

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2024



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Rajpath now becomes Kartavyapath, Mughal Garden becomes Amrit Udyan, new epaulettes of Indian Navy to be based on the naval ensign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

Freedom from colonial mindset



Scan for more information

Hamara sankalp Viksit Bharat



www.asianage.com

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 31 No. 14 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



Aditi Rao Hydari during an event in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

HC says ED, CBI can also arrest Shajahan apart from WB cops

Kolkata: The Calcutta high court on Wednesday directed that TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, the main accused in alleged sexual atrocities on women and land grabbing at Sandeshkhali, can be arrested by the CBI, the ED or the West Bengal police. On a prayer by the state's advocate general, the court clarified its order of February 26 in which it had ordered the arrest of Sheikh by the police authority. A division bench clarified that the court in its February 7 order had only stayed the constitution of a joint SIT of the CBI and Bengal police to probe an attack on ED officials. **Full report on Page 3**

PM on 2-day Bengal visit from tomorrow

Kolkata: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to embark on a two-day West Bengal tour from March 1. Targeting voters in constituencies held by the TMC, the PM plans to launch Centre's welfare projects and conduct rallies for his party ahead of the LS polls. **Full report on Page 3**

Sunil Mittal knighted by UK's King Charles

London: Bharti Enterprises founder and chairman Sunil Mittal on Wednesday became the first Indian citizen to be conferred an honorary Knighthood by Britain's King Charles III "for services to UK and India business relations". — PTI **Full report on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



Not money... I want a party ticket!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 38%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhkrut: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Panchami till 6.21 am (Friday)
Star: Chitta till 10.20 am
Variyam: 4.29 pm to 6.15 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.32 am to 11.18 am; 3.12 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 12 pm to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.46 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.34 PM
MOONSET TODAY 9.09 AM

Speaker expels 15 BJP MLAs; Budget passed by voice vote Top minister quits ■ BJP tells governor Cong lost mandate Sukhu govt faces collapse as MLAs demand change of CM

YOJNA GUSAI and ASHVAR KHAN
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

A day after six Congress MLAs voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls in Himachal Pradesh, the knives are out in the party's state unit, with several leaders demanding a leadership change in the hill state.

As the fate of the Congress government led by chief minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu hangs in balance, the Congress observers — former Haryana chief minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda and Karnataka deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar — are in Shimla speaking to all MLAs, including those who are disgruntled. The future course of action will be decided after they submit a comprehensive report to the high command of the Congress.

Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai



Leader of the Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jairam Thakur with BJP MLAs during a visit to Raj Bhavan to meet governor Shiv Pratap Shukla in Shimla on Wednesday. — PTI

CONG MLA and urban development minister Vikramaditya Singh resigned from the state Cabinet. Mr Singh said he took this step out of frustration and humiliation.

Ram Thakur on Wednesday met governor Shiv Pratap Shukla. After the meeting, he said, "The Congress is frustrated now... Their government

is in trouble not because of us but because of their own deeds."

Mr Thakur told the media: "The Congress has lost the mandate, is all I can say. Right now, the Congress government has no right to remain in power."

The LoP stated that he had apprised the governor of "what all happened in the last two days". In a jolt to the belea-

PAGE 3 Ruling NDA likely to get majority in Rajya Sabha in April

gued ruling party in Himachal Pradesh, Congress MLA and urban development minister Vikramaditya Singh resigned on Wednesday from the state Cabinet. He is the son of Himachal Pradesh stalwart and former chief minister late Virbhadra Singh. His mother Pratibha Singh is a Lok Sabha MP and state Congress chief.

Mr Singh said that he was pained to resign from the Congress. But he took this step out of frustration and humiliation. However, after meeting the Congress observers, Mr Singh said, "There is a difference between taking back the resignation and not pressing the resignation until the dialogue and the action of the observers are complete... We have talked to the

■ Turn to Page 4

PM launches projects over ₹17.3K-cr in TN, jabs Opp.

M. ARULOLI
THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 28

Lashing out at the Congress and its UPA government ally, the DMK, for ignoring the development of Tamil Nadu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that "it is Modi's guarantee" that the NDA government will ensure the overall development of the state. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 36 development projects worth over ₹17,373 crores in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.

Speaking at a government function organised at VOC port, the Prime Minister said that the projects, though implemented in Thoothukudi, will give momentum to development across the country.

"The projects that I have brought today were the demands of the people here for decades," the PM said.

■ More on Page 3

Akhilesh called by CBI today in UP mining case SP chief to be grilled as a witness

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, FEB. 28

The CBI has summoned Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav as a "witness" to record his statement on Thursday in illegal mining cases registered five years ago. The cases pertain to the issuance of mining leases in alleged violation of the e-tendering process. The Allahabad high court had ordered the probe.

It is alleged that public servants allowed illegal mining during 2012-16, the period when Mr Yadav was chief minister and illegally renewed licences despite a ban by the National Green Tribunal on mining.

In a notice issued under Section 160 of CrPC, the Central probe agency has asked Mr Yadav to appear before it on February 29, officials said. The section allows a



Akhilesh Yadav

■ REACTING TO the notice in the cases registered in 2019, Akhilesh Yadav attacked the BJP and linked the CBI move with the approaching Lok Sabha elections

police officer to summon witnesses in a probe. "He is not the accused. He is a witness," a senior official in the know of the development said.

Reacting to the notice in the cases registered in 2019, Mr Yadav attacked the BJP and linked the CBI move with the approaching Lok Sabha elections.

"The SP is on the ■ Turn to Page 4

In biggest drug bust off Guj coast, Navy, NCB seize 3,300 kg 5 held; cache worth ₹1,300-cr

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

In the biggest offshore seizure of narcotics in the country, the Indian Navy, in coordination with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Gujarat police, apprehended a suspicious vessel carrying around 3,300 kg of contraband off the Gujarat coast and arrested five foreigners. The dhow is suspected to have sailed from Chabahar Port in Iran.

The narcotics seized included 3,089 kg of charas, 158 kg of methamphetamine and 25 kg of morphine. The cache is estimated to be worth anything between ₹1,300 and ₹2,000 crores in the international market, said NCB director-general S.N. Pradhan. The packets bore the stamp of "Ras Awad Goods Co, produce of Pakistan", the NCB said.

Union home minister Amit Shah called the joint operation by the Navy, NCB and the Gujarat police a "historic success" and a testament to the Modi gov-

ernment's "unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free". The unregistered fishing boat was intercepted on Tuesday morning in the Arabian Sea from a point about 60 nautical miles from the Indian coast and along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

"Based on intelligence received from the Indian Navy's maritime surveillance aircraft, which was corroborated with inputs from the NCB, a mission-deployed Indian Navy's warship was pressed into action to intercept a suspicious dhow en route to the Indian waters with sizeable contraband," said the Indian Navy in a

■ Turn to Page 4

Shah, Nadda discuss picks for LS; CEC meets today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

Ahead of the BJP central election committee's (CEC) meeting on Thursday, the top brass of the party on Wednesday brainstormed over the probable candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in many states. Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda held separate meetings with party leaders from Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttarakhnad, among others.

So far, similar meetings with leaders from Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana have already been held.

According to party sources, the first list is expected to include the names of heavyweights like Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr Shah. The first list may also include many seats that the BJP had lost in the 2019 general election.

The names of Mr Modi and Mr Shah, who was then the party's national president and had made his Lok Sabha poll debut

■ Turn to Page 4

New Pak govt's first priority to 'fix' economy, says Nawaz

Islamabad, Feb. 28: Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said the priority of the upcoming government led by his party will be to "fix" the ailing economy as all the problems plaguing the cash-strapped nation were linked to the economic woes.

"The government will try to fix the economy which would in turn fix everything," Mr Sharif, the supreme leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) told the media after

■ PAKISTAN HAS avoided potential default with the help of international donors and friendly countries but its economy is still under clouds

arriving at the Parliament House for the first time since the February 8 elections.

Mr Sharif, who surprisingly nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif to be the Prime Minister of a coalition government, also said that he wishes

every National Assembly, senate and Prime Minister to complete their constitutional term.

No Prime Minister in coup-prone Pakistan has completed his/her five-year term. Mr Sharif became Prime Minister thrice but was removed on all three occasions in mid-term.

Pakistan has avoided potential default with the help of international donors and friendly countries but its economy is still under clouds. — PTI



MAHAKOSH™
Refined Soybean Oil

MAHI KA MAHAKOSH
Perform Kare Har Format mein Taste ho ya Health

Chuno Sahi

NEW & ADVANCED

VITAMIN E & K
OMEGA 3 & 6

Range of Mahakosh Kachi Ghani Mustard oil
Sunflower oil

For More information Call - 8954555999
To become a distributor in unrepresented areas, apply at welcomedistributor@patanjalifoods.com
Patanjali Foods Ltd. needs sales representatives across the country.
Apply at sales.recruitment@patanjalifoods.com

SHORT TAKES

Teen e-rickshaw driver killed, 2 held

New Delhi: A 15-year-old e-rickshaw driver was allegedly robbed and killed in south-east Delhi's Jamia Nagar area, the police on Wednesday. Two men - Sahil Ansari (20) and Afsar (27) - have been arrested over the incident, they said. The police said the victim's mother approached them on Tuesday saying he was missing, and added that an FIR was registered. "A team was formed to probe the matter. The team on Wednesday arrested Ansari and Afsar in connection to the incident," a police officer said. During interrogation, the police found that the accused knew the e-rickshaw driver and were looking to sell the vehicle's batteries, which was recently paid for by the victim's mother. "Ansari disclosed that he was unemployed and was in need of money. So, he and his friends Akib and Amir, made a plan to rob someone to make easy money," the officer said. — PTI

Ice cream vendor stabbed many times

New Delhi: A 25-year-old ice cream vendor was stabbed multiple times near north Delhi's Chandni Chowk area on Wednesday, the police said. They said that they got a PCR call at 1.25 am at Kotwali police station regarding the incident at Nai Sarak. "A team was dispatched and after reaching the spot they got to know that the man was rushed to LNJ Hospital with multiple stab injuries on his back, hip, and thigh. The victim was not fit for statement due to high intoxication," a senior police officer said, adding that teams have been formed to investigate the matter and CCTV cameras are being checked. "On further inquiry, it came to notice that two or three days ago, the victim had a scuffle with another ice cream vendor," said the officer.

5, including woman, held for medal theft

New Delhi: Five people, including a woman, were arrested in connection with the theft of the Padma Bhushan medallion of former Panjab University V-C G.C. Chatterjee, the Delhi police said on Wednesday. The accused have been identified as Shrawan Kumar (33), Hari Singh (45), Rinki Devi (40), Ved Prakash (39), and Prashant Biswas (49), all residents of Madanpur Khadar here, they said. According to the police, Biswas is a jeweller who allegedly bought the medal. On Tuesday, Hari Singh, Rinki Devi and Ved Prakash went to a jeweller, Dalip, to sell the medallion having two golden embossments on both sides. Dalip did not buy it and alerted the police, a senior police officer said. In the meantime, the accused left the shop, they said.

USE 'DIFFERENTLY ABLED' FOR DISABLED: HC

New Delhi: Persons suffering from disabilities are "no different from you or me" and the more appropriate term to use for them would be "differently abled" and not "disabled", the Delhi high court has said. Justice C. Hari Shankar said the Right of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act) and all other laws seek to neutralise disability so that a differently abled person and his peers stand on equal footing, which is the "heart" of the theory of equal opportunity and the Constitution. "It is because of this that the more appropriate term to use would be 'differently abled', rather than 'disabled'. Persons who are differently abled are as able as any of us; however, as their ability is different, it poses a challenge when they seek to integrate with the societal whole," said the judge in a recent order. "Persons who suffer from disabilities, as recognized by the RPWD Act, are no different from you or me. In one way or the other, each of us suffers from disabilities, known and unknown. Yet, we all have to function as a cohesive human whole," added the judge. The court's observations came while passing an order directing the Jawahar-lal Nehru University to provide facilities to its visually impaired student who was evicted from the hostel. — PTI

Delhi unit submits names of over 24 picks for 7 seats

Jaishankar, Puri in BJP list of LS probables from Delhi

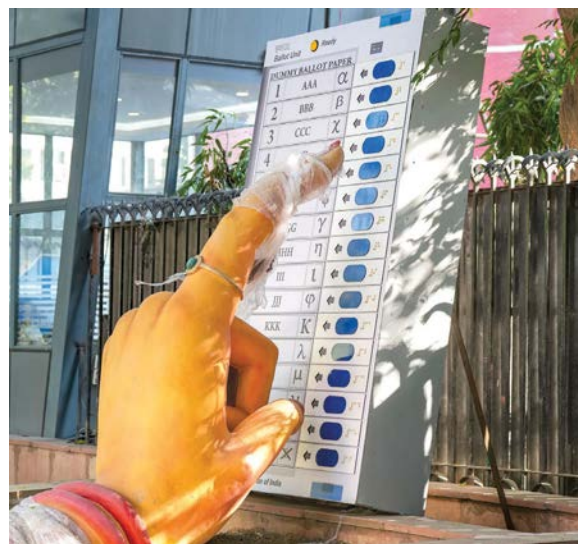
SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARM
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

The Delhi BJP on Wednesday submitted a list of over two dozen probable names for seven parliamentary constituencies in the national capital to the central leadership. This comes just a day before the BJP Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting to finalise candidates for the Lok Sabha polls is to take place.

It has been learnt that the names include external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, housing and urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri, former Union minister Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi Lok Sabha including sitting MP Meenakshi Lekhi.

Sources said that a discussion over probable names was held between Central and Delhi leadership at party national headquarters. The BJP CEC is scheduled on February 29 and the party leaders believe that the first list will be announced on Friday.

On February 27, the BJP announced the state elec-



A replica of electronic voting machine at the Election Commission of India head office in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

tion committee for Delhi headed by Virender Sachdeva, state unit chief. "Names of probables were discussed at the state election committee meeting held on Tuesday evening and submitted to central leadership on Wednesday," sources said.

After the state election committee meeting, there was strong speculation in the party that at least

three to four of the present seven sitting MPs or all of them may be replaced by the party.

Sources said that many members of the Delhi BJP election committee and office bearers were also probable for the party ticket for the 2024 polls.

Out of seven BJP MPs in the city 2 — Gautam Gambhir and Han Raj Hans — were elected to

Lok Sabha for the first time in 2019 and the remaining five — Manoj Tiwari, Ramesh Bidhuri, Ms Lekhi, Dr Harsh Vardhan, and Parvesh Verma — were representing their respective Lok Sabha constituencies for second time in a row. Sources claimed that all the sitting MPs were probable for ticket this time also.

During the feedback exercise, local leaders at district levels suggested names of probables including Delhi BJP vice-president Kapil Mishra, Ghonda MLA Ajay Mahawar, and Delhi BJP vice-president Dinesh Pratap from northeast Delhi.

Apart from Mr Sachdeva, state unit vice-president Vishnu Mittal and general secretary Harsh Malhotra are among probables from east Delhi.

Delhi BJP OBC Morcha president Sunil Yadav and former Delhi BJP general secretary Rajesh Bhatia are among probable from the New Delhi seat.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri is probable from the south Delhi seat.

