

Across State

Year -7 Issue - 19

Mumbai, Thursday 15-21 Feb '24

EDITOR IN CHIEF: SANJAY M. BHAIRE

Rs.5/- PAGES- 24

'A difficult decision' Ashok Chavan joins BJP

Mumbai

Former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan on Tuesday formally joined the BJP in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and state party president Chandrashekhar Bawankule, admitting that it was "not easy" to switch sides after his 38-year association with the Congress.

Sources said that Chavan would be the BJP's Rajya Sabha nominee from the state. The BJP is also likely to give up one Assembly seat in Nanded to him.

"It was a difficult decision for me. My association with the Congress was long. After 38 years of my political career, switching from Congress to BJP was not easy. After a lot of deliberations, I took the decision keeping the interests of my district Nanded, Maharashtra state and nation in mind," Chavan said, speaking at the BJP headquarters a day after he quit the Congress.

"I look forward to a new beginning with a positive outlook under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah

and party president J P Nadda," Chavan added.

"While I am obliged to the Congress for everything they offered me, I also



would like to state I have also contributed to the organisation. The decision to switch from Congress to BJP was my personal decision, which I took keeping the developmental agenda and welfare of state and country in mind," Chavan said on allegations that he had betrayed the Congress.

Chavan, who faces cases linked to the Adarsh Cooperative Housing Society scam dating back to 2011 and had to resign as chief minister after his name cropped up in the case, said it

was "a political accident". "The high court verdict on this issue has been in our favour. Some agencies have gone on appeal. Whatever the legal process, it will be followed. It was a political accident. I have faced enough of this issue. I do not think it is a matter of concern now," Chavan said in response to a question on the Adarsh scam.

"I have joined the party without any conditions. Whatever the BJP leaders at the Centre and state ask me, I will do," Chavan said. Former Congress MLA Amarnath Rajurkar also joined the BJP along with Chavan. "Ashok Chavan is a very seasoned, senior and experienced leader. He has played an important role as a Lok Sabha MP in the Centre and as MLA in the state Legislative Assembly. He was twice the chief minister of Maharashtra," Fadnavis said.

"Chavan is a national stature leader and he will be accorded that which befits his stature. The central leadership of BJP will decide," Fadnavis added when asked if Chavan would be the BJP's Rajya Sabha nominee from the state.

BJP fields Nadda for Rajya Sabha polls from Gujarat, Ashok Chavan from Maharashtra

Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday named party chief J P Nadda as its candidate for Rajya Sabha elections from Gujarat and fielded Congress turncoat Ashok Chavan from Maharashtra. Nadda is currently a Rajya Sabha member from Himachal Pradesh but the BJP does not have the numbers to win the lone seat from the Congress-ruled state.

Chavan's candidature for the Rajya Sabha elections was announced a day after he joined the BJP following his exit from Congress. Chavan's move follows the recent departures of senior Maharashtra Congress figures

Baba Siddique and Milind Deora. While Siddique joined Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Deora switched to Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

In its latest list of candidates for upcoming biennial elections for the upper house, BJP's central election committee approved four names from Gujarat and three from Maharashtra.

Earlier today, the BJP released its second list of candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections, fielding Union minister L Murugan, Maya Narollya, Bansilal Gurjar and Umesh Nath Maharai from Madhya Pradesh. Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was named as BJP candidate from Odisha.

How Rajya Sabha elections are held

If the number of candidates is equal to the number of vacancies, then no polling is required, and all the candidates are declared elected unopposed. However, if there are more candidates than vacancies, a poll is conducted by the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote. In the case of a poll, the votes are counted as per the single transferable vote system, and the candidates securing the required quota of votes are declared elected.

The seats are allocated to candidates based on the number of votes they receive. The number of seats allocated to each party is determined by their strength in the respective Legislative Assembly.

Inside...

Sharad Pawar moves Supreme Court challenging Election Commission order recognising Ajit Pawar-led faction as real NCP

[Read Story On page 2](#)

Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde inaugurates Shilphata flyover, set to decongest traffic in Thane

[Read Story On page 3](#)

MSP law cannot be brought in a hurry; farmers should come forward for talks with government: Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda

[Read Story On page 4](#)

Why Sonia Gandhi took the Rajya Sabha route to Parliament in 2024

[Read Story On page 7](#)

BJP Legislator Who Fired At Sena Leader Sent To 14-Day Judicial Custody

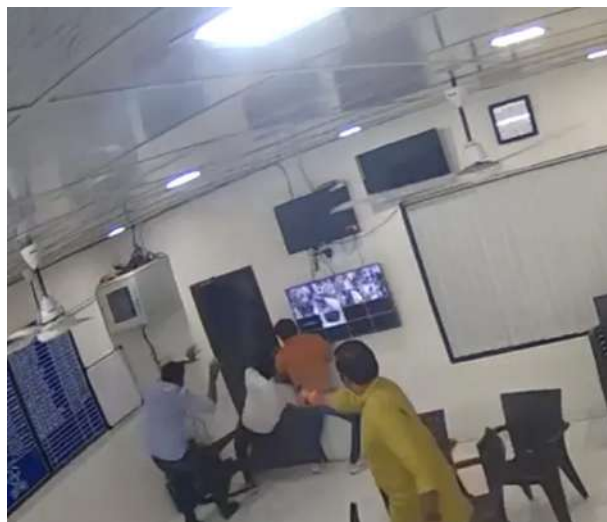
Thane

A court in Maharashtra's Thane district on Wednesday remanded BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, arrested for allegedly opening fire on a local Shiv Sena leader inside a police station, to judicial custody for 14 days.

The MLA allegedly opened fire on Mahesh Gaikwad, the Kalyan unit chief of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, inside the chamber of the senior inspector of Hill Line police station in Ulhasnagar area of the district on February 2.

Those accused in the case have been booked for attempt to murder and on various other charges.

After the incident, the Sena leader was taken to a private hospital in Thane and is now recovering.



The accused - MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, his associates Harshal Kene, Sandeep Sarvankar, Divyesh alias Vicky Ganatra and driver Ranjit Yadav - were produced in a court on Wednesday at the end of their police custody.

Heavy security was deployed around the court

premises.

Advocates Nilesh Pandey and Umar Kazi, representing the accused, told reporters outside the court that the police requested for extension of remand of the accused for interrogation which the court did not allow and remanded them to judicial custody.

Sharad Pawar moves Supreme Court challenging Election Commission order recognising Ajit Pawar-led faction as real NCP

New Delhi

Veteran leader Sharad Pawar has moved the Supreme Court challenging an Election Commission order recognising the party led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar as the real Nationalist Congress Party.

The plea was filed by Pawar senior in his personal capacity through lawyer Abhishek Jebaraj on Monday evening.

Prior to him, the Ajit Pawar faction had filed a caveat through advocate Abhikalp Pratap Singh to ensure that no ex-parte order is passed in favour of the Sharad Pawar group if the latter moves the top court.

On February 6, the Election Commission announced that the Ajit

Pawar faction is the real NCP, in a major setback to party founder Sharad Pawar.

The poll panel also allotted the NCP symbol 'clock' to the group led by Ajit Pawar.

The decision followed the laid-



out tests of maintainability of such a petition which included tests of aims and objectives of the party constitution, test of party constitution and tests of majority both organisational and legislative, the EC had said.

Subscribe Today!

Across State

SUBSCRIMEDIAON FORM

अक्रॉस मुंबई

Name :

Address :

.....

.....

.....

City : State:

Phone : E-mail:

☐ 1 year subscrimediaon of both Across State (English) & Across Mumbai (Marathi+Hindi) – 500/- Rs.

☐ 1 year subscrimediaon of Across State (English) 240/- Rs.

☐ 1 year subscrimediaon of Across Mumbai (Marathi+ Hindi) 240/- Rs.

Kindly, send the Cheque in favour of
BHAKTI PRINT MEDIA PRIVATE LIMITED.

Send Your Subscrimediaon Here:

B wing, 512, Knox Plaza, Mindspace,
Off. Link Road, Behind Inorbit Mall,
Malad (W), Mumbai-64.

Signature

Contact :
Mr. Sanjay M. Bhaire
(9819991194)

'If you come to Mumbai, everyone will die'; threat letter found in lavatory of Chennai-Mumbai flight

Mumbai

A threatening note was found in the lavatory of a Chennai-Mumbai IndiGo flight on Tuesday morning, police said here.

Nothing suspicious was found on the aircraft and an FIR was registered against unidentified people for mischief, said an airport police station official.

The note, scribbled on a tissue paper, was found minutes before the plane landed.

"If you come to Mumbai, everyone will die," it read.

The cabin crew immediately alerted the captain who informed the Air Traffic

Control, the official said.

The entire plane and passengers were searched but nothing suspicious was found, he said.



An FIR was registered against unidentified persons under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and further investigation was under way, the official added.

'IndiGo flight

6E 5188 operating from Chennai to Mumbai had received a bomb threat post landing in Mumbai. All necessary protocols were followed and the aircraft was taken to a remote bay as per guidelines by airport security agencies,' the airline said in a statement.

BJP giving Chavan RS nomination is disrespect to martyred soldiers: Uddhav

Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray slammed the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that if



(Chavan's home district) to address a rally, Modi had mentioned about corruption and Adarsh scam. They had said that Chavan had disrespected families of the martyred soldiers. But if the PM sends him (Chavan) to the Rajya Sabha, then it will amount to disrespecting the soldiers," Uddhav said.

