USD 900 in his bank account. (PTI)

I am always on the hotspot in any format and that maybe the reason (for injuries), and the ball comes to me often.

"There is an expectation from the team that I take a good catch or field well and that's good. I can work on my body more smartly and do it carefully and hope there will be no problem. But there is no guarantee," he added.

Jadeja said he will have to make smart adjustments to avoid injuries.

"I would like to give my 100 per cent and save my body and keep away from diving when not required. That's it. I don't think about that too much because it (returning from injury) has happened before. (PTI)

plan and if we stick to it then there are chances of being successful," Jadeja said.

On the injuries he has had to deal with of late, Jadeja said he



England are not difficult to beat, they just play differently: Jadeja

RAJKOT, Feb 14: India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja on Wednesday said England are not a difficult side to beat and the hosts only need to get used to their ultra attacking style of play to secure the five-match Test series. England shocked India in the series opener in Hyderabad before the hosts came back strong in Visakhapatnam to get on level footing. The third Test begins here on Thursday.

"I won't term England as (one of the most difficult) teams. It hasn't been easy for other teams to come to India and win. They have an aggressive style of play. We need to get used to that and plan accordingly for them," said Jadeja on the eve of the game.

"If it wasn't for small mistakes in the second innings of first Test, we wouldn't have lost," said the player who missed the second Test due to a hamstring injury.

Jadeja said it was imperative for India to stick to their plans and not try playing differently against England's aggressive tactics.

"It is better to keep the (bowling) lines as simple as possible in Test cricket because their batters look to play their strokes at every opportunity," he said.

"If we adjust according to that, it is possible that we may end up giving more runs and not get wickets as well. We will keep it simple and let them do whatever they want to, we have our game