

Across State

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BJP releases second list of 72 candidates for LS polls



New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday released its second list of 72 candidates from across 11 states for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Manohar Lal Khattar, who resigned as the chief minister of Haryana on Tuesday, will contest the elections from Karnal constituency. Union minister Piyush Goyal has been fielded from Mumbai North and Anurag Thakur from Himachal Pradesh's Hamirpur.

Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha chief Tejasvi Surya will contest from Bangalore South and the party's national secretary Pankaja Munde from Maharashtra's Beed, which has been her family's stronghold. Nitin Gadkari will contest from Nagpur, while former Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai has been fielded from Haveri.

The BJP announced Harsh Malhotra as its Lok Sabha candidate from East Delhi and Yogendra Chandolia from North West Delhi.

Here is a state-wise list of candidates:

Dadra and Nagar Haveli: Kalaben Delkar

Delhi

East Delhi: Harsh Malhotra

Northwest Delhi: Yogendra Chandolia

Gujarat

Sabarkantha: Bhikaji Dudhaji

Thakor

Ahmedabad East: Hasmukhbhai Patel

Bhavnagar: Nimuben Bambhania
Vadodara: Ranjanaben Dhananjay Bhatt

Chhota Udaipur: Jashubhai Rathwa
Surat: Mukeshbhai Patel
Valsad: Dhawal Patel

Madhya Pradesh

Balaghat: Bharti Pardhi
Chhindwara: Vivek Bunty Sahu
Ujjain: Anil Firoziya
Dhar: Savitri Thakur
Indore: Shankar Lalwani

Maharashtra

Nandurbar: Heena Vijaykumar Gavit
Dhule: Subhash Bhamre
Jalgaon: Smita Wagh
Raver: Raksha Nikhil Khadse
Akola: Anup Dhotre
Wardha: Ramdas Chandrabhanji

Tadas

Nagpur: Nitin Gadkari
Chandrapur: Sudhir Mungantiwar
Nanded: Prataprao Patil Chikhalikar
Jalna: Raosaheb Danve
Dindori: Bharti Pravin Pawar
Bhiwandi: Kapil Moreshwar Patil
Mumbai North: Piyush Goyal
Mumbai Northeast: Mihir Kotecha
Pune: Murlidhar Mohol
Ahmadnagar: Sujay Radhakrishan
Vikhe Patil

Beed: Pankaja Munde

Latur: Sudhakar Tukaram Shrangare
Madha: Ranjeetsinha Hindurao Naik-Nimbalkar

Sangli: Sanjaykaka Patil
Telangana

Adialabad: Godam Nagesh
Peddapalle: Gomasa Srinivas
Medak: Madavaneni Raghunandan

Rao

Mahbubnagar: DK Aruna
Nalgonda: Saida Reddy
Mahabubabad: Azmeera Seetaram Naik

Tripura East: Maharani Kriti Singh Debbarma

Uttarakhand

Garhwal: Anil Baluni
Haridwar: Trivendra Singh Rawat

On March 2, the BJP released its first list of 195 candidates from 16 states and two Union Territories (UT), fielding Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and Home Minister Amit Shah from Gandhinagar in Gujarat. The first list includes 34 Union ministers and two former chief ministers.

The BJP is heading towards the elections, expected to be announced soon, with an unprecedented confidence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a target of 370 seats for the party on its own and 400 plus for its NDA coalition.

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Integrated trial run on Mumbai Metro Line 3 begins



Mumbai

The integrated trial run of the underground Metro Line 3 Colaba-BKC-SEEPZ Phase 1 between Bandra Kurla Complex and Aarey depot has begun.

The Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (MMRCL), the project implementing authority of the 33.5 km long line, made the announcement on X on Tuesday. "Integrated trial runs for #Metro3 has been commenced. Various systems like rolling stock (coach), signal telecommunications, tracks traction etc., are

being validated during the trial runs which is being carried out between #BKC to #Aarey," the post said.

The post added that after completion of trials and certifications and receiving necessary sanctions, the section would be opened for passenger services.

The trial run was expected to begin in mid-February but was delayed due to incomplete work of shunting neck at Aarey depot and electrification of overhead traction wire.

The Aarey carshed depot houses 14 trains with eight coaches each,

which will be used in the integrated trial run where the systems undergo communication testing.

Metro Line 3, also known as the Aqua Line, is Mumbai's first 33.5 km long underground metro line, set to traverse through some of the city's most congested areas, passing under high-rises, heritage structures etc. Commercial operations on the line are expected to commence in three phases, with Phase 1 likely to be operational by September this year, according to the MMRC.

Join us if you are being 'insulted', we will ensure your victory: Uddhav tells Gadkari



Yavatmal

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray has again asked Union minister Nitin Gadkari to leave the BJP if he is being "insulted", saying the opposition in Maharashtra would ensure his victory in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking at a rally at Pusad in eastern Maharashtra's Yavatmal district on Tuesday, Thackeray said people like (former Congress leader) Kripashankar Singh, whom the BJP once targeted (over alleged corruption), figured in the saffron party's first list of candidates along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but Gadkari's name was missing.

"I had told Gadkari this two days ago, and I am repeating it again. If you are being insulted, leave the BJP and join

the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). We will ensure your victory. We will make you a minister when our government comes to power, and it will be a post with powers," he said.

The opposition MVA comprises the Shiv Sena (UBT), Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) and Congress.

Last week, responding to Thackeray's offer to Gadkari to contest as a candidate of the opposition, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis mocked the Sena (UBT) chief, saying it was like a man in the street offering someone to make US president.

Gadkari is a prominent leader of the BJP, but the first list did not have names from Maharashtra as seat-sharing discussions between the BJP and its allies were not complete, Fadnavis had said.

Thackeray, meanwhile,

termed the notification of rules under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act as an "election jumla" (slogan).

Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis and others coming to India (from neighbouring countries) are welcome but the timing of the notification is suspicious as elections would be soon announced, the former Maharashtra CM said.

It has been more than four years since the abrogation of Article 370, but no elections have taken place in Jammu and Kashmir and Kashmiri Pandits have not yet returned to their homes in Kashmir, he said.

The BJP should first bring Kashmiri Pandits back and then implement the CAA, Thackeray said.

In the coming elections, there is the BJP which is creating enmity between religions and wants to change the Constitution, and on the other hand there is the INDIA bloc which is an alliance of patriots, he said.

"This election will be between 'desh-bhakt' (those who love their country) and 'dvesh bhakt' (those who preach hatred)," Thackeray said.

Prime Minister Modi has not yet found time to visit the restive Manipur, he added.

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Senior Congress leader Padmakar Valvi from Maharashtra joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Mumbai today, marking a significant loss for the Congress in the state. Valvi, a three-time MLA from Nandurbar, was known for his popularity in the tribal-dominated district. His shift comes amidst Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Maharashtra.

It's Eknath Gangubai Sambhaji Shinde now: Maha CM includes mother's name on office nameplate

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday got a new name plate installed outside his office chamber at the state secretariat in south Mumbai, which now mentions his mother's name before that of his father.

His new name plate now reads 'Eknath Gangubai Sambhaji Shinde'.

The change in the name plate was done in accordance with the state cabinet's recent decision, making it mandatory for all children born on or after May 1, 2024 to include the name of their mother in all government documents, such as Aadhaar and PAN cards.

A statement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said,



"The state cabinet decided to implement the historic

proposal of Women and Child Development Minister Aditi

Tatkare to include mother's name in the official documents and the

chief minister decided to start it by implementing it himself." Just like one's father, his or her mother plays an important role in upbringing the child and the government feels that she should be given her due recognition, it said.

Deputy Chief Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Ajit Pawar also got their office name plates changed as a symbolic gesture, mentioning their mothers' names.

Fadnavis' name plate now reads, 'Devendra Sarita Gangadharrao Fadnavis', while Pawar's reads 'Ajit Ashatai Anantrao Pawar'.

Bombay HC to hear pleas challenging Maratha quota Act on April 10

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court will hear the pleas challenging the Maharashtra government's decision granting reservation for the Maratha community in government jobs and education on April 10.

The court has directed the state government to file its replies to the pleas seeking interim stay on the implementation.

Multiple petitions have challenged the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2024, under which 10 per cent reservation was granted to the Maratha community in government jobs and education.

On Tuesday, the division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor said that it will hear the petitions on interim relief after due weightage has been given to all arguments since it is a legislative enactment and not a simple administrative

order. The court said that in matters challenging the constitutional validity of a legislative enactment, there is a principle of presumed constitutionality.

It granted the state government time to respond to the plea of interim relief.

On March 8, a separate bench had said that the applications for NEET 2024 for admission to undergraduate medical courses, wherein a 10 per cent reservation granted to members of the Maratha community is applicable, will be subject to further orders passed on proceedings related to pleas challenging the Act.

The petitions have raised the question of the constitutionality of the Act stating that in the past, the Supreme Court has struck down reservations for the Maratha community.

The petitions also raised concerns over exceeding the 50 per cent cap for reservation for all states.

Uddhav Thackeray's invitation to contest on MVA ticket ridiculous: Nitin Gadkari

New Delhi

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari Tuesday dismissed Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray's invitation to contest on Maha Vikas Aghadi ticket for the Lok Sabha polls as "immature and ridiculous".

Gadkari's response came while speaking to mediapersons during the opening of 19-km Haryana section of Dwarka Expressway.

Gadkari said, "The Sena UBT leader should not worry about the BJP and its leaders. Such invitation is at best described as ridiculous and immature. In BJP there is a process. There is a laid



out system through which the tickets are decided and given."

The absence of Gadkari's name in the first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls released by the BJP last week saw opposition parties in Maharashtra attacking the central leadership and the party.

Leading the attack, Thackeray at a public rally last week said,

"We invite Gadkari to join the MVA. We will give him ticket and ensure that he is elected. Gadkari should hold on to his pride and not bow before Delhi at any cost."

The state BJP leaders were critical about opposition's "attempt to create rift" within BJP by questioning the non-inclusion of Gadkari's name in the first list.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis termed Thackeray's invitation to Gadkari as "absurd". Fadnavis said, "The first list has names of candidates from 16 states. When the list for Maharashtra is announced, Gadkari's name will be there at the top."

3 workers die as scaffolding collapses in Mumbai construction site, BMC issues stop-work notice to builder

Mumbai

Three labourers were killed and another was injured after a scaffolding collapsed at an under-construction high-rise building in Mumbai's Borivali on Tuesday afternoon. Following the accident, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation issued a stop-work notice to the builder after an inspection of the work site by ward officials revealed a glaring lack of adequate safety measures in place for the labourers of the construction site on Tuesday. According to the police officials, on Tuesday night a First Information Report (FIR) was registered under relevant sections of the Indian

Penal Code (IPC) for causing death by negligence and causing grievous hurt by negligent act, against contractor, site engineer and foreman. The police are in process of recording the statements of the labour contractors and other agencies concerned. The collapse occurred at a ground-plus-24-storey building at Kalpana Chawla Chowk in Borivali West at 12.58 pm after the scaffolding on the 16th floor of the under-construction building collapsed. While five people were present on the scaffolding when the accident occurred, one managed to escape unscathed and four were seriously injured.

Indigenous weapons showcase tri-service firepower at 'Bharat Shakti' military drill

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today witnessed a synergised demonstration of indigenous defence capabilities in the form of a tri-service live fire and manoeuvre exercise at Pokhran, Rajasthan.

The exercise named 'Bharat Shakti' had on display an array of indigenous weapon systems and platforms.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion, the Prime Minister said, "It is the same Pokhran that witnessed India's nuclear test and today, we are seeing the power of indigenisation. Pokhran is witness to the trinity of India's 'aatmanirbharta (self-reliance)', belief (vishwas) and self-pride (aatma-gaurav)."

"The strength of the armed forces increases manifold when weapons and equipment used in wars are made indigenously," he said. Referring to the recent Cabinet decision to design, develop and manufacture 5th generation fighter jets in India, the Prime Minister said India had emerged as a defence exporter and mentioned an eight-fold increase in the country's defence exports compared to 2014.

Recalling defence "scams", scarcity



of ammunition and deterioration of ordnance factories before 2014, the Prime Minister talked about the corporatisation of the ordnance factories into seven big companies. Similarly, HAL was brought back from the brink and turned into a company with record profit.

Speaking about the test firing of the long-range Agni V missile equipped with advanced MIRV technology yesterday,

the Prime Minister said "only a handful of countries in the world have a hold on this technology".

The Prime Minister congratulated the chiefs of all three armed forces for preparing lists of items that would no longer be imported and for supporting indigenous manufacturing.

In the last 10 years, equipment worth Rs 6,00,000 crore have been procured

from Indian companies. During this period, India's defence production has doubled to more than Rs 1 lakh crore. In the last 10 years, more than 150 defence startups have started and defence forces have given them orders worth Rs 1,800 crore.

During the exercise, the participants simulated realistic, synergised and multi-domain operations, displaying integrated operational capabilities of the Indian armed forces to counter threats across land, air, sea, cyber and space domains.

The key equipment and weapon systems participating in the exercise included T-90 (IM) tanks, Dhanush and Sharang gun systems, Akash Weapon System, logistics drones, robotic mules, advanced light helicopter and an array of unmanned aerial vehicles among others. The Navy showcased Naval Anti-Ship Missiles, autonomous cargo carrying aerial vehicles, and expendable aerial targets. The Indian Air Force deployed the indigenously developed light combat aircraft Tejas, light utility helicopters and advanced light helicopters, demonstrating air superiority and versatility in aerial operations.

