


THE ASIANT AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2024




Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Hamara Sankalp
Viksit Bharat

Prosperity of farmers

1 lakh 25 thousand PM Kisan Samridhi Kendras developed as one stop shop; Farmers are getting modern facilities and information close to home



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WINDOWS



Actor Akshay Kumar rides a bike during the 1st L&T Sea Bridge Marathon on the Atal Behari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu in Navi Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

Modi in UP today to lay foundation of Kalki Mandir

Lucknow: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a day-long visit to Uttar Pradesh on Monday, during which he will lay the foundation stone of the Shri Kalki Dham temple in Sambhal district and address a gathering there. The temple is being constructed by the Shri Kalki Dham Nirman Trust, whose chairman is Acharya Pramod Krishnam, who was expelled by the Congress for "anti-party remarks" days after he met Mr Modi and invited him to lay the foundation stone. ■ Full report on Page 4

Jaishankar, Wang meet after 6 mths

Munich: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi have met briefly in Germany on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, their first meeting in more than six months. ■ Full report on Page 4

18 killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza

Rafah: Israeli strikes across Gaza killed at least 18 people overnight and into Sunday, according to medics and witnesses, as the United States said it would veto another draft UN cease-fire resolution. ■ Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



I want a huge loan to run my small political party!

WEATHER

Max: 28°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 46%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Clear with clouds

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhkrut: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shukla Dasami till 8.51 am
Star: Mrigasira till 10.34 am
Variyam: 7.33 pm to 9.16 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.53 pm to 1.39 pm; 3.11 pm to 3.58 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.14 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.56 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.25 PM
MOONSET TODAY 3.22 AM

‘Seeking 3rd term for India’s benefit, not for power’ Modi urges BJP cadre to reach out to all, win everyone’s trust

YOJNA GUSAI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Exhorting the BJP karyakartas to be in mission mode for the next 100 days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked the party cadre to reach out to the masses, highlighting that the third term of the BJP-led NDA in power will further benefit the middle class, youth, farmers, women and the poor. He also told the BJP cadres that the party has to "win everyone's trust" to realise the aim of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. In his valedictory address at the national council meeting of the party, ahead of the coming Lok Sabha elections, the BJP-led NDA's "star campaigner", Mr Modi, who often describes himself as the "pradhan sevak", asked the BJP leaders to convey his "pranaam" (greeting) to each and every beneficiary of the Central government schemes and reach out to every youth who



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being garlanded by Union home minister Amit Shah, defence minister Rajnath Singh, BJP president J.P. Nadda and others on the second day of the party's national council meeting at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

▶ **THE PRIME MINISTER** asserted that in its third term, the BJP-led NDA is determined to position India as the world's third-largest economic power, up from the current fifth position

turns 18, saying they will play a crucial role in electing the 18th Lok Sabha. Mr Modi has already declared the party's target of winning 370 seats,

which he said will be a tribute to BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookherjee and "400 paar" for the NDA in the impending general election.

The Prime Minister asserted that in its third term, the BJP-led NDA is determined to position India as the world's third-largest economic power, up from the current fifth position. Slamming the Opposition, particularly

▶ **THE NATIONAL** council passed a resolution on Ram Mandir while noting that the values that Lord Ram instilled in his words and thoughts are the inspiration for 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'

the Congress, Mr Modi said it lacked the courage to take on the BJP ideologically or on the basis of principles. He accused the Opposition parties of trying to break the country over language and regional issues, as they have no "development agenda or roadmap for the future".

The national council passed a resolution on Ram Mandir while noting that the values that Lord Ram instilled in his words and thoughts are the inspiration for "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" and the basis of "Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas".

Noting that the temple where a grand consecration ceremony (led by Mr Modi) took place last month has become a



A crowd of visitors at the 37th Surajkund International Crafts Mela in Faridabad on Sunday. On the 17th and final day of the fair, domestic and foreign artistes captivated the audience with their performances. — PTI

Airlines told to deliver all baggage in 30 minutes

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Your baggage should be delivered to you within 30 minutes after your flight lands. In an order, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has directed seven airlines to ensure that all baggage of passengers are delivered within 30 minutes of landing of a flight at an airport. The BCAS has directed the airlines to implement the required measures by February 26.

The directive was sent to seven scheduled airlines — Air India, Indigo, Akasa, SpiceJet, Vistara, Air India Express Connect and Air India Express — against the backdrop of delays in passengers getting their baggage after the landing of a flight. "Airlines to ensure that delivery of last

Farmers for fresh protests, ask govt to decide quickly

■ Talks till late night ■ Borders calm

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, FEB. 18

The Centre held the fourth round of talks with the leaders of protesting farmers' unions in Chandigarh on Sunday. Meanwhile, in a bid to mount pressure on the BJP-ruled Centre to accept their demands, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) announced that from Tuesday it will protest outside the residences of BJP leaders in Punjab.

Union agriculture minister Arjun Munda, commerce minister Piyush Goyal and minister of state for home affairs Nityanand Rai represented the Centre during the talks with the farmers' unions. Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann was also present at the meeting. Representing the protesting farmers, SKM (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh

▶ **THE TALKS** between the ministers and farmers started around 8.30 pm on Sunday and continued till late at night. This was the fourth round of talks between the two sides

Dallewal and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher, among others, attended the meeting.

The talks between the ministers and farmers started around 8.30 pm on Sunday and continued till late at night. This was the fourth round of talks between the two sides. The three previous rounds of dialogue on February 8, 12 and 15 remained inconclusive.

Meaning upping the ante ahead of the fourth round of meetings, SKM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said that they will stage protests in front of the residences of ■ Turn to Page 2

INDIA dynastic, divisive alliance: BJP

■ Likens LS polls to Mahabharat war ■ Shah targets Opp. bloc

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Amid chants of "Bharat Mata ki Jai" and "Modi hai to mumkin hai" every now and then from the gathering of BJP leaders, Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday likened the coming Lok Sabha polls with the battle of Kurukshetra from the epic Mahabharat and asked the people to choose between the "Pandavs" (Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA) and the

▶ **IN HIS** address at the BJP's national convention in New Delhi, Amit Shah dubbed the Opposition INDIA bloc as "nothing but an alliance of seven dynastic parties"

"Kauravs" (Congress-led INDI alliance). He said that in the Modi government's third term, India will become the third-largest economy in the world and terrorism and naxalism will be completely eradicated.



Amit Shah

In his address at the BJP's national convention in New Delhi, Mr Shah slammed the Opposition INDIA bloc as "nothing but an alliance of seven dynastic parties". He slammed the Opposition alliance for

having a "divisive mindset" and "promoting hate politics".

Proposing the resolution "BJP: Desh ki aasha, vipaksha ki hatasha" (BJP: Country's hope, opposition's despair) on the concluding day of the BJP national council, Mr Shah slammed the Congress in particular for "soiling" even the Constitution for its vote-bank politics, apparently hinting at the insertion of the word "secular" in the

Kejriwal unlikely to face ED today

If Hemant joined BJP, wouldn't be in jail, Delhi CM tells Kalpana Soren

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is unlikely to appear before the Enforcement Directorate on Monday for questioning in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy. A day before his scheduled appearance before the ED, the AAP supreme said Sunday that had former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren joined hands with the BJP, he would not have been in jail now.



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge during a luncheon in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Mr Kejriwal had a telephonic conversation with Mr Soren's wife Kalpana Murmu Soren, who thanked him for his support. She wrote on X: "Today I had a telephonic conversation with honourable chief minister of Delhi

@ArvindKejriwal ji. Thanks to Arvind ji that at such time he is with Jharkhandi warrior Hemant ji and the JMM family." In the post in Hindi, she stressed on the need to come together to fight the BJP's "conspiracy".

"Today the entire country is watching the conspiracy of the Central government and the BJP. Everyone is upset to see how democracy is being sabotaged in Jharkhand as well as in Delhi and other non-BJP-ruled ■ Turn to Page 4

Pawar's plea against EC's NCP order is in SC today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by Sharad Pawar challenging an Election Commission order recognising the Ajit Pawar-led faction as the real NCP.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and K.V. Viswanathan is likely to hear Mr Pawar's plea.

On February 16, the top court had agreed to urgently list the plea after the NCP founder pleaded that a whip may be issued by the faction led by his nephew and Maharashtra deputy CM Ajit Pawar against the MLAs loyal to him.

The veteran leader had sought an urgent hearing in the wake of the setback suffered by the group following the EC order. He also cited the February 15 order of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar holding that Ajit Pawar's faction is the real NCP and that the anti-defection provisions in the Constitution cannot be used to stifle internal dissent. ■ More on Page 3



Ravindra Jadeja celebrates the match-winning wicket of England's Mark Wood as he take a five-wicket haul on the fourth day of the third Test between India and England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot on Sunday. India beat England by 434 runs to take a 2-1 lead in the series. This was also India's biggest win in Test cricket in terms of runs. — PTI

PML(N), PPP yet to strike deal over coalition, both claim 'progress' made

Islamabad, Feb. 18: The talks between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party on a power-sharing formula for a coalition government remained inconclusive, though both sides claimed "significant progress" in the discussions, according to a media report on Sunday. The third meeting between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the two parties, which took place on Saturday, remained inconclusive

▶ **A BRIEF** announcement issued by the PML-N after the meeting said that there had been "significant progress" in talks with both sides

and both decided to meet again on Monday.

A brief announcement issued by the PML-N after the meeting said that there had been "significant progress" in talks with both sides, stressing the need for a "strong democratic government". "The proposals put forth

by both parties were discussed, and while substantial progress was achieved, further deliberations are required to finalise the matters at hand," a joint statement read.

Nawaz Sharif led PML-N has nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the PM's post.

Independent candidates — a majority backed by former PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 of the 265 seats that were contested in the February 8 election. — PTI ■ More on Page 6

SHORT TAKES

Chhattarpur Metro
stn gate no. 2 closed

New Delhi: Entry and exit facilities at gate number 2 of Chhattarpur Metro station has been closed due to Phase-IV expansion work. The gate has been closed till the end of the Phase-IV work, a DMRC official said. At present, the DMRC is undertaking construction work on 65.2 km of three priority corridors spanning 45 stations under the project 'Janakpuri West-RK Ashram Marg (28.92 km), Majlis Park-Maujpur (12.55 km), which are extensions of the already operational 'Magenta Line' and 'Pink Line', and 'Aerocity-Tughlakabad that is being built as a new 'Golden Line', connecting the operational 'Violet Line' and 'Airport Line' from the respective ends. Out of these, 28 km will be underground and the rest shall be elevated. DMRC in a post on X said, "Entry/Exit from Gate no. 2 at Chhattarpur Metro station has been closed for Phase 4 expansion work. Passengers are advised to use Gates 1 and 3 for entry/exit purposes," it wrote.

Mantri inaugurates
garden tourism fest

New Delhi: Delhi tourism minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday inaugurated the 36th edition of the Garden Tourism Festival at the Garden of Five Senses. "The festival has attracted a diverse crowd, including people from ordinary and affluent families, housewives, and individuals from all walks of life, who are inspired by the exquisite gardening on display to replicate it at their own homes," Mr Bharadwaj said. The festival offers attendees a tranquil escape into nature's embrace. The theme of this year's festival, "The Earth Laughs in Flowers," encapsulated the essence of spring's arrival, showcasing the captivating transformation of the earth into a floral wonderland. The event displayed a dazzling array of plants, including cacti, dahlias, lilies, roses, chrysanthemums, and an assortment of potted plants.

POLICE HOLDS
ROAD SAFETY
EVENT AT CP

New Delhi: The Delhi police on Sunday organised 'Raahgiri Day' at Connaught Place inner circle under the 'Delhi Police Road Safety Week', an official said. "Safety of people is our objective. We organised Raahgiri for everyone to spread awareness about the traffic rules," deputy commissioner of police (traffic) Shashank Jaiswal said. The officer further said despite an increase in traffic, campaigns on road safety and road engineering have proportionally lowered accident rates. The DCP (traffic) said plays and quiz competitions on road safety were organised to improve awareness of traffic rules. The DCP Traffic the Road Engineering and Research cell makes a data analysis which tries to implement it in road engineering and campaigns. "Children are future of the country. They learn very quickly and can tell their parents if they make any mistakes on the road," the DCP said. "Message given by a children has more impact on parents. They can tell their parents that not to jump red light crossings. These campaigns are working and death rates compared to the last year have dipped," Mr Jaiswal said.

NETA'S NATTER

AAP MLAs UNITED OVER TRUST
VOTE, DIVIDED ON HOUSE TIMING

After winning the trust vote in the ongoing budget session of the Delhi Assembly on Saturday, the AAP leader and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj proposed to Speaker Ram Niwas Goel to fix the timing of the House from 11 am to 1.30 pm for the remainder of the session, beginning Monday.

He said that as the session will continue till the first week of March and MLAs will have to visit their constituencies, the House timing for the remaining session should be changed.

However, his proposal was opposed by his own party colleagues. While



some MLAs advocated for the morning session, others requested the Speaker for the afternoon session. After much deliberation, the Speaker announced that the House will commence from 2 pm to 5 pm from Monday.

CRICKET DIPLOMACY IS STILL A THING, AT LEAST BETWEEN INDIA & UK



Cricket was not too far behind when external affairs minister S. Jaishankar met UK foreign secretary David Cameron on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany recently. Apart from laboured discussions on bilateral ties and diplomacy, the

THE INSPIRING STORY BEHIND
SLIPPERS IN SPEAKER'S CAR

Much is known about Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, but few know that he keeps several pairs of slippers in his car and gives them away to people who walk barefoot under the hot sun in Kota, Rajasthan.

When asked, Mr Birla said that he got inspiration when he read about a schoolgirl who kept

slippers in her bag and gave them to poor people who needed them. Mr Birla initially didn't believe that people would be walking barefoot in such heat and he went out himself to check it out and found it to be true. After that, he always carried slippers with him to hand out to people walking barefoot.

keenly-contested ongoing cricket test series between the two nations being played in India also figured prominently.

"Tongue in cheek, Mr Jaishankar posted on social media platform X, "Also exchanged views on the cricket match underway."

AAP to protest
'blocking' of
1-time water
bills scheme

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

The AAP on Sunday announced to stage protests across the capital city over the alleged 'roadblock' of implementation of 'One Time Settlement' scheme for inflated water bills.

