



सत्यमेव जयते

Government of Assam

PM's Vision in Action Empowering Northeast to be the Ashta Lakshmi of India

PM Shri Narendra Modi
will inaugurate, dedicate & lay foundation
for several developmental projects
worth over ₹73,000 cr in Northeast



Towards a Glorious Assam

12 Major Projects

Inauguration • Dedication to the nation •
Foundation Stone laying



Total cost of all projects
₹17,500 crore

Chief Guest

Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

August presence

Shri Gulab Chand Kataria Governor, Assam
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma Chief Minister, Assam

9 March 2024 | 12 Noon | Meleng Meteli, Jorhat, Assam

Inauguration/Dedication to the nation

Foundation Stone Laying

Rural Development project



Griha Pravesh of 5,55,555 PMAY-G houses

Project Cost
₹8,500 crore

Health projects



Under AIFA, Govt of Assam
Tinsukia Medical College and Hospital, Tinsukia

Project Cost
₹620 crore

Hydrocarbon projects



Barauni - Guwahati Natural Gas Pipeline under PM Urja Ganga project

Project Cost
₹4,000 crore



Enhancement of Pumping Capacity of Barauni - Bongaigaon - Guwahati sector of Naharkatiya - Barauni Crude Oil Pipeline

Project Cost
₹600 crore



Replacement of Crude Oil Spur Line from PS-1 Duliajan to Digboi Refinery

Project Cost
₹50 crore

Railway projects



Doubling of Dhupdhara - Chhaygaon section under New Bongaigaon - Goalpara - Kamakhya doubling project
● Length- 34 km

Project Cost
₹810 crore



Doubling of New Bongaigaon - Sorbhog section under New Bongaigaon - Rangiya - Agthori doubling project
● Length- 36 km

Project Cost
₹520 crore

Total cost: ₹15,100 crore



Under PM- DevINE Scheme
Sivasagar Medical College and Hospital, Demow, Sivasagar with 100-seats

Project Cost
₹500 crore



Under PM- DevINE Scheme
Haemato-Lymphoid and Paediatric Oncology Centre at Dr B Borooah Cancer Institute, Guwahati

Project Cost
₹300 crore



Capacity expansion of Digboi Refinery from 0.65 to 1 MTPA

Project Cost
₹800 crore



Guwahati Refinery Expansion from 1.0 to 1.2 MTPA along with installation of CRU

Project Cost
₹500 crore



Revamping/Augmentation of facilities at Betkuchi (Guwahati) Terminal of IOCL

Project Cost
₹300 crore

Total cost: ₹2,400 crore



Watch the event LIVE on



₹100 cut in LPG cylinder price

estimated cost of Rs 12,000 crore. "Today, on Women's Day, our government has decided to reduce LPG cylinder prices by Rs 100. This will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting our nari shakti," Modi said in a post on X.

"By making cooking gas more affordable, we also aim to support the well-being of families and ensure a healthier environment. This is in line with our commitment to empowering women and ensuring 'ease of living' for them," he said. This is the second instance of the government announcing a cut in LPG prices for households in the current fiscal.

In '21, RSS-linked magazine said...

in the Income Tax e-filing portal developed by Infosys, it said: "Infosys is accused of providing assistance to Naxals, Leftists and tukde tukde gang. The issue of Infosys directly or indirectly supporting divisive forces in the country has already come out in the open."

Ukraine to \$80-85 per barrel, giving the OMCs more headroom to accommodate the cut in retail prices. Usually, OMCs bear the financial implications of price cuts, while the subsidy bill is footed by the Centre.

According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), LPG is the primary source of energy for nearly 50 per cent of households in rural areas and about 90 per cent of urban households across the country.

FROM PAGE ONE How Indians landed on Russia frontlines

The Ministry of External Affairs also issued a statement in this regard Friday. "Several Indian nationals have been duped to work with the Russian Army. We have strongly taken up the matter with the Russian government for early discharge of such Indian nationals," MEA's official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

taken/snatched by agents. They were being trained in combat roles and provided with Russian army uniform and batches. Later, these Indian nationals are/were being deployed at front bases in the Russia-Ukraine war zone against their wishes and put their lives in grave danger," it states.

home in Greater Kailash. Ambala-based Adventure Visa Services (OPC) Private Limited, whose director is Manjeet Singh, was incorporated in January 2023. It has an authorised capital of Rs 15 lakh and paid up capital of Rs 2 lakh.

mentioned in the CBI FIR, the flat was found to have been locked. According to his next-door neighbour at the Vasai apartment building, the flat had been occupied by Darugar, his wife and their children.

Faisal Khan aka Baba Vlogs

second Indian casualty in the war, was sent to Russia by Khan. The two are said to have come in contact when Afsan approached Khan after watching a video that he had posted on his YouTube channel, Baba Vlogs. Khan also runs a manpower consultancy firm by the name of Babavlogs, providing services to send people to countries like Dubai, Serbia, Croatia, Germany and Singapore, among many others.

do in Russia are still online and I have not pulled them down as I am not guilty," Khan added. A resident of Mumbai, Khan is a class 6 dropout and claims that his poor financial conditions made him take up work as a fishmonger in Dadar. In 2008, he headed to Dubai, where he worked as a salesman.

Cuts expenses

by Opposition parties, which already had their own insurance schemes and relatively better healthcare infrastructure, have made the most of the Ayushman scheme.

Over half of Ayushman beneficiaries used scheme for pvt care; 53% patients in 5 South states

scheme has significantly reduced their out-of-pocket healthcare spending. The government's own data suggests that average medical expenditure in private hospitals is 6-8 times that in government hospitals.

TOP SPENDING STATES

Table with 4 columns: State, Amount, Pvt hospitals, Govt hospitals. Lists top spending states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu.

STATES WITH MOST BENEFICIARIES

Table with 4 columns: State, Patients, Pvt hospitals, Govt hospitals. Lists states with most beneficiaries like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala.

Post-Covid trend

In the last two financial years, there is a shift towards government facilities among patients accessing treatment under the scheme but not in spending.

Premier League referee

years later, officiated in a Sunday league match. "Both Sunny and Bhupinder were very young when they started refereeing local matches. Due to lack of life experiences, they struggled to cope with the pressure from eager parents as well as fans and went back to playing football at the local level."

Sudha Murty picked for RS

to the Rajya Sabha. Sudha ji's contributions to diverse fields including social work, philanthropy and education have been immense and inspiring. Her presence in the Rajya Sabha is a powerful testament to our 'Nari Shakti'.

The scheme: scale and spread

The cashless and paperless scheme offers up to Rs 5 lakh annually per family for hospitalisations in 27,000 empanelled secondary (hospitals with basic specialties including medicine, gynaecology) and tertiary (super-specialty, like neurosurgery,

More patients availed of private healthcare

It's the private sector that saw a bulk of the 5.47 crore patients over the last five years. Consider some of these findings: While six out of 10 empanelled hospitals are government-run, when it came to hospitalisation, 54 out of 100 patients, or 2.95 crore patients of the total 5.47 crore who availed of the scheme in the last five years, accessed private hospitals for treatment under the scheme.

Cardiology, orthopaedics

healthcare facilities, with the benefits extending nationwide and without restrictions on family size, age, or gender. The scheme covers nearly 2,000 procedures and provides critical illness coverage for patients suffering from cancer, heart and liver diseases, among many more.

Cardiology, orthopaedics

Beneficiary families are identified from the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), based on specific deprivation and occupational criteria across both rural and urban areas. Around 13.44 crore families (65 crore people) are potential beneficiaries of the scheme.

Advertisement for KSG Institute For IAS Exam. Includes text 'It Pays to study with specialists...', 'CLASSROOM FOUNDATION COURSE', and contact details.

VIKSIT BHARAT, VIKSIT NORTHEAST



Dedication to the Nation and Foundation Stone Laying for

**Development Projects under
Infrastructure, Health, Education, Sports,
Har Ghar Jal, Agriculture, Sabroom Land
Port and Unity Malls**
in
Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya,
Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura worth

₹ 55,000 Cr

by

SHRI NARENDRA MODI

Hon'ble Prime Minister

Sela Tunnel
India's highest tunnel
providing all-weather connectivity
to strategic Tawang region



Jal Jeevan Mission
3 lakh Functional Household
Tap Connections in
Arunachal Pradesh

Ekta Mall
to promote One District,
One Product, GI tag Products
and other
indigenous products



Connecting Arunachal
4G connectivity to
321 villages through
170 towers

in august presence of

Lt. Gen. Kaiwalya Trivikram Parnaik
PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd.)
Hon'ble Governor, Arunachal Pradesh

Shri Pema Khandu
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Arunachal Pradesh

Shri Kiren Rijiju
Hon'ble Union Minister,
Earth Sciences

Ms. Anusuiya Uikey
Hon'ble Governor,
Manipur

Shri Phagu Chauhan
Hon'ble Governor,
Meghalaya

Shri La Ganesan
Hon'ble Governor,
Nagaland

Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya
Hon'ble Governor,
Sikkim

Shri Indrasena Reddy Nallu
Hon'ble Governor,
Tripura

Shri N. Biren Singh
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Manipur

Shri Conrad Sangma
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Meghalaya

Shri Neiphiu Rio
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Nagaland

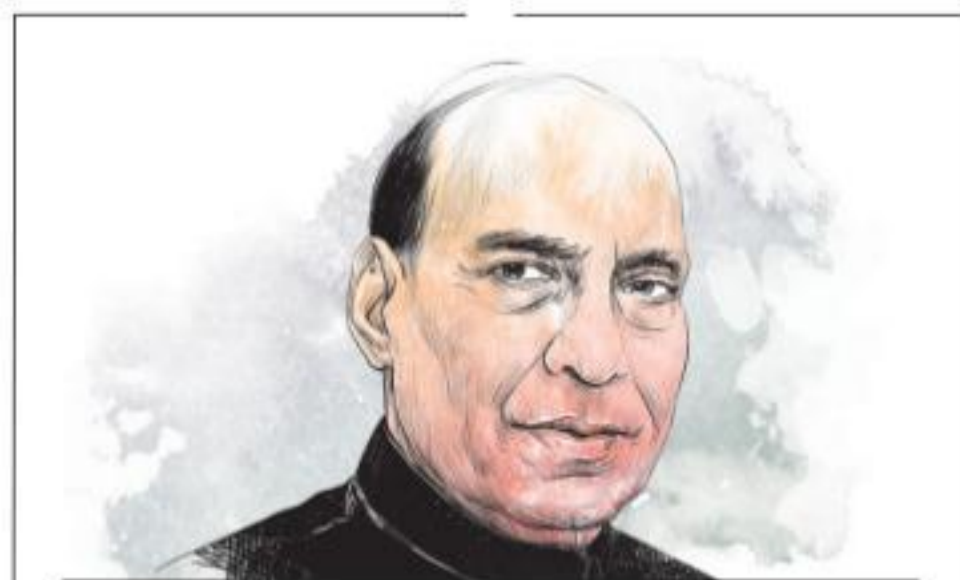
Shri Prem Singh Tamang
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Sikkim

Shri Manik Saha
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Tripura

9th March, 2024 | IG Park, Itanagar | Please be seated by 0800 hrs

Live telecast on DD NEWS Channel number: Tata Play - 502 SD, 501 HD, Airtel - 381, Dish TV - 699, Videocon D2H - 328
DD Arunprabha Channel number: Tata Play - 1986, Airtel - 649, Dish TV - 1514, Videocon D2H - 846, DD Free Dish(DTH) - 11
Time: 10:20 hrs onwards

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



MOVIE MESSAGE

IN BETWEEN his busy schedule ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday found some time to watch the recently released film *Article 370* with his family in a cinema hall in Delhi. The movie presents the events linked to the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. Singh, who watched the movie on International Women's Day, said it also presents a good example of women empowerment. The film shows two women officers leading the government's secret mission to abrogate Article 370.

BOOK OP

AS THE BJP looks to consolidate its OBC votes, a book — *Modi & OBC Politics* — written by Pankaj Choudhary, a law faculty member at Delhi University and the national in-charge of research and policy wing of the BJP's OBC Morcha, has presented the perfect opportunity. The book will be released this Sunday by BJP OBC Morcha president K Laxman, who is also the party's Parliamentary Board member, and BJP national general secretary Arun Singh. It has been published by Prabhat Prakashan. The book's description states that it tells the story of how the Narendra Modi government uplifted the OBCs.

9-YEAR-OLD'S MURDER

Puducherry stands still as DMK, ADMK, Cong unite in protest

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

PUDUCHERRY CAME to a standstill on Friday as political parties and the general public protested the alleged sexual assault and murder of a nine-year-old girl, whose body was found in a drain earlier this week.

DMK, the Congress, Left parties, VCK, and AIADMK all backed a near-total shutdown across the Union Territory to demand justice for the victim and to highlight the issue of drug-related crimes. The girl, who had been missing since March 2, was found dead in a drain near her home on March 5.

Protests had been taking place in Puducherry ever since the initial discovery of her body, with her limbs tied and covered in cloth. There has been speculation about the involvement of drug peddlers and addicts in the murder, prompting calls for a stringent crackdown on such activities.

The day-long bandh on Friday saw the closure of shops and all trade establishments in

Puducherry and neighbouring towns. Public life was disrupted as private buses, autorickshaws, and most commercial activities ceased, although government-run buses continued to operate on a limited basis to facilitate student transportation for exams.

The protests ever since the victim was found dead have been directed towards alleged inaction of the local administration. The subsequent arrest of two men, a 56-year-old and a 19-year-old, on charges of murder and kidnapping, and under the POCSO Act and the SC/ST Act, has done little to quell the public's fury.

Amid escalating tension, Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan visited the victim's family and assured them that a fast-track special court would expedite case proceedings. She also promised the most severe punishment for the culprits, even as calls for her resignation over alleged failures in curbing drug trafficking continued. While Friday's bandh was largely peaceful, protesters expressed their frustration and demanded accountability.

I-T tribunal rejects Cong plea against penalty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE INCOME Tax Appellate Tribunal Friday dismissed the Congress's appeal against imposition of penalty for discrepancies in tax returns for previous years and said it was exploring all legal options and will move the high court against it very soon.

Sources said the tribunal had

dismissed the appeal of the Congress for imposition of penalties of Rs 210 crore by the Income Tax department here Friday.

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the party is exploring all legal options and would move the high court "very soon".

"The BJP government has deliberately chosen the timing of this to coincide with the national elections," Maken told PTI. He said the I-T tribunal order

freezing Congress's funds is "an attack on democracy" as it has come just ahead of the national elections. "How can one expect fair elections in such a situation when funds to the tune of Rs 270 crore have been freed or taken away by the Income Tax authorities from Congress party's accounts," he asked.

Congress's legal cell head Vivek Tankha said the tribunal has not even followed its own past prece-

dents in this regard and the party will be approaching the high court soon. "We are disappointed with the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal order. We will be moving the high court very soon. They have not followed their own past precedents in granting relief on payment of 20 per cent penalty and that too to a national party which is now on the verge of contesting national elections, which is going to be notified soon," Tankha said.

