

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2024



**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

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**Ravindra Jadeja** addresses the media on Wednesday ahead of the 3rd Test against England at Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot beginning Thursday. — PTI

## BJP chief in Bengal hurt during Basirhat visit, hospitalised

**Kolkata:** West Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar sustained injuries during a clash in Basirhat, North 24 Parganas, while leading a protest. He fell unconscious and was hospitalised at Basirhat Hospital before being transferred to Apollo Gleneagles Hospital's ICU. His condition is stable. Mr Majumdar was in Basirhat since Tuesday to visit Sandeshkhali over the allegations of violence against TMC's Shahjahan Sheikh. The police denied permission for his visit, leading to confrontation. He was addressing reporters standing on the car's bonnet, when he slipped and fell on it. Full report on Page 3

## Mamata will visit Punjab on Feb. 21

**Kolkata:** West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee is going to visit Punjab on February 21 to hold a meeting with the two AAP leaders — Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann — to sharpen her strategy to support the farmers' protest and discuss the future of the INDIA bloc. Full report on Page 3

## WPI inflation eases to 0.27% in January

**New Delhi:** The WPI-based inflation eased to a three-month low of 0.27 per cent in January, mainly due to moderation of food prices, including vegetables. The WPI inflation was in the negative zone from April to October. Full report on Page 7

## COUNTERPOINT



It seems like one more party leader has resigned!

## WEATHER

Max: 23°C  
Min: 8°C  
RH: 59%  
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Shubhakarut:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Magha Shukla Shashti till 10.16 am  
**Star:** Ashwini till 9.28 am  
**Variyam:** Shesha Variyam up to 7.12 am  
**Dumhurantam:** 10.35 am to 11.21 am  
**Rahukalam:** 12 pm to 1.30 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.11 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.59 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.02 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 11.58 PM**

## Urges all nations to use tech to improve people's lives; ease of business World needs inclusive, sensitive govts free from corruption: PM

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Pitching the need for inclusivity in his keynote address at the World Government Summit in Dubai on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the world needs "inclusive and sensitive governments that can take everyone along" and which are "clean, transparent and free from corruption", adding people need "minimum government and maximum governance". Addressing a packed audience, Mr Modi referred to India as a "vishwa bandhu" (friend of the world) which had followed this vision during its G-20 presidency last year and had advocated the message of "One Earth, One Family, One Future".

In his speech, the Prime Minister said governments across the world should use technology to improve the lives of people and bolster the ease of living, mobility, justice and doing business. Pointing out that governmental interference should be minimal in people's lives, Mr Modi pitched for last-mile delivery and listed the achievements of his own government towards improving the lives of people, including direct benefit transfers, that had eliminated the scope for corruption. Saying a holistic approach was needed, he referred to women-led development in India for social, economic and political empowerment, of how hundreds of millions had been pulled out of poverty and how the country had made giant strides in the

Turn to Page 4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with spiritual gurus during the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday. — PTI

## Abu Dhabi's 1st Hindu temple 'symbol of global unity': Modi 'Priest of 1.4bn Indians' thanks UAE Prez

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Inaugurating the BAPS Swaminarayan temple in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally led the audience to a standing ovation for United Arab Emirates (UAE) President and Abu Dhabi ruler Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for playing the "biggest" role in approving and enabling the construction of the "grand, divine and sprawling" temple. The UAE President was represent-

ed on the occasion by his country's minister for tolerance Sheikh Mubarak Al-Nahyan. In his remarks, Mr Modi described the temple as a symbol of "communal harmony and global unity" as well as the "shared heritage of the world" and himself as a

"priest of 1.4 billion Indians", whom he described as his "esteemed gods". Pointing out that a "golden chapter" had been written in the UAE, the Prime Minister said the construction of the temple had "infused new energy" into India-UAE ties and had become a symbol of the India-Arab bond, besides becoming another magnificent cultural landmark in the UAE along with the Burj Khalifa tower and Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Sending out an

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## Govt for talks as farmers stick to 'Delhi Chalo' call

More clashes as stir into 3rd day Talks today

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

More clashes were reported as the standoff between the protesting farmers and the police at the Punjab-Haryana border entered its second day on Wednesday. Pushing ahead with their "Delhi Chalo" call, the farmers tried to break past the fortified Punjab-Haryana, even pelting stones at the security personnel. The police resorted to firing tear gas shells and rubber pellets. Meanwhile, the Union government roped in defence minister Rajnath Singh to assist in finding a solution to the farmers' issues. Also, three Union ministers will meet farmer leaders in Chandigarh on Thursday for the third round of talks.

While the Opposition attacks the BJP-led Union government and continues to extend support to the protesting farmers, three Union ministers — Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nityananda Rai — who had met farmers before the march began will engage in another round of talks around 5 pm on Thursday.

On their part, Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said that they will not make any fresh attempt to move towards Delhi till the meeting is held. He asserted that the next course of action will be decided on the basis of the Centre's proposals.

"Based on a message we got last night and Union minister Anurag Thakur's call for dialogue, we spoke to every-



Farmers disperse after the police fires teargas during their "Delhi Chalo" march at the Shambhu border near Patiala on Wednesday. — PTI



Commuters walk past a road dug up to prevent the movement of heavy vehicles in view of the farmers' march near the Singhu border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

one in the movement and decided that we will remain peaceful and not try to push further from where we were. A meeting has been called for 5 pm tomorrow and we will continue our peaceful protest. No action will be

taken from our side until then," said Mr Pandher. However, the farmer leader alleged that even though they held a peaceful protest on Wednesday, drones were used and teargas shells and rubber pellets were fired at them. "It wasn't the police, but paramilitary forces that were attacking us. Despite all this, we are ready to speak to the Union government. The farmer leader also appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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## Kejriwal gets 6th ED notice in excise case

Asked to depose on Feb. 19

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday issued a fresh and sixth summons to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for his questioning in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. The AAP's national convener has been asked to depose before the Central agency on February 19, the official sources said.

Earlier this month, acting on a complaint filed by the ED for dis-



Arvind Kejriwal

obeying ED summons in the excise policy-linked case, a Delhi court had asked the Delhi chief minister to appear before it on February 17. The court noted that, prima facie, the AAP chief is "legally bound"

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## Cong fields Sonia for RS from Raj

Maken is K'taka pick Singhvi trumps Anand Sharma in HP

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Congress parliamentary party chief Sonia Gandhi will not contest this Lok Sabha election. Twenty-five years after her first term in the Lower House of Parliament, she filed her nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on Wednesday.

Mrs Gandhi, who represented Rae Bareilly in the Lok Sabha, was first elected as an MP in 1999 after taking over as the Congress president. The seat in Rajasthan will fall vacant in April after former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's term comes to an end. Party treasurer Ajay



Congress leader Sonia Gandhi files her nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls at the Rajasthan Assembly in Jaipur on Wednesday. Party leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Ashok Gehlot are also seen. — PTI

Maken has been fielded from Karnataka and Abhishek Singhvi from Himachal Pradesh. The Congress party is in government in both

Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. Mr Maken had unsuccessfully contested the Rajya Sabha elections from Haryana last year.

## Shehbaz likely to become next Pak PM; Maryam will be Punjab CM

**Islamabad/Lahore, Feb. 14:** Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former Premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's next Prime Minister as a post-poll alliance of leading political parties led by them struck a deal to form a coalition government after last week's elections produced a split mandate. The surprise move means the party of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan will not be in power, despite independent candidates backed by his Pakistan Tehreek-e-



Shehbaz Sharif

Insaf (PTI) winning the maximum number of seats in Parliament in the February 8 elections marred by allegations of rigging. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated 72-year-old Shehbaz as the

party ministerial candidate instead of the party supremo and three-time former Premier Nawaz Sharif. The 74-year-old veteran politician, who was seeking a record fourth term as PM, returned to Pakistan in October last year after ending a self-imposed exile in the UK.

The party also added that PML-N senior vice-president Maryam Nawaz, considered the political heir of Nawaz Sharif, was nominated for the post of the chief minister of Punjab province. —PTI

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## Nadda is BJP RS candidate from Gujarat, Chavan Maha

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Putting an end to speculation on whether or not BJP president J.P. Nadda's Rajya Sabha



term will be extended, the party's central election committee on Wednesday announced that he will be renominated to the Upper House of Parliament, but this time from Gujarat.

Former Maharashtra CM and Congress stalwart Ashok Chavan, railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav and "kar sevak" Ashok Ghopchade are among those named by the BJP.

Mr Nadda is currently representing his home state Himachal Pradesh, but the Bharatiya Janata Party does not have the numbers to win the lone seat from the Congress-ruled state. His term is ending in April.

While Mr Vaishnav has been renominated from Odisha, Mr Chavan and Mr Ghopchade have been nominated from Maharashtra. The third name from Maharashtra is that of former MLA Medha Kulkarni.

The Rajya Sabha elections for 56 seats will be held on February 27. —PTI

More on Page 3

SHORT TAKES

**L-G approves land for road project**

**New Delhi:** Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena has approved the acquisition of land in southwest Delhi that was crucial for completion of the long-pending Urban Extension Road II (UER-II) project, Raj Niwas officials said on Wednesday. The UER-II has been planned to decongest Delhi by creating a bypass between north and southwest Delhi. Mr Saxena has approved the acquisition of over two bighas of land at Bharthal village that was critical for completion of the project, an official said, adding the non-acquisition of this land parcel alone has delayed the project by seven years. In April 2016, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had requested for acquisition of the land at Bharthal village in southwest Delhi. However, the acquisition process could not be completed pending several litigations and thus delaying the UER-II, which is proposed in the Delhi Master Plan as the third Ring Road for Delhi.

**20 nations inspired by Skill India Digital**

**New Delhi:** In a remarkable display of global collaboration, representatives from 20 nations came together on Wednesday to seek inspiration from country's successful implementation of 'Skill India Digital' - specially designed and developed to skill, reskill and upskill Indian individuals through an online training platform - in the national capital. The representatives from Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Togo, and Vietnam assembled for a day-long event 'India Summit on Education Knowledge Exchange'.

**'Over 23,000 availed govt scheme benefit'**

**New Delhi:** The All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, on Wednesday said that over 23,000 beneficiaries have availed benefits under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme at the hospital since September 2018, with a majority of the patients seeking treatment in the departments of medical oncology followed by ophthalmology, general medicine, orthopaedics and neurosurgery. As far as complex surgeries are concerned, 730 procedures for congenital heart diseases have been performed followed by 557 total hip replacements and 148 total knee replacements under the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

**HC TO DDA: HOLD DEER CENSUS IN DEER PARK**

**New Delhi:** The Delhi high court on Wednesday asked the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to conduct a census of spotted deer in the city's 'Deer Park' and suggested that some of them may be translocated to other green areas of the national capital if the existing facility was overburdened. A bench headed by acting Chief Justice Manmohan, who was hearing a petition against the decision of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) to cancel the recognition of the facility as a "mini zoo", observed that there are several "city forests" like Jahanpanah where excess deer could be relocated while the "Deer Park" continued to house at least 50 of them. "Children residing in the city get to see them. Why do you want to deprive Delhiites of this facility? Don't do away with this facility," the bench, also comprising Justice Manmeet P.S. Arora, said. The park, officially known as the A.N. Jha Deer Park, in south Delhi's Hauz Khas area is a popular among people. It comes under the jurisdiction of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The CZA issued the order cancelling the Deer Park's recognition as a "mini zoo" on June 8 last year. The court had subsequently asked authorities to maintain status quo with respect to translocation of spotted deer from the park.



Police personnel use teargas to disperse farmers (from left) gathered at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border during their "Delhi Chalo" march in Patiala district on Wednesday. The police removes "Welcome to Delhi" signboard amid tight security at the Singhu border in New Delhi. People make way through concrete barricades.



**Road near Singhu border dug up to prevent farmers' march ■ Drones being used to keep an eye on traffic ■ Traffic remains hit, security high at borders**

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Security remained tight in the national capital Wednesday in view of the farmers' 'Dilli Chalo' march, with personnel deployed in huge numbers and barricades regulating movement in central Delhi and at border points with Haryana, causing hardships to commuters. The traffic movement at Singhu (Delhi-Sonapat) and Tikri borders (Delhi-Bahadurgarh) is suspended, an official said, adding the security personnel in anti-riot gears are deployed and drones being used to keep an eye on the situation. While Singhu and Tikri borders with

Haryana have been entirely closed for traffic, vehicular movement is still allowed at the Ghazipur border in a regulated manner. A section of a road in a village near the Singhu border was dug up to prevent the farmers' march to Delhi. The Apsara and Ghazipur borders between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh are open for traffic, but there is heavy security deployment at both places. The police said the Singhu border on National Highway-44 is inaccessible for traffic. Inter-state buses and heavy goods vehicles for Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and other places are to take a diversion on Outer Ring Road at Majnu Ka

**CBSE advisory for students appearing in board exams in view of traffic curbs**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

The CBSE issued an advisory on Wednesday for the students appearing in the board exams in view of the traffic restrictions imposed in Delhi, advising them to leave their homes early to arrive at the examination centres

in time. Traffic restrictions are currently in place in the national capital in view of the farmers' "Delhi Chalo" march. The board exams for Classes 10 and 12 will commence from Thursday. More than 39 lakh students will appear in the exams this

year from India and 26 other countries. In Delhi, more than 5.8 lakh students will take the exams at 877 centres. "As the examination starts at 10.30 am, hence, all the students have been directed to reach their examination centres on or before 10 am," the advisory read.

service road towards Outer Ring Road, Haiderpur water plant and take a U-turn for Rohini Jail Road Sector-18 to Badli metro station to Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar. Only DTC buses and four-wheelers are allowed from Mukarba Chowk towards NH-44 to take exit number-2 on NH-44 at the DSIIDC cut to go towards Narela and the Safabad border. Commuters are advised to follow the above routes to avoid inconvenience, the police said. The police has put up barricades and placed concrete slabs on various roads to prevent the protesting farmers from entering Delhi.

