

Across State

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32 for party, 16 for allies: BJP close to a deal in Maharashtra



Mumbai

AFTER THE intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who held meetings late into Tuesday and early Wednesday, the BJP appears to have worked out a seat-sharing formula for Maharashtra. Sources said that the BJP is likely to contest 32 of the 48 seats in the state as per the deal, with the Shinde Shiv Sena fighting 11 and the NCP (Ajit Pawar) 5 seats.

The talks held by Shah involved Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar.

If the formula holds, it is a big gain for the BJP as its partners had been demanding many more seats than they seem to have settled for.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, when it was in alliance with the undivided Shiv Sena, the BJP had contested fewer seats, 25, and won 23. The Shiv Sena had contested 23 seats and won 18. The undivided NCP, which contested the elections with the Congress as an ally, had won 4 seats. The breakaway Shinde Sena now has support of 12 of the Sena's 18 MPs, while the Ajit Pawar-led NCP has 1 of the NCP's 4 MPs. The Shinde Sena had been claiming tickets for all the 18 seats the party won last time, while the Ajit Pawar had been pressing for 10 seats. The bargaining for more seats by the two partners had led to talk of trouble in the alliance, forcing Shah to step in. Sources said that, ultimately, ground reports coupled with

the winnability of candidates prevailed. A senior BJP functionary said: "While reassuring alliance partners about the party's willingness to accommodate them, Shah told Shinde and Ajit Pawar to reconcile to the ground reality. He cautioned the alliance partners against unreasonable aggression." The thrust was that they should all work as a team, keeping in sight the larger objective of winning 45-plus seats in Maharashtra.

While there was no official word from either the BJP, Shinde Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar) on the deal Wednesday, a highly placed source said that this was only because "some loose ends" are still to be tied up. "The outcome of the meeting was positive," the leader said. A BJP leader part of devising the poll strategy said: "Each and every seat was carefully discussed with the allies. All the details were discussed with adequate documentary evidence and surveys." According to party sources, the BJP has "not claimed any seat" where it believes its alliance partners can win comfortably. The anticipated seat-sharing firmly establishes the BJP as the big brother of the ruling alliance, with its partners Shinde Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar) both truncated versions of their parties.

For years a junior partner in its alliance with the undivided Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the BJP has been steadily gaining ground. In the 2019 Assembly elections, it had won 105 of the 288 seats.

Inflation reached double-digit growth in Congress regime, our govt contained it below 5%: Amit Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said their government contained the inflation below 5 per cent while it had reached double-digit growth during the Congress-led UPA regime.

Before 2014, the Indian economy was fragile, inflation was high and fiscal deficit was beyond control, Shah said at the India Global Forum's annual investment summit NXT10 in Mumbai.

Today, India has emerged as a policy-driven state, he said, adding the country will be a USD 4 trillion economy by this year-end.

"Our target is to set up a space station by 2025," he said.

The home minister also said he was confident that India will be rid of the Left Wing Extremism in the next two years.

"We are approaching elections with our government's performance of last 10 years and roadmap of next 25 years," the Union minister said ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a visionary PM, Shah said that by 2047, when the country celebrates its centenary of independence, Bharat will be completely developed, atmanirbhar (self-reliant) and among the top three economies in the world

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PM Modi unveils multiple Metro projects, including India's first underwater corridor in Kolkata

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Mumbai Boy's Skull Recovered Day After His Headless Body Found In Mangroves

Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Tuesday recovered the skull of a 12-year-old boy whose headless body was found in mangroves in Wadala area nearly 35 days after he went missing, an official said.

The boy, identified as Sandeep Yadav, had been missing since January 28 after he went out with one Bipul Sikari, also a resident of Wadala. A day before Sandeep's headless body was found.

Police said when Sandeep's father Bechai Yadav and others had confronted Sikari, he had told them that he handed over the boy to a transgender person.

"Sikari was thrashed and was subsequently taken to Wadala Truck Terminus police station. A cop told him to wash the blood but Sikari fled taking advantage of the circumstances," the official said. Sandeep was the only child of the Yadav couple born 14 years after their marriage. Meanwhile, police registered a case of kidnapping and continued the search for the boy.

Police were informed on Monday that a headless body was lying in mangroves in the Wadala creek area, the official added. He was identified by his father with the help of his clothes, footwear, and a 'kada' he was wearing.

During a search on Tuesday, police found the skull lying 15-20 feet away from the spot where the corpse was found earlier.

Police have added sections 302 (Punishment for murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of the evidence of the offence) of the Indian Penal Code and formed teams to nab Sikari.

According to the official, Sikari is a resident of West Bengal and was arrested in a murder case earlier.

Fire breaks out in Andheri residential building; mother and a kid rescued by fire brigade



Mumbai

The fire started at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, March 3, 2024. Fire broke out on the fourth floor of the Jagdish residential building at Marol Military Road in Andheri. Fortunately, no lives were lost in this incident. After acquiring information about the matter, Mumbai fire department members

raced to the scene. Following the incident, firefighters safely rescued a mother and a kid from a blazing flat on the fourth level of the building. Other stranded people have been safely rescued by Mumbai fire department officers. As the structure caught fire, smoke billowed forth. As a result, almost 40 residents were trapped inside the structure.

The fire brigade has succeeded in evacuating all of them safely. Central Officer AB Sonawane, Chief Firefighter Satyawane Shankar Natekar, Driver Vilas Nivritti Darade, Firefighter Ravindra Baban Chaher, Firefighter Deepak Vijay Khadaye, Firefighter Vishal Balu Thorat, Firefighter Parameshwar Ooty.



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Man smokes beedi inside IndiGo flight's restroom; arrested at Mumbai airport

Mumbai

A 42-year-old man has been arrested after he allegedly smoked a beedi inside a lavatory onboard a Riyadh-bound IndiGo flight, a Mumbai Police official said on Tuesday raising concerns over security as the passenger had managed to pass through pre-boarding check-in at the Delhi airport.

He was handed over to the police by cabin crew after the Delhi-Mumbai-Riyadh flight landed at the city airport on Monday.

Shockingly, the accused managed to sneak in a lighter and a beedi with him when he boarded the flight at the Delhi airport on Monday, the official said.

A labourer by profession, the accused, identified as Mohammed Fakruddin Mohammed Ammuruddin, was flying to Riyadh on a connecting flight via Mumbai.

"The incident came to light when a flight security official noticed smoke in its lavatory mid-air after Ammuruddin exited it," the official said.

After the flight landed in Mumbai, the man was detained by the cabin crew and the police were informed, he said.

He said Ammuruddin told police that he works as a labourer in the Saudi Arabia capital.

"During questioning, he claimed to have successfully passed the security check-up at the Delhi airport by concealing a beedi and a lighter in pockets of his pants," the official added.

Ammuruddin was booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including 336 (endangering life or personal safety of others) and the Aircraft Act.

Lok Sabha elections: NCP announces Sunetra Pawar as its candidate from Baramati



Mumbai

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) will field Sunetra Pawar, wife of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, from Baramati Lok Sabha constituency for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, party state unit chief Sunil Tatkare announced on Tuesday.

“NCP workers are of the opinion that the party should contest from constituencies which we have a strong base. NCP is firm on contesting in Baramati from within the ruling alliance. Once a final decision is made, Sunetra Pawar will be the party candidate from Baramati,” Tatkare said. He made the announcement during a press conference on the first day of a two-day exercise to review 16 Lok Sabha seats, which the party wants to contest from in the upcoming LS polls from Maharashtra.

The announcement means Sunetra Pawar will take on her sister-in-law Supriya Sule, current Baramati Lok Sabha MP from opposition NCP (SP) and daughter of Sharad Pawar. This will also be the first time that two members of the Pawar family will lock horns in an electoral battle as none of the allies on either side have staked claim to the Baramati seat.

“Ajit Pawar has contributed tremendously towards the development of Baramati in the last 40 years. The hard work will be reflected in the election result,” Tatkare said.

Sunetra Pawar’s candidature had been rumoured for the past few weeks as she had been travelling to different parts of the constituency and meeting workers and supporters. Tatkare’s announcement is a confirmation of NCP’s first Lok Sabha candidature from Maharashtra.

Tatkare had earlier announced his party will contest the Raigad LS constituency which he represents. “It is fixed that the NCP will be contesting Raigad Lok Sabha seat. Shiv Sena leaders too have confirmed it,” he said.

MMRDA allocates Rs 41,955 crore for infrastructure projects across MMR

Mumbai

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) in its authority meeting headed by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday approved the fiscal year 2024-25 budget estimated at Rs 39,453.04 crore with expenditure estimated to be Rs 46,921.29 crore. The estimated deficit is Rs 7,468.25 crore.

As per the MMRDA, Rs 41,955.34 crore is allocated for the infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, MMRDA also received approval for its revised budget of the preceding year 2023-24.

The financial budget for 2024-25 is planned to fund infrastructure projects and other developmental directives, including the construction of new Metro Lines dedicated to the strategic expansion of the Metro network, Thane-Borivali Twin Tube Tunnel Road, the Underground Tunnel Road from Orange Gate to Marine Drive, Versova-Virar Sea Link, Thane Coastal Road, Growth Centres, Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar Slum Redevelopment, etc. Thus, the timely approval from the Authority allows MMRDA’s progressive plans for infrastructure projects in and around the Mumbai Metropolitan Region to continue at a steady pace without any hindrance.

The Maharashtra government has facilitated the approval for



raising loans to Rs 60,000 crore, while the proposal for raising an additional loan of Rs 30,000 crore is also received by the government. The additional loan amount will be systematically utilised to fund various infrastructure projects across the MMR. A loan of Rs 30,593 crore from the approved amount has been allocated by the State run-REC.

Moreover, the government has guaranteed a loan of Rs 12,000 crore in the first tranche, while the proposal for the guarantee of Rs 12,000 crore in the second tranche is submitted for approval. Furthermore, the proposal for a loan of Rs 50,301 crore has been approved by Power Finance Corporation Limited, as per the MMRDA.

The CM, who is also the chairman of MMRDA said, “The MMR plays an important role in catalysing growth across the state of Maharashtra, and it is currently setting the blueprint for sustainable urban

development for not only our state, but also the entire nation, through MMRDA’s brave new directions. We rely on MMRDA to lead the way for the MMR’s infrastructure development and economic growth, and now we have reinforced its vision for the sustainable future of the MMR by approving the budgets...”

Dr Sanjay Mukherjee IAS, commissioner, MMRDA said the MMR’s path towards a sustainable future is laid down brick by brick through the visionary infrastructure projects of MMRDA. “The citizens of the MMR depend on us to complete these projects on time, and the Government of Maharashtra has entrusted us to fulfil this noble goal. Therefore, the approval from the authority for the submitted budgets catalyses the progress of our infrastructure projects, thereby contributing to the sustainable urban development of the MMR,” he said.

Rahul Gandhi’s Mumbai rally to kick-start MVA poll campaign on March 17

Mumbai

From tribals in Palghar district to powerloom workers in Bhiwandi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will meet different sections of the society in his final leg of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which will enter Maharashtra’s Nandurbar on March 12 and culminate at a public rally in Mumbai on March 17.

As the announcement of general elections is likely before March 17 that will result in the implementation of election code of conduct across the country, Gandhi’s Mumbai rally is likely to be the beginning of opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi’s (MVA) election campaign and may witness top leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT) and Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra

Pawar) also attending it. The party is mulling over two options — the historic Shivaji Park at Dadar and MMRDA ground at the Bandra Kurla Complex for the rally.

As per the present schedule of the yatra, Gandhi will enter tribal dominated Nandurbar from Gujarat on March 12. Nandurbar was one of the traditional strongholds of the Congress from where the party used to sound the bugle of the poll campaign. The party, however, has lost two consecutive elections from this ST reserved constituency. From Nandurbar, the yatra will enter Dhule and a roadshow is planned in Dhule city. From Dhule, the yatra will travel to Malegaon and through Nasik district, it will enter Palghar

district. Gandhi will also interact with tribal activists and workers in Mokhada of Palghar district. From Palghar, it will enter Thane district where Gandhi will meet powerloom workers in Bhiwandi town, which is known for this industry and facing a number of problems. The yatra while traveling from Thane city, enter Mumbai — its final destination. “The election is likely to be announced during the course of the yatra in Maharashtra and election code of conduct will come into effect if that happens. The Mumbai rally of Rahul Gandhi will be the election campaign rally which might see the presence of Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar. We are in the process of finalising the details,” said a senior leader from Congress.

BMC to install 481 dewatering pumps to tackle waterlogging this year

Mumbai

IN A bid to prevent waterlogging in low-lying areas during monsoon, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is slated to install 481 dewatering pumps in several pockets of the city this year, with the maximum pumps set to be installed in the island city division. Last year, the civic body had situated nearly 492 dewatering pumps across the city's low-lying areas by June 2023, which marks the onset of monsoon in Mumbai.

According to the civic data, the low-lying areas are prone to water accumulation, following heavy rain of more than 55 mm per hour and high tide period. Seeking to bring relief to residents as well as commuters frequenting these areas, the BMC

has rolled out plans to install 481 dewatering pumps, ahead of this year's monsoon.

Of these, 124 will be put up in the eastern suburbs, whereas 166 and 187 dewatering pumps



are planned to be installed in the western suburbs and the island city division respectively.

Data procured from the officials showed that last year, while 380 pumps had been planned in the city, following increased demand, a total of 492 dewatering pumps were eventually installed to combat

waterlogging. In 2022, 435 pumps had been installed in the city's low-lying areas.

With the aim to ensure smooth functioning, the stations will be staffed with operators and helpers. Senior engineers from the ward, meanwhile, will be entrusted with the task of overlooking and ensuring its timely operations.

Besides the installation of pumps, every year, as a precautionary move to minimise waterlogging in the city, the civic body undertakes several mitigation measures including desilting from all major and minor drains, rivers and water bodies in Mumbai, to allow free flow of water during heavy rain, construction of new as well as repairing of existing channels.

Maharashtra assembly Speaker's email address hacked



Mumbai

An email address of Maharashtra Assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar was hacked and an email was sent from it to the office of the state's governor, police said on Tuesday. A case was registered at the Marine Drive police station here against an unidentified person after the hacking came to light earlier in the day, said an official. An email was found to have been sent to Maharashtra governor Ramesh Bais's office after the account was hacked, he said. The First Information Report was registered under Indian Penal Code sections 419 (cheating by personation), 170 (personating a public servant), and relevant sections of the Information Technology Act, the official said, adding that further probe was on.