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Held talks on Chabahar port, humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, says India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

INDIA FRIDAY said the official delegation to Kabul met "senior members of the Afghan authorities", and had discussions on India's "humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan" and also discussed "use of Chabahar port by Afghan traders".

The Indian statement came after the Indian official delegation met Taliban's Foreign minister Amir Khan Mottaqi Thursday, in what is New Delhi's latest direct and official engagement with the Taliban leadership in Kabul.

The Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Friday, "An Indian delegation led by Joint Secretary (PAI), Ministry of External Affairs is on a visit to

Afghanistan. As you are aware, India opened its Technical Mission in Kabul in June 2022 and since then the Mission is facilitating and coordinating our ongoing humanitarian assistance endeavours."

"The delegation held meetings with senior members of the Afghan authorities. The delegation also met former President Mr Hamid Karzai, UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] officials and members of the Afghan business community. The delegation held discussions on India's humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and also discussed use of Chabahar port by Afghan traders," the spokesperson said. "India has historical and civilisational ties with the Afghan people and these longstanding linkages will continue to guide our approach," he said.

Global South believes in India; China doesn't take part in meets: Jaishankar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TOKYO, MARCH 8

HIGHLIGHTING INDIA'S leadership in the Global South, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said the 125 countries of the platform placed their trust in India and that China skipped the two meetings convened by India last year to listen to their concerns.

Addressing the Nikkei Forum on the India-Japan partnership here, Jaishankar said that countries of the Global South feel for each other on several issues.

"...This feeling has been intensified by Covid because many countries of the Global South felt they were the last in the line to get the vaccine. They even felt at the time when India became G20 President that their concerns were not even on the agenda. We did two meetings last year on the voice of the Global South because we wanted to listen to these 125

countries and then put before the G20 a set of issues which were their collective views," said the Foreign Minister. "Within Asia and Africa, Global South is very popular. They know exactly what is happening, who's speaking up for them, and how their issues are getting on the table...The two summits which we convened last year, I don't believe China was present," he said.



EAM S Jaishankar with Japanese PM Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on Friday. PTI

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Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

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Advertisement No. 01,02,03/2024 Date: 09.03.2024

EMPLOYMENT NOTIFICATION FOR FACULTY POSITIONS: PROFESSOR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Online applications are invited through CU-Chayan portal from Eligible Indian Citizens and candidates possessing Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) for appointment to the posts of **Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor** in the Academic Pay Level 14, 13A and 10 of 7th Central Pay Commission Pay Scales, in various Departments of the University on direct recruitment. The important dates are as follows:

Date of Short advertisement 09.03.2024
Date of detailed advertisement in the University
Website 09.03.2024
Date of online application (CU-Chayan) 26.03.2024
Last date of online application (CU-Chayan) 25.04.2024
For details, please visit the University website www.cuo.ac.in
Sd/- Registrar

SAD-BJP alliance emotion of masses from ground: Jakhar

RAAKHI JAGGA LUDHIANA, MARCH 8

PUNJAB BJP chief Sunil Jakhar Friday set the political circles abuzz saying that an alliance between the saffron party and the Shiromani Akali Dal "is the emotion of the masses from the ground". He, however, added that the BJP is preparing for all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab. "We are ready for all the 13 seats but it is the emotion of the masses from the ground that an alliance (with Shiromani Akali Dal) should happen. But I have never given any suggestions to the high command nor have any discussions held with me on this matter," said Jakhar. He was talking to the reporters after flagging off 'Viksit Bharat Modi ki guarantee' video vans, seeking people's suggestions from across the state for preparing the ruling party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections. These vans will gather suggestions from the people for the party's "sankalp pa-

tra" (manifesto), Jakhar said. The BJP state chief also battled for strengthening the regional parties. "I strongly believe that regional parties should be strengthened in every state as they are the voice of the people. The minority community tag is often applied on Sikh community and I feel that there should be a party for raising their voice," said Jakhar. The over a century-old Akali Dal is the oldest regional party in Punjab and has often claimed to be the 'sole representative' of the Sikhs. The Akali Dal had walked out of the NDA in September 2020 over the now-repealed farm laws. Asked if an alliance will be beneficial for the BJP, Jakhar said it was not a question of benefit of any individual party, but "it is always about Punjab and its people".

Jakhar's remarks come ahead of BJP National president JP Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's expected visit to Punjab to attend an event to mark the first death anniversary of former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal at latter's native village Badal.

FIRST NATIONAL CREATORS' AWARDS

PM gives maximum likes to new-era influencers

DIVYAA NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

INVITING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on to the stage to present the first National Creators' Awards, podcaster Raj Shamani said to the hall packed with social media influencers. "Thank you stars he is not a content creator, because had he been one, our shops would have been shut."

"His reels go viral, his tweets become trends and his slogans become hashtags, he is the OG (a casual term used for someone authentic yet exceptional) influencer of the influencers," said Shamani, a motivational speaker with two million followers on Instagram.

Over the next two hours of the event Friday morning, as the Prime Minister presented awards to 21 content creators, it was clear that formal structure had to give way to irreverence. By interacting with influencers individually before giving them awards, PM Modi also gave them ample content for their reels -- full of humour, wit, and repartee, even personal anecdotes -- the kind of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

stuff that works well online. With every award winner having a million followers at least, the content generated at the event -- with Modi in the frame -- would be viewed by crores in the days to come.

On stage with YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, who got 'Disruptor of the Year' award, PM Modi shared a friendly banter. "Will you give a fitness mantra to people?" Modi asked him, to

which he replied, "We should do yoga and meditation." Responding to this, the PM said, "Then they (people) will say that he is sharing Modiji's idea, and that you have become a BJP wala."

The conversation ended with Allahbadia, who runs a YouTube channel called BeerBicepsGuy, and has interviewed several Union Ministers in the recent past, including SJaishankar and Piyush Goyal, telling Modi, "Aapke saath

podcast karne ka mood ho raha hai (I feel like making a podcast with you)." The PM, in turn, asked him to talk about the importance of sleep in his future shows.

In a by-the-way fashion, all of them were nudged towards issues such as insomnia, mental health, environment, health and nutrition, women empowerment, culture and spirituality to work on for their future content videos. Spiritual orator Jaya Kishori,

who was awarded 'Best Creator for Social Change', was asked by Modi to dispel the notion that spirituality means renunciation; while travel blogger Kamiya Jani was asked to highlight local products also, while talking about the main tourist attractions in a city.

When Jani asked if she should talk about Lakshadweep or Dwarka (two places the PM visited recently) in her next blog, the PM jokingly said even as Dwarka is quite deep down, and very tough, they would discuss this in detail some other time.

While awarding Swachhata Ambassador award to Malhar Kalambe, who has collaborated with celebrities on cleanliness campaigns and requested the PM to join him in a swachhata drive, tongue in cheek Modi said, "Is chunao mein bhi safai hone wali hai (This election, too, will see some cleaning)."

Talking about the venue, Bharat Mandapam, the PM said the National Creators have assembled at the same spot today where world leaders gave direction to the future at the G20 Summit last year. FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

In Assam, Modi to inaugurate Rs 18K cr projects

Guwahati: PM Narendra Modi arrived in Assam Friday during his two-day visit to the state and Arunachal Pradesh.

After his arrival at Tezpur, Modi travelled to Golaghat district in a chopper from where he participated in a 16-km-long roadshow to Kaziranga for an overnight stay. He is scheduled to experience a safari there Saturday morning. Modi will also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of several development projects worth Rs 18,000 crore undertaken by Assam and the Centre.

Later Saturday, he is scheduled to inaugurate the Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh -- the world's longest twin tunnels built at an altitude of over 13,000 feet -- which is aimed at providing all-weather connectivity to the Tawang region. There, he is also scheduled to launch the Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialisation Scheme with a financial outlay of over Rs 10,000 crore. ENS

ODISHA ASSEMBLY POLLS

BJD-BJP talks hit stalemate: Naveen wants 100+ seats

SUJIT BISOYI BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 8

THE SEAT-SHARING talks between the BJD and BJP continue to hang, with sources talking of hard bargaining on both sides, especially over Assembly seats, with the state seeing simultaneous elections along with the Lok Sabha.

The Naveen Patnaik-led BJD reportedly does not want anything less than 100 of the total 147 Assembly seats. For the Lok Sabha, there is an overall agreement that the BJP will contest as much as two-third of the seats.

Senior BJD leaders V K Pandian and Pranab Prakash Das, who had flown to Delhi earlier this week for the seat-sharing talks, returned to Bhubaneswar Friday. BJP Odisha

leaders, including state unit president Manmohan Samal, who were earlier asked not to leave Delhi by the party, also landed in the state in the evening.

Sources said that Odisha BJP leaders are not agreeable to the BJD claiming the lion's share of the Assembly seats, and instead want the same arrangement as existed between the two parties in 2000-09, when the BJD-BJP share was 84-63, respectively.

State BJP leaders, who have been taking on the BJD as the main opposition in Odisha, are trying to persuade the central leaders that there is strong anti-incumbency against the ruling state party on the ground, and that the BJD would do well even on its own. Hence, they argue, first contesting in an alliance and then agreeing to less than



BJD chief Naveen Patnaik

50 Assembly seats would not fare well for the party.

Speaking to reporters after landing in Bhubaneswar, Samal claimed there had been no discussion on an alliance at all, and that the BJP "would fight on its own". "We had gone to Delhi to discuss our election strategy with the top leadership. The meeting was to discuss preparations for forming a govern-

ment at the Centre as well as in Odisha," the state BJP chief said.

BJP Odisha unit vice-president Prithviraj Harichandan said the state leaders believed the party would fare better if it fought alone, but they would accept whatever the central leadership decides.

BJD sources, however, spoke of multiple rounds of discussions with central BJP leaders, and said talks over an alliance and seat-sharing would continue.

"When it comes to the Lok Sabha, the two parties have more or less agreed to the BJP fighting 14 of the 21 seats, leaving 7 for the BJD. There may be some issues, such as the BJD looking to contest the Bhubaneswar and Puri Lok Sabha seats, but these can be sorted out. However, there will

be no compromise over the Assembly polls," a BJD source said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJD had won 12 of the 21 seats, the BJP 8 and Congress 1. In the Rajya Sabha, the BJD has 9 MPs, and helped the BJP's Ashwini Vaishnaw get re-elected recently.

But in the Assembly polls, the BJD dominance has been total, with the party giving specific examples of constituencies and of Naveen Patnaik's continuing popularity, to explain its push for not less than 100 seats. In 2019, the party had won 112 of the 146 seats.

"It would be difficult for the party to manage if it contests less than 100 seats. There will be rebel candidates, and it will cost the party," a BJD leader, on the condition of anonymity, said.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

UNION COOPERATION Minister Amit Shah Friday said that the Centre has decided to ensure formation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in every village by 2027.

Addressing an event, Shah said the Centre has introduced 20 new activities to be associated with PACS, enabling them to generate profits. The computerization of PACS has opened up many possibilities for their development, he said. Shah launched the National Cooperative Database and released the 'National Cooperative Database 2023: A Report'. The database aims to identify and address the gaps through a comprehensive analysis.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

He said the work on the National Cooperative Database has been carried out in 3 phases. In the first phase, mapping of approximately 2.64 lakh societies in three sectors, namely Primary Agricultural Credit Societies, Dairy, and Fisheries, was completed, he

said. In the second, data from various National Federations, State Federations, State Cooperative Banks (SCB), District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCB), Urban Cooperative Banks (UCB), Rural Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDB), Primary Agricultural and Rural Development Banks (PCARDB), cooperative sugar mills, district unions, and multi-state cooperative societies (MSCS) were collected/mapped, he said.

In the third, data mapping of all remaining 8 lakh primary cooperative societies in other sectors was carried out, he said.

After this, it was revealed there are over 8 lakh registered societies in the country, which are connected to over 30 crore citizens, he said.

NIA releases CCTV clips of Bengaluru cafe blast suspect

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU, MARCH 8

THE NIA, investigating the blast at The Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru on March 1, Friday released two CCTV clips of the suspect as part of a request for information from the citizens on the suspect.

The clips showed the suspect leaving the cafe after placing the bomb that went off at 12.56 pm, injuring nine people. "NIA seeks citizen cooperation in identifying the suspect linked to the #RameshwaramCafeBlastCase or email to info.bnr.nia@gov.in with any information. Your identity will remain confidential."

#BengaluruCafeBlast," the NIA said on social media.

In the first video provided by NIA, the suspect is seen on a state bus (KA 57 F 4233) which he boarded at 2.04 pm, after changing his clothes.

The suspect wearing a new cap, new mask and t-shirt initially sits in a middle seat next to another passenger but moves to the rear of the bus at 2.12 pm. The suspect travels on the bus for about 90 minutes and disembarks at 3.40 pm at the final stop near the Tumakuru road. He is seen napping during the journey without the mask and the cap.

The second video is of the suspect at the Ballari bus stand at 9 pm on March 1, around 8

hours after the IED blast. He is seen moving around the bus stand. The suspect is reported to have changed 10 buses during his journey to plant the bomb and for his escape.

The NIA is questioning members of a Ballari module that it busted in December 2023 for possible clues on the identity of the suspect. Police are yet to ascertain the direction in which the suspect went after being last seen at the Ballari bus stand on March 1 night.

Police sources said the probe is yet to ascertain details of the identity and location of the suspect and had gathered only basic aspects of the identity.

2 DANICS officers suspended for 'unproductive expenditure'

New Delhi: The Centre has suspended two DANICS officers in connection with alleged "unproductive expenditure" on advertisements by the Delhi government, officials said. They said Shamim Akhtar and Manoj Dwivedi previously worked as the director of the Directorate of Information and Publicity, Delhi government.

In separate orders issued on Friday, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said Akhtar and Dwivedi were suspended with immediate effect by the president in exercise of the powers conferred by the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1965. PTI

Electoral bonds: SC to hear on March 11 SBI plea seeking time to disclose details

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE SUPREME Court will hear on March 11 an application by the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking extension of time till June 30 to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties before the scheme was scrapped last month.

The five-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, will also hear a separate plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) that has sought initiation of contempt action against the SBI alleging it "willfully and deliberately" disobeyed the apex court's direction to submit details of the contributions made to political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission by March 6.

The top court had struck down the electoral bond scheme on February 15 and asked the SBI to furnish the details of the bonds purchased since April 12, 2019, to the ECI by March 6.

But in an application filed on March 4, the SBI sought time until June 30 to furnish the details, saying it is a "time consuming exercise" as there are "certain practical difficulties with the decoding exercise... due to the stringent measures undertaken to ensure that the identity of the donors was kept anonymous".

On March 6, ADR filed a contempt petition in the court terming the SBI's request for more time as "mala fide and" stating that it "demonstrates a willful and deliberate disobedience and defiance of the judgement passed by the Constitution Bench". The NGO contended that SBI "has deliberately filed" the application "at the last moment in order to ensure that the details of donors and the amount of donations are not disclosed to the public before the upcoming Lok Sabha elections" and that it "neither discloses the progress made so far and steps taken to comply with the judgement... nor it shows even part-compliance of the judgement".