He further alleged that Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis was making a "deal" with Ashok Chavan when a Shiv Sena worker was being killed in Mumbai.

Ashok Chavan gets the Rajya Sabha nominations from BJP then it would be an amount to BJP disrespecting martyred soldiers.

While speaking at a public rally in Ahmednagar, Uddhav said it was PM Modi who had said Chavan had insulted martyred soldiers in the Adarsh scam and that the former Congress leader might be joining the BJP to clear his name from the Adarsh scam.

"When PM Modi and DCM Fadnavis had gone to Nanded

leaders the BJP takes into the party, it will have no impact. The resentment and anger among the people is growing and the people of the state will defeat the BJP. Because the BJP has now become the party of ayaram (defectors) and not Shri Ram (Lord Ram)," Uddhav said.

Meanwhile, Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said that Ashok Chavan was going to leave Congress two years ago when Eknath Shinde quit the Shiv Sena.

Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde inaugurates Shilphata flyover, set to decongest traffic in Thane



Thane

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, inaugurated one arm of the ShilPhata flyover in Kalyan on National Highway (NH)-48. The flyover will ease traffic congestion on the road connecting Kalyan to Navi Mumbai.

The flyover built by The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) is 749 metres in length.

With an estimated cost of Rs 45.68 crore, the project features a dual carriageway, offering three lanes each for Panvel and Thane-bound traffic. While the Panvel-bound flyover is now operational, the Thane-bound side of the flyover is expected to be opened within the next two months.

The initiative, conceived by MMRDA to address traffic

congestion in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, targets areas like Kalyan Phata Junction, which experiences heavy influx of traffic everyday.

Dr. Sanjay Mukherjee, Commissioner, MMRDA, emphasised the project's significance in reducing fuel consumption and easing traffic congestion, aligning with MMRDA's vision for a sustainable future.

HC seeks BMC's response on solutions for 'city-wide problem' of unlicensed hawkers

Mumbai

Maintaining that the issue of unlicensed hawkers was a "city-wide problem", the Bombay High Court on Monday asked the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to respond to the specific troubles it faced and the solutions it would offer to deal with the pressing issue.

A division bench of Justices Gautam S Patel and Kamal R Khata on February 2, was hearing a suo motu plea, initiated by the HC in February, last year, after two shop owners from Borivali (East) complained that several unauthorised stalls had come up in front of their shop. The HC had then said that BMC should ensure "actually walkable"

footpaths are available for pedestrians including elderly and disabled people by removing encroachments by unlicensed hawkers.

It had also sought to know from authorities on the current policy about hawkers who function outside hawking zones and hamper pedestrian movement.

The Bombay Bar Association (BBA), oldest organisation of lawyers, practising before Bombay HC, had also filed an interim plea complaining about persons using the footpaths and sidewalks to set up stalls around Hutatma Chowk (Flora Fountain) or High Court area.

On February 12, the bench

identified some issues for the civic body's consideration.

It requested senior advocate S U Kamdar for BMC to "prepare a short note identifying further specific troubles and problems that the BMC faces regarding licensing hawkers, the continued problem of hawking outside designated hawking zones and the periodic removal of unlicensed hawkers."

"This is a city-wide problem. At this stage, we do not know whether they admit of a single solution or a series of smaller steps," the HC noted.

Seeking BMC's response, HC posted further hearing to March 1.

Spending time and money for mother is not domestic violence: Mumbai court

Mumbai

Husband's provision of time and financial support to his mother does not constitute domestic violence, a local court has said.

The court's decision came as it rejected a plea of a 43-year-old woman seeking action against her husband and his relatives under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.

"The grievance that the husband is giving time and money to his mother cannot be considered as domestic violence," additional sessions judge Ashish Ayachit said in his order on Tuesday.

Initially rejected by a magistrate's court in 2015, the woman, an assistant at the 'Mantralaya' (state secretariat), alleged in her complaint that her husband's frequent financial assistance and time spent with his mother led to conflicts in their marriage.

She also claimed ignorance about her mother-in-law's mental health condition prior to marriage, which increased tensions within the family. Dismissing the wife's assertions as "vague" and lacking "confidence of truthfulness", the court highlighted that the husband's support for his mother and the alleged mistreatment by in-laws did not meet the threshold for domestic violence, ultimately dismissing her appeal.

MSP law cannot be brought in a hurry; farmers should come forward for talks with government: Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda

New Delhi

Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda on Tuesday said a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) on crops cannot be brought in a hurry without consulting all stakeholders and urged the protesting farmer groups to have a structured discussion with the government on the issue.

In an interview with PTI, Munda also cautioned the protesting farmers to be "aware and alert" about some elements which could defame their protest for political benefits.

Munda is part of the ministerial delegation that held two rounds of discussion with the farmers' groups, including Samyuka Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha in Chandigarh, to resolve their concerns.

However, as the talks remained inconclusive, farmers' groups have started their 'Delhi Chalo' march on Tuesday.

"In the two rounds of discussions, we agreed to many of their demands. But there was no agreement on certain issues. The talks are still on," Munda said.

He said the Centre has agreed to meet many of their demands that can be done at the administrative level.

However, a policy guaranteeing an MSP requires a holistic approach taking into consideration the views of all stakeholders, including the state governments, the minister said.

"Humein MSP ke baare mein yeh



dekhna hai kanoon kis tarah banana hai aur ismein kya labh aur kya nuksaan hai. (On MSP, we need to see what kind of law we have to come up with and what are the benefits and drawbacks of such a law)," Munda said.

He also asserted that the Modi government does "solid work" keeping in mind the welfare of all stakeholders and will not make any announcements in a "hurry" which could later turn out to be a failed exercise.

"They want us to announce certain things. The government is not there for making announcements but to do work. Announcement is made only after a mature

discussion. For a mature discussion, we need to keep in mind the interest of every stakeholder," he said, and added that agriculture is a state subject.

"Suppose we do something at the national level, the same people will tell us tomorrow that you did not take states into confidence. That will also not be proper," Munda said.

During the course of the discussion with protesting farmers, the minister said farmers were requested to either be part of the Sanjay Aggarwal-chaired committee that is already looking at strengthening the MSP system, or be part of a new committee.

"...we will form a committee and asked them be a part of it. For that also, they were not ready," he said, adding that the whole issue should not be seen in isolation.

The government is ready for a holistic time-bound discussion with clear terms of reference "but they were not ready for this also", the minister said.

The Sanjay Aggarwal-headed panel on MSP was established in July 2022, eight months after the government promised to set up such a panel while withdrawing the three contentious agri-laws. To date, it has held 37 meetings/workshops.

Stating that the Centre is open to dialogue anytime to resolve the concerns of farmers, Munda said, "They (farmers) will give the date now."

"We have told them we are ready for talks... If they don't want to talk and creating a problem is the motto, then I would advise farmers to be careful about such people who want to create a situation for political benefit.

"I want to appeal to the farmers that there can be some elements amongst them who want to create some situation to defame farmers. They should be careful about them," he said.

Munda emphasised that the government is committed to farmers' welfare and has increased the agriculture budget from Rs 27,000 crore to Rs 1.24 lakh crore annually in the last 10 years.

Centre gave Bharat Ratna to Chaudhary Charan Singh, but doing 'injustice' to farmers: Congress

Ambikapur

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday said the Centre has honoured Chaudhary Charan Singh, who championed for farmers' causes, and agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan with the Bharat Ratna but has been doing "injustice" to cultivators.

His remarks came against the backdrop of the 'Dilli Chalo' march call given by thousands of farmers demanding a law on minimum support price (MSP) and the national capital being made a virtual fortress with authorities stopping them from entering the city.

Addressing a press conference in Chhattisgarh's Surguja district headquarters Ambikapur during the Congress' ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Ramesh also targeted Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar for joining hands with the BJP and termed him "Palti Kumar" (one who does somersault).



Notably, security in Delhi has been intensified with multi-layer barricades, concrete blocks, iron nails and walls of containers at border points to stop the 'Dilli Chalo' march of farmers from entering the national capital on Tuesday, after talks between farm leaders and the Centre remained inconclusive.

Ramesh said, "A few back back, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Bharat Ratna (country's highest civilian honour) for great farmer leader Charan Singh and the 'father of green revolution' Swaminathan posthumously and we welcome the decision."

"But the government, which has announced the prestigious honour for the two legends, has been committing injustice to farmers," he claimed.

Farmers have been staging protests in support of three-four demands which the Modi government promised to be fulfil when it rolled back three 'black' farm laws, Ramesh said.

PM's 3rd term to boost development: Shah

New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday claimed that in the last 10 years of the Central Government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the first five years were spent in overcoming the shortcomings of the previous UPA regime and the remaining five years were spent in laying the foundation of development works. "In his third term, the PM will construct a grand building on that foundation at a very fast pace," he said.

Shah further added that for almost 550 years, every citizen of the country was waiting for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the Prime Minister fulfilled this dream. The Home Minister said this while inaugurating projects worth Rs 1,950 crore in



Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

"There have been comprehensive changes in every field in the entire country in the last 10 years due to which 140 crore citizens of the country have faith that India will be at the top position in every field in 2047," he added.