"The implementation of this initiative has hit a roadblock as the BJP obstructs it through administrative channels. This interference comes amidst pressure from the lieutenant-governor (L-G) of Delhi and the Central government, leading officials of the Delhi government to decline its execution", said the party.

The Delhi govt has introduced the scheme for water bill settlement against inflated water bills received by over 10 lakh consumers in the city. The scheme was expected to benefit almost 40 per cent consumers who are currently facing the issue of inflated water bills.

Addressing the meeting, AAP's Rajya Sabha MP and national general secretary Dr Sandeep Pathak said that the Delhi government had announced the 'One-Time Settlement Scheme' for water bill settlement. Now, the Central government of the BJP has obstructed this scheme through officers. "This is not the first time that a scheme benefiting Delhiites has been stopped."

"We will go among Delhiites regarding the way the BJP has obstructed this scheme through bureaucratic measures. We will protest throughout Delhi on this matter. Under no circumstances will we allow injustice to be done to Delhiites. We will continue to work for the people of Delhi," he added.

Dermatomyositis caused
death of Dangal fame actor

Women twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with disease

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

Dangal fame actor Suhani Bhatnagar's death at the age of 19 at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has brought focus on dermatomyositis, a rare disease that is different from other muscle diseases as it also causes skin-related issues along with muscle problem.

The health experts said that it is an uncommon inflammatory disease that causes muscle weakness and a distinctive skin rash.

"Dermatomyositis" is the term used to describe both muscle and skin symptoms. "As true for most of the autoimmune or auto-inflammatory rheumatic diseases, dermatomyositis also requires a high index of suspicion and caution in diagnosing as it has many mimickers," said Dr Uma Kumar, the



Suhani Bhatnagar

HoD of the rheumatology department at AIIMS.

"Many autoimmune or auto-inflammatory rheumatic diseases fall under the category of rare disease—approximately one patient among 2,000 people—and so is dermatomyositis. It predominantly affects skin and muscles but can involve joints, lungs, heart, kidneys, etc.," said an AIIMS doctor, warning that it may also raise the risk of various cancers in the early years after onset.

Dr Kumar said that myositis has many sub-

sets and dermatomyositis is one of them. These subsets may have overlapping symptoms but differ in terms of specific clinical features, treatment response, and prognosis.

"However, these are treatable conditions that require a multidisciplinary approach towards patient care," she added.

As per some studies, dermatomyositis can occur at any age, but it most often affects adults aged 50 to 70. Women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with the disease. Some people with the disease also have a connective tissue disorder, such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis.

Talking about the disease, Dr Kumar said that raising awareness, collaborative research, the attention of policymakers, and drug availability and affordability are a few crucial steps to improve outcomes and quality of life for those affected by the problems.

Red Fort reopens for
visitors after a week

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

The historic Red Fort complex, which was closed for visitors about a week ago due to security reasons in view of a farmers' march, has been reopened.

The iconic Mughal-era monument, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in old Delhi, was 'suddenly sealed' late Monday night "due to security reasons". "It was reopened a couple of days ago."

The security forces in the national capital however stood guard at the three fortified borders of Delhi in order to tackle any untoward incident.

The Red Fort is regularly closed for visitors on Mondays, so they will not get entry inside the complex on February 19. The site was temporarily closed amid a massive deployment of police and paramilitary forces in central Delhi in view of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march.

"No order has been officially issued for reopening" of the site, adding, it was closed in accordance with police instructions and accordingly reopened.

In Delhi the situation remained calm even though the police are on high alert and security remains tight.

AQI is poor, moderate rain tomorrow

Storm, gusty winds
likely in Delhi today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

The national capital on Sunday recorded a maximum temperature of 26.5°C, two notches above the season's average, according to the India meteorological department (IMD). The humidity level oscillated between 100 per cent and 31 per cent during the day.

The IMD has forecast partly cloudy and misty conditions in Delhi on Monday morning, with the minimum temperature likely to settle at 9°C and the maximum at 27°C.

The weather department has also predicted rain or thundershowers with gusty winds on Monday and generally cloudy skies and moderate rain or drizzle on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi on Sunday stood at 269 in the 'poor' category, according to Central Pollution Control

Board (CPCB) data. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

On the other hand, red alert for heavy to very heavy rain and snow, and thunderstorms accompanied by hail, lightning and gusty winds has been issued in seven of Himachal Pradesh's 12 districts for Monday

Board (CPCB) data.

A western disturbance has affected the western Himalayan region from Saturday, with snow being recorded in the higher reaches of Kullu-Manali and Lahaul and Spiti, according to reports.

Videos of snow near the Atal Tunnel in Rohtang have also become widely circulated on social media. Higher reaches of Kashmir also received fresh snowfall even as plains of the valley received rains that brought down the temperatures by several degrees, officials said here on Sunday. Snowfall has been reported in all hilly and mountainous areas of Kashmir since early morning, they said.

The plains of the valley, including Srinagar city, received light to moderate rains, they said.

IP University V-C
given additional
charge of DPSRU

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

Professor Mahesh Verma, vice-chancellor of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, has been assigned the additional charge of the vice-chancellor of Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences & Research University (DPSRU).

Lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena on Saturday had ordered the removal of Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research University (DPSRU) vice-chancellor Ramesh Goyal in connection with an alleged scam involving the recruitment of teaching faculties in 2017-2019.

They said Mr Saxena has also approved the removal of professor Harvinder Popli, the university's registrar, and written to the Union ministry of home affairs for a probe by an external agency into the alleged scam.

"The Hon'ble Chancellor,

DPSRU/Lt. Governor, Delhi, is pleased to assign the additional charge of the post of Vice-Chancellor of Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research University (DPSRU) to Prof. Mahesh Verma, Vice-Chancellor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIU) with immediate effect till regular Vice-Chancellor of DPSRU is appointed," the order issued by the Delhi government on Saturday read.

"No extra remuneration will be paid to Prof. Mahesh Verma for this additional assignment," it added.

The L-G, who is the chancellor of the DPSRU, has given his nod to filing an FIR against Goyal and six other officers named in a report by the three-member enquiry committee for their alleged involvement in the "scam", the officials said on Saturday.



Atishi

Atishi nod to
rehabilitation,
strengthening
of 9 roads

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 18

PWD minister Atishi has approved projects for the rehabilitation and strengthening of various roads in the Shahdara district.

The PWD has conducted a thorough assessment of the roads with the assistance of experts and has been instructed to initiate the upgrading process.

The strengthening projects include nine roads in the Shahdara district.

While approving the projects, Ms Atishi said that the Delhi government's emphasis is on establishing a resilient and secure transportation network following global standards.

"The sanctioned road-strengthening projects across Delhi serve as a testament to the Delhi government's dedication to delivering world-class road infrastructure for the city's residents. The strengthening of these roads will positively impact thousands of individuals in the area, alleviating congestion and enhancing interconnectivity from main roads to colonies," she added.

The minister also stressed the importance of ensuring minimal disruption to commuters during the construction phase, with a directive to adhere to global standards for high-quality roads.

Farmers for fresh protests,
ask govt to decide quickly

Continued From Page 1

Punjab BJP leaders, including MPs, MLAs and district presidents, from Tuesday until Thursday. He also threatened that the farmers will also hold protests at all toll barriers in the state and make them free for all commuters from February 20 to 22.

The SKM leader said that the union will hold a high-level meeting on February 22 in Delhi to chalk out their future strategy and reiterated that they will not accept anything less than the formula for minimum support price (MSP) as recommended in the Swaminathan Commission report.

Ahead of the talks with the Union ministers, Mr Dalweal stated that the Centre should not dilly-dally and find a solution to

farmers' demands before the model code of conduct (MCC) comes into force. He asserted that their struggle will continue even if MCC is imposed.

Denying charges that the farmer's protest is politically motivated, while speaking to the media at the Shambhu border, Mr Dalweal stressed that the agitation has not been sponsored by any political party.

While BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) continued to hold protests for the second day at toll plazas in Punjab, forcing the toll authorities not to charge commuters, BKU (Charumi) in Haryana, held a "panchayat" following which it was decided that all the farmers will be consolidated to have a united protest.

Meanwhile, the ban on Internet services and bulk SMS

in several areas of Punjab and Haryana has been extended till February 24 and February 19 respectively.

The protesting farmers have stayed put at Shambhu and Khanauri borders of Punjab-Haryana for the sixth day, though no fresh confrontations took place between them and the security forces. The farmer leaders have asked the protesters to maintain calm at the borders.

In Delhi, the situation remained calm even though the police are on high alert and security remains tight. The two border points between Delhi and Haryana remained closed for traffic with a heavy deployment of security personnel. Traffic movement is allowed at the Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh.

INDIA dynastic, divisive alliance: BJP

Continued From Page 1
Constitution during the Emergency by the then Indra Gandhi-led government.

In an apparent jibe at the Congress, the senior BJP leader claimed that a party that failed to establish democratic spirit within its organisation cannot protect the country's democracy.

Slamming the Congress over its appeasement politics and boycott of the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, Mr Shah said, "You not only rejected to participate in such a historic event but also abstained from the process of making India great... People of this country are watching and they will remember it."

Asserting that the BJP-led NDA's motto is "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas" and not appeasement politics, Mr Shah said he had no qualms in saying that "never in any democratic country, the majority community had to fight a legal war for 75 years to follow its faith". He added that Ayodhya's Ram Mandir was constructed democratically, for which he thanked the Prime Minister.

Slamming the Opposition alliance for promoting casteism, dynastic politics, appeasement and corruption, Mr Shah said people will have to decide whether they want a Mr Modi-led development and democratic alliance

or a Rahul Gandhi-led dynastic alliance.

Mr Shah said that the Prime Minister has worked for the development of all sections of society and enhanced the country's global standing, while asserting that there is no doubt in people's minds that Mr Modi will retain power for a third term.

The Union home minister described Mr Modi as a candle that removes darkness while burning itself, as he lauded his dedication, hardwork and commitment to the country's progress.

He said while Mr Modi thinks of the poor and the country's development, INDIA bloc leaders think of making their children Prime Minister

and chief ministers, referring to former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, NCP founder Sharad Pawar, RJD's Lalu Prasad Yadav and DMK's M.K. Stalin, among others.

"The Congress is the mother of corruption and its nurturer in this country," he said as he listed the alleged scams during the Congress regime and those of its allies.

Alleging that all the family "princes" have come together against Mr Modi as they think only someone from a powerful family can occupy the top position, Mr Shah said: "On the one hand there are family-run parties and on the other is the son of a poor mother." He said the Opposition

parties are in denial mode and oppose everything for the sake of it, be it the repeal of Article 370, the ban on triple talaq, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or the construction of the new Parliament building.

"If family-run politics existed in the BJP, then the son of a tea seller would not have become the country's Prime Minister," asserted Mr Shah.

Noting that the Congress favoured the division of the country at the time of Independence, Mr Shah said the party and its leaders still follow the "divisive" mindset and called the Congress and the INDIA bloc "hiinsa failane wala gathbandhan".

SHORT TAKES

Irani, Rahul to be in Amethi today

Amethi: Union minister Smriti Irani will pay a four-day visit to her parliamentary constituency of Amethi beginning Monday, on a day Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is set to enter the Uttar Pradesh town. Mr Gandhi had represented Amethi in the Lok Sabha for 15 years before he was defeated by Ms Irani in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This will perhaps be the only second time since 2019 that the two leaders will be in Amethi at the same time. They had been in the town at the same time in February 2022 to attend different campaign events in the run-up to the Assembly polls. Ms Irani's representative Vijay Gupta said the minister will be in her constituency for four days, during which she will hold interactions with residents of several villages and attend her house-warming ceremony on February 22. — PTI

Raut: BJP running a 'political brothel'

Mumbai: Senior Shiv Sena UBT leader Sanjay Raut has made a stinging attack on the BJP saying the saffron party is running a 'political brothel' in Maharashtra and is solely responsible for ruining the political culture of the state. Mr Raut's criticism has come on the backdrop of senior Congress leader and former chief minister Ashok Chavan joining the saffron party. "The BJP is running a political brothel in Maharashtra. It will be difficult to predict the Congress' loss after the defection of Ashok Chavan, but the BJP has surely lost its whatever leftover respect due to this. BJP leader Devendra Fadnis has once said Chavan is a 'dealer' and not a leader, but the deputy chief minister has to now deal with him," Raut said in his weekly column 'Rokhtok' (point blank) in the Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamana on Sunday.

Deve Gowda leaves hospital after 3 days

Bengaluru: Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, who was admitted to a private hospital with respiratory illness, was discharged on Sunday afternoon, the hospital said. "Deve Gowda is fit and functional," Dr Satya Narayana Mysore, HoD and respiratory medicine and transplant physician at Manipal hospital, was quoted as saying in a bulletin. The 90-year-old JD(S) supremo was admitted to Manipal Hospital on Thursday morning for respiratory illness and was under the observation of Dr Mysore. — PTI

SULE: FIGHTING AN 'IDEOLOGICAL' WAR AGAINST BJP

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, FEB. 18

NCP founder Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule on Sunday said that her likely contest against Ajit Pawar's wife in Baramati Lok Sabha seat should not be seen as a family feud. Ms Sule said she is fighting an ideological battle against the BJP and anybody can contest the election in democracy. There is a strong buzz in Maharashtra politics that Ajit's wife Sunetra Pawar will be fielded as the NDA candidate in Baramati against Ms Sule. In fact, posters declaring Ms Pawar as the future MP of Baramati have come up in the town which has been a stronghold of the Pawar family. When asked about the reports that Ms Pawar will be her main opponent in the Lok Sabha election, Ms Sule said it is an ideological battle and her sister-in-law should not be dragged into it. She also said that she never mixes her work with relationships. "I have my professional life and ideology. This is not my personal battle but an ideological battle. My fight is against BJP and its wrong policies," said Ms Sule. Ms Sule also said that anyone can contest elections from any place in a democracy. "I had said yesterday (Saturday) that if they have a strong candidate, then I am ready to debate with that person. They can decide the topic, time, and place. I'm ready," she said. Taking a dig at Ajit Pawar, Ms Sule said that there has to be a discussion in the democracy to resolve the issues of the society.