HOLI FESTIVAL SPECIAL TRAINS-2024
For the convenience of the passengers Northern Railway will run the following Holi Festival Special Trains during the upcoming Holi festival season. The details are as under:-

04033/04034 New Delhi-Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan-New Delhi Express Special (weekly)	
Train No. 04033	Train No. 04034
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
11:10 --- 13:45	New Delhi 09:30 --- 20:55
Days of Run : 04033 Ex. New Delhi from 22.03.2024 to 29.03.2024 (Friday) and 04034 Ex. Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan from 23.03.2024 to 30.03.2024 (Saturday); Accommodation : 3 Tier AC Economy and Sleeper. Stoppages: Sonipat, Panipat, Karnal, Kurukshetra, Ambala Cantt., Pathankot Cantt., Ludhiana Cantt., Jalandhar Cantt. and Jammu Tawi Stations.	

04075/04076 New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi Express Special (Bi-Weekly)	
Train No. 04075	Train No. 04076
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
11:40 --- 23:45	New Delhi 09:30 --- 20:25
Days of Run : 04075 Ex. New Delhi from 24.03.2024 to 31.03.2024 (Wed, Sun) and 04076 Ex. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra from 25.03.2024 to 01.04.2024 (Thu, Mon). Accommodation : 3 Tier AC Economy and Sleeper. Stoppages: Sonipat, Panipat, Karnal, Kurukshetra Jn., Ambala Cantt., Ludhiana, Jalandhar Cantt., Pathankot Cantt., Jammu Tawi and Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan Stations.	

04080/04079 Delhi Jn.-Varanasi-Delhi Jn. Express Special (Tri-Weekly)	
Train No. 04080	Train No. 04079
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
09:45 --- 19:30	Delhi Jn. 08:50 --- 18:20
Days of Run : 04080 Ex. Delhi Jn. from 21.03.2024 to 30.03.2024 (Mon, Thu, Sat) and 04079 Ex. Varanasi from 22.03.2024 to 31.03.2024 (Tue, Fri, Sun). Accommodation : 3 Tier AC Economy and Sleeper. Stoppages: Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Alamnagar, Lucknow and Maa Belha Devi Dham Stations.	

01654/01653 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi-Varanasi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Express Special (Weekly)	
Train No. 01654	Train No. 01653
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
23:55 --- 23:35	Varanasi 11:25 --- 05:30
Days of Run : 01654 Ex. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra from 24.03.2024 to 31.03.2024 (Sunday) and 01653 Ex. Varanasi from 26.03.2024 to 02.04.2024 (Tuesday). Accommodation : 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC Economy, General and Sleeper. Stoppages: Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan, Jammu Tawi, Pathankot Cantt., Jalandhar Cantt., Ludhiana, Ambala Cantt., Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Alamnagar, Lucknow, Rae Bareilly and Maa Belha Devi Dham Station.	

02371/02372 Howrah-Banaras-Howrah Express Special	
Train No. 02371	Train No. 02372
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
21:15 21:20	Varanasi 23:45 23:50
21:45 ---	Banaras --- 23:05
Days of Run : 02371 Ex. Howrah and 02372 Ex. Banaras on 23.03.2024 (Saturday). Accommodation : 1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General. Stoppages: Bardhaman, Durgapur, Asansol, Chittaranjan, Madhupur, Jaidighi, Hajha, Kiul Jn., Mokama, Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Patna Jn., Ara, Buxar, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay Jn. and Varanasi Stations.	

04064/04063 Delhi Jn.-Tundla-Delhi Jn. Express Special (Daily)	
Train No. 04064	Train No. 04063
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
13:20 ---	Delhi Jn. 22:15 ---
17:15 ---	Tundla --- 17:45
Days of Run : 04064 Ex. Delhi Jn. and 04063 Ex. Tundla from 21.03.2024 to 24.03.2024 (Daily). Accommodation : General. Stoppages: Delhi Shahdara, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Dadri, Kurja, Aligarh and Hathras Stations.	

04923/04924 Saharanpur-Ambala Cantt.-Saharanpur Express Special (Daily)	
Train No. 04923	Train No. 04924
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
06:45 ---	Saharanpur 22:30 ---
06:45 ---	Ambala Cantt. --- 20:22
Days of Run : 04923 Ex. Saharanpur and 04924 Ex. Ambala Cantt. from 21.03.2024 to 24.03.2024 (Daily). Accommodation : General. Stoppages: Pilkhni, Sarsawa, Kalanaur, Jagadhari, Jagadhari Workshop, Darazpur, Mustafabad, Barara, Tandwal, Kesri and Dukheri Station.	

04051/04052 Delhi Jn.-Panipat-Delhi Jn. Express Special (Daily)	
Train No. 04051	Train No. 04052
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
12:10 --- 10:00	Delhi Jn. 15:40 ---
12:10 ---	Panipat --- 13:10
Days of Run : 04051 Ex. Delhi Jn. and 04052 Ex. Panipat from 21.03.2024 to 24.03.2024 (Daily). Accommodation : General. Stoppages: Subzi Mandi, Narela, Sonipat and Samalkha Stations.	

04249/04250 Varanasi-Lucknow-Varanasi Express Special (Daily)	
Train No. 04249	Train No. 04250
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
06:25 ---	Varanasi 22:35 ---
12:25 ---	Lucknow --- 16:35
Days of Run : 04249 Ex. Varanasi and 04250 Ex. Lucknow from 21.03.2024 to 24.03.2024 (Daily). Accommodation : General. Stoppages: Jaunpur, Shahganj, Akbarpur, Ayodhya Dham and Barabanki Stations.	

04048/04047 New Delhi-Agra Cantt.-New Delhi Express Special (Daily)	
Train No. 04048	Train No. 04047
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
11:15 --- 06:20	New Delhi 18:45 ---
11:15 ---	Agra Cantt. --- 14:30
Days of Run : 04048 Ex. New Delhi and 04047 Ex. Agra Cantt. from 21.03.2024 to 24.03.2024 (Daily). Accommodation : General. Stoppages: Faridabad, Palwal and Mathura Stations.	

For any kind of information, passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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बिहार सरकार
गया नगर निगम
अल्पकालिन पुनर्निविदा ई-कोटेशन आमंत्रण सूचना सं०- 17/2023-24
(ई-टेंडरिंग द्वारा <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)

- विज्ञापन दाता का पदनाम एवं पता : नगर आयुक्त, गया नगर निगम
- निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना निगम की तिथि : दिनांक- 07.03.2023
- निविदा प्रारम्भ करने की तिथि/समय : दिनांक- 19.03.2024 को 10:00 बजे से (on website <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)
- प्री विड मीटिंग का समय/स्थान/तिथि : समय 11:00 बजे, स्थान-कार्यालय, गया नगर निगम दिनांक- 21.03.2024
- संवेदक द्वारा निविदा अपलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि/समय : दिनांक- 25.03.2024 के 15:00 बजे तक (on website <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)
- (a) तकनीकी बीड खोलने की अंतिम तिथि/समय : दिनांक- 28.03.2024 के 15:00 बजे तक (on website <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)
- (b) वित्तीय बीड खोलने की तिथि/समय : तकनीकी बीड के निष्पादन के बाद (on website <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)
- प्रत्येक रुप के लिए कोटेशन दर का 2 (दो) % सुरक्षित जमा राशि केवल बैंक नॉटरी के रूप में दिनांक 19.01.24 के अपराह्न 03:00 बजे के पूर्व कार्यालय गया नगर निगम में जमा करना होगा। प्रत्येक रुप के लिए परिमाण विपत्र का मूल्य 10000/- जमा करना होगा। राबि ही Bid Processing Fee (as per eproc) जमा करना होगा। जमा करने की की अंतिम तिथि/समय एवं स्थान :- दिनांक 28.03.2024 को 15:00 बजे तक।
 - मुख्य अभियंता, बुढको, राजाजुल, घटना।
 - अधीक्षण अभियंता, मगध प्रमण्डल, गया।
 - नगर आयुक्त, गया नगर निगम कार्यालय, गया।
- कार्य का विवरण

क्र.सं	नगर निकाय का नाम	कार्य का नाम	कार्य अवधि
1	गया नगर निगम	Implementation of Biometric/Facial Based Attendance Management System under GMC Gaya	03 Year
02	गया नगर निगम	Scanning, Digitization and Document Management System and Supply, Installation of Boom Barrier Integration with Required Software under GMC Gaya	01 Year

10. विस्तृत निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना विभागीय वेबसाइट <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in> अथवा www.state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar में देखा जा सकता है।
PR- 19184 (B & C) 2023-24
नगर आयुक्त
गया नगर निगम
नरो से बनायी सूची है, क्योंकि परिवार जरूरी है

Jail official held after gadgets found in Waris Punjab De inmates' cell

SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, MARCH 8

THE SUPERINTENDENT of Dibrugarh Central Jail, where Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh and his associates are lodged for nearly a year, has been arrested after contraband items, including a smartphone, were found in their cell last month.

Superintendent Nipen Das was arrested Friday after being taken into police custody Thursday and the charges against him include a section of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for advocating, abetting, advising or inciting the commission of "any unlawful activity".

On February 17, the jail staff seized a smartphone with a SIM card, a keypad phone, a TV remote with keyboard, a spy-cam pen, pen drives, Bluetooth headphones, speakers, and a smart watch from the NSA cell housing Singh and nine of his associates.

On Friday, Dibrugarh Superintendent of Police V V Rakesh Reddy said the investigation into the source of these unauthorised items revealed a "nexus" between jail officials and the detainees.

In Manipur, Army JCO abducted, rescued hours later

SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, MARCH 8

A JUNIOR Commissioned Officer (JCO) with the Army, who was abducted from his residence in Manipur's valley district of Thoubal on Friday morning, was rescued around 6:30 pm and taken to Waikhong police station in Thoubal district, sources said.

The identity of the perpetrators and the cause for the abduction remained unknown at the time of the filing of the report.

According to sources, the JCO was on leave and at home when he was abducted and taken away in a vehicle around 9 am on Friday. Security forces conducted a coordinated search operation to rescue the abducted

officer, sources said.

Just 10 days ago, Manipur's valley districts were rocked by discontent from police forces after an Additional Superintendent of Police was abducted and his house in Imphal attacked by assailants identified as members of Arambai Tenggol. An inspector was also abducted with him. The two policemen were eventually rescued but sustained injuries and had to be hospitalised. The incident prompted the administrations of various valley districts to requisition central paramilitary forces and the Army to assist the police with the law and order situation.

Manipur IGP I K Muivah had also warned that such incidents would necessitate the presence of central forces.

Eight Myanmar nationals repatriated

Guwahati: Eight Myanmar nationals were repatriated by the Manipur government on Friday, and a total of 77 people are expected to be deported in the coming days. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh announced this saying, "First batch of Myanmar nationals who entered India illegally deported today. Although

India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has given shelter and aid to those fleeing the crisis in Myanmar on humanitarian grounds with a systematic approach."

These 77 people include 51 women and five children, and they are all to be deported by March 11. **ENS**

3 observation home employees get life term for custodial murder of juvenile in Mehsana

PARIMAL DABHI
GANDHINAGAR, MARCH 8

A HOUSE-MASTER and two guards of an observation home in Gujarat's Mehsana have been convicted and sentenced to life for the brutal custodial murder of a 17-year-old Dalit juvenile after his failed attempt to escape in February 2020.

A special Atrocity Court that convicted the three accused also held the state government indirectly responsible for the murder and ordered it to pay Rs 1.50 lakh in compensation to the parents of the deceased for violation of his human rights.

As government-appointed officials have caused the death of the juvenile...by brutally beating him, the government becomes indirectly responsible for the same," the court recorded in its judgment.

The court of Special Atrocity and Additional Sessions Judge C. M. Pavar, in an order dated March 7, also directed the three convicts to pay Rs 2 lakh penalty.

Apart from murder and allied charges, the three accused — Vishnu Prajapati, Akshay Chaudhary and Kanu Chaudhary — have also been convicted under the provisions of the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act as the deceased juvenile was a Dalit.

The deceased juvenile was lodged at the Observation Home and Safety Home in Mehsana from where he escaped on February 3, 2020.

He was caught by the Naroda police on February 12, 2020 and handed over to the Observation Home the same day.

According to the case, the now convicted staff mercilessly assaulted the minor with wooden and fibre clubs between 10:20 pm on February 12 and 4:00 am on February 13, 2020,

following which he died of hemorrhagic shock.

The court stated in its judgment that the assault was recorded by the CCTV cameras installed inside the Observation Home. In reference to the CCTV footage, the court recorded that after beating the juvenile, the convicts had abandoned the latter in a corner on the ground floor. When the juvenile, in extreme pain, crawled to the office seeking help, "one of the convicts kicked him to the corner".

Additional Public Prosecutor Ashok Makwana said that in all, the deceased juvenile had sustained 26 injuries on his body.

17 children suffer electric burns during Shivratri event in Kota

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
JAIPUR, MARCH 8

SEVENTEEN CHILDREN and a woman suffered electric burns on Friday during Shivratri festivities in Rajasthan's Kota. One of them is critical, officials said.

"The children were carrying a flag hoisted on an iron rod in a procession. The rod came in touch with a high-tension wire and children along with a woman suffered electric burns. All them were taken to a hospital. One of the children has suffered around 70% burns and is said to be critical," said Arvind Bhardhwaj, the Circle Inspector of Kunhari police station, where the incident took place.

The children admitted to Kota's MBS Hospital Kota are between 9 and 16 years, officials said. On receiving information, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla along with the collector Ravindra Goswami reached the hospital. Rajasthan Energy Minister Heeralal Nagar also paid a visit to the injured.

"It is a sad incident. There will be an investigation and everyone will get the best treatment possible. One child is serious. If there is a need for a referral to any other hospital, we will provide that," Birla said.

'Sorry Papa, JEE nahi ho payega': 16-yr-old ends life

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
JAIPUR, MARCH 8

A 16-YEAR-OLD boy preparing for JEE allegedly committed suicide in Rajasthan's Kota on Thursday night — the fifth student suicide in the coaching hub this year.

According to the police, the boy hailed from Bihar's Bhagalpur and had been living in Kota for the last one year.

His body was discovered when the landlord sensed a foul smell coming from his room on

Friday morning. When the boy did not answer the landlord's calls, the door was forcibly opened and the body found.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Dharamveer Singh of Kota said, "A two-line suicide note was recovered which states, 'Sorry Papa. Mere se JEE nahi ho payega. I quit. (Sorry Papa, I won't be able to crack JEE).'"

According to the police, the boy consumed a poisonous substance that emits a strong smell, which caught the landlord's attention. A used and an unused bottle of the substance was re-

covered near the body along with the suicide note, police said.

Police said the boy had skipped coaching tests conducted on January 29 and February 19 this year. He was supposed to take his class XII board exams this year.

The boy's father is a businessman in West Bengal and his mother and younger brother live in Bhagalpur. The family is yet to arrive at Kota and until then, the body has been kept at the mortuary, police said.

As many as 26 students had died by suicide in Kota in 2023.