In Cops' Arsenal Against Farmers, Barriers, Barbed Wire, Now Sonic Weapons

New Delhi

Four years ago, when lakhs of farmers from across the country arrived at Delhi's borders to protest the three farm laws, they were met with fortifications that might give Genghis Khan pause - concrete barriers, barbed wire, shipping container walls, and nail strips to deter tractors from pushing through.

Waves of protesting farmers also faced lathi charges, tear gas shelling, water cannons, rubber pellets and, in some cases, even live ammunition that resulted in multiple deaths and injuries.

Fast-forward to 2024 and the 'Delhi Chalo 2.0' has been met with similar measures, with at least one notable addition - a nod, perhaps, to flak police received after trying to stop the farmers with force.

The question - how do you solve a problem like an army of farmers marching on the national capital, provisioned for at least six months and determined not to back down till their demands are met?

A possible answer - puncture their ear drums.

Delhi Police have deployed LRADs, or Long Range Acoustic Devices, or crowd-control sound cannons, which function as uni-directional (or one-directional), non-



lethal, sonic weapons and can fire bursts of (very) loud sounds that can damage protesters' hearing.

The LRAD was developed by the United States military in the early 2000s and can double as a microphone, for playback device, making it a multi-purpose crowd control weapon.

Delhi Police got LRADs in 2013 as part of its efforts to counter protests and dharnas in the city, with reports indicating five such were ordered at a cost of over ₹ 30 lakh each.

Apart from these weapons, police have also been undergoing firing drills (non-lethal ammo, including tear gas) in an open area in the northern part of the city, in videos accessed by NDTV.

Police have also down key border points that link Delhi to satellite towns in neighbouring states, such as Noida and Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh, and banned large gatherings till March 12.

Over 200 farmer unions - and an estimated one lakh farmers - began moving towards Delhi Tuesday, to demand,

among other things, legal status for (and expansion of) minimum support price, or MSP.

It didn't take long for violence to break out... just minutes, in fact.

A little after noon farmers gathered at Shambhu, on the Punjab-Haryana border, were met with at least two dozen tear gas shells, triggering the first pitched battle of 'Delhi Chalo 2.0' with farmers throwing stones, forcing their way past barriers, and throwing barricades off flyovers.

Hours of clashes resulted between farmers and police - some were told to show "more aggression" in stopping protesters from entering Delhi - before night-time fell and a truce followed.

"It is ceasefire for today. We will try again tomorrow morning," one farmer said.

Day 2 dawned with a relative lull, with the focus more on stalemates in talks between the farmers and the government. Junior Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda said this morning farmer unions needed to understand the government would not take a decision in haste, and appealed for calm.

"I will also urge unions to not get influenced by politics..." he declared.

Meanwhile, it isn't just the police who are getting creative.

Farmers Fly Kites To Tackle Drones Carrying Tear Gas Shells

New Delhi

As the 'Delhi Chalo' protest by farmers entered its second day, an unconventional strategy emerged on the ground as protesting farmers flew kites to counter drones employed by the government to drop tear gas canisters on them.

The farmers, primarily from Punjab, have been steadfast in their determination to march towards Delhi, demanding a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP) and other agricultural reforms. The situation at the Shambhu border, near Ambala, turned tense as security personnel fired tear gas shells at the protesters.

The ingenious strategy involves utilising the long strings of kites to entangle the rotors of the drones, potentially causing them to crash.

Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda



earlier today appealed to the farmers, stressing the importance of constructive dialogue and urging them to avoid actions that disrupt normal life for the common man.

Despite the ongoing stalemate between the Centre and farmer leaders,

the farmers continued to gather at the Shambhu border, preparing to break through multi-layered barricades. Young farmers mobilised their tractors, ready to dismantle the cemented blocks hindering their progress.

The confrontation

intensified as Haryana security personnel deployed tear gas shells to disperse the protesters, prompting the farmers to take precautions. They equipped themselves with water bottles, wet clothes, and even protective gear to minimise the impact of tear

gas.

Sarwan Singh Pandher, a prominent farmer leader, criticised the government's approach, accusing it of prioritising corporate interests over the farmers' demands.

"We urge the government to stop all this and ensure a positive atmosphere. We were ready for talks yesterday and we are ready for it even today," said Mr Pandher.

Foremost among these demands is the enactment of a law guaranteeing an MSP for crops. Other key points of contention revolve around the repeal of the Electricity Act 2020, compensation for farmers killed in Lakhimpur Kheri, and the withdrawal of cases against those involved in the farmers' movement.

On Tuesday, clashes with Haryana Police led to injuries on both sides, with the police resorting to tear gas and water cannons.

Meditation, yoga helped me get over depression: President Droupadi Murmu

New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said that following the death of her two sons and husband, spirituality and meditation helped her overcome depression.

"I do cry. I have lost a lot of things. In order to feel good and lively, I had started doing yoga and meditation. Somebody had recommended

yoga. If your mind is idle, negativity starts to overcome you. I personally feel like spending time at work to stay away from negativity," Murmu said this to Union Minister Smriti Irani in an interview that was aired by All-India Radio (Akashvani) on the occasion of World Radio Day.

She lost a son in 2009 and another in 2013, and her husband in 2014.

Murmu said that she was an ordinary woman and had never dreamt of

becoming President.

"I was an ordinary woman in my village and used to steal guavas and mangoes or swim in ponds. I had never dreamt of becoming President or any officer. My grandmother made me realise the importance of studies and the struggle that I would endure in my journey to achieve my goals," she said.

In 1997, she became a councillor of the Rairangpur nagar panchayat (town council).

Supreme Court Collegium Recommends Transfer Of 3 High Court Judges

New Delhi

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the transfer of three high court judges on their request.

In a meeting held on Tuesday, the collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, accepted the request of Calcutta HC judge Justice Moushumi Bhattacharya seeking a transfer to any other high court.

"By a communication dated February 12, 2024, Ms Justice Moushumi Bhattacharya has sought a transfer from the High Court at Calcutta to any other High Court for personal reasons. The Collegium accedes to the request and resolves to recommend that Ms Justice Moushumi Bhattacharya be transferred, in the interests of

the better administration of justice, to the High Court for the State of Telangana," the collegium said.

It also accepted the request of Justice Anu Sivaraman who has sought a transfer out of the State of Kerala.

communication dated February 12, 2024, from Justice Sujoy Paul seeking a transfer on the ground that his son is practising in the High Court of Madhya Pradesh.

"The Collegium accedes to the request and resolves to



"The collegium accedes to the request and resolves to recommend that Ms. Justice Anu Sivaraman be transferred, in the interests of the better administration of justice, to the Karnataka High Court," it said.

In another decision, the collegium said that it received a

recommend that Mr Justice Sujoy Paul be transferred, in the interests of the better administration of justice, to the High Court for the State of Telangana," the collegium said in a resolution uploaded on the apex court website.

Bengal BJP Chief In Hospital After Clash With Cops On Way To Sandeshkhali

Sandeshkhali

Dramatic scenes played out in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali this afternoon as BJP workers clashed with cops in their attempt to visit women who have accused Trinamool Congress leaders of sexual abuse. State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar was rushed to a hospital after he fainted and suffered injuries during a scuffle with cops.

Mr Majumdar has been camping in the area after Sandeshkhali, an area in the North 24 Parganas, made headlines owing to shocking allegations by local women against Trinamool strongman Sheikh Shahjahan and his aides. Shahjahan is on the run for a month now after an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team, which raided his home in a ration scam case, came under a mob attack.

The state BJP chief and other party workers held a sit-in protest outside the police superintendent's office in Basirhat, demanding that they be allowed to visit Sandeshkhali. The local administration has imposed prohibitory orders in the area, flagging concerns of a breach of peace.

This morning, Mr Majumdar alleged that he had been put under "house arrest". "I decided to stay at a lodge in Taki so that I could easily visit Sandeshkhali. But this morning, police blocked the entrance of the lodge and are not allowing me to step out," news agency PTI quoted him as saying.

"In Sandeshkhali, TMC workers have been raping women for months now - Sheikh Shahjahan, Shibu Hajra and Uttam Sardar are raping them.



We had come to the SP peacefully with the demand to arrest them. If they do not arrest them, how will the women in Sandeshkhali gain confidence?" Mr Majumdar said yesterday. Earlier, Union Minister Smriti Irani had accused the Mamata Banerjee government of shielding the local strongman. "You (Ms

Banerjee) have traded the dignity of SC/ST, fishermen families and the farming communities and their women for your political benefit," she had said. The ruling Trinamool has trashed the allegations and accused the BJP of instigating violence. Party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "The allegations are baseless. The BJP is trying to vitiate the atmosphere of the area. They want to disturb the law and order situation." The Trinamool pointed to visuals of stone-pelting in the area and alleged that Ms Irani's "provocative comments" prompted BJP workers to target the cops. "It was a well-planned conspiracy by the BJP to create unrest in Sandeshkhali. Yesterday, Smriti Irani made provocative comments in her press release from Delhi and today, on her instructions, Sukanta Majumdar-

led workers and supporters of the BJP pelted stones at the police personnel," minister Shashi Panja said in a video message.

In allegations that have shocked the country, a group of women from Sandeshkhali have alleged that Sheikh Shahjahan and his aides sexually harass them and repeatedly ask them to visit the party office. There are also allegations of land grab by local Trinamool leaders.