Trinamool's Shatrughan Sinha Claims Sharp Fall In Ram Temple Visitors, BJP Hits Back

Asansol

Bollywood actor turned politician and Trinamool Congress MP Shatrughan Sinha took a dig at the Bharatiya Janata Party over the publicity of the Ram Mandir and said that the number of visitors dropped significantly after the Pran Pratishtha on January 22.

Addressing a public gathering in Bengal's Asansol, Mr Sinha said that BJP created a big drama even when the temple was not completely built.

"I say it with sadness. After so much publicity (of Ram Temple in Ayodhya), around five lakh people reached there on the first day. Big corporate houses and artists were called but the common man was not invited. However, on the second and third day, only three lakh people reached there. After that, it came down to two lakhs. Now, five thousand, 10 thousand and 20 thousand people are going there," he said.



"So when Shankaracharyas did not reach the place, the temple was not completed, you created so much drama and did publicity on it. Farmers are sitting on the road. It seems that he is not the Prime Minister but the Publicity Minister. If you just keep preaching, then when do you work?" he added.

The BJP hit back at the TMC MP and termed him a "liar".

In his post on X, In-charge of BJP's National Information and Technology Department, Amit Malviya said that will Asansol tolerate someone who defames and lies about Bhagwan Ram?

MU's Centre for Avesta-Pahlavi Studies set to give academic exposure to Zoroastrian culture

Mumbai

The Mumbai University (MU) is all set to offer unique courses in one of the ancient languages used by the Parsi community and an academic exposure to Zoroastrian culture for interested individuals with the establishment of its newest Centre for Avesta-Pahlavi Studies.

The varsity on Tuesday held the foundation stone-laying ceremony for this centre, which is a joint venture with the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs, which has provided funds of Rs 12 crore for the initiative aimed at preserving and reviving the ancient language used by the Parsi community by offering courses of various levels, to enthusiastic individuals irrespective of their faith.

Bhoomi puja ceremony for the construction of the Centre was held on Tuesday at the hand of Union Minister of Minority Affairs Smriti Irani in the presence of Minister of Higher and Technical Education Department Chandrakant Patil.

The varsity plans to offer multiple levels of courses in the Avesta-Pahlavi language, its script, grammar and the literature from the upcoming academic year, once the infrastructure is ready. Dr S D Sargar, Professor of English from the MU's department of English who has been appointed as nodal officer from the varsity for the Centre, said, "It is a very close-knit community. The new centre will in a way encourage revival of this ancient

language by opening it for many to learn."

He shared that an ad-hoc Board of Studies will now be constituted to decide on structures and nomenclatures of the courses to be offered through this centre, which already has three faculty members, who come from the community.

Ervad Cyrus Darbari, who is one of the three faculty members, said, "This is a result of patient



perseverance of over three years, after MU stopped offering this course in distance mode. Studying Avesta-Pahlavi language was a common phenomenon in Mumbai in the 80s when the popular St. Xavier's College offered a bachelor degree in the subject until early 90s and then stopped due to declining number of students." Ervad Darbari shared how the community offered an equivalent course through a private institution, wherein lectures would be held in Agiary. Degree holders could then approach Mumbai University, where Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) offered MA in Avesta-Pahlavi from 2014 to 2017. But it stopped because regulations restricted MU from offering any course in distance mode for which it did not have a full-time regular course.

Supreme Court pulls up TN minister Stalin over Sanatan Dharma remark

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday pulled up Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin over his "eradicate Sanatan Dharma" remark and asked why he approached it after abusing his right of freedom of speech and expression.

A Bench led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna told Stalin's counsel that he was a minister and should have known the consequences of his remark. "You abuse your right under Article 19(1)(a) (of the Constitution). You abuse your right under Article 25. Now you are exercising your right under Article 32 (to file a petition in the Supreme Court)? Do you not know the consequences of what you said? You are not a layman. You are a minister. You should know the consequences," the Bench said, posting the matter

for hearing on March 15.

Udhayanidhi Stalin, the son of Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin,



had in September last year said at a conference that Sanatana Dharma was against social justice and equality and should be "eradicated". Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Stalin, submitted he was not justifying his client's comments but only seeking consolidation of FIRs lodged against him over it in six states. The top court then asked him to approach the high courts concerned.

"Main Chithhi Likhunga": PM Modi's Promise, Mid-Speech, At Odisha Rally

Jajpur (Odisha)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday, showed a humble gesture toward children in the middle of a speech in Odisha and asked the Special Protection Group (SPG) commandos to collect the pictures (brought as gifts) from the children at a public rally and said that he will write a letter to them.

Addressing a rally in Odisha on Tuesday, PM Modi said, "I request SPG commandos to collect the pictures (brought as gifts) that were constantly being raised by some children. Children, please mention your addresses at the back of the paper. Main chithhi likhunga aap logo ko...(I will write a letter to you)."

Earlier, PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of multiple development projects worth over ₹ 19,600 crore in Odisha's Jajpur.

The projects relate to sectors including oil and gas, railways, roads, transport, and

highways, and atomic energy.

Noting the Jayanti of Biju Patnaik, the Prime Minister remembered his incomparable contribution to the nation and Odisha.

Highlighting the inauguration and foundation stone-laying of mega development projects worth about ₹ 20,000 crores in the sectors of petroleum, natural gas, atomic energy, roadways, railways, and connectivity today, the Prime Minister said that it will boost industrial activities in the region and create new employment opportunities. He congratulated the people of Odisha for the development projects.

The Prime Minister put forward the government's approach of taking care of the present needs of the nation while working for the resolution of Viksit Bharat. He mentioned the efforts to enhance the capabilities of the Eastern states in the energy sector. Under the Urja

Ganga Yojana, in the five big states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, major projects are underway for the supply of natural gas.

PM Modi inaugurated a 344-kilometre-long product pipeline from Paradip in Odisha to Haldia in West Bengal. He also inaugurated the Indian Oil Corporation Limited Mono Ethylene Glycol Project in Paradip Refinery and the 0.6 MMTA LPG Import Facility at Paradip, which will bring a revolutionary change to the polyester industry of eastern India. This will also provide raw materials for the textile parks in Bhadrak and Paradip.

Prime Minister Modi highlighted the central government making use of the abundance of natural resources in Eastern India for the development of Odisha and spoke about the desalination plant in Ganjam district that will treat almost 50 lakh litres of saline water every day and make it suitable for drinking.

Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई



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डिजिटल मिडीया संपादक संघटना



Need to reassess threat perception, says Rajnath



New Delhi

In separate developments through the day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called for "re-assessing threat perceptions", opened a new ship berthing jetty at Karwar and sailed at sea to witness simultaneous operations by Indian Navy aircraft carriers.

Rajnath, while speaking at the opening of new building of the Naval War College at Goa, said, "In view of increased movement of our adversaries in the Indian Ocean, it is necessary to re-assess our threat perception and accordingly re-balance military resources and strategic attention."

BJP slams Raja for 'India not a nation' remark

New Delhi

The BJP on Tuesday attacked DMK leader and former Union minister A Raja for his "India is not a country" remarks and said the Opposition INDI alliance leaders were "anti-India and anti-tradition".

Senior BJP spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad, while citing RJD supremo Lalu Prasad's anti-Narendra Modi remarks and now A Raja's comments, said, "INDI alliance's political agenda is defaming India, publicly insulting Indian culture and abusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Prasad said Raja had insulted Lord Ram and Bharat Mata.

"Raja has made indecent remarks against Shri Ram and INDI alliance leaders are maintaining a conspicuous silence. The Congress will have to answer this," said Prasad, after Raja's speech today where he said, "India is not a nation, but a subcontinent as a nation has one language, one tradition and one culture."



Era when a few powers exercised influence over reshaping global order is behind us, says Jaishankar

Seoul

The era when a few powers exercised "disproportionate influence" over the reshaping of the global order is a thing of the past so India and South Korea have a growing responsibility to actively contribute to the process, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy, Jaishankar who is here on a two-day visit, said India's partnership with the Republic of Korea is acquiring a greater salience in a more uncertain and volatile world.

"India and South Korea have a growing responsibility to actively contribute to the reshaping of the global order. The era when a few powers exercised disproportionate influence over that process is now behind us," he said.

"Willy-nilly, it has become

a more collaborative and broad-based endeavour. That multilateralism has also stalled and being replaced in good measure by plurilateralism is a factor as well," he said.



Jaishankar said issues like countering terrorism or weapons of mass destruction proliferation or indeed ensuring maritime safety and security matter fundamentally to both nations.

"In recent years, challenges like terrorism and WMD proliferation have impacted our national security. We have

learnt to be sensitive to changing currents of the global order. While our solutions may be suited to our particular national circumstances, working together has always been to our common advantage," he said.

The concept of the Indo-Pacific emerged as a consequence of geo-political shifts in the last few decades, he said.

"India's stakes in terms of trade, investment, services, resources, logistics and technology in the Indo-Pacific are growing by the day. Ensuring the stability, safety and security of this region is, therefore, vital for us. We have an obligation to the global commons, just as we have a duty to do global good," he said.

To realise their potential, Jaishankar said it is important that the two nations intensify their engagement in different spheres.

He said the two nations need more political discussions and more strategic conversations.

Storm of Sandeshkhali will reach every part of West Bengal: PM Modi launches scathing attack on Mamata Banerjee



Barasat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the "storm of Sandeshkhali" will reach every part of West Bengal, asserting that 'Nari Shakti' (woman power) will play a pivotal role in decimating the ruling TMC in the state.

Modi, while addressing a rally here, said whatever happened with women in Sandeshkhali "is a matter of shame".

The riverine island of Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district has been on the

boil over allegations of sexual atrocities on women and land grabbing by suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his cohorts.

"TMC leaders are committing atrocities against sisters and daughters of poor, Dalit and tribal families at various places. The women of Bengal and the country are angry. This storm of Sandeshkhali will reach every part of West Bengal, and decimate the TMC across the state," Modi said.

No impact on immune system of man who received over 200 COVID-19 vaccinations: Lancet study

New Delhi

Researchers have examined a man in Germany who claims to have received 217 vaccinations against COVID-19 and found that his immune system was fully functional.

Until now, it has been unclear what effects hypervaccination such as this would have on the immune system. Some scientists were of the opinion that immune cells would become less effective after becoming used to the antigens.

However, the case study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal found that the immune system of the person is fully functional.

More than 60 million people in Germany have been vaccinated against S-CoV-2, a majority of them several times, the researchers said.

The man examined by a team at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) in Germany claims to have received 217 vaccinations for



private reasons. There is official confirmation for 134 of these vaccinations, they said.

"We learned about his case via newspaper articles," said Kilian Schober from FAU.

"We then contacted him and invited him to undergo various tests in Erlangen (a city in Germany). He was very interested in doing so," he said.

Vaccinations contain parts of the pathogen or a type of construction plan that the

vaccinated person's cells can use to produce these pathogenic components themselves.

Thanks to these antigens, the immune system learns to recognise the real pathogen in the event of a later infection. It can then react more rapidly and forcibly.

The researchers wanted to analyse what happens if the body's immune system is exposed extremely often to a specific antigen.

"That may be the case in a chronic infection such as HIV or hepatitis B, that has regular flare-ups," explained Schober.

"There is an indication that certain types of immune cells, known as T-cells, then become fatigued, leading to them releasing fewer pro-inflammatory messenger substances," he added.

This and other effects triggered by the cells becoming used to the antigens can weaken the immune system, which is then no longer able to combat the pathogen so effectively.

However, the study does not deliver any indication that this is the case, the researchers said.

"We were also able to take blood samples ourselves when the man received a further vaccination during the study at his own insistence. We were able to use these samples to determine exactly how the immune system reacts to the vaccination," Schober said.

The results showed that the individual has large numbers of

T-effector cells against S-CoV-2. These act as the body's own soldiers that fight against the virus, the researchers said.

The person even had more of these compared to the control group of people who had received three vaccinations, they said.

The researchers did not perceive any fatigue in these effector cells. They were similarly effective as those in the control group who had received the normal number of vaccinations.

They also explored memory T cells—cells at a preliminary stage, similar to stem cells, that can replenish numbers of suitable effector cells.

"The number of memory cells was just as high in our test case as in the control group," explained Katharina Kocher, one of the leading authors of the study.

"Overall, we did not find any indication for a weaker immune response, rather the contrary," Kocher added.

High Court transfers Sandeshkhali probe to CBI, West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee govt moves Supreme Court

New Delhi

The West Bengal Government on Tuesday moved the Supreme Court challenging an order of the Calcutta High Court to transfer the probe into an attack on Enforcement Directorate officials at Sandeshkhali on January 5 to the CBI.

The SC bench, however, refused an urgent listing of the plea and asked senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the West Bengal Government, to mention the matter before the Registrar General of the top court.

The ED, meanwhile, provisionally attached movable and immovable assets worth Rs 12.78 crore in the ongoing investigation against former Trinamool Congress strongman Shahjahan Sheikh even as the Calcutta High Court on Tuesday



transferred his case and custody to the CBI.

The ED had initiated investigation in the matter on the basis of multiple FIRs registered by the West Bengal Police against Shahjahan and others for offences, including murder, attempt to murder, extortion, grabbing land of general public, etc.

Shahjahan had been evading the police since January 5, when a team of ED officials were attacked by a mob of his supporters while on way to conduct raids in Sandeshkhali. The incident led to a huge political row with the BJP attacking the Trinamool Congress, accusing the ruling party of protecting him. He was finally arrested on February 29.

Maha moves SC against ex-DU prof's acquittal



New Delhi

Hours after the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court acquitted former Delhi University professor, GN Saibaba, in a case relating to his alleged links with the banned CPI(Maoist), the Maharashtra Government on Tuesday moved the Supreme Court challenging his acquittal.

The High Court set aside the conviction of Saibaba (54) and five others under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

(UAPA) in the alleged Maoist links case, saying the prosecution failed to prove the case against them beyond reasonable doubt. The High Court held as "null and void" the sanction procured by the prosecution to charge the accused under the UAPA.