Despite Aatmanirbhar Bharat pitch, India largest arms importer

New pharma code: Gifts, travel sops for docs banned

New Delhi

The government on Tuesday night notified the new pharma code that bars pharma companies from extending gifts, monetary benefits or travel facilities to doctors in exchange for prescription of drugs.

The Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), 2024, issued today requires all Indian Pharmaceutical Associations to constitute Ethics Committee for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (ECPMP) to accept complaints from people on violations of the code and dispose them off within 90 days of receipt. The code provides for suspension or expulsion of the entity from the association if found guilty.

The Code under the head "Relationship with Healthcare Professionals" says no gift or pecuniary advantage should be offered for personal benefit

of any healthcare professional or family member (both immediate and extended) by any pharmaceutical company or its agent - distributors, wholesalers, retailers.

"Companies or their representatives, or any person acting on their behalf, should not extend travel facilities inside or outside the country, including rail, air, ship, cruise tickets, paid vacations, etc., to healthcare professionals or their family members for attending conferences, seminars, workshops unless the person is a speaker for a continuing medical education programme. Companies or their representatives should not extend hospitality like hotel stay, expensive cuisine, resort accommodation to healthcare professionals or their family unless the person is a speaker for a CME programme," states the code.

New Delhi

International think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks arms sales globally, has said in its annual report that India remains world's top arms importer.

The report also mentions a significant increase in Pakistan's arms imports, particularly from China.

"India is the world's top

arms importer. Its arms imports increased by 4.7 per cent between two five years blocks — 2014-18 and 2019-23," SIPRI said in a statement.

India accounted for 9.8 per cent of all global arms imports between 2019 and 2023.

"Although Russia remained India's main arms supplier, accounting for 36 per cent of its arms imports, this was the first five-year period since 1960-64

when deliveries from Russia (or the Soviet Union before 1991) made up less than half of India's arms imports," it said.

France and the US supplied 33 per cent and 13 per cent of the equipment, respectively.

"Such a shift is also visible in India's new orders, many of which are placed with Western suppliers, and its arms procurement plans that seemingly do not include any Russian options," says the SIPRI report. Indian imports increased despite the government's "Make in India" initiative, which aims to promote India as the "most preferred global manufacturing destination".

Pakistan is intensifying its arms procurement ties with China, with 82 per cent of its arms imports originating from China in the period 2019-23. This is an increase from 69 per cent in 2014-18 and 51 per cent in 2009-13.k



No Indian to lose citizenship due to CAA; Rahul Gandhi, Kharge, Owaisi lying, Amit Shah attacks Opposition

Hyderabad

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has honoured Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain refugees by giving them citizenship through CAA, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday and maintained there is no provision of stripping of anyone's citizenship in the new law.

Hitting out at the Congress and AIMIM, Shah, addressing party meetings here, said AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Hyderabad Lok Sabha member Asaduddin Owaisi are lying about minorities to lose their citizenship with



the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

Addressing a BJP social media volunteers meeting here, Shah alleged that the Congress opposed CAA due to appeasement and vote-bank politics.

"We had said we will bring CAA. The Congress opposed CAA. Since Independence, the Congress, makers of our Constitution, has been promising that citizenship will be granted to those persecuted on religious grounds in Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan. But, being a part of appeasement and

vote-bank politics, the Congress opposed CAA," Shah said.

"They (refugees) felt insulted in their own country when they were not granted citizenship," he said.

Later, addressing a BJP booth workers' meeting here, Shah hit out at those spreading "misapprehension" about CAA, saying the law grants citizenship and would not take it away.

"...I want to tell the minorities of this country that no citizen of the country will lose citizenship due to CAA. The CAA is a law that grants citizenship and does not to take away anyone's citizenship," he said.

Development work for us is a mission to build nation, not to win elections: PM Modi

Ahmedabad

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government undertakes developmental works as a part of its mission to build the nation and not to win elections as perceived by some people.

The PM launched Rs 1,06,000 crore development projects for the country at an event in Sabarmati area of Gujarat's Ahmedabad city after visiting the Dedicated Freight Corridor's (DFC) Operation Control Centre near the venue, ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

These comprise Rs 85,000 crore railway projects, including the launch of 10 new Vande Bharat trains, and a petrochemicals complex coming up at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district with an investment of Rs 20,600 crore.

"Some people try to look at our efforts through the electoral lens. Let me tell you that we undertake developmental works as part of a mission to build the nation, not to form a government (by winning elections). We want to ensure that our youth do not suffer what their past generations had suffered. This is Modi's guarantee," the PM said.

Modi said that in the last 10 years, his government spent around six times more amount for the development of Railways than was done earlier.

In just two months of 2024, his government inaugurated and laid the foundation of Rs 11 lakh crore projects, he added.

The PM said the railway sector in the country suffered heavily after the country's independence because the past governments prioritised "political motives" rather than development.

"Earlier, lawmakers used to clap in Parliament over the railway minister's announcement of giving stoppage to a train or increasing the number of coaches. This was the thinking back then. What would have happened if such an attitude persisted in the 21st century too? That is why the first thing I did was to merge the railway budget with the main Union budget so that the Centre's fund is made available for the development of Railways," he said.

Earlier, it was very common for trains to get late. Everything was left on the fate of the passengers, he said.

Till 2014, only 35 per cent of the railway lines were electrified. The common people were suffering due to long queues, agents demanding commission and hours of waiting to get train reservation, the PM said.

"I know this very well because I started my life on railway tracks," he said.

Modi said his government has shown a strong willpower to pull the Railways out of a "hell-like situation" and this sector's development is among their topmost priorities.

The previous governments did not give priority to the doubling of railway tracks, he said.

Referring to the DFC, Modi said

that for decades, there was a demand of separate tracks for goods trains.

It would have increased the speed of both passenger and goods trains and was also necessary to boost agriculture, trade and export activities, he said.

"But under the Congress regime, this project was either delayed or hit roadblocks. Today, we are inaugurating the freight corridor having a length of 650 km," said the PM.

At the venue, PM Modi laid the foundation stone of railway workshops, loco sheds, electric traction system upgradation work and dedicated to the nation two new sections of the Dedicated Freight Corridor and Western DFC's Operation Control Centre in Ahmedabad.

He flagged off 10 new Vande Bharat trains between Ahmedabad-Mumbai Central, Secunderabad-Visakhapatnam, Mysuru- Dr MGR Central (Chennai), Patna- Lucknow, New Jalpaiguri-Patna, Puri-Visakhapatnam, Lucknow-Dehradun, Kalaburagi-Sir M Visvesvaraya Terminal Bengaluru, Ranchi-Varanasi and Khajuraho- Delhi (Nizamuddin).

The PM also flagged off the extension of four Vande Bharat trains.

The Ahmedabad-Jamnagar Vande Bharat is being extended till Dwarka, Ajmer- Delhi Sarai Rohilla Vande Bharat till Chandigarh, Gorakhpur-Lucknow Vande Bharat till Prayagraj and Thiruvananthapuram- Kasargod Vande Bharat till Mangaluru.

He also flagged off two new passenger trains between Asansol and Hatia & Tirupati and Kollam stations.

The PM dedicated 51 Gati Shakti Multi-Modal Cargo Terminals to the nation. These terminals will promote seamless movement of goods between different modes of transportation, said a PIB release. Other projects which were launched by the PM included digital controlling of railway stations at 2,646 stations, 35 rail coach restaurants, 1,500 'One Station One Product' stalls to promote local products and generate income for local artisans and businesses and solar-powered stations and buildings at 975 locations. Modi also laid the foundation stone of the petrochemicals complex of Petronet LNG, including ethane and propane handling facilities of more than Rs 20,600 crore, at Dahej in Gujarat.

The setting up of the petrochemicals complex in proximity to the existing LNG regasification terminal would result in significant savings in the capex (capital expenditure) and opex (operating expenses) cost of the project, said the release.

The project implementation is likely to create direct and indirect employment opportunities for 50,000 persons during the execution phase and job opportunities for more than 20,000 persons during its operational phase, ushering in huge socio-economic benefits in the region, it said.

Pak boat with Rs 480 cr drugs seized off Gujarat coast



New Delhi

In an overnight operation, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), based on intelligence inputs, apprehended a Pakistani boat with six crew members and narcotics worth Rs 480 crore on board.

The boat was apprehended about 350 km from Porbandar

in the Arabian Sea, after a coordinated operation involving ICG ships and Dornier aircraft. The Narcotics Control Bureau and Anti-Terrorism Squad of Gujarat were part of the joint operation.

The Indian Coast Guard, on specific intelligence input from agencies, strategically positioned

its ships in the Arabian Sea on Monday. ICG also tasked its Dornier aircraft to scan and locate the boat in likely areas. After an exhaustive search in area, the ICG ships, with teams of NCB and ATS Gujarat, arrived on location and positively identified the boat, which was moving suspiciously in the dark. On being challenged, the boat started evasive manoeuvring, but was deftly chased and forced to stop. A team landed on board and an extensive search was carried out, which revealed a cache of 80-kg drugs worth Rs 480 crore.

The boat along with crew has been apprehended and is being brought to Porbandar for further investigation. This is the tenth apprehension by ICG, jointly with ATS Gujarat and NCB, in the last three years, amounting to 517-kg narcotics worth Rs 3,135 crore.

Hindu-Sikh refugees celebrate CAA implementation; say feel relieved and free now

New Delhi

Payara Singh, who took refuge in India escaping from war torn Afghanistan over three decades back, celebrated implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) saying he felt reborn hoping now to have his identity as bonafide citizen of the country.

Now, 57, Singh joined dozens of fellow Sikh refugees from Afghanistan and Hindu refugees from Pakistan bursting crackers, playing Holi, dancing on drumbeats and raising slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" at a programme hosted by Delhi BJP on Tuesday.

"It feels like I am celebrating my birthday as a new chapter has started in my life as I am on the verge of having an identity as citizen of India that has been my home for more than three decades," Singh said.

Recounting his tale, Singh said he left Paktia in Afghanistan in 1989 to save his life and reached India but there was no place for him to stay or money to start a new life.

"Identity is the most basic and important thing for any human being, but we didn't have it. We could not buy a house and the people were

reluctant to give us their house on rent," said Singh, who now lives in Tilak Nagar. He runs a small shop of mobile phone accessories in Karol Bagh.

"Now, I feel free and can do everything after getting the citizenship of India and even

"This Holi is unlike any other," said Sachdeva joining the refugees and BJP leaders and workers in celebrations.

Pakistani Hindu refugee Sona Das, who came to India in 2013, said he was hugely relieved and hoped for a better life for his



own a passport and voter card and travel anywhere that was impossible so far," he said.

Many other refugees living in India for decades expressed similar sentiments of relief and joy while thanking Modi government for the decision to implement the CAA. They handed over a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the function to Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva.

children, including five boys and two daughters. "We have seen very difficult times and I can't express the pain of being a refugee for more than a decade," he said.

Hundreds of Hindu refugees from Pakistan live in a temporary settlement at Majnu Ka Tila in north Delhi. "Our wait is over," said Manju Ram, another Pakistani Hindu refugee from Majnu Ka Tila.

Indian Muslims need not worry about CAA, will continue to enjoy equal rights as Hindus: Government



New Delhi

The Union Home Ministry on Tuesday asserted that Indian Muslims need not worry as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) will not impact their citizenship and has nothing to do with the community which enjoys equal rights as their Hindu counterparts.

The ministry sought to allay fears of a section of Muslims and students regarding the CAA, making it clear that "no Indian citizen would be asked to produce any document to prove his citizenship after this Act".

"Indian Muslims need not worry as CAA has not made any provision to impact their citizenship and has nothing to do with the present 18 crore Indian Muslims, who have equal rights like their Hindu counterparts," a Home Ministry statement said.

The government on Monday notified the rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act to fast-track citizenship for persecuted non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

In the statement, the home ministry said, "Due to the persecution of minorities in those three Muslim countries, the name of Islam was badly tarnished all around the world. However, Islam, being a peaceful religion, never preaches or suggests hatred/ violence/ any persecution on religious grounds".

This Act "protects Islam from being tarnished in the name of persecution", it said.

Explaining the need of the law, the ministry said India does not have any pact or agreement with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh to repatriate migrants back to these countries.

"This Citizenship Act doesn't deal with the deportation of illegal immigrants and, therefore, the concern of a section of the people, including Muslims and students, that CAA is against Muslim minorities is unjustifiable," it said.

The ministry said there is no bar on Muslims from anywhere in the world to seek Indian citizenship under Section 6 of the Citizenship Act, which deals with citizenship by naturalisation.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini wins trust vote in Assembly



Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Wednesday won the trust vote for his government in the state Assembly.

The confidence motion was passed with voice vote.

Earlier, the special session of the Haryana Assembly began here and obituary references were taken up.

The breakaway JJP faction MLAs were seen on the assembly premises. Devinder Babli, Ishwar Singh and Ram Kumar Gautam of the JJP defied the party whip and came to the

House. Later, they left the House when the trust vote motion was taken up.

Leader of opposition Bhupinder Hooda and Congress MLA BB Batra sought a one-hour adjournment of the House. They said the House was convened at a short notice and a few members were still on their way.

Congress MLA Raghuvir Kadian said there was instability in the state and President's rule should be imposed. He wanted a secret ballot on the trust vote, saying five MLAs of the BJP would vote against the motion.

PM Modi lays foundation stone of 3 semiconductor facilities, says India delivers on its commitment



Dholera (Gujarat)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said when India commits, it delivers, referring to his government's commitment to make the country a semiconductor manufacturing hub.