Both have arrived at 4:3 seat-sharing agreement

'AAP-Congress to campaign jointly in Delhi for LS polls'

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will hold joint campaigns in Delhi for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and meetings to chalk out a plan for the same will follow soon, Sandeep Pathak, Rajya Sabha MP of the party ruling the national capital, said. Mr Pathak, who is also AAP's national general secretary (organisation), said the seat-sharing arrangement for the polls was mutually decided by the parties after which the AAP's political affairs committee (PAC) came to a conclusion. "We will definitely have (joint) campaigns. We will hold meetings and a plan will be made," Mr Pathak said. "We have discussed with them (Congress) at length about the candidates and then the PAC came to a decision," he added.

The AAP and the Congress have arrived at a 4:3 seat-sharing arrangement for Delhi.

The AAP has fielded MLA Somnath Bharti, who is also the Delhi Jal Board vice-chairman, from the New Delhi constituency; Kondli MLA Kuldeep Kumar from east Delhi; Sahiram Pehelwan from south Delhi and former MP Mahabir Mishra from the

We will definitely have (joint) campaigns. We will hold meetings and a plan will be made. We just wanted the alliance for the betterment of the country. The whole country and all sectors are vitiated. So our party wanted to give an atmosphere where there is freedom.

— Sandeep Pathak, AAP national general-secretary



west Delhi Lok Sabha constituency. The Congress is yet to announce its candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi.

The AAP-Congress alliance will begin its election campaigning in Delhi and Haryana in the next one week and the announcement for Punjab will be made in the next few days, Mr Pathak said.

Asked how the seats were decided, Mr Pathak said "We just wanted the alliance for the betterment of the country. The whole country and all sectors are vitiated. So our party wanted to give an atmosphere where there is freedom."

On the selection of candidates, Mr Pathak said "The candidates were selected on the criteria of their winnability. When it comes to INDIA alliance seat-sharing, our INDIA was clear we don't want to be stuck up here and there for a seat or two."

This alliance was a must for India. And so there was no obstacle at any point of time, he added.

"Due credit to Congress as well, as they were also very cordial. Once the seats were decided, then the candidates were selected on the criteria of their public perception and winnability," Mr Pathak said.

The parties will have different strategies and pace for starting the poll campaigns in different states.

"In Bharuch and Bhavnagar, the campaigns have already started. In the next one week, you will see campaigns starting in Delhi at a large level, as well as in Haryana," he said.

"For Punjab, we will announce in the next few days," he added.

Mr Pathak said the party aims to add "intellectual, young and honest" people in the team to raise important issues which are public-centric. — PTI

AAP MLA Jarwal convicted in 2020 doc's suicide case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

A Delhi court on Wednesday convicted AAP MLA Prakash Jarwal of abetting the suicide of a doctor in south Delhi in 2020, holding that the prosecution has established his guilt.

Rajendra Singh, a 52-year-old doctor, had died by suicide in Durga Vihar on April 18, 2020.

Special judge M.K. Nagpal pronounced Jarwal, who represents Deoli Assembly constituency, guilty. The judge also found Jarwal's aide Kapil Nagar guilty of the crime. Besides abetment of suicide, the judge also held the two guilty of criminal conspiracy, extortion and criminal intimidation. "It is held that prosecution has successfully brought home guilt of Prakash Jarwal and Kapil Nagar and proved its charges framed against them for commission of the offence punishable under section 306 and 34 (common intention) of IPC for abetting commission of suicide by Dr Rajendra Singh," the judge held.

The judge said even in the absence of any corroborative or independent evidence showing proof of payment of different amounts of money by Singh or other tanker owners as extortion, as stated in the deceased doctor's dying declaration, the prosecution can be said to have successfully proved the offences against the two accused. The judge will hear arguments on the quantum of sentence on March 13.

The duo faces a maxi-



Prakash Jarwal

IN HIS suicide note, the doctor had accused Jarwal of driving him to end his life. The police had registered a case of alleged extortion and abetment to suicide against Jarwal on the basis of the note.

imum sentence of 10 years following their conviction. In his suicide note, the doctor had accused Jarwal of driving him to end his life. The police had registered a case of alleged extortion and abetment to suicide against Jarwal on the basis of the note.

Like Jarwal, Singh was also associated with the Delhi Jal Board since 2007 and was involved in the business of supplying water through tankers. The police alleged that the MLA and his associates were extorting money from other water tanker owners, including Singh.

The Delhi BJP chief Virender Sachdeva and LoP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri meanwhile said Arvind Kejriwal should immediately expel Mr Jarwal who is his close aide and also other criminal-minded MLAs. The AAP supreme should also apologise to the doctor's family, BJP leaders said.

L-G, Kejriwal spar over water scheme

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

In a letter to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday, lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena said that "not a single piece of paper was brought to L-G's notice, officially or unofficially with regard to Delhi government's 'water scheme'. He made a 'grave objection' to the resolution passed in the house claiming that the 'BJP was exerting control over his constitutional position' and termed it "irresponsible and in violation of constitutional propriety".

Hitting back, Delhi chief minister raised objection on the language and in a letter said, "I have myself discussed this matter with you more than once". "Water, Finance, Urban Development, all departments concerned with this 'scheme' are fully and totally under your control being transferred subjects. The said scheme is purportedly being stopped by me, has

never ever been brought to me", said Mr Saxena in an open letter to the CM.

Highlighting that the decision with regard to "One Time Settlement Scheme" was taken by Delhi Jal Board on Jan 13, 2023, Mr Saxena questioned why the minister kept sitting on the proposed scheme for more than one year.

"Failure to take any decision concerning this subject is apparently deliberate and political exercise being undertaken now, is nothing but an exercise of shifting the blame of your own inefficiency an inability on a constitutional office or the Govt. of India, either of whom have nothing to do with decision with regards to these subjects", said the L-G.

In response to the letter, Mr Kejriwal wrote to L-G, "As an elected representative and Chief Minister I meet hundreds of people every day who come to me with their problems. But what I am witnessing for

the last two years since you have taken over as L-G, I have never seen in my tenure as Chief Minister of Delhi".

Mr Kejriwal said that "all powers over officers working in GNCTD is exercised by you, by virtue of control over services and vigilance. The posting of officers, disciplinary action over them for non performance, suspensions, transfers between departments are all controlled by you. As a consequence, officers respond to your directions whether given orally or in writing. This is the reason why I have brought multiple issues to your notice, where matters of public interest are being held up by officers, including this issue of water bills".

However, concluding the letter Mr Kejriwal said, "to take exemplary action against one officer at least, then it will give bring the entire administrative machinery into the order".



Members of All-India Sikh Conference (Babbar) stage a protest in New Delhi on Wednesday against the Centre's decision to confer Bharat Ratna on former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, citing his alleged involvement in the 1984 Delhi massacre of Sikhs as the then Union home minister. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Minor raped by 'friend', found near Dabri Metro

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

A minor girl was allegedly raped by her social media 'friend' and was found in an unconscious state near Dabri Metro station in Delhi's Sagarpur area, the police said on Wednesday. According to the girl's statement, she had fainted near the Metro station on Tuesday. The police had earlier said that she was beaten up and thrown there.

The police has detained and booked the accused who is also a minor. "We got to know that

she decided to meet her social media friend. Thereafter she was raped. The girl took a rickshaw to return to her home when she fainted near the metro station and received minor injuries," a senior police officer said.

The girl had gone to her coaching class after which she met her friend who allegedly raped her. Some passersby took her to a hospital and informed her family members, the police said.

Following this, she narrated the ordeal to her family who then approached the police, the officer said.

Man with cancer jumps before Delhi Metro train, dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

A 39-year-old man, who had been diagnosed with cancer, allegedly committed suicide by jumping in front of a train that was approaching a station on the Delhi Metro's Yellow Line on Wednesday, according to officials.

Services were delayed for about 35 minutes on the corridor after the incident that took place at Udyog Bhavan Metro station, a senior DMRC official said.

According to the Delhi police officials, the man was upset due to his "illness", though "no suicide note was recovered".

A PCR call about the incident was received at Rajiv Chowk police station. A team reached the spot and on enquiry and after seeing CCTV footage, "it was found that the person had committed suicide" by jumping in front of the train at around 11:30 am at the station's platform number 2, the police officials said.

His wife told the police that her husband, a resident of Delhi's Mukundpur area, was earlier working as a painter, but "since he was suffering from cancer he was not working due to his illness". The body has been shifted to the RML hospital. Inquest proceedings under section 174 of the CrPC (unnatural

2 burnt to death mysteriously in Burari, 1 Nigerian

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Two people, including a Nigerian national, were burnt to death under mysterious circumstances in a house in north Delhi's Burari area, the police said on Tuesday. One of them was identified as Christian Ifeanyichukwu, a resident of Nigeria but the other deceased is yet to be identified, the police said.

They were admitted to AIIMS by a group of people, who stated to be their friends, on February 23. But they fled after leaving them in the hospital, a police officer said.

Both of them succumbed to their injuries during treatment in the hospital. — PTI

death) is underway, the police said. A mobile number written on a slip was recovered from his pocket, they said. The body has been sent to a mortuary for post-mortem. His wife also told the police that he was under treatment from a leading hospital and he recently underwent a surgery.

The train was going to Vishwavidyalaya station, the DMRC official added.

SHORT TAKES

Kashmiri scribe freed after over 5 yrs in jail

Srinagar: Kashmiri journalist Asif Sultan on Wednesday released after spending more than five and a half years in jail. Jammu and Kashmir high court had on December 11, 2023 quashed the preventive detention of Asif under the Union territory's tough law Public Safety Act (PSA) and ordered for his release "if he is not required in any other case". Mr Asif was arrested by the J&K police in August 2018 after being accused of "glorifying" Hizb-ul-Mujahideen's slain commander Burhan Wani in one of his write-ups appearing in a local periodical. He was later accused of also "harnessing known terrorists, criminal conspiracy and aiding and participating in terrorist activities" and subsequently booked under the relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the Indian Penal Code (then Ranbir Penal Code).

Assam Cong prez quits, may join BJP

Guwahati: Assam Congress working president Rana Goswami resigned from the party on Wednesday and headed to New Delhi where he is likely to join the BJP. Mr Goswami had on Sunday resigned as the party's organisational in-charge of Upper Assam citing "various political reasons". "I beg to state that I am tendering my resignation as the working president of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and as an active member of Indian National Congress," he said in the resignation letter addressed to Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal. Soon after resigning from the party, Mr Goswami went to New Delhi where he is likely to meet BJP president J.P. Nadda in the presence of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, sources said.

Bihar Cong wants 2 MLAs disqualified

Patna: A day after two MLAs of the Congress in Bihar crossed over to the NDA, the party on Wednesday sought their disqualification from the state Assembly. State Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh led a party delegation that met Speaker Nand Kishor Yadav and sought disqualification of MLAs Siddharth Saurav and Murari Gautam — both of whom sat beside the ruling coalition members in the Assembly on Tuesday. Mr Singh said, "The BJP is mis-using its power to offer inducements, and also issue threats through agencies like CBI and ED. We deplore the poaching of our MLAs, one of whom — Murari Gautam — was till recently a minister." The Congress ceased to share power in Bihar, after chief minister Nitish Kumar returned to his old alliance NDA. — PTI

U'KHAND TO SEE -VE ECONOMIC GROWTH THIS FY

Prithviraj Singh Dehradun, Feb. 28: Uttarakhand is set to witness negative economic growth in the current financial year, even as its SGDP is likely to take 15 per cent jump in the same period. Contrary to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement that this decade will be of Uttarakhand, financial survey report for 2023-24 presented by the Pushkar Singh Dhami government in the house on Wednesday indicates that state's economy is witnessing deacceleration in the current financial year. As per the report state's growth for 2023-24 will be around 7.58 percent. This is 0.5 per cent less than that of 7.63 per cent economic growth registered by the state in 2022-23. Interestingly, as per the report, the state's growth will be despite national growth likely to go up from 7.72 percent to 7.73 percent. However, the survey predicts more than 15 per cent rise in SGDP of the state in 2023-24 over 2022-23. It says that state's SGDP in 2022-23 was almost ₹3 lakh crores. This is likely to grow to around 3.5 lakh crores in the current FY.

Modi launches country's 1st local hydrogen fuel cell ferry Cong, DMK didn't care, TN's progress my guarantee: PM

M. ARULOLI THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged here on Wednesday that the previous UPA government at the Centre led by the Congress, with the connivance of the DMK, had not cared about the development of Tamil Nadu.

"The NDA government will not let it happen. This is Modi's guarantee," Mr Modi said, while addressing a gathering at the government function organised at VOC port here. The PM said Tamil Nadu is writing a new chapter of progress in Thoothukudi, with the inauguration and laying of the foundation stones of multiple development projects.

Stating that one could witness the spirit of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" in the 36-odd development projects he inaugurated and laid the foundation



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by Isro chairman S. Somanath during a programme in Thoothukudi on Wednesday. — PTI

stones of, with an investment of ₹17,373 crores, Mr Modi said the projects, though implemented in Thoothukudi, would give momentum to development across the country. The projects, the PM laid foundation stone of, include the outer harbour development project of the port at an estimated cost of ₹7,055 crores and the second rocket launch complex at Kulasekarapattinam for ₹986 crores. Both were long pending demands of the state. "The projects that I have brought today

were the demands of the people here for decades," Mr Modi said, adding that the people now in power in the state were in coalition with the Congress at the Centre then, but they did not care about bringing these projects to Tamil Nadu.

Pointing at the country's first indigenously built green hydrogen-fuel cell ferry that he inaugurated during the day, the Prime Minister said that a similar ferry would be launched in river Ganga in his constituency Varanasi that would further deepen the cultural ties between Varanasi and Tamil Nadu.

The Prime Minister stated that the cargo handling capacity of the country's major ports had doubled in the last 10 years and the development has placed India at the 38th position in the logistics performance index.

Modi: Farmers didn't get aid when Pawar was minister

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Prime minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday took a dig at the Nationalist Congress Party founder Sharad Pawar, saying farmers did not get government's aid during the latter's tenure as Union agriculture minister.

Speaking at a rally at Yavatmal in Maharashtra, Mr Modi said when Mr Pawar held the agriculture portfolio (in the Congress-led UPA government from 2004 to 2014), financial packages would be announced for farmers, but the money would be siphoned off before reaching the beneficiaries.

The PM also slammed the Congress over pending irrigation projects in the country, especially in the Vidarbha region of eastern Maharashtra. "It is Modi's guarantee that many irrigation schemes stalled during Congress regime have been completed," the PM said. He inaugurated development projects related to

Modi in Bengal March 1, to kick-start welfare projects

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to embark on a two-day West Bengal tour from March 1, to woo the voters of two parliamentary seats of the Trinamul Congress in different districts, with the launch of Central government's welfare projects and his party rallies ahead of the Lok Sabha Election.

These two seats, represented by women TMC MPs, are Arambagh in Hooghly and Krishnanagar in Nadia, which are the strongholds of the ruling TMC in

state. While Aparupa Poddar won from Arambagh twice since 2014, Krishnanagar went to TMC three times since 2009; but it saw the expulsion of its last MP Mahua Moitra — elected for the first time in 2019 — from the House in the cash-for-query scandal recently. Mr Modi, who was earlier supposed to start his Bengal tours from March 6, will land at Durgapur in Burdwan West from New Delhi in 1st March morning. He will fly to Jharkhand to attend a programme before returning to Bengal later in the day.