Multiple layers of barricades, concrete blocks, iron nails and container walls have been placed at Singhu and Tikri borders with Haryana as well as at the Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh. An official said the security arrangements at border points and in central Delhi could be increased if required. The commuters moving between Delhi and Haryana were either stuck up for hours on the closed borders or walked on foot to reach their respective destinations. Their plight was further aggravated by trenches dug up on the bylanes and streets at the border to prevent movement of vehicles and people impossible.

**CM: 5 months' salaries of Hardayal library staff released**

**New Delhi, Feb. 14:** Five months' pending salaries of 96 employees of Delhi's historic Hardayal library has been released, with chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday saying there is now an "honest government" in the municipal corporation that works for commoners. The released salaries in lumpsum pertains to the five months of 2021, according to an official statement. "On Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's direction, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) today released the salaries of 96 employees of the Hardayal Municipal Public Library for five months," it said. The over 160-year-old library in Delhi's Chandni Chowk area was christened as Hardinge Library in 1916 and boasts of a rich collection of books in Hindi, English, Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. The employees of library had been sitting on dharna for last 35 months as their salaries had not been paid since 2021, statement said. —PTI



Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena and chief minister Arvind Kejriwal during the flagging off ceremony of 350 electric buses in New Delhi on Wednesday.

**At 71.09 lakh, Metro records highest-ever daily ridership**

**New Delhi, Feb. 14:** As traffic crawled at a snail's pace in the capital city due to multiple layers of barricades on Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders in view of the farmers' march, Delhi Metro on February 13 (Tuesday) registered the highest-ever count of daily passenger journeys at 71.09 lakhs. The urban transporter shared the data in a post on X on Wednesday, saying it has surpassed its previous milestone accom-

plished last September. The count of daily passenger journeys in Delhi Metro had stood at 71.03 lakh on September 4 and 69.94 lakh on August 29 in 2023 around Raksha Bandhan festival. On Tuesday, the Delhi Metro had regulated passengers' entry and exit at nine stations by shutting some gates for several hours in view of the farmers' march towards Delhi. The commuters were allowed to enter or exit

these stations through other gates. The figures on February 12 stood at 70.87 lakh which rose to 71.09 lakh on February 13, officials said. Journey or line utilisation is calculated by the number of corridors passengers use to reach their destinations. On weekdays, the average count of daily passenger journeys in Delhi Metro stands at around 65 lakh, a senior official said. —PTI

**Khalid withdraws bail petition from SC in UAPA case**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

Former JNU student Umar Khalid on Wednesday withdrew his bail plea from the Supreme Court in a case lodged under anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act over his alleged involvement in the conspiracy behind the February 2020 northeast Delhi riots. Mr Khalid's bail application was pending before the apex court since April 6, 2023 and 13 adjournments were moved during the proceedings. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing Mr Khalid, told a bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal that he wishes to withdraw the application due to "change in circumstances". "I wish to argue the legal question (challenging UAPA provisions) but want to withdraw the bail plea due to change in circumstances. We will try our luck in trial court," Mr Sibal said. Accepting Mr Sibal's



UMAR KHALID

request, the bench allowed the application to be withdrawn. Mr Khalid had moved the apex court against the October 18, 2022 order of the Delhi high court that rejected his bail application. He also filed a separate plea challenging the constitutional validity of various provisions of the UA (P) A. 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 UA(P)A.

**24-year-old man held for posing as doc at hosp**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

A 24-year-old man was arrested for allegedly posing as a doctor at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in central Delhi, the police said on Wednesday. When Ashutosh Tripathi, a resident of Burari, was caught from the emergency department on Tuesday he was wearing a stethoscope and carrying a doctor's coat in his bag, an official said. A police officer said an FIR under section 170 (impersonating a public servant) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered at the North Avenue police station on the basis of a complaint filed by senior resident (department of surgery) Rahul Dhamija. The officer said that when hospital authorities questioned Tripathi, he first introduced himself as a doctor and later as a medical student. Suspecting his credentials, the hospital informed the police.

**Centre for talks as farmers stick to 'Delhi Chalo' call**

**Continued From Page 1** injured in the stone-pelting by protesters during the first day of the protest. The Haryana police said that over two dozen of their personnel were injured. The police fired nearly 4,500 tear-gas shells on the protesting farmers, most of them using drones. Slamming the BJP for action against the protesting farmers, the Congress again reiterated its support for their cause, with party leader Rahul Gandhi speaking to a farmer injured in police action. "Talked on the phone with former soldier Gurmeet Singh ji who was seriously injured in police atrocities during the farmers' movement," Mr Gandhi wrote in Hindi on social media. Officials from the Delhi police meanwhile were guarding at the fortified Delhi's Singhu and Tikri borders with Haryana as well as at the Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh.

**ACB arrests 10 for supplying sub-standard items to hosps**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

The anti-corruption branch has arrested 10 people for allegedly being involved in the supply of sub-standard items to government hospitals in Delhi. Seven of them are suppliers and three laboratory owners identified as Hemant Joshi (43), Rahul Chaurasiya (31), Kamal Deep Singh (33), Rajesh Malhotra (58), Shahid Chaudhary (31), Shekhar Sharma (36), Bipin Kumar Pathak (58), Arji-nder Pal Singh (61), Kapil Makhija (31) and Harneet Singh Bindra (42). According to ACB, the suppliers or manufacturers arranged receipts of prescribed items of the hospitals against the supply of sub-standard items and even in the case of short- or non-delivery. In August, six teams of the vigilance wing visited hospitals and collected samples. These samples were sent to different labs and the majority of them either were found sub-standard or failed during testing, a senior official said. During the initial investigation, it indicated that the alleged firms and suppliers had provided the requisite items through the GEM

**HC to decide cases of HIV positive people on priority**

**New Delhi, Feb 14** The Delhi high court will take up and dispose of "on priority basis" the legal proceedings concerning an HIV positive person whose anonymity and confidentiality shall be strictly maintained. The 'practice directions' have been issued in compliance with the directions passed by the Supreme Court in a judgment on September 26, 2023. It further said that courts shall also ensure that the anonymity and confidentiality of the name of the HIV-positive person is strictly maintained by substituting the name. —PTI

**Schoolteacher shot at by 2 boys near Noida, in hospital**

**Noida, Feb. 14:** A 26-year-old schoolteacher had a close shave Wednesday morning after he was shot at by two teenagers allegedly over some personal dispute, police officials said. The incident took place at around 9 am near here after the teacher and the boys had a conversation on the road, some 100 metres away from the school in Sakipur village, they said. A bullet grazed past an earlobe of the teacher, who was taken to a hospital where his condition was stated to be normal, according to officials. "Rakib Hussain, who lives in the Chand Wali Masjid Gali in the

Surajpur area, was on his way to Sushil Modern School today when the two boys, aged around 17 years, came to talk to him and later opened fire at him," a police spokesperson said. "The bullet hit him near his right ear and he has been admitted to the hospital for treatment. The condition of injured Rakib Hussain is normal. He is out of danger," the spokesperson said. The police said they are investigating the case from all angles, including links to previous dispute between the two sides, and have launched a search for the duo involved in the attack. —PTI

**NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE (Through e-tendering)**

Name of Work with its location	Shifting of cross over point 108 at JNC Station of Delhi Division.
Approx. Cost of the work (Rs.)	Rs. 18,36,383.02 /-only
Bid Security (Rs.)	Rs. 36,700.00 /-only
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of tender	Tender uploading 14.02.2024 / closing date & time-08.03.2024 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.nreps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055.
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-M-Tender-1415 Dated: 14.02.2024	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 498/24	

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Be it known to all that we, Mrs. Bhavna Bhardwaj and Mr. Rahul Bhardwaj both D/S/o Late Sh. Ashok Bhardwaj We (lost/misplaced the Original Allotment Letter, Possession Letter and Share Certificate of the Flat No.D-05, Oriental CGHS Ltd., Oriental Enclave, Plot No.32, I.P. Extn, Patparganj, Delhi-110092. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, vide I.R No.: 1444174/2024 dated 14/02/2024 any person found the original documents may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No.9052024969 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to Dy. Director (GH) or Asstt. Director (GH), Block-C3, Second Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

SHORT TAKES

**Jolt to Cong, Ex-MLA quits party in Odisha**

**Bhubaneswar:** Anshuman Mohanty, a former MLA from Rajanagar constituency in Odisha's Kendrapara district, resigned from the primary membership of the Congress party. The former legislator represented Rajanagar constituency in the Odisha Legislative Assembly from 2014 to 2019. He also resigned from the post of president of the Kendrapara District Congress Committee. Mr Mohanty sent his resignation letter to PCC President Sarat Pattanayak. "I, hereby, tender my resignation from the primary membership of the Congress party with immediate effect. This may also be treated as my resignation from the post of president of the Kendrapara District Congress Committee. I take the opportunity to thank all the Congress leaders and workers for the cooperation they had extended to me during my association with the party," reads the resignation.

**Former PM Shastri's grandson joins BJP**

**New Delhi/Lucknow:** Former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Vibhakar Shastri on Wednesday quit the Congress and joined the BJP. Mr Vibhakar 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, Mr 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." The junior 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. — PTI

**Maha quota leader's health deteriorates**

**Mumbai:** Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil's health deteriorated on Wednesday, on the fifth day of his fast. He suffered nose bleeding attributed to his hunger strike, informed the government doctor who examined him. He has been intravenously administered medicines. However, the activist has refused to take even water until the government enacts a law confirming its notification to provide Kunbi caste certificates to the eligible Marathas. Meanwhile, Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday gave its consent to hold a special session on February 20 to ratify the notification or come up with a new enactment for Maratha reservation. The decision was taken in a Cabinet meeting chaired by chief minister Eknath Shinde in Mantralaya.

**SC PROPOSES PANEL TO INSPECT TN COPPER UNIT**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**  
The Supreme Court on Wednesday proposed a committee of domain experts to inspect the closed sterile copper unit in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu to explore the possibility of resuming operations at Vedanta's plant to subserve public interest. Observing that shutting down a plant of "national importance" will not serve anybody's purpose, the apex court suggested that the panel of experts should suggest further compliance, including stringent conditions and the way forward. Following an order of the state government Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, the plant was shut down since May 2018. The closure order came after 13 people were killed as police opened fire to quell a protest over alleged pollution caused by it. While hearing a plea by the Vedanta group, the bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud proposed the setting up of a panel of experts and sought views of the firm, the TN government and the TNPCB. "Ultimately, shutting down the plant of national importance will not serve anybody's purpose," the apex court bench headed by Chief Justice said.

**Chavan from Maha ■ Murugan, mahila morcha chief, farmer leader from MP BJP nominates Nadda to RS from Guj**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

Putting an end to speculations on whether or not BJP president J.P. Nadda's Rajya Sabha term will be extended, the party's central election committee on Wednesday announced that its national president will be renominated to the Upper House of Parliament but this time from Gujarat. Mr Nadda is currently representing his home state Himachal Pradesh, and his term is ending in April. The hill state is currently under the Congress's rule.

Of the names announced by the BJP on Wednesday include that of former Congress stalwart and former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan, Union railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and a paediatric and a "kar sevak" Ashok Ghopchade. While Mr Vaishnaw has been renominated from Odisha, Mr Chavan, who had joined the BJP on Tuesday and Dr Ghopchade have been nominated from Maharashtra. The third name from Maharashtra is that of former MLA Medha Kulkarni. Speculation is rife in



J.P. Nadda

Maharashtra BJP that the party could field a fourth "surprise" candidate to upset the arithmetic of the "Mahavikas Aghadi" amidst the rumour that more than three to four MLAs from the Congress, close to Mr Chavan, are

ready to jump the ship. Polls for the 56 Rajya Sabha seats are scheduled to be held on February 27, and the last date for filing nominations is February 15. Of the prominent BJP leaders whose Rajya Sabha term is ending by May include Central ministers: Mansukh Mandavliya, Bhupender Yadav, Parshottam Rupala, Dharmendra Pradhan, V. Murleedharan, Narayan Rane, Rajeev Chandrashekar, L. Murugan and Ashwini Vaishnaw. Though the BJP has renominated Mr Vaishnaw and Mr

Murugan, speculation is rife that many of its current Rajya Sabha members, including Union ministers, will be contesting the Lok Sabha polls. While Mr Murugan has been renominated from Madhya Pradesh, other names from the state include Maya Naroliya, who heads the party's "Mahila Morcha" in the state, Umesh Nath Maharaj, a religious figure, and Banshilal Gurjar, a national vice president of its "Kisan Morcha". The BJP has the strength to win four seats in Madhya Pradesh, while the Congress can win one.