PM Narendra Modi was virtually addressing people after laying the foundation stone of three semiconductor facilities of about Rs 1.25 lakh crore, which include two in

Gujarat and one in Assam.

"This is a historic day as we are taking a strong step towards a bright future," PM Narendra Modi said.

The 'Made in India' semiconductor chips will take the country towards self-reliance and modernity, he said.

"When India commits, India delivers and democracy also delivers," PM Narendra Modi said on the promise to make the country a semiconductor

manufacturing hub.

He said the earlier governments committed scams of thousands of crores, but they could not invest thousands of crores for the development of the semiconductor industry.

The three semiconductor projects launched include India's first Fab facility at Dholera in Gujarat, Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facility at Sanand in the state, and an OSAT facility in Morigaon in Assam.

Rs 1 lakh to poor women annually, 50 per cent quota in govt jobs: Rahul Gandhi's 'Mahila Nyay' guarantees

Dhule

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday announced five 'Mahila Nyay' guarantees, including Rs 1 lakh annually into the bank accounts of poor women and 50 per cent reservation in government jobs if his party is voted to power in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a women's rally in Maharashtra's Dhule district as part of his ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Gandhi also promised that the central government's share in the budget for women working as ASHA, anganwadi workers and those in mid-day meal schemes would be doubled.

A nodal officer would be appointed to educate women



about their rights and fight their cases, he said.

The Savitribai Phule hostels will be set up for women in every district of the country, Gandhi said.

Before Gandhi's speech, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge in a video statement said the 'Mahalaxmi' guarantee

envisages depositing Rs 1 lakh directly in the bank accounts of poor women annually.

He said "Aadhi Aabadi Pura Hakk", which means 50 per cent quota for women in government jobs.

The Congress guarantees were "pathar ki lakeer" and not a "jumla", Kharge said.

NIA raids 30 sites of terror suspects across 4 states

New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday raided 30 locations in four states and one union territory in connection with

Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and the union territory of Chandigarh by NIA teams, as part of the agency's crackdown against the



terror activities of chiefs and members of the proscribed terrorist organisations and other such outfits. The premises raided on Tuesday were linked to various suspected associates of Dala, as well as Baljeet Maur and Australia-based Gurjant Singh, in NIA case dated February 13, 2024. Incriminating materials, including digital devices, were seized during the searches.

the terrorist-gangster nexus case, relating to individual designated terrorist Arshdeep Singh, alias Arsh Dala, and other suspects of the banned Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF).

Raids were conducted across

Total of 22,217 electoral bonds purchased from April 1, 2019 to February 15, 2024, SBI tells Supreme Court



New Delhi

The State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that a total of 22,217 electoral bonds were purchased and 22,030 redeemed by political parties between April 1, 2019 and February 15 this year.

In a compliance affidavit filed in the apex court, the SBI said as per the court's direction, it has made available the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India before the close of business hours on March 12.

It said details, including date of purchase of each electoral bonds, names of the purchaser and the denomination of the bonds purchased have been furnished.

The affidavit, filed by SBI's chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara, said the bank has also furnished to the EC details like date of encashment of the electoral bonds, the names of political parties

which received the contributions and the denominations of the bonds.

On March 11, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud had dismissed the SBI's plea seeking an extension of time and ordered it to disclose the details of electoral bonds to the EC by close of business hours on March 12.

The apex court had also directed the EC to publish the details shared by the bank on its official website by 5 pm on March 15.

In a landmark verdict delivered on February 15, a five-judge Constitution bench had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordered disclosure by the EC of donors, the amount donated by them and the recipients by March 13.

National Investigation Agency detains man from Ballari in Rameshwaram Cafe blast case

Bengaluru

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) probing the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case has detained a man from Ballari district, sources said on Wednesday. The man is said to have 'some resemblance' with the prime suspect, sources said. "NIA sleuths are interrogating him to know his whereabouts on March 1 when the blast took place", they said. The accused wearing a cap and mask placed a low-intensity bomb kept in a backpack in the popular eatery at Brookefield area near Whitefield here that went off injuring nine people.

The NIA has announced Rs 10 lakh cash reward for information leading to the arrest of the bomber, and also released CCTV pictures and videos of the suspect. Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said earlier this week that sleuths investigating into the blast have "in a way" identified the suspect, and efforts are on to nab him.

He had said the investigators are verifying the suspect's identity and are "getting closer to him".

Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh announces to fight elections, days after withdrawing from Asansol

Asansol

In a major political development, days after he withdrew his candidature from Bengal's Asansol constituency, Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh on Wednesday announced that he will fight the elections.

In a post on X, Pawan sought people's blessings and cooperation.

'I will contest elections to fulfil the promise made to my society, people, and mother. Your blessings and cooperation are expected. 'Jai Mata Di',' he said on X.

However, the Bhojpuri singer has not yet announced the constituency and the party from which he will fight the elections.

Earlier, Pawan Singh withdrew from the race for the Lok Sabha on March 3.

Taking to his official handle on X, the singer confirmed that he was pulling out of the contest 'due to some reason'.

'I express my heartfelt



gratitude to the top leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party. The party trusted me and declared me as the candidate from West Bengal's Asansol but due to some reason, I will not be able to contest the elections from Asansol,' Singh posted from his X handle.

Adding to the intrigue around his decision to stand down from the contest, the national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee of the ruling Trinamool Congress, who is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, tagged the Bhojpuri singer's post with a comment reading, 'The

indomitable spirit and power of the people of West Bengal'.

After Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh decided not to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from Asansol, Congress leader Pawan Khara said that on one hand, the BJP is raising the issue of the Sandeshkali incident, and on the other hand, it is fielding singers like Pawan Singh to fight polls.

Pawan Khara also questioned whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi was aware of Pawan Singh's image.

"This is an interesting case. All the agencies are under the control of the Prime Minister. Wasn't he aware of Pawan Singh's image? Now he gets to know that after 24 hours. This depicts what kind of government there is in the country. All the agencies are there to keep an eye on the opposition. It is obvious now that people like Harsh Vardhan are taking retirement because this is the era of Pawan Singh," Khara told media.

CAA implementation ahead of Lok Sabha polls 'dirty vote bank politics' of BJP: Arvind Kejriwal



New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act ahead of the Lok Sabha polls was a "dirty vote bank politics" of the BJP and asserted that people want this law to be repealed.

With this law, the BJP-led

government at the Centre has opened the floodgates for the arrival of a large number of poor minorities from Pakistan and Bangladesh into India, he said at a press conference.

"There are 3.5 crore minorities in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The BJP wants to spend the money of our people

in settling poor migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh by giving them houses and jobs here," charged Kejriwal, who is also the Aam Aadmi Party national convener.

He claimed that the BJP stands to gain in the coming elections as poor minorities from the neighbouring countries settling in India will become its vote bank. Implementation of the CAA ahead of the Lok Sabha polls was a "dirty vote bank politics" of the BJP, Kejriwal said. The country demands scrapping of CAA, he said and asked people to vote against the BJP if the law is not repealed.

The Citizenship Amendment Act seeks to grant citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if threatened, Vladimir Putin tells state media



Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if there is a threat to Russian statehood, sovereignty or independence.

Speaking in an interview with Russian state television released early on Wednesday, Putin said he hoped the US would avoid any escalation that could trigger a nuclear war, but emphasised that

Russia's nuclear forces are ready for it.

Asked if he had ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there had been no need for that.

He also voiced confidence that Moscow would achieve its goals in Ukraine and held the door open for talks, emphasising that any deal would require firm guarantees from the West.

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari to forgo salary amid economic crisis

Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari announced on Tuesday

took this decision to encourage prudent financial management in the country," said a statement released by the President's Secretariat.

The President considered it essential not to burden the national exchequer and preferred to forgo his salary, the statement added.

In a similar move, the newly sworn-in Interior

Minister Mohsin Naqvi also decided against drawing a salary during his service period, The Express Tribune reported.

Taking to social media platform X, Naqvi stated that he was committed to serving the nation in challenging times "in every possible way".



his decision to forgo his salary while in office, citing the economic challenges faced by the country, The Express Tribune reported.

"In view of the prevailing economic challenges, Zardari has decided that he will not draw his presidential salary. He

Biden and Trump set for election rematch after winning party nominations

Washington

US President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump are set for a bitter election rematch in November after they secured their parties' presidential nominations with impressive wins in another round of key primaries.

Biden, 81, won the Democratic presumptive nomination on Tuesday after easily clinching the presidential primaries in Georgia, as the number of delegates in his kitty crossed the halfway mark of 3,933 pledged delegates. A total of 1,968 delegates were required to win the Democratic nomination.

Four states -- Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, Washington -- one American territory and Democrats living abroad held their primaries on Tuesday.

Trump would formally be declared the party's nomination during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August.

Trump, 77, reached the 1,215 delegates necessary with an allocation of delegates from Washington state.

Trump will be officially nominated at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee this July.

He will lead the Republican Party in a third consecutive presidential election after clinching the nomination Tuesday.

Their rematch, long anticipated, but hardly clamoured for, is broadly expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges.

Trump is scheduled to become the first former American president to go on trial in a criminal case on March 25 in New York, where he faces charges he falsified business records to hide hush money payments to a porn star. Other charges are related to allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat; played a lead role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol and illegally took classified documents from the White House. It would be the first presidential rematch since 1956.

The last presidential rematch came in 1956 when Republican President Dwight D Eisenhower again defeated Adlai Stevenson,



the Democratic opponent he had four years prior.

Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 November elections, an outcome still challenged by the Republican leader.

Biden has faced only nominal opposition to become the Democratic nominee.

Trump has defeated several Republicans in primary elections, including Indian-origin former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Other candidates, including Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence, dropped out months ago for lack of voter support.

Biden said he is honoured to become his party's presumptive nominee and warned of another Trump presidency.

"I am honoured that the broad coalition of voters representing the rich diversity of the Democratic Party across the country has put their faith in me once again to lead our party — and our country — in a moment when the threat Trump poses is greater than ever," Biden said in a statement after he bagged majority of the delegates.

"Voters now have a choice to make about the future of this country. Are we going to stand up and defend our democracy or let others tear it down? Will we restore the right to choose and protect our freedoms or let extremists take them away? Will we finally make the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes — or will we allow corporate greed to run rampant on the backs of the middle class?" he said. In a post to the social media platform X, Biden celebrated his status as his

party's presumptive nominee, calling it "a time of choosing" in a new campaign video.

"Today's a day, a call to action," Biden says in a voiceover.

"With your voice, with your power, with your vote — come November, we will vote in record numbers, and can do it, we have the power to do it. Are you ready? Are you ready to defend democracy? Are you ready to protect our freedom? Are you ready to win this election?"

Vice President Kamala Harris celebrated Biden securing the delegates needed to clinch his party's nomination on Tuesday and forecast how the president's campaign will look to take the fight to Donald Trump in the general election. "From the start, the President and I never took this re-nomination process for granted. We have campaigned in earnest because we know doing so is an important step towards earning reelection and will help us mobilise the voters we need in November," Vice President Kamala Harris said in a statement. "Now, the general election truly begins, and the contrast could not be clearer. Donald Trump is a threat to our democracy and our fundamental freedoms," she said. With his State of the Union speech last week, Biden passionately presented our alternative vision, she said. "We will reduce costs for families, make housing more affordable, and raise the minimum wage," she added. "We will restore Roe (nationwide right to abortion), protect voting rights, and finally address our gun violence epidemic. The American people overwhelmingly support this agenda over Donald Trump's extreme ideas, and that will propel our campaign in the months ahead," Harris said.

Trump's campaign posted a video on X of the former president after he clinched the nomination.

"This was a great day of victory. Last week was something very special — Super Tuesday — but now we have to get back to work because we have the worst president in the history of the country. His name is Joe Biden, sometimes referred to as crooked Joe Biden, and he must be defeated," Trump said in the video.

Boosting India-US ties

IN his State of the Union address on Thursday, US President Joe Biden underscored the significance of strengthening ties with key allies like India amid the Chinese challenge. His commitment to confronting China's unfair economic practices and ensuring a level playing field in global trade highlights the strategic importance of the India-US relations. Their deepening ties in a wide range of sectors are opening myriad avenues for growth and development in both countries.

Biden has clarified that the US wants competition with China, not conflict, while exuding confidence that America is firmly placed to win the 21st-century race against the Dragon. India is a vital player in the US scheme of things. Enhanced defence cooperation between the two countries, including joint military exercises and technology transfers, serves as a deterrent against

aggression and helps promote stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This region is witnessing geopolitical tensions, particularly in Taiwan. By



reinforcing their shared values of democracy, Washington and New Delhi can collaborate to address these conflicts and ensure a rules-based order.

The US efforts to bolster

multilateral cooperation are bearing fruit, going by the growing clout of the Quad alliance in the face of China's expansionist moves. The grouping has emerged as a crucial platform leveraging the collective strengths of the member-countries — the US, India, Australia and Japan. It aims to promote a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, where nations can thrive without fear of coercion or intimidation. The alliance also provides a framework for addressing other pressing global challenges, ranging from maritime threats to cybersecurity. It is obvious that the US is determined to keep China on tenterhooks and will try to make the most of its allies' prowess to achieve its objective.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don't have in life, you'll never have enough.