At present, there are only six MPs who have been nominated by the President of India as members in the Rajya Sabha, with some having joined the BJP later. There are a total of 12 nominated members in the House. The data shows that with the support of some independents and nominated members, the NDA — which did not have a majority in the Upper House so far — will finally achieve the magic figure this April. With the Congress strength going down to 30 seats, the joint Opposition has less than 100 MPs in RS. — PTI

Former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia are among the prospective candidates recommended by the state election committee of the BJP for the 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh for the upcoming polls, this year.

The committee, which met on Tuesday night, prepared a list of names of prospective candidates for each of the 29 Lok constituencies in the state for the approval by the parliamentary board of the party after scrutiny. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav and state BJP president V.D. Sharma left for Delhi on Wednesday to submit the names before the central party leadership, a BJP functionary said. Sources said that the four-time chief minister, Mr Chouhan, currently a sitting MLA of the BJP, has been recommended

along with several other prospective candidates for Bhopal and Vidisha Lok Sabha seats. Mr Chouhan is a former MP from Vidisha. Sources said that sitting MP from Bhopal Pragya Singh Thakur may be denied a ticket by the party in the upcoming LS polls. Significantly, Mr Chouhan has been recommended as party's prospective candidate for two LS seats, Bhopal and Vidisha, despite the fact that he had several times in the past openly expressed his unwillingness to contest in the LS polls. Minister and BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya had earlier hinted that Mr Chouhan may be fielded in Chhindwara.

on this," they demanded. A BJP delegation comprising Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and party national general secretary Arun Singh met the poll panel with the demands. "The BJP keeps making efforts to see how the entire poll process could be made more and more transparent and the voters' involvement in the elections be further increased. Our delegation made some requests to the EC (in this regard)," Mr Vaishnaw told reporters after the meeting with the EC. He said the BJP delegation urged the poll panel to set up booths at high-rise apartment complexes in urban areas as

Ruling NDA likely to get majority in RS in April

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is likely to get a majority in the Rajya Sabha in April this year, once the remaining six vacancies under the nominated category are filled and those newly elected take oath.

According to data available with the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, the BJP, which currently has 94 members, gained two seats in the Upper House in the recently concluded polls, pushing its own strength to 96.

The strength of NDA, which at present has 113 members, will cross the half-way mark of 123 in the 245-member House in April this year, once all nominated members take oath.

At present, there are only six MPs who have been nominated by the President of India as members in the Rajya Sabha, with some having joined the BJP later. There are a total of 12 nominated members in the House.

The data shows that with the support of some independents and nominated members, the NDA — which did not have a majority in the Upper House so far — will finally achieve the magic figure this April. With the Congress strength going down to 30 seats, the joint Opposition has less than 100 MPs in RS. — PTI

At present, there are only six MPs who have been nominated by the President of India as members in the Rajya Sabha, with some having joined the BJP later. There are a total of 12 nominated members in the House.

BJD, Cong play numbers to prove 'rising popularity' in Odisha Parties step up psychological warfare

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 28

In electoral battles, political parties concentrate on different methodologies such as good poster and banner campaigns, public rallies and roadshows to get a good number of seats to form the government. However, a new addition is now getting into the repertoire of methodologies — showcasing the number of applicants for party tickets. The ruling BJD claims it has received over 10,000 applications for the 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats. The Congress says it has got 300 applications for the Assembly tickets and 700



BJP MP Dilip Ghosh with party leader Agnimitra Paul and others during a sit-in "dharna" in Kolkata on Wednesday against the state government over the Sandeshkhali incident. — PTI

CBI & ED free to arrest Shahjahan: Calcutta HC

Violence culprit in safe custody of police: BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 28

In a further setback to the West Bengal government, the Calcutta high court on Wednesday granted permission to Central agencies — CBI or ED — to arrest the absconding Trinamul Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh — the prime accused in the Sandeshkhali violence case in North 24 Parganas. A division bench comprising chief justice T.S. Sivagnanam and justice Hiranmay Bhattacharya gave the liberty to the Central agencies in a clarification, in response to a query raised by state advocate-general Kishore Datta regarding the order issued on February 26. During the hearing of the matter, counsels of the CBI and ED expressed their apprehensions before the two judges against the state police for conniving with Mr Sheikh to dilute the case. The bench later stated,

"As of date, what has been stayed is only the constitution of an SIT. Therefore it is well open to the CBI or ED also to arrest the absconding accused. Equally so, there are other cases registered against the same accused, where he has been shown as absconding. Therefore, a person elected to public office cannot defy the law. It is open to any agency to arrest the concerned person."

Earlier in the day, Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari claimed that absconding TMC strongman Shahjahan Sheikh of Sandeshkhali is in "safe custody" of the state police since last night.

"The scoundrel of Sandeshkhali — Seikh Shahjahan is in the safe custody of Mamata police since 12 am last night. He was taken away from the Bermajur-II Gram Panchayat area, after he managed to negotiate a deal with the Mamata

police, through influential mediators, that he would be taken care of properly while in police and judicial custody," Mr Adhikari in a X post said. "The BJP MLA added, "He will be extended 5-star facilities during his time behind the bars and will have access to a mobile phone, through which he will be able to lead the Tolamool Party virtually. Even a bed in the Woodburn Ward will be kept ready and vacant for him if he chooses to spend some time there."

The ruling Trinamul Congress, however, dismissed Mr Adhikari's claim as "baseless" and an "attempt at disturbing the law and order situation", while asserting that the police are doing everything to nab Shahjahan.

"Many are making tall claims now. But I do not encourage anything wrong consciously," chief minister Mamata Banerjee said at an event in Bankura.

Bengal MLA Soumen Roy quits TMC, returns to BJP

AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, FEB. 28

West Bengal BJP MLA Soumen Roy, who had defected to the Trinamul Congress four months after his victory from Kaliaganj in North Dinajpur in the 2021 Assembly election, made a comeback to the saffron party on Wednesday. He returned to the BJP in presence of its secretary general and former state minister Partha Chatterjee, now in jail custody in the teachers' recruitment scam. He was later made the president of the TMC-backed state primary teachers' association.

three months. He is also the first Opposition legislator to leave the TMC. Mr Adhikari pointed out that though Mr Roy joined the TMC, his heart was with the BJP even after joining the TMC, and he decided to make a comeback. On September 4 in 2021, the BJP MLA had switched to the TMC in presence of its secretary general and former state minister Partha Chatterjee, now in jail custody in the teachers' recruitment scam. He was later made the president of the TMC-backed state primary teachers' association.

ED notice to WB minister in PMLA case

Kolkata, Feb. 28: The ED on Wednesday issued summons to TMC leader and West Bengal sports minister Arup Biswas in connection with ₹1,900-crore money laundering case involving the Alchemist Group, a senior official said. The Bengal minister was asked to appear before the ED officers at its city office on Thursday morning, he said. Mr Biswas has been issued summons in connection with the Alchemist scam. We have a few specific questions for him," the ED officer said. — PTI

Set up booths in high-rise complexes too: BJP to EC

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The BJP on Wednesday urged the Election Commission to videograph the voting process at all polling stations during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and set up booths in high-rise buildings complexes. In a memorandum, the BJP also urged the poll panel to consider reforming the approval process

for political parties' media content to make it faster, allowing them adequate time to plan their campaign. It also requested the EC to ensure there is no ambiguity in the rule pertaining to putting flags and making wall paintings by party workers at their homes during polls. "There should be clarity

on this," they demanded. A BJP delegation comprising Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and party national general secretary Arun Singh met the poll panel with the demands. "The BJP keeps making efforts to see how the entire poll process could be made more and more transparent and the voters' involvement in the elections be further increased. Our delegation made some requests to the EC (in this regard)," Mr Vaishnaw told reporters after the meeting with the EC. He said the BJP delegation urged the poll panel to set up booths at high-rise apartment complexes in urban areas as

Advertisement for Punjab State Transmission Corporation Limited (PSTCL) regarding tender for manufacture, testing and delivery of armoured FRLS PVC outer sheathed, heat resistant PVC insulated annealed, tinned copper control cables of various sizes (total length=84.6km).

SHORT TAKES

UP: 3 killed in clash over love marriage

Muzaffarnagar (UP): Three youths were killed and one other suffered injuries following an altercation between two groups over a love marriage here, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place in Fulat village on Tuesday, police said, adding that the warring groups belonged to the same caste. Ankit (25) and Rohit (29) died in the clash, while Harimohan (48) and Rahul (27) were hospitalised with serious injuries, they said. Rohit also succumbed during treatment. Ankit had married Harimohan's daughter against the wishes of her family. On Tuesday, a confrontation between Ankit and Harimohan turned violent, and firearms were used resulting in the deaths and injuries, police said. Senior superintendent of police Abhishek Singh told reporters that a case was registered against Raju, Monu, and Govardhan. — PTI

UP dalit teen killed, 2 injured in clash

Rampur, UP: A 17-year-old dalit boy was killed and two others were injured in a clash over the installation of a board with B.R. Ambedkar's photo on a disputed land here, police said on Wednesday. The clash occurred between two groups in Silai Baragaon village in Milak area on Tuesday, police said. Divisional commissioner, Moradabad, Aujaneya Kumar Singh said one faction was trying to install a board with the picture of Ambedkar and wanted to install his statue on the land. They also demanded the land to be turned into a park in his name, he said. However, the other faction opposed same and claimed land belonged to gram samaj, leading to a clash, Mr Singh said. — PTI

ED raids in WB in Mahadev app case

New Delhi/Mumbai: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches in Mumbai, some places in West Bengal and the Delhi-NCR as part of its money laundering investigation in the Mahadev online gaming and betting app that reportedly involves various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. About 15 premises in these locations were covered by the investigators of the central probe agency under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the official sources said. A total of nine persons have been arrested by the ED in this case till now. The agency had earlier said that the alleged illegal funds generated by the app were used to pay bribes to politicians and bureaucrats in Chhattisgarh, from where the main promoters and operatives of the app hail.

Def & trade focus during EAM's Seoul visit: Envoy

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

Ahead of external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar's visit to Seoul next week, South Korean ambassador Chang Jae-bok on Wednesday said several issues, including defence production cooperation, upgradation of trade ties, cooperation in space and education sectors, and people-to-people exchanges, could be discussed between the EAM and his counterpart Cho Tae-yul.

Apart from regional and global issues, talks to explore a possible migration pact could also figure in the talks, he added. The South Korean envoy expressed confidence that the two sides could conclude negotiations on an upgraded Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) before the end of this year. On possible 2+2 talks sometime in the future between the two nations on the lines of what India has with a few other nations, Mr Chang mooted that such talks may be initiated initially at the secretary-level, then moving on to the vice-minister level and then finally at the ministerial level. He also said that the South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol may schedule a visit to India later this year after the parliamentary polls. Mr Chang also touched upon geo-political issues in his country's neighbourhood and lambasted the leadership of neighbouring North Korea, saying that nation's dictator is only interested in protecting his power.



Firefighters at a slum in Bhayandar in Thane district where a fire had broken out on Wednesday, destroying several huts and shops. At least one person was killed, according to officials. Two children were injured in the blaze, they said, adding that three fire personnel also received minor injuries. — PTI

Cops lay down arms over Manipur ASP abduction

Demand they be allowed to retaliate when attacked

Imphal, Feb. 28: Manipur Police commandos on Wednesday laid down their arms in protest against the abduction of additional superintendent Amit Kumar Moirang them and demanded they be allowed to retaliate when attacked. The police commandos of all the five valley districts put down their arms asking for action against Meitei radical group Arambai Tenggol and no hindrance from political executives when the forces act against the outfit, officials said. They are protesting against the Tuesday's incident during which a group of Meira Paibis (women volunteer group) and cadres of Arambai Tenggol, a Meitei organisation, kidnapped the police officer and beat up other personnel guarding him.

THE ARMY had to be called in as fresh tension mounted in Manipur East on Tuesday and four columns of the Assam Rifles were deployed after the senior police officer was abducted. The officer was rescued within hours, and is currently hospitalised. The Army had to be called in as fresh tension mounted in Manipur East on Tuesday and four columns of the Assam Rifles were deployed after the senior police officer was abducted. The region has witnessed escalating violence since May 3, with over 180 casualties reported after a "Tribal Solidarity March" in the hill districts protested the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The Meiteis, constituting around 53 per cent of Manipur's population and residing predominantly in the Imphal Valley, contrast the tribals, including Nagas and Kukis, who make up 40 per cent and primarily inhabit the hill districts. — PTI

Shah: Modi firm on uprooting terrorism

Centre bans 2 J&K groups for anti-India activities

AGE CORRESPONDENT,
NEW DELHI, FEB 28

The Union home ministry has declared two factions of the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir as unlawful associations with immediate effect for a period of five years under Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 for their anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda, and asking people to refrain from taking part in elections. Union home minister Amit Shah said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to uproot terrorism, and anyone involved in unlawful activities will face dire consequences. "Striking terror networks with undiminished vehemence the government has declared the Muslim Conference Jammu & Kashmir (Sumji faction) and Muslim



Amit Shah

Conference Jammu & Kashmir (Bhat faction) as Unlawful Associations. These outfits have been engaging in activities against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's government is determined to uproot terrorism and anyone involved in unlawful activities will face dire consequences," Mr Shah said in a post on X. The Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir (Sumji faction) is involved in unlawful activities and supporting terrorist activ-

UNION HOME minister Amit Shah said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to uproot terrorism, and anyone involved in unlawful activities will face dire consequences

ities to separate J&K from India, which is prejudicial to the sovereignty, security and integrity of India. Many criminal cases have been registered against the Sumji faction and its members under various sections of law, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. The Bhat faction is involved in promoting, aiding and abetting the secession in Jammu and Kashmir from India by supporting terrorism and involving itself in unlawful activities. Many criminal cases have been registered against the faction and its members.

Top court hears batch of petitions over mining

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud held a detailed hearing on Wednesday on a clutch of pleas to decide the legal vexation whether royalty paid by mine operators to the Centre can be dubbed as a form of tax. The bench is seized of

the key reference to examine the nature and scope of royalty as prescribed under Section 9 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and if the same could be deemed as tax. During the hearing, the SC asked mineral-rich states like Jharkhand and Odisha whether Parliament can prescribe any limitation on the taxes they impose on mineral bearing land.

Prez's 4-day Odisha tour begins, visits Kichakeswari

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 28

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday arrived in Odisha on a four-day visit to the state. She arrived at Khiching in Mayurbhanj district from Ranchi on a special helicopter of the Indian Air Force. On her arrival, she was accorded a warm welcome by the state in the presence of governor Raghubar Das, Union minister Bishweswar Tudu, the Mayurbhanj collector and scores of people's representatives. Soon after arrival, the President and her daughter Sushri reached the Kichakeswari temple at Khiching. Along the way, she waved at thousands of people, including schoolchildren, who waited for the President amid tight security arrangements. It was her first visit to the Kichakeswari shrine after becoming the President. On the first day of her visit, she laid foundation stone for the Central Government Holiday Home at Rairangpur. Apart from this, she also virtually laid foundation stones for various road projects and a sports complex at Rairangpur and inaugurated Eklavya Model Residential School.