A wheelchair-bound man suffering from physical disability, Saibaba is currently lodged in the Nagpur Central Jail since his arrest in the case in 2014.

PM Modi unveils multiple Metro projects, including India's first underwater corridor in Kolkata

Kolkata

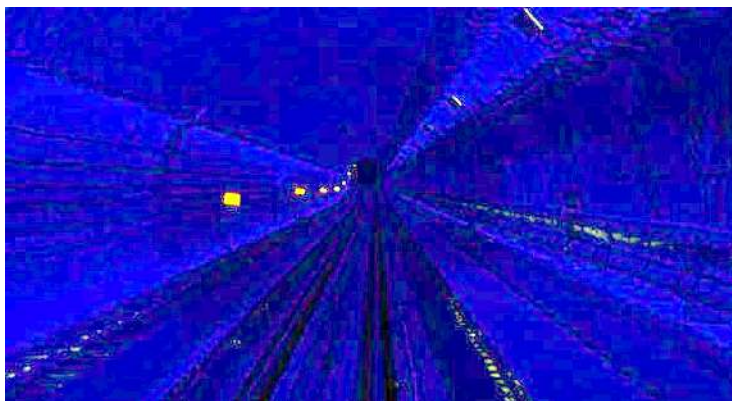
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday unveiled multiple Metro projects across the country, including India's first underwater Metro line in Kolkata.

The Rs 4,965-crore Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of Kolkata Metro's East-West Corridor, which has the first transportation tunnel "under any mighty river in India", was inaugurated by the PM. The stretch also has the deepest metro station in the country—the Howrah Metro station.

After the inauguration programme, Modi took a metro ride from Esplanade to Howrah Maidan along with schoolchildren.

The under-river section of the tunnel is 520 metres long, and a train will take around 45 seconds to cross it, officials said.

From the function at the Esplanade Metro station, the PM also inaugurated the Kavi Subhash-Hemanta



Mukhopadhyay section of the New Garia-Aiport line and the Taratala-Majerhat section of the Joka-Esplanade line of the Kolkata Metro, the country's oldest Metro network.

The Majerhat Metro station is a unique elevated installation across railway lines, platforms and a canal, an official statement said. Modi also inaugurated the Duhai-Modinagar (North) section of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS Corridor, Pune Metro's Ruby Hall Clinic-Ramwadi stretch, Kochi Metro's SN Junction to Tripunithura section

and Agra Metro's Taj East Gate-Mankameshwar section.

The PM also laid the foundation stone for the extension of the Pune Metro between Pimpri Chinchwad and Nigdi.

These sections will help decongest road traffic and provide seamless, easy and comfortable connectivity, the statement said.

The section of the Agra Metro that was inaugurated will enhance connectivity to historical tourist places, it said.

The 17-km section of the RRTS will boost economic activity in the NCR, it added.

Rahul Gandhi to contest Lok Sabha poll from Amethi: UP Congress leader



Amethi

A Congress leader from Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday said that party leader Rahul Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha election from Amethi – a constituency he has represented several times since 2002.

Congress District President Pradeep Singhal, who returned after a meeting in Delhi,

said Gandhi will be the party candidate from Amethi and his name would be announced soon.

Gandhi, a former Congress president, represented Amethi in Parliament from 2002 to 2019.

In 2019 General Election, he lost to BJP's Smriti Irani. He is now MP from Kerala's Wayanad.

Khelo India medal winners now eligible for government jobs

New Delhi

Medal winners in all Khelo India competitions will now be eligible for government jobs as per a revised criteria, Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said on Wednesday.

Thakur said the move is in keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "vision of a robust sports ecosystem, nurturing talent at grassroots level and turning sports into a lucrative and viable career option."

He said the department of personnel and training, in consultation with the sports ministry, has made "progressive revisions to the eligibility criteria for sportspersons seeking government jobs."

"This groundbreaking step now extends eligibility to medal winners from the Khelo India Games—Youth, University, Para and Winter Games—to be eligible for government jobs. Additionally, games and events have been clearly defined to ensure inclusivity across various sports," Thakur said in his post on X.

"These revised rules mark a significant stride in supporting our athletes in making Bharat a sporting superpower," he added.

Khelo India Games were first organised in 2018 as part of the Modi Government's initiative to revitalise sports culture at the grassroots level.

Army's new anti-drone weapon — high-flying kites armed with camera

New Delhi

As a joint India-Japan Army team mimicked a raid during the "Dharma Guardian" exercise underway in Rajasthan, the Indian Army used a kite, a bird from the eagle family, trained for anti-drone and surveillance missions.

The kite flew overhead, providing real-time imagery and situational awareness to ground troops, who are part of the "Dharma Guardian" exercise being held in Rajasthan, officials said.

"Arjun" and "Deep" have been trained to intercept drones and provide live feed with a head-mounted camera system connected via secure communication to ground stations. The small, lightweight camera system attached to the heads of the birds for aerial surveillance represents a remarkable fusion of nature and technology.



It is difficult to combat dangerous combat drones that can launch airborne assaults in border and conflict zones. Birds possess

the ability to navigate complex terrains, making them ideal for surveying remote or challenging areas. Additionally, their unobtrusive presence reduces the risk of detection by enemies. Conventional drones or aircraft are detectable by enemy radars.

The Army also used specially trained dogs during the "Dharma Guardian" exercise. The canines have been trained to assault, immobilise and even kill on handler's command.

Assault dogs undergo rigorous training in varied scenarios and conditions to develop skillsets which make them invaluable assets for the military personnel in apprehension, jungle search, vehicle assault and other such scenarios. The Army also has explosive detection and mine detection dogs.

Biden and Trump begin to rack up wins as Super Tuesday moves them closer to November rematch

Washington

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump began racking up early wins as states across the country held Super Tuesday elections, moving them closer to a historic rematch despite a lack of enthusiasm from many voters. The results could ramp up pressure on Nikki Haley, Trump's last major rival, to leave the race.

Super Tuesday features elections in 16 states and one territory — from Alaska and California to Vermont and Virginia. Hundreds of delegates are at stake, the biggest haul of the race for either party.

Biden and Trump won Maine, Oklahoma, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee. Biden also won the Democratic primaries in Massachusetts, Vermont and Iowa.

While much of the focus is on the presidential race, there are also important down-ballot contests. California voters will choose candidates who will compete to fill the Senate seat long held by Dianne Feinstein. The governor's race took shape in North Carolina, where Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson and Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein will face off in a state that both parties are fiercely contesting ahead of November. And in Los Angeles, a progressive prosecutor is attempting to fend off an intense reelection challenge in a contest that could serve as a barometer of the politics of crime.

The spotlight, however, remains on the 81-year-old Biden and the 77-year-old Trump, who continue to dominate their parties despite both facing questions about their age and neither commanding broad popularity across the general electorate.

The earliest either can become his party's presumptive nominee is March 12 for Trump and March 19 for Biden. But, in a departure from most previous Super Tuesdays, both nominations are effectively settled, with Biden and Trump both looking ahead to a reprise of the 2020 general election.



"We have to beat Biden — he is the worst president in history," Trump said Tuesday on "Fox & Friends." Biden countered with a pair of radio interviews aimed at shoring up his support among Black voters, who helped anchor his 2020 coalition.

"If we lose this election, you're going to be back with Donald Trump," Biden said on the "DeDe in the Morning" show hosted by DeDe McGuire. "The way he talks about, the way he acted, the way he has dealt with the African American community, I think, has been shameful." Despite Biden's and Trump's domination of their parties, polls make it clear that the broader electorate does not want this year's general election to be identical to the 2020 race. A new AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds a majority of Americans don't think either Biden or Trump has the necessary mental acuity for the job.

"Both of them failed, in my opinion, to unify this country," said Brian Hadley, 66, of Raleigh, North Carolina.

The final days before Tuesday demonstrated the unique nature of this year's campaign. Rather than barnstorming the states holding primaries, Biden and Trump held rival events last week along the U.S.-Mexico border, each seeking to gain

an advantage in the increasingly fraught immigration debate.

After the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 on Monday to restore Trump to primary ballots following attempts to ban him for his role in helping spark the Capitol riot, Trump pointed to the 91 criminal counts against him to accuse Biden of weaponizing the courts.

"Fight your fight yourself," Trump said. "Don't use prosecutors and judges to go after your opponent." Biden delivers the State of the Union address Thursday, then will campaign in the key swing states of Pennsylvania and Georgia.

The president will defend policies responsible for "record job creation, the strongest economy in the world, increased wages and household wealth, and lower prescription drug and energy costs," White House communications director Ben LaBolt said in a statement. LaBolt also drew a contrast to Trump's priorities that he described as "rewarding billionaires and corporations with tax breaks, taking away rights and freedoms, and undermining our democracy." Biden's campaign called attention to Trump's most provocative statements that evoked Adolf Hitler by declaring that immigrants are "poisoning the blood" of the U.S. and suggesting flippantly that he would serve as a dictator

on his first day back in the White House.

Trump recently told a gala for Black conservatives that he believed African Americans empathized with his four criminal indictments. That drew another rebuke from Democrats around the country for comparing personal legal struggles to the historical injustices Black people have faced in the U.S.

The former president has nonetheless already vanquished more than a dozen major Republican challengers and now has faces Haley, his former U.N. ambassador. She has maintained strong fundraising and notched her first primary victory over the weekend in Washington, D.C., a Democrat-run city with few registered Republicans. Trump scoffed that Haley had been "crowned queen of the swamp." "We can do better than two 80-year-old candidates for president," Haley said at a rally Monday in the Houston suburbs.

Trump's victories, however dominating, have shown vulnerabilities with influential voter blocs, especially in college towns like Hanover, New Hampshire, home to Dartmouth College, or Ann Arbor, where the University of Michigan is located, as well as areas with high concentrations of independents. That includes Minnesota, a state Trump did not carry in his otherwise overwhelming Super Tuesday performance in 2016.

Seth De Penning, a self-described conservative-leaning independent, voted Tuesday morning in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, for Haley, he said, because the GOP "needs a course correction." De Penning, 40, called his choice a vote of conscience and said he has never voted for Trump because of concerns about his temperament and character.

Still, Haley winning any Super Tuesday contests would take an upset, and a Trump sweep would only intensify pressure on her to leave the race.

Russian spy chief scolds French President Macron for 'extremely dangerous' remark on Ukraine

Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign intelligence chief has said French President Emmanuel Macron's refusal to rule out sending European troops to fight Russian soldiers in Ukraine was extremely dangerous and irresponsible.

Macron said last month that there was no consensus on sending European troops to fight in Ukraine but that nothing should be excluded, though the United States and other European

members of the alliance have said there were no plans to do so.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered the deepest crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and President Vladimir Putin has warned that the West risks provoking a nuclear war if it sends troops to fight in Ukraine.

Asked about Macron's remarks, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the main successor to the KGB's First

Directorate foreign spying section, said they were deeply irresponsible.

"This shows the high degree of political irresponsibility of Europe's leaders today, in this case, the president of France," Naryshkin told state television in remarks on Tuesday. "These statements are extremely dangerous."

"It is sad to see this, sad to observe and sad to understand that the ability of current elites in Europe and the North Atlantic to negotiate is at a very low level," he said.

Economic surge

SURPASSING expectations, the Indian economy grew by 8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter of 2023. This pace of growth, the fastest in a year and a half, has led to an upward revision of the estimate for the current financial year (2023-24) to 7.6 per cent, according to data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). This estimate is better than the 7.3 per cent projection made by the NSO in January and well above the outlook of 6.7 per cent and 6.3 per cent by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, respectively. The impressive GDP trajectory is set to ensure that India will continue to be the fastest-growing major economy in the world, and that too at a time when global growth is largely witnessing a downturn.

The surge during the last three months of 2023 was spurred by an 11.6 per cent uptick in the

manufacturing sector, which had seen a contraction of 4.8 per cent in the year-ago quarter. The mining and quarrying sector grew by 7.5 per



cent in this period, up from 1.4 per cent during October-December 2022, while the construction sector has maintained a growth rate of 9.5 per cent.

The cherry on the cake is that

the Indian manufacturing sector's growth rose to a five-month high in February on the back of a jump in factory production and sales.

In contrast, manufacturing in China has contracted for the fifth consecutive month, according to an official survey. It is evident that the 'Make in India' initiative is bearing fruit, with ease of doing business apparently improving. However, there is no room for complacency. India must consolidate the gains and capitalise on China's patchy performance. Due attention needs to be paid to the backbone of India's rural economy, the agriculture sector, which saw a contraction of 0.8 per cent during the October-December quarter.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success.

-James Cameron

TMC acts at last Suspends leader after arrest in Sandeshkhali case

THE Trinamool Congress (TMC) suspended party strongman Sheikh Shahjahan for six years on Thursday, a day after he was arrested in connection with a mob attack on an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team at Sandeshkhali in early January. The ruling TMC has finally taken action against the tainted leader, who had been evading the police and the ED for nearly two months. Also accused of land-grab and sexual harassment, Shahjahan has been a law unto himself in Sandeshkhali, unleashing a reign of terror in the West Bengal village. The widespread protests against him underscore the rampant

abuse of power and the urgency of delivering

justice against Shahjahan is carried out in a fair and



justice.

The onus is on the state government, which has belatedly stepped in to restore public trust and address the grievances of the affected group, to ensure that the investigation

time-bound manner. His accomplices should also not be spared. Notably, it was the Calcutta High Court's order to the authorities to arrest Shahjahan that led to action. Earlier, despite the serious

charges levelled against her party colleague, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had tried to deflect the blame on to the Opposition.

The TMC leader's no-holds-barred excesses are symptomatic of the entrenched culture of political violence and persecution in West Bengal. During the Left government's long rule in the state, political vendetta was the order of the day. The strategy of inflicting atrocities on rivals is continuing during the TMC's reign. The impunity enjoyed by goons and troublemakers highlights the need for systemic reforms to address the root cause of political violence and ensure the protection of citizens' rights.

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Gaza tragedy

Killing of aid-starved civilians unpardonable

THE death of over 100 Palestinian civilians, including children, who were allegedly shot by Israeli defence forces when they swarmed a food convoy in Gaza on Thursday, has caused an international uproar. The United Nations Security Council has urged all stakeholders to

of Justice, has condemned the incident. India, Brazil, France and Germany are among the other nations which have expressed outrage. Even US President Joe Biden has admitted that this tragedy would create complications for a proposed deal to facilitate a truce and the release of hostages.