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• BJP, TDP on cusp of poll deal

nine. For the Assembly elections, which will be held simultaneously, the BJP initially demanded 15 but could make some compromises. But for the Lok Sabha polls, it is insisting on more Lok Sabha seats as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set the party a target of winning 370 seats. For the NDA as a whole, the target is winning 400-plus seats.

A source in the TDP said Naidu does not want to completely give away the party's stake in the Lok Sabha as "he thinks it is very important to have a respectable number of seats in the Lower House of Parliament" for the stability of the alliance. A BJP functionary said the party was keen to get its erstwhile partner back in the NDA as well as "increase the number of candidates who contest and win on the lotus symbol".

Naidu, Pawan Kalyan, and the BJP leadership held discussions past midnight on Wednesday too. "The agreement is more or less done. But a formal announcement will be after the final round of talks today," said a source.

The TDP broke its alliance with the BJP in 2018 over Andhra Pradesh not receiving special category status from the Centre. Despite Naidu's repeated attempts to revive the ties after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had been dragging its feet over allowing the TDP back into the NDA. One of its main reasons was its "friendly partnership" with Andhra's ruling YSR

Congress Party (YSRCP) and Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The BJP made several attempts to reach out to Jagan and get the YSRCP to join the NDA but the Andhra CM has resisted those efforts so far. The BJP offered Cabinet berths to the YSRCP in 2021 in an attempt to bring the party over to the NDA, but at the time Jagan maintained that he "would remain friendly towards the Centre and extend issue-based backing to it".

Last year, the BJP lost both its only southern stronghold Karnataka and failed to stop the Congress from coming to power in Telangana despite a high-decibel campaign. Having saturated itself in the Hindi heartland states and Gujarat, where it has won all in previous elections and is in a commanding position this time, the only way it can increase its tally this time is by making gains in the southern states. The party has officially joined hands with Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka and in Tamil Nadu it is attempting to bring back the AIADMK into the NDA.

In Odisha, the BJP has almost finalised the deal with former ally Biju Janata Dal (BJD). Sources said the BJP could contest 14-15 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats from Odisha and about 40 of 147 Assembly constituencies. The final announcement on this alliance is delayed because of differences over some Lok Sabha seats — both the number of seats and candidates — said sources.

• Delhi cop kicks men during namaz

video clip also showed two other policemen walking behind Tomar, shouting at the devotees to fold their mats and leave the spot.

According to some eyewitnesses who were among those offering namaz, the crowd of devotees had spilled over from the mosque to the road outside, but were not blocking traffic.

About 10 minutes after the prayers started, Tomar reportedly approached the devotees, kicking some of them, and shouting at them to leave the spot, as seen in the video clip.

"We were not blocking the road... only a narrow pathway beside the mosque was being used to read the namaz, and traffic was flowing smoothly as it does every Friday," said one of the devotees.

"We had just spread our mats and sat down to read the namaz when the incident took place... police personnel approached us from behind and forcefully removed us, although the road was not blocked... there is a layer of police security (deployed) from the nearby police post every Friday when we offer namaz, but this is the first time this has happened," said another person who did not want to be named.

After the incident, a crowd gathered outside the police post, demanding action against Tomar.

"Action has been taken against the police officer in the video. He has been suspended. Further action will be taken. The local residents joined us in explaining to the crowd that police have taken action, and announcements were made from mosques," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Manoj Kumar Meena.

While no official complaint has been filed, police said disciplinary proceedings would be initiated against the SI. Police also said they are checking if any complaints have been registered against Tomar in the past. The SI was posted at the Inderlok chowki for the past two months.

Security was stepped up in the area, including deployment of riot-control vehicles and paramilitary forces with DCP-level and Joint CP-level officers being sent to maintain law and order.

Some of the devotees were seen making announcements on a microphone, asking the crowd to maintain peace in the area.

"The people of the North-East Delhi district have always supported the police in maintaining law and order. We condemn the Inderlok incident. In view of this, strict instructions have been given to all the police personnel. There is an appeal to all the people to maintain social harmony and not pay attention to rumours," DCP, Northeast, Joy Tirkey, said in a social media post on X.

Transforming Maharashtra...

Narendra Modi Prime Minister
Eknath Shinde Chief Minister

- Hindu Hriday Samrat Bala Saheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samridhi Highway:**
 - 701 km long highway directly connecting 10 districts.
 - The 625 km long Highway opened for transportation after the inauguration of the third phase from Bhavir to Igatpuri.
 - Nagpur to Mumbai journey now in just 8 hours.
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri - Navha Sheva Atal Setu:**
 - The 22 km long Sea Link is the longest in the country which will boost development by connecting Mumbai with Navi Mumbai.
 - Huge cut-off in travelling time.
 - Emergency Lanes on both the sides of 6 Lane Sea Link.
- Coastal Road (South):**
 - Work of Coastal Road in Mumbai near completion. One lane will be opened.
 - Length of road 10.58 kilometers. Number of roads on both sides of the lane is 8. (Six in the Tunnel).
 - 70 percent of the time and 34 percent of the fuel to be saved due to Coastal Road.
 - Gestion of traffic to be lessen along with decline in noise and air pollution.
- New railway route:**
 - Rupees 3552 crore for Jalna- Jalgaon new Broad Gauge railway and 750 crore for Nanded- Bidar new railway line approved as a part of state's contribution.
 - Facilities being increased at 126 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat scheme.
 - 5 Vande Bharat Trains started.
- Metro network:**
 - 337 km Metro network to be spread in Mumbai. 46 km route opened. This year a 50 km long road will be opened. Colaba-Bandra-Seez Metro route-3 project accelerated.
 - Online Bhumi Pujan of Pimpri-Chinchwad to Nigdi Metro at the hands of the Prime Minister. Green signal for Metro from Ruby Hall to Ramwadi.
 - First phase of Nagpur Metro railway inaugurated at the hands of the Prime Minister and laid the Foundation stone second phase.
- Road development:**
 - Development of a 451 km long road with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank. The work of constructing a 468 km long road in the second phase is in progress.
 - 2470 km long road renovated under the loan assistance scheme of NABARD. 731 bridges completed.
 - More than 13315 km of National Highway was constructed.
 - Construction work of 7426 kilometer long roads under the Mukhyamantri Gram Sadak Yojana is ongoing.
 - Maharashtra State Infrastructure Development Corporation (MSIDC) established for implementation of infrastructure projects like Road, ports, airports, railway, metro, electricity etc.
- Maharashtra Shakti Peeth Mahamarg:**
 - Prime Shakti Peeths will be connected due to this express highway as it will be passing through 12 districts between Wardha to Sindhadurgh.
 - Communication has gained momentum and hence the development of the region will be as per the planned speed.

Devendra Fadnavis Deputy Chief Minister
Eknath Shinde Chief Minister
Ajit Pawar Deputy Chief Minister

Directorate General of Information and Public Relations, Government of Maharashtra
www.mahasamvad.in MaharashtraDGIPR MahaDGIPR

Minor detained, four arrested for gangrape of 18-year-old in Kolkata

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MARCH 8

DAYS AFTER an 18-year-old woman filed a police complaint alleging five persons, including a minor, gangraped her in

Kolkata, an Alipore court Friday sent four of the accused to police custody till March 18. The minor has been sent to a juvenile home, police said.

Sources in the police said one of the accused is the son of a TMC councillor, adding that a probe is

on. According to the police, in a complaint filed Tuesday, the girl alleged the accused persons had spiked her drink and then molested her. The five were detained Wednesday but were released on bail a day later. "However, the girl produced a video related to the

incident after which the section of gangrape was added. The five were detained again and produced before a court on Friday," said a senior police officer.

"Four persons and a minor have been named in the case. The four (adults) have been remanded in police custody till March 18," said the officer.

BJP and CPI(M) workers staged protests outside the police station concerned, demanding stringent punishment for the culprits. The CPI(M) members blocked a road near the police station. BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul, who led the BJP protest, raised questions over women's safety in the state.

Letter for eviction of 'parasite' students from Pune varsity hostels triggers row

DEVANSHI SRIVASTAVA PUNE, MARCH 8

A LETTER sent from the security department of Savitribai Phule Pune University to the Chief Hostel Rector referring to "action against unauthorised/illegal ('parasite') students staying in the boys' hostels" has left students worried and angry.

The letter, issued on March 6, whose subject was "action against unauthorised/illegal ('parasite')" stated, "We have been informed that some students who are staying in the hostels are living without permission or allotment. Some security

guards have been allotted to resolve this issue in the hostels earlier from time to time. The hostel rectors need to be present with a list of students staying in the hostel during the action/inspection."

The letter stated the security department of the university as well as the police administration needs to be intimated of such action in advance. Many students are worried that such inspections will end up driving out genuine students who are adjusting in hostels unofficially. Because hostel vacancies are so few and are allotted only on meritorious grounds or first-come basis, many students adjust in the rooms with the hostel residents.

One such student, who has been living in such an arrangement for the past few months, said, "I applied to the hostel several times but did not get it. Now I am staying in a hostel room with the help of a friend who is allotted a room. We are students from weak economic and social backgrounds who want to study, not 'parasites' as the letter is saying."

Chief Rector Varsha Wankhede clarified that the "action" mentioned in the letter would only be taken against outsiders not enrolled as university students. "We conduct such drives regularly and are strict with non-students," said Wankhede.

कार्यालय, उप वन संरक्षक (वन्यजीव) चिडियाघर, जयपुर. इ-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना. इस कार्यालय में निम्नांकित खाद्य सामग्री की आवश्यकता है। अतः माल एवं सेवा कर (Goods & Service Tax) में पंजीकृत फर्मों से निधारित प्रपत्र में खुली बोली आमंत्रण सूचना आमंत्रित की जाती है।

GOVERNMENT OF RAJASTHAN OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER AND PROJECT MANAGER. NOTICE INVITING BID. Bids for the execution of Construction of various watershed development structures under PMKSY 20 Projects of estimated value as mentioned below are invited from interested bidders up to 10.03.2024, 06.00 PM.

WESTERN RAILWAY - VADODARA DIVISION CORRIGENDUM 1. Tender Notice No. EL-TRD-2023-24-EPC-01 (Open Tender). Closing date: 16/05/2024 at 15:00 hrs.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER, DELHI. Old St. Stephen's College Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-10006. Email: eproc11@gmail.com. No: CEO/P&I / 1 306/2023-24/Vol. III Dated: e Tender for "Selection of Vendor for Installation and implementation of Live Web casting solution and CCTV monitoring services..."

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER AGRA CIRCLE, P.W.D AGRA. Short Term Notice inviting E-Tender. Letter No.: 1159/14M-A.C/2023-24. Date :- 01.03.2024. 1. The Superintending Engineer Agra Circle, U.P.P.W.D. on behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh invites the percentage rate bids online from the eligible and approved registered Contractors.

NORTHERN RAILWAY (E-Auction Notice). The Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager/PS, Northern Railway, Delhi Division, New Delhi invites e-Auction through IREPS (https://ireps.gov.in) for allotment of contracts of Advertisement/NFR at following railway stations/locations:

CROSSWORD 5308. 1 Noisy outburst of four voices (10). 2 Captain maybe in command in present situation (7). 3 Problem for an agony aunt in a magazine? (5). 4 Strangely silent recruit (6). 5 Keep giving notice (7). 6 Wife comes up about to be angry (5). 7 Please try anew one at a time (10). 8 Stiff resolution shown in disputes (5). 9 The pound is to a certain amount flexible (7). 10 They aim to get her into the bright lights (7). 11 Dance from Burma (5). 12 Companion of an American star (6). 13 School subject taken by the sick? (7). 14 Avenge massacre in Switzerland (6). 15 An opponent of the Yemen perhaps (5). 16 Steps in the development of Wells Fargo? (6). 17 Queen Elizabeth right or wrong (5). 18 Price I'm prepared to give a quack doctor (7). 19 Take steps to keep down (7). 20 Boxing ring takes an age to erect (5). 21 RC using a form of bad language (7). 22 Relay perhaps in good time (5). 23 There's opposition since rates were changed (10).

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis. VERNE, WE ALL HAVE OUR ROLES... AND YOURS IS THE MOST VITAL! FOR THE MERRIMENT OF DOZENS, YOU SACRIFICE YOURSELF BY PLAYING THE VICTIM! LIKE, YOU'RE A HERO! TWEEET!

CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson. SOME KIDS AT SCHOOL GOT FILTHY RICH TODAY. REALLY? HOW? THEY GRABBED HIM BY THE DRINKING FOUNTAIN.

MARVIN by Tom Armstrong. NOW THIS IS THE LIFE! WE CAN JUST RELAX AND ENJOY THE SUN ALL DAY! I'M BORED. DO YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO OUR ROOM AND WATCH A MOVIE?

DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL. ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20) Cash and career matters are still on your mind, but do try to put practical issues behind you during the weekend. LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23) You could be in for a romantic weekend, especially if you're single.

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 5307. 1 Scrap, 4 Profit, 9 Trapeze, 10 Basra, 11 Lotus, 12 Diskie, 13 Candlemaker, 18 Apricot, 20 Canoe, 22 Scam, 23 Resigns, 24 Notion, 25 Editor Down, 1 Settle, 2 React, 3 Pleased, 5 Robes, 6 Festive, 7 Tea set, 8 Dead letters, 14 Airport, 15 Accused, 16 Watson, 17 Censer, 19 Canto, 21 Night.

JUMBLED WORDS. Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

SUDOKU 5496. Difficulty Level 1s Instructions. To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

BLOC LIKELY TO COMMIT \$100-BILLION INVESTMENT OVER 15 YEARS

India poised to sign trade agreement with four-nation EFTA bloc tomorrow

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

INDIA AND the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA) grouping — comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland — are poised to sign a trade deal on March 10, a person aware of the development said.

The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) is among three free-trade agreements (FTAs) India is pushing to finalise this month, before the Model Code of Conduct, that bars major policy announcements after the release of general election dates, kicks in.

The two other deals are with Oman and the UK.

While the Oman deal is in advanced stages with legal scrutiny underway, the much-anticipated India-UK FTA is also being taken up at the highest level, with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reviewing the deal late last month. According to a PTI report, UK Secretary of State for

TRADE DEALS: A STATUS CHECK

PACTS BEING PUSHED BEFORE THE POLLS

India-EFTA deal:
To be announced Sunday
India-Oman deal:
Legal scrubbing underway
India-UK: Reviewed by PMO

TARIFF
PACTS CONCLUDED
2022: India-UAE FTA
2022: India-Australia interim FTA

FTAs EXPECTED AFTER ELECTIONS

A comprehensive India-Australia deal

India-EU deal: 7th round of talks ended last month

Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch has said that an India-UK FTA "is possible" before the Indian elections, but that the UK does not want to use that as a "deadline".

Other trade deals — the comprehensive agreement with Australia and the FTA with the 27-member European Union (EU) — are also being negotiated but are expected to be concluded only after the general election.

Both deals involve the agriculture sector, a sensitive subject for India especially amid the farmers' unrest.