Mittal first Indian to be knighted by King Charles

London/New Delhi, Feb. 28: Telecom tycoon Sunil Bharti Mittal has been awarded Honorary Knighthood by the British King in recognition of his services to the UK and India business relations. Mittal, Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, which owns the country's second largest telecom firm Airtel, is the first Indian to be awarded the Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) by King Charles III, his company said in a statement. The KBE is among the highest honours conferred by the British Sovereign to civilians. It is awarded in an honorary capacity to foreign

nationals. Mittal, whose Airtel Africa is listed on the London Stock Exchange, in recent months led the revival of OneWeb (now known as Eutelsat), leading a consortium with the UK government and other strategic investors to offer satellite broadband services globally. He is a member of the India-UK CEO Forum as well as a member of the Vice Chancellor's Circle of Advisors at the University of Cambridge. He also served on the governing body of the London Business School (LBS) and as a member of the India Advisory Group at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). — PTI

Ashok Saraf, Rajeev Verma, Bombay Jayashri to receive Akademi award

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The Sangeet Natak Akademi on Wednesday announced the list of six Akademi Fellows and 92 artists, including actors Ashok Saraf, Rajeev Verma and singer Bombay Jayashri, who will receive the prestigious award for the years 2022 and 2023. The National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama elects eminent personalities in the field of performing arts as Akademi Fellows. The Fellows are folklorist and author Vinayak Khedekar, veena player R. Visweswaran, Kathak dancer Sunayana Hazarilal, Kuchipudi dancing couple Raja and Radha Reddy, theatre director Dular Roy, and playwright D.P. Sinha.



Ashok Saraf Bombay Jayashri Rajeev Verma

"The General Council of Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi, at its meeting held on 21 and 22 February 2024 at New Delhi unanimously elected six eminent personalities in the field of performing arts as Akademi Fellows. The Fellowship of the Akademi is a most prestigious and rare honour, which is restricted to 40 at any given time," it said in a statement. The Akademi also selected 92 artists from the field of music, dance, theatre, traditional/folk/tribal music/dance/theatre, puppetry and overall contribution/scholarship in the Performing Arts for the Akademi Puraskar for the years 2022 and 2023. The eminent artists cover the entire gamut of the performing arts such as

Hindustani and Carnatic vocal music, Hindustani and Carnatic instrumental music, and Sugam Sangeet; the major forms of Indian dance such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Chhau, Odissi, Sattriya, Mohiniattam as well as contemporary dance. Artists with different specialisations of theatre such as playwriting, direction, acting, make-up, and lighting as well as other major traditions of theatre like Rameela, Ankiya Bhaona and Kutiyattam have been selected. Award of Akademi Fellow carries a prize money of ₹3 lakh, while Akademi award carries a prize money of ₹1 lakh, besides a "tamrapatra" and "angavastram". — PTI

Sukhu govt faces collapse

Continued from Page 1
observers. We have informed them about the present situation...I will not press my resignation until a decision is taken. The final decision will be taken soon..." However, the chief minister said that he would want Mr Singhto to continue and is not inclined to accept his resignation. Mr Sukhu asserted: "Despite the setback, I want to emphasise that the people of Himachal are with us, the MLAs are with us, and I can confidently state that we will lead the Himachal government for the next five years. The Congress rebels are seeking to install a person of their choice as the new chief minister of the state. Speaking to the media, Congress general secretary Jai Ram Ramesh said, "The Congress will not hesitate to take some tough steps as the party is our priority and we will not let people's mandate be betrayed in Himachal Pradesh." During the day, the Assembly saw stormy sessions as 15 MLAs of the BJP were suspended by the Speaker for unruly behaviour. The remaining 10 MLAs of the BJP walked out and the state budget was passed, after which the House was adjourned sine die. Interestingly, Mr Singh voted for passing the budget on party lines. The six MLAs who cross-voted in the Assembly during the Rajya Sabha election have been given notice by the Assembly speaker for defying the official whip of the party. The Speaker has summoned them for a hearing.

After the state budget was passed, Himachal Pradesh parliamentary affairs minister Harsh Vardhan Chauhan said, "The Congress government proved its majority today and passed the budget. Six rebel MLAs were also found absent today during the passing of the budget. I told the Speaker about this. We filed a petition yesterday to disqualify them and a hearing was held today... The Speaker will now take a decision on this..." Reacting sharply, Mr Thakur said, "Now they are moving towards taking action against the MLAs who supported the BJP candidate. We will fight the battle." Meanwhile, Mr Hooda and Mr Shivakumar also met the Congress state unit chief, Mr Sukhu and deputy chief minister Mukush Agnihotri on Wednesday. After the meeting, Ms Singh said, "You all know that after the formation of the government, some things were not going well. We had informed the party high command about this to resolve it. More than a year has passed, but no decision has been taken. Due to which we are facing such a situation now. Vikramaditya Singh has not resigned from the party. He has said that he has resigned, but the chief minister has not accepted it yet. This is for those who have come as observers. It's up to them to decide what to do about it... Let's see what happens." As per sources, the Congress in Himachal Pradesh has earned a temporary respite. If proper steps are not taken soon, the party may lose another state.

In biggest drug bust off Gujarat coast, Navy, NCB seize 3,300 kg

Continued from Page 1
statement. The Indian Navy units successfully located, tracked and intercepted the suspicious boat at sea. The Navy's Marcos boarded the dhow, which resulted in the largest seizure of narcotics in quantity in recent times. Subsequently, the boat was towed by the warship to the nearest Indian port to hand over the crew and contraband to the law enforcement agencies. NCB deputy director-general (operations) Gyaneshwar Singh said the fishing boat has been brought to Porbandar and the five nationals who were onboard have been arrested. "They could either be Pakistani or Iranians. However, we have recovered no IDs from them. A Thuraya satellite phone and four mobile phones have been seized from the arrested men," Mr Singh said. The DDD said the drugs packets had the name of a Pakistani food company and hence they "suspect" the hand of that country in mobilising this cache whose destination is being probed. The traffickers onboard vessels carrying drugs keep in touch with buyers on the land and once they strike a deal, the consignment can land anywhere up to the southernmost tip of India, the NCB officials said. Mr Singh said this operation was codenamed "Sagarmanthan-1" and the joint

teams have been working on inputs for the "last few weeks". "This is the biggest offshore narcotics seizure in the country to date. We have seen that drugs smuggling has increased through the maritime route over the last few years and hence we are jointly working with other government agencies like the Navy, Coast Guard, customs, etc. to intercept such activities," said Mr Pradhan. "The smugglers and drugs operators use the Arabian Sea to exploit the Indian coastline, which is vulnerable. It is part of the grand design to destabilise the country using drugs," Mr Pradhan added. The last big seizure from the high seas was 2,500 kg by the NCB and the Navy off the Kerala coast in May 2023. "This operation is significant, not only in terms of quantity and cost of the seized contraband, but also highlights the collaborative efforts between the Indian Navy and the NCB for disruption of the illegal narcotics smuggling routes, which emanate from the Makran coast and flow towards various Indian Ocean Region countries," said the Indian Navy. The successfully coordinated mission reaffirms the strong commitment and resolve of the Indian Navy in thwarting attempts to use the seas as a medium for illegal activities, especially in India's maritime neighbourhood, the Indian Navy statement added.

Shah, Nadda discuss picks for elections

Continued from Page 1
from Gandhinagar, were on the party's first list of candidates for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections as well. While the lists of candidates in 2019 were released only after the Election Commission had announced the general election schedule, it is going to be different this time as the BJP looks to follow the template seen during the last round of Assembly polls in five states when it named its candidates, especially in the seats the party had lost five years earlier, before the announcement of poll dates. On Wednesday, the BJP also approached the Election Commission, urging the poll body to videograph the voting process at all polling stations during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and set up booths in complexes housing high-rise buildings. In a memorandum, the BJP also urged the poll panel to consider reforming the approval process for political parties' media content to make it faster, allowing them adequate time to plan their campaign. It also requested the EC to ensure there is no ambiguity in the rule pertaining to putting up flags and making wall paintings by party workers at their homes during polls. The party delegation, comprising Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and party national general secretary Arun Singh met the poll panel with the demands. Mr Vaishnaw said the BJP delegation urged the poll panel to set up booths at high-rise apartment complexes in urban areas as much as possible so that the maximum number of eligible voters at such residential buildings could exercise their franchise.

Continued from Page 1
maximum target (of the BJP). In 2019 as well, I got a notice in some matter ahead of the approaching Lok Sabha elections then. Now, when the general election is approaching, I am getting a notice again," he said in an event organised by the media group in Lucknow. "I know, when the election comes, notice will also come," he said, adding, "Why this nervousness? If in the past 10 years, you (the BJP) have done a lot of work then why are you nervous?" The SP chief took a swipe at the BJP over the issue of development as well, saying, "The Prime Minister landed here on a Hercules plane at the expressway. It was built by Samajwadi. Why could you not make such highways in the country where Hercules can land?" According to CBI officials, it is

Akhilesh called by CBI in mining case
Continued from Page 1
alleged that when Mr Yadav was chief minister, officers allowed the theft of minerals and extorted money from leaseholders and drivers. The CBI filed seven preliminary inquiries, which initiated the process of verification of allegations by the agency, based on which a decision to file an FIR was taken in 2016 on the directions of the Allahabad high court to probe the case of illegal mining of minor minerals. The CBI had also alleged that Mr Yadav's office cleared 13 projects in a single day on February 17, 2013, in violation of the e-tendering process, officials said. Mr Yadav, who was the chief minister of the state between 2012 and 2017, also held the mining portfolio during 2012-13, bringing his office's role under scanner, according to the FIR. The CBI claimed that on February 17, 2013, the leases were granted by Hamirpur district magistrate B. Chandrakala after getting approval from the chief minister's office in violation of its 2012 e-tender policy, which was ratified by the Allahabad high court on January 29 that year. The CBI had carried out searches at 14 locations in January 2019 in connection with its FIR against 11 people, including Hamirpur district magistrate, SP MLC Ramesh Kumar Mishra and Sanjay Dixit, who unsuccessfully contested the 2017 Assembly election on a BSP ticket, to probe the alleged illegal mining of minor minerals in Hamirpur district during 2012-16. Mr Yadav was succeeded by Gayatri Prajapati, who took charge as mining minister in 2013. Mr Prajapati was arrested in 2017 following a rape complaint by a woman from Chitrakoot.

THE ASIAN AGE

29 FEBRUARY 2024

Himachal turmoil doesn't augur well for democracy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi often reminds the world that India is the mother of democracy. Whatever is his logic and whatever be the historical facts he would advance to substantiate the claims, what the nation witnessed during the election to the Upper House of Parliament on Tuesday is an antithesis of what the world understands as democracy. And what makes the whole episode more upsetting for all those who have a stake in the survival and success of the democratic republic called India is that it was orchestrated under the aegis of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to which the Prime Minister belongs.

An MLA defecting here or an MLA cross-voting there is not a very uncommon practice in India but what was on display in Himachal Pradesh was mass defection in a planned manner during an election. So much so, the Congress which runs the government with the support of 43 members in a 68-member state Assembly failed to get its candidate elected to the Rajya Sabha in a straight contest. The Congress and the Opposition BJP with 25 members in the Assembly scored the same 34 votes, necessitating a draw of lots. Now the Congress ministry, which was formed hardly a year ago with a clear mandate in an election, is on notice. Infighting within the Congress which resulted in the resignation of a powerful minister the day after cannot be ignored, though.

A similar show but of lesser magnitude was staged in Lucknow where seven legislators of the Samajwadi Party crossed over to the BJP which resulted in eight of the ruling party's candidates sailing through in the election while the SP, which had the strength to secure the win of three candidates to the Rajya Sabha, had to contend with two. There was a still lighter version in Karnataka, but the operation did not produce major upsets.

Representative democracy functions through political parties. Various laws, including the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and the anti-defection law, have bestowed upon them the right to function as legitimate entities. In fact, the laws have practically endowed the parties with a greater right to popular mandate than the elected representatives themselves, as it is assumed that the voter elects the party rather than the candidate. What we saw on Tuesday is that there are elected representatives who are willing to let down their electors, and then there are political parties with deep pockets and access to the levers of power to facilitate it.

The BJP has perfected the art of engineering defections in its political rivals, especially the Congress, over the last decade through the notorious programme dubbed Operation Lotus. The party has found an ingenious way to ensure that the defecting MLAs escape the impact of the anti-defection law by making them resign from the Assembly first, thereby reducing the government into a minority one. With the help of a pliant governor, it can subsequently instal a new government, which then makes the re-election of the very same defectors an easy task.

Democracy survives through its institutions which keep evolving. Legislature is the first and foremost of these institutions, and hence its strength reflects the strength of the democratic process. Deliberate attempts to weaken it, and to undermine it, is like striking at the roots of the democratic system.

It's a paradox that the BJP, which advocates the idea of "one nation, one election" is the sponsor of these mass defections. It is for the party to explain how its systematic attempt to hollow out the legislatures squares with its argument that a House elected for a fixed period should be allowed to last its full term.

4 Indians get ready for space

As India aims to expand space exploration, four well-trained Air Force test pilots are on a shortlist to become astronauts, ready to embark on a wondrous journey to the stars and stardom. In an earlier era of the space race, India had an astronaut in space, Rakesh Sharma, but this time there is a different feel to it as the country has become a major player in space and has plans for its own space station, besides successful unmanned missions to faraway places, including Aditya-L1 to study the Sun.

While Rakesh took a ride on a Soviet spacecraft four decades ago, astronauts from among Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan, Angad Pratap and Shubanshu Shukla will be on a low-earth orbit flight in a home-grown spacecraft launched on a desi rocket in an indigenous mission. The first test flight to take place as early as this year and a manned flight in 2025 of a habitable space capsule that will be in orbit for three days at an altitude of 400 km and should splash down with three astronauts on board in a controlled descent into the Indian Ocean on its return.

India's first crewed mission will be a significant milestone in the history of rocketry that may have begun with an early rocket heading to a launch in Thumba on the rear carrier of a bicycle in the 1960s. Considering India's capacity to explore space with an astonishing degree of economy — the crewed Gaganyaan mission project may cost under \$1.5 billion — there should be no financial constraints to the dream of elite scientists of the country to contribute to learning to expand the knowledge of all humanity.

India's recent success with the Moon mission landing in the polar region upright and operating for a lunar day as opposed to Japan and a private US firm both facing trouble in achieving 100 per cent landing success should give Isro scientists great confidence in their own ability. Regardless of how far advanced technologically other space faring nations may be currently, India will be into space exploration on its own as well as on collaborative projects like Artemis.