-Oprah Winfrey

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INDIA has been demonstrating deft diplomacy in Afghanistan ever since its game plan of riding on the US coat-tails came a cropper when the Taliban stormed into Kabul in August 2021. By all accounts, the pact the US had signed with the Taliban in 2020 reeked of capitulation. Then Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in whom India had invested its diplomatic capital, ignominiously fled the country. A month later, Foreign Minister S Jaishankar had nursed hopes of the Taliban co-opting members of the old regime in the new government when he said India would never accept

‘any outcome which is decided by force’.

Last week, the arc lights in Kabul were on



an Indian delegation that discussed with the Taliban leadership various aspects pointing to near normalisation of ties. New Delhi has also closely observed the bitterness

between Islamabad and Kabul, generated by skirmishes on the Durand Line and the fact that a bankrupt

Pakistan is incapable of economically helping Afghanistan. By the end of last year, India seemed satisfied with the Taliban's commitment to preventing Afghanistan from again becoming a

hub of jihadi terrorism.

The Taliban, in return, were allowed to quietly take over the Afghan missions in India. India's decision to sidle up to the Taliban was also motivated by China restoring diplomatic ties with Kabul. The Taliban, though, have a long way to go before they receive global legitimacy. Their greater accommodation of Indian interests should spur New Delhi to handhold the post-Mullah Omar generation as it seeks to integrate with the wider world. But past experience tells India to be circumspect as it finds its feet again on the Afghan chessboard.

Talks with Taliban

India needs to tread warily on Afghan chessboard

TMC going solo

Rivalry with Congress can hurt INDIA

THE Trinamool Congress (TMC), a key constituent of the Congress-helmed INDIA bloc, has decided to go solo in the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal. The failure of the TMC and the Congress to negotiate a seat-sharing agreement has laid bare fissures in the Opposition grouping. In another embarrassment for INDIA, TMC

from INDIA so as not to antagonise PM Narendra Modi.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Bengal, the TMC had won 22 seats out of 42, while the BJP had made major inroads by clinching 18; the Congress had won two seats. The seat-sharing talks proved futile this time as the Congress wanted

more than two seats for its candidates, while the TMC was not keen on ceding ground. The bitter rivalry between the two INDIA allies was starkly visible last year when Left-backed Congress candidate Bayron Biswas defeated the TMC's Debashish Banerjee in the Sagardighi bypoll. Later, Biswas

switched over to the Trinamool camp, much to the Congress' chagrin.

Already on a sticky wicket over the Sandeshkhali outrage, the ruling TMC might find it tough to brave the BJP's onslaught on its own. The Congress has complicated matters by trying to bite off more than it can chew in Bengal. This will have implications for INDIA's national prospects in the Lok Sabha elections.



supremo Mamata Banerjee has declared that her party would confront not only the BJP but also the Congress and the CPM in the state. Putting on a brave face, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has said: 'Our doors are always open and an alliance can happen any time before the withdrawal (of nominations).' State Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, however, has claimed that Mamata has distanced herself

EXAM malpractices have regrettably become common in school board exams across India, undermining the credibility of the education system. Recent reports from Nuh district in Haryana underscore this disturbing trend. 'Chit gangs' are exploiting systemic vulnerabilities to facilitate cheating. Their modus operandi reveals collusion between villagers, gangs and even examination centre staff. Villagers allegedly take money to provide their houses and fields for these illicit activities, profiting from the desperation of the students and the greed of the gangs. The brazenness of the offenders is evident in the tactics employed — from using WhatsApp to obtain question papers to scaling walls of examination centres to assist students directly. The interrogation of three teachers and an exam centre official, arrested on the charge of abetting cheating, is expected to help the police nail others who are part of this nexus.

Past incidents serve as reminders of the challenges posed by the use of unfair means in exams. In Bihar in 2015, mass

cheating during Class X board exams, captured on camera, shocked the nation as family members and friends scaled school walls to hand over sheets to students inside examination halls. Similarly, a scandal was witnessed in Uttar Pradesh during Class X exams in 2017, exposing gross impropriety facilitated by unscrupulous elements.

Efforts to combat cheating in exams have been intensified, with the authorities implementing stricter measures and deploying technology-driven solutions

Address challenges posed by exam malpractices

'Chit gangs' of Nuh

educational resources, providing support to vulnerable communities and promoting a culture of academic honesty are essential to fostering an environment where cheating is

Right to criticise

SC ruling should make the police see reason

QUASHING an FIR registered against a professor for his comments denouncing the abrogation of Article 370, the Supreme Court has asserted that every citizen has the right to criticise any decision of the state. The Maharashtra Police had booked Prof Javed Ahmed Hajam under Section 153-A (promoting enmity between groups on the grounds of religion, race, etc.) of the IPC for posting WhatsApp messages such as 'August

an integral part of the rights guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a). In December last year, the SC had upheld the Central Government's 2019 decision to abrogate Article 370. However, voices of disapproval have not yet died down.

The professor's case has brought under judicial and public scrutiny the controversial role of the police. Overzealous cops blew things out of proportion to demonise a dissenter.

The court said the time had come to 'enlighten and educate our police machinery' about the concept of freedom of speech and expression and the extent of reasonable restraint on this freedom. The SC's suggestion that police personnel must be sensitised to the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution needs to

be given serious consideration. The registration of cases on flimsy grounds demonstrates police highhandedness; it is an undemocratic practice reeking of repression. It is hoped that this verdict will deter cops from branding citizens as anti-national or anti-social merely on the basis of their social media posts. Unless there is incitement to violence or hatred, such comments should not invite punitive action.



5 — Black Day Jammu & Kashmir' and '14th August — Happy Independence Day Pakistan'. Setting aside an order of the Bombay High Court, the apex court said: 'If every criticism or protest of the actions of the state is to be held as an offence under Section 153-A, democracy, which is an essential feature of the Constitution, will not survive.'

The court has made it clear that the right to dissent in a lawful manner is



to enhance monitoring and detection. However, addressing the root causes of malpractices, including socioeconomic disparities and pressure on students to excel, remains a formidable task. Investing in

not tolerated. Ethical conduct is the key to ensuring a level playing field.

PM in Kashmir

Outreach laudable, but twin challenges remain

PAYING his first visit to Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reached out to the valley residents with the slogan 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir'. His message is clear: the state-turned-UT's development will go hand in hand with that of the country. He launched and dedicated to the nation more than 50 projects worth Rs 6,400 crore, including initiatives in the tourism sector and a project for the integrated development of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar.

The PM has asserted that J&K is touching new heights of development and 'breathing freely' after the 2019 abrogation. It goes to the credit of the Union Government and the security forces that the count of terror-related incidents has come down significantly in recent



years. The annual death toll — both of civilians and security personnel — has also been waning. No major terror strike has taken place in Kashmir after the Pulwama attack

of February 2019. The government has been prioritising development and employment in a bid to keep the youth off the perilous path of violence and extremism.

Amid all these confidence-building measures, there are two major challenges for the Centre: restoring J&K's statehood and holding the Assembly elections. An inordinate delay in undertaking these all-important exercises is sending out the message that all is not well on the ground. This runs contrary to the government's claim that everything is hunky-dory in J&K. The resumption of the electoral process is the need of the hour to regain the trust of political parties and voters. Allowing democracy to wither is a recipe for disaster in a region highly vulnerable to cross-border terrorism. The simmering discontent over perceived disempowerment following the revocation of the special status as well as statehood must be addressed with timely remedial steps.

Maple smuggling

HP must enhance vigil to catch thieves

THE busting of a maple wood smuggling racket in Chamba has revealed the magnitude and expanse of the illegal timber trade in the region. The illicit activity spans states such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Maple tree knots, valued for their unique grain patterns and religious significance, have become a lucrative commodity for



smugglers. These knots, sought after by woodworkers, craftsmen and Buddhist monks, fetch high prices in the market. However, their smuggling not only causes environmental degradation, but also robs the state of considerable revenue. The arrest of 15 persons, mostly from Nepal, underscores the transnational nature of this racket. The smugglers' modus operandi, involving

clandestine transportation of maple wood across state borders, reflects the challenges faced by the authorities in combating the crime. Efforts to integrate forest and police outposts, as highlighted by Himachal CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu at a meeting of forest officers in Shimla last August, are crucial for tackling timber smuggling. By leveraging modern technology, the authorities can enhance surveillance and clamp down on illegal activities. Further, the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the Forest Department must extend beyond the mere integration of outposts. Comprehensive strategies involving intelligence-gathering, targeted raids and strict enforcement of laws are imperative to dismantle the entire network of the illegal trade. It is not just about protecting the state's natural resources, but also about safeguarding the livelihoods of the local communities dependent on the forest ecosystem. The plunder of maple trees disrupts the delicate ecological balance and deprives future generations of these resources. Only through collective vigil and decisive action can we save our natural heritage.

Muizzu's folly

Antagonising India to appease China

EARLIER this week, the Maldives announced that China would provide free 'non-lethal' military equipment as well as training to its soldiers under a newly inked agreement. This is Male's first military cooperation deal with Beijing, which had so far assisted it with urban and economic development. The pact comes days after Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu issued the ultimatum that no Indian, uniformed or civilian, would man India-deployed helicopters after May 10.

The move to send back uniformed Indian military personnel was on the cards after Muizzu won the presidential elections last year. He had campaigned mainly on the 'India Out' plank, which viewed all assistance provided by India with a jaundiced eye. Muizzu even called India a bully. But External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar hit back by saying that big bullies did not provide \$4.5 billion when their neighbours were in trouble. They also 'don't make exceptions

to their own rules to respond to food demands or fuel demands or fertiliser demands because some war in some other part of the world has complicated their lives,' Jaishankar asserted.

Muizzu should remember that the Maldives needs all the friends it can have. Lacking in healthcare and education facilities, its mainstay is tourism, a fickle sector which is the first to be hit by hostilities or shortages. India has responded to the expanding Chinese military footprint by commissioning a new naval base at Minicoy island, a mere 125 km from the Maldives. There is weariness in the Maldives over Muizzu's unending grandstanding against India — the Opposition won the politically important Male Mayor's seat he had vacated. India is probably sending out a message by naming the naval base INS Jatayu, after the mythological bird from the Ramayana that was the first responder when Sita was abducted by Ravana.

Price manipulation in SME IPOs: SEBI chief

Mumbai

Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Monday said there are pockets of “froth” in small and mid-cap stocks which appear like “irrational exuberance” to the capital markets regulator.

Buch also said Sebi has evidence, pointing to signs of “price manipulation” in the small and medium enterprises (SME) segment, and asked investors to be more cautious while investing in the risky segment.

When asked about the small and mid-cap space, which has seen a fast-paced rise in valuations over the last few months, on the sidelines of an event here, Buch admitted that there are “pockets of froth in the market” which are like bubbles.

“It may not be appropriate to allow the bubble to keep building, because when it bursts, they impact the investors adversely. That is not a good thing,” Buch said. She added that the valuation parameters are “not supported by fundamentals at all” and it appears like “irrational exuberance”.

Since January 2023, small



and mid-cap indices have significantly outperformed the broader equity indices, and many asset management companies have stopped accepting lumpsum amounts into schemes and also capped monthly investments in such schemes. She said the investors need to understand that the SME segment is different from the main board and it is necessary for Sebi to push the companies to make the necessary

disclosures.

Smallcaps down 2%

Market sentiments dampened after SEBI chief Madhabi Puri Buch highlighted irrational run-ups and expensive valuations in small and midcaps

In the selloff in broader markets, smallcaps bore the maximum brunt and were down 2 per cent. Midcap index dipped 0.24 per cent

Govt revamps scheme to support pharma units

New Delhi

The Department of Pharmaceuticals has revamped a scheme which entails financial assistance to drug companies to help them upgrade their facilities to produce medicines conforming to global standards.

As per the revamped Pharmaceuticals Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme (PTUAS), the government has expanded the scope of the initiative

beyond MSMEs to include any pharmaceutical manufacturing

upgradation, the Chemicals and Fertilisers Ministry said in a statement.

Preference however remains for MSMEs, supporting smaller players in achieving high-quality manufacturing standards, it added.

The revamped scheme also introduces more flexible financing options,

emphasising subsidies on reimbursement basis, over traditional credit-linked approach.



unit with a turnover of less than Rs 500 crore that requires technology and quality

IndiGo co-founder sells 5.83% stake for Rs 6,785 crore

Mumbai

Rakesh Gangwal, the co-founder of the country's largest airline IndiGo, on Monday sold 5.83 per cent stake in the carrier for Rs 6,785 crore through open market transactions.

The stake sale is part of Gangwal's decision to trim his shareholding, a decision announced in February 2022 after a bitter feud with co-founder Rahul Bhatia over alleged corporate governance issues. A total of 2.25 crore shares of InterGlobe Aviation were sold in three tranches, with the price ranging from Rs 3,015.10 to Rs 3,016.36 apiece.



HDFC Bank signs pact with SAIL

HDFC Bank has signed a memorandum of understanding with Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) for corporate salary relationship. Over 60,000 on-roll and 65,000 contractual employees of SAIL now have the opportunity to move to HDFC Bank's corporate salary account.

RBI nod to Fincare-AU SFB merger

The RBI has approved the merger of Fincare Small Finance Bank Ltd (Fincare SFB) into AU Small Finance Bank Ltd (AU SFB), marking a significant milestone in the banking sector. The merger has created a formidable entity with a combined customer base of over one crore and a deposit base of Rs 89,854 crore.

PHDCCI establishes SHE-Forum

PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry has established a women's cell, 'SHE-Forum', with the aim of making women self-reliant and providing a better platform to women entrepreneurs. Bharti Sood, Regional Director, PHDCCI, urged women to join the forum and participate in its activities.