The *Indian Express* had reported last week that India and EFTA are nearing a conclusion of the deal which would see the European bloc committing an investment of \$100 billion in India over 15 years in sectors including pharma, food processing, engineering and chemicals.

The investment commitment, the first of its kind in an FTA, would largely come from provident funds in EFTA countries. These include Norway's \$1.6-trillion sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest pension fund which posted a record profit of \$213 billion in 2023 on the back of strong technology stock returns.

The investment commitment, however, may not be legally binding. A government official had told *The Indian Express* that the commitment falls under "investment promotion" and that India and EFTA are not signing a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), as is being negotiated with the UK and the EU.

An investment commitment is crucial as India-EFTA trade is largely in favour of the European grouping as far as goods are concerned. Trade experts say India runs a high trade deficit with Switzerland, which could widen after India eliminates duties as part of the deal. During FY23, India's imports from Switzerland stood at \$15.79 billion in stark

contrast to its exports of \$1.34 billion, leading to a substantial trade deficit of \$14.45 billion.

Trade agreements have historically helped India's partner countries because of high average tariffs in India. India, therefore, is looking to attract investments and get better market access for its service sector workforce.

The *Indian Express* had also reported that EFTA is also looking at striking joint ventures in pharma, (especially medical devices), chemicals, food processing and engineering. Trade experts pointed out that the investment commitment could be a crucial gain for India.

After the India-EFTA deal, India could see higher imports of machinery, pharmaceuticals, medical instruments and machinery as there would be a sharp reduction in Indian tariffs which hover around an average rate of 18%, among the highest in the world. India is also looking at the EFTA deal to help diversify imports away from China. India currently depends on China for key medical imports.

Equity MF inflows at near 2-yr high in Feb, but investors slam brakes on small caps

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

EQUITY MUTUAL funds in February saw a 23 per cent net rise in inflows to ₹26,865.78 crore, the highest infusion in 23 months, even as small-cap funds, which are facing scrutiny, saw a slowdown in funds received.

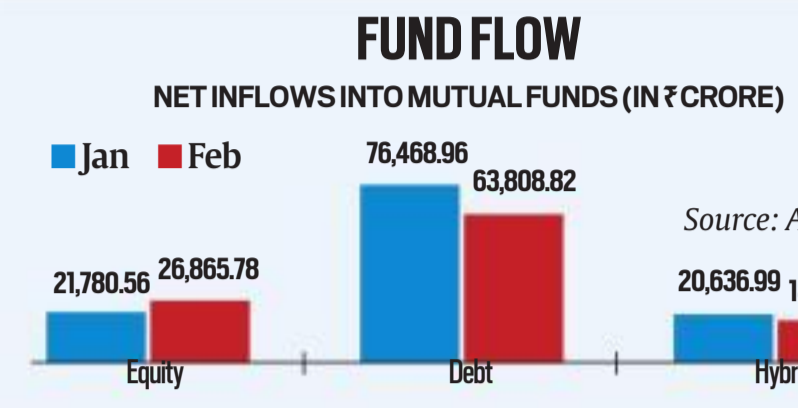
Inflows into small-cap funds declined 10 per cent to ₹2,922.45 crore in February from ₹3,256.98 crore in January, data released by the Association of Mutual Funds (AMFI) showed. Net inflows into mid-cap funds also dropped 12 per cent to ₹1,808.18 crore from ₹2,061.18 crore in February.

Last month, AMFI wrote to mutual fund houses to take measures to protect the interests of investors in small and mid-cap schemes, which have seen heavy inflows in the recent past.

AMFI Chief Executive Venkat Chalasani said fund houses have been asked to strengthen the risk management framework and to enhance disclosures to investors.

During February, inflows into the large and mid-cap category increased to ₹3,156.64 crore from ₹2,330.1 crore in the last month. Chalasani attributed this to strong macroeconomic fundamentals.

"The economy is performing well, BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) is doing



well, capacity utilisation has crossed 70 per cent and private investment and consumption are picking up. Signals are positive and people have started investing across sectors," he said.

In January, net inflows into equity mutual funds stood at ₹21,780.56 crore.

Contributions from systematic investment plans (SIPs) rose to an all-time high of ₹19,186.58 crore in February 2024 as against ₹18,838.33 crore in January.

Among equity categories, all mutual fund schemes received inflows except focused funds. Sectoral or thematic funds witnessed the highest inflows of ₹11,262.72 crore. Focused funds saw an outflow of ₹532.89 crore in the month.

Total net inflows into debt-oriented schemes stood at ₹63,808.82 crore in February compared to ₹76,468.96 crore in the previous month. Overnight funds and low-duration funds

recorded outflows of ₹17,375.61 crore and ₹4,100.38 crore, respectively. Inflows into liquid funds were highest at ₹83,642.33 crore.

The mutual fund industry's net assets under management (AUM) stood at ₹54.54 lakh crore as of February 2024 compared to ₹52.74 lakh crore the previous month. "The consistent and robust growth is backed by increasing inflows across various equity-oriented schemes, particularly the mid, small-cap, sectoral, and thematic funds on the back of good growth in stock markets, despite short-term volatility due to the election year and ahead of earnings," said Ashwini Kumar, Head Market Data, ICRA Analytics.

Retail AUM (equity + hybrid + solution-oriented schemes) stood at ₹30,70,641 crore for February. The number of new SIPs registered in February was 49,79,431. The SIP AUM touched the highest ever of ₹10.52 lakh crore for February.

Govt eases thresholds for M&A scrutiny

MANU KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE MINISTRY of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has relaxed the exemption limits for notifying mergers and acquisitions (M&As) to the Competition Commission of India (CCI). In the new regime, companies are not required to notify the regulator if the acquired firm has assets (including subsidiaries) of less than ₹450 crore and turnover below ₹1,250 crore. The old thresholds were ₹350 crore for assets and ₹1,000 crore for turnover.

Experts said the revision of the thresholds for combinations is to make CCI focus on deals where the impact on the competition landscape is substantial. "With the increase in high-value deals, the ministry wants to take the burden away from CCI to scrutinise bigger M&As," said Rohit Jain, Managing Partner, Singhania & Co.

However, this poses challenges. For instance, a large number of startups don't have assets or revenues in their initial years to qualify for CCI inspections at the time of their acquisitions. But they do add value for the acquiring companies after the deal, and could have implications for competition in the relevant markets.

For instance, when Facebook acquired WhatsApp in 2014, the deal didn't come under the CCI's purview because WhatsApp didn't breach the thresholds. Later, the deal caused discomfort among global regulators. FE

Govt to work on domestic AI chipsets in 3rd term: Vaishnav

RISHI RAJ
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE UNION government in its third term will work towards enabling domestic manufacturing of AI chipsets, communications and IT minister Ashwini Vaishnav told FE.

"There are a lot of global manufacturers who are interested in partnering us in developing their chipsets here," Vaishnav said. "We have started domestic manufacturing of smartphones and IT hardware. A beginning has been made in the direction of semiconductor and the Union Cabinet approved the ₹10,372-crore AI mission on Thursday to create sovereign capability in computing. The next on our agenda, which we will look at in the third term of the Modi government, is making AI chipsets," the minister said.

AI chipsets include graphics processing units (GPUs) and other computing hardware essential for creating AI models as



Union minister Ashwini Vaishnav, PTI

these require large-scale computing. The US and China lead in computing infrastructure required for the development of AI tech. US-based Nvidia dominates the GPU market.

Vaishnav said there are several other global firms making GPUs, but their processing capacity is around 60% of Nvidia's. "These firms want to scale up and we need to start from ground zero. If they partner us, together we will be able to make GPUs with processing capacity

NORMS AGAINST DEEPFAKES AFTER POLLS: I.T. MINISTER

New Delhi: The government asked digital platforms to provide solutions to curb misinformation that can harm society and democracy, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has said. He also said a legal structure against deepfakes and misinformation will be finalised after polls. "We have been very categorical in our discussions with platforms... after the elections, we will be coming up with a very well thought-through legal structure," Vaishnav said. PTI

close to that of Nvidia's over time. It will be a win-win for both sides," Vaishnav said.

The minister said that alliance with the global firms would be on a public-private partnership model. FE

RBI decision on IDBI Bank bidders soon

PRASANTA SAHU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE RESERVE Bank of India's (RBI)'s much-awaited decision on the fit-and-proper profiles of the bidders for IDBI Bank will likely be conveyed this month to the government, a source privy to the matter said. This would pave the way for the first strategic disinvestment of a bank, with a significant government hold-

ing, immediately after a new government assumes office after the April-May general elections.

The sale of IDBI Bank, formerly a public sector bank, is seen as a test case for the new public sector enterprises policy, which aims to minimise government's presence in businesses, including banking, as the Centre feels private sector is best suited to scale up businesses, with skin in the game. Recent laudatory comments on public sector un-

der takings by Prime Minister Narendra Modi have strengthened the perception that the government may be rethinking its policy with regard to these firms.

Reports had suggested that Kotak Mahindra Bank and Fairfax India Holdings are likely in the fray for IDBI Bank.

"The RBI's 'fit-and-proper assessment' of the bidders is at an advanced stage and the approval could come during this month," said the source. FE

RBI norms may force Tata Sons to consider mega ₹55,000-crore IPO

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

AFTER TATA Technologies, the first initial public offering (IPO) listing by the Tata group in over 19 years, made a blockbuster debut in November last year, the group will likely be considering the option of a mega initial public offer (IPO) before September 2025 in the wake of stringent Reserve Bank guidelines for non-banking finance companies.

Tata Sons — whose valuation is estimated at ₹11 lakh crore — could be looking to IPO, which is worth about ₹55,000 crore, according to a Kotak Securities report. The last time an IPO of this magnitude hit the market was the one by LIC, which was worth ₹21,000 crore.

"The Tata group's non-banking financial company (NBFC) is classified as 'upper-layer' NBFC and because of this, Tata Sons

UPPER LAYER NBFCs BY ASSET SIZE

Company Ltd	Company Ltd
1. LIC Housing Finance Ltd	9. Shangvi Finance Pvt. Ltd
2. Bajaj Finance Ltd	10. Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services Ltd
3. Shriram Transport Finance Company Ltd	11. PNB Housing Finance Ltd
4. Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd	12. Tata Capital Financial Services Ltd
5. L&T Finance Ltd	13. Aditya Birla Finance Ltd
6. Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd	14. HDB Financial Services Ltd
7. Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd	15. Muthoot Finance Ltd
8. Cholamandalam Investment and Finance	16. Bajaj Housing Finance Ltd

has to be listed on the stock exchanges by September 2025," the report said.

A Tata Sons spokesperson did not respond to an email from *The Indian Express* seeking comment on the matter.

Tata Trusts, headed by Ratan Tata, holds 66 per cent stake in Tata Sons. The Pallonji Mistry

group holds an 18.4 per cent stake in the company.

The Tata Group has over 100 operating companies across sectors. Tata Sons, the group's non-banking financial arm, supports and promotes all these businesses. "India's central bank classified Tata Sons as an 'upper layer' NBFC in 2022, suggesting it must go public

within three years. This could possibly be one of the biggest IPOs... not just for the Tatas but in the history of the Indian stock market," the Kotak report said.

The RBI published the list of 16 upper layer NBFCs on September 30, 2022. "This means Tata Sons will have to list its shares by September 30, 2025 unless the RBI extends the deadline or gives an exemption," said a financial sector analyst.

And the central bank may not be in favour of relaxing the listing requirement for one entity as others may seek the same.

The upper layer NBFCs comprise companies that are specifically identified by the Reserve Bank as warranting enhanced regulatory requirements based on a set of parameters and scoring methodology. The top ten eligible NBFCs in terms of asset size shall always reside in the upper layer. Tata Sons, listed at the fourth position, is the only core investment company in the list.

Rates on small savings schemes unchanged

New Delhi: The government on Friday left the interest rates unchanged on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of the next fiscal, beginning April 1, 2024. "The rates of interest on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of FY 2024-25, starting from April 1, 2024, and ending on June 30, 2024, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the fourth quarter (January 1, 2024, to March 31, 2024) of FY 2023-24," a Finance Ministry notification said. PTI

SPECTRUM AUCTION TO START FROM MAY 20

New Delhi: The forthcoming spectrum auction will start from May 20. The government will auction eight spectrum bands for mobile services at a base price of ₹96,317.65 crore. PTI

AFTER ACTION AGAINST JM FINANCIAL

Regulators widen inquiry into public debt issue managers

REUTERS
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

THE FINANCIAL market regulator and the central bank are widening an investigation into how merchant banks manage retail subscriptions in public debt issues, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) barred JM Financial from taking new mandates this week, saying it had found that funds from con-

nected entities were used to inflate subscriptions and provide an assured exit to investors.

JM Financial said in a stock exchange filing on Thursday that it will fully cooperate with SEBI in its investigations.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), meanwhile, has told JM Financial's non-banking unit to stop any form of financing against shares and debentures, including loans to customers to subscribe to IPOs.

Several other cases are under investigation to see if merchant banks provided investors with an exit through connected non-banking finance firms, said the two sources, who declined to be named as they are not authorised to speak to the media.

Investigators are also studying if disproportionate loans were given to subscribers and whether customer identification processes were not adequately followed, the sources added.

U.P. State Bridge Corporation Ltd.
16-Madan Mohan Malviya Marg Lucknow-226001

Recruitment Notice
Recruitment of 28 Nos Assistant Engineer (Civil)
Notice No.: 196 ESB/659-SBC/2024 Date: 06.03.2024
Uttar Pradesh State Bridge Corporation Ltd. invites applications from interested candidates for direct recruitment to the posts of 28 nos. Assistant Engineers (Civil) on the basis of GATE-2023/GATE-2024 Marks upto 30/04/2024.

The prescribed format of application, complete details and terms and conditions are available on the Corporation's website www.bridgecorporationindia.com.

General Manager (HQ)

UTTARAKHAND POWER CORPORATION LTD.
(A Govt. of Uttarakhand Undertaking) Corporate Identity No. U40109UR2015GIC023867
Victoria Cross Vija Babar Singh Urja Bhawan, Kanwali Road, Dehradun-246001
Tel. No. 0135-276244; Fax No. 0135-276333; Website: www.upcl.org; Email ID: cgmpcl@yahoo.com

CORRIDGUM FOR PURCHASE OF POWER UNDER MEDIUM TERM PROCUREMENT AGAINST TENDER SPECIFICATION No.10/CE(COMM)/UPCL-10/MT/PP/2023

It is to inform that an amendment/modification has been made by UPCL in tender specification No. 10/CE(COMM)/UPCL-10/MT/PP/2023 and the detailed amendment/modifications/ corrigendum can be read/studied completely in official website of UPCL i.e. www.upcl.org and website of MSTC India Limited (DEEP Portal) i.e. www.mstcecommerce.com

All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged.