There is an uneasy calm in Sandeshkhali. Senior police officer Sumit Kumar said the situation is under control. "Section 144 was imposed in around 19 places yesterday. The public is cooperating with us and we hope everything will be normal. The state government wants to establish peace in the area, extra force has been deployed," he said.

Why Sonia Gandhi took the Rajya Sabha route to Parliament in 2024

New Delhi

Speculation that multiple-time Lok Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi may opt for the Rajya Sabha in 2024 was rife for a while now. Interestingly, however, the first clear indication that perhaps Sonia Gandhi, and some other Congress leaders as well, were contemplating taking a different route to reach Parliament came from none other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Taking a jibe at the opposition, primarily the Congress party, in his hard-hitting speech in Lok Sabha, PM Modi recently said: "I see that many of you (Opposition) have even lost the courage to contest elections. Some seats were changed last time also...I have heard that many are looking to change their seats this time as well. I have also heard that many people now want to go to Rajya Sabha instead of Lok Sabha. They are looking for their paths by assessing the situation."

Later, I&B Minister Anurag Thakur, too, claimed that no one from the Gandhi family in the Congress was "fit to contest Lok Sabha election from Uttar Pradesh this year."

"Those who won never went (there) to show their faces. Those who lost didn't leave any opportunity to insult north Indians. Those who criticised Lord Rama are now afraid of even setting their foot on the land of Ram Lalla," Thakur said.

Sonia Gandhi was the lone party winner in UP, winning Rae Bareilly, in 2019. She first came to the Lok Sabha from



Amethi in the 1999 Lok Sabha poll, a seat she vacated for son Rahul Gandhi in 2004, shifting to Rae Bareilly which she has represented since. However, from a vote share of 72.23% in 2009 to 63.8% in 2014 to 55.8% in 2019, her vote share in Rae Bareilly has been going down to the advantage of the BJP.

Second member of Gandhi family in Rajya Sabha

The former Congress president was on Wednesday named the party candidate from Rajasthan, a move on the eve of the 2024 general election that created suspense on who would contest from family bastion Rae Bareilly.

She will be the second member of the Gandhi family to enter Rajya Sabha after former prime minister Indira Gandhi who remained a member of the Upper House from August 1964 to February 1967.

Rae Bareilly—the constituency

Rae Bareilly is a constituency represented by who's who of the Congress and Gandhi family, including Indira Gandhi and her husband Feroze Gandhi.

Except for 1977 when Janata Party's Raj Narain served a humiliating defeat to Indira Gandhi and in 1996 and 1998 when BJP's Ashok Singh was elected from Rae Bareilly, it has been an out and out Congress stronghold.

Since 1952 till date, Rae Bareilly has gone largely with the Congress, electing leaders like Feroze Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Arun Nehru, Sheila Kaul, Satish Sharma and Sonia Gandhi.

Reasons, including 10 Janpath

The decision was apparently taken in mind her advancing age and health situation. Party leaders say the former Congress president had made up her mind on stepping back from active politics soon after the last general election, a decision that was firmed up after Mallikarjun Kharge took charge in 2022, replacing her.

Dismissing the jibes of "fear of failure", they say Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had requested her to contest from his state. Congress leaders were of the opinion that since Indira Gandhi had also contested from Medak, it was an ideal constituency for Sonia Gandhi.

"Sonia Gandhi is our top leader and star attraction. By opting for the Rajya Sabha she will be able to concentrate more on strategising for the entire party than just for her seat," they add.

But then why she needed to enter Parliament given that the strategising could have been done otherwise as well, the buzz is that the decision to opt for Rajya Sabha was taken in order to retain 10 Janpath—her residence for more than three decades now.

Former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson quits Congress to join BJP

New Delhi

Vibhakar Shastri, grandson of former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri, joined the BJP on Wednesday in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak.

In a post on X, Shastri tagged Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as he tendered his resignation.

'Hon'ble Congress President Shri @kharge ji! Respected Sir, I hereby tender my resignation from the primary membership of Indian National Congress (@INCIndia) Regards Vibhakar Shastri', the post by Shastri read.

The resignation comes

close on the heel of stalwarts like Ashok Chavan and Baba Siddique quitting the grand old party.



Rajya Sabha polls: BJP renominates Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw from Odisha, L Murugan from MP

New Delhi

The BJP on Wednesday named Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and L Murugan as its Rajya Sabha candidates from Odisha and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

If elected, a near certainty, it will be the second Rajya Sabha term for the two leaders from these states.

Railway Minister Vaishnaw is likely to get elected with the support of the state's ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD), as was the case during the former IAS officer's election for the first term in 2019.

From Madhya Pradesh, the BJP has named three more candidates besides Murugan, the MoS in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, for the five vacancies from the state.

The BJP has the numbers to win four seats while the Congress can win one.



World today needs governments which are inclusive, free from corruption, says PM Modi at UAE summit

Dubai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the world today needs governments that are inclusive and free from corruption, as he asserted that his mantra over the years has been 'minimum government, maximum governance'.

Addressing the World Governments Summit here on the second day of this visit to the UAE, Modi said that in the last few years in India, people's trust in the government has increased.

"People have trust in the intent and commitment of the Indian government. This was possible only because we prioritised public sentiments," he said.

Modi said that as chief minister of Gujarat and as Prime Minister he had spent 23 years in government and his principle of 'minimum government, maximum governance'.

The prime minister said his government focused on women-led development, strengthening the financial, social, and



political conditions of the Indian women.

Modi said social and financial inclusion has been his government's priority and over 50 crore people were connected to the banking system.

The world today needs governments

that are inclusive, take everyone along, and are clean and free from corruption, he asserted.

"On one hand the world is progressing towards modernity, on the other, the challenges from earlier centuries are

intensifying," he said.

Today, technology is proving to be a key disruptor be it positive or negative, he said.

"Terrorism in various forms is bringing new challenges before humanity every day. Today, climate challenges are becoming widespread with time. On the one hand, there are domestic concerns, on the other hand, the international system seems in disarray," Modi said.

In his remarks, Modi also said Dubai is becoming the epicentre of the global economy, commerce and technology.

Hailing UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, Modi said he is a leader with vision and resolve.

The World Governments Summit is taking place under the theme of 'Shaping Future Governments' with the conversation involving governments, international organisations, thought leaders, and private sector leaders from around the globe.

PM Modi Holds Bilateral Meetings With UAE Counterpart, Madagascar President

Dubai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday met his UAE counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and discussed a wide range of areas of bilateral cooperation including trade and investment.

"Strengthening India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership! PM @narendramodi met VP & PM of UAE @HHSkhMohd in Dubai. Discussions covered a wide range of areas of bilateral cooperation including trade & investment, technology, education, and people-to-people ties," said a post on the official X handle of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

In another meeting with Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina, PM Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to further strengthen India-Madagascar partnership and help in the developmental journey of his island nation.

A first meeting between the two leaders, PM Modi and Rajoelina met on the sidelines of the World Governments Summit



here.

"Both leaders recognized the long-standing friendly relations and ancient geographical ties between the two countries. They discussed ways to advance bilateral ties and appreciated the close cooperation between the two countries in various multilateral fora, including the UN," an MEA statement said.

Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to "further strengthen India-Madagascar partnership" and to Vision SAGAR - Security and Growth for All in the Region, it said. PM Modi also conveyed that as a fellow developing country in the Indian Ocean Region, India

will remain a committed partner in the developmental journey of Madagascar, the MEA added.

PM Modi, while speaking at the Summit, elaborated on a wide range of subjects that strengthened the conversations around building a better planet and also sought reforms in global governance institutions.

After signing multiple bilateral agreements with the UAE, and attending the high-voltage 'Ahlan Modi' event that saw massive participation from the Indian diaspora, PM Modi is set to inaugurate the largest Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi.

US Has Great Military-To-Military Relationship With India: Pentagon

Washington

India and the US have a great military-to-military relationship and good communication with each other, the Pentagon's Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said in a press briefing on Tuesday (local time).

"We have a great military-to-military relationship with India, good communications. We're going to continue to monitor what's happening in the region, but I don't have more to share on any updates," she said.

Speaking about expecting a high level visit from India, Sabrina Singh said, "I don't have any visits to read out from officials from the Indian Government. At least here at the department. I can't speak for other officials across the interagency."

Asked whether the Pentagon is monitoring the situation in Pakistan after the elections held on February 8, Sabrina Singh said, "Yeah, we're certainly monitoring what's happening there, but I'd direct you to state for more specifics on that."

Sabrina Singh's remarks regarding the military relations between India and Pakistan come at a time when the Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande embarked on a four-day official tour to the US, starting February 13, an official statement from the Ministry of Defence said on Monday.

In a press release, the Ministry of Defence said, "During his visit, the COAS will engage in high-level discussions and interactions with General Randy George, United States Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) and other senior military leaders."

"Highlights of the tour include a prestigious US Army Honour Guard ceremony, a solemn laying of the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, and a comprehensive tour of the Pentagon. These engagements symbolise the respect and mutual commitment towards global peace and security shared between the two countries," it added.

Russia warns the West: 'We will be very tough if you 'steal' our assets'

Moscow

Russia warned the West, on Tuesday, that Moscow would be very tough if the United States and European Union seized hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of Russian assets.