All-woman workforce at Delhivery

Integrated logistics service provider-Delhivery has entrusted its Moga hub to an all-woman workforce. The end-to-end hub operations will be orchestrated by an all-women workforce. Women-only housekeeping and security staff have also been deployed to support the facility 24X7.

CP67 Mall honours tricity women

As a tribute to remarkable achievements and contributions of women from tricity, CP67 Mall in Mohali held celebrated International Women's Day. The “Women of Inspiration” event was organised at CP67 Mall in collaboration with the Chandigarh Divaz Club.

UFBU convener welcomed at SBI

Sanjeev Kumar Bandlish, convener, United Forum of Banks Unions (UFBU), received a warm welcome by staff of State Bank of India, Chandigarh, upon his return after signing the 12 Bipartite Settlement between Bank Unions and Indian Banks Association on March 8.

India-EFTA trade pact: Swiss watches, chocolates to enter Indian market at lower prices

New Delhi

Domestic customers will get access to high-quality Swiss products such as watches, chocolates, biscuits, and clocks at lower prices as India will phase out customs duties under its trade pact with the EFTA bloc on these goods over a period of time.

India and the four-European nation bloc EFTA signed a trade and economic partnership agreement (TEPA) on Sunday to boost trade and investments between the two regions.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. It will take up to a year to implement the agreement due to an elaborate ratification process of these pacts in different countries. "We are giving duty concessions on Swiss watches, and chocolates," an official said. Some famous Swiss watch brands are Rolex, Omega, and Cartier. Nestle, which is a Swiss brand, is a major player in the Indian FMCG industry and manufactures chocolates in India. It is the third-largest listed entity in the Indian FMCG segment.

According to an analysis of the TEPA documents by economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India has allowed tariff concession to a number of products imported from Switzerland under the agreement. "India will soon have access to high-quality Swiss products at lower prices because it has decided to remove tariffs on many Swiss goods over seven to ten years," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. Key categories of these goods include seafood like tuna and salmon; fruits such as olives and avocados; coffee capsules; different oils like cod liver and olive oil, a variety of sweets and processed foods including chocolate and biscuits.

Other products that are covered are smartphones, bicycle parts, medical equipment, clocks, watches, medicines, dyes, textiles, apparel, iron and steel products, and machinery equipment. Srivastava said tariffs on cut and polished diamonds will be reduced from 5 per cent to 2.5 per cent in five years after the implementation of

the agreement.

India has offered no effective tariff concessions on gold. On paper, it has offered a one per cent concession on the bound rate of 40 per cent, but the effective duty remains at 15 per cent, resulting in no real benefit.

For wines, it said duty concessions are similar to those given to Australia, with no concessions for wines costing less than USD 5. "Wines priced between USD 5 and less than USD 15 will see a duty reduction from 150 per cent to 100 per cent in the first year, then decreasing gradually to 50 per cent over 10 years," Srivastava said.

For wines costing USD 15 or more, he said, the initial duty cut is from 150 per cent to 75 per cent, eventually reducing to 25 per cent after 10 years. India-EFTA two-way trade was USD 18.65 billion in 2022-23 as compared to USD 27.23 billion in 2021-22. Switzerland is the largest trading partner of India followed by Norway. Switzerland is considered one of the world's most innovative economies. It had been consistently ranked number one in the Global Innovation Index. The bilateral trade between India and Switzerland stood at USD 17.14 billion (USD 1.34 billion exports and USD 15.79 billion imports) in the last fiscal. In 2022-23, India's trade deficit with Switzerland was USD 14.45 billion. India's main imports from Switzerland include gold (USD 12.6 billion), machinery (USD 409 million), pharmaceuticals (USD 309 million), coking and steam coal (USD 380 million), optical instruments and orthopaedic appliances (USD 296 million), watches (USD 211.4 million), soybean oil (USD 202 million), and chocolates (USD 7 million). Major exports from India include chemicals, gems and jewellery, shops and boats, machinery, certain types of textiles and apparel. Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports for India, with about 41 per cent share during April-October this fiscal, followed by the UAE (about 13 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent). The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports.

'Master plan aims to...': Karan Adani says our biggest investment outside Gujarat to be in Uttar Pradesh

Lucknow

The Adani Group will make its biggest investment outside Gujarat in Uttar Pradesh, says Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd Managing Director Karan Adani.

Talking to IANS, Karan Adani said: "Our vision for the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport (CCSIA) is big and far-reaching. The master plan aims to expand the airport's capacity to ultimately serve 38 million passengers annually by 2047-48. This will generate employment for 50,000 to 60,000 people."

"This exponential growth is a cornerstone of our strategy to support Uttar Pradesh's aspiration to become a one trillion dollar economy. We are not just building infrastructure - we are creating over 13,000 direct and indirect job opportunities, thus contributing significantly to the economic advancement of the region and



the state."

Karan Adani said that the Adani Group was looking towards investments in the road, cement, data sector, power and renewable energy in Uttar Pradesh, making it his company's biggest investment outside Gujarat.

"Today, we are making history. This new Integrated

Terminal 3 will transform CCSIA, the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow, into the Gateway to Uttar Pradesh and will also mark a celebration of progress and testament to our collective vision," said Adani.

The Phase-I of Terminal 3 is designed and engineered to accommodate 8 million passengers a year, which is two times the population of this city.

With an initial investment of 2,400 crore, this state-of-the-art facility will augment passenger experience and take operational efficacy to a new level, he informed the gathering.

Karan Adani lauded PM Modi's vision of transforming India into a global economic superpower and stated that government's focus on modernising infrastructure and promoting sustainable development aligns with Adani Group's mission of creating world-class airports in the country.

India, 4-nation European bloc EFTA ink free-trade agreement; USD 100 billion investment target in next 15 years

New Delhi

India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA on Sunday signed a free trade agreement under which New Delhi has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion over the next 15 years to facilitate the creation of one million jobs.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The agreement was signed after a gap of almost 16 years as negotiations, started in 2008, but were put on hold in November 2013. Talks resumed in October 2016, and after 21 rounds of negotiations were held before its conclusion.

For the first time in the history of FTAs (free trade agreements), a legal commitment is being made to promoting target-oriented investment and the job creation.

Almost all the domestic industrial goods would get duty-free access in EFTA nations under the agreement, besides duty concessions on processed agricultural products. Switzerland, the major trading partner of India in the bloc, already removed duties from January this year on almost all industrial goods.

On the other hand, India is offering 82.7 per cent

of its tariff lines or product categories, which covers 95.3 per cent of EFTA exports of which more than 80 per cent of imports is gold.

On gold, India has not touched the effective customs duty (which is 15 per cent) but has reduced the bound rate by one per cent to 39 per cent.

Bound and applied rates are used in international trade parlance. While bound tariffs or duties refer to the ceiling, the applied tariff is the duty, which is currently in place.

India will also provide duty concessions on certain PLI (production-linked incentive) sectors like pharma, medical devices and processed food.

Sensitivities related to these sectors have been kept in mind while extending offers.

Sectors such as dairy, soya, coal and sensitive agricultural products are kept on the exclusion list, which means there would not be any duty concessions on these goods.

In the services sector, the commerce ministry said, India has offered 105 sub-sectors to the EFTA like accounting, business services, computer services, distribution and health. On the other hand, the country has secured commitments in 128 sub-sectors from Switzerland, 114 from Norway, 107 from Liechtenstein, and 110 from Iceland.

SEZ units to get export benefits under RoDTEP

New Delhi

The government has in the special economic zones (SEZs) and export-oriented units.

The commerce ministry said that amid global economic uncertainties and supply chain disruptions, extending RoDTEP benefits to the

extended export benefits under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme to companies uncovered sectors will help the exporting community in handling the international headwinds.



ED attaches Rs 367 cr assets in Bhushan Steel case

New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it had attached immovable assets worth Rs 367 crore in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and some cities in Odisha as part of a money-laundering probe linked to an alleged bank-loan fraud against Bhushan Steel Limited (BSL).

A provisional order has been issued under the PMLA to attach the assets that were held "in the name of benamidars/shell entities



through dummy directors so as to conceal them and to ensure that they are out of the reach of law enforcement agencies", the ED has said in a statement.

After completing the corporate insolvency resolution

process (CIRP), BSL was taken over by Tata Steel Limited in 2018. The ED has accused BSL, its managing director Neeraj Singal and associates of forming "several shell companies".

"They rotated funds from one company to another through a chain of multiple entities. The funds were circulated to infuse capital, buy property and for other personal purposes not intended by the banks," it has said.

Vegetarian food thali turns costlier in February, non-veg cheaper: Crisil

Mumbai

A vegetarian thali became dearer by 7 per cent in February primarily on the upsurge in onion and tomato prices, according to rating agency Crisil.

A cool down in poultry prices led to non-veg thali becoming cheaper by 9 per cent, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analysis said in its monthly "Roti Rice Rate" report released on Friday.

The cost of a vegetable thali, which comprises roti, vegetables (onions, tomatoes and potatoes), rice, dal, curd and salad, increased to Rs 27.50 per plate in February from Rs 25.60 in the year-ago period, it said.

"The cost of the veg thali increased due to a surge of 29

per cent and 38 per cent on-year in prices of onion and tomato,



respectively," it said, adding that rice and pulses have also got dearer.

However, the thali was cheaper when compared with the Rs 28 in the preceding month of January.

In the case of non-veg thali, which comprises all the same ingredients but dal gets replaced by chicken, the price declined to Rs 54 as compared to Rs 59.20 in the year-ago period, but was higher when compared with January's Rs 52.

A 20 per cent decline in the cost of the broiler prices, which has a 50 per cent weightage in the overall price, was the primary reason for the decline in the cost of non-veg thali on a year-on-year basis, it said.

When compared with January, the prices of broiler increased by 10 per cent on the bird flu outbreak in Andhra Pradesh impacting supply and higher demand ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, the report said.

Interest rates on small savings schemes remain unchanged



New Delhi

The government on Friday left the interest rates unchanged on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of the next fiscal, beginning April 1, 2024.

A notification in this regard has been issued by the finance ministry.

"The rates of interest on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of FY 2024-25, starting from April 1, 2024, and ending on June 30, 2024, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the fourth quarter (January 1, 2024, to March 31, 2024) of FY 2023-24," the notification said.

The deposit under the Sukanya Samriddhi scheme will attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent, while the rate on a three-year term deposit remains at 7.1 per cent.

The interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits, too, have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra will be 7.5 per cent, and the investments will mature in 115 months.

The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate (NSC) will remain at 7.7 per cent for the April 1-June 30, 2024, period.

Like the current quarter, the interest rate for the Monthly Income Scheme will earn 7.4 per cent for investors.

The government notifies the interest rates on small savings schemes, majorly operated by post offices, every quarter.

The Reserve Bank, since May 2022, has raised the benchmark lending rate by 2.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent, prompting banks to raise interest rates on deposits as well.

However, the RBI has maintained the status quo on policy rate in the last five consecutive Monetary Policy Committee meetings since February this year.

At Rs 26,866 cr, equity MFs inflow nears 2-year high

New Delhi

Equity mutual funds continued their positive momentum with inflow of Rs 26,866 crore in February, making it the highest monthly infusion in 23 months, driven by massive interest for thematic funds and launch of new fund offerings. Also, the latest flow was about 23% higher than inflows of Rs 21,780 crore in January. Moreover, the monthly Systematic

Investment Plan (SIP) contributions reached a fresh high of Rs 19,186 crore, surpassing January's Rs 18,838 crore, according to the data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Friday. "We observe that there is a surge in SIP accounts, totalling 8.20 crore with 49.79 lakh new SIP registrations. This underscores investors' unwavering commitment to disciplined wealth

accumulation," Venkat Chalasani, Chief Executive, AMFI, said. Overall, the mutual fund industry witnessed an inflow of Rs 1.2 lakh crore in February, almost similar to the one seen in the preceding month. The huge inflow was driven by contributions from debt-oriented schemes at Rs 63,809 crore, equity schemes at Rs 26,866 crore and hybrid schemes at Rs 18,105 crore.

Navigating Carbon Pricing: The G20 Experience and Global South Prospects

Climate change is widely recognised as a consequence of both market and policy failures. The failure to account for the costs of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the prices of goods and services can be described as a fundamental market failure which has effectively allowed economic actors to exploit the atmosphere as a free resource, encouraging a continued link between fossil fuel consumption and economic growth. Another significant factor driving climate change is policy failure in the form of fossil fuel subsidies and a distortionary tax system that incentivises emissions over environment protection.

Carbon pricing is a well-established economic instrument which can internalise the cost of carbon dioxide emissions in goods and services and, by effect, optimally drive down the costs associated with reducing emissions. Carbon pricing is a cost imposed on units of carbon emitted, or a proxy for such emissions—in theory, it incentivises polluters to decrease the volume of carbon that they release into the atmosphere. Through this approach, carbon pricing aims to redirect both the production and consumption patterns towards activities with lower carbon intensity and stimulate advancements in technology. Carbon pricing can take various forms, typically, carbon taxes or carbon trading markets.

The concept of internalising externalities, first introduced by economist Arthur Pigou in *The Economics of Welfare* (1920), is underpinned by the argument that individuals and firms tend to disregard the costs imposed on others unless those costs are reflected in their own actions.