No. 131/EE(cm)/UPCL/A-2 Date.: 07/03/2024 CE (COMMERCIAL)

"SAVE ELECTRICITY IN THE INTEREST OF NATION" Use LED Bulb, Save Electricity (Toll Free No. 1800 419 9485)
"Pay Electricity bill online 24x7 from www.upcl.org (For information on Electricity Theft, Informer may report to Toll Free No. 1800 180 4185)

Government of Karnataka
(Infrastructure Development, Ports & Inland Water Transport Department)
Karnataka Maritime Board
Office of the Marine Engineer, Department of Ports & IWT, Baithkhol, Karwar- 581302

No. ME/GNL/CR- 03/2023 Date: 07.03.2024
TENDER NOTICE (Only in E-Procurement) (TWO COVER SYSTEM)

Tender is invited by the undersigned in E-Procurement (KPPP) portal for the mentioned service. The reputed, bonafide, resourceful & experienced registered firms/ contractors and interested shipping companies who have executed and are having experience in similar nature of service can participate in the Tender through E-procurement portal. To obtain more information, please visit the website: <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> (Tender Indent No. IDD/2023-24/SE0013)

Name of work: Providing 2 Nos. of minimum 30 Ton Bollard pull capacity each Tug service on revenue sharing basis for berthing and unberthing of ships and search and rescue operations for a period of 3 years at Karwar Port, Uttara Kannada round the clock (24 hrs a day) including Handling, Operation and Maintenance (HOM) charges of Tug, Fuel, Lubricants, Water, Manning Crew, Maintenance, etc., and inclusive of all applicable taxes.

Bidding Parameter is Payment of Royalty per GRT of the vessels berthed and unberthed each way subject to minimum of Rs.5000/- payable to the Karnataka Maritime Board subject to conditions mentioned in the bid document

EMD: As mentioned in bid document, Last date for Quarries: **05.04.2024 @ 17.30 hours**, Last Date for receipt of Tender: **08.04.2024 @ 17.00 hours**

For further details and general enquiries, interested firms/ contactors may contact the undersigned office E-mail: marineengineerkrw@gmail.com and phone No: **08382 221402** during working hours, before last date of quarries.

Sd/- Marine Engineer, Karwar

DIPR/ADK/SCMA/R2023-24 dt. 07.03.2024

BBJ THE BRAITHWAITTE BURN AND JESSOP CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Regd. Off.: 27, Rajendra Nath Mukherjee Road, Kolkata - 700 001 Phone No. (033) 2348-5841-44; Fax: (033) 2210-3961 E-mail: info.bbjonst@bbjonst.com; Website: www.bbjonst.com

NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)
Expression of Interest (EOI) applications are invited from reputed and established firms/agencies for empanelment towards Design Consultancy and Geo Technical/ Soil Investigation for various Civil/ Structural works.
EOI No.: BBJJ/G(P&P)/EOI-01/EMPA/MENT/2024 Dated 08-Mar-2024
EOI documents may be downloaded from <https://e-procure.gov.in/publish/app> and/or www.bbjonst.com (Tender ID: 2024_BBJCL_749280_1). Sealed applications can be submitted to BBJ's Head Office at Kolkata up to 15:00 hrs. on or before 21-Mar-2024 and opening of applications will be on 21-Mar-2024 at 16:00 hrs. "Corrigendum": If any, would appear only on the BBJ's website & e-Publishing portal and not to be published in any newspaper.

Barshi Municipal Council, Barshi
e-Tender Notice No. 34 for 2023-24

Barshi Municipal Council invites e-Tender for the work of PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF ROAD UNDER STATE NAGOROTHAN SCHEME

- 1) CONSTRUCTION OF CC ROAD AND STROM WATER GUTTER FROM POST OFFICE CHOUK TO KURDUWADI ROAD N.P BORDER (JAIN MANDIR).
- 2) CONSTRUCTION OF CC ROAD AND STROM WATER GUTTER FROM POST OFFICE CHOUK TO JAMGAON BORDAR (LATUR ROAD).

At Tal. Barshi Dist. Solapur In The State Of Maharashtra, Valued at Rs. 92,54,80,313.00 Please visit website www.mahatenders.gov.in for detailed information.

Sd/-
Chief Officer
Barshi Municipal Council
Date: 05/03/2024

MSRDC MAHASAMRUDDHI RENEWABLE ENERGY LIMITED SPV OF MAHARASHTRA STATE ROAD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD. (A Govt. of Maharashtra undertaking)
Office - Plot No. A/792, Near Lilawati Hospital, Opp. Bandra Reclamation Bus Depot, K. C. Marg, Bandra West, Mumbai - 400 050, Maharashtra State, INDIA.
Ph. No. :- 022-265 17910/966 Email :- eamsrdc@gmail.com & cgmenv@msrdc.in Website :- www.msrdc.in
E-Tender Portal :- <https://mahatenders.gov.in>

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER
Date - 09.03.2024
The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation ("MSRDC"), through its Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) named Mahasamruddhi Renewable Energy Limited invites online bids For Request for proposal for appointment of Renewable Energy consultant for carrying out pre review of existing Detailed Project Report (DPR), preparation of revised Detailed Project Report (DPR), Bid process management, carbon credit trading & Project Management Consultancy (PMC) work for the proposed solar energy projects along the HHBTMSM as per details below:

- RFP document can be viewed/downloaded from e-tendering portal <https://mahatenders.gov.in> from 11.03.2024 from 11:00 hrs. to 10.04.2024 (upto 11:00 hrs. IST)
- Cost of RFP document is Rs. 25,000 + GST which can be paid through SBI payment gateway which can be accessed through <https://mahatenders.gov.in>.
- Last date of submission of RFP is 10.04.2024 (upto 11:00 hours IST).
- Pre-bid meeting will be held on 27.03.2024 at 12:00 hrs.
- Right to accept or reject any or all the RFP without assigning any reason whatsoever is reserved with MREL.

Director
Mahasamruddhi Renewable Energy Ltd., Mumbai



WORDLY WISE
ART WASHES AWAY FROM THE SOUL THE
DUST OF EVERYDAY LIFE.
— PABLO PICASSO

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Change in the Valley

In his first visit since abrogation of Article 370, PM charts course for development, ending Pakistan's proxy war



SYED ATA HASNAIN

A SPEECH, A QUESTION

PM Modi's public address in Srinagar framed the contours of 'Naya Kashmir'. It will be incomplete without elections

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's public address in Srinagar on Thursday – his first in the Valley since the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019 – was a report card of the Centre's administration of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. From the announcement of schemes and packages to the expansion of reservation and a growing economy – the PM sought to draw a straight line between the abrogation and what he called "Naya Kashmir". There were at least three aspects to the formulation underlined in the speech. First, that J&K's exceptionalism was a "shackle" that prevented the benefits flowing from New Delhi from reaching people of the erstwhile state. Second, the people of the Union Territory were denied benefits such as reservation. Granting ST status to an internally diverse community such as the Paharis, despite opposition from other social groups, flowed from this understanding. The third was that special status gave the Valley-based parties, which PM Modi painted as dynastic fiefdoms, a stranglehold over J&K's resources and politics. The speech highlighted the importance of J&K and abrogation to the BJP – as an ideological issue – ahead of the general election. But it also left an important question unanswered.

The last time J&K had an elected government was in 2018, which was dissolved after the BJP withdrew from the ruling alliance. Since then, only two local body elections have been held – to Block Development Councils in 2019 and District Development Councils in 2020 – in both of which the Gupkar alliance did better than the BJP. The fact is that the abrogation of Article 370 changed fundamentally the nature of the region. That change is irreversible, especially after the Supreme Court's imprimatur on the decision. Valley-based political parties too seem to have made peace with this reality and are demanding that elections to panchayat bodies – due in January but yet to take place – and the assembly be held with the general elections. The Supreme Court asked that assembly elections be held by September. And, according to the Centre's own claims, the security situation has improved and the delimitation exercise is complete.

PM Modi has in the past said that it is important to remove both "dil ki doori" and "Dilli ki doori" between Kashmir and the rest of India. In fact, bridging the gap – sentimental and political – was a justification for ending the "special" status. Yet, without elections, the erstwhile state continues to be an exception – the only state to have been made a Union Territory by Parliament. The election schedule, even for its local bodies, appears more malleable than anywhere else. Like other Indians, the people in J&K deserve accountable governments and a political process in which they have a stake. Before the Supreme Court, the government said as recently as September 2023 that it was "ready to hold elections", though it did not give a timeline for restoring statehood. By allowing politics to return to the region, the government will go a long way in ending dil ki doori, and Dilli ki doori in Naya Kashmir.

STOCK TAKING ABOUT Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is usually done post terror-related incidents. However, when a popular leader, that too the Prime Minister of the country, visits such a region after an interval, there is an opportunity to do a more balanced examination and reflect on where we stand in a region seriously affected by externally sponsored "proxy war" for 35 years. There have been many dimensions to J&K over this period. To best understand them, the political, military, social, economic, and most importantly, the psychological domains need examination; we can also add diplomatic to the mix because much depends on external perceptions.

Of these, the psychological domain remains the most important. In 1989, when Pakistan launched its long-drawn plan of wresting J&K by triggering internal turmoil, aided by external support, the ground had been well prepared. The Army's security-related deployment was hardly sufficient to prevent the frequent trans-LoC movement of the people who had already declared J&K a part of Pakistan. "Kashmir banega Pakistan" was the refrain and the most popular slogan. The stark difference 35 years later and five years after the abrogation of Article 370 is that most of India and much of J&K reverberates with the other virtual slogan – "PoJK banega Hindustan". That is the psychological change evident as one talks to Kashmiri youth now; the idea of Azadi and of Pakistan is finally receding. However, the duality in the Kashmiri mind, although seriously dented, remains, and will take time to fully neutralise.

Right from 1997, when the Army adopted a more structured approach to the doctrine of "winning hearts and minds" (WHAM), there existed only a broad understanding for such a doctrine at the national level. In the face of terror threats, it was the civil administration's inability to effectively administer the populous rural segment that led to it falling under the ambit of the Army. Only the Army, assisted by the J&K Police, had the run of the countryside. That has largely changed

under Prime Minister Modi's passionate deliverance of urban and rural development. The transformational change in the security situation after August 2019, enabled by the Centre's strong backing, has facilitated two things. First, that an "all of government" approach could be truly applied, even to WHAM. In earlier years, except for a few departments of the state government, no one had a sense of commitment nor an understanding of its significance – WHAM was considered just a military commitment. PM Modi's socio-economic outreach through deliverable development projects has managed to create far greater hope than ever before. The psychological effect of this has multiplied because of the economic abyss which exists in Pakistan. All this has been possible because of direct rule from Delhi through an astute Lieutenant Governor who has been energetic and committed, but most importantly, understands the mind of the populace. His balanced ideological orientation has been a force multiplier as has been his willingness to meet people.

Youth and women's empowerment is half the battle and both of these have been more than adequately addressed, as is also evident from social media. The Army's experience of outreach has been well exploited through a more integrated approach. What is even more helpful is that the Army's "in the face" projection and involvement have taken a back seat without any perceptible loss of effectiveness. Kashmir's youth and its aspirations are today well managed by many articulate and dynamic youth leaders, all patriots in their own right. When the PM spoke of Mahashivratri and Ramzan in the same breath and mentioned the lotus which abundantly grows in Kashmir's many lakes, with linkage to the symbol of his party, he was only symbolically articulating the place that J&K has in the psyche of India. By speaking about Kashmir's participation in the G20 process during India's presidency and mentioning tourism as one of the mainstays, he again

made it clear that India's intent was to turn the region into an international tourist hub and link it to J&K's most important industry.

Yet, even the Prime Minister knows that the story of change in Kashmir is not yet over; a great beginning has been made despite the pandemic interlude. J&K is crucial to international and regional security. There are two aspects that will continue to cause concern in the all-important security domain. The first is Pakistan, which remains committed to forces of separatism in J&K through acts of sponsored terror whenever possible, in a bid to remain relevant even in the face of a transforming region. The second is that ideological extremism, like elsewhere, continues to remain embedded. A study of the proliferation of international conflicts and their nature reveals that an ideologically driven second cycle of global terrorism could well be triggered. J&K falls within the ambit of such a cycle. Although Pakistan is also a victim of its manipulations, its deemed leadership always perceives its own invincibility as well as India's vulnerability. That thought process could reignite fresh fires, of which we have to be mindful. Pakistan Army's control over Shehbaz Sharif also gives no promises of peace and it would be premature to initiate talks with Pakistan because that would mean giving it more significance than it deserves. It is the insignificance it has been driven to that has made such a difference to the psyche of the people.

Although so much has been achieved, militarily we need not indulge in rapid dilution of structures and concepts established through experience. Yet, what is evident is that J&K is ripe for meaningful politics without any sentiment for the provisions of Article 370. The latter is well and truly behind us. The words of the Prime Minister made that very clear.

The writer, a member of the National Disaster Management Authority, is former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

TRAINING GROUND

Subsidised apprenticeship programme can contribute to developing skills, help country reap demographic dividend

THE CONGRESS HAS promised to enact a Right to Apprenticeship law, mandating private or public sector concerns to provide a one-year internship with part-government funding to any college degree/diploma holder on demand. The idea of forcing companies to accept candidates seeking temporary employment – which is what a legal entitlement amounts to – is bad. The decision to hire, even if for only a year, should be the employer's prerogative and not a government diktat. But the idea of the government subsidising an apprenticeship training system in private industry isn't a bad one. Equally welcome is the main opposition party's effort to make jobs for the youth a key election campaign, even if questions may be raised as to what stopped its own governments, whether in the past or in the states now, from implementing similar programmes.

There are costs to a firm's decision to engage in apprenticeship training. The potential employee's capabilities aren't fully known at the time of recruitment, which is often based on unreliable CVs or personal recommendations. Nor does the person contribute much to the firm's revenues during the period of training, when she's still learning on the job. Worse, there's no certainty that the apprentice who has acquired the requisite skills will remain after the training period is over. These costs and uncertainties are higher for MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises), which can neither afford to hire people from top-notch educational institutions nor invest in training employees whom they cannot retain. This leads to a classical market failure where firms are deterred from hiring due to a lack of skilled workforce and their own reluctance to train those who may end up working elsewhere.

One way to avoid under-employment and under-provision of training at the workplace is for the government to bear part of the cost. That's what the Congress has proposed, while billing a one-year apprenticeship in the organised private sector or government for a Rs one-lakh annual stipend as a "Pahli Naukri Pakki" or first job guaranteed scheme. A government-financed workforce training programme incentivising companies, especially MSMEs, to hire is preferable to unemployment allowance schemes such as the Congress-ruled Karnataka's recently rolled out Yuva Nidhi. India has to generate gainful employment for its young labour force – both a challenge and a demographic dividend-seizing opportunity. The solution cannot be doles. Instead, it has to be skilling the youth for them to be employable. Those skills have to be imparted in schools, colleges and the workplace. The government can and should do more there, both by itself and partnering with the private sector.

LEGEND OF SON GOKU

Creator of 'Dragon Ball' series, Akira Toriyama, was one of the first global superstars of manga

WHEN SON GOKU, with his shock of hair and orange dogi (martial arts robe), made his first appearance in 1984, he was a little boy with a tail. Based on the monkey hero of the Ming-era Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, the story of Goku's quest to collect seven magical orbs to summon a dragon, catapulted his creator Akira Toriyama into the big time. Goku would eventually shed his tail (it was tedious to draw, Toriyama once said) and grow up into the heavily muscled manga and anime hero recognisable around the world today. Spanning several volumes and fictional timelines, selling millions of copies worldwide and adapted for film, television and video games, the *Dragon Ball* series made Toriyama, who died last week at the age of 68, one of the first global superstar manga creators.