Mamata accuses Centre of deactivating Aadhaar cards

'They are doing this so that people don't get benefits of welfare schemes'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 18

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday accused the Centre of deactivating Aadhaar cards of the people of the state before the Lok Sabha elections to deny them government's facilities and pave the way for the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC). Her allegations came days after around 50 people of Jamalpur in Burdwan East found their Aadhaar cards deactivated. The CM has directed state chief secretary B.P. Gopalika to open an online portal for the registration of complaints of Aadhaar cards' deactivation. "A fresh conspiracy is underway to implement the NRC. CAA cries have started again. The election is going to be declared in a



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a public welfare programme at Suri, in the Birbhum district on Sunday. — PTI

month or so. A plan is made to snatch the voting documents of the citizens," the TMC supremo claimed at a public event in Suri, Birbhum. She elaborated, "All should enroll themselves in the voter list. I also ask those involved in prepar-

immediately. We will explore the alternative way. If the banks say Aadhaar cards are mandatory, then we will make the cards without them. We will ensure that people do not get deprived of their benefits." In a veiled warning to the leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari and others, who earlier switched from the TMC to BJP, Ms Banerjee said, "You have got so many people arrested. Can't I get the traitors arrested also? I'm only taking some time for a good opportunity to come. These traitors were into thefts, corruption." She argued, "Now they are calling others thieves. But they forget they are the heads of the thieves. They are like those empty vessels which sound much. They do politics at the mercy of Delhi. They are against Bengali, dalits, farmers."

Human-animal conflict: Rahul visits Wayanad

GILVESTER ASSARY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 18

A day after violent protests broke out in Wayanad over the deaths of three persons in wild animal attacks, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday visited the district and assured compensation to the victims' kin without delay. Mr Gandhi, who represents Wayanad in the Lok Sabha, took a break from the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which was in its Varanasi leg on Saturday, rushed to his constituency in the wake of fatalities caused by human-animal conflict. The Wayanad district had witnessed violent protests by local people on Saturday who came out on the streets against the state government and forest department. In 2019 LS polls, Mr Gandhi had secured 7.06 lakh votes defeating his nearest CPI candidate by over 4 lakh votes.

'For jobless, double engine govt means a double blow'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday attacked the ruling BJP over the issue of unemployment in Uttar Pradesh, saying the double engine government means a "double blow" to the unemployed. Writing on social media platform X, Mr Gandhi posted a photograph of Kanpur station where a huge crowd was seen, purportedly going to take the UP police constables examination. The state government is recruiting 60,244 police constables for which over 48 lakh applicants applied. Tagging the photograph, Mr Gandhi claimed that today every third youth of Uttar Pradesh is suffering from the "disease of unemployment". "Where more than 1.5 lakh government posts are vacant, graduates, postgraduates and PhD holders are standing in line even for the posts that require minimum qualifi-



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi meets the family of Ajeesh, a forest watchman killed in an elephant attack, in Wayanad on Sunday. — PTI

gets leaked, if the paper happens then the result is not known and even when the result comes after a long wait, one often has to go to the court for ensuring joining," he said. Laks of students have become overage after waiting for years for recruitment from the Army to railways and from education to police, he said. A student trapped in this maze of despair is falling victim to depression and breaking down, Mr Gandhi said.

Discontent in MP BJP over buzz on Nath joining party

Vijayvargiya says doors closed to Cong leader

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB. 18

Senior BJP leader and state urban development minister Kailash Vijayvargiya on Sunday said that the doors of BJP were shut for "a leader like Kamal Nath". "Doors of BJP are shut for a leader like Kamal Nath at least in Madhya Pradesh. We cannot comment on the decision taken by Delhi (BJP central leadership) on Mr Nath. But, Mr Nath will not be accepted by the BJP in Madhya Pradesh", Mr Vijayvargiya, who is also the former national general secretary of the party, told the media here. He was reacting to the raging rumours making rounds in political circles that the Congress veteran may join along with his son in BJP. A week ago, Mr Vijayvargiya had also ruled out Mr Nath's induction into the BJP, saying that "One will prefer to buy fresh vegetables in the market, not the rotten ones". Mr Vijayvargiya echoed the sentiments of the influential sections of the BJP in the state. "Mr Nath will obviously come to the BJP along with his supporters, if at all he joins BJP. This will trigger strong resentment among the cadres in the party. Such a move may boomerang on the party in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in Madhya Pradesh", a senior BJP leader said, requesting not to be quoted. Speculations about Mr Nath quitting the Congress started making



Kamal Nath

'Nath not leaving Cong, he won't yield to pressure of ED, I-T or CBI'

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, FEB. 18

Senior Congress leader and former minister Sajjan Singh Verma, known as a staunch loyalist of party veteran Kamal Nath, on Sunday dismissed speculations about the latter quitting the grand old party. Mr Verma who left for Delhi from here in the evening to meet Mr Nath said that he held discussions with the latter on the matter. "Mr Nath told me that he is not quitting the Congress. He said that he is now focusing on putting strong party candidates in the 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," Mr Verma told this newspaper after his meeting with Mr Nath. "Mr Nath told me that he never even thought about leaving Congress", Mr Verma said. In a related development, Congress veteran and former chief minister Digvijay Singh on Sunday reiterated his assertion that Mr Nath is not leaving the Congress. "He has got all posts, including chief minister, Union minister, AICC general secretary and MP Congress chief. Nath's character is such that he won't yield to the pressure of ED, I-T or CBI," he said.

Says INDIA bloc's doors are 'open', up to Mayawati to decide Congress sends feelers to BSP

New Delhi/Prayagraj, Feb. 18: INDIA bloc's doors are "open" for the BSP and it is up to Mayawati to decide if she wants to join the united fight against the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls or not, Congress' Uttar Pradesh in-charge Avinash Pande said on Sunday. The Congress general secretary said the INDIA bloc very much wanted the BSP to join the bloc but Mayawati has already declared that she will go it alone in the Lok Sabha polls.

In an interview with PTI during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the politically-crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, Mr Pande said the Congress is "wholeheartedly" supporting the Samajwadi Party and expressed confidence that a seat-sharing deal for the Lok Sabha polls in the state will be finalised "very soon" with remaining "confusions" dispelled. He said the Congress-SP combine is in talks with small parties in Uttar Pradesh who would also be joining the INDIA bloc to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, and asserted that everything will be sorted out by the end of this month. "Some of them are joining unconditionally and some have some expectations and therefore it is taking a little time (for finalising the seat-sharing in UP) but everything will be sorted out by the end of this month," he said. Eminent economists, industry experts, intellectuals and academia of Odisha on Sunday called for "all-encompassing" and "inclusive" growth so as to build the state economy robust and resilient. Speaking at the Vibrant Odisha Conclave 2024, Odisha's higher education, cooperation minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak said the state economy had witnessed an annual average of growth over 7 per cent in recent years and the government was making a serious effort to see that all sections of the people share the benefits of the prosperity. "There was a time when we did not have enough



The Indian Air Force's C-17 Globemaster III aircraft during the Vayu Shakti exercise at the Pokhran range in the Jaisalmer district on Saturday. — PTI

VBA chief's demand to delay MVA's seat-sharing

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, FEB. 18

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) chief Prakash Ambedkar has asked the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) to distribute the Lok Sabha seats among themselves first and then his party would negotiate with each one of them. His new demand has surprised every constituent, which will force them to rework the seat-sharing formula. As general elections are expected to be announced in March, the Maha Vikas Aghadi, which consists of Sharad Pawar led NCP, Congress and Uddhav Thackeray led Shiv Sena (UBT), is yet to finalise its seat sharing formula. An insider in the MVA told this newspaper that the VBA chief's demand is going to further delay the finalisation of the seat sharing. The sources said that the VBA is likely to demand Akola, Amravati, Parbhani, Solapur and Buldhana among others. The Congress has included Prithviraj Chavan in place of Ashok Chavan in the panel which will negotiate with the alliance partners.

SC to hear Pawar's plea over EC order on real NCP today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of Sharad Pawar challenging an Election Commission order of recognising the Ajit Pawar-led faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and K.V. Viswanathan is likely to hear Mr Pawar's plea. On February 16, the top court had agreed to urgently list the plea after the NCP founder pleaded that a whip might be issued by the faction led by his nephew and Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar against the MLAs loyal to him. The veteran leader had sought an urgent hearing of his plea in the wake of the setback by the group following the EC order and his MLAs facing action for violation of whip. Mr Pawar had sought urgent hearing in view of the February 15 order of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, holding that the NCP faction led by Ajit Pawar was the real NCP and that the anti-defection provisions in the Constitution cannot be used to stifle internal dissent. On February 6, the



Sharad Pawar

Election Commission announced that the Ajit Pawar faction is the real NCP and also allotted the party's "clock" symbol to the group. The special Maharashtra Assembly session is beginning on February 20. The Maharashtra strongman, who founded the NCP with former Lok Sabha speaker P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar in 1999 after their expulsion from the Congress, filed the petition through lawyer Abhishek Jeebaraj. Earlier, the Ajit-led faction had filed a caveat in the SC through advocate Abhikalp Pratap Singh to ensure that no ex-parte order is passed in favour of the Sharad Pawar group if the latter moves the top court. Ajit Pawar had walked away with a majority of NCP MLAs in July last year and supported the Maharashtra government led by the BJP-Shinde's Sena alliance.

Experts call for 'all-encompassing' and 'inclusive' growth for Odisha

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 18

funds to build a bridge, good roads and other infrastructure. Now, things are different. We established connectivity to every part of the state. Good hospitals have been established. The government is providing nutritional foods to mothers and children. As a result, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) and infant mortality rate (IMR) have drastically come down. The state is skilling the youths so as to make them employable," said the minister Mr Nayak. Former finance minister Prafulla Chandra Ghadai presented a graphical picture of how Odisha's economy made a march from revenue deficit to revenue surplus in the 24 years under the Naveen Patnaik government and

said Odisha had emerged a major investment destination largely because of the political stability and proactive policies of the state government. Leading economist and Odisha's top industrialist R.P. Gupta presented a vivid picture of the industrial growth achieved in the post-independence era. He credited Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visionary leadership to build various state-owned entities that contributed to the development of the country. He also appreciated the leadership of former Odisha chief minister Biju Patnaik and present chief minister Naveen Patnaik for the industrial development witnessed during their regimes.

J'khand set to conduct caste survey

Ranchi, Feb. 18:

Jharkhand CM Champai Soren has given the go-ahead for a caste-based survey in the state on the lines of neighbouring Bihar, a senior official said on Sunday. The CM has directed the personnel department to prepare a draft (SoP) for conducting the survey and place it before the Cabinet. If everything goes according to the plan, the exercise will begin after the Lok Sabha elections, the official said. Indicating the survey, the CM posted on X, "Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Uttni Hissedari (Bigger the population, bigger the share). Jharkhand is ready." — PTI

SHORT TAKES

More relaxation in Haldwani curfew

Dehradun: Curfew in the Banbhoolpura area of Haldwani has been further relaxed, with the Nainital district administration saying on Sunday that the restrictions will now be in place between 10 pm to 5 am only. Violence broke out on February 8 over the demolition of an illegally built madrasa in the Banbhoolpura area of Haldwani, with locals hurling stones and petrol bombs at municipal workers and police, forcing many police personnel to seek refuge at a police station, which the mob then set on fire. In the violence, six rioters were killed and more than 100 people, including police personnel and mediapersons, were injured, according to the police. According to an order issued by Nainital district magistrate Vandana Singh on Sunday, there will now be a 17-hour relaxation in the curfew. — PTI

MBBS aspirant dies of ailments in Kota

Kota, Rajasthan: A youth from Uttar Pradesh, preparing for medical entrance tests here in Kota, died during treatment, two days after he had to be rushed to the city's MBS Hospital with high sugar level and blood pressure, officials said on Sunday. NEET aspirant Shivam Raghav (21) from Aligarh in UP, had been preparing for the entrance test in Kota for the last three years and was living in a hostel room in Kota under Kunhari police station in Kota. The student had high sugar levels and blood pressure for the last six months and was rushed to MBS Hospital on Friday after his condition deteriorated, Sub Inspector at Kunhari police station Rajaram said. Raghav's condition continued to deteriorate in the hospital following which he was shifted to ICU, where he succumbed early Sunday morning, he added. The police handed over the body after post-mortem to his family members, who had arrived in Kota. — PTI

C'garh: Maoists kill CAF commander

Raipur: A commander of Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) was on Sunday hacked to death by Maoists in a local weekly market in Jaigar under Kutru police station limits in Bastar in Chhattisgarh, police said. According to the police, a CAF team led by commander Tejau Ram Bhuiyara went to the local market to buy vegetables at around 9.30 am. Two Maoists suddenly attacked Bhuiyara with axes in the market and fled the spot. The CAF commander died on the spot. Security forces later launched a combing operation in the area to nab the killers.

Police nabs over 100 in 2 days for playing dummy across state 14 held for cheating in UP police exam

Lucknow/Ballia/Gonda (UP), Feb. 18: Police have arrested 14 people for alleged cheating in the ongoing police constable recruitment examination in Ballia district, officials said on Sunday. This included 11 members of three gangs, including a forest department and a health department technician, and three men allegedly posing as aspirants in the exam, they said. Superintendent of police of Ballia Dev Ranjan Verma said police have busted three gangs that were allegedly trying to disrupt the ongoing police constable recruitment examination and arrested 14 people. Among those arrested were Abhay Kumar Srivastava, a lab technician in the health department in Sultanpur district, and Fatehbahadur



Candidates being checked before appearing in the UP police constable recruitment exam in Mathura. — PTI

Rajbhar, a constable in the forest department in Katni district of Madhya Pradesh, he said. Police have also arrested three persons, who were allegedly appearing for the exams in place of registered candidates. In Gonda district, police have arrested three persons in connection to the constable recruitment process, including one for posing as a candidate. Kundan Kumar Chaudhary, a resident of Nalanda district of Bihar, was arrested on Saturday evening with the help of the local police at an examination centre in Nawabganj town, Gonda superintendent of police Vineet Jaiswal said. He was giving the test in place of Tanmay Singh, a resident of Mankapur police station area of the district. Tanmay and Harendra Kumar, both of whom had applied for the constable recruitment process, were arrested on Sunday, the SP said. He added that a deal had been finalised between Chaudhary and the two candidates for ₹6 lakh. He was giving the exam in place of Tanmay at an examination centre in Nawabganj in the second shift on Saturday and was to take the exam in place of Harendra on Sunday at another centre in Gonda city. Mr Jaiswal further said that a case has been registered against the three in Nawabganj police station. — PTI

Jain seer embraces death via 'sallekhana'

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB. 18

Famous Jain seer Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj on Sunday passed away at Chandragiri teerth in Dongargarh in Rajnandgaon district in Chhattisgarh after undertaking the religious practice of 'sallekhana' involving voluntary fasting unto death for spiritual purification. Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj attained 'sama-dhi' through sallekhana at Chandragiri teerth at 2.35 am, a statement issued by the teerth said. The statement added, "Maharaj was staying on the teerth in Dongargarh for the last six months and was unwell for the last few days. For the last three days, he was observing sallekhana — a religious practice of voluntary fasting to death — and had quit intake of food and liquids. According to Jainism, it is a vow taken for spiritual purification". Final rites of the seer were performed in Chandragiri teerth on Sunday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed condolence over the seer's demise, calling his death an irreparable loss to the country. "His efforts for spiritual awakening will always be remembered," Mr Modi in his condolence message said.