**Arch rival BJD will support BJP's Vaishnaw in RS polls**

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 14**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has got only 22 members in Odisha Legislative Assembly on Wednesday sprang a surprise as it nominated Union railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw as its candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha election in Odisha. What is more surprising is that the saffron party has once again managed to get support from its arch rival Biju Janata Dal (BJD) to see its candidate through in the elections.

As per the current effective strength of the present Odisha Legislative Assembly, a candidate needs at least 37 (36.51) votes to get elected. Soon after the BJP announced Mr Vaishnaw as its official candidate, BJD president and Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik issued a letter to the media declaring his party's support for him. In his letter, the CM said the BJD supported the BJP Rajya Sabha nominee for the state's railways and telecom development.



BJP candidate Sadhna Singh files her nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections at the UP Assembly in Lucknow on Wednesday. — PTI

**Falls on car bonnet ■ Party alleges TMC tried to kill him Bengal BJP prez hurt during protest**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 14**

West Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar was injured during a fight with the police at Basirhat in North 24 Parganas, while leading an agitation on Wednesday. He immediately fell unconscious. The Balurghat MP was rushed to Basirhat Hospital from where he was shifted to Apollo Gleneagles Hospital in the city later. He has been admitted to the ICU (neurology). His condition is stable. Mr Majumdar was in Basirhat since Tuesday to visit Sandeshkhali over the allegations of violence against women by Trinamul Congress



West Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar falls on the bonnet of a car amid the Sandeshkhali protest in North 24 Parganas district on Wednesday. — PTI

strongman Shahjahan Sheikh and his aides and public unrest there. On Wednesday morning, he planned to visit the troubled zone after per-

forming Saraswati Puja at Taki. The police, however, denied permission. A fight soon unfolded between the BJP workers and the cops. Mr Majumdar rode on the bonnet of a car and stood on it. The cops asked him to get down. The state BJP chief tried to give a speech. He, however, lost balance amid the chaos, fell down and was hurt. State BJP leader Jagannath Chattopadhyay alleged, "The police hatched a conspiracy to kill Mr Majumdar when he wanted to make an address while standing on the bonnet of the car. The police started driving the car." He claimed, "We suddenly saw many youths in slippers around us. We do not know who they were, civic volunteers or TMC goons. They blocked the car's way for half-an-hour to delay Mr Majumdar's movement to hospital."

**Didi to discuss INDIA with Kejriwal & Mann on Feb. 21**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 14**

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is going to visit Punjab on February 21 to hold a meeting with the two AAP leaders — Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann — to sharpen her strategy to support the ongoing farmers' protest and discuss the future of the anti-BJP bloc INDIA. The BJP, however, took potshots at the Trinamul Congress supremo's plan. According to TMC insiders, Ms Banerjee will fly to Punjab from the city in the evening of February 21. She will visit Golden Temple in Amritsar to pay obeisance. Later, she will



Mamata Banerjee

meet the CMs of Delhi and Punjab over the farmers' agitation and the fate of INDIA, sources said on Wednesday. Ms Banerjee's proposed tour came to light a day after she backed the fresh protests by the farmers on en route to Delhi, and slammed the police action against them.

Interestingly, she and Mr Mann have already ruled out any alliance with the Congress in their states in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Taking a jibe at the TMC chief, the West Bengal BJP spokesperson Shameek Bhattacharya claimed, "Their stand on the farmers' movement is understandable. But their alliance has died. It has entered the autopsy room. So it is better not to talk about it. Ms Banerjee leaves the state sometimes to get some relief from huge pressure here. It is her habit. People are not bothered about it. In the coming election TMC will not be able to cross double digit."

**Modi is going back on what he promised on MSP: Cong**

**New Delhi, Feb. 14:** The Central government has "betrayed" farmers by not implementing the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, the Congress on Wednesday alleged, and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi apologise to the country for it. In its 2006 report, National Commission on Farmers' chairman M.S. Swaminathan suggested the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) to fix MSP at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production (C2 plus 50 per cent). The Opposition party said its promise to give a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) is the only way to implement the Swaminathan Commission report and claimed that the Prime Minister is "opposing" what he had recommended when he was the Gujarat chief minister. "Be it the BJP's manifesto of 2014 or the recommendation of CM Modi's committee, the Modi government betrayed the farmers on the guarantee of giving legal MSP," Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara alleged amid an ongoing stir by a section of farmers on the MSP and other issues. "PM Modi should apologise to the country for going back, for not answering the question of MSP through RTI and for calling farmers terrorists," he said. — PTI

**To start from Aurangabad in Bihar today Congress Nyay Yatra's 2nd phase in J'khand cancelled**

**Ranchi, Feb. 14:** The second phase of Rahul Gandhi's "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" in Jharkhand, which was scheduled to commence on Wednesday, has been cancelled, Congress leaders said. The march will resume from Bihar's Aurangabad on Thursday as was planned earlier. The Yatra's second phase in Jharkhand had to be cancelled as the senior Congress leader rushed to Delhi to take part in a farmers' agitation in the national capital, party sources said. The Yatra was scheduled to re-enter Jharkhand through Garhwa district from Chhattisgarh on Wednesday. The scheduled interaction with MGNREGA



Rahul Gandhi

workers at Ranka in Garhwa district was conducted by senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and other party leaders. "The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will resume in Bihar's Aurangabad on Thursday. A public rally will be organised in Aurangabad at 2 pm, which will be addressed by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi," Mr Ramesh said in Garhwa on Wednesday. Mr Gandhi was scheduled to stay in Jharkhand for two days in the second leg, before entering Bihar on February 15. Jharkhand Congress president Rajesh Thakur said Mr Gandhi had to leave for Delhi for a "special purpose". "Rahul ji has already covered 650 km in Jharkhand during the first leg of his Yatra in Jharkhand in the first week of February. The remaining around 150 km Yatra could not be possible due to some unavoidable reasons. We will request Rahul ji to visit this place (Palamu division) once the yatra gets completed," Mr Thakur said. He added that the Yatra has been successful in Jharkhand. — PTI

**EC seeks deployment of 3.4L CAPFs for LS, state elections**

**New Delhi, Feb. 14:** The Election Commission (EC) has sought 3.4 lakh Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) personnel for deployment in a phased manner during the upcoming Lok Sabha election and Assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim. The EC has also sought adequate rolling stocks with all appropriate facilities in the trains, thereby ensuring hassle-free mobilisation and a timely movement of the forces to perform election duties. In a communication to the ministry of home affairs (MHA), the EC has said the chief electoral officers of all the states and Union territories have requested for the deployment of CAPFs for poll-related duties, such as area domination, confidence-building measures, poll day-related duties, guarding of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and strong room centres, counting centre security etc. during the elections. — PTI

**Siddaramaiah moves SC against HC order**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah has moved the Supreme Court against a Karnataka high court order that has dismissed his plea to quash a 2022 FIR lodged against him and others in connection with a protest march. The Congress leader has challenged the February 6 order of the high court that has imposed a fine of ₹10,000 on him as well as Congress general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala, state ministers M.B. Patil and Ramalinga Reddy, and directed him to appear before a special court on March 6. The case was registered against the Congress leaders after they took out a march to lay siege to the then chief minister Basavaraj Bommai's resi-

**SC to deliver verdict today on electoral bond scheme**

**RAKESH K SINGH NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

The Supreme Court is set to deliver on Thursday its verdict on a clutch of pleas challenging validity of electoral bond scheme. A five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud is scheduled to deliver the key judgment at 10:30 AM on Thursday. The bench will also comprise Justices Sanjeev Khanna, B.R. Gavai, J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. On November 2, the SC had reserved the verdict after hearing the petitioners for three days. During the hearings, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta told the bench that the electoral bonds scheme was a fair method to ensure that money was used for political fundings through proper banking channels, and contended that it was necessary to keep the identity of donors confidential so that they will not face any retribution from political parties. The Centre had also suggested if the apex court desires then it can make RBI the statutory bank to issue electoral bonds instead of SBI, as per the existing scheme. Earlier, the Supreme Court had also pulled up Election Commission of India for not maintaining the data of donors and quantum of contributions by then to political parties.



Villagers, wearing masks and traditional attire, dance during the Fagli festival in Kullu district on Wednesday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

**Bull shark nearly bites off man's leg**

**Mumbai:** A bull shark, the species which can live and breed in freshwater, nearly bit off one leg of a 30-year-old man in the Vaitarna river in Maharashtra's Palghar district, prompting his fellow villagers to kill the fish, a forest official said on Wednesday. The encounter with the fish with razor-sharp teeth took place when a group of residents from Manor village, out to collect wood and for fishing, entered the river. A large fish sprang up a surprise attack and grabbed the left leg of one of them, identified as Vicky Govari. Hearing his screams, the others pulled him to the shore, he said. In their bid to save their friend, they began hitting the fish, eventually killing it, the official said. However, the fish, later identified by wildlife experts as a bull shark, had ripped off the calf muscle of Govari's left leg, leaving the shin bone exposed. Govari was rushed to the nearest hospital, where he is receiving medical care. — PTI

**ED raids in Raj over 'illegal' mining case**

**New Delhi:** The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches at multiple locations in Rajasthan as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged irregularities in the mining sector. According to sources, the raids were conducted in Jaipur, Udaipur and Nagaur as part of the money laundering case linked to irregularities in the mining sector in the state and the agency sleuths conducted the raids under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Central probe agency's move comes after a month the new BJP government in the state launched a major drive against illegal mining activities by conducting surveys through drones, wherever needed, to put a curb on the sources of such activities.

**Badrinath portals to open on May 12**

**Dehradun:** The doors to the Badrinath Dham in Uttarakhand will be opened for devotees at 6 am on May 12, the temple committee said on Wednesday. Keeping with tradition, the date and time for the opening of the temple gates were announced after a religious ceremony at Narendra Nagar Palace on the occasion of Basant Panchami on Wednesday, chairman of Badrinath-Kedarnath temple committee Ajendra Ajay said. The erstwhile Tehri royal family members, including BJP MP from Tehri Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah, her husband Manujendra Shah and their daughter Shrija Shah were present at the ceremony, Ajay said. The Tehri royal family is an integral part of the rituals associated with the opening of the Himalayan temple. — PTI

**World needs inclusive, sensitive govts free from corruption: PM**

**Continued from Page 1**  
fintech and digital payments' sectors. The Prime Minister also spoke about the menace of terrorism and for the need for all nations to fight this menace together. Another issue raised by him was for the world to become environment-friendly and adopt green energy, noting that India had suggested a pro-planet roadmap for the globe in the form of a Life Style for Environment (LIFE). He also spoke about the need for reform in global multi-lateral institutions. Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with the Emir of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who is also the vice-president, Prime Minister and defence minister of the UAE, thanking him for "the grant of land for an Indian Community Hospital in Dubai which will offer affordable health-care facilities for Indian blue-collar workers", and expressing "deep appreciation" for this. New Delhi also said "both leaders held discussions on a wide range of areas of bilateral cooperation, including trade, investment, technol-

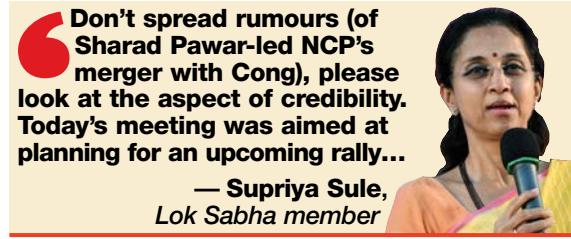
ogy, space, education and people-to-people ties", adding: "They expressed their satisfaction at the rapidly growing economic and commercial ties between India and the UAE, and acknowledged in particular the key role played by the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. They also welcomed the signing of the Bilateral Investment Treaty." Both leaders also "virtually laid the foundation stone of the Bharat Mart at Jebel Ali Free Trade Zone in Dubai that is to be built by DP World". They also "expressed confidence that Bharat Mart will propel India-UAE bilateral trade further by leveraging Jebel Ali Port's strategic location and strength in logistics". Mr Modi said "Bharat Mart has the potential to play an important role in promoting exports of the micro, small and medium sectors of India by providing them an effective platform to reach out to international buyers in the Gulf, West Asia, Africa and Eurasia". Thanking the Dubai ruler "for his graciousness towards the Indian community" living there, both

leaders also "acknowledged the contribution of the Indian diaspora in Dubai's evolution into a global hub for trade, services and tourism". New Delhi added, Mr Modi also invited his UAE counterpart to visit India at his earliest convenience. In a separate bilateral meeting that Mr Modi held on the sidelines with Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina, "both leaders recognised the long-standing friendly relations and ancient geographical ties between the two countries and discussed ways to advance bilateral ties and appreciated the close cooperation between the two countries in various multilateral fora, including the UN". New Delhi said the Prime Minister "reaffirmed India's commitment to further strengthen India-Madagascar partnership and to Vision SAGAR -- Security and Growth for All in the Region -- and conveyed that as a fellow developing country in the Indian Ocean Region, India will remain a committed partner in the development journey of Madagascar", a large island nation off the west coast of Africa.