The humanitarian crisis has pushed some areas in the Gaza Strip to the brink of famine. Ensuring safe and speedy delivery of relief items to the affected people has become a major challenge amid the Israel-Hamas war, which will complete five months this

week. Notably, US air force planes have started dropping food supplies into Gaza, even as the international community has asked Israel to keep border crossings open for the entry of convoys carrying humanitarian aid.

It is vital for the UN to up the ante against a defiant Israel and hold it accountable for lapses that led to the death of Palestinian relief-seekers. The ceasefire and hostage release proposal must be firmed up promptly to stem the tide of bloodshed and starvation.

comply with their obligations under international law. Israel has claimed that most of the victims were trampled upon or run over as they scrambled to get aid, with an official saying that troops fired 'in a limited response' to the threat posed by the unruly crowd. The Israeli military has promised an 'exhaustive and truthful' investigation into the deaths, but nothing less than an international inquiry is required to get to the bottom of the matter. South Africa, which has filed a genocide case against Israel at the International Court



Homeless hero

Rat-hole miner bears the brunt of demolition drive

WAKEEL Hassan, a member of the rat-hole miners' team that rescued 41 workers trapped in Uttarakhand's Silkyara tunnel in November last year, was rendered homeless after his house at Khajoori Khas in the national capital was razed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) during a demolition

Feted as a hero barely three months ago, Hassan now finds himself at the receiving end of official high-handedness. The unsavoury row has triggered a war of words between the BJP and Opposition parties since the DDA comes under the Centre's jurisdiction. AAP, the ruling party in

Delhi, has repeatedly accused the BJP-led Centre of targeting slum clusters for political reasons.

The proliferation of encroachments in the national capital lays bare the laxity of the authorities. Moreover, political patronage emboldens dwellers to stay put on encroached land and build their dwellings anew



drive. It was a bolt from the blue for Hassan, who was among those who had risked their lives while carrying out a nerve-racking operation in the partially collapsed tunnel. Hassan alleged that the DDA demolished his house without giving him prior notice. Justifying its action, the DDA said it could not allow encroachment on its land or unauthorised construction in its development areas. The authority also claimed that Hassan had declined its offer of shifting him and his family to a temporary accommodation.

after they have been razed. A pick-and-choose approach, whereby localities dominated by minorities bear the brunt of demolitions, is also a cause for concern. In April 2022, the Supreme Court had stayed a demolition drive in Delhi's Jahangirpuri in the wake of communal clashes during a Hanuman Jayanti procession. Whenever the due process is not followed, such exercises reek of an attempt to punish wrongdoers of a particular community. Officials must be held to account for resorting to vindictive, selective action.

THE Union Cabinet's approval for setting up three semiconductor plants with an investment of a whopping Rs 1.26 lakh crore marks a pivotal moment in India's technological march. The country is poised to establish itself as a significant player in the global semiconductor manufacturing industry. The Tata Group's pioneering chip fabrication facility in Dholera, Gujarat, is geared towards offering cutting-edge technology. The focus on manufacturing chips with

28-nanometre technology demonstrates that India is ready to embrace advanced processes and intends to compete on a global scale. In addition, reflecting a comprehensive approach to bolstering the chip ecosystem is the plan to modernise the existing facility in Mohali, the SCL (Semiconductor Laboratory). The Centre aims to inject Rs 10,000 crore to make it an R&D and training centre in collaboration with a partner.

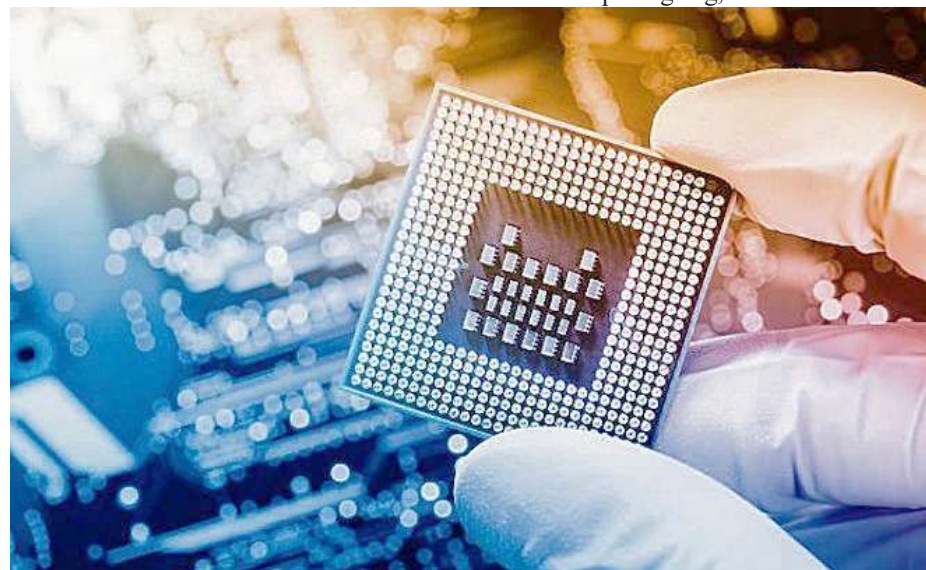
The big push to semiconductor plants holds the key to unlocking a multitude of

Chipping in for chips

Semiconductor industry set for big investments

opportunities. The chips made in these units will boost innovation and technological advancement in sectors ranging from high-performance computing to electric vehicles, telecom, defence and consumer electronics. An estimated 20,000 direct and indirect skilled jobs are expected to be generated by the Dholera facility alone. With similar prospects of the plants to be set up in Assam and Sanand, Gujarat, this industry will not only push economic growth but also provide thousands of employment opportunities.

nations across the globe are reconsidering their reliance on China's semiconductor industry. While India has a rich pool of talent in chip designing, it needs to work



Significantly, the Cabinet's nod comes at a crucial juncture; in view of supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical conflicts,

towards incentivising and retaining the best brains, for they can play a decisive role in making India a semiconductor hub.

Jharkhand horror

Enhance safety measures for women tourists

THE appalling gangrape of a Spanish tourist in Dumka, Jharkhand, has brought into sharp focus the need for enhanced safety measures for foreign travellers, especially women. The ordeal suffered by the woman and her husband, who was beaten up by the goons, is a stark reminder that India must get its act together to facilitate a hassle-free stay for international tourists.

Such incidents of violence and harassment against women pose a threat to the country's reputation as a safe destination. The recent surge in crimes against foreigners, as highlighted by the National Crime Records Bureau report of 2023, is deeply worrisome. Notably, the report says that Delhi alone saw a 48 per cent rise in crimes against foreign visitors in 2022.

The Jharkhand High Court has taken suo motu cognisance of the



gangrape and asked the DGP, chief secretary and the SP concerned to file a report. National Commission for Women chief Rekha Sharma has

condemned the heinous attack and called for swift action to bring the

perpetrators to justice. However, her disapproval of a US-based writer's social media critique — which holds a mirror to the Indian

society in the wake of the Dumka crime — doesn't help address such issues. It demands concrete steps, with collaboration among citizens, local authorities, embassies and the tourism sector.

While dedicated tourist police units have been set up and awareness campaigns organised for the safety of travellers, much more needs to be done. Enhancing surveillance in tourist areas and imposing stricter penalties on offenders, besides speedy delivery of justice, can be crucial deterrents. Also, greater emphasis must be laid on curbing gender-based abuse. Fostering equality and respect for women is integral to creating a safer environment for all travellers, both domestic and international.

Brazen murder

Imperative to curb gang violence in the region

THE murder of Gurugram-based bookie Sachin Goda has turned the spotlight on organised crime in the region. The audacious attack, which took place in Haryana's Rohtak days after the killing of INLD state chief Nafe Singh Rath in Bahadurgarh,



left Goda's mother injured. The Lawrence Bishnoi gang, notorious for its brazen defiance of the law, has purportedly claimed responsibility for this heinous crime. This is not an isolated incident; in fact, it is symptomatic of a deeper malaise gripping the region. The 2022 broad-daylight killing of popular singer Sidhu Moosewala in Punjab's Mansa district was a wake-up call for law enforcement agencies, with gangs being not only active in India but

also operating from Western nations such as Canada and the UK.

The gangsters' involvement in extortion, drug trafficking and targeted killings underscores the urgent need for decisive action by the authorities. The failure to curb this menace is emboldening criminal elements and perpetuating a culture of impunity. The rivalry between the Bishnoi gang and its adversaries, like the Bambiha group, is another vital aspect of the problem, with both groups wantonly indulging in revenge killings.

The rising influence of international crime syndicates undermines the rule of law, jeopardising the security of citizens. It is imperative for various

agencies to strengthen coordination among themselves and enhance sharing of intelligence so as to bust such gangs and nail the perpetrators. Mere reshuffling of officers is not enough to tackle the recurring violence. Efforts must also be made to address the socio-economic factors that contribute to the proliferation of such gangs. The at-risk youth must be persuaded to stay away from the world of crime by providing them opportunities for gainful employment.

Stripped of immunity

SC shows zero tolerance for corrupt lawmakers

EMPHASISING the importance of probity in the lawmaking process, a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that MPs and MLAs taking bribes to vote or make a speech in the House are not immune from prosecution. The landmark unanimous verdict overrules the 1998 judgment of the court's five-judge Bench in the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) bribery case, whereby lawmakers were granted immunity under Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution. These Articles deal with the powers and privileges of members of Parliament and legislative assemblies. Five JMM MPs had allegedly accepted bribes to help the PV Narasimha Rao government survive a no-confidence motion in 1993.

The court has rightly observed that corruption and bribery of members of the legislature erode the foundation of Indian parliamentary democracy, even as PM Narendra Modi has asserted that the verdict will ensure

clean politics and deepen the people's faith in the system. The judgment comes weeks after the SC annulled the electoral bond scheme, saying that it violated the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the right to information. The scheme, whose avowed aim was to cleanse political funding, had run into rough weather from the outset due to a glaring lack of transparency.

It's laudable that the SC is making interventions to clean the Augean stables of Indian politics. Voters expect their representatives to raise issues of public interest in the House, not sell themselves to the highest bidder. The 1998 ruling was flawed as it had given unscrupulous lawmakers the licence to misuse parliamentary privileges to save their skin. The latest judgement is a significant step towards curbing the rampant role of money power in horse-trading and other legislative malpractices.

Tata Motors to demerge biz into 2 listed entities

Mumbai

Tata Motors on Monday said the board of directors has approved the proposal of demerger of Tata Motors Ltd into two separate listed companies. One entity will encompass the commercial vehicles business and its related investments, while the other will include passenger vehicles businesses, comprising PV, EV, JLR and its related investments.

The demerger will have no adverse impact on employees, customers, and business partners. The demerger will be implemented through an NCLT scheme of arrangement and all shareholders of TML shall continue to have the identical shareholding in both the listed entities.

Over the past few years, the commercial vehicles (CV), passenger vehicles (PV+EV), and Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) businesses of Tata Motors have delivered a strong performance by successfully implementing



distinct strategies. Since 2021, these businesses have been operating independently under their respective CEOs.

"This demerger will help them better capitalise on the opportunities provided by the market by enhancing their focus and agility," Chairman N Chandrasekaran said.

The demerger will be subject to all necessary shareholder, creditor and regulatory approvals

which could take a further 12-15 months to complete.

No impact on shareholders

All Tata Motors shareholders shall continue to have identical shareholding in both entities, which will focus on passenger & commercial vehicles separately. N Chandrasekaran, chairman, Tata Motors, said the demerger would help them better capitalise on the opportunities provided by the market

Moody's raises India's growth forecast to 6.8%



New Delhi

Global rating agency Moody's on Monday raised India's growth forecast for 2024 calendar year to 6.8 per cent on "stronger-than-expected" economic data and said that the country will remain the fastest growing among G20 countries.

In its Global Macroeconomic Outlook for 2024, Moody's Investors Service said with global headwinds fading, the Indian economy should be able to register 6-7 per cent real GDP growth comfortably. For 2025, the GDP growth is estimated

at 6.4 per cent. Moody's had projected a 6.1 per cent growth for 2024 earlier.

"India's economy has performed well and stronger-than-expected data in 2023 has caused us to raise our 2024 growth estimate to 6.8 per cent from 6.1 per cent. India is likely to remain the fastest-growing among G-20 economies over our forecast horizon," Moody's said.

India's real GDP expanded by 8.4 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023, resulting in a 7.7 per cent growth for full-year 2023.

IIFL Finance barred from disbursing gold loans

Mumbai

The Reserve Bank on Monday barred IIFL Finance Ltd from disbursing gold loans, with immediate effect following multiple supervisory concerns, including serious deviations in assaying and certifying the purity of the yellow metal.

A leading financial services provider, IIFL Finance offers a range of loans and mortgages. The latest directions from the RBI pertain to only the gold loan business. The company can, however, continue to service its existing gold loan portfolio through the usual collection processes.

Google reinstates shaadi.com, naukri.com, other apps on Play Store amid criticism

New Delhi

Facing intense criticism, Google on Saturday started to reinstate some of the apps of Indian digital companies it delisted from the Play Store.

Sources confirmed that the tech giant reinstated some of the apps such as shaadi.com, Info Edge's naukri.com, 99acres and Naukrigulf.com, and others.

Info Edge co-founder Sanjeev Bikchandani also confirmed the development in a post on X.

"Many of the Info Edge apps are back on the Play Store. An effort very well led by Hitesh (Hitesh Oberoi) and the entire Info Edge team. People were up all night for this.

Great crisis management," he posted.

Earlier in the day, Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) slammed removal of Indian

Play Store.

Google had delisted more than a dozen apps by major Indian digital companies including matrimony.com and shaadi.com from Play Store.

The move comes after Google announced its plan to take action against 10 developers who had refused to comply with its payment policy, despite following the payment policies of other app stores.

Applications from companies like Alt, Stage, and Aha streaming platforms, Truly Madly and QuackQuack dating apps, Kuku FM audio content platform, and FRND social



companies' apps and asked Google to reinstate those delisted apps on its

networking app have also been delisted by Google.