After President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, the United States and its allies prohibited transactions with Russia's central bank and finance ministry, blocking around \$300 billion of sovereign Russian assets in the West.

The EU, on Monday, adopted a law to set aside windfall profits made on frozen Russian central bank assets in a first concrete step towards the bloc's aim of using the money to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine.

"This is theft: It's the appropriation of something that doesn't belong to you," Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Sputnik radio, TASS reported.



Zakharova said the response from Moscow would be "extremely tough" as Russia felt it was essentially dealing with thieves.

"Considering that our country has qualified this as theft, the attitude will be towards thieves," Zakharova said.

"Not as political manipulators, not as overplayed technologists, but as thieves."

Russia has said that if its property is seized then it would seize US, European and other assets in responses.

Joe Biden slams Donald Trump for comments on Nikki Haley's husband

Washington

US President Joe Biden has slammed his predecessor Donald Trump for dragging Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley's husband into the swirl of personal attacks.

Haley's husband Major Michael Haley, a commissioned officer with the South Carolina National Guard, is currently on a year-long deployment with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, which is providing support in the Horn of Africa. He deployed in June. Trump at a rally in South Carolina on Saturday questioned the whereabouts of Michael Haley. "Where's her husband? Oh, he's away...what happened to her husband? Where is he? He's gone," Trump said.



Ready to fight for victory in poll: Rishi Sunak

London

British PM Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year. In an interview this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better".

"At the beginning of this year there is a sense

that the country is pointing in the right direction," he told a newspaper. "Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes. I do believe those pressures are starting to ease and that hopefully over the course of this year, we can continue to make even more progress," he said. In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hardworking people of the country.

Shehbaz Sharif likely to become Pakistan prime minister as coalition led by him is set to cross simple majority mark

Islamabad

Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's new prime minister as the coalition of leading political parties led by them is set to comfortably cross the simple majority mark to form the next government after elections produced a split mandate.

In a surprise move, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated Shehbaz as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif.

Earlier, Shehbaz along with Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan Peoples Party and Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui of Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) met at the residence of Shujaat Hussain of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) for a consultative meeting and agreed on government formation.

"Today, we have united to tell the nation that we all accept the split mandate. I am thankful to Zardari and Bilawal (Bhutto) that they decided for their party to vote for the PML-N," he said.

PML-N Information Secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that party supremo Nawaz Sharif has nominated the party president and his younger brother



Shehbaz Sharif, 72, for the post of the country's prime minister.

She added that PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz was nominated for the post of Punjab's chief minister.

"Nawaz Sharif has thanked the political parties which provided support to the PML-N (in forming the upcoming government) and expressed hope that through such decisions Pakistan will come out of crises," she said.

Shehbaz, 72, who was prime minister after the Imran Khan-led government was ousted in April 2022, said the other parties that joined hands with the PML-N enjoyed "almost 2/3 majority" of Parliament after

the elections. He also said that the new government would pull the country out of trouble.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan's tally, the total number of general seats won by the six parties -- the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP (Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) which announced their plans to form a coalition led by Shehbaz -- comes to 152.

This clearly shows that these parties will easily achieve the minimum required number of 169 to form the government at the Centre after the addition of 60 women and 10 minority seats in their tally.

However, it is yet to be seen if these parties will be able to get to the next magic number of 224, which is required to obtain the elusive two-thirds majority in a 336-member National Assembly (NA).

"Now our war is against the country's challenges. The first challenge is the economy. We have to stabilise it which is a tall task. Nations move forward when their leadership unites and decides to end conflicts and take the nation forward to eliminate problems," he said.

The PML-N reportedly enjoys the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army.

Reacting to the latest political developments, jailed former prime minister

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said that the best option for the PML-N is to "accept [its] defeat gracefully" and let their party founder Imran Khan "fix and heal the country".

Independent candidates backed by the PTI won the most seats in Parliament.

PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said on Tuesday that his party had won 180 seats across the country, and the name of the party's prime ministerial candidate would be announced by Thursday.

During a conversation with the media, after meeting with the party's founding chairman and former premier Khan in Adiala Jail, along with other PTI leaders, he said that they had secured all three NA seats in Islamabad and an additional four seats in Balochistan.

Zardari speaking alongside Shehbaz said that a coalition government would be set up.

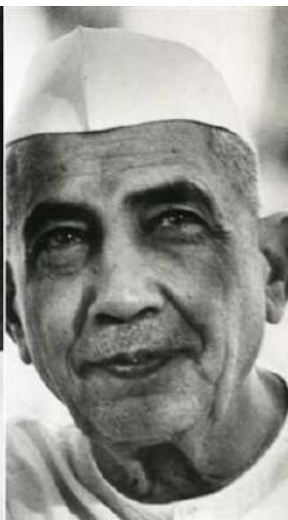
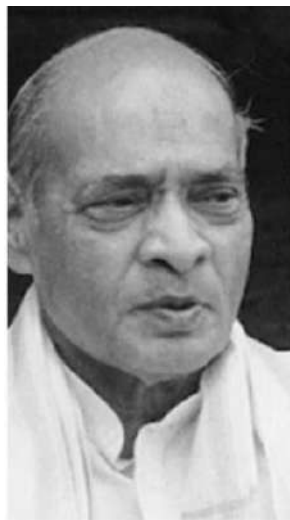
"We have decided to form a coalition government and pull the country out of the economic crisis," he said and added that the new government would also try to reconcile with everyone including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of Imran Khan.

He promised to deliver the country out of these troubles and lead on to the road to prosperity.

Bharat Ratna for trio

THE Central Government's decision to posthumously confer the highest civilian honour of the country, the Bharat Ratna, on former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Charan Singh and father of the Green Revolution MS Swaminathan is laudable. Even as the selection made by the Modi government is being seen through the political prism in the election year, it does not diminish the awardees' contribution. Stealing a march on the Congress by honouring Rao, the ruling BJP has claimed that the Gandhi family meted out unfair treatment to the senior party leader. Last month, the government had bestowed the Bharat Ratna on former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur, who had implemented OBC reservation in an effort to uplift the underprivileged section of society. Now, the ruling dispensation

has tried to woo the farming community by picking Charan Singh, who advocated pro-farmer measures such as loan waiver



and remunerative prices.

As PM, Rao spearheaded economic reforms with the help of then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. Their policies dismantled decades-old controls, opening up the economy to globalisation,

privatisation and deregulation. The growth spurred by those reforms helped India make rapid strides on the economic front; today, the country is the fastest-growing major economy in the world.

Advocating scientific methods to boost agricultural productivity, Swaminathan played a pivotal role in the Green Revolution. His research led to the development of high-yielding crop varieties, transforming India into a self-sufficient food producer and helping mitigate hunger and poverty. No less path-breaking were the initiatives taken by Verghese Kurien, who revolutionised India's dairy industry. His innovative approach produced an amazing success story in the form of the cooperative movement. This great son of India deserves the nation's highest civilian honour.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

*Don't judge each day
by the harvest you reap
but by the seeds that you
plant. -*

Robert Louis Stevenson

Pitfalls for tourists HP must warn visitors of deadly spots

THE story of two young tourists who ended up dead in the freezing cold at a height of 9,000 ft in Kangra's Bir Billing is heart-wrenching. It was the pet dog of one of the tourists who fended off wild animals and guarded the bodies for two days before the cops arrived, alerted by its continuous barking. The unfortunate case should jolt the authorities into reviewing the implementation of tourist safety regulations in Himachal Pradesh.

Attacks by wild bears and leopards are not unheard of in the state. Even as vacationers are advised to take all precautions and not venture out alone in secluded hills

or forests surrounded by cavernous gorges, the authorities need to improve measures to enhance the

wind. The tourism industry must pull out all the stops to ensure that hoteliers, travel agents and organisers of

season, when the tourist footfall surges and the possibility of accidents rises amid lax enforcement of

the guidelines. Prima facie, that seems to have happened in the Bir Billing case as the two friends — one from Pathankot and the other from Pune — fell off a snow-clad slope into a deep ravine. Tourism is a significant contributor to the state's economy. The government has decided to spend Rs 2,500 crore, with Asian Development Bank's aid, to develop the sector. A fair

proportion of the funds must be earmarked to ensure that foolproof safety provisions are in place.



safety of the holidaymakers, including putting up warning boards, and raise awareness about the dangers of throwing caution to the

adventure activities do not compromise on the stringent norms.

Any lapse is particularly hazardous during the winter

Printer-Publisher &
Editor In Chief

Sanjay Mangesh Bhaire
Allied publication Across Mumbai
(Marathi & Hindi)

Managing Editor
Suchita Bhaire

Editor
Sreeraj N.

Legal Advisor
Adv. Ameet Mehta

Special Correspondents
K V Raman
Vinod Raghavan
Asha Menon

Chief Designer
Vikram Jadav

Cartoonist
Sunil Vinekar

Photographers
Ajit Raut
Bhooshan Koyande

Contributors and Advertising
Satish Shetty
Savita Tiwari
J D Rodrigues

Circulation Dept.
Dinesh Gupta
Suchit Kumar Saytonday

Unsafe in the US

Five Indian students dead in five weeks

THE fabled American dream is turning out to be a nightmare for one Indian student after another. Syed Mazahir Ali was chased and attacked by unidentified men near his house in Chicago on February 4. The incident has left Ali, who moved to the US from Hyderabad about six months ago, traumatised. The attack comes less than three weeks after another student, Vivek Saini, who had recently received an MBA degree, was hammered to death

was found dead last month. The death of Shreyas Reddy (19) was reported last week.