Modi to lay foundation of Kalki Dham temple today

Will launch over ₹10L-cr UP investment projects

Lucknow, Feb. 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a day-long visit to Uttar Pradesh on Monday, during which he will lay the foundation stone of the Shri Kalki Dham temple in Sambhal district and address a gathering there, according to a statement. The temple is being constructed by the Shri Kalki Dham Nirman Trust whose chairman is Acharya Pramod Krishnam, who was expelled by the Congress for "anti-party remarks", days after he had met PM Modi and invited him to lay the foundation stone. The inauguration programme around 10:30 am will be attended by many saints, religious leaders and other dignitaries, said the statement issued on Saturday. Around 1:45 pm, the Prime Minister will launch 14,000 projects across Uttar Pradesh worth more than ₹10-lakh crore at the fourth ground breaking ceremony for

THE PROGRAMME will be attended by about 5K participants, including industrialists, representatives of top global and Indian firms, ambassadors and high commissioners and other guests

investment proposals received during the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit 2023 (UPGIS 2023). The projects relate to sectors like manufacturing, renewable energy, Information Technology and IT-enabled services, food processing, housing and real estate, hospitality and entertainment, education, among others. The programme will be attended by 5,000 participants, including industrialists, representatives of top global and Indian firms, ambassadors and high commissioners and other distinguished guests. — PTI

SC to hear today PIL seeking CBI or SIT probe into WB's violence

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Supreme Court is likely to hear on Monday a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking a court-monitored CBI or SIT probe into the violence in Sandeshkhali village of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. The PIL moved by Supreme Court lawyer Alakh Alok Srivastava sought transfer of investigation and subsequent trial outside West Bengal, besides free and fair CBI or SIT probe under the top court supervision. The PIL also sought enquiry by a three-judge committee, in line with

the Manipur violence. The SC on Friday had agreed to consider listing of the PIL. A day after the filing, the PIL was mentioned on Friday for urgent listing before a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. "Have you sent an email (seeking urgent hearing)?" the CJ had asked. When PIL petitioner answered in affirmative, the CJ said, "I will deal with this." The plea also seeks compensation for victims of the violence and action against the police officials for alleged dereliction of duty.

CAPFs face hurdles with air courier

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Central Armed Police Forces personnel are finding it difficult to get slots at sanctioned prices in the designated flight for their air courier facility particularly those posted in Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern states. This issue was prominently flagged during a recent meeting of the Central Reserve Police Force, chaired by the DG Anish Dayal Singh with its field formations. The officials in the various frontiers explained that the jawans are facing this challenge because of the limited capacity of the Srinagar-Jammu-Delhi

route, and these facilities are available on Saturday or Sunday only. Similar instances have also been noticed in the northeastern sectors such as Dibrugarh-Guwahati-Delhi and Kolkata-Imphal-Kolkata routes too. A high ranking official in the CAPFs said the Union home ministry has been informed about the situation and the ministry has been working on it to resolve the issue after due consultations with the operator InterGlobe Aviation Limited known as 'Indigo Airlines'. He also said that air courier services face challenges due to coordination and financial issues across various locations,

THE OFFICIALS said jawans encounter difficulties on the Kolkata-Imphal-Kolkata route due to large deployment of the Central forces in Manipur following the eruption of an ethnic clashes last year affecting the multiple forces, prompting discussions at the highest levels within the ministry. He also said that security personnel were not facing the lack of seats during the government owned Air India's days but soon after the acquisition of the Air India by the Tatas in October 2018, the problems started. The officials said jawans encounter difficulties on

the Kolkata-Imphal-Kolkata route due to large deployment of the Central forces in Manipur following the eruption of an ethnic clashes last year and sought to expand services from three to five days to adjust the rising demand. This air courier is given to the jawans going to the place of posting or going on leave from the place of posting in J&K and in the north eastern sector such as Dibrugarh to Guwahati and then Delhi and Kolkata-Imphal-Kolkata. The private carrier "Indigo Airlines" had bagged the tenders for air courier service for the security personnel of the Central Armed police Forces in April 2022.

Modi urges BJP cadre to win trust, reach out to all

Continued from Page 1

and how after the Modi government's decision to mark December 26 as "Veer Bal Diwas" in the memory of "Chaar Sahibzade", "even children as far as Kerala and Nagaland now know about the valor of the Sahibzades". His remarks came at a time when a section of farmers from Punjab have been protesting to demand legal status for the minimum support price, among other issues. A considerable part of Mr Modi's nearly 65-minute speech was about the poor, youth, women and farmers, the ruling BJP's support base, along with beneficiaries of the Central government schemes. Addressing the BJP leaders, Mr Modi said the "nation will now have to dream big and make big resolutions to make India a developed country by 2047". "The next five years are going to be crucial. We have to take a big leap towards Viksit Bharat. The first imperative is to ensure the return of the BJP to power in strong numbers," the Prime Minister said. Slamming the Congress, Mr Modi said, "The Congress is demoralised... Therefore, abusing Modi and levelling false allegations against me have become the single-point agenda of its leaders." The PM said that even Opposition leaders are now raising slogans in favour of more than 400 Lok Sabha seats for the NDA. "But, for the NDA to cross 400 seats, the BJP will have to cross the milestone of 370," he said. Confident of the BJP-led NDA scoring a hattrick, Mr Modi said every country across the world is now keen to forge a deeper relationship with India. "Elections are yet to take place, but I already have invitations from different countries for July, August and September. This

means that several countries of the world are also completely confident about the return of the BJP government," said the PM. Mr Modi said that every country across the world knows "aayega toh..." as the gathering shouted "...Modi hi. Aayega toh Modi hi." "We rid the country of mega scams and terror attacks and made efforts to improve the living standards of the poor and the middle class," he said. Maintaining that he is seeking a third term not to enjoy power but to work for the nation, Mr Modi said, "If I had thought of my home, it would not have been possible to build homes for crores of people." He said 10 years of unblemished governance and pulling 25 crore people out of poverty were no ordinary feats. "A senior leader once told me I had done enough as the PM and the CM; I should rest now. I am working for 'rashtraniiti', not 'rajaneeeti'," he said. The Prime Minister said he lives by the ideals of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and takes inspiration from him. "I am not someone who lives for his own happiness. I am advocating for a third term for the BJP, not for political gains but for the benefit of India. My efforts are dedicated to the people of India. The dreams of Indians are my commitments," Mr Modi said. He said he is the first Prime Minister to raise the issue of toilets and speak about dignity for women from the ramparts of Red Fort. "The BJP is bringing together the power of the youth, women and farmers to build a Viksit Bharat," Mr Modi said, adding, "We asked those who were not acknowledged by anyone, and not

just that, we have also worshipped them." Talking about the women empowerment initiatives of the BJP government during the last 10 years, the Prime Minister said, "In the times to come, there will be plenty of opportunities for "our mothers, sisters and daughters." He said Mission Shakti will create a complete ecosystem for the protection and empowerment of women in the country and added that 15,000 women self-help groups will get drones. "Now, 'Drone Didi' will bring scientific temperament and modernity to farming. Now, 3-crore women in the country will be made 'Lakhpati Didis'," the Prime Minister said. On Ram Mandir, Mr Modi said that the BJP ended the five-century wait and constructed the temple in Ayodhya. "The religious flag has been hoisted in Pavagadh, Gujarat, after 500 years. After seven decades, we opened the Kartarpur Sahib highway. After waiting for seven decades, the country has got freedom from Article 370," the Prime Minister said. He said the spirit of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" is visible in governance. "The Northeast was completely ignored by earlier governments. But we do not work for votes and seats. For us, every corner of the country should be prosperous and developed; this is our belief," Mr Modi said, adding that his Council of ministers had a record representation of leaders from the Northeast. "For the first time, a woman has become a member of the Rajya Sabha from Nagaland. We are proud that for the first time we have given a place to a person from

Tripura in the Council of ministers," he said, pointing out that for the first time Arunachal Pradesh has got a Cabinet minister. "Our government is for everyone. 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' is reflected in our work ethics," the Prime Minister said. Taking aim at critics who wondered if he would be able to handle foreign policy, Mr Modi said India's ties with West Asia are strongest now and noted that he was the first Prime Minister in a few decades to visit the UAE. "The Congress government used to look at West Asia but through the prism of Pakistan," he said. Slamming the Congress, Mr Modi said the Opposition party is riven by internal divisions, not due to ideological differences but over its stand on him, as one section believes in tarnishing his image by all means, including personal attacks, while another wants to avoid this approach. Earlier, the national council passed a resolution on the Ram temple in Ayodhya, asserting that this heralds the establishment of "Ram Rajya" in India for the next 1,000 years. The resolution noted that the temple where a grand consecration ceremony took place last month has become a temple of "national consciousness" and will play a decisive role in fulfilling the resolutions adopted in building a "Viksit Bharat". "The construction of a grand and divine temple of Lord Shri Ram at his birthplace in the ancient holy city of Ayodhya is a historic and glorious achievement for the country. This heralds the establishment of 'Ram Rajya' in India for the next 1,000 years with the beginning of a new 'Kalachakra'," the resolution said.

about whether the CM would appear before the probe agency, sources said that he was likely to skip the summons this time too. The AAP has always maintained that its legal team was studying the summons issued to Mr Kejriwal. The sixth summons came after the ED approached a city court against the Delhi CM over skipping five summonses. On Saturday, the court granted exemption to Mr Kejriwal from personal physical appearance before the court due to the ongoing budget session and the confidence motion in the Delhi Assembly. The court listed the matter for a hearing again on March 16.

Kejriwal may not face ED today

Continued from Page 1

Together, we have to fight this conspiracy of the Central government and the BJP. Jai Johar! Jai Jharkhand!" she said. Quoting her post, Mr Kejriwal said he stands in solidarity with Mr Soren. "Kalpana ji, we fully stand with former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren ji. The whole country praises his strength and courage. How he is facing the atrocities of the BJP. If today he had gone with the BJP, he would not have been jailed. But he did not leave the path of truth. Salute to him!" he said in the post in Hindi. Though the AAP remained tight-lipped

Airlines directed to deliver all baggage in 30 minutes

Continued from Page 1 baggage is made within 30 minutes for as per the Service Quality Requirements of Operation, Management and Delivery Agreement (OMDA)," the order said. The BCAS also started the exercise of monitoring the time of arrival of baggage at belts in six major airports since January 2024. Officials said since the onset of review exercise, the performance of all airlines is being monitored on a

weekly basis and have improved somewhat, but are still not as per the mandates. The mandates require the first baggage to arrive at the luggage belt within 10 minutes of shutting off the aircraft engine and the last bag within 30 minutes. The monitoring is now being done at six major airports. However, the BCAS has directed the airlines to ensure that the mandated levels are achieved in all the airports where they fly.

THE ASIAN AGE

19 FEBRUARY 2024

KCR in hot water: CAG nails graft by BRS govt

Even as the people of Telangana, and India, are trying to fully comprehend the fullest extent of the corruption of the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government in the last decade over two terms, a simple way of summation of all data and its scathing condemnation of various decisions and actions of former chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is to say that Telangana suffered one of the most corrupt governments ever in Independent India.

One of the biggest flagship schemes of the BRS led by then-CM K. Chandrashekar Rao was a multi-purpose Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KILS) project, which alone would qualify as one of India's biggest failures, and was the greatest of corrupt endeavours by any government. The entire project was a rushed affair, totally botched up with ill intent and wilful carelessness, with the BRS government, and in particular the irrigation department, cutting corners on quality and the following of technical expertise, inflating costs, skipping comprehensive plans for sourcing funds and flouting a plethora of norms, as the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's damning report has recently made clear.

The CAG report also noted that design deviations and flaws in construction of the Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla barrages, which are all now leaking and cracking, and might be of no use at all

Several components of the project were approved and handed to contractors even before detailed project reports (DPR) were finalised, the CAG audit found. The CAG report, which took into consideration the project execution till 2022, also concluded that the final cost of Kaleshwaram will likely touch ₹1,47,427 crores, against an original estimate of ₹81,911 crores, as was projected to the Central Water Commission. The CAG said the project was a "financial disaster", with a "return" of just 52 paise for every rupee spent, and, therefore, the project was economically unviable ab initio.

The KIPCL, formed by the BRS government to bear the entire cost of the project, will require a total of ₹1,41,544 crores for servicing debt incurred through various borrowings. The annual repayment amounts, beginning this year, will start from ₹14,462 crores, which will gradually come down to ₹712 crores in 2035-36.

The CAG report also noted that design deviations and flaws in construction of the Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla barrages, which are all now leaking and cracking, and might be of no use at all.

Understandably, the Congress Party which won the recent Assembly elections in the state, has gone to town because it had won the polls exposing the BRS corruption. Interestingly, the BRS government did not even allow the tabling of the CAG report till it was in power, and also resorted to not uploading most of the government orders (GOs) online as was the norm prior to Mr Rao taking charge as CM. The Telangana government now stares at a ₹2,52,048 crores debt repayment, per the CAG report.