Apple fined over Rs 16,570 crore for breaking European Union law over music streaming

London

The European Union levelled its first antitrust penalty against Apple on Monday, fining the US tech giant nearly \$2 billion for breaking the bloc's competition laws by unfairly favouring its own music streaming service over rivals.

Apple muzzled app developers from telling users where they could go to pay for cheaper music subscriptions instead of paying through iOS apps, said the European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer.

"This is illegal. And it has impacted millions of European consumers who were not able to make a free choice as to where, how and at what price to buy music streaming subscriptions," Margrethe Vestager, the EU's competition commissioner, said at a news conference in Brussels.

Apple — which said it contests the decision — behaved this way for a decade, resulting in "millions of people who have paid two, three euros more per month for their music streaming service than they would otherwise have had to pay," she said.

The 1.8 billion-euro fine follows an investigation triggered by a complaint from Swedish streaming service Spotify five years ago. Since then, the EU has drawn up new regulations taking effect this week to prevent



tech giants from cornering digital markets.

The EU has led global efforts to crack down on Big Tech companies, including three fines for Google totalling more than 8 billion euros and charging Meta with distorting the online classified ad market.

Apple, meanwhile, also is trying to resolve a separate EU antitrust investigation into its mobile payments service by promising to open up its tap-and-go mobile payment system to rivals.

The fine for the music streaming investigation is so high because it includes a big extra lump sum to deter Apple from offending again and to act as a deterrent to other tech companies from carrying out similar offences, the commission

said.

Apple hit back at both the commission and Spotify, saying it would appeal the penalty.

"The decision was reached despite the Commission's failure to uncover any credible evidence of consumer harm, and ignores the realities of a market that is thriving, competitive, and growing fast," the company said in a statement.

It said Spotify stood to benefit from the EU's move, asserting that the Swedish streaming giant that holds a 56% share of Europe's music streaming market and that doesn't pay Apple for using its App Store met over 65 times with the commission during the investigation.

"Ironically, in the name of competition, today's decision just cements the dominant position of

a successful European company that is the digital music market's runaway leader," Apple said.

Spotify said it welcomed the EU fine, without addressing Apple's accusations.

"This decision sends a powerful message—no company, not even a monopoly like Apple, can wield power abusively to control how other companies interact with their customers," Spotify said in a blog post.

The commission's investigation initially centered on two concerns. One was the iPhone maker's practice of forcing app developers that are selling digital content to use its in-house payment system, which charges a 30% commission on all subscriptions.

But the EU later dropped that to focus on how Apple prevents app makers from telling their users about cheaper ways to pay for subscriptions that don't involve going through an app.

The investigation found that Apple banned streaming services from telling users about how much subscription offers cost outside of their apps, including links in their apps to pay for alternative subscriptions or even emailing users to tell them about different pricing options.

"As a result, millions of European music streaming users were left in the dark about all available options," Vestager said,

adding that the commission's investigation found that just over 20% of consumers who would have signed up to Spotify's premium service didn't do so because of the restrictions.

The fine comes just before new EU rules are set to kick in that are aimed at preventing tech companies from dominating digital markets.

The Digital Markets Act, due to take effect Thursday, imposes a set of do's and don'ts on "gatekeeper" companies including Apple, Meta, Google parent Alphabet, and TikTok parent ByteDance — under threat of hefty fines.

The DMA's provisions are designed to prevent tech giants from the sort of behavior that's at the heart of the Apple investigation. Apple has already revealed how it will comply, including allowing iPhone users in Europe to use app stores other than its own and enabling developers to offer alternative payment systems.

Vestager warned that the commission would be carefully scrutinising how Apple follows the new rules.

"Apple will have to open its gates to its ecosystem to allow users to easily find the apps they want, pay for them in any way they want and use them on any device that they want," she said.

Mcap of 7 of top-10 most valued firms climb Rs 65,302 crore; TCS, ICICI Bank biggest gainers

New Delhi

The combined market valuation of seven of the top 10 most valued firms climbed Rs 65,302.5 crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services and ICICI Bank emerging as the biggest gainers.

Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 663.35 points or 0.90 per cent, and the Nifty jumped 165.7 points or 0.74 per cent.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE conducted a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site.

From the top-10 pack, TCS, HDFC

Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and

Corporation of India (LIC) faced erosion from their market capitalisation (mcap).

The market valuation of TCS climbed Rs 19,881.39 crore to Rs 14,85,912.36 crore.

ICICI Bank added Rs 15,672.82 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 7,60,481.54 crore.

The market valuation of State Bank of India jumped Rs 12,182.1 crore to Rs 6,89,917.13 crore, and that of HDFC Bank rallied Rs 7,178.03 crore to Rs 10,86,464.53 crore.

The mcap of Hindustan Unilever went up by Rs 5,051.63 crore to Rs 5,67,626.01 crore, and that of

Bharti Airtel climbed Rs 4,525.14 crore to Rs 6,38,721.77 crore.

The valuation of ITC increased by Rs 811.39 crore to Rs 5,14,451.76 crore. However, LIC's mcap eroded by Rs 19,892.12 crore to Rs 6,54,763.76 crore.

The market valuation of Infosys declined by Rs 9,048.17 crore to Rs 6,86,997.15 crore, and that of Reliance Industries dipped Rs 3,720.44 crore to Rs 20,16,750.44 crore.

In the ranking of the most valued companies, Reliance Industries continued to lead the pack, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, LIC, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.



ITC were the gainers, while Reliance Industries, Infosys and Life Insurance

GST revenue up 12.5% to Rs 1.68 lakh cr in Feb



New Delhi

Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue collected for February was Rs 1.68 lakh crore, a 12.5% increase compared to that in the same month last year.

This growth was driven by a 13.9% rise in GST from domestic transactions and 8.5% increase in GST from import of goods. GST revenue net of refunds for February 2024 is Rs 1.51 lakh crore, a growth of 13.6% over that for the same period last year, stated an official news release.

However, the revenue dipped by about Rs. 4,000 crore when compared to the intake of Rs. 1.72 lakh crore in January. GST collections in February missed becoming the fourth month in

this financial year to cross Rs 1.70 lakh crore in collections.

As of February 2024, the total gross GST collection for the current fiscal year stands at Rs 18.40 lakh crore, which is 11.7% higher than the collection for the same period in the last fiscal. The average monthly gross collection for fiscal '23-24 thus stands at Rs 1.67 lakh crore whereas the average was Rs. 1.5 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.

GST revenue net of refunds as of February for the current fiscal is Rs. 16.36 lakh crore, a growth of 13% over that the same period last year. "Overall, the GST revenue figures demonstrate continued growth momentum and positive performance," said the official news release.

The National Stock Exchange crosses 9 crore unique investors mark

New Delhi

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Friday said its unique registered investors have surpassed 9 crore, with the latest 1 crore additions taking place in just five months.

The investor base has seen more than three-fold jump in the last five years, facilitated by rapid growth in digitisation, rising investor awareness, financial inclusion, and strong market performance.

"The unique registered investors on the National Stock Exchange of India crossed 9 crore on February 29, 2024," the bourse said in a statement.

Besides, the total number of client codes registered with the exchange reached 16.9 crore. This includes all client registrations done till date. Notably, clients can register with more than one trading member.

Unique investor registrations at NSE have seen an accelerating trend over the last few years. While the increase from 6 to 7 crore unique investors took about nine months, the next crore investors came in eight months, and the jump from 8 to 9 crore took only five months.

Daily new unique registrations have averaged between nearly 47,000 in October 2023 to 78,000 in January this year.

From the beginning of FY24 till February 29 this year, the Nifty 50 has given a return of 27 per cent, while Nifty 500 delivered 38 per cent return over the same period.



"It is encouraging to see that the latest 1 crore new investors have been on boarded on the exchange in the shortest time of five months," Sriram Krishnan, Chief Business Development Officer at NSE, said.

He further said that deepening participation in various exchange traded financial instruments such as equities, exchange traded funds (ETFs), REITs, InvITs, Government Bonds, Corporate

Bonds, etc. can be attributed to some of the key drivers such as simplification of KYC process over the years, financial literacy imparted by all stakeholders through investor awareness programmes and sustained positive market sentiment over the long term.

Of the new investors that have entered the market since October 2023, nearly 42 per cent hailed from North India, followed by West India (28 per cent), South India (17 per cent) and East India (13 per cent).

Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra contributed the largest number of new investors during this period, together accounting for

more than a quarter of all new additions.

Currently, the highest number of unique registered investors are from Maharashtra with 1.6 crore, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 97 lakh and Gujarat with 81 lakh such investors.

This increase in new investors has come across states, with all but 33 pin codes having at least one individual directly investing in the market.

Government hikes windfall tax on crude petroleum, cuts levy on diesel

New Delhi

The government has hiked windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to Rs 4,600 per tonne from Rs 3,300 per tonne with effect from Friday.

The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).

The SAED on export of diesel, however, has been cut to nil from Rs 1.50 a litre, according to an official

notification.

On petrol and jet fuel or ATF, the levy has been retained at nil.

The new rates are effective from March 1.

India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks.

Big push for chip biz, 3 new units okayed

New Delhi

In a bid to boost semiconductor production facilities, the Union Cabinet today okayed three proposals of private investment worth Rs 1,26,000 crore in the sector.

The government will provide incentives to manufacturers like was done when Micron, a US company, came to India. "Subsidy for three new units and Micron will now total Rs 59,000 crore," said Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw while talking to mediapersons.

Three new plants — two in Gujarat and one in Assam — will address multiple layers of the semiconductor market. The construction of the units,

which will make chips for sectors including defence, automobiles and telecommunications, is expected to start within 100 days. "We expect production to start in three years," said Vaishnaw, adding that plant set up by Micron in Gujarat would start deliveries around the year-end. Vaishnaw said Indian electronics manufacturing industry would grow to \$300 billion in a few years up from the \$105 billion now.

The biggest proposal okayed is for the first semiconductor fabrication (fab) facility in the private sector with capacity to produce 50,000 wafers a day and will results in output of 300 crore chips — used in almost all electronics.

Date for 'one FASTag' may be extended



New Delhi

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is likely to extend 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative compliance deadline to March-end, in view of the problems being faced by Paytm FASTag users, a senior official said. PTI

Snowflake appoints Indian-origin CEO

New York: Indian-origin Sridhar Ramaswamy has been named as the CEO and member of the Board of Directors of US-based data cloud company Snowflake. Previously, Ramaswamy led all of Google's advertising products for almost 15 years.

Leveraging Community Engagement in Swift and Skillful Disaster Response

IN LATE MAY 2021, Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal battered large parts of India's eastern coastline, causing severe damage in the states of West Bengal and Odisha. The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, and eastern Uttar Pradesh also suffered the impact of the cyclone, which was categorised as a 'very severe' cyclonic storm as soon as it made landfall near Balasore district in Odisha on 26 May. Although a massive evacuation drive prior to landfall minimised casualties, the state government estimated that the storm affected 6 million people in 11,000 villages and caused damages to infrastructure amounting to losses of some INR 6.1 billion.

Sradhanjali Pattanaik, 25, was born and raised in Chanuri, a village of 300 people in Bhadrak district, Odisha. For as long as she can remember, Sradhanjali's father, a farmer, had imparted to her a deep understanding of the community's vulnerability to disasters. Bhadrak is under the constant threat of cyclonic storms that form in the Bay of Bengal during the monsoon season. Often, heavy rainfall, accompanied by cyclonic storms, would lead to flooding in low-lying regions from the catchment areas of Baitarani River. In the past 16 years, the district has witnessed no less than eleven floodings and three massive cyclones.

Sradhanjali remembers her father's accounts of the first cyclone their family experienced in 1999, when she was a toddler. Those stories left a mark on her and, looking back, she feels they ignited in her a passion to take part in disaster response.

In college, Sradhanjali participated in a two-day course on preparedness that gave her knowledge and skills. In 2014, she attended a one-week training camp that not only increased her awareness but also connected her with like-minded individuals.

In 2019, she became a Reliance Foundation Youth Volunteer and began her active involvement in disaster response. She joined training programmes, which continued virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. She helped raise awareness about the health emergency and, along with other volunteers, distributed masks to the community.

Sradhanjali worked hard, continuing with her volunteer work as she managed her part-time teaching job. Proving herself to be an inspiring figure, she managed to enlist the support of 15 other young women and men from the community, including her younger brother. Her dedication to supporting her community before and during calamities also included actively engaging in relief efforts in and around Chanuri village. With the help of pre-cyclone advisories received from Reliance Foundation, she was well-informed about the cyclone details, including the time and place of landfall. She focused her efforts on reaching out to communities in various flood-prone areas.

Sradhanjali encountered challenges to her work with the cyclone-affected communities. After evacuation, they received rations for people in shelters. However, volunteers were needed for transporting the rations to the shelters. Despite the risks posed by the cyclonic storm, Sradhanjali and her friends took it upon themselves to personally move the rations.

During another cyclone, Sradhanjali witnessed the neighbouring family narrowly escaping harm when a large tree fell in their backyard. As the public services were already overwhelmed dealing with communication and electricity issues, rescue efforts were delayed. The community came together and, using household tools, cleared the backyard of the fallen tree.

Sradhanjali's parents often express concern for her safety, but at the same time, they have always been proud of what she does and offer her their support. While her mother wishes for her to delegate certain tasks to individuals whom she feels would be better equipped to handle them, she acknowledges Sradhanjali's role as a beacon of hope for their community in times of crises. Says Sradhanjali, "When they have problems, they come and find me, and we try to solve it together." Her commitment to her community and her willingness to confront challenges head-on demonstrate her invaluable role as a reliable support system during difficult times.

Sradhanjali shows the impact that a single leader—with enough heart and passion—can have on a community. By supporting and empowering individuals through targeted disaster preparedness trainings, it becomes possible to initiate a positive ripple effect that extends to the entire community.

Sradhanjali's story underlines certain lessons in disaster preparedness.

The crucial role of capacity building for community leaders: Building knowledge and skills among local community leaders through even short-term training courses can equip them for the difficult task of disaster preparedness and response. When a leader possesses the necessary knowledge and skills, they become catalysts for change and are able to inspire others. By providing focused trainings to these leaders, they gain the tools and understanding to effectively engage their community, raise awareness about potential risks, and implement preparedness measures.