In this context, a Pigouvian tax on carbon serves as a mechanism to ensure that the costs of emitting GHGs are included in the prices of goods and services. This approach was later popularised by Yale University economist William Nordhaus in the 1970s, who argued for assigning a monetary value to the environmental damage caused by GHG emissions, including carbon. Today, it is generally recognised that carbon pricing is important and potentially useful but not a silver bullet and should be complemented with other fiscal policy and mitigation instruments to address market deficiencies and foster innovation while facilitating the adoption of low-carbon technologies.

Potential Benefits of Carbon Pricing

Carbon pricing serves multiple purposes, each contributing to its importance as a policy tool.

The first aim is to correct market failures. By placing a price on carbon, businesses and individuals are incentivised to reduce their emissions, thereby enhancing economic efficiency. This incentive is based on an opportunity cost and is maintained throughout the operation of the carbon pricing system, whether a particular entity reduces its emissions to comply with a cap or decides to purchase allowances or credits to meet its obligation.

Additionally, carbon pricing mechanisms can play a vital role in stimulating investments

in low-carbon technologies, renewable energy sources, and energy-efficient practices. Especially when carbon pricing mechanisms are designed to provide medium-term price signals, carbon pricing can promote investment stability and investor confidence, allowing finance to flow towards emission-saving technologies or solutions and encouraging the development of new emission-reducing practices. This not only contributes to a more sustainable future but also fosters innovation, promotes job creation, and spurs economic growth in green sectors. Studies suggest that investments in sustainable industries have the potential to generate three times as many jobs compared to government spending in the fossil fuel sector. In the context of developing economies, such investments take on greater significance as they support vulnerable sectors and communities in adapting to climate change and achieving just transitions.

Furthermore, carbon pricing can generate substantial revenue for governments, which can be allocated to support climate-related initiatives and regional and social transitions or be redistributed to citizens through dividends or tax cuts, thereby fostering public support for emission reduction efforts. The World Bank's *State and Trends of Carbon Pricing*

content of fossil fuels. Scandinavian nations were among the pioneers in implementing these carbon levies. In 1990, Finland became the first country to introduce a carbon tax, followed by Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. In the last 30 years, several countries, including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, South Africa, and Uruguay, have initiated carbon taxation policies in one or more economic sectors. Additionally, numerous regional entities, such as the Canadian provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec, have implemented their own carbon taxation measures.

The second approach is through an emissions trading system (ETS), or carbon market, which imposes emission limits on economic agents and allows such entities to trade emissions allowances, thereby creating a market-based price for carbon. Trading allows entities within the ETS to decide whether to reduce emissions or to purchase emission allowances from other entities which may have a surplus or an overall lower cost to emission abatement. In this way, the overall cost of abatement is efficiently minimised across the participating economic actors, and emissions stay within the overall mandated limits. In 2005, the EU

initiated the world's inaugural carbon emissions trading system, building on previous experience in the US in the control of criteria pollutants, in particular sulphur dioxide. This EU ETS market is characterised by annual emission caps and pricing determined by the interplay of supply and demand for allowances. Comparable emissions trading mechanisms have since been adopted in Canada, China, South Korea,

the United Kingdom, and several states of the United States (US).

According to the World Bank, the percentage of global emissions subject to carbon taxes and emissions trading systems increased from 7 percent in 2005 to some 23 percent in 2023. The same report states that there are 73 carbon pricing instruments currently in operation covering 23 percent of global emissions.

In parallel with developments in these compliance instruments, the world has also seen the emergence of a global voluntary carbon market, wherein companies seeking to decarbonise in line with the objectives of the United Nations (UN) Paris Agreement commit to long-term reduction pathways and purchase carbon credits generated by emission reduction projects and activities.

Finally, companies have also increased their use of implicit (or shadow) carbon pricing in their decision-making. This implies incorporating a carbon price (usually related to the social cost of carbon or to a metric similar to the longer-term carbon price in the prevailing sector in which the company operates) into investment calculations. By doing so, a company can best align its internal investment and operational decisions with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

These carbon pricing instruments are further explored in Chapter 2.

Context for Carbon Markets in the G20 Countries

The concept of carbon pricing offers a spectrum of benefits, with three core advantages. First, it promotes sustainable growth by incentivising cleaner and more energy-efficient practices, thereby fostering an environmentally responsible economy. Second, it serves as a magnet for investments, attracting capital for renewable energy projects and technology innovations that drive environmental progress. Third, carbon pricing contributes to substantial emission reductions, steering societies toward a lower-carbon future.

However, alongside these benefits come a series of challenges that must be carefully addressed. For one, equity concerns are paramount throughout emissions mitigation policies. To avoid inequity, carbon pricing mechanisms need to be designed in ways that do not disproportionately burden vulnerable or marginalised populations. Ensuring industrial competitiveness is another challenge, as businesses need to remain competitive in a global market while undergoing the transition to cleaner practices. Additionally, the effective design and implementation of carbon pricing policies is crucial to maximise their potential benefits and minimise unintended consequences. Balancing these benefits and challenges is essential for achieving a successful and equitable carbon pricing strategy.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of carbon pricing make a compelling case for carbon pricing mechanisms, particularly within the G20 countries, which account for over 80 percent of global GHG emissions. Mitigation instruments such as carbon pricing will prove to be a useful addition to the fiscal policy toolkit to reduce emissions as well as augment revenues. There is growing recognition among the G20 countries of the imperative to transition towards net-zero GHG emissions to mitigate the existential dangers associated with climate change. Many nations have taken proactive steps by setting ambitious targets for reducing emissions. The implementation of carbon pricing measures can serve as a highly effective means to accelerate progress and attain the renewable-energy and energy-efficiency interim goals set for 2030.

The G20 nations encompass a wide range of economies, from highly industrialised to emerging markets. While these nations exhibit diverse economic structures, they share common values and objectives in addressing climate change and emissions reductions. Carbon markets, due to their flexibility and market-oriented mechanisms, offer an avenue for these economies to tailor carbon pricing policies that suit their specific contexts. Tailored policies can assist in achieving ambitious emission-reduction targets while promoting economic diversity, equity, and innovation. Furthermore, carbon markets can facilitate international collaboration by allowing emissions trading, enabling countries to work together in achieving these emission reduction targets. Looking ahead, 122 of the 195 Parties to the Paris Agreement[25] have indicated in their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that they are planning or considering the use of carbon pricing to meet their NDCs.



The 'Smart Economics' of Moving Women from the Private to the Public Sphere



likely as men to say they have experienced discrimination based on their sex and 35 percent of women report having been subjected to physical or sexual violence by either intimate partners or non-partners.

To be sure, progress has been achieved in certain fronts. For example, in the past decade, there has been a global increase in women's representation in parliaments: from 18.7 percent of seats in 2013 to 22.9 percent in 2022, as shown in this year's Global Gender Gap Report. One of the policies that some countries have applied to nurture political equity is gender quotas, which according to the UNSTATs, has translated to having up to 10 percent more women in parliament. Women's participation has also increased in local governance since 2017. Available data from 117 countries show that women account for more than 40 percent of the representation at the local level in 18 countries across different regions—examples include Bolivia, India, and France.

Despite such progress, however, women continue to be underrepresented in every dimension of social life: they occupy fewer managerial positions in the private sector; and they have largely negligible roles in labour unions, educational institutions, and in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. At the current rate, it would take almost half a century to achieve equal representation in national parliaments worldwide.

The situation is even more grim in the area of economic autonomy, where women continue to face a multitude of obstacles and achieve worse outcomes than men.

Gender Gaps in the Labour Market and Women's Economic Autonomy

Women participate less in the labour market compared to men. The female-to-male ratio in labour force participation rates shows that there is no gender parity in any region. According to 2021 estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO), in the vast majority of countries across the world, the male labour force participation rate is at least 10 percent more than that of females—with the exception of some countries like Laos, Nepal, Mozambique, or Sweden.

Even when the female workforce has increased over the last three decades in countries of all income levels—with some exceptions such as Türkiye and Thailand—women work fewer hours. Furthermore, women tend to have jobs in less dynamic and low-productivity sectors, work under worse working conditions, and receive lower salaries—a phenomenon known as 'occupation or horizontal segregation' that is observed in both developed and developing economies. The highest female Labour Force Participation Rates can be found in three particular sectors: services, industry, and agriculture. In the first two, however, women are employed largely in specific areas associated with education, health, and other care-related services and industries.

Women are also more likely to work in the informal economy than men, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Taking into account non-agricultural employment, informality can account for anywhere from 70 percent to 90 percent of female employment in African and Southeast Asian countries, between 20 percent and 30 percent in Latin America, and below 10 percent in European countries; the exception in the latter is the UK, where the share of informality is at around 20 percent.

Another crucial gap is in pay: Women, on average, earn less than their male counterparts. As Nobel laureate in Economics, Claudia Goldin, has shown, in the third quarter of 2020, for every dollar earned by a man in the US, a woman received 0.8 dollars for the same job. Such gap can also be explained by the aforementioned factors. That women do the lion's share of the most precarious jobs and do not occupy top positions cross-sectorally, render them more likely to have lower incomes.

Various factors underlie the obstacles faced by women and girls in participating in the labour market: cultural norms; gender stereotypes; and unpaid care and domestic work.

From the time a person is born, they internalise social norms and gender roles embedded in societal institutions and which guide human interactions.

These consist of attitudinal behaviours, emotions and predispositions towards consumptions, desires, career paths, and individual decisions. They affect men's and women's decision-making and access to opportunities throughout their lives.

Historically, these norms and stereotypes have constrained women to the private sphere, with their social role being attached to familiar domestic tasks such as raising, nurturing and caring for family members; the men, meanwhile, are assigned to the administration of the public sphere and associated with production as well as decision-making. This has consolidated a sexual division of labour that has been perpetuated and reinforced in legislation, informal rules, and habits. As a result, women's agency is limited and equality is absent in the opportunities made available to men and women.

Evidence shows that, despite cultural change, the role of women as carers and household managers is still normalised, and indeed, in vigour. Globally, women spend, on average, 3X (three times) more hours than men on unpaid domestic and care work. This figure hides huge differences between regions and countries. For instance, while women in Canada spend about 1.5X more hours to domestic chores than men, in India they dedicate 8X more.

Such an unequal distribution of care and domestic work results in women suffering what is known as 'time poverty': they are left with less time to offer in the labour market, or to dedicate to education, leisure, and other activities. Studies have also shown the impact of becoming a mother on increasing the odds of falling into poverty. Women who are mothers tend to earn less than women who are not (10 percent less in Argentina, and 30 percent in China and Türkiye). In contrast, men who are fathers have, on average, higher incomes than men without children. The fatherhood gap, which compares the hourly wages of non-fathers to those of fathers, indicates that the latter experience a wage premium, according to the ILO's Global Wage Report 2018/19. Simultaneously, given that women spend more time in the so-called 'economy of the shadows', leading to the feminisation of poverty, they are not only more likely to be poorer than men but their contribution to economic growth and development goes unnoticed and unaccounted for.

Yet, the care economy underpins society, production, and overall well-being. Care work includes services and activities that foster, safeguard, acquire, accumulate and restore human capabilities and social skills necessary for individuals and families to have fulfilling lives and unleash their potential; it is a precondition to thriving societies. Therefore, care work is the enabling force behind all other productive endeavours. Even though its potential in job creation is estimated to be at nearly 300 million jobs by 2035, care and domestic work's social and economic value remains largely invisible.

In 2015, an ambitious and holistic agenda was set to guide countries' priorities to achieve a more sustainable and egalitarian world. Different targets were established to ensure economic growth and social well-being while regarding intersectionalities between environmental protection; institutional quality; and territorial, technological, income, and gender gaps. Standing at the midpoint of the 2030 deadline, this agenda is far from being met.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 shows meagre results: the world has not made progress, or has regressed, in over 30 percent of the targets. This is true for the goal of gender equity. On SDG 5, for example—"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"—only 15.4 percent of the indicators of the 2030 targets are on track to being fulfilled.

Over the past decades, the significance of achieving gender equality has firmly established itself on the public agenda due to the work of feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements across the globe. There is still a long way to go, however. This brief underlines the imperative of nurturing women's autonomy in three crucial domains, as conceptualised by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) of the United Nations: physical, economic, and decision-making autonomy.

Addressing gender gaps and increasing women's autonomy would allow women to enjoy a life of independence and freedoms, on equal terms with their male counterparts. Narrowing and closing these gaps will foster women's rights; it is also a strategy for overall development.

This article analyses current global progress in the nurturing of the three autonomies. It explains the persisting barriers to their realisation, focusing on the economic dimension; offers recommendations to increase both women's economic autonomy and sustainable and inclusive development; and outlines the key imperatives and challenges that lie ahead, even beyond the 2030 Development Agenda.

The Three Autonomies: Progress and Enduring Challenges

Many countries have expanded the rights and the recognition of the need for women to attain physical autonomy and have passed legislation against violence and in favour of voluntary interruption of pregnancy. Moreover, according to the United Nations Population Fund's population dashboard, almost eight out of every 10 girls and women (15 to 49 years old) were users of a modern contraceptive method in 2023. Still, there continue to be barriers in the access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, especially in developing regions where, for instance, the number of users falls by 20 percent; there are also persistent gender gaps in legal protection against gender-based violence and the many forms of discrimination. These gaps need to be addressed as, globally, women are twice as

Afghanistan Under the Taliban: Enduring Challenges, Evolving Responses

In mid-February 2024, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres led an international conference in Doha to discuss and frame a coordinated approach to Afghanistan. Those who gathered at the meeting included special envoys for Afghanistan from 25 countries, members of Afghan civil society organisations, and representatives from regional organisations such as the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It was the second such conference organised by the UN in a year, following the first one in May 2023. The meetings have sought to discuss engagement with the Taliban and work on the recommendations made by the UN Special Coordinator for Afghanistan on the appointment of a new UN Special Envoy for the country.