**We will contest polls as part of MVA: Sule rubbishes reports 'Pawar-led camp not to merge with Cong ahead of 2024 polls'**

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
**MUMBAI, FEB. 14**

Maharashtra political circles were abuzz with the reports that the Sharad Pawar faction of the NCP will merge with the Congress ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. However, Mr Pawar's MP daughter Supriya Sule issued a denial, saying her party will not merge with any political party. "Our faction will not merge with any political party. We will contest the upcoming polls as part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)," Ms Sule said when asked about reports of her party's merger. According to reports, the Congress high command has proposed that Mr Pawar should merge his faction and contest the election on a single sym-



**Don't spread rumours (of Sharad Pawar-led NCP's merger with Cong), please look at the aspect of credibility. Today's meeting was aimed at planning for an upcoming rally...**  
— Supriya Sule, Lok Sabha member

bol with the Congress and the NCP is considering it. The proposal came during the meeting of Congress' Maharashtra in-charge Ramesh Chennithala and top Maharashtra leaders with Sharad Pawar, sources said. It was proposed that Mr Pawar should return to his parent party and merge with the Congress. The move comes after the Election Commission named the Ajit Pawar-led NCP faction as the "real

NCP", allotting them both the party name and the party symbol clock. The Sharad Pawar-led group has challenged the EC order in the Supreme Court. Amidst the merger reports, a meeting was held at Mr Pawar's Modi Bagh residence in Pune along with key party leaders to discuss the strategy ahead. After the meeting, Ms Sule said that there was no such discussion in the

meeting. "Don't spread rumours (of Sharad Pawar-led NCP's merger with the Congress), please look at the aspect of credibility," she said. "Today's meeting was aimed at planning for an upcoming rally (of the INDIA bloc). The discussion revolved around the names of leaders who will address the rally," she said. Senior party leader Anil Deshmukh also said that there was no truth in the merger reports. Sharad Pawar started his political career from the Congress. The NCP was founded on June 10, 1999 after Mr Pawar, along with former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, raised the issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi, leading to their expulsion.



Devotees take a dip in the Ganga river on the occasion of the Basant Panchami festival during the annual religious "Magh Mela" festival at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Wednesday.

**51 navies to take part in 9-day 'Milan' exercise Navy 'proactively' deploys assets to contain piracy, says Vice-Adm.**

**PAWAN BALI**  
**NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

The Indian Navy deploys its assets on surface and air "very proactively" the moment it sees signs of pirates trying to revive their activities near the Indian coast to take an advantage as the global attention is currently being diverted towards the situation in the Red Sea, Deputy Chief of Staff Vice-Adm. Tarun Sobti said on Wednesday. Now, international navies, which used to be deployed for anti-piracy operations, have their attention taken up by some of the attacks happening on merchant ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, he said. "Our assessment is that

pirates, who were dormant to a certain extent in the east coast of Somalia, have rallied up again thinking that nobody would be keeping a watch and they could take advantage of the situation," Vice-Adm. Sobti said during a press conference on the upcoming multinational naval exercise "Milan", which will be held in Visakhapatnam from February 19 to 27. Vice-Adm. Sobti added that piracy in the Arabian Sea is a major concern for the Navy as, in the past, it took phenomenal efforts to push back piracy along the Somalia coast. He said that if piracy extends towards the Indian Coast, it would increase the cost of the freight that is moving by sea in the region and also

insurance costs of the ships moving there. "Therefore it is our job to maintain maritime security in the water around us. The minute we see signs of piracy, we proactively deploy both surface and air assets to contain the situation," the Vice-Adm. said. "Milan", one of the biggest naval exercises in the country, will see participation from 51 countries. Interestingly, despite the current hostility, Iran and US ships will be participating in the exercise as per their commitment. Some 15 countries, including Japan, Russia, Australia and Sri Lanka, will be sending their ships to participate in the exercise. France has sent its maritime patrol aircraft.

**Situation in J&K better after abrogation of Art 370: MHA**

**46 terror incidents in 2023 as against 125 in '22: Data**

**AMRESH SRIVASTAVA**  
**NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

With well coordinated efforts of the security forces against terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly after the Centre's decision to do away with the provisions of Article 370, the overall situation in the Union territory has improved substantially as there were only 46 terror incidents last year as against 125 attacks in the year 2022, 129 in 2021 and 153 incidents in 2019. According to the latest data of the Union home ministry, only 14 civilians and 30 security personnel were killed in 48 encounters in 2023, while 73 militants were neutralised. In 2022, as many as 187 terrorists were killed in 117 encounters. The casualties among security per-



A soldier stands guard near the 2019 Pulwama attack spot on its anniversary at Lethpora in Pulwama district on Wednesday.

sonnel and civilians stood at 32 and 31, respectively. In 2021, there were 100 encounters that led to the neutralisation of 180 terrorists and 42 security personnel attaining martyrdom. Forty-one civilians also lost their lives during the same period.

In 118 encounters in 2020, 221 terrorists were killed and 63 security personnel lost their lives. 2019 witnessed a total of 102 encounters in which 157 terrorists were killed and during the operations 80 security personnel also lost their lives.

**2 tribal youth beaten up in MP dist, 7 held**

**Admin bulldozes house of 1 accused**

**Betul, Feb. 14:** The police has so far arrested seven persons after two tribal men were allegedly beaten up in separate incidents in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district, while the local administration bulldozed the house of one of the accused, officials said on Wednesday. In one of the incidents which took place on November 15 last year, the victim, a resident of Baspani area, was brought to Betul city by one of the accused, who was known to him, under some pretext following a dispute over money between the two. He was allegedly hung upside down in a room and beaten up with a belt, slippers and sticks, police said. The victim told

reporters on Tuesday that he was afraid of the culprits due to their "criminal background" and hence did not report the matter earlier. After a video of the incident went viral on social media, the victim's family members took him to the Kotwali police station on Tuesday to file a complaint. An FIR was subsequently registered against three identified persons and as many others, a police official said. In another incident, a tribal youth was allegedly beaten up by a group of persons here on February 7 over an old enmity, the police said in a release. A video of the incident went viral on Sunday and the police arrested two of the accused. — PTI

**Gunfight in Manipur dist, no injuries so far: Police**

**Imphal, Feb. 14:** Armed men attacked Sognu 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 the police. "Several armed individuals fired shots towards Sognu, prompting a response from the village volunteers," the police said. Additional security personnel have been dispatched to the area to manage the situation. Last May, Sognu 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. An Army officer also suffered gunshot injuries in a separate incident in the district. 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

**AAI issues Mumbai airport directives over congestion**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
**NEW DELHI, FEB. 14**

In order to control air space congestion at Mumbai, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has asked the airport operator to restrict air traffic movements during high intensity runway operations (HIRO) period from 46 to 44 per hour and in non-HIRO period from 44 to 42. Further general aviation aircraft operations during the HIRO period have also been restricted. It is expected that Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) will take immediate action to ensure that all airlines are on board with the prescribed restrictions, the government has said. The ministry of civil Aviation said that this action has been taken in larger public interest from the perspective of airspace safety, efficiency of operations and passenger satisfaction. Mumbai airport, being one of the busiest airports in the country, suffers from congestion and excess capacity on its runways, which inadvertently leads to air space congestion.

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**6th ED notice to Kejriwal**

**Continued from Page 1**

February 2, January 18 and January 3 this year and on December 21 and November 2 last year. The Delhi chief minister has so far skipped all five previous summonses, calling the notices "illegal". Mr Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in the ED chargesheets in the case. The agency has said the accused were in touch with him regarding the preparation of the now-scraped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22. Reacting to the ED's summons, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said, "Mr Kejriwal has not obtained any relief on his plea against the ED's action till date. Therefore, Delhi hopes that he will accept the agency's summons and cooperate in the investigation of the liquor scam. If he still does not cooperate with the investigation, he will be disrespecting the investigation and justice system of the country."

The agency claimed that the Delhi chief minister intentionally disobeyed each summons and made each such omission or disobedience a separate offence. The Central financial probe agency has alleged that the Delhi CM intentionally disobeyed the summons and kept on giving "lame excuses". If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would "set the wrong example for the common man", the agency said. This is the sixth summons in this case by the ED to the former Indian revenue service officer. He was earlier called on

**Cong fields Sonia for RS from Raj**

**Continued from Page 1**

Karnataka G.C. Chandrasekhar has also been renominated by the party in the list announced on Wednesday. From Madhya Pradesh, the party has fielded local leader Ashok Singh. It has named Chandrakant Handore as its candidate from Maharashtra. The biennial elections to fill 56 seats in the Rajya Sabha will be held on February 27. The last date for filing nominations is February 15.

**Abu Dhabi's 1st Hindu temple 'symbol of global unity': Modi**

**Continued from Page 1**

inclusionist message, Mr Modi pointed out that members of other communities, such as Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs, helped in various ways in the temple construction and inauguration, adding that for India, "diversity is always special". He also mentioned that the temple was being inaugurated on the auspicious occasion of the "Basant Panchami" festival. According to reports, the temple spans an impressive 27 acres and is 108 ft in height, 262 ft in length and 180 ft in width. It has seven spires, each representing one of the seven emirates of the UAE and has the distinction of being the first Hindu temple in the UAE's capital city. Seers of the Swaminarayan sect said the temple sculptures are based on Hindu epics such as the Ramayan and other sacred works like the Shiv Purana. Praising the "large-hearted" UAE President, whom he once again referred to as his "brother" who "fulfilled the desire" of all Indians living in the country, Mr Modi recalled how the land allocation had been approved by the UAE President "without batting an eyelid" when he had made a request to him way back in 2015. The PM said that subsequently, in 2018, when two proposed architectural models of the temple were presented — one with Hindu symbols and one without — the UAE President had stated that the building should also look like a temple, following which the one with the Hindu symbols was approved. "The biggest role (in making the Temple a reality) is that of my broth-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

er Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed," Mr Modi said to loud cheers from the audience. To equally loud cheers from the audience that included Bollywood actors Akshay Kumar and Vivek Oberoi, Mr Modi also referred to the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya last month, adding that Lord Ram is now in his home. He also praised the Indian diaspora abroad for always respecting the culture of all, including that of the country of their residence abroad. On the occasion, the UAE's minister for tolerance said that the UAE's President has "respect and regard for all religions". He described the temple inauguration as the "beginning of something very special" and a "place of worship with a community centre."

THE ASIAN AGE

15 FEBRUARY 2024

Govt has to show empathy in tackling farmers' protests

The capital New Delhi has been ring-fenced by the police as they face a stir by groups of Punjab farmers. The farmers' march to the capital — marking the farmers' stir 2.0 after year-long events of the agitation over three contentious farm laws ended when the Centre dropped them in November 2021 — has paralysed movement in New Delhi. The events over the first two days of a fresh demonstration of the farmers' general unhappiness over their lot have featured disproportionate responses from riot police forces who seem not only to have prepared to keep the farmers and their ubiquitous tractors out of New Delhi at any cost but also fired teargas shells, some launched from drones, at columns of demonstrators trying to breach the barricades, especially on the Shambhu border between Punjab and Haryana.

While talks have been ongoing despite the failure to reach any kind of agreement to take negotiations further in the first round, the government may have learnt its lessons from the major "Delhi Chalo" stir of 2020 that the way to handle the issue is to seek a consensus with the agitating farmers and prepare to seriously look at issues for ways to mitigate their plight. It might seem incongruous that the farmers of Punjab are the initiators of this round of protests as they are better off than their counterparts in many other states. They have free power and generous allotments of subsidised fertiliser, besides copious water for irrigation. Their productivity levels are high, particularly in wheat and rice crops and they have reasonable access to grain procurement by the government through the Minimum Support Price system.

There is, however, no imagining that things are perfect for them as farmers, besides a hard life to feed the nation, face real income issues from free market and MSP prices that are not remunerative enough while hazards like climate change rendering rainfall patterns erratic are making their livelihoods even more unpredictable.

The idea would be to discuss their issues threadbare and work out what best can be done, though capitulating to the demand for a law to make MSP compulsory might prove disruptive and counterproductive while leading to uncontrollable food price inflation.

That was one reason why the UPA-2 government in 2010 and the NDA governments since 2014 have refused to contemplate the accepting of the Swaminathan committee report which recommended raising MSP to at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production.

Farmers in France and Germany have also been up in arms over their lot, which means the Indian farmer's agitated state of mind is not unique. But in an economy in which nearly half the people of 140 crore population are dependent on agriculture, the need to look at how best to support them better must be worked out.

Protecting the capital from protesting and camping farmers cannot be the sole objective of tackling this second round of protests. Considering this is election season, opportunistic Opposition parties, none of which had conceded such demands in their states nor when in power at the Centre, are promising the moon in an MSP law, if they are elected to power.

The route out may seem extremely complicated for the ruling party, but a method by which the MSP is raised for basic grains like wheat and rice that buttress the free ration scheme for 80 crore people can be worked out to bring some relief to those who sweat and toil to till the soil.