- The value of community support during emergencies: The support and involvement of the community are vital in driving effective disaster response. Sradhanjali's collaboration with other young people from her community exemplifies the power of collective action and community support in extending humanitarian assistance.

THIS STORY OF Sradhanjali is a modified version of a chapter that appeared in 'Stronger Together: A Compendium of Stories of Courage and Resilience During Disasters', jointly published by Reliance Foundation and Sphere India and launched on 22 February. The publication highlights the imperative of building resilience during disasters by telling the stories of exceptional individuals whose efforts in humanitarian work have rallied their communities to work together and, consequently, grow stronger.

'Stronger Together' documents the stories of ten individuals who have shown courage and leadership in response to the challenges and the growing local needs in aftermath of a disaster or a recurring calamity. The volume highlights the replicability of actions described in the stories. The manner in which local leaders function, the approach of the community in responding to the calamity,

and the lessons learnt from their efforts, can be applied across regions given an enabling environment.

Indeed, the stories of individuals like Sradhanjali can inspire communities not only in India but in other parts of the world. After all, according to the Global Risks Report 2021, extreme weather events, climate action failure, and human-led environmental damage will only intensify in the next 10 years.

INDIA IS ALREADY witnessing these events. Over the recent years, the country has seen a concerning surge in climate change-induced disasters, posing challenges to the country's overall resilience. India is a climate-sensitive country and experiences various calamities, such as floods, droughts, cyclones, and heatwaves, which have become more frequent and intense due to climate change. Some recent examples include the devastation caused by Cyclone Tauktae in 2021 in the southern parts of India, the displacement of people and damage to property during the floods in Assam and Bengaluru in 2022, heatwaves in Northern India, and the forest fires in Nagaland and in different regions across Uttarakhand.

While India has been taking concerted efforts to deal with these climate change-induced disasters, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching ramifications on lives and livelihoods, and the overall social and economic fabric of communities across the world. While biological disasters primarily affect humans, there has been a rising incidence of diseases amongst animals, such as the Lumpy Skin Disease that affects cattle and the Nipah virus that afflicts pigs as well as humans. These diseases cause economic losses that impact the livelihoods of people dependent on livestock, and health and sanitation concerns for the people in the community.

The escalating frequency of disasters presents a pressing challenge for all nations, but more particularly for countries like India, where developmental challenges are more acute. The urgency of the task has prompted the government to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates climate resilience, disaster management, and public health strategies.

To be sure, investing in resilience and adaptation to avoid costs of hazard impacts is an imperative across the globe, as underscored by the United Nations GAR Special Report 2023. These efforts will save lives and resources. The same report calls attention to the need to act effectively to mitigate the impacts of a so-called 'polycrisis', describing how the impacts of climate change are causing existing hazard events to become more intense and frequent, creating compound and cascading crises.

In 2016, the Prime Minister of India released a 10-point agenda on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) to address the need for enhanced resilience against disasters. The agenda on DRR serves as a guiding framework for enhancing the country's resilience against disasters. It emphasises the vital role of sustained and collective action in strengthening communities against disasters, while also acknowledging the importance of local organisations that have an acute

understanding of local needs, challenges, and capacities. This approach fosters a resilient society capable of withstanding and overcoming challenges.

In this regard, 'Stronger Together: A Compendium of Stories of Courage & Resilience During Disasters' was published to serve as a powerful source of inspiration and courage to better prepare for and respond to disasters in India. This aligns with the core aspects of the 10-point agenda, particularly Point 9: "Make use of every opportunity to learn from disasters."

The compendium captured specific best practices adopted by individuals and communities at the grassroots for response to, and mitigation of disaster impacts in different parts of India, supported by local organisations in building capacities of these individuals and in assisting them to thrive through adversities. Their stories of courage exhibit resilience in the face of crisis and acknowledges the Agenda's Point 8, which focuses on building local capacities to enhance disaster risk reduction.

Identifying the need for participatory decision-making in disaster management, the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) was constituted by the Government of India in 2013. The theme of the 3rd session, in 2023, "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate", reflects the need for localising disaster risk management at a time when disaster risks are not only increasing but new patterns are emerging. While building local capabilities is indispensable for resilience, equally critical is the localisation of disaster risk reduction efforts. Representing local expertise, communities at the grassroots possess a sensitive understanding of local needs, challenges, and capacities. 'Stronger Together' highlights the efforts of local communities to respond to the increasing frequency of disasters, in order to save lives, minimise impacts, and build resilient frameworks to face future disastrous events.

One of themes of the 3rd session of the NPDRR focused on enabling women's leadership, which is also aligned with the agenda's Point 3: "Women's leadership and greater involvement should be central to disaster risk management." 'Stronger Together' recognises these objectives and captured stories of women at the grassroots, portraying courage in response to disasters, building trust relationships across communities, and acknowledging that gender equality is a pillar of any effort to empower communities.

During emergencies, the delivery of relief support can take many months due to disruptions in the supply chain and restricted movement, as witnessed during the COVID-19 emergency. In response to such adversities, therefore, it is crucial for communities to lead themselves out of danger and foster a practice of disaster resilience and risk management through coordinated support and assistance from local organisations, local leaders, and government response agencies.

Cause and Effect: The Factors that Make Pakistan's Military a Political Force

In recent years, Pakistan's fragile democracy has grappled with an overbearing military, strained regional relationships, and repercussions from the growing rivalry between the US and China. Amid domestic political turbulence and a deteriorating economy, the civilian government increasingly relied on a power-hungry military for stability and support. Indeed, the domestic political rollercoaster underway since 2022 showcases the impact of the military's involvement in the country's politics, with then-Prime Minister Imran Khan's worsening relationship with the military eventually leading to his ouster and imprisonment. Khan's public clashes with the military chief regarding top military appointments and policy decisions and his poor political and economic management are said to have led to him losing the military's backing, which the opposition said had helped bring him to power in the 2018 general election.

The February 2024 election further showcases the Pakistan military's involvement in the domestic political process. The confusion and disorganisation with which the results were announced have fueled widespread claims of vote rigging. The outcome of the polls indicates a sophisticated electioneering, and that the military likely shaped the elections. Despite the apparent dominance of Khan's political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the military's strategic orchestration prevented them from securing a two-thirds majority. Notably, the sidelining of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in favour of his brother Shahbaz Sharif, also a former prime minister and the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), strategically aligns with the military's interests, given the PML-N's history of challenging military authority, even more than Khan. By tactically undermining Nawaz's key allies and distributing provincial governments among seemingly favourable parties, the military will effectively maintain a grip on the political narrative while preserving the facade of democratic representation. This nuanced manipulation underscores the military's adeptness in navigating the complexities of Pakistani politics, ensuring its continued influence within the democratic framework.

Pakistan is deemed 'authoritarian' due to the pervasive influence of and interventions by its powerful military, which shapes and often controls the nation's political dynamics. Certain theories, such as modernisation, and dependency theories, help explain the lack of socioeconomic development and the rise of authoritarianism in countries worldwide. Modernisation theory suggests that Pakistan's struggle with development is linked to entrenched traditional values, resistance to change, and inadequate educational progress. While the theory anticipates a transition towards democracy as a society modernises, Pakistan has experienced military rule,

indicating deviations from the expected democratic trajectory. On the other hand, dependency theory suggests Pakistan's underdevelopment is attributable to its reliance on more economically powerful nations. The country has frequently sought foreign aid, particularly in times of economic distress, resulting in a dependency on external actors. This external dependency has created imbalances in power relations, limiting Pakistan's autonomy in shaping independent economic policies. In response to external pressures, especially economic challenges exacerbated by dependency, Pakistan has witnessed military interventions, justified as measures to maintain control and stability. The interplay between external reliance and authoritarian governance highlights a pattern where the need for stability in the face of economic challenges has, at times, led to the assertion of authoritarian control in Pakistan. Thus, through textbooks, popular Urdu media and the news media, military generals are often portrayed as epitomes of bravery and



true representatives of Islam.

The intertwining of military narratives (or that of security forces, such as Iran's morality police) and Islamic values is a distinct aspect of political and social discourse, reflecting the historical, cultural, and geopolitical influences that shape the perception of military leadership within an Islamic framework. Such narratives and portrayals have enabled military coups and given the armed forces the confidence to remove civilian governments when needed to fulfil their personal and institutional interests, with limited resistance from the masses in Islamic countries. In Pakistan, the use of state-sponsored propaganda legitimises military coups and presents the armed forces as the sole defenders of the country, its ideology, and its people.

Pakistan, much like several other postcolonial countries, has an underdeveloped society and overdeveloped state. Consequently, this hampers the effectiveness of democratic processes, including political parties, elections, and constitution-making. However, the structural conditions alone, such as bureaucratic strength and centralised power, are not the sole drivers of sustained military involvement. The armed forces' popular legitimacy is significantly shaped

by their portrayal as saviours and guardians of Islam, through a narrative that grants them public support and confidence to assert political dominance.

This issue brief investigates the enduring and significant political influence of the military in Pakistan by assessing the historical, social, and geopolitical factors that have contributed to the armed forces' oversized role in the nation's governance structure.

An Overview of Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Political System

Strategic culture is the collective set of beliefs, norms, values, and historical experiences of a ruling elite within a political entity, shaping their interpretation of security issues and guiding policy responses by providing a perceptual framework through which policymakers observe and decide on external security dynamics. Strategic culture establishes "pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences for states by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs,

and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of actuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious." In the postcolonial era, the intricate relationship between military institutions and political governance played a pivotal role in shaping

the trajectories of newly independent nations. Pakistan is a case in point. This enduring issue—of the military wielding significant influence within the political sphere—reflects not only a historical legacy inherited from the colonial era but also encapsulates the evolving challenges and aspirations of an independent nation striving to establish its identity and stability.

This colonial legacy is a prominent feature of Pakistan's 'strategic culture' and sheds light on the profile and behaviour of its security policymakers. The disposition of Pakistan's security leaders is moulded by factors such as historical experiences during the early years of independence, their assessment of the regional security environment, and their threat perceptions. This shapes their worldview, their interpretation of political and military developments, their perception of adversaries, and their policy options. As such, Pakistan's strategic culture can be summarised as: "(a) An acute insecurity developed in the early years of independence due to troubled relations with India and problems with Afghanistan. (b) A strong distrust of India and a history of acrimonious Indo-Pakistani relations reinforced by the historical narratives

of the pre-independence period and the troubled bilateral interaction in the post-independence period. (c) Aversion to an India-dominated regional power arrangement for South Asia. (d) An active search for security to maintain its independence in deciding about foreign policy options and domestic policies. (e) A close nexus between Islam and strategic thinking, leading to connections between Islamic militancy and foreign policy."

The Pakistan military emphasises integrating Islamic principles with professionalism, hierarchy, discipline, and a sense of service pride as the fundamental tenets of its organisational structure. Military education and training programmes incorporate Islamic teachings, history (particularly significant Islamic battles), and notable Muslim commanders. Key Islamic concepts such as shaheed (martyr), ghazi (victorious), and Jihad-e-fi-sibilallah (holy war in the name of God) are underscored as major sources of inspiration for the Pakistan military in both peacetime and wartime. Given the close association of Islam with the establishment of Pakistan, its defence, particularly in relation to India, is portrayed by civilian and military leaders as the safeguarding of Islam itself. These notions and Islamic symbols were frequently invoked during the war of 1965 and 1971 to rally military personnel and garner popular support for war efforts.

Islamic conservatism within the military has surged since the 1970s, coinciding with a rise in the representation of officers hailing from middle- and lower-middle-class backgrounds, many of whom have strong conservative religious affiliations. Islamic conservatism gained further momentum in the 1980s due to several factors. During General Zia-ul-Haq's rule (1977 to 1988) as president, there was a notable increase in the emphasis on Islam within the military. Facing a crisis of legitimacy, Zia's military regime invoked orthodox Islamic injunctions and mobilised orthodox Islamic groups to build support for his rule. This fits well with the changes in the orientation of the officers recruited in the 1970s and 1980s. The Zia regime endorsed and encouraged the public expression of religious convictions within the army and allowed certain orthodox religious groups to establish a presence within the military.

Additionally, the Afghan conflict (1979-1989) played a pivotal role in furthering Islamic conservatism among Pakistan Army personnel. Many of them actively collaborated with Islamic parties and Afghan resistance factions engaged in combat against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. A significant number of Pakistan Army personnel, particularly those affiliated with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), believed that the lessons drawn from the Afghan experience could be applied in other contexts, and saw it as a potential means to counteract non-Muslim dominance over Muslim populations.

The carbon emission hierarchy: Worthy and unworthy emissions

In a brief article in the Financial Times, Minna Palmroth, a professor of computational space physics at the University of Helsinki and the Chair of the Board of Technology Academy, Finland argued that “carbon emissions from research are a price we must pay to understand the world”. Her article was in response to the revelation that some scientists wanted to “scale back their research” to reduce carbon emissions. To justify energy consumption for research, Prof Palmroth offers examples of persons trained as engineers specialising in renewable energy (RE) technologies who went on to improve the efficiency of RE technologies. If her argument is accepted and research activities are given priority in the carbon emission hierarchy, some inconvenient issues may arise.

To justify energy consumption for research, Prof Palmroth offers examples of persons trained as engineers specialising in renewable energy (RE) technologies who went on to improve the efficiency of RE technologies.

Status

At the third Conference of Parties (COP3) in 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, historic responsibility for carbon emissions and the obligation to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were assigned to the Global North, labelled annex I countries (primarily North America and Western Europe) that benefitted from early use of fossil fuels. The rest of the world was labelled annex II countries with no historic responsibility for causing climate change and limited obligation to reduce GHG and other emissions. This was in line with the ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ (CBDR-RC) principle enshrined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to incorporate equity and fairness in distributing responsibility for reducing GHG emissions. The Global North systematically diluted the CBDR-RC principle in the subsequent COP events to eliminate the division of labour between countries that were responsible for climate change and countries that were not. To lend credibility to their position, the Global North used the argument that the Global South (primarily China and India) was responsible for current and future GHG emissions even if they did not carry historic responsibility. In response, India, along with other countries in the global south, requested the inclusion of three agenda items, which included ‘equitable access to sustainable development’ (the other two related to access to technologies and trade issues) before the COP17 meeting at Durban in 2011. This brought equity and fair distribution of responsibility back to the negotiation table. However, the ad-hoc working group in the

Durban platform for enhanced action, which had the mandate of developing a new global compact that would come into force by 2015 to replace the Kyoto Protocol, included the legally ambiguous phrase ‘agreed outcome with legal force’ in its final declaration. This effectively compromised the red line of equity that the Global South could not cross and the red line of the EU which required a ‘legally enforceable mandate applicable to all.’ The Paris Agreement effectively nullified the CBDR-RC principle



by introducing the supposedly “bottom-up” concept of nationally determined commitments (NDC) to address climate change. The bottom-up nature of the NDC is consistently diluted by the global north with calls for top-ups of greater ambition to the NDC. Several climate activist organisations based in the Global North routinely publish name-and-shame reports to force the Global South to contribute more towards addressing climate change. All this together effectively imposes a mandate of climate action on the Global South by stealth destroying the bottom-up nationally determined character of climate action.