Congress leaders, led by chief minister A. Revanth Reddy, are already making it a political issue ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, crying "corruption worth thousands of crores, illegal activities and wastage of funds occurred under KCR's rule. CAG report is proof of all misdeeds. KCR and ministers must answer".

The BJP is demanding a CBI investigation while the state government wants a sitting or retired judge of the high court to lead a probe.

But one thing is certain — the most corrupt of state governments ever in India's history should not go unpunished.

Navalny a heroic figure of hope

The world reacted with a great deal of emotion and grief to the death of Alexei Navalny (47), the Russian dissident who languished in jail for a couple of years before being sent to a penal colony in the Arctic to make his sentencing even more stringent.

To refer to him as Russia's Opposition leader might be a misnomer as there is no such thing as an "Opposition Leader" in the monochromatic system of governance in which the State is everything and the authoritarian at the helm is a virtual dictator who rules supreme.

The world that grieves for such a brave man is also wondering why he went back to Russia — his wife and two children stayed in exile — after he had been poisoned with a nerve agent by shadowy figures of the Russian state in Germany. Having been rescued by doctors, he was going back to certain death when he chose to go home in January 2021.

"I don't want to give up my country or my beliefs," Navalny had said in response to a question that his Russian guards used to ask him often. He stood up for his beliefs, but in a tragic life of imprisonment in a system which gave him no chance to savour triumph like Nelson Mandela did after his 27-year incarceration on Robben Island in South Africa where he fought the despicable apartheid system.

In the modern age, far removed from where Russia was at the time of the Revolution, Navalny did not return to Russia like Vladimir Lenin did to a hero's welcome when he brought the Bolsheviks to power and then went on to create and rule over the Soviet Union.

Today's Russia is in the absolute grip of Vladimir V. Putin, who will this week be marking the second anniversary of his invasion of Ukraine, staying on his chosen path of a historic correction and the rest of the world can do nothing about it.

In his years as a dissident fighting the Kremlin from prison, Navalny, a nationalist to begin with, was a figure of hope and of change, but one against whom the odds were stacked. As those who wished to hold a memorial for him were being detained all over Russia with a threat of at least a year in jail, his wife, Yulia Navalny, is expected to lead the dissident movement, but from abroad. Such is the power of Putin's Russia.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTAR
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

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Subhani



The bond of wealth, power: SC verdict won't end nexus



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

The verdict of the Supreme Court on the electoral bonds scheme has been widely welcomed. Even the Bharatiya Janata Party, the scheme's biggest beneficiary, has also welcomed it. While this verdict may make the scheme more transparent, it is unlikely to end the nexus between wealth and power that defines any democracy.

During the Congress era, the Communists used to refer to the Union government as the "Tata-Birla ki Sarkar". Today they refer to it as the "Adani-Ambani ki Sarkar".

Through the electoral bonds scheme, the Narendra Modi government spread its net wide, beyond big business, and garnered more than a lion's share of the contributions. The late Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, the Big Bull on Dalal Street, once famously told a journalist that his Agrawal community within the bania caste "owned the country". Look at the names, he said, Jindal, Goyal, Mittal, Bansal, Singhal and so on and so on. "So, boss, do we own the country or not?" The dominant section of the business community across the country is invested heavily in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his BJP and in Hindutva. So, why would the BJP not corner as much as 90 per cent of the electoral bonds issued in this past half-decade?

The shifts in Indian politics over the past seven decades have, without doubt, shaped the social composition of the political power elite. Their caste, class and regional composition has certainly changed. The rise of the intermediate castes, the OBCs, has been one of the major structural changes

in both the class and caste composition of the ruling political class. Yet, the land-owning upper castes have retained their place of prominence and dominance in many regions. From the Jats and Rajputs of North India to the Marathas and Patels of western India and the Reddys, Kammas, Velamas, Chettiers and Nairs of the South, the upper castes have retained their presence in business and politics.

As I have tried to explain in my book, *India's Power Elite: Caste, Class and a Cultural Revolution* (Penguin, 2021), in India's "psephocracy", as sociologist Ashis Nandy characterised an electoral democracy, wealth remains, above all, the most important determinant of power. The cost of getting people out on election day to cast their vote is rising even as their trust in the system may be waning. Several recent studies have focused on the role of "money power" in politics and the nexus between crime, business and politics. The rising cost of election campaigns, the inability of the State to enforce the rules pertaining to election funding and, more recently, the brazen manner in which political parties in power are able to corner the bulk of the funds provided by corporates and other donors has made politics a game of the rich in which the wealthy become wealthier and are able to become politically more powerful.

It is not, therefore, surprising that a disproportionate number of the members of state legislatures and Parliament are wealthy. There had been some dilution of this aspect in the first decade after Independence with more members of the mid-

During the Congress era, the Communists used to refer to the Union government as the "Tata-Birla ki Sarkar". Today they refer to it as the "Adani-Ambani ki Sarkar". What has changed?

dle class, including rich peasants, entering politics. However, as election expenses have grown and with the rising importance of political office as a source of both power and wealth, there has been a rise in the number of the wealthy among the elected representatives of the people.

Consider the social composition of the 17th Lok Sabha, that was elected in 2019. It has more wealthy members than any other Lok Sabha in the past half century. Data collated by the Association for Democratic Rights shows that as many as 475 MPs (constituting 88 per cent of the 539 MPs for whom data was available) have assets upwards of ₹10 million (₹1 crore), slightly up from 443 (82 per cent) in the 16th Lok Sabha. Out of 542 winners analysed during the Lok Sabha 2014 elections, 443 (82 per cent) winners were crorepatris. In the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14), the comparable number was appreciably less at 315 (68 per cent).

The ADR study shows that not only had MPs become richer during the five years they were members of the Lok Sabha, but that in successive elections since 2009 the proportion of "crorepati" candidates among the victors has also risen. In other words, the wealthy had a better chance of securing admission to political office, and that office became an important source of acquiring wealth. In a country with a nominal per capita income that is less than ₹200,000 per annum, and at least a fifth of the population living in abject poverty, it is surprising that an over-

whelming number of elected representatives, both in the Lok Sabha and in the state Assemblies, are millionaires, if not billionaires.

The ADR data showed that with the exception of MPs from the Communist parties, all other MPs of all other parties were millionaires, with the BJP having the largest number of them. As many as a third of MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha had assets worth more than ₹50 million, while average assets per winning MP was ₹21 million. The wealthiest MPs, however, came from smaller political parties like the YSR Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, DMK, Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) and the Akali Dal.

These are, of course, declared assets, and that too, in the name of the specified individual and not of all family members taken together. Many wealthy Indians hold considerable wealth in the name of their spouse. The ADR data also shows, interestingly, that MPs from regional parties like the Akali Dal, BRS and the Nationalist Congress Party saw the highest increase in wealth of sitting MPs between the general elections of 2014 and 2019.

The role of money power in politics has only increased with time and this is reflected in the wealth of elected politicians. With the decline of the Congress, the balance of power and wealth has shifted in favour of the BJP. Hindutva politics has arrived with deep pockets, with the rural and urban rich bankrolling the BJP, making it the richest political party. The electoral bonds scheme was just one more instrument used by a party in power to cement the alliance between wealth and power.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He has recently edited *The Importance of Shinzo Abe: India, Japan and the Indo-Pacific*.

LETTERS

TROPICS UNDER STRESS

As is well-known, deforestation causes a low rate of precipitation. The practice of felling trees and converting agricultural land into commercial space was initiated by modern people. But we are both directly and indirectly damaging the environment. Callum Smith and colleagues (University of Leeds, UK) presented an analysis of satellite measurements that showed changes in the forests of the Congo basin and Southeast Asia between 2003 and 2017. For the removed forest, monthly rainfall decreased by 0.25 millimetres. It is assumed that forest clearing will result in a 10-20 per cent decrease in precipitation in impacted areas.

Rina Roy Karmakar
Durgapur, West Bengal

AUTUMN LEAVES

LIKE LEAVES of a tree that fall in autumn, or spring, they are deserting the Congress Party. On February 13, the BJP inducted an accused in the multi-crore Adarsh scam, Ashok Chavan. In Rajasthan, there are rumours that Mahendrajeet Singh Malaviya, an MLA and the Congress' tribal face, may be crossing over the BJP. Another Congress veteran, Kamal Nath, and his son, Nakul, an MP, may be inching towards the safe-camp. Kamal Nath has flown down to Delhi to meet the BJP leadership.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

KAVITA THE BRAVE

THE DEMISE of renowned TV actress Kavita Chaudhary of Udaan fame is truly shocking. The actress is best known for her portrayal of IPS officer Kalyani Singh in the iconic television series by Doordarshan in 1989. Its story was in fact inspired by the life of Kavita's sister Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya, the second IPS officer after Kiran Bedi. Kavita was the writer and director of the show. Kavita was also famous for a detergent commercial where she played the role of Lalitaji, a homemaker who makes wise decisions. Kavita will live eternally in the hearts of Indian TV viewers. We love you, ma'am. Rest in power.

M. Pradyun
Kannur

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Arka Goswami (Feb. 18). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



New-look London Overground open; Baroness Shreela's remarkable legacy

Miracles will never cease. Paul McCartney's original bass guitar — a Hofner 500/1, no less, that he bought in 1961 for thirty pounds (a lot of money in those days) — has been found. He played it at the Cavern club in Liverpool and at Abbey Road for that iconic LP. But then the guitar was "lost". Now after 54 years it has been returned to him by a student, Ruiadhri Guest, who said he had inherited it. It was discovered in an attic in Hastings. The last time McCartney had used it was in the Beatles album, *Let It Be*.

That is not the only good news. The sun is shining and there is a promise of spring in the air. Even the by-elections or the recession in the economy is not dampening down the people enjoying the lovely weather.

London has always had the Underground. Now it has Overground railways as well. Sadiq Khan who faces election as Mayor just unveiled the new lines. The underground has routine names like Northern and Central. These new Overground railways have trendy names. There is Lioness celebrating the successful English women's soccer team. Windrush — in honour of the boat that brought Afro-

Caribbean people back in the 1940s and which changed the cultural scene with Bob Marley and the Notting Hill carnival. There is the Suffragette line to commemorate the women who fought for the vote.

These overground lines (somewhat like Paul McCartney's guitar) have been recovered from little used overground railway lines. So Sadiq Khan is frugal as well as imaginative. Let us hope it helps him get back in as Mayor.

But elsewhere there is trouble. Students can no longer afford night life. Swinging London from when the Beatles and the Rolling Stones ruled the roost is gone. Night venues for dancing are shutting down. Even pubs are suffering. There is a recession in the economy and it is telling.

But fortunately for authors — money is not everything. There is now to be a new literary prize for women authors for nonfiction writing. It turns out that women have caught up with men in fiction but they are lagging in the nonfiction prize field. So we now have 16 women shortlisted for a nonfiction prize worth 30,000 pounds. Naomi Klein, the well-known *Guardian* columnist, is shortlisted.

Sixteen titles on the long list will be narrowed down to six on March 27 and winner will be announced on June 13.

One person who will be sorely missed is Baroness Shreela Flather, who just passed away.

She was a pioneer in many ways. She was the first woman Mayor of Maidenhead as well as a member of the European Parliament and entered the House of Lords as the first woman of Indian origin.

She sat on the Conservative benches and remained a fiercely independent member with a marvellous wit and a keen debating style. She married Gary Flather, a barrister and judge, but revelled in her Indian roots. We, at the Partition Museum (set up by the trust that I chair in Amritsar and Delhi) were delighted to interview her as she was the descendant of the great Sir Gangaram — who set up institutions in Lahore and India. She was proud of the connection — especially when one remembers that the hospitals he set up in both countries have survived the Partition. But in her own right she has left a permanent monument in London in the vicinity of the Buckingham Palace. It is a memorial to all the soldiers of the

Commonwealth who fought and died during the world wars. She raised the money, made the arrangements and secured the place. There is a memorable photograph of hers in the Parliament gallery. A true pioneer.

Shreela ushered in a new chapter for Parliament — but the House of Lords has recently gained a new woman member who is also a novelty. She is only 27, Welsh and does not approve of the unelected House. She belongs to the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru which nominated her. She intends to take her oath in Welsh and wear her Martens Boots. That may wake up some noble lords from their afternoon nap but then they are used to that. Perhaps it was about time the House of Lords got a young rebel!

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author, playwright, and heritage buff who helmed the setting up of the two Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi, and chairs the trust that runs them. She also helped set up the Mahatma Gandhi Statue outside the UK Parliament.



SHORT TAKES

SPAIN NURSING HOME FIRE KILLS TWO WOMEN

Madrid, Feb. 18: A fire that broke out in a Madrid nursing home early on Sunday killed two women and injured at least 10 other people, Spanish emergency services said.

VOTERS EXERCISE FRANCHISE IN SPAIN'S GALICIA

Madrid, Feb. 18: Voters went to the polls in Spain's northwest region of Galicia on Sunday in a close-run race where polls have suggested the opposition conservative People's Party could lose an absolute majority that it has held for 15 years.

CALL TO FREE SENEGAL PREZ CANDIDATE

Dakar, Feb. 18: Supporters of opposition presidential election candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye on Sunday demanded his immediate release.

"All candidates must benefit from the constitutional principles of equal treatment," said a statement from the Diomaye President coalition.

ERITREANS RIOT IN THE HAGUE, SIX POLICEMEN HURT

The Hague, Feb. 18: At least six police officers were injured and 13 suspects arrested after rival groups of Eritreans fought running battles in The Hague in the early hours of Sunday, torching police cars and hurling rocks.

Special police units fired tear gas at the rioters, who police said were pro- and anti-Eritrean government groups attending a meeting in The Hague.

CHARLES SEEN AT COUNTRY HOUSE CHURCH SERVICE

London, Feb. 18: UK's King Charles III attended a church service at his country residence of Sandringham on Sunday as he continues to receive treatment for an unspecified cancer.

POPE APPEALS FOR AN END TO SUDAN CIVIL WAR

Vatican City, Feb. 18: Pope Francis appealed to Sudan's warring factions to put an end to a 10-month conflict that has seen millions displaced and prompted warnings of famine.



A picture of Kremlin's critic Alexei Navalny lies next to flowers and candles at a makeshift memorial in front of the Russian embassy in Vienna, on Sunday. — AFP

'Confident' of US war aid, Biden tells Zelenskyy

Rehoboth Beach, Feb. 18: President Joe Biden on Saturday told Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy that he is "confident" the US Congress will renew war aid, but added that without American help Kyiv could lose further territory to Russian advances.