Subhani



Needed: A less intrusive, more inclusive civil code



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

A Uniform Civil Code (UCC) dealing with matters of personal law is a good idea in a multi-cultural country like India, given the rising number of cross-community marriages — although still minuscule in proportion to total marriages. A UCC can be a framework to promote cross-community affinity by applying the benign principle of causing the least harm to any community, borrowing the best features from all personal laws, and ending practices rendered obsolete by time or plainly inequitable like gender inequality.

The Government of Uttarakhand notification dated May 27, 2022 setting up a committee chaired by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai (Retd) merely states the desired end result of framing a common code for personal laws. It does not elaborate on the various laws which might be impacted or would need to be reconciled. The committee held 41 public meetings, including one in New Delhi, and had received 60,810 suggestions, which indicates the wide range of consultations.

These meetings could have been made more productive if the committee had shared a brief to inform stakeholders of "how" amalgamation across personal laws would be achieved and assured communities that the resulting common code would cause the least harm and reduce dissonance across the existing personal law legislation, thus promoting inter-community marriages, mixed community families and "ease of living" — an oft repeated goal of the Narendra Modi government.

The success of the UCC will be assessed by a single metric — citizen satisfaction that the discomfort and uncertainty from the new legislation is minimal and that the burden of compliance with government regulations is reduced.

The UCC does well to recognise "live-in heterosexual relationships". These social arrangements are proliferating in cities, where the exigency of eye-wateringly expensive accommodation encourages the sharing of a house, albeit not always in the "nature of marriage". Recognising and defining such households also enables a new safeguard provision under Section 388, which provides maintenance rights for a woman deserted by a "live-in partner". Here the UCC falters by protecting only deserted women. Under Sections 33 and 34 of the code, maintenance rights are available to either spouse as per "good practice" gender neutral terms. In comparison, Section 388 errs in not reproducing this gender-neutral stance.

The code also errs in not using this opportunity to widen the scope of the landmark, nine-bench verdict of the Supreme Court of India in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) versus the Union of India (2017). The right to privacy is protected as a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Indian laws do not recognise gay marriage. Extending provisions for live-in arrangements to the LGBTQ community could have been transformative by bestowing some legitimacy on such relationships. The UCC would have made global headlines for its vision, sagacity, and social empathy.

There is little doubt that codifying "live-in" arrangements, increase state micromanagement of private affairs is an intrusion, which reduces the "ease of living" and enhances litigation. Uncertainties persist. How will the police enforce compliance with the onerous provisions for registration? Is house to house checking next? Will it become mandatory for house owners renting property to couples to ask for marriage or "live-in" certificates? How

The UCC is tilting at shadows by implicitly seeking to 'protect women', painting modern Uttarakhand women in faintly derogatory, patriarchal terms. Around 80.7 per cent of Uttarakhand's women are literate, versus the national average of 70.3.

will a court distinguish between a man and a woman who are just sharing a house for economic reasons, or as friends — where desertion by one would not qualify for maintenance rights — from a man and a woman "cohabiting in the nature of marriage" — where maintenance rights would be attracted?

The UCC is tilting at shadows by implicitly seeking to "protect women", thereby painting modern Uttarakhand women in glib, faintly derogatory, patriarchal terms. Around 80.7 per cent of Uttarakhand's women are literate, versus the national average of 70.3 (NSO 2017). Independent women are the backbone of Uttarakhand's economy.

Women led the forest preservation "Chipko" movement in the 1970s. They manage lands and business, settle disputes, and yet remain homemakers because working men often emigrate for economic reasons or are in the Army posted far away. The world was recently presented visuals of a new Indian womanhood — column after column of women soldiers, officers, and students — marching down New Delhi's Kartavya Path on Republic Day — confident, secure, serene — more than at par with any developed country. The UCC does not internalise this sentiment.

There are good reasons why a uniform civil code makes eminent sense but force-feeding uniformity from the top is not one of them. Judicial law has already plugged loopholes and protected the right to privacy and women's rights. The rights of children are similarly protected with rights and responsibilities linked to parentage irrespective of the bond of marriage.

Conversely, consider the

case of polyandry — an ancient Indian practice mentioned in the Mahabharata — still practised under tribal law. Curiously, it has resurfaced as a coping strategy amongst poor, landholding families to prevent the fragmentation of land. The award-winning Punjabi film *Kohrra*, created by Sudip Sharma and directed by Randeep Jha for Netflix, documents this practice, illustrating the need for new laws to resonate with the prevailing economic and social circumstances.

There is much to be learnt from tribal law and striving to include tribal communities under a single code provides that opportunity. But that will never happen if tribal law remains a closed black box. The UCC chooses not to confront this vexed issue by exempting tribal communities from its provisions, thereby sheltering behind Part XXI of the Constitution, clause (25) of Article 366 read with Article 342. A plain reading shows that there is no constitutional bar in these provisions on a state legislature, after consultations with tribal communities, proposing to the President of India, a bridging device — an appropriate, possibly lagged, procedure to merge non-conforming aspects of tribal law with the mainstream UCC provisions. Doing so would have provided other states with proactive, tested pathways for similar mainstreaming of tribal law.

The UCC was commendably legislated in record time. But it is error prone. Section 51 dealing with intestate succession, correctly uses the gender-neutral term "surviving spouse". But the supporting Schedule 2, mistakenly, mentions "widow", making male spouses ineligible for intestate succession. Sadly, what has been gained by haste is likely to be lost to higher costs during implementation and does not match the social cost of the lost opportunity, for Uttarakhand to showcase its time-honoured culture of open-minded scholarship, an open worldview and inclusive social relationships.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS JUSTICE FOR FARMERS

Today when I picked up the newspaper, my sight fell on the headline that shocked me. This harrowing incident occurred in the borders between Haryana and Punjab. For some days, farmers are protesting over MSP. Haryana police fired and lobbed tear gas shells. Farmers play a crucial role in the country's economy. The Narendra Modi government has to break the dictatorial attitude towards the nation's farmers.

Arbaz Sheikh Bettiah, Bihar

MAYOTTE DILEMMA

ACCORDING TO the latest plan rolled out by the French government, it will not be possible to become a French citizen if you are not the child of French parents. In a country where citizenship can be obtained by parenthood (*droit du sang*) and by birthplace (*droit du sol*), the two islands that make up Mayotte are in turmoil. Mayotte chose to remain a part of France in 1974 when several of the archipelago's other islands gained independence and united to establish the new nation of Comoros. In an effort to escape poverty, an estimated 1,50,000 people have now moved from Comoros to Mayotte. Over 40 per cent of the people living on Mayotte now have to make do with less than 160 euros per month. What next for Mayotte, Europe and the world?

Arka Goswami Durgapur, West Bengal

BRILLIANT YOUNG FOLK

TWENTY-THREE candidates scoring a perfect 100 in the JEE-Main results leaves no doubt that the young people of today are smarter in their studies. There was a time when a first class in the SSC exams was considered quite an achievement but now one finds tens of thousands of scoring in the nineties. The JEE Mains are a different kettle of fish and the 100 percenters deserve all credit. But what about the over six lakh candidates who have failed to qualify? It should not be the end of the world for them. Not all parents are supportive. Failures in academics are often treated as good for nothings and what is worse: a shame for the family. This attitude needs to change.

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Sonia for RS: Big shift for Cong

The decision of the Congress Party to field its top leader Sonia Gandhi, former AICC president, from Rajasthan, a state where it lost power in the Assembly elections recently to the BJP, is a big shift in the party's situation, and contains an acknowledgement of its relative weakness vis-à-vis the ruling saffron party.

The Gandhi family has had a unique position in the Congress Party which remained sui generis in Indian polity for most decades since Independence. And almost as a rule, the Gandhis went to the Lower House, as an acknowledgement that they were in power only because the people legitimised it in a direct election, every once in five years. Since Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was first elected in the general election of 1952 through Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, and later on, Sonia Gandhi herself, and her son Rahul Gandhi, everyone has made it to the House of the People. Hence, this is a black swan event for the family and party.

It is quite clear that the party, having first lost its pocket borough of Amethi in Uttar Pradesh when BJP leader Smriti Irani defeated Rahul Gandhi, forcing him to retreat to Wayanad in Kerala, has conceded any pretence of space in Uttar Pradesh for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. When conceding UP almost equals conceding the whole election.

Of course, the Congress might still field Rahul Gandhi from Amethi, or forward Rahul Gandhi or his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Rai Bareilly, a seat currently held by Sonia Gandhi, as candidate, but the party will easily acknowledge that these are no longer the safe seats they once used to be.

Sonia Gandhi as a Rajya Sabha member, or an elder in Indian politics, is a welcome decision, but it does reflect the decline of both her family and party.

THE ASIAN AGE

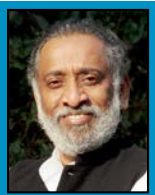
KAUSHIK MITTER Editor

K. SUDHAKAR Printer & Publisher

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at: New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 25211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for: Decan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301. London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ. RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Dilip Cherian Dilli Ka Babu



New CM, new team: Mohan Yadav signals change in MP

The winds of change are sweeping through the administrative corridors of Madhya Pradesh as new chief minister Mohan Yadav is moving quickly to assemble his core team of officers. Mr Yadav's proactive approach hints at a shift in the state's governance dynamics, and an attempt, undoubtedly in close consultation with the Centre, to leave the legacy of his predecessor Shivraj Singh Chouhan behind.

In recent weeks, we've witnessed a flurry of appointments and reallocations, with senior babus, emblematic of Mr Chouhan's tenure, gracefully stepping aside to make room for fresh faces and new perspectives.

Sandeep Yadav's appointment as commissioner of public relations and Sameer Yadav's assignment as the head of the CM's security underscore the new CM's intent to infuse vigour and competence into critical positions. Additionally, the elevation of Raghuvendra Singh to the role of principal secretary in the Chief Minister's Office reflects a strategic move to blend experience with innovation. Others in the new team include Bharat Tadav, Avinash Lavania, Chandrashekhar Walimbe, Aditi Garg and Anshul Gupta.

The chief minister's recent meeting with director general of police Sudhir Saxena signals an imminent reshuffle of IPS officers as well, sources have told DKB. With change comes opportunity, and Mr Yadav's administration appears determined to capitalise on it.

THE 'PAPER' WARS

The white papers and the black papers on the economy have sent a lot of bureaucrats scurrying around for data. Everybody recognises that these papers are almost political weaponising of data figures. Still, at the moment, both former bureaucrats and current bureaucrats are locked in an almost death-like struggle to thread out new figures that can justify the policy measures that they had initiated during their terms in office.

Amid this struggle, there came an extremely erudite data stream from ex-Tamil Nadu finance minister and current DMK IT minister P. Thiaga Rajan, hailed by some as a financial statesman, who was able to show how the Dravidian model has outdone the Gujarat model and any national model, especially the current flavour, the Uttar Pradesh model, as far as economic growth and its benefits are concerned.

Mr Rajan argues that the UP model is more a chimera than a fact, even with the continuous net transfer of tax revenues from better-off states such as Tamil Nadu to less developed Uttar Pradesh. He showed data that at an accelerated growth rate that is two per cent higher than Tamil Nadu's every year; it would still take 64 years for Uttar Pradesh's per capita net SDP to catch up with Tamil Nadu's! But for the babus at the Centre, the UP success story is a great narrative to run with as we head into the poll season. Why let reality interfere with a dream?

NAVIGATING THE NEXUS

Serving and retired IAS officers, retired IPS and IFS officers, district judges and officials working in various departments are among the 370 people who have applied for the six posts of information commissioners in Karnataka.

The government issued a notification to fill six posts of information commissioners — five in Bengaluru and one in Belagavi — in November. Among the applicants are IAS officers Mamata B.R. and Richard Vincent D'Souza, and retired IAS, IPS, IFS officers A B Ibrahim, B Balagopal, Allappa R., M.G. Hiremath, Ashit Mohan

Prasad, K.T. Balakrishna, M.V. Amaranath and Rajeev Ranjan. The list also has four district judges, over 30 retired officials who served in posts ranging from directors to joint secretary and first division assistants.

With a diverse pool of candidates, the process appears to be teeming with potential. However, beneath the surface lies a contentious issue that has plagued such appointments for years — the influence of political connections over meritocracy.

An activist who has revealed lapses in several departments through RTI said successive governments have ignored the basic principles during selection. Instances where individuals with dubious records or questionable integrity have been appointed to such positions undermine the very essence of transparency and erode public trust in institutions. The ramifications of such appointments are dire. How will Karnataka decide?

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

**U.S. IMPEACHES HOMELAND SECY BY ONE VOTE**

Washington, Feb. 14: The US House voted on Tuesday to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. In a historic rebuke, the House impeached Mayorkas 214-213. With the return of Majority Leader Steve Scalise to bolster the GOP's numbers, Republicans recouped despite dissent from their own ranks. President Joe Biden called it a "blatant act of unconstitutional partisanship that has targeted an honorable public servant to play petty political games."