The Paris Agreement effectively nullified the CBDR-RC principle by introducing the supposedly “bottom-up” concept of nationally determined commitments (NDC) to address climate change.

With the elimination of developmental differences between countries, individuals are characterised as the generalised homogeneous units of consumption. This facilitates the assignment of responsibility for carbon emissions, not so much on those who produced and continue to produce most of the emissions, but on those producing the differential transforming it into a critical mass and therefore concealing the fact that the Global North is

the world’s most ‘over-populated’ region. The equalisation of populations ‘democratises’ guilt as everyone now feels equally guilty for causing ‘climate change’. The democratisation of guilt makes it possible to criminalise populations in the global south who use extremely small quantities of energy merely to cook a meal or keep warm just to stay alive.

The global north has thus managed to stay on top of the carbon emission hierarchy retaining control over scientific research and

consumption and carbon emissions, only about 12 countries had higher energy consumption shares than data centres and only 16 countries had higher carbon emission shares than data centres. Most countries in the EU and the African continent had lower shares of energy consumption and carbon emissions than data centres in 2022. Artificial intelligence (AI) is projected to consume more energy than data centres. When energy consumption by other energy-intensive research technologies such as particle accelerators, rockets and satellites the scientific research sector will qualify as a key energy-consuming sector with carbon emissions to match. However, all research activities that use energy-intensive data, AI and other energy-intensive technologies may not contribute to improving human lives or in addressing climate change.

The observation that laboratories, scientific instruments, rockets and satellites as well as data and information that are required to measure the pulse of the Earth consume considerable quantities of energy cannot be contested.

China leads the tables in all categories, patents, utility models, trademarks, industrial designs and plant varieties with close to 50-percent share of the total in 2022 if intellectual property (IP) filings are treated as a proxy for dominance in scientific research. The United States, Japan and countries in the EU take the second and third places in most categories. It is not known if all scientific research behind the IP filings is in the fields that enrich human lives or in military technologies that end human lives. Some research sectors may relate to entertainment, or generation of false information or for development of military technologies. Can they be classified as worthy of carbon emissions?

People involved in activities other than scientific research may be disturbed by the idea that their work is unworthy of carbon emissions. Who gets to identify activities worthy of carbon emissions may also become a contentious issue. To counter the predominance of science in the emission hierarchy other activities may be identified as worthy of carbon emissions. For example, the Global South would want development as an effort worthy of carbon emissions. On the other extreme of the spectrum, science and technology may be portrayed as the cause of the climate problem (technologies for using fossil fuels for energy generation and manufacture of petrochemicals and fertilisers) which would make it unworthy of carbon emissions.

the agenda for multilateral discussions. The Global North also promotes the narrative of global climate responsibility through state and non-state organisations to mask its historic responsibility and to successfully distribute the costs of addressing climate change across the world. Most of the scientific research takes place in the global north though China is gaining significant ground. The argument that carbon emissions from research are justified will not only strengthen the position of the Global North but push livelihood carbon emissions of the Global South down the carbon hierarchy.

Issues

The observation that laboratories, scientific instruments, rockets and satellites as well as data and information that are required to measure the pulse of the Earth consume considerable quantities of energy cannot be contested. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), energy demand from data centres and data transmission networks alone account for about 1-1.5 percent of global energy demand (more than the energy demand of France or Mexico in 2022) and for about 1 percent of carbon emissions (comparable to emissions of Australia in 2022). Out of the top 100 countries in terms of energy

The quick transformation of Russia-North Korea ties

In the middle of a series of actions that are fuelling tensions in the Korean peninsula, including the abandoning of the decades-long unification goal with Seoul, Pyongyang is quickly deepening its ties with Russia. The pace and the depth appear to have gained momentum since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which led to a strain in most of Moscow's international ties. It gathered further fuel during the visit, in July 2023, of a delegation from Russia led by Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu to Pyongyang, which was followed soon after by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's subsequent visit to Moscow in September 2023.

The pace and the depth appear to have gained momentum since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which led to a strain in most of Moscow's international ties.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, is expected to visit Pyongyang once again in 2024, with both countries preparing for a summit between the two leaders where "very good" deals are expected to be signed. With 2023 having been a year in which bilateral ties were fast-tracked, Russia's Ambassador to North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, anticipates 2024 to be a breakthrough year for the two countries. Just last month, Mr. Putin gifted the North Korean leader a luxury Russian-made car, a type that is used by Mr. Putin himself.

Warming ties, greater collaboration While historically, the two nations maintained diplomatic ties during the Cold War era, largely driven by shared ideological affinities as communist states, relations between Moscow and Pyongyang experienced fluctuations as the geopolitical landscape shifted. In recent years, there has been a noticeable warming of ties between Russia and North Korea, manifesting itself in diplomatic engagements and strategic collaborations, with Pyongyang emerging as a key arms, munitions, artillery shells and another conventional weaponry supplier to Moscow during the ongoing Ukraine crisis.

Reports also suggest that the two countries are discussing cooperation in sensitive areas that cannot be disclosed, with Mr. Putin also offering technical support for the development of spy satellites (a feat that North Korea has been aiming for some time now). There are also talks of trilateral naval exercises with Beijing although these are unconfirmed. In February 2024, Pyongyang also welcomed the first group of tourists from



Russia since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grappling with economic challenges and international sanctions, Russia has emerged a potential saviour for development in sectors such as energy and transportation, and even in addressing Pyongyang's chronic food shortages.

For Russia, as a country that is an outcaste in world politics and yet a nuclear power, North Korea is a useful neighbour to cultivate. For North Korea, grappling with economic challenges and international sanctions, Russia has emerged as a potential saviour for development in sectors such as energy and transportation, and even in addressing Pyongyang's chronic food shortages. Earlier, infrastructure projects such as the Rajin-Khasan railway linking Russia to North Korea's Rajin port, underscored the tangible efforts to bolster economic cooperation.

The energy link

Energy collaboration has also formed another crucial aspect of the partnership. Russia has been a key supplier of fuel to North Korea, and discussions have been under way to explore further cooperation in the energy sector. The mainstay of bilateral

cooperation is, however, a food-for-arms agreement, evidence of which surfaced during August 2023, although both countries have not confirmed the existence of such an agreement. The utility of a deal such as this is undeniable though, as Moscow needs arms to sustain its invasion of Ukraine while Pyongyang is in dire need of commodities and food. Satellite images in October 2023 tracked a significant increase in freight railcar traffic at the Tumangang rail facility located near the North Korea-Russia border, pointing to North Korea's transfers of ammunition to Russia.

The American factor

Among other factors contributing to this rapprochement is the shared challenge posed by the United States and its allies in the region. North Korea and Russia have faced varying degrees of strain in their relations with the West, prompting a pragmatic recalibration of their foreign policy priorities. Moscow perceives engagement with North Korea as a means to influence the broader security landscape in northeast Asia.

The diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Russia, often in collaboration with China, underscore a desire to shape regional security architecture

independently of western influence. The North Korean Foreign Minister, Choe Son-hui, observed in October 2023 that powerful ties between Moscow and Pyongyang could potentially offset the U.S.-led efforts of a strong alliance between Washington, Tokyo and Seoul.

As both nations deepen their engagement and cooperation across various sectors, their relationship is likely to exert a significant influence on the dynamics of the Korean Peninsula and the broader Northeast Asian region.

Developments in 2023, and indications thus far in 2024, point to the 'solidification' of bilateral ties between Russia and North Korea, with both countries having found instinctive collaborators in each other. This partnership, forged amid common challenges and shared strategic objectives, has far-reaching implications for regional stability and global geopolitics. As both nations deepen their engagement and cooperation across various sectors, their relationship is likely to exert a significant influence on the dynamics of the Korean Peninsula and the broader Northeast Asian region. As such, Russia-North Korea ties represent a notable development in the geopolitical landscape, with ramifications that extend beyond the immediate bilateral relationship.

Kanpur's Vaibhav Gupta wins Indian Idol 14

Kanpur's Vaibhav Gupta has won singing reality show Indian Idol 14 after besting co-contestants Subhadeep Das Chowdhary



from Kolkata and Rajasthan's Piyush Panwar. Gupta, 19, was awarded with a cheque of Rs 25 lakh from Sony Entertainment Television and a Brezza from co-sponsors Maruti Suzuki India Ltd in a ceremony last night.

The singer says he wants to pursue a career in playback singing.

"When I was a kid, I used to say idol (Indian Idol) is my dream and today it has come true for me. I am very happy and feel very proud that I have made my father happy. I thought if I work hard for long enough, one day I will

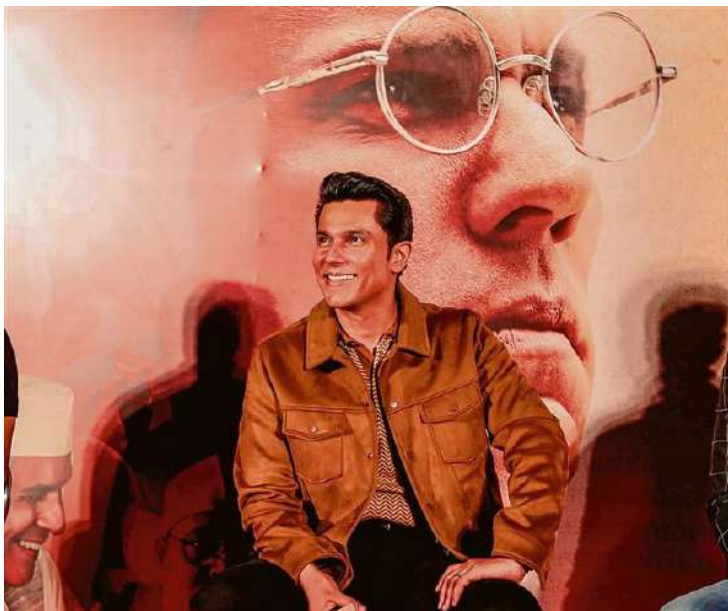
get it (the idol trophy) and today I have become the winner of Idol 14," Gupta said. "I will make my dream studio. I will make new songs in the studio and will try my best to reach you with my voice and good music," he said.

Ae Watan Mere Watan trailer captures Sara Ali Khan's fights for freedom



The makers of the film Ae Watan Mere Watan starring Sara Ali Khan has unveiled the intriguing and impactful official trailer of the film. Directed by Kannan Iyer, Ae Watan Mere Watan is written by Iyer, along with Darab Farooqui. The film features Sara Ali Khan in the lead along with Sachin Khedekar, Abhay Verma, Sparsh Shrivastav, Alexx O'Neil, and Anand Tiwari in pivotal roles and a guest appearance by Emraan Hashmi.

Randeep Hooda says his film will counter decades of propaganda against Vinayak Damodar Savarkar



Randeep Hooda, who is gearing up for his upcoming directorial debut Swatantrya

Veer Savarkar, has said that his film is not a propaganda. The actor shared that it's actually

the antidote to the propaganda against freedom fighter and politician Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. The actor, who stars in the film in the titular role, spoke with the media on Monday at the film's trailer launch in Mumbai.

Randeep opined as he told the media that the public perception of Savarkar has been heavily skewed owing to propaganda against him.

The actor said, "This is an anti-propaganda film. It will counter all the propaganda against Savarkar that has been going on since decades. He was not a 'maafiveer' (apologist). Not only him, many other people too wrote mercy petitions at the time. I have addressed this very extensively in the film."

Shweta Tiwari oozes elegance in a chikankari kurta; fans call her 'goddess'



The 'Kasautii Zindagii Kay' fame actress Shweta Tiwari is a vision to behold in the new pictures that she has dropped on social media, oozing grace and elegance.

Shweta, who was recently seen in the web series 'Indian Police Force', shared a series of pictures, wearing a baby pink-coloured chikankari kurta.

The actress opted for a subtle makeup look—glossy pink lips, kohl rimmed eyes, and blushed cheeks.

Shweta kept her long tresses open, and rounded off the look with small silver jhumkas. She is holding a flower in her hand.

The fans took to the comment section and wrote, 'Cuteness overloaded'.

One fan said, 'goddess queen', another commented, 'ur smile is lit'.

Kriti Sanon oozes oomph in 'Naina' song from Crew

Kriti Sanon on Saturday shared a sneak peek from the upcoming song, titled Naina, from the movie Crew, saying "it doesn't get hotter than this". The upcoming crime comedy movie stars Tabu as Geeta, Kareena Kapoor Khan as Jasmine, and Kriti as Divya.

Taking to the social media, Kriti shared a snippet, wherein she can be seen walking in the airbridge, wearing a beige coloured tube top, matching short skirt, and a long coat. Her look is completed with brown boots. The diva, who was last seen in Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya, is full of sass, and shelling boss babe vibes. Directed by Rajesh Krishnan, it will hit the cinemas on March 29.



People started seeing me in a different light post 'Maharani': Huma Qureshi

Huma Qureshi believes her OTT show 'Maharani', which is coming up with a third season, was the beginning of a new chapter in her journey as an actor.

Qureshi, who made her acting debut with 'Gangs of Wasseypur' in 2012 and has featured in films such as 'D-Day', 'Dedh Ishqiya' and 'Badlapur', said she could also command a certain fee with the show as she is playing the lead in it.

"Today, because I'm doing 'Maharani' and the show is mounted around my character, I am able to command a certain fee. It is a show that benefited all of us. People started seeing me in a different light.... I can say without hesitation that 'Maharani' was the start of a new chapter in my career," the actor said in an interview.