While manga has roots going, some say, all the way back to the painted scrolls from the Edo period (1603-1867), it acquired the recognisable *chibi* style – characters with slender figures, big eyes and exaggerated expressions and reactions – in the early 1900s, inspired by American and Western cartooning. The "godfather" of modern manga and creator of the iconic *Astro Boy* series, Osamu Tezuku was inspired by Walt Disney. It is to this lineage of art and storytelling that Toriyama belongs – he has cited Tezuku's work as sparking his early interest in manga – and it's no wonder that his vividly drawn and breathlessly paced stories translated so well from the page to the screen. This year will see the release of the new anime *Dragon Ball Daima*, scheduled to coincide with the series' 40th anniversary.

Toriyama's manga company said in a press note that at the time of his death, he had several works "in the middle of creation". Goku died many times, only to be resurrected because of "unfinished business" – an irony that would resonate with Toriyama's legions of fans.



P V SINDHU

THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRATIC machinery is gearing up for the 18th Lok Sabha election. In this democratic spectacle, the participation of every eligible voter is crucial, but particularly crucial is the role of the youth, who constitute a significant portion of the population and bring with them the unparalleled spirit of *yuva shakti*. Their engagement in the voting process holds the potential to shape the future of nations. Understanding the pivotal role of the youth in the electoral process is thus imperative.

Over the years, the participation of the youth in elections has been improving. This can be attributed to an increasing awareness among the youth about their role in shaping the political landscape as India inches towards Amrit Kaal. However, given the strength of the young electorate in India, this participation can be increased. The 2024 general elections present an opportune moment for the youth to accept the mantle of the Amrit Peedhi.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has taken measures to mobilise young and first-time voters for the Lok Sabha Elections. It has called upon the youth to cast their ballots in record numbers and be part of the Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye campaign. This initiative aims to instill a sense of civic duty and national pride among first-time voters, estimated to be nearly two crore.

This campaign builds upon the need to invest in civic education and create platforms for meaningful participation of the youth in political processes. This has transformed the young voters campaign into a *jan andolan*.

A campaign becomes a people's movement when it builds upon its goals and objec-

EVERYONE GETS A VOICE

Campaign to mobilise youth and first-time voters is becoming mass movement

Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye has taken the form of a crowd-sourced movement – it has become a collective effort that inspires widespread participation and seeks to drive meaningful change on a large scale. The cascading effect of growing participation builds upon a familiar feature of several recent campaigns and initiatives, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Bharat and Covid-19 awareness. It builds on the momentum of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra.

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tives, and resonates deeply across all segments of society, leading to widespread participation. Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye gained momentum as more and more credible voices joined the call to action. In his 110th Mann Ki Baat address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon the country's youth to actively participate in the democratic process. Others, including cricketers, cine artistes and social media influencers, have followed in his footsteps. I am privileged to be a part of this campaign, realising the power of the collective, not just as a citizen, but also as a woman.

A stirring anthem encapsulating the essence of the Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye campaign was released recently. Enthusiastic youngsters are sharing videos of the anthem being sung at iconic locations and World Heritage Sites across the country, with some Padma awardees releasing renditions of the anthem in multiple languages.

The digital age has revolutionised the way information is disseminated and opinions are formed. Social media platforms, online forums and digital campaigns have emerged as powerful tools for mobilising support, particularly among the youth. In recognition of this, the MyGov portal is hosting creative competitions for reel making, blog writing, quizzes and an online voters pledge.

The youth and first-time voters are also being mobilised in colleges and higher learning institutions across the country. Students are coming together in celebratory fests where they are taking voter pledges and participating in rallies, seminars, and creative competitions such as debates.

Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye has taken the form of a crowd-sourced movement – it has become a collective effort that inspires widespread participation and seeks to drive meaningful change on a large scale. The cascading effect of growing participation builds upon a familiar feature of several recent campaigns and initiatives, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Bharat and Covid-19 awareness. It builds on the momentum of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra.

When people get connected to a cause, widespread dividends accrue for the whole nation. The 'Give It Up' movement, launched in 2015, wherein the Prime Minister appealed to people to come forward and give up their LPG subsidy, saw almost a crore households voluntarily give up subsidy in the first year itself. Similarly, empowering the youth to engage in politics will foster a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the democratic process, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and representative society.

The participation of the youth in the voting process for Election 2024 is not just desirable but imperative for the health of democracy. By empowering the youth to exercise their democratic rights, we can ensure a more inclusive, representative, and responsive political system. As we embark on this democratic journey, let us recognise the immense potential of the *yuva shakti* to shape the destiny of our nation and forge a brighter future for generations to come.

The writer is an ace Indian badminton player. Views expressed are personal



MARCH 9, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

RAJ BHAVAN IN DOCK

THE GOVERNOR OF Madhya Pradesh, Bhagwat Dayal Sharma, has offered to resign in the wake of the controversy over his remarks against the policy reservation for Harijans and Adivasis. Raj Bhavan sources, when contacted, refused to confirm or deny the news. Sharma had completed his five-year term as Governor in September 1982. Meanwhile, 26 CPI workers were arrested for demonstrating before the Raj Bhavan.

ESPIONAGE IN ARMY

GEN FD Larkins (ret'd), accused in the espi-

ionage case, has confessed that he received more than Rs 1 lakh from a foreign source for supplying information about Soviet equipment used by the Indian defence services. He paid his co-accused officers to collect information. He paid Lt Col Jasbir Singh Rs 1,000 per month for military information, especially about tanks. He separately paid him Rs 55,000 for providing eight classified manuals.

BANGLADESH STRIKE

BANGLADESH'S TWO MAIN opposition alliances called for a nation-wide strike to protest against the military government of President Hossain Mohammad Ershad. The

strike, the second in Bangladesh this month, would fall on the second anniversary of Ershad's takeover.

PAKISTAN CLASHES

ABOUT 140 STUDENTS were arrested when a crowd clashed with the police in a campus demonstration against the Pakistani military government's ban on student unions, the police said. The police said some students fired at them when they broke up a protest march led by the right-wing student group Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba (IJT). Eye witnesses said about 25 students and 11 policemen were injured in the clash.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Filling in the diet chart

Nationwide studies on dietary patterns that throw a light on nutrient intake should complement the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN AND RAMA NARAYANAN

THE RECENTLY RELEASED Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) data for 2022-23 by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation points to a shift in the food consumption pattern of Indian households. The survey covered a sample of 2,61,746 households (1,55,014 rural and 1,06,732 urban) and was spread over 8,723 villages and 6,115 urban blocks.

The household consumption basket consisted of three major categories — food items, consumables and durable goods. Information was collected through three separate questionnaires for each category. In addition, a questionnaire seeking information on household characteristics and demographic features was also used. Imputed values were obtained for home-grown or home-produced items and also for food items consumed free of cost through social welfare programmes such as rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, maize, ragi, barley, small millets, pulses, gram, salt, sugar and edible oil.

The average monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) was Rs 3,773 for rural and Rs 6,459 for urban households. The percentage share of food and non-food items was 46 per cent and 54 per cent for rural and 39 per cent and 61 per cent for urban areas, respectively. The good news is that for the first time the share of expenditure on food for rural households has come down to less than 50 per cent. This means that the earning potential of rural households has gone up, such that they can spend more on other consumer goods, indicating a better standard of living. Even better is the fact that the proportionate share of expenditure on cereals has come down along with better dietary diversity including other food groups. The percentage share of expenditure on cereals stood at 22 per cent for rural and 12 per cent for urban areas in 1999-2000 while the present data shows it to be at 4.9 per cent and 3.6 per cent respectively.

So what does India eat now? Top on the list come beverages, refreshments and processed foods with the share of expenditure being 9.6 per cent and 10.6 per cent respectively for rural and urban areas. Processed foods, known for high sugar and salt content, are not a healthy choice. This is a new development and it is striking that the proportion of processed food consumed in rural and urban areas is very similar. However, it is comforting to know that next on the list come milk and milk products at 8.3 per cent and 7.2 per cent respectively for rural and urban areas. The consumption of pulses is the lowest with the average MPCE being 2 per cent and 1.4 per cent for rural and urban respectively. While milk and dairy products are a source of good quality protein when compared to pulses, the cultivation of pulses has declined substantially with a corresponding increase in cost, which could have led to a decline in consumption levels. Micronutrient-rich vegetables and eggs, fish and meat occupy the



CR Sasikumar

third and fourth positions. The share of expenditure on fruits and edible oil is almost the same and there is practically no difference between rural and urban consumers. Sugar and salt account for less than 1 per cent of the total share of expenses on food.

The MPCE data shows only the consumption pattern of the entire household and does not throw light on intra-household allocation of food. Given the high level of anaemia among adult women, young children and adolescent girls as compared to men, it is important to know the food and nutrient intake of different sections of the population. Though the share of expenditure on salt and sugar is low, this by no means is an indicator of the actual intake since there is no way of estimating the amount of salt and sugar consumed through processed foods and beverages. This is particularly relevant in the context of the increasing risk of obesity, diabetes and hypertension in India. Only diet surveys can estimate the actual nutrient intake.

For a long time, the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) of the Indian Council of Medical Research undertook periodic nationwide dietary surveys that threw light on macro and micronutrient intake of Indians. While the National Family Health Surveys provide information on the frequency of intake of various food groups, they do not estimate the nutrient intake. While the NNMB no longer exists, the

Nutrition literacy will educate consumers about healthy eating practices and lifestyle modification. Front-of-pack food labelling will make consumers aware of the composition of processed foods, with a traffic light system indicating high salt, fat or sugar content. A study commissioned by the Niti Aayog recommended a 20 per cent to 30 per cent health tax in addition to GST on high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) foods. Several countries including Denmark, France, Mexico, South Africa, the UK and the US have a dedicated tax on HFSS foods.

National Institute of Nutrition is currently undertaking a nationwide dietary and nutrition survey.

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Swaminathan is Chairperson and Narayanan is consultant nutritionist, M S Swaminathan Research Centre

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As Pakistan celebrates its first female provincial chief minister, it is a reminder of the progress made and the journey ahead. Ensuring women's rights and participation in all spheres of life is not just a moral imperative but also a necessity for Pakistan's development." — DAWN, PAKISTAN

In pursuit of conservatism

As even liberals become uncomfortable with radical left, political flavour of the season has changed, including in India



RAM RAJYA BY RAM MADHAV

SHOULD WE CALL ourselves "conservative"? A section of India's ruling right-wing establishment appears to be mulling over this. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government completes 10 years in office, its unapologetic embrace of India's cultural and civilisational identity has prompted many in those circles to enthusiastically come forward to identify with the concept of "conservatism".

There is a global context to it. Of late, with more and more countries in Europe electing right-wing parties to power, conservatism seems to have returned as the flavour of the season. It is being written and talked about a lot these days, not with the usual pejoration, but with a sense of either sympathy or *fait accompli*.

Indians are prone to obsessions with ideologies and tend to assume that conservatism must also be an ideology for the right wing. "All ideologies are idiotic, whether religious or political..." warned noted spiritual master Jiddu Krishnamurti, "for, it is conceptual thinking, the conceptual world, which has so unfortunately divided man".

From Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill in the 18-19th century to today, terms like conservatism and liberalism represent political movements that respond to certain socio-political challenges of the times. Western conservatism stood for principles such as individual freedom, limited government, constitutionalism, unity of community, responsible fiscalism, open market economy, centrality of religion and family and an abstract idea of human dignity.

The very word "conservatism" has a "timid" sound, complained renowned Austrian-British political philosopher F A Hayek. Yet, like him, many were surprised to see it ascend the political ladder in country after country. How is it that this name "redolent of passive obedience of the past" — as Kenneth Minogue wrote in his review of John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's book *The Right Nation: Why America is Different in the Claremont Review of Books* — should become such a dominant force, they wondered. That too in such modern and economically developed nations like the US and countries in Western Europe.

Conservatism's success lay less in its doctrines — there are none common to all anyway — but more in what the regimes that swore by it delivered. As we see in history, dictators like Hitler and Mussolini openly espoused socialism. In fact, the very name Nazism was derived from the German word for National Socialism — *Nationalsozialismus*. Mussolini publicly acknowledged the legacy of Italian socialist heroes like Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi. The dictatorships that the communist ideology promoted, from Lenin, Stalin and Mao in the past to Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un now, are too well known.

On the contrary, the track record of countries with conservative regimes, from the US to the United Kingdom to Germany to Italy, has been much better, compared to their revolutionary counterparts. They created economic prosperity and social stability. As Minogue wrote in the same review, al-

though the word may sound a bit odd and awkward "there is no problem about associating conservatism with dynamism". We unknowingly make the mistake of positioning conservatism as an ideology against liberalism. Conservatives are liberal too while many liberals hang on to ideas that conservatives hold as sacrosanct. In fact, during the French Revolution, the conservatives who occupied the right chamber of the parliament stoutly opposing the aggressive enthusiasm of the revolutionaries, often called themselves liberals. Even today, in several countries like Australia, the party of the conservatives is called the Liberal Party.

In their riveting account of the history of American politics, Micklethwait and Wooldridge conclude that irrespective of the Democrats and Republicans rotating power, America remains a conservative nation at its core. Thomas Jefferson's famous statement about the "American creed" consisted of a deep commitment to individual freedom, constitutionalism, patriotism, limited government and rejection of tyranny and despotism — all considered conservative ideas. Interestingly, not many liberals will be found opposing several of these ideas. Barring issues concerning sexual morality and statism in economic activity, the classical liberals embrace several of those issues that the conservatives do.

But the challenge that the US in particular, and Western societies in general, face today is the hijacking of the liberal movement by left-wing radicals who want to dismantle society as a whole. While a word like conservatism stood for rational and progressive ideas, a benign word like liberalism came to be identified with anarchy, thanks to this bunch of radicals.

Conservatism may not be the same everywhere. Donald Trump represented a populist-nationalist version of it, which can be identified with trade protectionism, hawkishness on China, restriction on immigration — both legal and illegal — and a fierce dedication to fighting the culture war.

A few months ago, I met one of the "bad boys" of the EU, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban. A proud conservative leader, hated by his peers in Europe for his stand on the Russia-Ukraine war and his resistance to "woke" ideologies, Orban represents a version of conservatism that is gaining popularity in eastern and central Europe. In power for almost 15 years now, he built Hungary into what the OECD describes as a "high-income country". "God, religion, family, nationalism and patriotism — no compromise," he told me when asked about the criticism that he endures. That is his brand of conservatism.

Like the US, India, too, is a conservative nation at the core. Swami Vivekananda called it "Dharma prana Bharata", meaning religion was the soul of Bharat. Gandhi understood it well. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, an unabashed admirer of socialism, admitted in the Constituent Assembly that India was a "deeply religious country". Narendra Modi, too, understands it perfectly well.