"I spoke with Zelenskyy this afternoon to let him know that I was confident we're going to get that money," Biden told reporters after attending church in Delaware.

Failure by US lawmakers to approve new funding for military aid to Kyiv would be "absurd" and "unethical," he said, adding: "I'm going to fight to get them the ammunition they need."

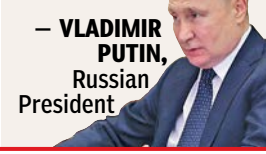
400 DETAINED ACROSS RUSSIA

Over 400 people were detained in Russia while paying tribute to opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died at a remote Arctic penal colony, a prominent rights group reported.

The UK government on Sunday extended its visa scheme for war-hit Ukrainians who sought refuge in the country, allowing an additional 18-month stay on their current terms.

Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said he had discussed the prospects for peace in Kyiv's nearly two-year-old war against Russia with his Chinese counterpart, part of a long-running bid to bolster relations with Beijing.

Everything that is happening on the Ukraine front: For them it is an improvement of their tactical position, but for us it is our fate, it is a matter of life and death.



— VLADIMIR PUTIN, Russian President

Trump hawks \$399 shoes at 'Sneaker Con'

Philadelphia, Feb. 18: As he closes in on the Republican presidential nomination, former president Donald Trump made a highly unusual stop on Saturday, hawking new Trump-branded sneakers at "Sneaker Con," a gathering that bills itself as the "The Greatest Sneaker Show on Earth."

Trump was met with loud boos as well as cheers at the Philadelphia Convention Centre as he introduced what he called the first official Trump footwear. The shoes, gold lame high tops with an American flag detail on the back, are being sold as "Never Surrender High-Tops" for \$399 on a new website that also sells Trump-branded "Victory-47" cologne and perfume for \$99 a bottle.

He'd be the 47th president if elected again. The website says it has no connection to Trump's campaign, though Trump

campaign officials promoted the appearance in online posts. On Friday, a judge in New York ordered Trump to pay a whopping \$355 million in penalties, finding that the former president lied about his wealth for years, scheming to dupe banks, insurers, and others by inflating his wealth on financial statements.

That penalty came after Trump was ordered to pay \$83.3 million to the writer E. Jean Carroll for damaging her reputation after she accused him of sexual assault. With interest payments, Trump's legal debts might now exceed a half-billion dollars — an amount it is unclear he can afford to pay.

PML-N, PPP power-sharing formula to form govt skids

Significant progress in third meeting, both parties to meet again today

Islamabad, Feb. 18: The talks between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party on a power-sharing formula for a coalition government remained inconclusive, though both sides claimed "significant progress" in the discussions, according to a media report on Sunday.

The third meeting between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the two parties, which took place on Saturday, remained inconclusive and both decided to meet again on Monday to finalise the power-sharing formula.

A brief announcement issued by the PML-N after the meeting said that there had been "significant progress" in talks with both sides, stressing the need for a "strong democratic government".

The proposals put forth by both parties were thoroughly discussed, and while substantial progress was achieved, further deliberations are required to finalise the matters at hand," a joint statement read.

Nawaz Sharif led PML-N has nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the Prime Minister's post. Independent candidates — a majority backed by former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 of the 265 National Assembly seats that were contested in the February 8 election.

The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third



Former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party nominee for prime minister, Omar Ayub Khan (R) speaks during a press conference at PTI's central secretariat in Islamabad on Sunday. — AFP

with 54 seats. The Muttahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has also agreed to support them with their 17 seats.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly. During Saturday's meeting, the PML-N was represented by Ishaq Dar, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Malik Muhammad Ahmed Khan, whereas those representing the PPP included former Sindh chief minister Murad Ali Shah, Saeed Ghani, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Nadeem Afzal Chan and Nawab Sanaulah Zehri.

In the last meeting on Thursday, representatives

of both parties sought more time to assess the proposals discussed in the first meeting. Bilawal Bhattu-Zardari-led PPP has assured the PML-N of its support in the government formation and election of the next prime minister on the condition that, in return, it will get key constitutional offices, including that of the president.

The PPP has also announced that despite supporting the PML-N at the centre, the party will not take ministries in the federal Cabinet. Sources said the PML-N had been vigorously trying to change PPP's minds on the issue of ministries before discussing the constitutional offices. The latter has so far refused to budge. A PPP office-bearer, privy to the talk on government formation, told the Dawn newspaper that the party has decided to seek the posts of National Assembly (NA) speaker and Senate chairman. But the PML-N appears reluctant and wants to keep the NA speaker's office with it, the PPP leader added. The PPP has sought top offices in both houses of Parliament as the party feared that under the PML-N, Parliament "would not be able to gain its lost prestige".

Sources in the PPP claimed that so far, the party had not finalised the names for the top constitutional and parliamentary offices. — PTI

POLL RIGGING: ECP FORMS PANEL, PTI FOR JUDICIAL PROBE

Islamabad, Feb. 18: Pakistan's election commission has formed a high-level committee to probe the explosive allegations levelled by a senior bureaucrat that widespread rigging aided by the judiciary and the top election body happened against jailed ex-PM Imran Khan's party in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

Imran's party PTI on Sunday demanded a judicial probe and called for the resignations of the Chief Election Commissioner and Chief Justice of Pakistan over the rigging.

Supporters of PTI party have clashed with police in various cities across the country as they staged protests against the alleged rigging.

PTI-backed candidate for NA-128, Salman Akram Raja, was arrested and taken to Racecourse Police Station. He was later released. Ali Ijaz Buttar, another PTI candidate, was also arrested, along with elderly men, women and a child. In many cities of Punjab, police arrived at the protest site even before the demonstrators had gathered and arrested several party leaders, candidates, workers and supporters. — PTI

THAI FORMER PM THAKSIN GETS FREE ON PAROLE

Bangkok, Feb. 18: Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole on Sunday, just six months after he was arrested following a dramatic return to the kingdom from 15 years of self-imposed exile.

The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, was jailed for eight years on graft and abuse-of-power charges upon his return in August. But his sentence was cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn within days of his return and the government said last week the 74-year-old was eligible for early release because of his age and health.

Thaksin — wearing a neck brace and sitting next to his daughters Paetongtarn and Pintongta — was driven away Sunday from the police hospital in central Bangkok where he had spent the past six months.

A handful of people protesting against his release had gathered in front of the hospital.

The car then drove to Thaksin's home, where a welcome banner was tied across the gates.

One woman wearing a T-shirt with a picture of Thaksin emblazoned across the front said she had stood outside his house for two days.

"I want to tell him to fight," she told local media. "If he is (here), the country will develop." However, Thaksin may be subject to monitoring.

Israel against Palestinian state

Jerusalem, Feb. 18: Israel on Sunday formalised its opposition to what it called the "unilateral recognition" of Palestinian statehood, and said any such agreement must be reached through direct negotiations.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brought the "declaratory decision" to a vote in Cabinet, which unanimously approved the measure, according to a statement.

Netanyahu said at the start of the weekly meeting that the move comes after "recent talk in the international community about an attempt to unilaterally impose on Israel a Palestinian state."

The war in Gaza that has raged since Hamas' Oct. 7 rampage through Israeli communities is the latest in a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that has rumbled on for seven decades and destabilised the Middle East.

Efforts to achieve a two-state solution — a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel — have been stalled since 2014.

US President Joe Biden has been trying to clinch an even broader deal in the Middle East, that would include Saudi Arabia and other Arab states normalizing ties with Israel, as well as the creation of a Palestinian state.

The formal Israeli statement, according to Netanyahu's office, reflects the fact that "Israel rejects outright international dictates regarding a permanent accord with the Palestinians. An accord, should it be reached, will only come through direct negotiations between the sides, without preconditions. Israel will continue to oppose the unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state." — Reuters



A Palestinian child walks past a destroyed house in Rafah on Sunday, following overnight Israeli air strikes on the southern Gaza Strip border city. — AFP

ISRAEL READIES RAFAH ASSAULT

FIGHTING, FUEL SHORTAGES KNOCK OUT GAZA'S NASSER HOSPITAL

Fighting, fuel shortages and Israeli raids put the Gaza Strip's second-largest Nasser Hospital completely out of service on Sunday, local and UN health officials said, as Israel battled Hamas militants in the devastated Palestinian enclave and prepares for an assault on the city of Rafah.

US THREATENS TO BLOCK NEW UNSC VOTE ON GAZA TRUCE

The UN Security Council could hold a vote next week, sought by Algeria, on a resolution seeking an "immediate" ceasefire in Gaza, diplomatic sources, although Washington again appeared set to block it.

TENSIONS 'OBSTACLE' TO PEACE, SAYS EU'S BORRELL

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday said the situation in the Israel-occupied West Bank posed a major obstacle to finding a long-term solution for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

RUSSIA INVITES PALESTINIAN FACTIONS TO MEET

Russia has invited Palestinian factions to meet in Moscow on Feb. 26, the Palestinian Authority prime minister said on Sunday, adding that the PA was ready to engage with Hamas.

— Reuters

LULA LIKENS WAR TO HOLOCAUST, INCENSES ISRAEL

Jerusalem, Feb. 18: Israel accused Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of trivialising the Holocaust and causing offence to the Jewish people on Sunday after he likened the Israeli war against Hamas militants in Gaza to the Nazi genocide during World War Two.

"What is happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people has no parallel in other historical moments. In fact, it did exist when Hitler decided to kill the Jews," Lula told reporters during the 37th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.

The foreign ministry in Jerusalem said it would summon the Brazilian ambassador for a reprimand over the remarks, which Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu described as "disgraceful and grave".

"This is a trivialisation of the Holocaust and an attempt to attack the Jewish people and the right of Israel to self-defence. Drawing comparisons between Israel and the Nazis and Hitler is to cross a red line," Netanyahu said in a statement. Brazil's presidential palace and the foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Brazilian Israelite Confederation said the remarks were a "perverse distortion of reality" and "offend the memory of Holocaust victims and their descendants." — Reuters

OSCAR PRECURSOR Shortlist another disappointment for Barbie as it only managed five nominations

Epic movie on A-bomb creation eyes glory at Baftas

London, Feb. 18: Stars of the silver screen will gather in London on Sunday for the annual Bafta awards, often an indicator of Oscars glory, with Oppenheimer in the running for an unrivalled 13 awards.

Christopher Nolan's epic movie about the creation of the atomic bomb, which has grossed more than \$1 billion, has already won big at the Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards, and is the clear frontrunner to sweep the board at next month's Oscars.

At Sunday's Baftas, the blockbuster is nominated for best film, for Nolan

(director and adapted screenplay), as well as for Emily Blunt (supporting actress) and Robert Downey Jr (supporting actor). The Bafta shortlist was another disappointment for Barbie — the other half of last summer's "Barbenheimer" box office phenomenon — which only managed five nominations.

Greta Gerwig's film, which turned nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, has however failed to capture the number of top prizes expected this awards season. — AFP

BAFTA AWARDS 2024

BEST FILM

- The Holdovers
- Killers of the Flower Moon
- Poor Things
- Anatomy of a Fall
- Oppenheimer

BEST DIRECTOR

- Jonathan Glazer - The Zone of Interest
- Christopher Nolan - Oppenheimer
- Alexander Payne - The Holdovers
- Justine Triet - Anatomy of a Fall
- Andrew Haigh - All of Us Strangers

BEST ACTOR

- Bradley Cooper - Maestro
- Paul Giamatti - The Holdovers
- Barry Keoghan - Saltburn
- Cillian Murphy
- Colman Domingo - Rustin
- Cillian Murphy - Oppenheimer

BEST ACTRESS

- Carey Mulligan - Maestro
- Vivian Oparah - Rye Lane
- Margot Robbie - Barbie
- Emma Stone - Poor Things
- Fantasia Barrino - The Color Purple
- Sandra Hüller - Anatomy of a Fall

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,426.64	0.52
Nifty 50	22,040.70	0.59
S&P 500*	5,005.57	-0.48
Dollar (₹)	83.01	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.48	-0.21
Euro (₹)	89.37	-0.27
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	61,832.46	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	83.01	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.099	0.014
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.264	0.024

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Braithwaite & Co gets ₹180 cr order for 500 wagons

Central PSU Braithwaite & Co has received an order worth ₹180 crore to supply 500 wagons to the railways, official said on Sunday. These are BCVM-C type wagons, also known as brake vans attached to rakes. "The company has been diversifying into services and construction for a sustainable turnaround and to attain high growth," Braithwaite chairman and managing director Yatish Kumar said.



RVNL's order book touches ₹65,000 crore

Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) order book has touched ₹65,000 crore, 50 per cent of which are railway projects, the company has said. RVNL is also looking for new projects in off-shore markets including Central Asia and UAE and Western Asia, the management said. Of the total order book, the share of the Vande Bharat trains was around ₹9,000 crore, and ₹7,000 crore was for several metro projects.

FPIs offload equities worth ₹3,776 crore

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) adopted a cautious approach offloading Indian equities worth close to ₹3,776 crore so far this month owing to a spike in the US bond yields and uncertainty over the interest rate environment in the domestic as well as the global front. In contrast, they are bullish on the debt market and injected ₹16,560 crore in during the period under review, data with the depositories showed.

Sundaram arm to raise ₹1,000 cr for green projects

Sundaram Alternates Assets (SAA), the private equity arm of Sundaram Finance Group, plans to raise about ₹1,000 crore from global investors to fund green real estate projects in India. "This move reflects our commitment to build on our own track record, depth of underwriting and risk management skills in the ever-evolving landscape of the Indian real estate credit market," said Vikaas M Sachdeva, MD, SAA.

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Two full-blown fabs in 65, 40, 28 nanometer tech envisioned Semi-conductor units to be investment magnets

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Two full-fledged semiconductor fabrication plants are going to come up in India very soon entailing multi-billion dollar investment besides several chip assembly and packaging units, minister of electronics, minister of IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said. The minister confirmed that the two projects include a \$8 billion proposal submitted by Israel-based Tower Semiconductors and the other from Tata Group.