The first season of 'Maharani' featured Qureshi as Rani Bharti, an illiterate woman, who is handpicked by her husband and politician Bheema Bharti (Sohum Shah) to become the chief minister of Bihar after he is shot and injured.

The second season of the show, directed by Ravindra Gautam, saw Rani Bharti go head to head with her husband who is keen to get the power back in

his hands and is worried with his wife's growing popularity as a chief minister. She also has to fight a political rival in Navin Kumar (Amit Sial).



The upcoming season, directed by Saurabh Bhave, will see Rani Bharti take on her enemies after the murder of her husband. Subhash Kapoor and Nandan Singh serve as showrunners and writers of the show.

Qureshi, 37, believes the third season will be bigger, better and bolder as there is more at stake. The actor said the makers

have just scratched the surface of the story.

"There is a lot of potential in the series. There are so many stories. As a country, we are obsessed with politics and everything political. There is a lot that can happen. Right now, we just scratched the surface. There is a lot more to go. Maybe we do seven or 11 seasons. Even if this were to be our last, I will be happy and grateful for all the love we have received," she said.

The actor said Rani Bharti will remain a memorable character in her filmography.

"I always say that if you get five (memorable) roles in your career as an actor you become a legend, everything else is EMI. One is done (for me), four more to go." Qureshi, who has featured in a number of women-led projects be it 'Tarla', or 'Double XL', said a lot of work needs to be done before women can enjoy similar opportunities in the film industry.

"When we talk about female led content, we don't get as many opportunities as those films and shows aren't made often. We have to be twice as good as all the other shows or prove a certain kind of invisible benchmark.

Shah Rukh, Suhana groove to 'Chammak Challo' with Akon, Salman Khan plays drums at Anant Ambani-Radhika's pre-wedding bash



American singer Akon set the stage on fire with his special performance at the pre-wedding festivities of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant.

On day three of the gala event, Akon also performed his

the drums.

Soon after the American singer shared the clip, it went viral on social media and the fans couldn't stop themselves to share their happy reactions.

A user wrote, "bestestt videos



hit track 'Chammak Challo' from the sci-fi action thriller film 'Ra. One' which got superstars Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan to shake a leg on the dance floor.

Taking to Instagram, Akon shared a video of his performance at the grand event which he captioned, "Best pre wedding party of the year. Got to bring my whole Indian family on stage to perform my biggest record in India. @iamsrk, @beingsalmankhan, @sukhbir_singer, and the bride and groom Anant and Radhika. Unforgettable evening."

Apart from Salman and SRK, the bride and groom-to-be Radhika and Anant also hit the dance floor and danced their heart out.

The video also features a glimpse of King Khan hugging his daughter Suhana on the stage with his wife Gauri by his side and the 'Dabangg' actor playing

soo far."

Another user wrote, "SRK vibing on chammak challo is the best and that too with suhana." "Best thing I have watched today," a user commented.

Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani's youngest son, Anant Ambani, is set to tie the knot with industrialist Viren Merchant's daughter, Radhika Merchant, later this year.

Apart from Shah Rukh and Salman, actors including Aamir Khan, Sidharth Malhotra, Kiara Advani, Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Anil Kapoor, Rani Mukerji, Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh, Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, among others attended the mega bash.

Also, famous sports personalities including Sachin Tendulkar, MS Dhoni and Rohit Sharma also attended the celebrations.

Jason Tham beefs up for his role in Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond

Jason Tham has opened up on working in the web series Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond, sharing how he had to gain a little mass to achieve a serious and matured look.

Jason, who has starred mostly in romantic comedy space like Happy New Year, Happy Bhag Jayegi, will be seen in uniform in this series.

About the character, Jason said, "I am playing the role of Victor Maisnam, a special agent, from the military intelligence unit, who is actively helping out in the mission with help of my informants."

He added, "I have played a



very different character from all the earlier roles I have played on screen. The character gave me a very serious and matured look, I even had to gain a little mass. Playing someone in uniform is a sense of responsibility and as

an actor, I have taken that effort to look like a military officer. I consider this as a great opportunity to play a special character." The show takes the audience behind the scenes of a large magnitude defence operation like Balakot, and the ensuing mission to bring back Group Captain Abhinandan Varthaman.

The Balakot strike was a bombing raid conducted by Indian warplanes on February 26, 2019 in Balakot, Pakistan, against an alleged terrorist camp. Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond is inspired by this defining chapter in India's history. The show stars Ashutosh Rana, Jimmy Shergill and Lara Dutta.

Final destination

India climb to top spot in World Test Championship standings, replace New Zealand



Dubai

Two-time finalists India jumped to the top of the World Test Championship standings, replacing New Zealand in the latest rankings issued on Sunday.

India, who defeated England by five wickets in the fourth Test in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series, replaced the Kiwis with a stronger points percentage of 64.58.

With five wins, two losses and one draw, India have 62 points in 8 matches, while the Black Caps have 36 from five matches (three wins, two losses) and have a point-percentage of 60.00.

Before the start of the Wellington Test, New Zealand were sitting at the top of the table with 36 points in four games and a points percentage of 75.

But following their massive

172-run defeat, the 2021 WTC champions lost the top spot, slipping to the No 2 position with a points percentage of 60.

Third-placed Australia have closed on the gap after the Wellington Test, gaining 12 crucial points as they now have 78 points from 11 matches (seven wins, three losses and one draw). Their points percentage has also increased from 55 to 59.09.

The 2023 champions have the opportunity to surpass New Zealand and move up to the second spot if they win the second and final Test at Christchurch from March 8.

India, meanwhile, take on England in the final match of the five-Test series in Dharamsala from March 7. Australia can climb to the top spot if England beat India in the Dharamsala Test.

Sakshi sees no return to competitive wrestling

Olympics bronze medallist Sakshi Malik has ruled out a return to competitive wrestling, saying the long-standing protest against former national federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for alleged sexual harassment has left her mentally tormented.

The 31-year-old had announced retirement in December after Brij Bhushan's close aide Sanjay Singh was elected president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).

"It's been more than a year, there is so much mental pressure and we have been trying to fight

in every possible way to make this protest a success, so I'll not be able to continue wrestling," Malik said. "I got (Olympics) bronze for India and I want my juniors to get silver and gold. I would love to see each and every girl in India pursuing her dreams," she added.



Shardul Thakur's all-round brilliance was central to Mumbai's massive innings and 70-run win over clumsy Tamil Nadu inside three days as they marched to their 48th Ranji Trophy final.

After his stunning 109 on the second day that handed the 41-time champions a big 232-run lead, Thakur rattled the TN top-order with two wickets that saw the visitors get shot out for 162 in their second innings in their semifinal.

Baba Indrajith (70) waged a lone battle for TN as other top-order batters walked back without any significant contributions and the middle-order too crumbled.

However, the pair of Indrajith and Pradosh Ranjan Paul showed some resistance, stitching 73 runs for the fourth wicket.

The catalyst of Mumbai's win was Thakur's mighty effort — 109, 2/48 and 2/16. He dragged them back into the contest from a perilous 106/7 in the first innings to a handy lead while making his maiden century across formats.

Thakur's two-wicket burst early on Day 3 set the tone, helping Mumbai reduce the visitors to 10/3.

B Sai Sudharsan was given a reprieve by Shreyas Iyer at midwicket, spilling a sitter, but Thakur had the left-handed opener caught behind with a superb inswinger that took an

inside edge.

Thakur swung the new ball dangerously and snaffled the key wicket of N Jagadeesan for a seven-ball duck.

Pacer Mohit Avasthi also tasted success when he had Washington Sundar, who was promoted to No. 3, caught behind by Hardik Tamore.

With the top-order blown away, recovery was a herculean task for TN but the pair of Indrajith and Paul did well to take the attack to the opposition and keep their side in the contest.

However, spinners Tanush Kotian (2/18) and Shams Mulani (4/53) joined pacers in piling up further misery on the TN batters, sharing the remaining six wickets to wrap up the win for the hosts.

"I am taking the game as deep as I can and making a good contribution. We have a deep batting order with Shardul at No. 9," Kotian said.

"We have made runs down the order, most of the time our team was 100 for five but we have the confidence of reaching 400-450. Mohit (Avasthi) also can bat and Tushar (Deshpande) can too. We have the confidence of playing session-by-session," added Kotian.

Rathod rises for Vidarbha

Nagpur: A spunky unbeaten 97 by Yash Rathod helped Vidarbha script a superb fightback and reach 343/6 in their second

innings against Madhya Pradesh on the third day of their semifinal.

Rathod, who faced 165 balls, received excellent support from his captain Akshay Wadkar (77 off 139 balls) and the pair added 158 runs for the sixth-wicket stand as the hosts recovered from a shaky 161/5. Vidarbha lead by a handy 261 runs.

The first hint of resistance came when Dhruv Shorey (40 off 65 balls) and Aman Mokhadde (59 off 100 balls) made 84 runs for the third wicket after Vidarbha lost nightwatchman Akshay Wakhare in the second over of the day after resuming from 13/1. However, left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya broke the alliance when he induced an edge from Shorey to press Himanshu Mantri into action behind the stumps.

Vidarbha were 90/3 then, and from there they lost Mokhadde and Karun Nair (38) to be at 161/5 and a mere 79 runs ahead.

Brief scores: TN: 146 and 162 in 51.5 overs (Indrajith 70; Shardul 2/16, Mulani 4/53, Kotian 2/18) vs Mumbai: 378 all out in 106.5 overs (Kotian 89*, Musheer 55, Shardul 109; Sai Kishore 6/99); Vidarbha: 170 & 343/6 in 90 overs (Rathod 97*, Wadkar 77, Mokhadde 59, Shorey 40; Anubhav 2/68) vs MP: 252.

New IPL season, new captain: Sunrisers Hyderabad make Pat Cummins skipper, their fourth in 3 years



Hyderabad

Australia's World Cup-winning skipper Pat Cummins was on Monday named captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad for the upcoming Indian Premier League, becoming the fourth player to be handed the responsibility in the last three years.

The 30-year-old pacer was bought by SRH for a whopping Rs 20.50 crore in the IPL auctions in December last year, making him the second costliest player in the event's history.

He replaced South African Aiden Markram, who led SRH in the 2023 season.

"Our new captain Pat Cummins," SRH posted on its social media platforms, along with a picture of Cummins.

In the 2023 season, SRH finished bottom of the heap under Markram's captaincy with only four wins in 14 league games.

Markram's feat of leading Sunrisers Eastern Cape to the inaugural SA20 title this year did not help him retain the SRH captaincy, though he remains in the squad.

The SRH leadership role has been changing hands for the last three years.

It began with the infamous 2021 saga when swashbuckling Australian batter David Warner, who led the team to its only title win in 2016 and spent six years with the side, was sacked in the middle of the season.

Warner was replaced earlier too, by New Zealand's Kane Williamson in 2018 and 2019,

when he was serving a ban for his involvement in the ball-tampering scandal during Australia's tour of South Africa.

The big-hitter returned to the position in 2020 and was a fan favourite at SRH before his relationship with the team management began to turn sour during the 2021 season.

He was sacked from the captaincy in May that year after SRH lost five of their six games and was then axed altogether later in the season.

Williamson was handed the reigns of the side once again and Warner was blocked by SRH on Instagram.

This came to light when the controversial player tried to congratulate his Australian team-mate Travis Head for joining SRH in December last year.

Williamson continued at the helm during the 2022 season and under him, the team finished eighth in the standings. He was eventually released from the team.

Cummins earlier played for Kolkata Knight Riders and Delhi Daredevils, now Delhi Capitals, but this will be his first stint as captain in the lucrative T20 league. He has not led a team in top-flight T20 cricket before.

But he has achieved huge success as Australia captain, leading the team to victory in the World Test Championship and the 2023 ODI World Cup, with both wins in the finals

coming against India.

In 42 IPL matches, Cummins has taken 45 wickets with 4/34 being his best bowling figures in a match. With the bat, he has scored 379 runs at an average of 18.95 with 66 not out being the highest.

He made his IPL debut in 2014 for KKR but played just one match that season. He had a stint with Delhi Daredevils in 2017 and opted out of the IPL for a few years.

Cummins returned to KKR as the costliest player of IPL 2020 auction with a whopping price tag of Rs 15.50 crore.

He was with KKR till 2022 and withdrew from IPL 2023 to focus on international cricket.

He entered the auction for the 2024 season, where he became the first player in IPL history to get a bid of Rs 20 crore and above, though his national team-mate Mitchell Starc overtook him with a Rs 24.75 crore bid from KKR.

Besides the captaincy change, SRH has also named a new head coach ahead of the new season. Former New Zealand left-arm spinner and captain Daniel Vettori has taken over from Brian Lara.

Apart from this, former New Zealand all-rounder James Franklin will take over as SRH bowling coach in place of South African Dale Steyn.

SRH will begin their IPL 2024 campaign against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on March 23.

CSK's Devon Conway to undergo surgery for thumb injury, all but ruled out of IPL



Wellington

New Zealand opener Devon Conway is all but ruled out of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) due to a left thumb injury that will take eight weeks to heal, dealing a blow to his franchise Chennai Super Kings.

Conway sustained the injury during the T20I series against Australia last month.

The 32-year-old will undergo a surgery on his left thumb which got injured during the second T20I in Auckland on February 23.

The IPL is scheduled to start on March 22, with defending champions CSK taking on Royal Challengers Bangalore at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai.

He missed the first Test which ended on Sunday and after further medical examination, he has been advised surgery, which will take place later this week.

"Devon Conway has a small fracture in the joint of his thumb. So he will undergo surgery this week

and hopefully he will good in somewhere between an eight-week period," New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said in a media interaction.

Conway was bought by Chennai Super Kings for a base price of Rs one crore in the 2022 auction.

The left-handed batter has amassed 924 runs in 23 matches in the IPL at an average of 46.12 with a strike rate of 141.28. CSK have started preparing for the upcoming IPL season with a training camp in Chennai.

"Following several scans and specialist advice, the decision was made to operate on Conway with a likely recovery period of at least eight weeks," New Zealand Cricket said in a statement.

The IPL schedule has been announced only for the first 21 matches. The fixtures for the remaining games will be announced after the schedule of the upcoming general elections in India is unveiled.

अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
संजय मंगेश भैरे
सुचिता संजय भैरे