Representatives from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) under the Taliban were not invited for the first conference in May 2023, and this year, the IEA's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined the invitation. While this may seem inconsistent with the Taliban's expressed effort to be included in conversations on Afghanistan, it also reflects the Emirate's current position of relative influence, two and a half years after the fall of Kabul.

In a statement released on X,[1] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the control of the IEA stated that their participation in the meeting could only be "beneficial" if they were regarded as the "sole official representative of Afghanistan" and given a platform to hold talks with senior officials of the UN. It also urged the UN to take into account the current situation in the country and "rebuff pressure from a few parties"—a reference to the consistent calls from the international community for a more inclusive government.[2] It also dismissed any prospect of progress in talks with the regime unless the international community ceases their "pressure and coercion tactics".[3]

Since coming to power in August 2021, the Islamic Emirate has been

expanding its relations with the countries in the region as well as with the United States, advocating for its de jure recognition. At the time of writing, no country has officially recognised the Islamic Emirate even as they have increased their diplomatic and economic engagements with the group. Many countries, including China, Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, have allowed the Taliban to take over the country's embassy within their borders. This is

Shia community and civilians. The UN Secretary-General also raised concerns about the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in the country, as the Taliban continue to provide the group a haven, and the possibility of similar groups proliferating and expanding their operations.

This report refocuses the attention on developments in Afghanistan and provides an understanding of how the countries in the region, and the United

threat of foreign militant groups, and keeping the Western powers, especially the US, at bay.

Aleksei Zakharov, in the third chapter, outlines the three phases of Russia's Afghanistan policy post-August 2021: the initial enthusiasm with the departure of the US; soon followed by concerns about the deteriorating security situation with attacks on the Russian Embassy in Kabul in September 2022; and finally, Moscow's

current efforts to increase its economic presence in the country. Amira Jadoon then assesses the declining leverage that Pakistan now has in Afghanistan, in the backdrop of the deteriorating bilateral relationship between the two countries amid the growing attacks by the TTP and Taliban's refusal to take action against the group.

For the Central Asian Republics, as explained by Hamza Boltaev in the fifth chapter, the considerations about economic cooperation with the Islamic Emirate have taken priority. Similar to other countries in the region, Iran has also continued to engage pragmatically with the Islamic Emirate, as Vali Golmohammadi explains in the sixth chapter. However, historical

differences between the two countries on issues such as water sharing and refugees, along with the additional security concerns in the aftermath of the Taliban's resurgence, will put the relationship to test in the future.

In the final chapter, Elizabeth Threlkeld and Sania Shahid explore how the US's moderate engagement with the group could be influenced by certain factors—the outcome of the 2024 elections in the US and the possible return of a Trump presidency; the state of the Afghan economy; a persistent fall in humanitarian aid and assistance; and the breakdown of the global consensus on non-recognition of the Taliban.

It is our aim that the seven articles in this report provide readers a deeper understanding of how countries are navigating the security challenges posed by the Taliban while protecting their stakes in Afghanistan.



despite the Emirate's regressive policies on women and girls, the state of the minority religious and ethnic groups, and the curbs on freedoms such as those of the press and media.

Two and a half years since the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, the emergence of new theatres of conflict in other regions has perhaps pushed Afghanistan to the periphery of global focus. While calls for forming an inclusive government have persisted, the countries in the region, and the United States, have attempted to secure their interests by establishing a communication framework with the Emirate. While daily fightings have reduced in Afghanistan—with anti-Emirate resistance groups facing bleak prospects, unlike in the 1990s—terrorist groups like the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) have escalated their activities in the country.[4] They have been targeting both the Taliban and their functionaries, as well as the minority

Sates, view the security challenges posed by Afghanistan. Our contributors explore how the responses of these countries have evolved in the past two and a half years, specifically on the question of the degree of engagement and outreach with the IEA, and economic cooperation and the incremental normalisation in ties. The articles also ponder how the situation in the country could change in the near future.

In the first chapter, Shanthie Mariet D'Souza highlights India's evolving policy towards the Islamic Emirate following the fall of Kabul, from an ad-hoc approach to incremental engagement. India's aim is to secure its strategic interests while forging a regional consensus and putting pressure on the Taliban to create a more inclusive and representative government. In the second chapter, Antonio Giustozzi explains how China's engagement with Afghanistan is guided by two primary concerns: the

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

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.



Czech beauty Krystyna Pyszkova crowned Miss World; Sini Shetty makes it to Top 8



Krystyna Pyszkova of the Czech Republic was crowned the 71st Miss World at a glittering ceremony co-hosted by filmmaker and celebrity talk show host Karan Johar in Mumbai on Saturday night. Krystyna was crowned by Miss World 2023, Karolina Bielawska of Poland. The beauty pageant returned to India after 28 years. It was last held in Bengaluru in 1996.

The Czech beauty edged out Yasmina Zaytoun of Lebanon, Ache Abrahams of Trinidad and Tobago, and Lesego Chombo of Botswana to win the title. Miss India (and Mumbai girl) Sini Shetty could make it only to the Top 8.

Shetty's answer to the competition question in the Top 8 stage did not impress the judges and resulted her in being ousted from the competition. She was asked how social media can be instrumental in the empowerment of women.

Sini said social media had the power to change the world and that it had led to an increasing participation of women across different fields. She added that social media can make the world march towards progress. As many as 40 contestants from around the world were chosen for the grand finale out of the 112 who participated in the event.

The grand finale turned out to be a star-studded event as it saw Bollywood actresses Kriti Sanon, Pooja Hegde (both served on the panel of judges), Manushi Chhillar (the last Indian woman to be crowned Miss World in 2017) and Sonakshi Sinha (who spoke at the event) as well as Hindi pop stars Shaan and Neha and Tony Kakkar (who put up electrifying performances), reality TV specialists Shiv Thakare and Mannara Chopra, and even Test cricketer-turned-Rajya Sabha MP Harbhajan Singh.

The leading ladies of the upcoming Sanjay Leela Bhansali web series

Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar — Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sanjeeda Shaikh and Sharmin Segal — also made an appearance on a deferred live broadcast. The first track of the series, Sakal Ban, released on Saturday was also played at the venue.

Oppenheimer dominates with 7 wins, Poor Things gets 4 honours at 96th Academy Awards

Christopher Nolan's film Oppenheimer dominated the 96th Academy Awards, as it took home seven trophies, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor.

"We made a film about the man who created the atomic bomb, and for better or for worse, we're all living in Oppenheimer's world," Cillian Murphy said while accepting the honour at the 96th Oscars at Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles.

For Nolan, who took home the Best Director, the Oscar win is a first despite being nominated seven times previously for directing Dunkirk, as well as for his work on movies like Memento and Inception.

During his acceptance, he said, "Movies are just a little bit over 100 years old. I would imagine being 100 years into painting or theatre.

We don't know where this incredible journey is going from here, but to know that you think that I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me." Emma Stone earned her second best actress Oscar for Poor Things.

Da'vine Joy Randolph was

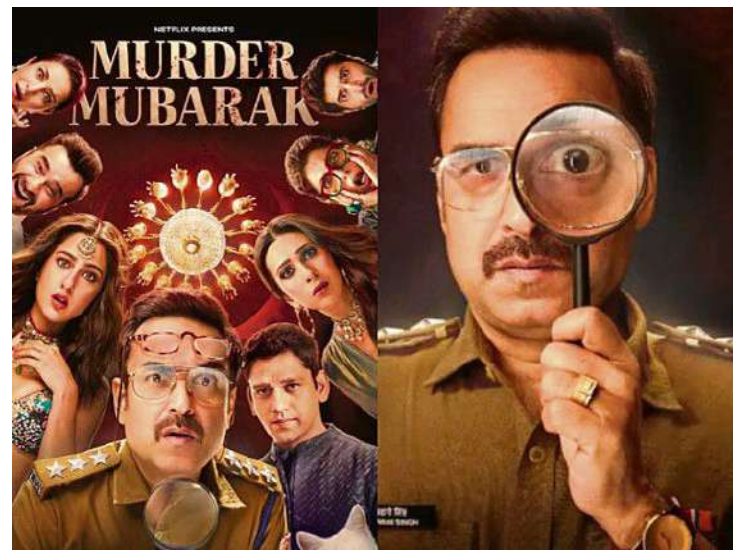
Pankaj Tripathi shares experience of working with Homi Adajania on Murder Mubarak

Actor Pankaj Tripathi never disappoints when he comes on screen. He credited his 'good luck' for getting to work in 'good films'. "I try not to disappoint. I have good luck that I get good films."

Pankaj's next is Murder Mubarak, which also stars Sara Ali Khan, Vijay Varma, Dimple Kapadia, Karisma Kapoor, Sanjay Kapoor and Tisca Chopra among others.

Talking about working with an array of stars, Pankaj said, "It was great working with these people. Homi Adajania is a fabulous captain. He takes care of everything." The shooting of the film was great fun, he said, adding: "All of them are great human beings and actors."

The shooting helped make a



suitcase full of memories. "We all stayed together and made a lot of memories. Every day we would sit down with Homi. He would share Parsi stories and

of his childhood, and I would share stories from my childhood in north Bihar," he said. Murder Mubarak is all set to release on Netflix on March 15.



feted Best Supporting Actress for her role as a grieving cafeteria manager grappling with the death of her son in The Holdovers.

Robert Downey Jr won the Best Supporting actor for the Cillian Murphy-starrer. He said, "Here's my little secret — I needed this job more than it needed me."

The actor, who struggled with drug addiction for much of the 1990s before getting sober and launching his comeback, thanked Tom Hansen, his lawyer of 40 years, "half of which he spent trying to get me insured and bailing me out."

Jonathan Glazer, director The

Zone of Interest, which won the Best International Feature Film, a drama set in Auschwitz, spoke about violence in the Middle-East and to draw parallels with the message of his searing look at the Holocaust.

American Fiction, a satire that explores race and art, won Best Adapted Screenplay, while Anatomy of a Fall earned Best Original Screenplay.

The documentary 20 Days in Mariupol won Best Documentary. Its director Mstyslav Chernov drew attention to the human costs of Russia's invasion.

Billie Eilish shattered records, becoming the youngest two-time



Oscar winner at age 22 after earning best song for her Barbie ballad What Was I Made For?

This year's Academy Awards, honouring the best films of the previous year, arrived at a tumultuous moment for Hollywood, which didn't have a whole lot to celebrate in 2023.

Jimmy Kimmel returned to host the Oscars for the fourth time. He started the ceremony with jokes about the Academy snub of Barbie filmmaker Greta Gerwig, the excessive lengths of many of the nominated films and Robert De Niro's much younger girlfriend.

'One love': Diljit Dosanjh vibes with tribe women in Kinnaur, watch him embrace the local traditions with a dash of swag



Actor and singer Diljit Dosanjh shared his recent travel experiences with the locals in Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh.

Taking to Instagram, the actor shared a lively video of him vibing with Kinnauri women, singing traditional songs and his own tunes.

In his latest post, Diljit gave his fans a glimpse of his visit and captioned it, 'One Love'.

Last week, the actor shared a string of pictures and videos, dancing with the locals on a folk song. The photos show him joining hands in gratitude in front of the people.

Indian art designer Nitin Desai remembered at 96th Academy Awards 'In Memoriam'

Renowned production director Nitin Desai, who created sets for blockbuster movies such as the Oscar-nominated 'Lagaan' and 'Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam', was among the film personalities who were honoured in the 'In Memoriam' segment at the 96th Academy Awards.

Every year, the Academy Awards pay a tribute to industry legends who passed away in the last one year in its 'In Memoriam' montage.

Desai, 57, was found hanging at his studio in Karjat near Mumbai on August 2, 2023.



He was also known for his art work in films such as 'Jodhaa Akbar' and 'Prem Ratan Dhan Payo' as well as the popular TV quiz show 'Kaun Banega Crorepati'.

In his career spanning over 30 years, Desai closely worked with directors like Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Rajkumar Hirani and Ashutosh Gowariker.

The 'In Memoriam' segment opened with a tribute to Alexei Navalny, Russia's opposition leader, who died last month. A documentary about Navalny won the Oscar for feature documentary at last year's ceremony.

Italian music icon Andrea Bocelli performed a new version of his signature single 'Time to Say Goodbye' with his son Matteo Bocelli for the segment.

In its 2021 edition, the Oscars featured actor Irrfan Khan and Oscar-winning costume designer Bhanu Athaiya in its tributes section, while Bollywood stars Rishi Kapoor and Sushant Singh Rajput found mention on the official website of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

40 years in films: The indefatigable Anupam Kher

540 films and still counting, 40 years in Bollywood and still going strong. That is the indefatigable and irrepressible Anupam Kher, Padma Bhushan recipient and two-time National Award-winner, who abhors titles like living legend, thespian and veteran. "These epithets," he asserts, "are indirect ways of telling people that they should retire."

The gifted actor, whom audiences are currently seeing in 'Kaagaz 2', would rather let people know him as a newcomer. He works with the same spirit. Thus, even today, he has no hesitation in asking for work. Not to say that he is undermining his sterling achievements. Apart from international honours such as a BAFTA nomination (for supporting role) in the British sitcom 'The Boy With the Topknot', he has held exalted positions such as chairperson of the National School of Drama and the Film Training Institute of India as well as penned bestsellers.