"In the near term, two full-blown fabs are going to come up in India. These are going to be multi-billion-dollar fabs in the 65, 40 and 28-nanometer technology and there are going to be a host of other packaging proposals that



● **THE GOVERNMENT** has received four proposals for setting up semi-conductor manufacturing plants and 13 for chip assembly, testing, monitoring and packaging (ATMP) units.

we are evaluating," Chandrasekhar said. He was responding to a question on an \$8 billion investment proposal submitted by Tower Semiconductors and the status of India's semiconductor roadmap. "I can safely tell you that the names that you mentioned have submitted

these big, very credible, very significant investment proposals. There are other announced proposals by Tata as well in the fab. We see this happening in a very, very quick short term," he said. The government has received four proposals for setting up semiconductor manufacturing plants

and 13 for chip assembly, testing, monitoring and packaging (ATMP) units.

The proposals are in addition to a ₹22,516-crore chip assembly plant being set up by US-based memory chip maker Micron in Gujarat.

The minister said India's semiconductor story is very akin to that of electronics in the country.

"We have made significant progress in a broad spectrum of areas: semiconductor design, startups, research, talent, packaging and fabrication," Chandrasekhar said.

According to government data, domestic electronics manufacturing increased over four-fold to ₹8.22 lakh crore in the last 10 years. —PTI

7 cities saw 4.35L residential units last year: Report

New Delhi, Feb. 18: India's seven major cities witnessed an annual 8 per cent rise in the completion of housing units last year at 4.35 lakh units as developers' cash flows improved on better sales, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock data showed that 4,35,045 units were completed during last year, as against 4.02 lakh units in the previous year.

The data pertains to the primary (first sale) residential market.

In Mumbai Metropolitan Region, 1,43,500 housing units were completed last year, up 13 per cent from 1,26,720 units in the previous year. The completion of housing units in Delhi-NCR rose 32 per cent to 1,14,280 units, as against 86,300 units in 2022.

"The Indian residential sector is unlikely to forget 2023, which was nothing less than phenomenal at every level. Housing sales breached the previous peak levels of 2022 and remain robust in 2024.

Among other cities, the completion of homes in Pune declined 23 per cent to 65,000 units in 2023, from 84,200 units in 2022. Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai collectively saw 87,190 units completed in 2023, as against 81,580 units in 2022. In Kolkata, 25,075 units were completed in 2023, as against 23,190 units in 2022.

Proptech firm Reloy founder and chief executive officer Akhil Saraf said the housing market is gradually becoming more organised after the passage of realty law RERA.

Record sales of residential properties in 2023 is one of the major factors for better execution of projects.

As per the data, housing sales rose 31 per cent last year to nearly 4.77 lakh units across these seven cities. —PTI



● **THE INDIAN** residential sector is unlikely to forget 2023, which was nothing less than phenomenal at every level. Housing sales breached the previous peak levels of 2022 and remain robust in 2024.

sons for higher execution levels.

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TWO-WHEELER SECTOR LIKELY TO GROW AT DOUBLE DIGIT NEXT FISCAL

New Delhi, Feb. 18: The domestic two-wheeler industry is expected to witness a double-digit revenue growth next fiscal with demand for premium models anticipated to gain further momentum, according to Hero MotoCorp chief executive officer Niranjana Gupta.

The company reported a total income of ₹10,031 cr in Oct.-Dec. quarter this fiscal, also expects the entry level segment to do better going ahead.

"As far as the demand is concerned, as we have been saying, we do expect the industry to grow double digit on revenue in the coming year at the least," Gupta said.

He noted that in the domestic two-wheeler space there is a shift taking place towards premiumisation with buyers looking for feature-rich trims.

Gupta stated that the entry level bike vertical, which has seen muted sales over last few years, is also on a recovery path. "So, it's not just about the top end of India which is growing, you can see aspirations of people growing," he said.

He noted that demand in the rural areas has improved considerably. "We clearly see the positive signals which are emanating from the rural sector as well and growth picking up from that segment in coming quarters." —PTI

Realtors bullish on property market in 6 mths

FALAKNAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 18

With the domestic economy continuing its upward trajectory and timely interventions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), real estate developers and financial institutions are bullish on their outlook for the property market for the next six months and expect the high demand to sustain its momentum.

The 39th edition of the Knight Frank-Naredco Real Estate Sentiment Index for Q4 2023 (Oct.-Dec. 2023) reported that

the current sentiment index score rose to 69 from 59 in Q4 2022.

"Confidence among real estate stakeholders has surged as Indian enterprises, including those in the real estate sector, anticipate further gains from a flourishing domestic economy," said the report released on Sunday.

The quarterly Knight Frank-Naredco report captures the current and future sentiments towards the real estate sector, the economic climate and funding availability as perceived by the supply-side stakeholders like

● **CONFIDENCE** among real estate stakeholders has surged as Indian enterprises, including those in real estate sector, anticipate further gains from a flourishing domestic economy.

developers and financial institutions. A score of above 50 indicates 'optimism' in sentiments, a score of 50 means the sentiment is 'same' or 'neutral'. The score below 50 indicates 'pessimism'.

The future sentiment score, which indicates stakeholders' outlook, has

also increased from 65 in Q3 2023 to 70 in Q4 2023, driven by general optimism about Indian economy and sustained demand in the real estate sector.

In 2023, office transactions in India surged by 15 per cent YoY, resulting in a total absorption of 59.6 mn sq ft, approaching an all-time high while the annual residential sales grew to a ten-year high by 5 per cent to 329,097 Units.

This growth was despite the RBI's 250 basis points increase in policy rates from May 2022 to Feb. 2023 and a steady rise in residential prices, it said. —PTI



INDIA'S POWER USAGE UP 7.5% TO 1,354 BILLION UNITS

New Delhi, Feb. 18: India's power consumption increased 7.5 per cent on-year to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-Jan. period of this financial year from 1,259.49 BU in the April-Jan. period of fiscal 2022-23, indicating an uptick in economic activities across the country. It was 1505.91 BU in the entire fiscal year of 2022-23, the government data showed.

Experts believe the 7.5 per cent growth in power consumption in the country clearly shows a perk up in economic activities in the first 10 months of this fiscal year.

They said power consumption grew in August, Sept. and Oct., mainly due to humid weather conditions, and a pick-up in industrial activities.

Experts are of the view that India will have a steady growth in power consumption as well as demand during the current fiscal year due to improvement in economic activities and cold wave conditions. —PTI

Pesky calls continue despite registering for DND: Survey

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Around 90 per cent of people surveyed stated that they are getting pesky calls from individuals selling financial services, real estate projects and other products despite being registered on the Do Not Disturb list, says a survey by LocalCircles.

A majority of respondents surveyed have shared that they get spam calls every day and most of the calls are from individuals selling financial services and real estate products and services, according to the survey.

The survey claims to have received 60,000 responses from 378 districts. The 90 per cent of respondents surveyed shared that they get at



least 1-2 calls daily while 3 per cent said that they get over 10 pesky calls daily.

Similarly, 90 per cent of respondents shared that they have been getting unwanted, pesky, sales promotional or robo phone calls on their mobile number despite being registered on the Do Not Disturb (DND) list.

"Despite multiple efforts by telecom regulatory authority of India (TRAI) over the last few years, the

pesky call situation has not improved enough for the consumer with 90 per cent surveyed still receiving such calls," said Sachin Taparia, founder, LocalCircles.

According to the survey, calls from different mobile phone numbers of companies have risen from 29 per cent in Feb. 2023 to 36 per cent in Feb. 2024.

The survey found that 40 per cent of respondents have identified most of the calls from non-banking financial services firm followed by private banks.

The survey indicated that 40 per cent respondents get the majority of pesky phone calls from different mobile numbers that seem to belong to the individuals. —PTI

Export benefits extended to SEZ units

New Delhi, Feb. 18: The central board indirect taxes and customs (CBIC) has revised guidelines for reporting of arrests, smuggling and commercial frauds by customs officers, as it looks to enhance risk-based targeting to nullify fraud attempts by syndicates.

In an instruction to field officers, the CBIC said that the arrest and inci-

dent reports of smuggling and commercial frauds are not being shared or are sporadically shared by the customs zones.

In some cases, the arrest report many times contains description/details that are insufficient as input for enhanced risk profiling.

As per the revised guidelines of CBIC, the chief commissioner/director

generals of a customs zone would be required to send the arrest report through email to the CBIC within 24 hours of the arrest of an individual.

The arrest report would contain details of nationality and the details of offence committed by the individual who has been arrested. It would also contain details of seizure of goods by the authori-

ties in quantity as well as in terms of market value.

Observing that customs commissioners are expected to be up to date with respect to smuggling and commercial fraud cases under his/her jurisdiction, the CBIC said the incident report should describe the modus operandi and the customs declaration document name. —PTI

GOING PUBLIC

Company plans to launch IPO this year with valuation of \$5 billion

Reddit signs AI content licencing deal

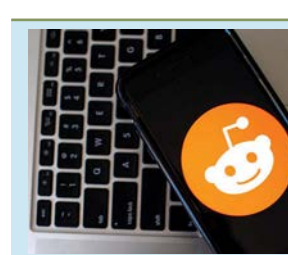
San Francisco, Feb. 18: Reddit Inc. has signed a contract allowing a company to train its artificial intelligence (AI) models on the social media platform's content, according to people familiar with the matter, as it nears the potential launch of its long-awaited initial public offering (IPO).

The San Francisco-based firm told prospective investors in its IPO that it had signed the deal, worth about \$60 million on an annualised basis, earlier this year, the people said. Reddit's agreement with

an unnamed large AI company could be a model for future contracts of a similar nature, one of the people said.

Reddit had more than \$800 million in revenue last year, about a 20 per cent increase over its 2022 figure, people familiar with the matter have said. The ability to profit from the AI wave sweeping the corporate world could help Reddit tap into investors' enthusiasm for the technology, and boost its IPO.

The company has been advised to consider a valu-



● **AI COMPANIES** hungry for data to train their programs on have been striking data licensing deals with content providers eager for new sources of revenue.

ation of at least \$5 billion in an IPO, which could launch as soon as next month. Deliberations around the IPO are ongoing and details of both the listing and the AI deal could

change, the people said, asking not to be identified as the information isn't public. A representative for Reddit declined to comment.

AI companies hungry for data to train their pro-



erage universe, excluding Nifty, was lacklustre," said Motilal Oswal.

"Of the 252 companies under our coverage, 82 exceeded our profit estimates, 95 posted a miss, and 75 were in line. Of the 23 sectors under our coverage, 6 sectors reported profits above/ 10 in line and 7 below our estimates," it said.

"The overall earnings grew 34 per cent YoY as compared to the estimate of 28 per cent YoY. The star sectors of the Q3 earning season were energy, metal, BFSI, and cement with the highest YoY surge in net profit, driven by an upswing in the capex cycle, robust demand, and healthy margins," said Arvinder Singh Nanda, senior VP, Master Capital Services.

As per another report by Bloomberg among Nifty-50 companies 16 companies beat consensus estimates, 18 were in line and 16 missed estimates.

grams on have been striking data licensing deals with content providers eager for new sources of revenue. OpenAI agreed a contract in December with German media giant company Axel Springer SE for AI training worth tens of millions of dollars. The startup text generation tool is also in talks with publishers including CNN, Fox Corp. and Time to licence their work, to feed its AI chatbots data to make their results more accurate, relevant and up to date. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Dhoni skipper of IPL all-time team

New Delhi: Iconic Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday selected as the leader of IPL's all-time greatest team which was picked to celebrate the success of world's most-popular T20 league which was launched in 2008. The selection panel consisted of former cricketers Wasim Akram, Matthew Hayden, Tom Moody and Dale Steyn. About 70 journalists were also part of the selection process. Australia's fiery David Warner and India's batting mainstay Virat Kohli were chosen as openers while 'Universe Boss' Chris Gayle was given the number three spot in batting order. The middle-order consisted of Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav and Dhoni, while Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja and Kieron Pollard were the three all-rounders in the 15-member squad.

All-time great IPL squad:

MS Dhoni (C), Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle, David Warner, Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Kieron Pollard, Rashid Khan, Sunil Narine, Yuzvendra Chahal, Lasith Malinga and Jasprit Bumrah.

S. Africa legend Procter dies

Johannesburg: Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Sunday mourned the death of one of country's finest all-rounders Mike Procter. He was 77. Procter's career as a fast bowler, capable off-spinner, hard-hitting middle-order batter, and astute captain is etched in the annals of South African cricket history. Beyond his playing days, he served the game in every conceivable role — as a national captain and coach, administrator, selector, commentator, elite ICC match referee, and then dedicated his final years to coaching underprivileged children. Procter was South Africa's coach in the post-apartheid era. He played as many as 401 first class games but could only feature in seven Tests due to South Africa's isolation in 1970s and 1980s. Procter's achievements, including his remarkable record of twice taking a hat-trick and scoring a century in the same match, and his world-record six consecutive Currie Cup centuries for Rhodesia. — AFP

Suspended PCI to poll on March 9

New Delhi: The suspended Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) on Sunday announced that it will conduct its delayed polls March 9. The Sports Ministry had on February 4 suspended the body for not holding election on time. The four-year term of PCI Executive Committee had ended on January 31. The ministry had even advocated forming of an ad-hoc panel to run the day-to-day affairs of the sports body but the world governing body of the game, IPC did not allow it. PCI president Deepa Malik and general secretary Gusharan Singh issued the election notice in which they asked all the state affiliated units to send the names of representatives, who would be eligible to vote in the polls. The notice mentioned that elections will be conducted as per the guidelines of the National Sports Development Code and PCI by-laws. PCI will elect one President, two Vice Presidents, one Secretary General, one treasurer, two joint secretaries and five Executive Members. — PTI

Man City stumble in EPL title race

Manchester: Rodri's late equaliser extended Manchester City's year-long unbeaten record at home but a 1-1 draw against Chelsea on Saturday handed Liverpool and Arsenal a huge boost in the Premier League title race. Raheem Sterling gave Chelsea a first-half lead on his return to the Etihad and City were headed to a first defeat on home soil for 34 games until Rodri's deflected effort seven minutes from time. City move four points behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but have a game in hand on both their title rivals. A 3-1 Champions League win in Copenhagen in midweek was City's 11th consecutive victory in all competitions as they appeared well set to defend the treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup they won last season. But Chelsea exposed chinks in the champions' armour. City have kept just seven clean sheets in 24 Premier League games this season. — AFP

Rajkot, Feb. 18: Yashasvi Jaiswal's sensational double hundred found harmonious co-existence with the stunning craftiness of five-wicket man Ravindra Jadeja as ruthless India demolished wasteful England by a record 434 runs on the fourth day of the third Test here on Sunday.