THE ASIAN AGE

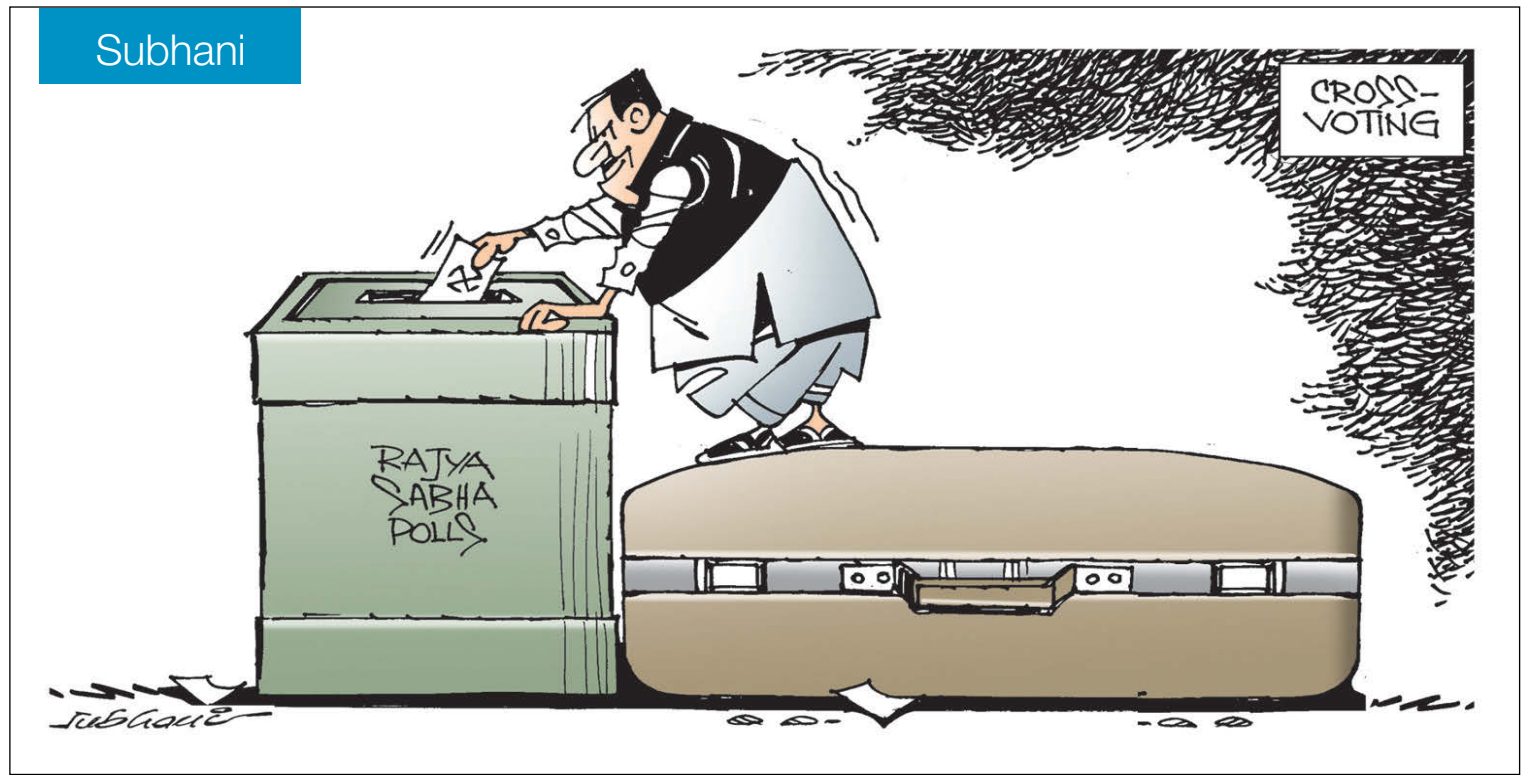
KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

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

Subhani



Acute poverty falls in India, but not extreme inequality



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Everyone loves a survey, especially in a paradox-ridden country. Take the survey that has been making news and is fast emerging as potent campaign fodder as the Lok Sabha elections draw nearer. After a gap of 11 years, the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) has released data on household consumption expenditure in the country. It is a preliminary fact sheet, not the detailed report yet. But in a sharply polarised landscape, both the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its opponents have jumped on it to sell their own political narratives. On offer are dramatically different images of India.

The "good news" emanating from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES), conducted during August 2022 to July 2023, and flagged by government spokespersons, is about a dramatic reduction in poverty, about per capita monthly household spending more than doubling in 2022-23 compared to 2011-12, about Indians who are eating better and have more disposable incomes. There is data to buttress some of these assertions - Indians are indeed spending less on food as a percentage of their monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) and more on clothes, toiletries, durable goods, etc. They are spending more on dry fruit - up from 0.58 per cent of the MPCE in 2011-2012 to 1.15 per cent in 2022-23.

All this is part of the India story. But it is not the full story.

If everything in the country is so "shiny", why do the poorest five per cent of rural India — about seven crore people — spend only ₹46 per day, asked Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. That a survey released

on the eve of elections becomes a political tool should surprise no one. But there is also the citizen's perspective. One basic question leaps out: is India progressing towards better living standards for all citizens? Here, the picture is a mixed one.

Clearly, extreme poverty is declining across vast swathes of the country. But extreme inequality is not.

Extreme inequality matters because it comes in the way of the country realising its full potential. The latest household survey offers some stark facts about the gaps — between the richest and the poorest, between states, between cities and villages and between social groups.

The bottom five per cent of India's rural population has an average MPCE of only ₹1,441; it is ₹2,087 in the urban areas; the top five per cent of India's rural and urban population has an average MPCE of ₹10,581 and ₹20,846, respectively.

Among the states, Sikkim has the highest MPCE (rural — ₹7,787 and urban — ₹12,125); Chhattisgarh has the lowest (rural — ₹2,575, urban — ₹4,557), says the report.

The latest HCES data also reflects the sharp cleavage between social groups. The Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes continue to trail behind others. In rural areas, the Scheduled Tribes reported the lowest MPCE at ₹3,098, followed by ₹3,571 for the Scheduled Castes.

It is interesting to look at changing patterns of household spending on food. The share of cereals and pulses within overall expenditure on food has reduced sharply, both in villages and cities. The MPCE share spent on cereals fell to 4.9 per cent in 2022-23 from 10.7 per cent in 2011-12. Part of the reason can be attributed to

the government's free foodgrain schemes. It is also true that more protein-rich dairy products, eggs, fish, meat, and fresh fruits are being consumed. That said, there are questions, troubling take-aways, and much that we do not know. For example, when we say Indians are moving towards better food, are we factoring in the sharp spike in consumption of ultra-processed food? The HCES 2022-2023 shows that Indians in rural and urban areas are consuming greater quantities of beverages and ultra processed food that are unhealthy. The share of expenditure on "beverage, processed food, and others" has gone up from 7.9 per cent of the total MPCE in 2011-12 to 9.4 per cent of the same. Alongside, expenditure on "pan (betel leaf), tobacco, & intoxicants" has risen from 3.2 per cent to 3.7 per cent in the same period.

This is happening against a backdrop of rising obesity among adults and children and an alarming spike in lifestyle diseases in the country. The latest household consumption survey shows rising expenditure on medical treatment (both hospitalisation and non-hospitalisation) in both rural and urban areas.

There is another very important dimension: gender. The fact sheet does not tell us anything about intra-household food consumption or allocation of resources. We need more granular data on who is eating what, when and how much to be able to conclusively say if diets have improved for all Indians. Ditto with the data on conveyance. Both urban and rural Indians are spending more on conveyance. Overall, spend-

ing on conveyance has jumped from 4.2 per cent of the MPCE in 2011-12 to 7.3 per cent of the MPCE in 2022-23.

The question: is this sharp spurt in expenditure about greater mobility or about increase in fuel costs and rising inflation? Further, is the extra money spent on transport leading to greater freedom of movement and opportunities for women as well as men? The most recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-2021) tells us that only 42 per cent of women in the 15-49 age group reported enjoying "freedom of movement". That means being able to go alone to the market, health facility, and places outside the village or community. This marked a very slight increase from 41 per cent (NFHS-4, 2015-16).

There are more worrying takeaways. Indian families are cutting down on expenditure on education. The factsheet does not tell us why, but some analysts say the data in HCES 2022-2023 could well be reflecting the after effects of the Covid-19 pandemic or pandemic effect. Many children were pulled out of private schools and put into government schools. "Many children did not resume private schooling after that... there was a shift to govt schooling/cheaper options noted during those years. Many small private schools were shut down or handed over to the state," says education strategy expert Meeta Sengupta. Clearly, we need much more research on why expenditure on education has come down.

As the poll season kicks off, data wars are going to intensify. There are great stories tucked within a survey. It depends on which story one wants to listen to, whether one has the appetite to listen to all the stories, and ask about the ones that are not being told loud enough.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS
SMOOTH CRIMINALS

Earlier, Rajya Sabha elections rarely made news. Cut to the present where the intrigue and machinations of the political parties are on full display. This probably would dismay and disgust the founders and creators of the Constitution, The RS was supposed to have upstanding members with wisdom and knowledge. Unfortunately, many are in the RS simply because they cannot win the Lok Sabha elections and parties want to accommodate them in some way or other. Parties often trot out the excuse of the winnability of candidates charged with heinous crimes and indirectly blame the people for electing such elements. Such compulsions do not exist in the RS, so why are 36 per cent of them with serious charges against them in the House?

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

OUR OWN GAZA

PALESTINE'S declaration as an independent state was recognised by UN in 1988 and as a sovereign one, in 2012. Yet Palestine remains at the mercy of Israel for every resource, be it water, electricity and even its share of taxes. Israel has been usurping even Palestinian territory at its will. In the 1948 war, Israel took away three-fourths of it. Back home we have Delhi under similar existence under a plenipotentiary Centre. An elected CM and his Cabinet stay beholden to an unelected authority and the attendant bureaucracy. We, too, have our Gaza Strip.

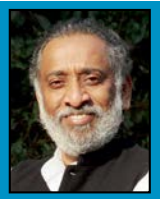
R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

GLASS HOUSES

FAR FROM DEFENDING Sandeshkhali, Mamata Banerjee has personally instructed the police to let the law take its own course and this is the reason why many of the accused have got arrested. In contrast, BJP leaders religiously maintain stunned silence whenever women get sexually assaulted in saffron states as is currently happening in Manipur! So instead of trying to reap political dividends by exploiting one man's excesses in West Bengal, that, too, by giving them a communal twist, the BJP should at first try to clean up its own backyard.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Longer tenures for senior babus so they can do their job better

Almost 60 per cent of empanelled IAS officers just got the nod as secretaries and equivalents, and most of them are getting a five-year stint. This is Modi Sarkar's way of providing long tenures to high-ranking officials so that they can really sink their teeth into their roles.

Usually, the defence and home secretaries get a measly two-year stint, which isn't enough time to make some real moves. But for the rest, it's been a mixed bag. Some babus often grumble about how short stints impede when it comes to making big decisions and getting things done.

Sources have informed DKB that from the latest group of empanelled officers from the 1993 batch, 12 out of 200 of them are in for the long haul, with more than five years on the clock. Even from among the preceding batch of 1992, five IAS officers out of 20 are looking at a five-year tenure.

The word is that we might see a major babu reshuffle in June-July once the new government settles into the driver's seat. Consequently, many of the recently empanelled officers are likely to be reassigned to new postings soon.

Former secretaries have offered insights into this evolving trend, noting that the traditional three-year tenure for secretaries was once considered sufficient. However, circumstances and administrative imperatives have prompted a

shift towards longer tenures to facilitate effective governance.

2 YRS AFTER PM'S SECURITY BREACH, PUNJAB GOES AFTER SENIOR COPS

Two years ago, in January 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's convoy was stranded on a flyover for half an hour when he was travelling in Punjab due to a crowd of 300 protesters who had blocked the flyover. The security breach had sparked a political controversy. At the time state government was led by Congress chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi. The inquiry conducted by the Indu Malhotra committee later recommended significant disciplinary action against three senior officers for the security breach.

Now, the Punjab government of Bhagwant Mann has decided to initiate disciplinary proceedings against the cops. The officers in the dock include former director general of police (DGP) Siddharth Chattopadhyaya, the then Faridkot DIG Inderbir Singh and former Ferozepur SSP, Harmanbir Singh Hans. While Mr Chattopadhyaya has since retired and could be off the hook, Mr Mann intends to proceed against the other two, both of whom will be allowed to present their responses.

According to directives from the Supreme Court, which appointed the investigative com-

mittee, Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla has requested Punjab to furnish an action-taken report. Those in the know say that the implicated officers may be looking at anything from a slap on the wrist to dismissal from service. Talk about a rollercoaster ride from security slip-up to political uproar, it's never a dull moment in Punjab!

MUMBAI TO PUNE, MAHARASHTRA'S BABU RESHUFFLE UNFOLDS

Big changes are going down in Maharashtra's babu corridors as the nation braces itself for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

In a decisive move, the state government recently executed a massive babu overhaul, reassigning 12 IAS officers to new roles. Notable among them is the transfer of Rajesh Kumar, a senior 1988-batch officer, from additional chief secretary of cooperation and marketing to the pivotal position of additional chief secretary of revenue. Meanwhile, O.P. Gupta steps into the role of overseeing finance, filling a vacancy left by Nitin Kareer's ascent to chief secretary.

Sanjay Sethi, returning from his tenure as chairman of Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority, takes the reins as additional chief secretary of transport, displacing Parrag Jaim Nainutia, who has moved to the Information Technology Department. Then there is Vijay Singhal, who is

now steering the ship at CIDCO and Milind Shambharkar taking charge at Mumbai Repairs and Reconstruction Board.

This reshuffle extends beyond Mumbai, with Kavita Dwivedi's transfer from commissioner of Akola Municipal Corporation to additional divisional commissioner of Pune district.

Amidst these transitions, given that it's rather crowded at the top with chief minister Eknath Shinde and deputy CMs Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar, everyone's trying to guess who's pulling the strings behind this shake-up.

Those in the know informed DKB that the Election Commission's three-year transfer policy is also a major factor prompting the state government's action. The EC, reportedly, wants officers posted for more than three years shifted out. Consequently, a major reshuffle is expected in the powerful Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), with the fate of heavy hitters like BMC's Commissioner I.S. Chahal and Pune Municipal Corporation's Vikram Kumar hanging in the balance. Expect more changes in the days ahead.

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



SHORT TAKES

GUNFIRE NEAR CHAD OPPOSITION HEADQUARTERS

N'Djamena, Feb. 28: Sporadic shots were heard on Wednesday in Chad's capital near the headquarters of an opposition party, accused by the government of an overnight attack on the internal security agency's offices which left several dead. The sound of automatic weapon fire prompted people to leave the area in the centre of N'Djamena where the Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF) has its main office and had been surrounded by the army. Presidential guard trucks were also seen headed towards the party HQ.

BIDEN UNDERGOES ANNUAL MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Washington, Feb. 28: US President Joe Biden reported to a hospital on Wednesday for his last yearly medical examination before November's election as scrutiny intensifies over the 81-year-old's fitness and mental acuity for a second term.

The White House said a summary of the test results from the Walter Reed military medical facility outside Washington would be released later.

It will be closely followed for details about the health of America's oldest ever leader. Biden is on course for a rematch with 77-year-old former president Donald Trump.

HONG KONG PLANS A NEW SECURITY LAW

Hong Kong, Feb. 28: As Hong Kong moves toward enacting a new national security law, four years after Beijing imposed a similar law that all but wiped out dissent and vocal pro-democracy media in the semi-autonomous Chinese city, concerns are spreading among the city's international business and media communities.

Critics say the legislation will make Hong Kong's legal system increasingly similar to that of mainland China.