**INDONESIAN DEFENCE MIN. WINS PREZ POLL**

Jakarta, Feb. 14: Defence minister Prabowo Subianto, an ex-general, claimed victory in Indonesia's presidential election on Wednesday based on unofficial tallies. The 72-year-old candidate, who was once banned by the US from entering for two decades due to his human rights record, told supporters in Jakarta, that the victory, was the victory of all Indonesians. There was no declaration by electoral officials and the two former provincial governors who also contested the election in the world's third-largest democracy have not conceded defeat.

**1 DEAD, 53 HURT AS BALCONY OF CHURCH FALLS**

Manila, Feb. 14: A Catholic church balcony collapsed, killing an elderly woman and injuring 53 during a packed mass in the Philippines on Ash Wednesday, when millions of Filipinos flock to services, local disaster officials said. One of the busiest dates on the Church calendar, the day marks the beginning of Lent in Asia's Catholic outpost. An 80-year-old woman expired from her chest injuries at a local hospital, Gina Ayson, civil defence chief of San Jose del Monte, near Manila, told AFP.

**15 DEAD AS TRUCK CRASHES INTO CARS IN EGYPT**

Cairo, Feb. 14: A truck slammed into several passenger vehicles in Egypt's Mediterranean Alexandria, killing at least 15 people, authorities said on Wednesday. The crash, which happened late on Tuesday in Amreya district, west of Alexandria city, also injured eight people, according to a police report. The truck slammed into four minibuses, a type of mass-transit minivan that's popular across Egypt, the report said. One minibus overturned and a second was set ablaze, it said.

**U.S. OFFICIALS CONFIRM HUMAN BUBONIC PLAGUE**

Los Angeles, Feb. 13: Officials in the US state of Oregon have said they are dealing with a rare human case of bubonic plague that was likely transmitted by a pet cat. The disease, which killed at least a third of Europe's population in the Middle Ages during a pandemic known as the "Black Death," is uncommon in developed countries and can now be treated, but remains potentially dangerous. The identity of the patient in Deschutes County has not been revealed, but officials said they were being treated, adding that the individual was most likely infected by their cat.

**BALI \$10 TOURIST E-TAX COMES INTO FORCE**

Denpasar, Feb. 14: The Indonesian resort haven of Bali began imposing a \$10 tax on arriving tourists from Wednesday to preserve the culture of the "Island of Gods", officials said. "This levy is aimed at the protection of the culture and the environment in Bali," Bali's acting governor Sang Made Mahendra Jaya said at a launch ceremony on Monday. The fee will have to be paid electronically through the "Love Bali" online portal and will apply to foreign tourists entering Bali from abroad or from other parts of Indonesia, according to a press release. The levy will not apply to domestic Indonesian tourists.

**Shehbaz Sharif likely to become next PM of Pak**

**Strikes post-poll alliance deal to form coalition government**

Islamabad/Lahore, Feb. 14: Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's next prime minister as a post-poll alliance of leading political parties led by them struck a deal to form a coalition government after last week's elections produced a split mandate.

The surprise move means the party of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan will not be in power, despite independent candidates backed by his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) winning the maximum number of seats in Parliament in the February 8 elections marred by allegations of rigging. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated 72-year-old Shehbaz as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party's 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.

**OPPOSITION ALLEGES MANDATE STOLEN AT NIGHT**

**IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY SAYS MANDATE HAS BEEN STOLEN IN DARK OF NIGHT**

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party on Wednesday alleged that its mandate has been "stolen in the dark of the night. Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Central Information Secretary Raof Hasan said on X, Pakistan is being put on [the] road to further destabilisation. He said the decision to induct criminals to form governments, who were rejected by people, reflects a myopic view of the challenges Pakistan faces.

**BALUCHISTAN AT STANDSTILL, FACING UNREST AS PARTIES PROTEST RIGGING**

Pakistan's restive Balochistan province has come to a standstill and is facing unrest with several political and nationalist parties launching an indefinite blockade of all national highways against alleged rigging of the election results. Four political parties, including the Balochistan National Party (Mengal), National Party, Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party, and Hazara Democratic Party are jointly protesting.

**ENSURE TRANSPARENT ELECTION PROCESS, RESPECT WILL OF PEOPLE. SAYS U.S.**



The White House has called for ensuring a transparent election process in Pakistan and said there is a need to respect the will of the Pakistani people. US President Joe Biden is aware of the elections, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters at her daily news conference. "Millions of Pakistanis, including record numbers of women voted," Jean-Pierre said.

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.

retary Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that party supreme Nawaz Sharif has nominated the party president and his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif for the post of the country's prime minister.

She added that PML-N senior vice-president Maryam Nawaz, considered the political heir of Nawaz Sharif, was nominated for the post of the chief minister of Punjab province.

"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. —PTI

**Ukraine drones sink Russia landing ship in Black Sea**

Kyiv, Feb. 14: Ukraine's military said on Wednesday it used naval drones to sink a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea, a report that has not been confirmed by Russian authorities.

The *Caesar Kunikov* amphibious ship sank near Alupka, in Crimea, 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 February 24, 2022.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refused to comment. He said questions should be addressed to the Russian military.

Several Russian military bloggers confirmed the attack on the ship but stopped short of confirming that it had been sunk.

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-km 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. —AP



A hospital destroyed in a missile attack in Selydove, Donetsk region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It killed 3 people including a pregnant woman. —AFP

**18 Nato nations hit def. spending target**

Brussels, Feb. 14: Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said 18 of the alliance's 31 countries are set to hit its defence spending target this year, after Donald Trump threatened to encourage Russia to attack members not coughing up enough.

Trump was widely rebuked after saying he would not defend Nato members who had not met their financial obligations, in his most extreme broadside yet against the organisation. The comments drew condemnation from leaders including US President Joe Biden — his likely opponent in November's election — and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Stoltenberg laid out new defence spending estimates showing the number of states reaching two per cent of their gross domestic product was expected to jump from 11

**UKRAINE: FRONTLINE WITH RUSSIA VERY 'DIFFICULT'**

Ukraine's new army chief said Wednesday the situation on the front line with Russia was "extremely difficult" as delays to much-needed US military aid cast a shadow over the war effort.

in 2023. "That is another record number and a six-fold increase from 2014 when only three allies met the target," Stoltenberg told journalists ahead of a defence ministers' meeting. The Nato chief did not provide a breakdown of which allies are hitting the target. Overall though, he said European allies and Canada will have added more than \$600 billion to their defence spending since they set the two-percent goal a decade ago. —AFP

**MICROSOFT NABS HACKERS USING AI TOOLS**

Washington, Feb. 14: State-backed hackers from Russia, China, and Iran were using tools from Microsoft-backed OpenAI to hone their skills and trick their targets, according to a report published on Wednesday.

Microsoft said it had tracked hacking groups affiliated with Russian military intelligence, Iran's Revolutionary Guard, and the Chinese and North Korean governments as they tried to perfect their hacking campaigns using large language models. —Reuters

**TECH FIRMS PACT TO FIGHT AI-LED POLL TRICKERY**

New York, Feb. 14: At least six major technology companies are planning to sign an agreement this week that would guide how they try to put a stop to the use of artificial intelligence tools to disrupt democratic elections.

The upcoming event at the Munich Security Conference in Germany comes as more than 50 countries are due to hold national elections in 2024. Attempts at AI-generated election interference have started. "Technology companies are working on an accord to combat the deceptive use of AI targeted at voters," said a joint statement from several companies on Tuesday. "Adobe, Google, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI, TikTok and others are working jointly."

**Israel strikes Lebanon after rocket attack, 4 die**

Jerusalem, Feb. 14: The Israeli military said on Wednesday its fighter jets "began a series of strikes in Lebanon" killing four people and wounding nearly a dozen, two Lebanese security sources said, as Israel intensified its bombardment in retaliation for rocketfire from Lebanon.



An Israeli medical team evacuates a person injured by a rocket fired from Lebanon, at Ziv hospital in Safed, northern Israel on Wednesday. —AP

A woman and her two children were killed in an Israeli strike on the village of al-Sawana, the sources said. Lebanon's powerful armed group Hezbollah said a strike on a separate town killed one of its fighters. Eleven people were wounded across the south and the level of damage was "vast", the sources said.

Israel's military said it had responded to cross-border rocket fire from Lebanon. A rocket attack from Lebanon killed an Israeli woman in a barage that also hit a military base and wounded several people on Wednesday, an Israeli government spokesperson said.

An AFP photographer saw medics and troops evacuating a wounded person by military helicopter from Safed's Ziv hospital.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said Tuesday fire from southern Lebanon will end "when the attack on Gaza stops and there is a ceasefire" between the group's Palestinian allies Hamas and arch foe Israel.

"If they (Israel) broaden the confrontation, we will do the same," Nasrallah warned in a televised address. The cross-border shelling has already killed more than 200 people in Lebanon, including more than 170 Hezbollah fighters, as well as around a dozen Israeli troops and some Israeli civilians. —Agencies

**Abbas asks Hamas to accept Gaza deal**

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories, Feb. 14: Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas pressed the militant group Hamas on Wednesday to agree a Gaza deal quickly to avoid "dire consequences", the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

"We call on the Hamas movement to quickly complete a prisoner deal, to spare our Palestinian people from the calamity of another catastrophic event with dire consequences, no less dangerous than the Nakba of 1948," Abbas said.

The president was referring to the war accompanying the creation of Israel, which saw 760,000 Palestinians flee or forced from their homes. —AFP

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The president was referring to the war accompanying the creation of Israel, which saw 760,000 Palestinians flee or forced from their homes. —AFP

**BLASTS HIT NATURAL GAS PIPELINE IN IRAN**

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.

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

**IS. ATTACKS SYRIAN MILITARY, 9 TROOPS KILLED**

Militants from the Islamic State group attacked military barracks in 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 on Tuesday.

**Maldives deports 186, 43 are Indians**

Male, Feb. 14: The Maldives has deported 186 foreigners, including 43 Indians, after accusing them of committing crimes like visa violations and drug offences, according to a media report. The highest number of people deported was from Bangladesh. At least 83 Bangladeshis were deported followed by 43 Indians, 25 Sri Lankans and 8 Nepalis. The date of their deportation is not yet known, Male-based *Adhathu* reported.

THE HIGHEST number of people deported was from Bangladesh. At least 83 Bangladeshis were deported followed by 43 Indians, 25 Sri Lankans and 8 Nepalis. The date of their deportation is not yet known, Male-based *Adhathu* reported.

working on shutting down such businesses and deporting the foreigners who operate them, Ihusan said.

If the registrar believes based on sufficient evidence that a business is operated with a foreigner earning profits either directly or indirectly, a law was enacted in December 2021 to allow the registration of such businesses to be terminated.

Immigration Controller Shamaan Waheed said 186 foreigners found to have committed crimes have been deported from the Maldives. Immigration detained several people in operations conducted to find foreign workers who committed criminal offences, out of whom those with valid documents and passports were deported, he said. —PTI

The deportations come as efforts are underway in the Maldives to shut down businesses operated illegally. Homeland Security Minister Ali Ihusan said at a press briefing on Tuesday that the ministry was working together with the Economic Ministry to take action against illegal businesses operating under various names.

These include both registered and unregistered businesses, the minister noted. Such businesses include those operated by a foreigner instead of the registered owner, Home Minister Ihusan said.

The Home Ministry was

**INDO-AMERICAN COUPLE, TWIN SONS FOUND DEAD IN U.S.**

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.

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 man and woman were found inside a bathroom, according to police. —PTI

**EXISTENTIAL CRISIS Intensive agriculture, overgrazing of livestock, real estate development main reasons**

**World is quietly losing land it needs to feed itself**

Geneva, Feb. 14: The greatest threats to our existence today are caused by human activity rather than nature acting alone, according to a recent United Nations report.

Rarely does desertification, also known as land degradation get the required attention. The world is rapidly losing usable land for self-inflicted reasons, ranging from intensive agriculture and overgrazing of livestock to real estate development and, yes, climate change. The crisis is further fueling food and water insecurity, as well as adding to more greenhouse gas emissions. Environmental scientists

haven't ignored the problem. In fact, the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 led to the creation of three UN conventions: climate change, biodiversity and desertification. The climate convention holds big COP summits each year — such as COP28 in Dubai — that now frequently make front-page headlines.

But while the biodiversity and desertification conventions also hold COP summits, they're only once every two years and rarely get that much interest. It's a lost opportunity, says Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, who hint-



A drought-affected corn field in the Argentinian town of Serodino in November 2023. —Bloomberg

ed it could be a branding issue because people think it's only about deserts. "There is a misunderstanding of the term desertification. That's why

we also use 'land degradation,'" Thiaw said. Ironically, one of the biggest challenges in the fight against land degradation is universal: We need

to eat. About 40 per cent of the planet's land — 5 billion hectares — is used for farming. One third of that is to grow crops and the rest for grazing livestock.

Unfortunately, the world doesn't have a great track record for sustainable agriculture practices. Over the past 500 years, human activity (mainly agriculture) has led to nearly 2 billion hectares of land being degraded.