England resisted their desire to play 'Bazball' but the Indian bowlers led by Jadeja (5/41) were an irresistible force, as they hustled out the tourists for 122 in their second innings while chasing an improbable 557-run target.

India, now, lead the five-match series 2-1. This was also India's biggest win in Test cricket in terms of runs, bettering the previous 372-run win over New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in 2021.

Jaiswal's unbeaten 214 off 236 balls, in which he equalled the highest number of sixes (12) in a Test innings, was the cornerstone of India's second innings total of 430 for four declared, which gave them a massive lead of 556 runs earlier in the day.

It was also a perfect platform for Jadeja to weave his magic as England's claims of fancying themselves in big chases through an aggressive approach came to nothing.

India's plan of attacking the wickets took the wind away from the sails of England, whose top order crumbled without any significant contribution.

With Jadeja finding ample support from Kuldeep Yadav (2/19), Jasprit Bumrah (1/18) and Ravichandran Ashwin (1/19), who rejoined the match on this day after attending a medical emergency at home, England found no way out.

Ben Duckett (4) ran himself out, Zak Crawley (11) was trapped leg-before by Bumrah and Jadeja struck twice in quick succession to see the back of Ollie Pope (3) and extended Jonny Bairstow's (4) misery on this tour.

Struggling desperately for runs on this tour, Bairstow was trapped leg-before while trying to sweep Jadeja.

England's hero of the win in the first Test, Pope cut one straight to Rohit Sharma at first slip as Jadeja shook their top-order.

After a brief period of resistance, Joe Root (7) missed a sweep with the umpire declaring him out leg-before off Jadeja, and the replays confirmed that the ball would have flicked the top of off-stump.

Captain Ben Stokes (15) had a similar fate, missing a sweep off Kuldeep Yadav as England slumped to 50 for six.

Ashwin took the field in the post tea session and contributed his bit with the scalp of Tom Hartley.

For a while, it seemed England would fold for one of their lowest-ever totals against India, but a late burst from Mark Wood (33, 15 balls, 6x4s, 1x6s) took them to 122 from 82 for eight. — PTI

— PTI

RAJKOT

India rule over England for their biggest-ever Test win



India captain Rohit Sharma (left) and Ravindra Jadeja celebrate India's victory in the third Test against England in Rajkot on Sunday. — AP

Test cricket is tough, but I'm here to make it count: Jaiswal

Rajkot, Feb. 18: Playing an aggressive brand of cricket, Yashasvi Jaiswal has already hit two double hundreds in his nascent career and the young India opener says though Test cricket is "tough" he believes in making it big after getting a start. The left-handed attacking opener scored unbeaten 214 off 236 balls to steer India to a commanding 430 for 4 declared in their second innings, setting England a mammoth target of 557 runs.

● The left-handed attacking opener scored unbeaten 214 off 236 balls to steer India to a commanding 430 for 4 declared in their second innings, setting England a mammoth target of 557 runs.

Test cricket you never know, when you're playing well you have to make it big. Analysing his double century, Jaiswal said he just tried to play session by session and also had to overcome a back problem en route the knock. "It was pretty difficult for me because initially I wasn't getting runs. So had to play the session, and get set. That's when I felt I could score runs. "After a while my back was not good. I didn't want to go out (of the field) but since it was too much, I went out. Today when I came, I wanted to make sure that I take the game forward and bat till the end," he said. — PTI

SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings: 445
England 1st Innings: 319

India 2nd Innings (overnight): 196/2; Yashasvi Jaiswal not out 214, Rohit Sharma lbw b Root 19, Shubman Gill run out (Stokes/Hartley) 91, Rajat Patidar c Rehan Ahmed b Hartley 0, Kuldeep Yadav c Root b Rehan Ahmed 27, Sarfaraz Khan not out 68. Extras (lb-9, w-2) 11. Total (For 4 wickets decl in 98 overs) 430. FoW: 1-30, 1-85, 2-191, 3-246, 4-258.

Bowling: James Anderson 13-1-78-0, Joe Root 27-3-111-1, Tom Hartley 23-2-78-1, Mark Wood 10-0-46-0, Rehan Ahmed 25-1-108-1.

England 2nd Innings: Zak Crawley lbw b Bumrah 11, Ben Duckett run out 4, Ollie Pope c Sharma b Jadeja 3, Joe Root lbw b Jadeja 7, Jonny Bairstow lbw b Jadeja 4, Ben Stokes lbw b Kuldeep Yadav 15, Ben Foakes c Jurel b Jadeja 16, Rehan Ahmed c Mohammed Siraj b Kuldeep Yadav 0, Tom Hartley b Ashwin 16, Mark Wood c Jaiswal b Jadeja 33, James Anderson not out 1. Extras (b-5, lb-4, nb-3) 12. Total (All out in 39.4 overs) 122. FoW: 1-15, 2-18, 3-20, 4-28, 5-50, 6-50, 7-50, 8-82, 9-91.

Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 8-1-18-1, Mohammed Siraj 5-2-16-0, Ravindra Jadeja 12.4-4-41-5, Kuldeep Yadav 8-2-19-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 6-3-19-1.

ROHIT CREDITS YOUNG PLAYERS FOR RECORD WIN

Rajkot, Feb. 18: India skipper Rohit Sharma on Sunday credited the young and inexperienced members of his side for their role in delivering the team's biggest ever Test win, in terms of runs, here on Sunday.

"Obviously it's a very good feeling to win a game like that and especially with such a young team as well. (We had) two debutants (Sarfaraz Khan and Dhruv Jurel) and not a lot of Test matches amongst the playing eleven as well," Rohit said.

"A lot of these guys are learning from the experience that they're having in the middle. We got to learn a lot about how we played in Hyderabad and then in Vizag when we won."

Both Sarfaraz and Jurel gave a good account of themselves in the game.

"We have (had) to work really, really hard, especially with a lot of our front line players missing as well," Rohit said.

"A lot of credit to these young boys who have come in and showed a lot of character. Looks like they actually belong here and they want to stay here as well," he added. — PTI

ASIAN TEAM | BADMINTON



Indian women's team celebrate after winning the Badminton Asia Team Championships with a 3-2 victory over Thailand in Malaysia on Sunday. — PTI

Historic gold for India girls

Shah Alam (Malaysia), Feb. 18: Anmol Kharb yet again performed when it mattered, winning the decisive fifth rubber to lead the Indian women to a historic Badminton Asia Team Championships title with a tight 3-2 victory over a depleted Thailand, here Sunday.

The young sprightly group of Indian women's team, led by seasoned P. V. Sindhu, defied all expectations to come up trumps against two-time bronze medallists Thailand.

"I'm very happy that we bagged the gold medal because this is the first time India are winning the gold at the Badminton Asia Team Championships," Anmol said after the match.

"It is a big thing because history has been scripted here. Yesterday (after the semifinal win) it went crazy in India because beating powerhouses like Japan and China was such a big thing. I wanted to play my 100 per cent but there was no pressure on me at all. We were confident of winning the fifth match," Anmol added.

It is the first-ever major title for Indian women in team championships and provides a big boost to the side ahead of the Uber Cup, which is set to be held in Chengdu, China from April 28 to May 5.

India had won two medals in the past with

● The young sprightly group of Indian women's team, led by seasoned P. V. Sindhu, defied all expectations to come up trumps against two-time bronze medallists Thailand.

the men's team claiming bronze medals in the 2016 and 2020 editions.

Though like most of the teams in the competition, Thailand were not at full strength, they still had higher-ranked players in their side.

Thailand were without their top two singles players — world No. 13 Ratchanok Intanon and Pornpawee Chochuwong, who is ranked 16th in the world.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu provided India a confident start, riding on her power and placement to outclass world number 17 Sumanida Katethong 21-12, 21-12 in the first singles and hand India a 1-0 lead.

World No. 23 Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand then dished out another gritty performance to shock the world number 10 pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Pra Jongjai 21-16, 18-21, 21-16 to put India in the driver's seat.

— PTI

MANIKA STARS IN INDIA'S VICTORY AT TT WORLDS

Busan, Feb. 18: Manika Batra won both her singles matches as the Indian women's team edged out Hungary 3-2 for its first win of the World Table Tennis Championships here on Sunday. However, the Indian men's team suffered a 1-3 loss to Poland in its second group game.

It was a fine comeback from Manika who had lost both her singles against China on Friday when India stood on the cusp of a mega upset before falling short 2-3. Manika, who is India's top-ranked player at 36, had to dig deep against Dora Madaras in the opening singles before pulling off an 8-11, 11-5, 12-10, 8-11, 11-4 win on Sunday.

Georgina Pota then levelled the tie with a 11-3, 11-7, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8 win over Sreeja Akula.

Ayhika Mukherjee, the conqueror of world number one Sun Yingsha on Friday, put India 2-1 up with a 7-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-8 win over Bernadett Balint.

The contest was stretched into the decider when Madaras got past Sreeja 11-4, 11-6, 5-11, 11-7 in the fourth singles. Manika kept her composure in the all-important decider against Pota to complete an 11-5, 14-12, 13-11 win. — PTI

Vysakh, Srinivas put Karnataka in command

Hubli, Feb. 18: Sharath Srinivas and Vysakh Vijaykumar notched up stroke-filled unbeaten hundreds as Karnataka placed themselves in a prime position to push for an outright win against Chandigarh on the third day of their Ranji Trophy Group 'C' match here on Sunday. Wicketkeeper batter Srinivas (100, 160b, 11x4) and Vysakh (103, 141b, 10x4, 2x6) stitched together 198 runs for the sixth wicket stand as Karnataka declared their first innings at 563 for five.

It gave the home side a lead of 296 runs and at close Chandigarh have reached 61 for no loss.

Karnataka started the day at 268 for three, ahead by just one run with veteran batter Manish Pandey, overnight 102, having young Hardik Raj (49) for company.

They batted with purpose as Pandey motored to 148 and Hardik reached 82. But their 239-run association for the fourth wicket

RANJI TROPHY BRIEF SCORES

- **At Hubli:** Chandigarh 267 & 61/0 in 11 overs vs Karnataka 563/5 declared (Manish Pandey 148, Sharath Srinivas 100 not out, Vysakh Vijaykumar 103 not out, Hardik Raj 82; Karan Kalia 3/143).
- **At Salem:** Tamil Nadu 435 vs Punjab 274 & 180/4 (Nehal Wadhwa 103 batting; S. Ajith Ram 3/42).
- **At Agartala:** Tripura 149 & 333 vs Railways 105 & 270/4 (Pratham Singh 113 batting, Mohammad Saif 106, M Mursasingh 2/41).
- **At Porvurim:** Goa 317 & 143 vs Gujarat 346 & 117/3 (Aditya Patel 38 not out, Het Patel 46 not out).
- **At Kolkata:** Bihar 95 & 112 in 35.1 overs (Sakibul Gani 28; Mukesh Kumar 6/32, Suraj Sindhu Jaiswal 4/34) lost to Bengal 411 for 5 decl in 104.1 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 200 not out, Abhishek Porel 56; Ashutosh Aman 2/64).
- **At Lucknow:** Chhattisgarh 414 & 124 for 5 in 37 overs (Ashutosh Singh 43, Shashank Chandrakar 42; Shivam Sharma 3/14) vs Uttar Pradesh 238 all out in 67.5 overs (Saurabh Kumar 55, Yash Dayal 55, Nitish Rana 54; Ravi Kiran 3/59, Jivesh Butte 3/66).
- **At Vizianagaram:** Andhra 272 & 19 for 1 in 7 overs vs Kerala 514 for 7 decl (Akshay Chandran 184, Sachin Baby 113; Manish Golanru 4/161).
- **At New Delhi:** Odisha 440 (Subhransu Senapati 111, Biplob Samantray 110, Sumit Mathur 4/97) vs Delhi 451 in 130.3 overs (Gagan Vats 66, Yash Dhull 112, Jonty Sidhu).
- **At Puducherry:** Himachal Pradesh 463 (Nikhil Gangta 108, Mukul Negi 55, Gaurav Yadav 2/123, Sidak Singh 4/155) beat Puducherry 202 all out and 198 (f/o) in 43.3 overs.

ended when Hardik cumbled to left-arm spinner Karan Kalia, the most successful Chandigarh bowler (3/143).

Karnataka were 354 for 4 then.

Kalia trapped Pandey leg before 11 runs later but the hosts found two more willing soldiers in Srinivas and Vysakh as both of them went on to make their maiden First-Class hundreds.

As things stand now, Karnataka can finish the group engagements with 27 points by virtue of their first innings lead. But an outright win, if it is by innings, will swell their tally to 31.

At Salem, Tamil Nadu are battling for a quarter-finals berth against Punjab. TN have 22 points and they have taken the first-innings lead over Punjab.

If the match ends in a draw TN will have 25 points, same as Gujarat, but they can go through to knockouts after logging a better Net Run Rate of 1.78 as against the Western side's 1.11.

But if they manage a win, then Tamil Nadu can have 28 points.

MUKESH, JAISWAL SHINE IN BENGAL WIN

In Kolkata, India pacer Mukesh Kumar returned with an impressive match haul of 10 for 50 while Suraj Sindhu Jaiswal too shone bright with the ball to power Bengal to a massive innings and 204 runs win over Bihar in a Ranji Trophy Group B match here on Sunday.

Resuming their second innings at 32 for 1, Bihar crumbled like pack of cards in front of Mukesh (6/32) and Jaiswal (4/34) to be bundled out for 112.

Mukesh (4/18) and Jaiswal (4/47) had earlier picked up four wickets each to bundle over Bihar for 95 in their first innings.

In reply, Bengal piled up a mammoth score of 411 for 5 declared, riding on Abhimanyu Easwaran's unbeaten 200 and Abhishek Porel's 56. — PTI



Karnataka's Vysakh Vijaykumar celebrates his century on the third day of the Ranji Trophy match against Chandigarh at the KSCA Rajnaraj Stadium in Hubballi on Sunday. — PTI

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