However, the government argues the new law will affect only a small minority of disloyal residents.

GOOGLE HIT WITH \$2.3 BN LAWSUIT BY MEDIA GROUPS

Brussels, Feb. 28: Alphabet's GOOGLE Google was hit with a 2.1-billion-euro (\$2.3 billion) lawsuit by 32 media groups, including Axel Springer and Schibsted SCHA.OL on Wednesday, alleging that they had suffered losses due to the company's practices in digital advertising.

The move by the group — which include publishers in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden — comes as antitrust regulators also crack down on Google's ad tech.

INDIAN CG SHIPS IN SRI LANKA FOR TRAINING DRILLS

Colombo, Feb. 28: Two Indian Coast Guard ships arrived at the port of Galle in Sri Lanka for a formal visit to facilitate professional exchanges and conduct joint training exercises, the Indian mission said.

The Indian Coast Guard ship *Samarth*, an Offshore Patrol Vessel, and *Abhinav*, a Fast Patrol Vessel, arrived at the southern port on Tuesday, the Indian High Commission said.

The ships will visit Colombo from March 2 to 5 before departing the island nation. "@IndiaCoastGuard Ship *Samarth* and *Abhinav* enter #Galle harbour today."

AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA TO PUSH FOR PEACE

Berlin, Feb. 28: Armenia and Azerbaijan's foreign ministers are due to hold peace talks in Berlin on Wednesday, in a new push to resolve a decades-long conflict between the neighbouring Caucasus countries.

The dialogue involves Armenia's Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijan's Jehyun Bayramov.

Under German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's mediation that was held earlier this month, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev had agreed then to push on with peace negotiations.

Israel's settlement plan speeds up, US criticises

Hamas claims rocket fire on north Israel from S. Lebanon

Jerusalem, Beirut, Geneva, Berlin, Feb. 28: Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich pledged to continue expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank, defying international pressure on Israel to stop building on land Palestinians see as the core of a future independent state even as Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki said that he did not expect "miracles" at talks in Moscow to discuss the formation of a unified Palestinian government and the rebuilding of Gaza.

The military wing of Palestinian group Hamas on Wednesday said it fired a volley of rockets towards northern Israel from south Lebanon, amid escalating exchanges at the Lebanon-Israel border in recent days while a German frigate sent to help secure merchant shipping in the Red Sea has successfully repelled an attack by Houthi rebels.

The "Hesse" Navy frigate intercepted a drone on Tuesday evening, the Army said on X, formerly Twitter. "A short time later, a second drone approached (the ship). The crew again initiated defence measures and also successfully engaged the target," the Army said.

Late on Tuesday, Smotrich announced the approval of a new settlement called Mishmar Yehuda, in Gush Etzion, a cluster of Jewish settlements



An aerial view shows relatives and supporters of Israeli hostages, as they start a march to Jerusalem calling for their release, on Wednesday in Reim.

located south of Jerusalem, and said work would continue on authorising further settlements.

"We will continue the momentum of settlement throughout the country," he said in a statement.

The move comes just days after US secretary of state Antony Blinken said Washington considered Jewish settlements in the West Bank to be inconsistent with international law, reverting to a long-standing US position that was overturned by the administration of former President Donald Trump. The change brought the US back into line with

most of the world, which considers the settlements built on territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war to be illegal. Israel itself disputes this view, citing the Jewish people's historical and Biblical ties to the land.

The Palestinians say that the expansion of settlements across the West Bank is part of a deliberate Israeli policy to undermine its ambition of creating an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Last week, Israeli ministers agreed to convene a planning council to approve 3,300 homes to be built.

UK BOOSTS MPS' SECURITY AMID GAZA WAR FEARS

London, Feb. 28: The UK government announced a multi-million-pound package Wednesday to boost the security of elected lawmakers who say they face increasing threats amid tensions over the Israel-Hamas war.

The 31 million (\$39 million) in extra funding over the next year follows UK MPs being targeted with intense criticism and abuse over their stances on the Middle East conflict.

It also comes during a febrile, pre-poll atmosphere, with a nationwide vote due later this year and expected to result in a change of government from Conservative to Labour.

Under the new provisions, lawmakers will have access to a dedicated police contact to discuss security while those most at risk could seek bodyguards, the interior ministry said. The money will also expand cybersecurity advice to MPs and increase police patrols in areas witnessing heightened community tensions, it added.

"None of us should have to accept that enduring hate crimes, harassment, or threats is part of the job," interior minister James Cleverly said in a statement.

2 audios back Imran's rigged election claims

Lahore / Karachi, Islamabad, Feb. 28: Two bombshell audio clips of the main leaders of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan leaked on social media on Wednesday have given credence to the claim made by former prime minister Imran Khan's party that February 8 elections were "massively rigged" and its mandate was "stolen."

In one of the audio leaks, Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori is allegedly heard saying, "They say that our mandate is 100 per cent fake."

Tessori is heard telling someone that when he became the Governor, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) was aligned with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

PTI has asked the International Monetary Fund to factor in the country's political stability in any further bailout talks. PTI has sent a letter to the IMF detailing its position, two senior sources in the party said, adding more details would be made public in due course.

"When the Pakistan Democratic Alliance formed the government, the MQM changed its loyalties in April '22, which didn't go down well with their voters." The Governor said,



Supporters of jailed ex-PM Imran Khan's PTI party throw a shoe at a newly elected PMLN member, during an oath taking ceremony of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in Peshawar, on Wednesday.

'LEGAL CONSEQUENCES' FOR ALVI OVER REFUSAL TO SUMMON PARL SESSION

Islamabad, Feb. 28: Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi's refusal to summon the newly-elected National Assembly for its first session may lead to "legal consequences", senior leaders of the PML-N and PPP have warned.

On Monday, Alvi rejected a move from the caretaker parliamentary affairs ministry to summon the first session of the National Assembly on February 29. Alvi, known for his closeness to Imran Khan, has maintained that all reserved seats be allocated before the summoning of the session in which newly-elected members of the National Assembly will take oath.

rs ministry to summon the first session of the National Assembly on February 29. Alvi, known for his closeness to Imran Khan, has maintained that all reserved seats be allocated before the summoning of the session in which newly-elected members of the National Assembly will take oath.

Imran and his PTI party have alleged "Mother of All Rigging" in the polls that, according to the ECP saw PTI-backed independents win 92 National Assembly seats.

CIVILIANS RELIEVE ARMY AT MALDIVES AVIATION WHARF

Male, Feb. 28: Ahead of the March 10 deadline for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel in the Maldives, an Indian civilian team has reached here to take charge of one of the three aviation platforms in the island nation, local media reports said on Wednesday.

"The civilian team to operate and maintain the aircraft has now arrived in Maldives. The Indian civilian team arrived in Addu early last night to complete the handover/takeover process," a news portal *themaldivesjournal.com* said quoting a statement by the Maldives defence ministry. After a high-level meeting in Delhi on Feb. 2 between the two sides, the Maldivian foreign ministry said India will replace its military personnel operating the three aviation platforms in the Maldives by May 10 and the first phase of the process would be completed by March 10.

The Indian military personnel are expected to be replaced by civilians who have expertise in operating the three platforms. There are 88 military personnel manning the platforms that have been providing humanitarian and medical evacuation services to people for the last few years with two helicopters and a Dornier aircraft.

It comes after pro-China Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, on Feb. 5 announced that Indian Army personnel will be sent back from the nation.

—PTI

Biden, Don near rematch after Michigan victories

Dearborn, Feb. 28: President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump won the Michigan primaries on Tuesday, further solidifying the all-but-certain rematch between the two men.

Biden defeated Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips, his one significant opponent left in the Democratic primary. But Democrats were also closely watching the results of the "uncommitted" vote, as Michigan has become the epicentre for dissatisfied members of Biden's coalition that propelled him to victory in the state — and nationally — in 2020.

The number of "uncommitted" votes has already surpassed the 10,000-vote margin by which Trump won Michigan in 2016.

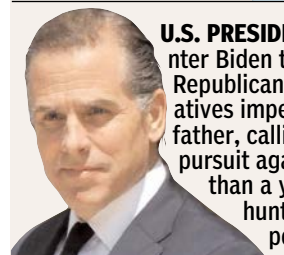
As for Trump, he has now swept the first five states on the Republican primary calendar. His victory in Michigan over his last major primary challenger, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, comes after the former president defeated her by 20 percentage points in her home state of South Carolina on Saturday.

The Trump campaign is looking to lock up the 1,215 delegates needed to secure the Republican nomination sometime in mid-March. Both campaigns are watching Tuesday's results for more than just whether they won as expected. For Biden, a large number of voters choosing "uncommitted" could mean he's in significant trouble with parts of the Democratic base.

HUNTER FALYS IMPEACHMENT PROBE

THE U.S. CONGRESS ON WEDNESDAY has three days to avert a partial government shutdown, as disagreements between the two parties and within the fractious House Republican majority delay lawmakers in their duty of funding federal agencies.

SUPREME COURT TRAINS SIGHTS ON U.S. BAN ON GUN 'BUMP STOCKS' The US Supreme Court on Wednesday is set to consider the legality of a federal ban imposed under former President Donald Trump on "bump stock" devices that enable semiautomatic weapons to fire rapidly like machine guns in a case targeting another firearms restriction after a major gun rights expansion in 2022.



U.S. PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN'S SON Hunter Biden took a defiant tone at a Republican-led House of Representatives impeachment inquiry into his father, calling it a "baseless" partisan pursuit against his family. "For more than a year, your committees have hunted me in your partisan political pursuit of my dad."

BIDEN ISSUES EXEC. ORDER TO BETTER SHIELD AMERICANS' SENSITIVE DATA

Washington, Feb. 28: President Joe Biden on Wednesday is signing an executive order aimed at better protecting Americans' personal data on everything from biometrics and health records to finances and geolocation from foreign adversaries like China and Russia.

The attorney general and other federal agencies are to prevent the large-scale transfer of Americans' data to what the White House calls countries of concern, while erecting safeguards around other activities that can give those countries access to people's sensitive data.

The goal is to do so without limiting legitimate commerce around data. Biden's move targets commercial data brokers and shadowy companies that traffic in personal data.

Navalny to be buried tomorrow

Moscow, Feb. 28: Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny's funeral service and burial will take place in Moscow on Friday, his wife Yulia announced, but she said she was unsure if it would pass off peacefully or whether police would arrest attendees.

Kira Yarmysh, Navalny's spokesperson, posted on X that a service for Navalny would be held on Friday afternoon in the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God in the Moscow district of Maryino where Navalny lived.

Navalny would then be buried at the Borisovskoye cemetery, which is located around 2.5 km (1.5 miles) away from the other side of the Moskva River. A Reuters reporter on Wednesday saw three police patrols at the snow-covered cemetery, located near a busy road.

Navalny's allies have accused the Kremlin of thwarting their attempts to organise a bigger event a day earlier. The Kremlin has said it has nothing to do with such arrangements.

Russian funeral services are usually presided over by a priest and accompanied by choral singing, with attendees filing past the open casket of the deceased to say their farewell. The chosen Russian Orthodox church is a five-domed white building in a Moscow suburb.

It was not immediately clear how the authorities would control crowd. But judging from past gatherings of Navalny supporters — designated US-backed extremists — a heavy police presence is likely and the authorities will break up anything they deem to resemble a political demonstration under protest laws.

'FOREIGN AGENT' WEBSITE AD BAN: RUSSIA NODS BILL

Moscow, Feb. 28: Russia's lower house of Parliament, the State Duma, unanimously approved a bill on Wednesday banning advertising on publications by "foreign agents", a designation authorities have given to anti-Kremlin politicians, activists and media.

The new law will prohibit all Russians and companies from placing ads on websites, blogs, social networks or any other resources published by a "foreign agent".

Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said the law would bolster Russia's security as it heads into war's third year.

ZELENSKY EYES WAR SUPPORT FROM BALKANS

Tirana, Feb. 28: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tried to drum up Balkan support for his vision of peace in Ukraine and promoted the idea of joint arms production at a two-day summit of southeastern European countries.

The summit in Tirana comes as Kyiv is trying to improve its defensive capabilities to beat back Russian forces at a time of faltering US support. "We are interested in co-production with you and all our partners," he told delegations from Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Montenegro, Croatia and Moldova.

COP SECURITY: HARRY LOSES CASE, TO PLEAD

London, Feb. 28: Prince Harry said on Wednesday he would mount an appeal after he lost his legal challenge against the British government's decision to take away his police protection when he is in Britain.

Harry, King Charles' younger son, had brought the action against the government at the High Court in London after the Home Office decided in Feb. 2020 that he would cease to automatically receive personal police security in UK.

Harry, along with other senior royals, had received full publicly-funded security protection provided by the state before he stepped back from his royal duties.

N. IRELAND AMNESTY LAW BREACHES HR

Belfast, Feb. 28: Belfast's HC ruled on Wednesday that a law introduced by UK to offer conditional amnesties to ex-soldiers and militants involved in the region's decades of violence is in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

The law, introduced last year, sparked more than 20 legal challenges in Northern Ireland, mostly from victims' families.

MANPOWER | CRUNCH Workers can now take on jobs in new growth areas such as the digital economy

Facing low birth rate, S'pore open to foreign talent

Singapore, Feb. 28: Manpower-short Singapore has to stay open to foreign talent due to slower population growth and resident workforce growth slowing and insufficient to meet the demands of the economy, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said on Wednesday.

At the upper end, this means workers can take on jobs in new growth areas such as the digital economy, where there is a global shortage of skilled talent, said Wong.

Speaking in Parliament on Wednesday, he said the manpower includes work-

permit holders, which comprise about two-thirds of the total foreign workforce, mostly doing jobs that Singaporeans do not want to do.

Prosperous Singapore needs to keep its economy growing so that it can make a living and take care of its people, at a time when the world is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable, he told Parliament on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, minister in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Indraneel Rajah told Parliament that Singapore has seen its resident total fertility rate

(TFR) drop to an estimated 0.97 per cent in 2023, the first time it has dropped below one per cent in the country's history.

Wong also said Singapore has a comprehensive system of controls to regulate the quality and number of work-pass holders across every level of the workforce. As he laid out the government's plans to achieve between 2 and 3 per cent growth annually over the next decade, Wong said, "The reality is that Singapore will always be a little red dot (a teaser for being small) — we have no hinterland."

France votes for abortion 'freedom'

Paris, Feb. 28: A French government plan to enshrine the "freedom" to have an abortion in the Constitution is to be tested on Wednesday in a crucial vote in the right-dominated Senate.

President Emmanuel Macron last year pledged to inscribe the right to terminate a pregnancy — which is controlled by the right, with several leading senators opposed to the change. However, only if the upper house approves

turned the half-century-old right to the procedure, allowing states to ban or curtail abortion. France's lower-house National Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favour of making abortion a "guaranteed freedom" in late January, with almost all members of Macron's centrist minority coalition as well as left-wing opposition parties approving it.

But the plan still needs backing from the Senate, the government's exact wording, can a combined vote of both chambers of Parliament be held next month.



President Macron last year pledged to inscribe the right to terminate a pregnancy.