That's contributed to about 500 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent released from soil disturbance, or about a quarter of all greenhouse gases contributing to additional warming today. —Bloomberg

**UN chief warns on food, climate crises**

United Nations, Feb. 14: The United Nations chief warned on Tuesday that climate chaos and food crises are increasing threats to global peace, telling a high-level UN meeting that climate disasters imperil food production and empty bellies fuel unrest.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world is teeming with examples of the devastating relationship between

hunger and conflict. In war-torn Gaza, he said, no one has enough to eat and the tiny strip accounts for 80 per cent of the 700,000 hungry people in the world. After more than a decade of war in Syria, he said, 13 million Syrians go to bed hungry every night. And in Myanmar, prospects of ending hunger have gone into reverse because of conflict and instability, he said. —AP

## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	71,822.83	0.73
Nifty 50	21,840.05	0.45
S&P 500*	4,983.95	0.62
Dollar (₹)	83.03	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.12	0.88
Euro (₹)	88.84	0.61
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	61,350	154
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	83.31	0.65
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.114	0.017
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.295	-0.021

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

### Godrej Properties acquires 12.5 acre in Hyderabad

Realty firm Godrej Properties Ltd on Wednesday said it has bought 12.5-acre land in Hyderabad to develop a housing project having ₹3,500 crore revenue potential. This marks the company's foray into the Hyderabad property market. "This acquisition is in line with our strategy of strengthening our portfolio across the key markets in India," said Gaurav Pandey, MD, and CEO of Godrej Properties.



### BHEL to develop 800 MW thermal plant in Haryana

State-owned BHEL has bagged an order to set up an 800 MW ultra-supercritical thermal power plant at Yamunanagar in Haryana. The 800 MW Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Thermal Power Plant (DCRTPP) will be Haryana's first ultra-supercritical technology-based power project, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) said. On commissioning, this plant will offer more efficient parameters and consume less coal.

### Signpost India debuts on stock exchanges

Signpost India made a debut on the stock exchanges following the merger of Pressman Advertising with Signpost India and allotment of new shares. Pressman Advertising, the only listed advertising company, will now be a division of Signpost India. "We are committed to driving innovation and creating meaningful connections between brands," said Shripad Ashtekar, chairman and MD, Signpost India.

### RBI directs Visa to halt select transactions

Visa said that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had directed it last week to halt all domestic transactions for business payment solution providers (BPSPs). BPSPs facilitate business-to-business card payments made to non-card-accepting vendors or suppliers. RBI's directive will not impact all commercial card payments but only those intermediated by BPSPs. Visa did not say why RBI had issued the directive.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle is prohibited.

## Food inflation declined to 6.85% from 9.38% in Dec. Wholesale inflation dips to near zero in January

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

With moderation in prices of food items, including vegetables, India's wholesale price index or WPI-based inflation eased in Jan. to 0.27 per cent. The WPI inflation was at 4.8 per cent in Jan. 2023 and 0.73 per cent in Dec. 2023.

The WPI inflation was in the negative zone from April to October last year and had turned positive in November at 0.39 per cent, the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. As per the ministry's data, all items on food inflation declined to 6.85 per cent in January, from 9.38 per cent in December 2023. "Within food articles, inflation in vegeta-



The supply side reforms will begin to have a positive impact. Inflation is important as it has implications on social stability for households," — V Anantha Nageswaran, CEA

bles eased to 19.71 per cent from 26.3 per cent in December. Inflation in potatoes was in the negative zone. Similarly, the prices of fruits, eggs, fish, and milk have eased as well," the ministry said. "We are not done yet in our fight against inflation. We are going to be a supply-constrained world. If

our inflation performance in 2022 and 2023 is any indicator, perhaps we have learnt to manage inflation. However, the supply side reforms will begin to have a positive impact. Inflation is important as it has implications on social stability for households," chief economic advisor (CEA) V Anantha

Nageswaran said at an event here.

"India has had supply side constraints because of which the growth spurts have been sprints rather than marathons, unlike China. Our policy-makers should thus think of productivity seriously. Going ahead, the return differential will lend a bias to Indian rupee vis-à-vis dollar for investors," he added.

As per the commerce and industry ministry's data, in the fuel and power segment, inflation was (-) 0.51 per cent in January, as against (-) 2.41 per cent in December 2023. "In manufactured products, inflation was (-) 1.13 per cent, as against (-) 0.71 per cent in the previous month," the statement said.

## Super rich buy luxury homes worth over ₹4 cr

New Delhi, Feb. 14: High net-worth individuals (HNIs) are showing interest in buying luxury residential properties as sales of homes costing ₹4 crore and above rose 75 per cent last year across 7 major cities, according to real estate consultant CBRE.

Delhi-NCR saw a nearly three-fold jump in sales of luxury homes last year. It also recorded highest sales among 7 major cities. CBRE on Wednesday released a report, showing a 75 per cent increase in sales of luxury homes (each priced ₹4 crore and above) to 12,935 units in 2023 from 7,395 units in the previous year.

Anshuman Magazine, chairman and chief executive officer, India, CBRE, said, "the premium and luxury sectors are expected to sustain their attractiveness, supported by favourable market conditions driving healthy growth in the foreseeable future." While regional dynamics might lead to fluctuations in capital values, he said the overall outlook remains positive.

According to the data, the sales of luxury homes in Delhi-NCR jumped to 5,530 units in 2023 from 1,860 units in the previous year. In Mumbai, sales of luxury homes in ₹4 crore and above price category rose to 4,190 units from 3,390 units.

Sales of luxury homes in Hyderabad rose to 2,030 units from 1,240 units. Pune witnessed sales of 450 units last year as against 190 units in 2022.

Sales of luxury residential properties in the Bengaluru remained flat at 265 units last year. Kolkata saw a marginal increase in sales of luxury homes to 310 units from 300 units. In Chennai too, sales rose marginally to 160 units last year from 150 units in 2022.

Gurugram-based realty firm Krisumi Corporation managing director Mohit Jain said, "Higher economic growth is resulting in higher disposable income and better job opportunities, which has brought an enhanced lifestyle within reach for many." "Homebuyers are increasingly seeking spacious dwellings in well-established societies," Jain added.

As per the CBRE data, the overall housing sales across price categories exceeded 3,22,000 units in 2023, registering a nine per cent year-on-year growth. —PTI



● IN MUMBAI, sales of luxury homes in ₹4 crore and above price category rose to 4,190 units from 3,390 units. Sales of luxury homes in Hyderabad rose to 2,030 units from 1,240 units.

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## Nomination required in insurance policies: Irdai

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, FEB. 14

The Insurance regulator on Wednesday proposed to make nomination mandatory in life insurance policies. The insurance regulator and development authority of India (Irdai) introduced the amended draft regulations on protection of policyholders' interests and allied matters of insurers regulations 2024.

Under the proposed regulations, life insurance companies will not be able to issue a policy unless nomination has been

obtained. Similarly, the insurance regulator introduced nomination provisions in health and non-life policies.

"The free look period for the policies, obtained through any mode, shall be 30 days from the date of receipt of the policy document," said the Irdai.

Currently the free look period offered by most insurers is 15 days. A free look period is an opportunity provided by an insurer to the insured to return a policy if it does not meet his/her requirements.

In order to enable electronic transfer of refund

● THE REGULATOR also proposed to do away with existing requirement of reporting of outsourcing but has asked insurers to make necessary disclosures in their annual report.

and for payment of claims, the insurer has to collect the details of bank accounts of the insured at the proposal stage.

In a major relaxation for insurers, the regulator also did away with the requirement of filing of advertisement with the authority. Currently adver-

tisements can be launched only after prior approval from the regulator is obtained.

Insurers having specified solvency ratio, profitability in three years out of five years and having satisfactory track record can now open foreign branches including offices at international financial services centre authority (IFSCA).

The regulator also proposed to do away with existing requirement of reporting of outsourcing but has asked insurers to make necessary disclosures in their annual report.



### FIN COMMISSION DISCUSSES TERMS OF REFERENCE

FC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 14

The 16th Finance Commission on Wednesday held its first meeting under the chairmanship of Arvind Panagariya here. During the meeting, the commission discussed its terms of reference (ToR), according to statement.

The distribution between the Union and states of the net proceeds of taxes, which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between states of the respective shares of such proceeds are among the ToR approved by the Cabinet.

Another ToR is about the principles governing the grants-in-aid of the revenues of states out of the Consolidated Fund of India and the sums to be paid to states by way of grants-in-aid of their revenues.

It will also suggest measures needed to augment the consolidated fund of a state to supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities, as per the ToR.

## B2B e-commerce cos focus on sustainable growth, profitability

SANGEETHA G  
Chennai, Feb. 14

The funding winter in the start-up space has made B2B e-commerce companies focus on profitability and this in turn has led to scale back in their penetration. Market penetration of eB2B companies have halved in the past two years.

The 2019-2021 period, known as the 'Goldilocks Years,' heralded an era of rapid, exponential growth, propelled by a surge in private capital investment and Covid-induced disruptions of supply chains, finds RedSeer Consultancy.

Post-2021, the focus shifted to sustainable growth as private investments



receded, prompting eB2B platforms to prioritise profitability. This change led to major eB2B firms either scaling back operations in unprofitable pin codes or ceasing operations altogether, resulting in a drop in buyer penetration from about 25 per cent in 2021 to 12-15 per cent in 2023.

As such, the past two years have catalysed a secular shift towards resilient and profitable

growth. eB2B firms are now focusing on customer value proposition and operating density to build profitable growth.

Looking forward, buyer penetration can potentially triple from 12-15 per cent currently to 35-45 per cent by 2030. Between 2024 and 2030, the sector would see a steady growth in penetration facilitated by cost rationalisation and prudent investments.

According to RedSeer, eB2B companies like Udaan have deepened understanding of customer needs at a granular level to increase adoption among buyers, and increase their wallet share. This has decreased supply chain costs through improved buyer density.

## CIL to begin operations in 5 new mines

Singapore, Feb. 14: State-run Coal India plans to start operations at five new mines and expand capacity of at least 16 existing ones to address growing demand for the fuel, its chairman said on Wednesday.

A record output by Coal India is set to boost inventories at power plants running on domestic coal by 16.1 per cent year-over-

year to 40 million metric tons by end-March, Coal India chairman P. M. Prasad said in written response to questions.

The company is on track to exceed its production target for the second straight year during the fiscal year ending March, Prasad said, after failing to achieve its output goals for 16 straight years. Coal India aims to boost

output by more than 7 per cent to a record 838 mn tons for the next fiscal year, with initial stockpiles at 80 million tonnes, over 15 per cent higher from a year earlier.

The miner plans to start operations at five new mines, with a combined annual capacity of 14.3 million tons, in the next fiscal year, Prasad said. Coal India's revenue

growth has outpaced an increase in costs in recent years, but spending surged nearly 20 per cent each in 2022 and 2023.

The company is scouting for lithium assets in Australia. "We are participating in exploration of lithium assets in Australia that are currently under development stage," Prasad said. —Reuters

### COCHIN AIRPORT TO SET UP GREEN HYDROGEN PLANT

Kochi, Feb. 14: Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) for setting up a green hydrogen plant in the premises of airport.

This collaborative effort will result in the world's first green hydrogen plant and fueling station located within an airport setting, CIAL said in a statement on Wednesday.

The agreement exchange ceremony for the green hydrogen plant was held at Legislative Complex, Thiruvananthapuram in the presence of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who is also the chairman of CIAL, it said. —PTI

## Stock markets witness volatility on global cues

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, FEB. 14

Market turned bearish with the Sensex dipping close to 750 points in morning trade as stubborn US inflation data leading to fall in US market and rise in bond yields. But later the market recovered to close in the green for the second consecutive session.

The Sensex closed at 71822 up 267 points or 0.37 per cent after dipping to day's low of 70,809.84. The Nifty-50 index closed at 21,840.05 up 96.80 points or 0.45 per cent.

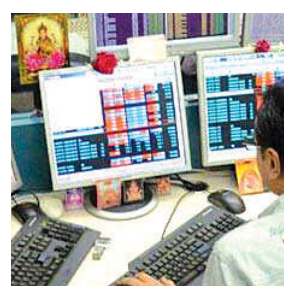
The broader market outperformed with BSE mid-cap index up 1.26 per cent and BSE small-cap index up 1.16 per cent.

US inflation rose more than expected in January. On a 12-month basis, US January inflation stood at 3.1 per cent, down from 3.4 per cent in December.

US market indices slid sharply as rate cut hopes withered and treasury yields surged higher.

The Indian market remained volatile throughout the day on global cues which later turned positive.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth ₹3,929.60 crore while domestic institutions were net buy-



ers by ₹2,897.98 crore.

"Positive European market cues and short-covering towards the fag-end buoyed the sentiment, as key benchmark indices overcame massive sell-off in early trades following overnight slump in US markets amid higher-than-expected inflation data, Prashanth Tapsee, senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities, said.

"There could be more bouts of intra-day volatility in the near term, as investors are getting restless in the wake of delay in rate cuts by the US Fed," Tapsee said.

"Nifty gained more than 1.5 per cent from intraday low to close with gains of 96.80 points (+0.45 per cent) at 21,840 levels near the day's high. All sectors ended in the green, barring the IT and pharma," said Siddhartha Khemka, head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

WORK | FASTER

Building up detailed history allows it offer customised solutions

## Nokia unveils AI tool to enhance factory output

Espoo (Finland), Feb. 14: Technology company Nokia on Wednesday unveiled an AI-powered tool that generates messages for industrial workers, including warnings about faulty machinery based on real-time data and recommended ways to boost factory output.