The succession of tragic incidents has raised concerns about the safety and security of Indian students in America. These youngsters, whose parents have spent huge sums of money to send them to the US, are being targeted by petty criminals and drug users/traffickers. There are reports that stress caused by the lack of employment opportunities is pushing some of them to the brink — they are taking drugs or trying to end their lives.

The worrisome situation calls for greater efforts by the Indian community and diplomatic staff in America to reach out to the students and help them cope with myriad problems. They also need to build pressure on law enforcement agencies to probe the cases in a time-bound manner. Exemplary

action against the culprits, including those in uniform, can send out a strong message of zero tolerance to crime. Last year's Seattle incident, in which a police officer made insensitive remarks over the death of university student Jaahnavi Kandula, showed that the rot ran deep. The US media, which is quick to highlight any kind of hate crime in India, needs to give due attention to the plight of Indian students.



by a homeless drug addict in Lithonia (Georgia). Sameer Kamath of Purdue University, Indiana, was found dead this week; according to the authorities, he died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Another Purdue student, Neel Acharya, was confirmed dead days after being reported missing, while Akul Dhawan, an 18-year-old who was studying at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign,

INDEPENDENT candidates backed by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) sprung a surprise in the general election, upstaging three-time premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Even as the counting of votes and declaration of winners were marked by chaos and delays, Nawaz suffered a shock defeat to PTI-supported Shahzada Khan from the Mansehra seat. He, however, defeated another independent candidate, Yasmin Rashid, to clinch the Lahore seat.

Members of the PTI contested as independents after they were not allowed to use the party symbol (cricket bat) in the February 8 polls, which were held amid a controversial countrywide mobile phone shutdown. The provisional results show that cricketer-turned-politician Imran, the founding chairman of the PTI, has made his presence felt despite being barred from contesting the elections due to his conviction and sentencing in multiple cases. Imran,

who was ousted as PM in 2022, continues to be a popular leader. His arrest in May last year had sparked violence in many parts of the country; protesters had even targeted military installations, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The PTI's success is a setback to the Pakistani military, which had thrown its weight behind the Sharifs and gone all out to keep Imran out of the electoral contest. Confident of forming the government at

Government school crisis

Critical to win back trust of students

AS many as 30,000 posts of teacher are lying vacant in government schools in Haryana, reveals a report submitted by the state government in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The affidavit claims that a process has been initiated for direct recruitment of 7,575 trained graduate teachers (TGTs) and 4,526 post-graduate teachers (PGTs). Even after the hiring, the gap between the required and the actual strength would remain large. Why

is an established practice. The numbers, it would agree, demand a relook at the strategy. It's not only the faculty shortage or the absence of basic facilities, such as benches, drinking water and toilets, that has come to be associated with government schools, especially in rural areas. Allegations of sexual assault and harassment of girl students by principals in Jind and Kaithal sent shockwaves across the region. A similar incident

was reported from Punjab. Only stringent action and a robust grievance redressal mechanism will send out a message of security and safety. Winning back the trust of students and parents entails inculcating a culture of caring and a continuous engagement that inspires confidence.



such a mismatch fails to trigger sweeping reform confounds logic. Lack of funds is a lazy excuse. It all boils down to priorities.

According to a survey conducted for the 7-14 age group, the number of out-of-school children in the state has increased to 31,068 in the present academic session from 28,139 in the previous one. The government claims that follow-up action

Piecemeal, half-hearted measures only add to the perception of disinterest towards government schools.

On a petition by Kaithal villagers demanding the safety of students attending classes in a dilapidated building, the high court has been seeking reports about infrastructural requirements and manpower. The judicial overview raises hopes of a course correction.

Pakistan polls

Candidates backed by Imran's party make gains

Pakistan People's Party. Meanwhile, PML-N leader Ishaq Dar has claimed that some victorious independent candidates have contacted his party. An intriguing power tussle has begun in the beleaguered



the Centre, Imran's party has ruled out forging an alliance with its main rivals — the PML-N and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's

country, which is hoping for a stable and strong government that would pull it out of a prolonged economic crisis.

Farmers' protest

Beyond politics, farming should be made profitable

Leaders of farm unions decided to go ahead with the 'Dilli Chalo' march after their marathon talks with a team of Union ministers ended on an inconclusive note, even as the Delhi Police invoked Section 144 of the CrPC, prohibiting the assembly of five or more people in the national capital till March 12. Upping the ante in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the unions are exerting pressure on the Centre to accept their demands, which include the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for all crops. The protesters are also seeking the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police

cases and justice for victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Staging a peaceful protest



is a constitutional right of every citizen or group. In a democracy, this is a legitimate way for protesters to bring the government to the negotiating

table. The year-long farmers' agitation of 2020-21 was a watershed in India's post-Independence history. Showing

remarkable resilience and determination, the agitators had forced the Centre to repeal the three contentious farm laws. The ongoing protest, however, appears

to be a political attempt to corner the government and browbeat it into acceding to their demands before the elections.

Farm unions should look at the larger picture instead of eyeing short-term gains. The MSP regime has largely remained confined to wheat and paddy, and that too in a few states. Legalising it across the country would only spur farmers to further step up the production of these crops. While this is crucial for food security, it can also have a deleterious effect on the water table, which is already under severe strain due to groundwater overextraction. The future of Indian agriculture is at stake. Various stakeholders need to jointly come up with a long-term action plan to ensure that farming remains viable and sustainable.

Haldwani violence

Restoration of peace has to be the priority

A court-mandated removal of religious structures, particularly at a disputed site, calls for extreme caution. That primarily involves working out a strategy to keep emotions under control and to be prepared for any eventuality. The turn of events in Haldwani is deeply troubling. The Uttarakhand government claims that the

The authorities maintain that they went ahead with the demolition as the high court had declined a stay on the proceedings. An area councillor counters that there would have been no resistance had the authorities waited for the court's final word. Amid contrasting claims, six persons are dead, scores are injured and peace lies shattered.

The stringent National Security Act is set to be invoked against the rioters, who are accused of hurling stones, setting cars ablaze and gheraoing a police station. A policy of zero tolerance to violence, whatever the provocation, is appropriate. The test for the government is to not be seen as selective while implementing this policy. A similarly tough approach is expected with regard to the administrative lapses. A magisterial

inquiry has been ordered; and responsibility must be fixed. The violence in Haldwani gives rise to questions that need to be carefully considered: Were intelligence inputs about the possibility of disturbance ignored? Why the urgency to conduct the demolition drive? Were community leaders taken into confidence?



violence after an anti-encroachment drive in an area where a mosque and a madrasa stood was not communal. According to the District Magistrate, it was a planned attack on the state machinery. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who issued shoot-on-sight orders, said an attempt was made to kill police personnel and other officials.

Back from Qatar

Critical to draw lessons from Navy veterans' case

THE release of eight former Indian Navy personnel, who were sentenced to death in Qatar, comes as a huge relief. It's being viewed as an outcome of intense negotiations led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Credit must also go to all those in the diplomatic community and

last year, the death penalty was commuted to imprisonment. Neither the Qatari authorities nor New Delhi has made the charges public. It is unlikely that the cloak of secrecy would be lifted.

Working for a technology and consultancy firm, the veterans were arrested supposedly on the charges of spying on a submarine programme on behalf of Israel. Insinuations were made linking it to efforts aimed at preventing the development of military technologies in West Asia. The role of Pakistan also came under the scanner for trying to muddy the waters. Only the veterans can answer whether they were caught in a geo-political maelstrom not of their making, or acted irresponsibly and recklessly, or the charges against them were false. The Government of



the security establishment who worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Their release marks the end of a harrowing period for the Navy veterans and their families. Yet, as a Congress leader put it succinctly, it is a matter of quiet celebrations for all Indians. The charges against the eight were grave. They were arrested in August 2022 for alleged espionage. In December

India lent them its full support, but such steadfast commitment cannot be taken for granted. The Qatar case calls for putting in place protocols for re-employment of defence personnel. It should also serve as a terse reminder of the pitfalls of not reading the fine print while signing up for professional commitments, and the enormous risks that transgressions pose.

Retail inflation eases to 3-month low of 5.1% in January



New Delhi

In a relief to the common man, retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 5.1 per cent in January mainly on account of lower food prices, according to official data released on Monday.

Inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was at 5.69 per cent in December 2023 and 6.52 per cent in January 2024. In August 2023, inflation

touched a high of 6.83 per cent.

According to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), retail inflation in the food basket was at 8.3 per cent in January 2024, down from 9.53 per cent in the preceding month. The RBI has been tasked by the government to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

5,000 students selected for Reliance scholarship

Mumbai

Five thousand students have been selected from a country-wide application pool for the Reliance Foundation Undergraduate

part of its vibrant and enabling alumni network.

Across 35 states and UTs of India, 58,000 students studying at more than 5,500 educational institutions had applied



Scholarships 2023-24, results for which were announced today. Of these 174 students are from Haryana.