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	72,304.88 -1.08
Nifty 50	21,951.20 -1.11
S&P 500*	5,065.29 -0.25
Dollar (₹)	82.93 -0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.70 0.46
Euro (₹)	89.55 0.46
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	62,145.156 0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	84.25 0.72
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.066 -0.002
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.282 -0.033

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Cognizant to call employees to work from office

Cognizant said it expects employees to work from the office at least thrice a week, according to a memo, becoming latest company to end of pandemic-induced remote working era. Employers cited reasons such as better collaboration and awareness of company culture for the move, but many workers have lamented on social media about the resultant loss of flexibility and work-life balance.



Minister Joshi to launch new coal policy today

Union coal and mines minister Pralhad Joshi will on Thursday launch the 'Coal Logistics Plan & Policy', which focuses on technologically advanced, cost-effective and integrated logistics ecosystem for coal evacuation. The Indian national committee world mining Congress under the ministry is organising in New Delhi, the coal ministry said. The ministry of coal is aiming to produce 1.5 billion tonne of coal by the FY30.

IFC partners with Solcon Capital to invest in tech cos

International Finance Corporation (IFC) has partnered with technology-focused investment firm Solcon Capital to explore investment opportunities in the deep tech sector in India and South Africa. This strategic partnership is aimed at identifying and nurturing investment opportunities in the deep tech sector within India and South Africa to propel the digital economy in these burgeoning markets, IFC said.

Mahindra unveils special edition of Thar SUV

Mahindra, the SUV maker, has introduced a special edition of the Thar called the 'Earth Edition' with price ranging from ₹15.4 lakh- ₹17.6 lakh. The Thar Earth Edition is inspired by the infinite expanse of the Thar Desert, with a palette inspired by the desert geography, the company said. It features a satin matte exterior colour called 'Desert Fury', dune-inspired decals, and Earth Edition badges on B-pillars.

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

Nita Ambani to chair biggest media firm in India RIL, Disney join to form ₹70,000-cr media giant

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Global media giant Walt Disney Co and Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries on Wednesday announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a ₹70,000 crore-behemoth. A successful completion of the deal would create the biggest firm in the Indian media and entertainment sector, with over 100 channels in several languages, two leading OTT platforms and a viewer base of 75 crore across the country.

"As part of the transaction, the media undertaking of Viacom18 will be merged into Star India through a court approved scheme of arrangement," a joint statement said. "The transaction values the joint venture at ₹70,352 crore (\$8.5 billion) on a



● **COMPLETION** of the above steps, the JV will be controlled by RIL and owned 16.34 per cent by RIL, 46.82 per cent by Viacom18 and 36.84 per cent by Disney.

post-money basis, excluding synergies," it added.

Nita Ambani, wife of Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani, will chair the joint venture while Uday Shankar will be the vice chairperson.

Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent stake in the combined entity while Disney will have remaining 36.84 per cent shareholding.

Reliance has also agreed to invest at closing ₹11,500

crore into joint venture to grow the OTT business.

"Post completion of the above steps, the JV will be controlled by RIL and owned 16.34 per cent by RIL, 46.82 per cent by Viacom18 and 36.84 per cent by Disney," the statement said.

"The joint venture will be one of the leading TV and digital streaming platforms for entertainment and sports content in India," it said.

The joint venture will be granted exclusive rights to distribute Disney films and productions in India, with a licence to more than 30,000 Disney content assets.

Mukesh Ambani said this is a "landmark agreement" that heralds a new era in the Indian entertainment industry and welcomed Disney as a key partner of Reliance group. "This strategic joint venture with Disney will help us pool our extensive resources, creative prowess, and market insights to deliver unparalleled content at affordable prices to audiences," he said.

The transaction is expected to be completed in the last quarter of the calendar year 2024 or the first quarter of 2025, it said.

— PTI

India to take away China's pie in electronics export

New Delhi, Feb. 28: India is chipping away at China's dominance in electronics exports in some key markets as manufacturers diversify supply chains away from world's factory to other parts of Asia, a new study shows.

The impact is most pronounced in the UK and US, where geopolitical tensions with China have increased in recent years.

India's electronics exports to US as a ratio of China's increased to 7.65 per cent in Nov. last year from 2.51 per cent in Nov.

2021, according to London-based Fathom Financial Consulting. In the UK, the share rose to 10 per cent from 4.79 per cent.

India is luring electronics manufacturers to the country with heavy incentives, such as tax cuts, rebates, easier land acquisition and capital support.

The aim is to expand the domestic manufacturing industry in order to export more, and help businesses grow to global scale through partnerships.

India houses Samsung's biggest mobile phone fac-

● **THE IMPACT** is most pronounced in the UK and US, where geopolitical tensions with China have increased in recent years.

tory, while Apple Inc. makes at least 7 per cent of all its iPhones in India through Foxconn Technology and Pegatron Corp.

The rise in electronic exports is "likely the result of Foxconn's increasing investment in the India," Andrew Harris, an econo-

mist at Fathom Financial Consulting.

India's progress in gaining market share has been more limited in Europe and Japan, "suggesting a move towards dual supply chains (China plus one) rather than a complete abandonment of China-based production, at least for now," Harris said.

Companies have been touting their role in multi-nationals' "China plus one" strategy, which sees manufacturers developing back-up capacity in other countries. — Bloomberg

Insurance regulator to check spiralling claims

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Non-life insurance companies have moved a step closer to launching common empanelment of hospitals to the check spiralling health insurance claim costs.

The General Insurance Council (GIC), a self-regulatory body of non-life and pure health insurance companies, had appointed consulting firm PwC to come out with indicative rates for various medical procedures. The consulting firm has just submitted its report containing indicative pricing for 23 most common procedures which bring the maximum claims. The study analysed the claims data for each procedure to come out with the average cost of each procedure.

An insurance official said, "the indicative pricing depends on the location where treatment is being sought. For patients with comorbidities, the treatment cost over and above the fixed charges will be considered."

"The hospitals cannot



force high treatment costs on insured patients nor can we force our pricing on them. Insurers will be free to negotiate with the hospitals and onboard them on these indicative rates," added the official.

Meanwhile, insurers welcomed the Supreme Court's order asking the central government to standardise rates for medical procedures across all states.

Tapan Singhel, chairman of GIC said, "We have always maintained that we need to charge an appropriate cost for customers whether it's at the time of taking out a policy or bearing certain expenses at the time of a claim. It is encouraging to see the apex court urging the centre to take a decision on standard hospital rates."

YOUNG MFG PLANTS WILL BENEFIT FROM CONNECTIVITY: WB

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

Young manufacturing plants benefit from connectivity and their scaling up drives the positive aggregate economic effects, said a study.

A World Bank study on the impact of Golden Quadrilateral (GQ) on the manufacturing sector has revealed that young plants and the firms born within a more competitive context will benefit from connectivity. However, connectivity alone will not drive growth.

The study was done to understand on net effect of the construction of India's GQ highway connecting the four major cities in India - Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata on manufacturing sector as the popular notion is that enhanced market access and increased competition facilitated by greater connectivity are critical drivers of firm dynamics and overall growth.

Younger plants tend to be more capital intensive and engaged in value chains.

Chip companies to grow in India

Mumbai, Feb. 28: Domestic manufacturing of semiconductors is the next big space and many companies are expected to venture into this segment, a senior MeitY official said on Wednesday adding that a \$2 billion digital economy is what India seriously needs.

S Krishnan, secretary of ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY), while speak-

● **ABOUT 20 LAKH** people are employed in the electronics manufacturing sector in the country and the government would like these jobs to go up to about 45 lakh.

ing virtually at the India Digital Summit (IDS) 2024 said the digital economy is expected to grow at a faster pace in the next few

years. "Semiconductors is another big space. More companies are likely to come into the space...Our interest in semiconductor is open," he said, adding that in the next 5-10 years semiconductor manufacturing in the country is expected to come up in a big way.

About 20 lakh people are employed in the electronics manufacturing sector

in the country and the government would like these jobs to go up to about 45 lakh, he added.

On the proposed Digital India legislation, he said efforts were being made to enhance it with additional elements. The ministry is exploring ways to address a significant issue related to idea and understanding of ideas, where different forms of control are in place, he added. — PTI

'WTO to have appellate body'



Abu Dhabi, Feb. 28: India will only finalise new deals at a WTO ministerial meeting if the United States stops blocking an agreement on a dispute settlement mechanism, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

Delegates are hoping for progress on issues such as fisheries and agriculture at the World Trade Organization's 13th ministerial meeting, under way in Abu Dhabi.

But Piyush Goyal said that India would not finalise any new agreements without progress



on the dispute-settlement system.

"It's important that the first issue we should settle is that there should be an appellate body and some countries are not allowing that to happen."

Washington brought a WTO dispute settlement to a grinding halt in 2019

after blocking for years the appointment of new judges to the WTO's appeals court.

Goyal said "the entire working of WTO currently has come to a little bit of a standstill".

New agreements require full consensus between WTO's 164 member states as per the body's rules.

"I think it's important that the issues which relate to the past and have been under consideration for many years should be addressed first and among them is the appellate body which is of prime importance," he said. — AFP

BIG | PROBLEM Tech firm chief emails staff to address issues

Google to rework on Gemini AI

California, Feb. 28: Alphabet Inc.'s Sundar Pichai emailed staff to address the problematic responses from Google's Gemini AI engine, describing them as completely unacceptable.

Teams are now working around the clock to rectify the issues, Pichai wrote in his note. Stressing the need for the company to deliver unbiased and accurate information, the chief executive officer of both Alphabet and Google said structural changes will be made to prevent similar incidents.

Gemini, formerly Bard, is Google's flagship artificial intelligence (AI) product, but the company was criticised for its image generation that depicted historically inaccurate



● **THE BOOM** in AI interest and use has brought with it a wave of closer scrutiny, with many critics pointing to the potential for AI-created content to mislead, either deliberately or accidentally.

scenes when prompted to create images of people.

The California-based company stopped accepting prompts for people in its image generator while it worked to address the concerns raised.

"We'll be driving a clear set of actions, including structural changes, updated product guidelines, improved launch process-

es, robust evals and re-teaming, and technical recommendations," Pichai wrote, urging a focus on "helpful products that are deserving of our users' trust."

The boom in AI interest and use has brought with it a wave of closer scrutiny, with many critics pointing to the potential for AI-created content to

mislead, either deliberately or accidentally.

"I want to address the recent issues with problematic text and image responses in the Gemini app (formerly Bard). I know that some of its responses have offended our users and shown bias - to be clear, that's completely unacceptable and we got it wrong," Pichai said.

"Our teams have been working around the clock to address these issues. We're already seeing a substantial improvement on a wide range of prompts. No AI is perfect, especially at this emerging stage of the industry's development, but we know the bar is high for us and we will keep it at it for however long it takes," he said in email. — Bloomberg

Equity market falls on profit booking

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Negative global cues from Asian and US markets triggered across the board profit booking in the market. Weak Asian market cues and US Dow Futures indicating a negative start triggered massive profit-taking across the board, said analysts.

The Nifty-50 index fell below 22,000 mark touching a low of 21,915.85 while the Sensex fell below 73,000 touching a low of 72,222.29. The Sensex closed 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent down at 72,304.88 while Nifty-50 fell 247.20 points or 1.11 per cent to close at 21,951.15.

The fall in the broader market was much worse

with BSE Mid-cap index down by 1.82 per cent and BSE Small-cap index down by 1.94 per cent.

Several mid-cap and small-cap stocks were down by 5 to 6 per cent.

"Indian markets were jittery, mirroring weak global markets. Global investors are awaiting the key US economic data like personal consumption expenditure, in anticipation of a good forecast there is a fear that Fed rate cut may be delayed. Profit booking weighed on Indian markets, fuelled by concerns about India's Q3 GDP growth potentially slowing to 6.6 per cent from 7.6 per cent in Q2," said Vinod Nair, head-Research, Geojit Financial Services.

India's UHNWIs to rise 50 per cent by 2028: Report

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

The number of ultra-high net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) in India is expected to rise 50 per cent to 19,908 by 2028, finds an estimate by Knight Frank India.

This would be the highest growth for any country in the world in the next five years.

In 2023, the number of UHNWIs (individuals with net-worth of \$30 million and more) in India grew 6.1 per cent to 13,263.

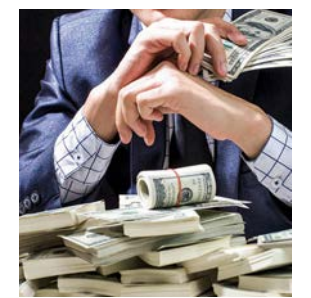
Further, 90 per cent of Indian ultra-high net-worth individuals are expecting an increase in their wealth this year. Almost 63 per cent of these UHNWIs expect a significant increase of more than 10 per cent in their wealth.

"While global uncertainty prevails, easing domestic inflationary risks and likelihood of rate cuts will further accentuate the growth of the Indian economy, and the reflection of this sentiment is echoed by the wealthy Indians," Shishir Bajjal, chairman and managing director, Knight Frank India, said.

In 2023, the number of ultra-high net-worth individuals globally rose to 4.2 per cent to 6.26 lakh from 6.01 lakh a year earlier.

With 7.2 per cent, North America led the growth and was followed by the Middle East with 6.2 per cent. Only Latin America saw its number of wealthy individuals fall, the Knight Frank India said.

The number of wealthy



● **IN 2023**, the number of UHNWIs (individuals with net-worth of \$30 million and more) in India grew 6.1 per cent to 13,263. Further, 90 per cent of Indian UHNWIs are expecting an increase in their wealth this year.

individuals globally is expected to surge by 28.1 per cent to 8.02 lakh by 2028.

Asia saw 2.6 per cent growth in ultra-high net-worth individuals in 2023 and is estimated to register 38.3 per cent growth for next five years.

Apart from 50 per cent growth in India, China is expected to grow by 47 per cent, Malaysia 35 per cent and Indonesia 34 per cent.

Further, 32 per cent of India's ultra-high net-worth individuals are allocating wealth in residential real estate, the Knight Frank India said.

Nearly 14 per cent of the residential portfolio is allocated outside India and about 12 per cent of them plan to buy a new home in 2024 while a similar number of the wealthy purchased a new home in 2023.



RBI REVISES ITS REGULATORY SANDBOX PLAN

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 28

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday revised the framework for the Regulatory Sandbox (RS) scheme under which participating entities will have to comply with digital personal data protection norms. The central bank also extended the timeline of the various stages of the RS from seven months to nine months.

"The framework (for RS) has been revised based on the experience gained over the last four and a half years in running four cohorts and feedback received from FinTechs, banking partners, and other stakeholders.

Among others, the timelines of the various stages of the RS process have been revised from seven months to nine months," the central bank said in a release.

A sandbox entity should ensure it has appropriate technical and organisational measures for the compliance of the provisions under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, the banking regulator added.

Entities should ensure safeguards to prevent breach of personal data.