The tool, "MX Workmate", will expand on Nokia's existing communications technology used by industrial clients by harnessing generative artificial intelligence (AI) large language models to

write human-like text, the company said in a statement.

These could include early warnings about machine failure along with recommended actions for repairs, solutions to boost production quality and rates, or dealing with accidents at factories, Stephane Daeuble, head of Enterprise Solutions Marketing at Nokia, said.

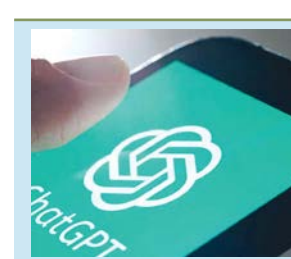
Nokia will showcase the MX Workmate's first versions at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in late February. —Reuters

San Francisco, Feb. 14: The next time you tell ChatGPT that you're allergic to avocados or prefer all meeting notes to be formatted in bullet points, the chatbot might be able to remember those details indefinitely.

OpenAI is testing an option for users to ask the popular chatbot to retain specific information from one exchange to the next, the artificial intelligence start-up said. ChatGPT will also be able to automatically determine which tidbits from a user's conversations

should be remembered. OpenAI will initially make the features available to free and paid ChatGPT users, with plans to review feedback before rolling it out more widely, the company said.

The new memory feature marks OpenAI's latest attempt to make its most well-known product more useful, and personalised, for its 100 million weekly users as the start-up faces a growing list of rivals offering comparable chatbots. While building up a more detailed history for each user could create



● CHATGPT ALREADY steers users away from offering sensitive personal information, such as passwords, passport numbers, and it refuses to save such data.

new privacy concerns, it's also an effective way for internet companies to tailor each person's experience and lock in customers. Joanne Jang, OpenAI's product lead who focuses

on how its AI models respond to people, demonstrated the feature's potential by providing ChatGPT with three different facts, one in each of three different chats. OpenAI will notify peo-

ple if they gain access to the feature, the company said. Those with the feature will be able to delete individual details that have been saved, wipe all of it at once, or choose to switch off the option entirely. Users can also ask ChatGPT what it remembers to get a rundown of any information it has retained over time.

ChatGPT already steers users away from offering sensitive personal information, such as passwords, passport numbers, and it refuses to save such data, Jang said. —Bloomberg

## SHORT TAKES

### Rohit to captain India in T20 WC

**Rajkot:** India will be playing the T20 World Cup 2024, to be organised in the Caribbean and the USA, under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma, said BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event here on Wednesday. India have had Hardik Pandya as their full-time skipper in the shortest format but the heartbreaking loss in the final of the 2023 World Cup to Australia have reignited the murmurs of senior batters Virat Kohli and Rohit returning for the T20 showpiece in June. "In 2023 (final) at Ahmedabad, even though we did not win the World Cup after 10 straight wins, we won hearts. I want to promise you that in 2024 (T20 World Cup) in Barbados (venue for the final), under Rohit Sharma's captaincy, *ham Bharat ka jhanda gaadenge* (we will hoist the Indian flag)," Shah said at the end of his speech. Shah was present at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Khanderi as the chief guest. — PTI

### Piedt grabs five as SA take lead

**Hamilton, New Zealand:** Recalled South African spinner Dane Piedt claimed five New Zealand wickets Wednesday to give the understrength tourists a 31-run lead at stumps on the second day of the second Test. New Zealand's batting succumbed to a disciplined attack led by Piedt, in his first Test since 2019, to be all out for 211 in response to South Africa's 242 in Hamilton. A Proteas team with just 40 Test caps between them have opened up the prospect of squaring the two-match series after crashing to a 281-run loss in the first Test at Mount Maunganui. The Proteas have never lost a Test series to New Zealand but most of their first-choice players stayed home for a domestic Twenty20 competition. Piedt took career-best figures of 5/89 on a spin-friendly Seddon Park pitch as seven wickets tumbled in the final session. The Proteas started the day at 220/6. — AFP

**Brief scores:** South Africa 242 in 97.2 overs (Ruan de Swardt 64, O'Rourke 4/59) vs New Zealand 211 in 77.3 overs (Kane Williamson 43, Tom Latham 40, Dane Piedt 5/89, Dane Paterson 3/39).

### Indians finish 1-2 at Jr World Cup

**New Delhi:** India clinched both the gold and silver medals in the 10m air rifle junior mixed team event at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) 10m World Cup in Granada, Spain. Isha Anil Takale and Umamahesh Maddineni, who had won gold in their respective women's and men's individual events, teamed up to beat compatriots Anvii Rathod and Abhinav Shaw 16-8 in the finals on Tuesday. India thus increased their medal tally to seven, with three golds. Anvii and Abhinav qualified for the gold medal match with a combined score of 629.0 while Isha and Umamahesh were behind them, shooting 627.4. Earlier on Tuesday, the pair of Drishti Sangwan and Paras Khola could not qualify for the medal matches in the air pistol mixed team event as they finished sixth in qualification, shooting 560-12x. Georgia secured both gold and silver in the event. A 34-member Indian contingent is taking part in the World Cup which is having junior and senior 10m air gun competitions only. — PTI

### Teen tennis player dies during event

**Islamabad:** A teenaged Pakistani tennis player, Zainab Ali Naqvi, died of suspected heart attack after collapsing in her room following a practice session ahead of an ITF junior tournament here. The 17-year-old died while being taken to hospital late on Monday night. She was accompanied by her grandmother who sought help after the youngster fainted. A police official handling the case said doctors declared her dead after she was brought to an Islamabad hospital. "The doctors suspect a heart attack and have termed it as a natural cause of death and her parents also didn't want any postmortem and they have been handed over her body for transportation back to Karachi," the police said. The PTF official said on condition of anonymity that doctors suspected hers to be a case of Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, a disease in which the heart muscle becomes thick. — PTI

# MIDDLE MUDDLE

## India seek middle-order solutions against 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 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 forth the possibility 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 K. S. 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 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.

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.

For England, it would be all about taking the right steps as they have done so far in India. — PTI



Shubman Gill during a practice session ahead of the third Test against England at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot on Wednesday. — PTI

## Jadeja says India need to adapt Eng attacking style

**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.



England captain Ben Stokes trains in Rajkot on Wednesday. — AP

"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 plan and if we stick to it then there are chances of being successful." — PTI

## STOKES UPBEAT ABOUT PLAYING HIS 100TH TEST

**Rajkot, Feb. 14:** England captain Ben Stokes tried hard to be self-effacing on the eve of his 100th Test appearance, saying "milestones are what they are" but he is looking forward to the "theatre" that would come with playing the marquee game against a star-studded India.

Stokes will become the 16th England player to appear in 100 Tests when he will lead the side out in the third Test against India here on Thursday. In the pre-match press conference, the dashing big-hitter tried his best to downplay the hype around his achievement.

"Milestones are what they are. I've always enjoyed playing against India because of the contest, the theatre it brings," he said in a brief reply when asked about his thoughts on the match.

Stokes said his mind is focused on decoding the conditions and having a solid strategy in place for the crucial game. "You look down and there's a few cracks that meet up. Only time will tell if they will come into it. (I) don't want to have too many preconceived ideas about pitches, but you do have to have some sort of idea which forms the XI you pick," he said. — PTI

## ASIAN TEAM | CHAMPIONSHIP

# Sindhu wins as India pip China

**Shah Alam (Malaysia), Feb. 14:** Two-time Olympic medalist P. V. Sindhu made a winning return from a lengthy injury lay-off as India stunned formidable China 3-2 in the women's competition of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Wednesday.

With just two teams in Group W, India were assured of a knock-out round berth even before their opening match but the team made its mark in style with the shock win over the top-seeded Chinese side.

The Indian men's team, which lifted the Thomas Cup in 2022 and secured a first-ever silver medal at last year's Asian Games, registered a dominating 4-1 win over Hong Kong to qualify for the knock-out round from Group A.

Hong Kong had lost to China 0-5 on Tuesday. India will take on top seeds China on Thursday to decide the group winner in the men's section.

Sindhu, who was missing in action since October last year due to a knee injury sustained at the French Open, led the way as she beat higher-ranked Han Yue 21-17, 21-15 in 40 minutes to give India 1-0 lead in the women's tie.

The pair of Tanisha Castro and Ashwini Ponappa then lost to Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning

● Sindhu, who was missing in action since October last year due to a knee injury sustained at the French Open, led the way as she beat higher-ranked Han Yue 21-17, 21-15 in 40 minutes to give India 1-0 lead in the women's tie.

19-21, 16-21, followed by Ashmita Chaliha's 13-21, 15-21 loss to world number nine Wang Zhi Yi, as India trailed 1-2 after three matches.

India were on level terms when Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand beat the Chinese duo of Li Yi Jing and Luo Xu Min 10-21, 21-18, 21-17 in one hour and nine minutes in the women's doubles.

In the deciding match against the second-string Chinese outfit, Anmol Kharb punched way above her weight as the 472nd-ranked Indian emerged 22-20, 14-21, 21-18 winner over world number 149 Wu Luo Yu in a gruelling one hour and 17 minute contest to give India a memorable win.

Meanwhile, in the men's competition, HS Prannoy lost the first singles against Ng Ka Long Angus 18-21, 14-21 but that turned out to be the only blip for India who won the next four matches. — PTI



## SAKSHI, BAJRANG THREATEN FRESH PROTEST AGAINST WFI

**New Delhi, Feb. 14:** Olympic medal-winning grapplers Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia on Wednesday alleged that national federation chief Sanjay Singh used devious means to get the suspension on WFI lifted by United World Wrestling (UWW) and threatened to restart their agitation against the body.

The UWW on Tuesday lifted the provisional suspension on India but directed the national federation to provide written guarantees that there would be no discriminatory action against the protesting trio of Punia, Malik and Vinesh Phogat.

The suspension was imposed by UWW in August last year after the WFI failed to hold elections in time.

Punia, Malik and Phogat have been protesting for more than a year, demanding the arrest of

former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for allegedly sexually harassing women grapplers.

"We came to know yesterday that Sanjay Singh had done some setting with UWW to get the suspension lifted. Brij Bhushan and Sanjay Singh have left no stone unturned to show that they are above the law," said Sakshi in a video posted on X.

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, when asked about the latest developments on the sidelines of the Chess Olympiad Torch hand-off ceremony here, said, "We will let you know what we will do."

Sakshi stressed that if the BJP MP's loyalists are allowed to run the affairs of the WFI, the protesting wrestlers will be left with no choice but to restart the agitation. — PTI

# Man City cruise towards CL quarters

**Copenhagen (Denmark), Feb. 14:** Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne's form "extraordinary" after the Belgian was involved in all three goals as Manchester City beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 on Tuesday to close in on the Champions League quarter-finals.

De Bruyne's early opener was cancelled out against the run of play by Magnus Mattsson.

Bernardo Silva restored City's lead before half-time, but they had to wait until stoppage time to add further punishment for the hosts when Phil Foden turned home De Bruyne's cut-back.

De Bruyne was sidelined for five months by a hamstring tear suffered on the opening night of the Premier League season in August.

But since his return last month, the 32-year-old has scored two goals and pro-



Manchester City's Phil Foden (front) celebrates after scoring against FC Copenhagen during the Champions League Round of 16 first leg match in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Tuesday. Manchester City won 3-1. — AP

vided seven assists in seven appearances. "Extraordinary," said Guardiola of De Bruyne's statistics. "The biggest players love to appear in the biggest stages.

"It's the hour of truth when you are in the last 16 of the Champions League and we start well."

The English champions have now won 11 consecutive games in all competi-

for two months since sealing their place in the last 16 by dumping out Manchester United and Galatasaray in the group stages.

"They had a great group stage so we had to respect them," said De Bruyne. "We started really well but I think we made one mistake and they pounced on it."

"We played a really good game. In the second half we created a lot of chances, could have scored more and luckily in the end we scored the third one, so it is a little bit of an advantage now."

That lack of match sharpness from the Danish champions showed in the early stages as City stormed out of the blocks.

De Bruyne headed a glorious chance wide and Kamil Grabara denied Ruben Dias with a fine save inside six minutes. — AFP

## RAM SHOCKS TOP SEED, ENTERS QUARTERFINALS

**Bengaluru, Feb. 14:** Indian Davis Cupper Ramkumar Ramanathan made a remarkable comeback to shock top seeded Luka Nardi to enter the singles quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open here on Wednesday. Ramkumar, a wildcard entrant, prevailed over the Italian 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 in little over two hours in their pre-quarterfinal match at the KSLTA Stadium.

The match began on an ominous note for the Indian star as Nardi broke his serve in the very first game of the opening set.

From that point onwards, Ramkumar was not able to offer any kind of fight to his higher-ranked opponent, who used a heavy first serve and precise ground shots to choke his opponent.

But Ramkumar seemed a totally transformed player in the second set as he engaged Nardi more effectively in rallies, exploring the deeper areas of the court to keep the Italian pinned on the baseline. — PTI