The scholarship, one of India's largest, inclusive and diverse scholarship initiatives for higher education, awards undergraduate students a grant of up to Rs 2 lakh and an opportunity to be

for the scholarships. The final 5,000 have been selected through a systematic merit-cum-means process. In addition to their performance in the aptitude test and their Grade 12 marks, 75 per cent of the selected students have an annual household income of less than 2.5 lakh rupees.

Government examining FDI flow from China in Paytm Payments Services, say sources

New Delhi

The government is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said.

In November 2020, PPSL had applied for licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways.

However, in November 2022,

investments from China in PPSL and decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and comprehensive examination, sources said.

Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries which share

FDI approval," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said PPSL followed the relevant guidelines and submitted all relevant documents to the regulator within the stipulated time.

During the pending process, PPSL was allowed to continue with its online payment aggregation business for existing partners without onboarding any new merchants.

"Since then the ownership structure has changed. The Paytm founder remains the largest stakeholder in the company. Ant Financial reduced its stake in OCL to less than 10 per cent in July 2023. Subsequently, it does not qualify for beneficial company ownership. OCL founding promoter now holds a 24.3 per cent stake. Therefore, your understanding of FDI from China in PPSL is incorrect and misleading," the spokesperson said.

The Reserve Bank last month barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), an associate company of OCL, from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after February 29, 2024.

The Reserve Bank's action against PPBL follows a comprehensive system audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of external auditors.

RBI had said that these reports revealed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in PPBL, warranting further supervisory action.

On March 11, 2022, RBI had barred PPBL from onboarding new customers with immediate effect.



RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to resubmit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co.

Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022, with Government of India for past downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines.

An inter-ministerial committee is examining

land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

When contacted, a Paytm spokesperson said PPSL applied for an online Payment Aggregator (PA) application for online merchants and the regulator subsequently asked PPSL to seek necessary approvals for past downward investment and resubmit the application.

"This is part of the regular process where everybody applying for a payment aggregator licence has to get

RBI rules out review of action against Paytm Bank

New Delhi

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), saying the decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the lender.

"If you are expecting a review of the decision, let

me very clearly say there is (going to be) no review of the decision," Das said at a press conference. The RBI on January 31 asked PPBL to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FAST Tags and other instruments after February 29.

HDFC launches new credit cards

HDFC Bank has announced expansion of its SME Payment Solutions with the launch of business range of credit cards for business owners and entrepreneurs. These will be available in four variants — BizFirst, Biz Grow, BizPower and BizBlack.

New COO for Unacademy Centres

Unacademy, India's largest learning platform, has promoted Jagnoor Singh as chief operating officer of Unacademy Centres. Jagnoor has played a key role in building Unacademy Centres into one of the fastest growing businesses within the group.

Realme launches 12 Pro Series 5G

Smartphone maker realme, has announced the launch of the realme 12 Pro Series 5G, the new addition to its premium Number Series. The realme 12 Pro Series 5G has introduces two standout smartphones — the realme 12 Pro+ 5G and the realme 12 Pro 5G.

inDrive starts delivery service

inDrive has added a new service inDrive.Delivery, enabling users in Chandigarh to order delivery on-demand. Now inDrive is giving customers liberty to set the price for their deliveries," said Pavit Nanda Anand, APAC Communications Manager, inDrive.

Pashu Vikas Day celebrations

SMFG India Credit Co Ltd observed its 6th Pashu Vikas Day in Rewari and celebrated the role of women in dairy farming. Pashu Vikas Day exemplifies the company's unwavering dedication to fostering sustainable practices in the dairy farming sector.

Toyota holds donation drives

As part of "Always Deliver Happiness through Brand Globe" initiative by Globe Toyota, a JCBL Group company, two separate donation drives were conducted in Mohali and Ludhiana, aimed at supporting students and patients.

Tanishq relaunches store in Mohali

Tanishq, India's largest jewellery retail brand from the house of Tata, has expanded its retail footprint with the relaunch of its grand store in Mohali. The store was inaugurated by Swati Aditya Rana, Regional Business Manager, Tanishq (North).

PHDCCI holds interactive session

Punjab state chapter of PHDCCI organised an interaction with visiting Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) Delegation at PHD House, Chandigarh. The objective of the interaction was to explore the business, investment and collaboration opportunities available in various sectors.

SBI gives CSR funds for TB drive

Dinesh Khara, Chairman, SBI, handed over CSR contribution of Rs 50 lakh for National TB Elimination Programme and Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan in Haryana. The fund will be used for purchasing machine for diagnosis and supporting poor TB patients.

Bajaj Allianz holds 'Plankathon'

Bajaj Allianz Life, one of India's leading private life insurers, organised the fourth edition of #Plankathon in Bengaluru's Sri Kanteerava Outdoor Stadium to celebrate the Indian Space Research Organisation's achievements with Chandrayaan and Solar Mission, Aditya L1.

Hero Realty's Phase II launched

Hero Realty's Phase II has been launched at Hero Homes on Sidhwan canal road in Ludhiana. Noted singer B Praak enthralled over 5,000 fans during a grand musical extravaganza at the launch.

Rs 5K crore FDI reported by defence sector firms: Government

New Delhi

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth Rs 5,077 crore has been reported by companies operating in the defence sector, the defence ministry said in the Lok Sabha on Friday. The data was provided by Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt while replying to a question. The defence industry sector was opened up in May 2001 for private sector participation, he said.

"The FDI limit in the defence sector was enhanced in 2020 up to 74 per cent through the automatic route for companies seeking new defence industrial licence and up to 100 per cent by the government route wherever it is likely to result in access to modern technology," Bhatt said.

The minister said the government also promotes co-development and co-production

of niche defence technologies with foreign original equipment manufacturers to encourage FDI in the defence sector.



Meanwhile, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said India continues to be a preferred FDI destination despite soaring global interest rates. The minister was speaking at the

Global Business Summit 2024 in New Delhi.

He said that interest rates rose worldwide, including in the US, and that led to the flow of capital back in the developed nations, but the strength of demand in India, the strength of opportunities that people saw in India, ensured that we did not see the drastic fall that many of our other peer countries (witnessed)," Goyal said. He added that India continued to see traction for investments and the country "continues to see money coming in".

India preferred destination: Goyal

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said India continued to be a preferred FDI destination despite soaring global interest rates. The minister was speaking at the Global Business Summit 2024 in New Delhi.

Uncharacteristic of NBFCs to seek bank licence: RBI

Mumbai

Reserve Bank's Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao on Friday said it is uncharacteristic of non-bank lenders to seek bank licences when they are already enjoying some regulatory advantages. Addressing a conference on non-bank finance companies (NBFCs) organised by the CII, Rao also hit out at certain microlenders for "misusing" the liberty offered by the regulator on interest rates, and charging high rates.

Rao also expressed displeasure

at certain peer-to-peer lending platforms for following business practices which are not in line with the licensing guidelines, and made it clear that such breaches were not acceptable.

He also spoke about the constant demand from NBFCs to convert into banks, and made it clear that regulations for even entities in the top-most tier of NBFCs are not at par with universal banks, and NBFCs enjoy some advantages.

Interestingly, the remarks came right after the speech of

Bajaj Finserv's Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Bajaj in which he said NBFCs have grown and become more "solid" courtesy the stronger regulation and supervision by RBI.

Forex reserves up

India's forex reserves jumped by USD 5.736 billion to \$622.469 billion for the week ended February 2, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of \$645 billion.

Direct tax collection reaches 80 per cent of revised financial year 2024 target at Rs 15.6 lakh crore

New Delhi

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.6 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year.

"The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to February 10, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs 18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.3 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes said in a statement.

Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till February 10 of financial year 2024 stands at Rs 15.6 lakh

crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year.

This collection is 80.23 per cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24.

Refunds amounting to Rs 2.77 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to February 10, 2024. Gross revenue collections for Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) also showed a steady growth.

Growth rate for CIT was 9.16 per cent while for PIT, it was 25.67 per cent. After adjustment of refunds, the net growth in CIT collections was 13.57 per cent and that in PIT was 26.91 per cent (PIT only), it added.

Jeff Bezos sells 12 mn Amazon shares worth \$2 billion



Seattle

Jeff Bezos filed a statement with federal regulators indicating his sale of nearly 12 million shares of Amazon stock worth more than \$2 billion. The Amazon executive chairman notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission of the sale of 11,997,698 shares of common stock on February 7 and February 8. The collective value of the shares of Amazon, which is based in Seattle where he founded the company in a garage about three decades ago, was more than \$2.04 billion.

UPI payment services launched in Sri Lanka, Mauritius

New Delhi

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services were rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius on Monday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing it as a "special day" for the three nations as it marked linking historic ties with modern digital technology.

India's RuPay card services were also launched in Mauritius at a virtual ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi, his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"India's UPI or United Payments Interface comes in a new role today—Uniting Partners with India," Modi emphasised.

Today is a special day for the three friendly countries of the Indian Ocean Region as "we are linking our historic ties with modern digital technology", he said.

"I believe that Sri Lanka and Mauritius will benefit from the UPI system," Modi said.

The Prime Minister said digital public infrastructure has brought about a revolutionary change in India. He also highlighted India's focus on its "neighbourhood first policy".

"Be it natural disaster, health

related, economic or supporting on the international stage, India has been the first responder, and will continue to be so," he said.