SHORT TAKES

Bopanna, Yuki win; Nagal exits

Dubai: Top seeds Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden entered the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships with a straight set win over the Tunisian-Pakistani pair of Skander Mansouri and Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi here. Bopanna and Ebden, who won the Australian Open last month, took one hour and 41 minutes to get the better of Mansouri and Qureshi 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5) in the round of 16 on Tuesday night. Bopanna and Ebden will face Ariel Behar of Uruguay and Czech Adam Pavlasek in the quarterfinals. Another Indian, Yuki Bhambhani and his Dutch partner Robin Haase also progressed to the quarterfinals, defeating Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik and Adrian Mannarino of France 6-7 (6), 6-3, 10-8 in a round of 16 match. However, it was curtains for India in men's singles after the country's top player Sumit Nagal exited in the round of 32. Nagal lost 4-6, 7-5, 1-6 against Italy's Lorenzo Sonego. — PTI

Pragg crushes Keymer in opener

Prague: India's R. Praggnanandhaa came up with a scintillating performance to grind down German Vincent Keymer in the first round of the Prague Masters Chess tournament that got underway here on Wednesday. With this win Praggnanandhaa also added some more spice to the tale around the highest rated Indian as he again overtook Viswanathan Anand in live rating to clinch the top spot in the country. Nodirbek Abdusattar of Uzbekistan defeated Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czech Republic while Parham Maghsoudloo of Iran was the other player to score a full point at the expense of Bartel Mateusz of Poland. In other games of the day, D. Gukesh had a chance to fight for more but had to settle for a draw with Richard Rapport of Romania, and Vidit Gujrathi split the point with David Navara of Czech Republic. Gujrathi tried for as long as 89 moves before finally signing the peace. — PTI

Jhajharia files for PCI prez post

New Delhi: Two-time Paralympics gold medalist Devendra Jhajharia on Wednesday filed nomination papers for the president's post in the March 9 elections of the national body. The 42-year-old Jhajharia had won a gold medal each in the 2004 Athens and 2016 Rio Paralympics in the F46 disability category. The javelin thrower also won a silver in the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021. Jhajharia won the world championships gold in 2013 and a silver in 2015 (both F46 category) as well as a silver in the Asian Para Games in 2014. "With encouragement from my well wishers and with an aim to work for the betterment of para sports and para athletes, I filed my nomination papers for the post of president of Paralympic Committee of India," Jhajharia said. "I have been a representative of para athletes in the PCI for the last four years but many well wishers want me to lead the PCI now, so I am here as a candidate for the top post," he said. Thursday is the last day for filing nomination papers for the PCI elections. — PTI

Dhawan hits 39 on return

Navi Mumbai: Out-of-favour veteran Indian batter Shikhar Dhawan returned to competitive cricket with a 28-ball 39 but his knock went in vain as DY Patil Blue lost by one run to Tata Sports Club in the DY Patil T20 Cup here on Wednesday. The 38-year-old, who last played for India during the ODI series in Bangladesh in 2022, hit five boundaries and two maximums during his entertaining knock. Set a target of 186, Dhawan, who last played competitive cricket in 2023 IPL for Punjab Kings, shared a 64-run stand with Abhijit Tomar in 71 overs. Nutan Goel remained unbeaten on 38 off 35 balls as he added a valuable 58 runs for the fifth wicket with Shubham Dubey (42). However, in the end, Blue fell short by just one run to finish on 184 for seven in their allotted 20 overs. Former India wicket-keeper Dinesh Karthik, playing for Blue, was dismissed for a first-ball duck but he took the important catch of Samarth Vyas. — PTI

DEAL WITH IT

Kishan, Iyer lose central contracts after ignoring Ranji diktat

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The out-of-favour duo of were excluded after ignoring the directive to play Ranji Trophy, while skipper Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli expectedly retained their place in the top bracket as the BCCI unveiled its centrally-contracted players for this year on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team's campaign in Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty since leaving from the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He has instead focussed on preparing for the IPL next month.

Iyer, on the other hand, did not make himself available for Mumbai's Ranji quarterfinal against Baroda after being excluded from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for the Ranji semifinals starting March 2.

While announcing the central contracts for 2023-24, the BCCI once again advised all India cricketers to play domestic games when not on national duty.

"Please note that Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan were not considered for the annual contracts in this round of recommendations," said the BCCI in a statement.

"The BCCI has recommended that all athletes give precedence to participating in domestic cricket during periods when they are not representing the national team," the board added.

Their exclusion can be seen as a stern message to young players unwilling to put in the hard yards in first-class cricket, while chasing white-ball glory and lucrative IPL contracts.

Rohit, Kohli, pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja were retained in the A plus category, the highest bracket of the BCCI's central contracts list.

Six cricketers feature in the A category including senior off-spinner R. Ashwin, who will be playing his 100th Test next week, when India takes on England in the fifth and final game. Ashwin recently became only second Indian bowler after former captain Anil Kumble to take cross 500 wickets in Tests.

Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, K. L. Rahul, Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya are the others to feature in the A category.

Siraj, who was in the B category previously, has been promoted while Axar Patel has moved down from A to B.

Others in the B category are Suryakumar Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Rishabh Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has had a



Ishan Kishan



Shreyas Iyer

BCCI Contracts for Indian Cricketers

Annual contract category for players during the period Oct 2023 to Sept 2024 as announced by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)

Senior Men

GRADE	A+	A	B
1	Rohit Sharma	R Ashwin	Surya Kumar Yadav
2	Virat Kohli	Mohd. Shami	Rishabh Pant
3	Jasprit Bumrah	Mohd. Siraj	Kuldeep Yadav
4	Ravindra Jadeja	KL Rahul	Axar Patel
		Shubman Gill	Yashasvi Jaiswal
		Hardik Pandya	
GRADE C			
1	Rinku Singh	6 Ravi Bishnoi	11 Arshdeep Singh
2	Tilak Verma	7 Jitesh Sharma	12 KS Bharat
3	Ruturaj Gaekwad	8 Washington Sundar	13 Prasidh Krishna
4	Shardul Thakur	9 Mukesh Kumar	14 Avesh Khan
5	Shivam Dube	10 Sanju Samson	15 Rajat Patidar

KBK Sports Graphics

stellar start to his international career. Pant was in the A category last year but finds himself in B in the latest contracts having not played any cricket since his horrific accident in December 2022.

As many as 15 were handed C category contracts including Rinku Singh, Tilak Verma, Ruturaj Gaekwad, Shardul Thakur, Shivam Dube, Ravi Bishnoi, Jitesh Sharma, Washington Sundar, Mukesh Kumar, Sanju Samson, Arshdeep Singh, KS Bharat, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan and

Rajat Patidar. Cricketers who end up playing a minimum of three Tests or eight ODIs or 10 T20Is within the specified period are automatically included in Grade C on a pro-rata basis.

PUJARA, CHAHAL, DHAWAN DROPPED

The big names who have lost their contracts include Cheteshwar Pujara, Shikhar Dhawan, Umesh Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal, who all have fallen out of favour with the selectors.

It signals the end of the road for the likes of Pujara but the 33-year-old Chahal can still make a case for himself if he plays more games.

The selection committee has also recommended fast bowling contracts for Akash Deep, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Umran Malik, Yash Dayal and Vidwath Kaverappa.

Cricketers are normally paid ₹7 crore per annum in A plus bracket, ₹5 crore in A, ₹3 crore in B and ₹1 crore in C category, over and above their match fees. — PTI

RAHUL STILL UNLIKELY FOR FIFTH TEST

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Senior India batter K. L. Rahul is unlikely to feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala as he continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps. Rahul became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January but as per BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month.

Rahul has now travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury and with the series in the bag, the Indian team management will not take the risk of playing him in the Dharamsala Test beginning March 7.

He needs to be fully fit before the IPL where he will lead Lucknow Super Giants and is expected to bat in the middle order to bolster his chances of making the India squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean.

There is a possibility that Patidar will make away for Devdutt Padikkal in Dharamsala.

India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested for the Ranchi Test, is expected to lead the attack at the HPCA Stadium. — PTI

JAISWAL RISES TO 12TH IN ICC TEST RANKINGS

Dubai, Feb. 28: India's latest batting sensation Yashasvi Jaiswal advanced towards a top-10 spot in the ICC rankings for Test batters by climbing three spots to 12th while his compatriot Dhruv Jurel leapfrogged 31 places to 69th on Wednesday.

Jaiswal, who started the series in 69th position, continues his ascent to the top after scores of 73 and 37 in the fourth match of India's ICC World Test Championship series against England in Ranchi.

Player of the Match Jurel's scores of 90 and 39 has jumped a whopping 31 places while former England captain Joe Root is back in the top three. Root, a formerly top-ranked batter, struck an unbeaten 122 in the first innings in Ranchi to move up two places to third position. He also moved up three spots to fourth among all-rounders. — PTI

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

Kiran crushes Mumbai team

Bengaluru, Feb. 28: Kiran Navgire and Alyssa Healy unleashed a remarkable assault on Mumbai Indians bowlers to power UP Warriorz to a seven-wicket win in their Women's Premier League match here on Wednesday.

Navgire (57, 31b, 6x4, 4x6) and Healy (33, 29 balls) added 94 runs for the opening wicket stand in just 9.1 overs as the Warriorz eased past the 162-run target in 16.4 overs to hand the defending champions their first defeat of the season.

Mumbai batting suffered in the absence of skipper and in-form batter Harmanpreet Kaur, who is nursing a niggle, as a laboured 55 off 47 balls from Hayley Matthews guided them to 161 for six.

It was a competitive total but the Mumbai bowlers would not have suspected a carnage like the one Navgire and Healy unloaded on them.

Navgire, who is the only Indian women batter to score a 150-plus score in senior T20s, fully exploited her promotion as opener, as Mumbai also suffered from the injury-enforced absence of lead pacer Shabnim Ismail. Healy gave a sound start to UP's chase with two successive boundaries off pacer Nat-Sciver Brunt, and they kept the momentum going from that point.

Navgire, who made a slow start making five off six balls, slipped into her aggressive best against pacer Issy Wong, hammering her for four fours in the third over to collect 16 runs and it was just the beginning of the onslaught.

Navgire, who was

SCOREBOARD

Mumbai Indians: Hayley Matthews c Harris b Gayakwad 55, Yastika Bhatia c Gayakwad b Harris 26, Nat Sciver-Brunt run out 19, Amelia Kerr lbw b Sharma 23, Pooja Vastrakar c Sharma b Ecclestone 18, Issy Wong not out 15, Sajeevan Sajana b Anjali Sarvani 4, Amanjit Kaur not out 0, Extras (w-1) 1. Total (for 6 wickets in 20 overs) 161.

Fall of wickets: 1-50, 2-92, 3-105, 4-134, 5-150, 6-161.

Bowling: Anjali Sarvani 4-0-38-1, Grace Harris 4-0-20-1, Sophie Ecclestone 4-0-25-1, Deepti Sharma 4-0-40-1, Rajeshwari Gayakwad 4-0-38-1.

UP Warriorz: Alyssa Healy c Ishaque b Wong 33, Kiran Navgire st Bhatia b Kerr 57, Tahlia McGrath lbw b Wong 1, Grace Harris not out 27, Deepti Sharma not out 38, Extras (b-1, lb-1, nb-2, w-3) 7. Total (for 3 wickets in 16.3 overs) 163.

Fall of wickets: 1-94, 2-97, 3-98.

Bowling: Nat Sciver-Brunt 3-0-30-0, Saika Ishaque 2-0-17-0, Issy Wong 3-0-30-2, Hayley Matthews 3-0-32-0, Amelia Kerr 4-0-34-1, Pooja Vastrakar 1.3-0-18-0.

dropped on 42 by Wong near the ropes off Matthews, soon completed her fifty in just 25 balls and it came through a thundering six off the West Indian spinner over long-on.

But leg-spinner Amelia Kerr had player of the match Navgire stumped to give a bite of respite to Mumbai, who seemed to have gained a foothold as Wong dismissed both Healy and Tahlia McGrath in the 11th over.

They needed 64 runs at this stage, but Grace Harris (38, 17 balls) and Deepti Sharma (27, 20 balls) made those runs with minimum fuss.

— PTI

HI PRESIDENT DENIES RIFT WITH SECRETARY

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey and secretary general Bhola Nath Singh on Wednesday denied outgoing CEO Elena Norman's assertion of a rift between them, saying that they are "united" and working in the best interest of the sport. Norman resigned on Tuesday and in an interview she alleged that there was factionalism in the body. The 49-year-old Australian suggested that Tirkey and Singh were at loggerheads and also complained of a difficult work environment.

In a joint statement, Tirkey and Singh rejected Norman's claims. "Recently there have been statements by outgoing officials published in the media, claiming that there are divisions within the organisation. This is not correct. We remain united in working together, and as always in the best interest of the sport," the two said.

"Hockey India is an autonomous and professional body dedicated to the development of Indian hockey. Our primary objective as an organisation has been and continues to remain the welfare and progress of the sport of hockey and our athletes."

Norman's resignation was the second blow to HI in the last few days after the Indian women's hockey team coach Janneke Schopman resigned, also complaining of a difficult work environment. — PTI

COPA DEL REY

Mallorca go past Sociedad in semi

San Sebastian (Spain), Feb. 28: Sergi Darder fired the decisive spot-kick as Real Mallorca beat Real Sociedad 5-4 on penalties to book their place in the Copa del Rey final on Tuesday.

With the two sides deadlocked at 1-1 following extra-time in the return leg after a goalless first leg, it was Mallorca who will line-up in the final in Sevilla at La Cartuja stadium on April 6.

The Balearic islanders will face the winner of Thursday's second semi-final - Athletic Bilbao taking a 1-0 lead into their home tie against Atletico Madrid.

After a goalless 140 minutes of play over the two legs, Uruguayan defender Giovanni Gonzalez finally struck to put Mallorca in control in San Sebastian.

Gonzalez latched onto a good cross from Jaume Costa to bury a close-range header past Sociedad's keeper Alex Remiro.

But just as Mallorca's thoughts began to turn to a first appearance in the Cup final in two decades Sociedad were back level with skipper Mikel Oyarzabal blasting home a nifty assist from Brais Mendez inside the box with half an hour of normal time remaining.

That set up a frenetic finale, but neither side was able to break the deadlock, resulting in extra-time, and then spot-kicks. Oyarzabal was first to go only for the player who had kept Sociedad in the semi-final to miss, his shot well anticipated by Mallorca goalkeeper Dominik Greif. — AFP



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (centre) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Luton during the FA Cup fifth round match at the Kenilworth Road Stadium in Luton, England, on Tuesday.

in a single game for City after his heroics in the Champions League last 16 second leg win against RB Leipzig in March 2023. Saluting De Bruyne's role in his demolition of

Luton, Haaland said: "Kevin is massive. It's a pleasure playing with him. We know what we both want from each other."

returning from a foot injury that sidelined him for two months, Haaland added: "I'm getting back to my best. Finally I'm feeling good. "It's an amazing feeling.

● Haaland now has 27 goals in all competitions this season, making a mockery of the critics who took a swipe at him after a misfiring display in a recent draw against Chelsea.

It's coming, we're coming. Exciting times ahead. We are ready to attack."

Guardiola added: "What can I say? Erling is on fire, and Kevin. The connection was perfect. Kevin needs players like Erling and Erling needs players like Kevin."

City have won 14 of their last 15 games in all competitions as they try to emulate last season's Premier League and FA Cup treble. Haaland and De Bruyne are rounding into form in time for Sunday's crucial Premier League showdown against Manchester United at the Etihad Stadium.

City needed just three minutes to take the lead this time as Haaland finished off a flowing move. — AFP