Only, the actor, who made a mark with his very first film, Mahesh Bhatt's 'Saaransh', does not take himself seriously and does not carry the burden of who Anupam Kher is.

With his debut film itself, however, we woke up to his immense talent. Did he ever feel that he had set the bar rather high with 'Saaransh'? He agrees, "'Saaransh' was the best thing that happened to me. A 27-year-old playing the part of a 65-year-old man — not many would have thought they can pull it off." The stellar role might have been an acid test, but he never thought of bettering himself. He qualifies, "I am not competing with myself. I am not here to create any record. Life is 20 per cent excitement and 80 per cent monotony. You just have to go out and work." Thus, every film of his can't be brilliant, he observes. "You are only a small part of a film. There is a director, producer and so many other variables. You only work to the best of your ability. Just as a painter can't paint a masterpiece every time and a writer can't come up with a classic each

time he picks up a pen, every film can't be exceptional. In my filmography, too, I know that only 50-odd films matter."

Among his best, he counts films like 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge', 'A Wednesday', Golden Globe-nominated 'Bend It Like Beckham' and the Academy Award-winning 'Silver Linings Playbook'. As for his searing role in 'The Kashmir Files', he dubs it as "soulful", the closest to his heart, a leaf out of the lived



experience of a Kashmiri Pandit.

On the tribe of critics who often view cinema through a political lens, he quips, "Well, there are critics and then there are doers. I belong to the latter category." Of course, critics have rarely been critical of his acting. He laughs, "Well, they can't be." But this confidence does not stem from arrogance. What has made him survive in the industry is not just talent, but his never-say-die attitude. "No one makes it without failing," insists Anupam. His fascinating and uphill journey has been documented in his autobiography 'Lessons Life Taught Me, Unknowingly' and the play 'Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai', which has been running for the last 18 years.

That failure can be a stepping stone to success is a lesson he learnt early in life when he flunked in Class IX and his father told him, "Failure is an event, not a person." Similar sentiments were played out in 'DDLJ', where he played an indulgent father to

Shah Rukh Khan, a memorable part in an equally memorable film. But he is equally grateful to the not-so-great films as each taught him something significant. Indeed, it's difficult to survive in the cut-throat film industry where millions come and go and only a miniscule number make a solid headway. He adds, "Why single out the film industry, no field of life is easy."

While his alma maters, the Department of Indian Theatre, Chandigarh, and the National School of Drama, New Delhi, gave him solid grounding, three years spent on the streets of Mumbai further firmed up the actor in Anupam. "I understood human vulnerability, lack of dignity and many other human foibles." To aspiring actors and his son Sikander, whom he rates as a very fine actor, his advice is simple, "There is no substitute to hard work and honesty."

Bollywood, he feels, has mostly changed for the better and it now functions like a corporate, as in the West, where he has had an opportunity to work time and again. Earlier, he laughs and shares, "An actor's hairstyle was more important than anything else. And there I was, not a perfect baldhead you see today but a youngster losing hair left, right and centre, and wanting to become an actor."

Overcoming all challenges, he did become one, an excellent one at that, irreplaceable and pitch perfect each time, mastering every nuance, be it comic or somber. He is still an ambitious actor whom you will see in 'Metro in Dino' and in the titular role in 'Vijay 69'. And he is likely to once again wield the directorial baton he had picked up for his not-so-successful 'Om Jai Jagadish'. Restless but content, his journey is the stuff dreams are made of. Who could have known that a small-town Shimla boy would one day become a famous actor?

Four decades on, he views the present juncture only as an interval point. Picture abhi baaki hai, as Anupam Kher the actor prepares for yet another innings.

Vinesh puts foot down



New Delhi

There was drama and despair in Patiala. Vinesh Phogat won the final of the 50kg category trials to win a right to represent India at the Asia Olympics Qualifiers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, next month. She beat Shivani 11-6 in the final. However, more than her skills that were evident, Vinesh's insistence on competing in two weight categories — 50kg and 53kg — left her opponents feeling cheated.

In bizarre scenes, the 50kg trials did not start in the morning after Vinesh insisted on a written guarantee that she be allowed to take part in the 53kg trials before the Olympics. Moreover, the draw list in both the weight categories was also not shared.

The ad hoc panel comprising Bhupinder Singh Bajwa, MM Somaya and Manjusha Panwar delayed the trials in the 50kg division to try and make her understand. However, she did not budge and the bouts could only begin around 1:30pm when her competitors started to complain about the delay and ensuing confusion.

"This is not the way to conduct trials. It was very apparent that the officials were hell-bent on

favouring her. We gave our weights at 7am and were made to wait as Vinesh wanted to fight in two categories," said a wrestler who competed in the 50kg class.

"We complained but nothing happened. She got a bye in the first round — how did they arrive at that decision? They fixed my bout against Ankush so that there is one less competitor. They tried to fix Shivani's bout in the semifinal too. This is cheating," she added.

Shivani's coach Vikram Kumar, who runs the Guru Premchand Academy in Delhi, pointed fingers at the ad hoc panel and the referees for making a mockery of the trials. "Bajwa and the referees are acting on the behest of Vinesh and Bajrang (Punia). They have played with the future of many girls today. I am still trying to find out as to how she was allowed to take part in two weight classes. My girls were told that the ad hoc panel has the discretion to allow it. It looks as if the referees work only for Haryana and the rest of India is nothing," Kumar told The Tribune.

"They tried to make Shivani lose her semifinal bout against

Ankush. Shivani had her pinned on the mat but the judge did not permit the referee to end the contest. She won but she was exhausted while Vinesh was given ample time to recover. Vinesh was allowed to throw in challenges to allow her to recover in the bouts as well. I cannot believe they allowed this farce to happen in plain view," he added.

Interestingly, the ad hoc panel in their circular had specifically mentioned that the trials will be held as per the United World Wrestling (UWW) rules. While allowing Vinesh to take part in two weight categories they have kept the rules at bay. Article 7 clearly states that "each contestant deemed to be taking part of his/her own free will, and responsible for himself/herself, shall be allowed to compete in only one weight category: the one corresponding to his weight at the time of the official weigh-in. For categories in the senior age group, competitors may opt for the next higher category than their body weight, except for the heavy weight category..."

'Help' in 53kg

While Vinesh was head and shoulders above everyone else in the 50kg category, she was helped by her fellow competitors to stay in contention in the 53kg class. After forfeiting her bout against Nancy, Vinesh then took it easy against Anju to lose 0-10. In the third-place bout, it was Nancy who forfeited in Vinesh's favour.

"All this was done to ensure that she stays in contention for a future trial ahead of the Olympics should the body hold a trial in the 53kg weight class," a coach said on the condition of anonymity.

Olympics medallists Bajrang, Ravi lose in trials for Paris Games qualifiers

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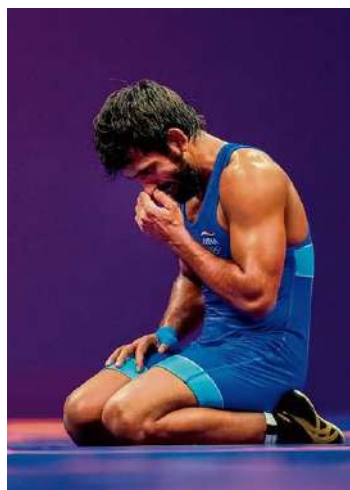
Tokyo Olympics medallists Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya lost their respective bouts in the selection trials for the Asian Olympics qualifiers here today.

Punia, who was a prominent face of the protest against former WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, suffered a crushing 1-9 defeat in the men's freestyle 65kg semifinal against Rohit Kumar.

This was after he barely managed to win against Ravinder

(3-3 on criteria) in the opening round. If Ravinder had not conceded a caution point in the bout, Punia would have been eliminated in the opening bout itself.

Punia had trained in Russia to prepare for the trials, which are being organised by the IOA ad hoc panel. Punia though won a case in the Delhi High Court after contending that the suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had no authority to conduct trials.



Nishant one win from securing Paris quota



Busto Arsizio (Italy)

World Championships medallist Nishant Dev moved within touching distance of a Paris Olympics quota after he registered a dominant victory over Christos Karaitis of Greece to enter the 71kg quarterfinals of the first world Olympics boxing qualifier.

The 23-year-old, who won the featherweight bronze at the World Championships last year, continued his rich vein of form as he beat Karaitis by a 5-0 decision.

With the qualifying tournament offering four quota places in the men's 71kg weight class, Dev needs to win his quarterfinal to seal his passage for the Paris Games and earn the fifth Olympics quota, and first

in the men's category, for India.

However, Dev will have his task cut out as he faces a tough opponent in 2021 World Championships silver medallist Omari Jones of the USA in the last-eight.

The Haryana boxer is the only Indian boxer out of the nine-member contingent who is still in the fray for a quota. The remaining boxers will get a final chance to seal their passage to Paris during the second qualifier, scheduled to be held in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3.

Four Indians — Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) — have so far secured Paris quotas.

Carey's 98 drives Australia to series sweep against Kiwis

Christchurch

Alex Carey scored a magnificent 98 not out as Australia chased down their 279-run victory target to beat New Zealand by three wickets before tea on the fourth day of the second Test, sweeping the series 2-0. Rain at Hagley Oval delayed the start of Australia's pursuit of the 202 runs they still needed for victory and New Zealand skipper Tim Southee struck early to dismiss Travis Head and reduce the tourists to 80/5.



Carey and Mitchell Marsh (80) both had scares but put together a partnership of 140 for the sixth wicket to subdue the crowd and take the visitors to within 60 runs of their target. Carey kept his wicket by virtue of reviews when he was on 19 and 37, while Marsh was saved on 55 when the technology showed the tiniest bit of bat on a Glenn Phillips delivery that hit him on the toe.

Ravichandran Ashwin replaces Jasprit Bumrah at top of ICC Test rankings; Rohit Sharma rises to 6th among batters

Dubai

A nine-wicket haul in his 100th Test match helped Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin re-claim the top spot in the bowlers' list, while his captain Rohit Sharma was back in the top-10 at sixth in the batting charts of the latest ICC rankings on Wednesday.

Ashwin was at his best throughout the Dharamsala contest against England as the experienced right-armers picked up four wickets in the first innings and then a 36th five-wicket haul in the second as India cruised to a dominant triumph in the fifth and final Test of the series.

The big haul helped Ashwin move past teammate Jasprit Bumrah into the premier position that he previously held earlier this year, the ICC said in a statement.

Rohit, who smashed a hundred in Dharamsala, rose five places to sixth and within 108 rating points of No 1 ranked Test batter Kane Williamson.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (up two places to eighth) and Shubman Gill (up 11 spots to equal 20th) reached new career-best ratings following excellent individual series against Ben Stokes' side.

Bumrah fell into a share of the second position with Australia seamer Josh Hazlewood



following his six scalps in the second Test against New Zealand in Christchurch.

Ashwin's teammate Kuldeep Yadav earned a new career-high rating and jumped 15 places to 16th overall on the latest rankings following his seven wickets and Player of the Match heroics against England.

New Zealand's Matt Henry

(up six spots to 12th) also moved up to a career-best mark.

India spinner Ravindra Jadeja remained well out in front of second-placed Ashwin in the updated list for Test all-rounders, with Australia skipper Pat Cummins (up two places to eighth) and Henry (up six spots to 11th) among the big movers.

Onscreen Sachin Tendulkar fires up Musheer Khan



Mumbai

Sachin Tendulkar's presence on the third day served as a huge motivating factor for 19-year-old Musheer Khan, whose patient 136 turned the Ranji Trophy final result into a mere formality with hosts out-batting Vidarbha.

The batting legend was present for the morning session on the third day as Musheer piled up his second century in the three knockout games of this season.

"I did not even know that Sachin sir was here," Musheer said. "But when I was batting on 60, I saw him on the big screen and (thereon) I batted with the motivation that he is watching today and I have to impress sir," he said.

Not only Tendulkar, India captain Rohit Sharma was also present at the Wankhede, underlining the growing importance of domestic red-ball matches.

Tendulkar took to his social media platforms to share his observations. "Mumbai displayed a lot more discipline, patience and commitment in the second innings," he wrote.

Pant fit to keep wickets in IPL, Mohammed Shami ruled out

NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant has been cleared to keep wickets in the Indian Premier League (IPL) beginning next month but pace bowler Mohammed Shami will miss the T20 tournament following heel surgery, the country's cricket board (BCCI) said today.

India wicketkeeper Pant was involved in a near-fatal car crash in December 2022 that required him to undergo multiple surgeries and kept him out of the 50-over World Cup on home soil last year.

The Delhi Capitals' captain was initially expected to play purely as a batter in the 10-team IPL, which begins in Chennai on March 22. "After undergoing an extensive 14-month rehab and recovery process ... Rishabh Pant has now been declared fit as a wicketkeeper-batter for the upcoming IPL 2024," BCCI secretary

Jay Shah said in a statement.

A strong showing in the IPL could earn the 26-year-old a place in India's squad for the T20 World Cup in June.

Shami, who missed India's recent home series against England and underwent surgery, is a doubt for the World Cup. He is not expected to be back before September this year. "The fast bowler successfully underwent surgery on February 26th, 2024, for his right heel problem. He is currently being monitored by the BCCI medical team and is ruled out of the upcoming IPL 2024," the BCCI statement read.

Fellow seam bowler Prasidh Krishna has also been ruled out of the IPL with a quadriceps tendon injury.

There is, however, no update on KL Rahul, who hasn't played since the first Test against England in January.



अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
संजय मंगेश भैरे
सुचिता संजय भैरे