Latching on to the conservative bandwagon may or may not mean much domestically for the Indian right wing. But at a time when global conservatives are waging fierce battles against radical left anarchists, with whom even Western liberals are highly uncomfortable, a powerful country like India standing by that political movement definitely means a lot for them.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS

What I learnt from amma

Lessons on life, ageing and simple living from a centenarian



ROHINI NILEKANI

DURGABAI NILEKANI RECENTLY entered the 100th year of her life. My mother-in-law is in good health, physically active, and mentally calm. She has mild cognitive impairment and some age-related decline. But every time you ask her how she is, Amma will say, "Oh, I am fine!" On some days, she will giggle and say she is "Ekdam fine". This is even when we can hear her wheezing, or when we know she is in pain.

It is a lifelong training on how to live gracefully. Some days, when I may be feeling depressed, I quiz her, "Amma, how are you like this?" "Simple," she answers. "I don't worry about death. I think about life. And I am happy."

Durgabai epitomises the long-gone culture of a simple, content society. Her father, Annaji Rao Sirur, was a very popular medical practitioner in the university town of Dharwad in Karnataka, where Amma grew up with 14 siblings and many other relatives. While there was enough to go around, there was not much to spare. "Waste not, want not" was the axiom they grew up with, alongside the idea of moderation in all things.

And the phrase "Reduce, recycle, reuse" might well have been modelled on her. In the days when she expertly ran her household in Dharwad, every last scrap had a life extension that would be incredible to today's use-and-throw consumers.

Simple living and high thinking were not just words but a *dharma* to live by. Compassion to all was not just written in the scriptures but something to practise on everyone who knocked at the mostly unlocked door.

Amma once gave away almost all her personal wealth to help a nephew who needed expensive medical treatment. "Why do I need money when my sons are looking after me?" she shrugged.

Amma now seems like a rare commodity in a world where suspicion is more common than compassion and where neighbours may themselves be strangers.

Her lifetime has coincided with the most prosperous age in human history, where more people have experienced more abundance than ever before. She has witnessed so much change in these 100 years — from a World War and the Independence movement to rapid technological advances, and a prospering nation. She has experienced abundance and scarcity, death and loss, including that of Mohanrao Nilekani, her husband, and many siblings too. She has coped remarkably well and is as comfortable with microwaves as she is used to making jowar rotis on an open fire, and as easy with Zoom calls as she was writing postcards. "We have to adjust, is it not?" Amma will say, in her ever simple and ever direct way.

There is one thing she cannot adjust to,

though. And that is inflation. While she no longer has to make her own purchases, her face crumples up when I tell her the price of everyday items. "But how do poor people manage?" she wonders, shaken.

Amma is equally shocked at how old she has become. "Has God forgotten about me?" she asks jokingly. But when I coax, "Since you are 99 not out, you may as well hit a century," she agrees, emitting her signature rat-a-tat gunfire laugh.

In 1925, the year Durgabai was born, life expectancy in the Subcontinent was 27.6 years. Today, life expectancy in India has more than doubled to 67.2 years. Which means that the country will age rapidly over the next few decades. According to the India Ageing Report 2023, the share of senior citizens — aged 60 years and above — will rise to 20.8 per cent of the population by 2050. That is almost 350 million people, approximately the population of the United States. It is double the 2022 demographic of 149 million elderly persons — roughly 10.5 per cent of the population.

By 2050, today's conversation, about a young nation's demographic dividend, will seem a distant dream. The focus will be on human health and well-being, the productivity of a shrunken workforce, and the fiscal challenge of providing retirement benefits and pensions for all. Many countries will face similar chal-

enges. Humanity will have to deal, for the first time ever, with issues of mass ageing. By some estimates, there are already half a million centenarians in the world today. Research on longevity has also speeded up, especially in the West. Unlike Amma, Silicon Valley billionaires seem particularly obsessed with increasing lifespans. One of them allegedly declared death to be a bug, not a feature of life! And the Methuselah Foundation wants 90 to become the new 50 by 2030. If that fanciful project fails, many hope that it will, more importantly, yield answers to the problems of dementia and other age-related disorders.

Amma may herself contribute something of significance to medical research. She has agreed to donate her blood to a project at NIMHANS, which analyses cell degeneration and rejuvenation in older people. She would surely volunteer to donate her body for research if she believed it would help others.

As we plan for her 100th birthday, I ask Amma, "How long should people live?" "So long as they are not a burden to others," she says. "But it is not in our hands, is it?"

Wise words from a compassionate centenarian, who has gracefully added life to her years, not just years to her life.

The writer is Chairperson, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and author of Samaaj, Sarkaar, Bazaar — A citizen first approach

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WIN OVER TERROR

THIS REFERS TO the reports, 'Terror in Punjab', 'Policemen killed' and 'Violence in Jammu' (IE, March 8, 1984). These hostile elements are still active in the hinterland and at the borders. Though the violence has reduced due to the concerted efforts of successive governments, there still exist elements that need managing. Enhanced vigil, use of modern surveillance gadgets, more connectivity in isolated and remote areas, improving infrastructure in healthcare and education, and ample employment opportunities may win the hearts of people in the affected districts. Efficient governance will surely help in achieving a prosperous and peaceful atmosphere sooner than later.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

MODI'S BJP

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'NDA, then & now' (IE, March 8). Atal Bihari Vajpayee stressed on morals and ethics. But his government was dependent on coalition partners. Unlike Vajpayee, Narendra Modi's politics is not based on principles. His NDA has been an alliance of convenience and doesn't deepen federalism.

THE GIVE AND TAKE OF ALLIANCE POLITICS IS NOT A PART OF MODI'S BJP. THE PRESENT PUSH FOR ALLIANCES APPEARS TO MARK A SHIFT IN ATTITUDE AND IS CERTAINLY A CONSEQUENCE OF MODI SETTING THE NDA A TARGET OF WINNING 400 SEATS IN THE LOK SABHA.

SS Paul, Nadia

BOGEYMAN, INDEED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Advantage Trump' (IE, March 7). Whatever legal or financial stress Donald Trump may be facing is simply the reasonable consequence of his actions. The "abuse of reality" the writer mentions is Trump's speciality — countless times over the course of his presidency, he seemed to abide by his own facts. Trump is also no harbinger of "free speech". He has used his office to bully and attack every media outlet that didn't parrot his senseless lies. In the fight between the rule of law and mob rule, the US Supreme Court has bowed down to the brute force of the MAGA mob. An insurrectionist who tried to undermine democracy and failed has been given another go at it, in the name of democracy.

Prakhar Jaiswal, Meerut

15 BIG PICTURE

Ms Murty goes to Parliament

From being the person who stood behind Narayana Murthy as he lived his Infosys dream, Sudha Murty has over the years emerged as a more public person — as philanthropist, author of children's books, twice Padma winner and now, a nominated member of Rajya Sabha

KIRAN PARASHAR

IN 1981, she famously lent her husband the Rs 10,250 that she had squirreled away, resulting in the creation of the \$80-billion Indian IT bellwether firm Infosys Ltd. That image of Sudha Murty — as the woman behind the successful Narayana Murthy, who doggedly pursued business success as founder, CEO and chairman of Infosys — stayed until her husband retired from executive roles at the company in 2014.

But those who have known her say Sudha Murty was always her own person — the only woman in her engineering college in the 1960s in Karnataka's Hubballi, the first woman engineer at Pune's Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO, now Tata Motors), and later, winner of the Padma Shri (2006) and Padma Bhushan (2023), philanthropist and writer of books for children, and mother-in-law of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

On March 8, Sudha Murty was made a nominated member of Rajya Sabha — one of 12 members nominated by President Droupadi Murmu to the Upper House.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* from Thailand, Sudha Murty said the news of the nomination had taken her by surprise. "I was not expecting it... It is also a happy moment that the announcement was made on Women's Day. I believe this is a big platform for me. I will definitely try to do my best," she said.

Over the past couple of years, Sudha Murty has made several public appearances, with her comments — on being a "pure vegetarian" and a woman of "simple" tastes — setting off social media trends and triggering speculation that she may be getting ready for a political debut.

While her husband was at one point spoken of as a potential candidate for a high office, Sudha Murty's name was being bandied around as a possible choice for the Bengaluru South Lok Sabha constituency, where the RSS and BJP has a strong hold.

"Thank you, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. It is my privilege and my honor to be nominated to Rajya Sabha by our Hon'ble President of India Smt Droupadi Murmuji. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve our nation," Sudha Murty said on social media in response to a congratulatory message by PM Narendra Modi.

Born on August 19, 1950, in Shiggaon in Haveri district of north Karnataka, Murty has often spoken of her father, Dr R H Kulkarni, a surgeon who practised at the Government Hospital in Hubballi and other parts of the state, as being a major influence on her life. Her mother Vimala Kulkarni was a housewife.

After graduating in electrical engineering from BVB College college in Hubballi, Sudha Murty pursued a Master's degree at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, where she received a gold medal in 1974.

She was the first woman engineer to be hired at Pune's Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO). The recruitment is considered to be a watershed moment for women engineers since it was a let-

ter to JRD Tata objecting to the firm's 'only male employees' policy that eventually led to her recruitment.

BJP leader and former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, also an alumnus of BVB College, recalls that when he enrolled for his Bachelor's in Engineering, Sudha Murty had graduated. "All I knew was her name then — she was the first girl student of our college. It was only after entering public life that I got the opportunity to meet and interact with her. Incidentally, her first job was at TELCO and so was mine," he says.

Sometime in the 1970s, Sudha Murty is said to have met Narayana Murthy through a common friend. In 1978, the couple tied the knot despite Sudha's family having apprehensions about Murty, then an unemployed engineer heavily influenced by socialist values and looking to start his own business.

When Infosys was founded in 1981, Sudha Murty stayed with her parents in Hubballi before shifting to Bengaluru.

In 1996, the Infosys Foundation, a non-profit organisation, was set up with Sudha Murty as its chairperson, a role she executed for the next 25 years. The Foundation has been recognised for its work in eradicating and rehabilitating Devadasis in North Karnataka in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In her book, *Three Thousand Stitches*, Sudha Murty writes about her work among Devadasis and says she was "attacked with slippers and tomatoes" when she approached the women involved in the sex work. More than 3,000 Devadasis were eventually rehabilitated. The Foundation also works with schools, villages and hospitals and has stepped in with funds and volunteers during natural disasters.

Former Infosys CFO and chairman of Aarin Capital, Mohandas Pai, who has worked with Sudha Murty told *The Indian Express*, "She is committed to her work... I still remember when Akshaya Patra opened in Rajasthan, she rolled chapatis for them. She is a humble human being who is able to connect with all strata of society."

In September 2021, amid glitches in the Income Tax e-filing portal developed by Infosys, the RSS-affiliated magazine *Panchjanya* accused Infosys and the Foundation she chaired of deliberately trying to destabilise the Indian economy and helping Naxals, Leftists and "tukde tukde gang".

Sudha Murty retired as chairperson of the Infosys Foundation on December 31, 2021, three months after the article was published.

Murty has more than 30 books and 200 titles to her credit — including novels, non-fiction, children's books, travelogues, technical books, and memoirs. She is a recipient of the R K Narayan Award for Literature.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

In recent years, her increasing presence on public platforms, has seen Sudha Murty being subjected to intense scrutiny on social media.

Appearing on a popular food show, Sudha Murty said last year, "One of my biggest fears is that the same spoon may have been used for both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes." She went on to say she doesn't eat "even eggs" and called herself a "pure vegetarian", dividing the Internet with many ac-

curring her of Brahmanical superiority. Yet, many others came to her defence calling her food choices her personal matter.

Earlier, appearing on Kapil Sharma's comedy show, Sudha Murty narrated an encounter with an immigration officer in London who, she said, refused to believe her when she cited her residential address in UK as 10, Downing Street (the official residence of her son-in-law and UK prime minister), suggesting that the officer's response

was due to her "ordinary sari" and "simple appearance".

This time, too, she was trolled on social media, with social media users saying that her simple woman image flies in the face of her being one of the richest in the country.

The social media scrutiny was unsparring. Yet, Sudha Murty remained unruffled. Now, as she walks into Parliament as a member of Rajya Sabha, she will be under a new, national spotlight.

Bengaluru cafe reopens: Dosas and a dash of determination

Week after an IED went off at Rameshwaram cafe in Bengaluru, leaving nine people injured, the eatery was back in business — "it is our answer to the attack"

SANATH PRASAD
BENGALURU, MARCH 8

BANANA LEAVES at the entrance, marigold garlands on the facade, priests chanting mantras and tables packed with guests — a week after an explosion rocked Rameshwaram cafe in Bengaluru's Whitefield, on March 8, founders, employees and patrons turned up at the popular eatery to cheer each other up and help put the incident behind them.

Nine people were injured in the lunch hour blast at the cafe in Whitefield, a tech hub. A man who came to the restaurant is suspected to have planted an improvised explosive device in a corner of the cafe.

On Friday, the cafe's founders, Divya Raghavendra Rao and Raghavendra Rao, were back to business, relaunching their quick service restaurant that's known for its South Indian staples.

"The attack on the cafe did not dampen our spirits. It only united us and made us fight back harder. The reopening today is our response to the attack. It also sends a message — that Indians will not be deterred by such attacks," said Divya, adding that the cafe will reopen for the public from 6 am on Saturday. The cafe had sustained damage in the at-



(Left) A CCTV grab showing the blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru's Whitefield area on March 1; at the reopening ceremony on Friday. PTI, Jithendra M



tack, with the impact mostly confined to the area designated for washing of hands. The roof, cash counter and the cafe's logo too had sustained minor damage. Security measures at the cafe have been upgraded since the attack.

Raghavendra said the 1,500-strong cafe family will now "remain on high alert" and "be our eyes and ears" at all times.

"The attack was a wake-up call for us to tighten our security. We have recruited four

retired Army personnel to advise us on making our security measures foolproof. These retired officers will also train the staff to remain alert at all times," he said, adding that two metal detectors and 25 more CCTV cam-

eras have been installed now.

Urging other hotels and restaurants to consider installing metal detectors too, he said the cafe staff has also been directed to report any bag lying unclaimed for over 10

minutes in the 'Lost and Found' Whatsapp group for employees.

Beaming with pride, Raghavendra said "not a single employee left us after the blast".

A cafe staff member said, "Raghavendra sir held a meeting with us after the blast. He was quite emotional. All he said was that we were going to create a new Rameshwaram Cafe. We all knew then that we could not abandon him."

Applauding his employees, Raghavendra said, "One of them was bleeding after the blast. Still, he was determined that we should reopen the cafe the day after the blast. Such committed employees motivated us to restart our operations within a week."

Pramod N, an HR professional and a cafe regular, said, "I am surprised at how quickly the cafe reopened. I think people will take some time to come back here in huge numbers, like they used to, given the security concerns."

Chethan Kumar, another regular who was at the cafe on Friday, was more optimistic. He said, "The cafe and the management have only emerged stronger after the blast. The cafe is known for its ghee podi dosa and podi idli. I'm sure the area's IT professionals will be back here in no time."