The launch of the Indian services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius came amid New Delhi's increasing bilateral economic ties with the two countries. The launch enables availability of UPI settlement services for Indian nationals travelling to Sri Lanka and Mauritius as well as for Mauritian nationals travelling to India.

Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. RuPay is a global card payment network from India, with wide acceptance at shops, ATMs and online.

In his address, Modi said the launch of the services is proof of New Delhi's commitment towards the development of the people, underlining that fintech connectivity will further strengthen cross-border transactions and connections.

Digital public infrastructure has brought about a revolutionary change in India, where the smallest

of vendors in the remotest of villages are transacting via UPI and making digital payments, he said.

Speaking about the convenience and speed of UPI transactions, Modi informed that more than 100 billion transactions took place via UPI last year worth Rs 2 lakh crores or 8 trillion Sri Lankan rupees or 1 trillion Mauritius rupees.

The Prime Minister also mentioned making last-mile delivery through the trinity of bank accounts, Aadhaar and mobile phones where Rs 34 lakh crore or 400 billion US dollars has been transferred into the bank accounts of beneficiaries.

"Use of technology is promoting transparency, reducing corruption and increasing inclusivity in society," he said.

Modi stressed that "India's policy is 'Neighborhood First'. Our maritime vision is SAGAR, that is security and growth for all in the region". "India does not see its development separately from its neighbours," he said.

The prime minister expressed confidence that connection with UPI will benefit Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and digital transformation will get a boost.

Mumbai

Crisis-hit SpiceJet plans to hand out pink slips to at least 1,000 employees in the coming days as the airline works to significantly reduce costs and streamline operations of its depleted aircraft fleet, officials said on Monday.

Faced with financial woes and legal battles, the no-frills carrier might ask more staff to leave as there is excess manpower now compared to the number of planes in service. A final decision on the quantum of layoffs is expected this week, one of the officials in the know said.

When contacted, a SpiceJet spokesperson said the airline had initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, for achieving



profitable growth but did not provide any numbers.

The airline has around 9,000 employees and is now looking at reducing the strength by 10-15 per cent, the official said, adding that layoffs are necessary to reduce the overall costs and annual savings could be up to Rs 100 crore.

A reduction of 15 per cent would mean around 1,350 people will lose their jobs.

The second official in the know said layoffs are expected across departments and the final list is being prepared. People from the management and consultancy are working on chalking out the contours of letting staff leave, and all the departments have been asked to give their inputs, the official added.

There was no official comment from SpiceJet on the proposed job cuts.

The second official explained that the airline has stopped operations on certain RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme) routes and at those stations, there is excess manpower, especially staff with lower salaries. Relocating such people will be a challenge, the official noted.

Currently, SpiceJet has a fleet of a little over 30 aircraft apart from 10 planes that are on wet lease.

"As part of our turnaround and cost-cutting strategy, following the recent fund infusion, SpiceJet has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, aimed at achieving profitable growth and positioning ourselves to capitalise on the

opportunities in the Indian aviation industry.

"Through this initiative alone, we anticipate an annual saving of up to Rs 100 crore," the airline spokesperson said in a statement.

During a meeting with the airline's senior officials last month, SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh emphasised the importance of judicious spending and that he will personally oversee all major expenditures.

The carrier will prioritise fleet upgrades, enhance on-time performance and cost-cutting measures will be implemented to streamline operations, according to an internal note last month.

SpiceJet, which has undergone multiple ownership changes since inception and is currently helmed by Ajay Singh is in the process of raising funds from various investors.

On January 26, the carrier announced that it has received Rs 744 crore as the first tranche of the total Rs 2,250 crore proposed to be raised through the issuance of securities on a preferential basis.

There were reports that there has been a delay in raising the requisite funds.

The airline has also availed funds worth around Rs 1,000 crore under the government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme and Singh has committed to infuse Rs 500 crore.

In recent times, SpiceJet also witnessed lessors taking legal recourse to take back their leased aircraft due to non-payment of dues.

Reclaiming the storied legacy of Arabian Sea



often come with prescriptive clauses of what India can or cannot do; of what India should or should not be. A large part of why the India UAE relationship is special is because it is descriptive, not prescriptive.

Embedded deeply in the India-UAE bond is a celebration of each other for what we are — plural yet singular. Plural because of our diversity of cultures and customs, and the heterogeneity inherent in our nations. Singular because we have navigated uncharted territory, and plotted an unmapped path for ourselves. In their own unique ways, both countries are exceptions in the region and in today's times. The UAE has created a lush economy in the middle of an arid desert. India's specific development challenges have no parallels, with individual states the size of entire nations. For both of our countries, there have been no models to follow, no moulds to fit into. This is the foundation of our mutual respect. It will continue to be the bedrock of our relationship as we transform incomes, update infrastructure, and move from an analogue to a digital world.

Diaspora lies at the centre of

our relationship. More than 60,000 Indians have signed up to attend the PM's address at the Zayed Sports City Stadium. However, statistics of this sort do not do true justice to the real story of the Indian diaspora in the UAE. The fact is Indians today share the top floor of skyscrapers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Positions that by default went to Europeans and Americans, today, see a large proliferation of Indians, whether in finance, energy, or infrastructure. They are being recognised as valued advisors, creative talents, and financial wizards, rubbing shoulders with Emiratis in building a 21st-century nation and contributing to the future of the UAE. This cohort of Emiratis and Indians is working to make the UAE a global hub for our century, even as they make India a global economic powerhouse for the benefit of the country, the region, and humankind at large.

Positions that by default went to Europeans and Americans, today, see a large proliferation of Indians, whether in finance, energy, or infrastructure.

As China rose, a small clique of cities benefitted: Hong Kong, Singapore, London, and New York.

India's journey, from four trillion dollars to 30, will see the world benefit. Abu Dhabi and Dubai will hold a privileged position in this odyssey. Even as India benefits, so will the global ambitions of the UAE. Moving forward, the UAE will be the new Gateway to India. It will be a talent hub, connecting Indian opportunities and Indian talent with the rest of the world. It will be a trade hub, with goods — and energy — that flow to and from India passing through it. It will be a finance hub, where it will be able to source at scale the capital required to sate India's growing appetite.

PM Modi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed are putting in place the building blocks for a prosperous Arabian Sea community. They are restoring the sea to the storied position it held in antiquity, refreshing it and bringing it into the 21st century. This community will offer people-centric, development-first, and growth-led solutions for Africa, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific. The space between the Gulf and the subcontinent will reclaim its role as the wellspring of inclusive globalisation in this century, just as it was millennia ago.

Post-Independence, India has been unfair to the sea that laps against our western shoreline. We forget that the Arabian Sea has long been a fertile bridge for the exchange of ideas, stories, commerce, and culture. Khazanas of knowledge have flowed through its waters and lasting friendships have been forged. More than any Indian Prime Minister (PM) before him, Narendra Modi recognises the injustice of this neglect. His upcoming visit to Abu Dhabi will be his seventh — six more than any predecessor. Before his first trip in 2015, no Indian PM had set foot in the Emirates for over three decades.

While numbers are often inconsequential, sometimes they do matter. As the B-school adage goes: If you can't count it, it doesn't count. Seven prime ministerial visits paint a picture. It signifies a change in the relationship and growing appreciation of each other's importance. What India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have built is a special affinity. It reflects a new reality, one where the India-UAE bond is no longer voluntary but mandatory, not a choice but an instinct. PM Modi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have undertaken a systematic overhaul: We are now mutually indispensable.

At the same time, he is attending the World Government Summit, a platform for deliberating innovation to deal with emerging governance challenges.

The very texture of this relationship is different. PM Modi is travelling to inaugurate the first Hindu temple in the UAE, an exemplar of Abu Dhabi's promotion of a more pluralistic society. At the same time, he is attending the World Government Summit, a platform for deliberating innovation to deal with emerging governance challenges. In tandem, these act as a synecdoche for the larger relationship: The two nations are partnering with each other while celebrating who they are. They seek to be part of each other's change while not seeking to change the other. India has friendly relations with many nations, and yet such friendships

Revamping Water Governance in India

The Pathway to a New National Water Policy

Water governance faces a multifaceted challenge due to the elusive nature of water, which transcends boundaries. Though the traditional definition of “transboundary waters” entails waters crossing international political borders, state-of-the-art definitions broaden the scope of the notion to include waters crossing any form of boundary, ranging from the international level to the smallest societal units and sectoral divisions. This expanded perspective includes interstate waters within a country. Notably, the latest manifestation of transboundary water conflicts arises between the economic and ecosystem sectors over water allocation. Human interventions, driven by the pursuit of short-term economic gains, often disrupt flow regimes, resulting in significant downstream ecosystem losses.

Despite recognising river basins as optimal natural units for planning and managing surface water resources, there is a pervasive historical tendency to fragment basins into separate units for governing the river systems. This fragmentation has two origins: first, it makes managing the resources easier, and second is the respect for political or geographical jurisdictions. This is a reductionist approach of treating water as a mere stock of resources within a region to be used for human convenience as per the need. The frequent disputes over water resources between Indian states, as well as between the central and state governments, can be attributed to this reductionist approach and the decentralised governance structure inherent in the federal nature of the Indian democracy.

India encompasses 25 major river basins and 103 sub-basins, many extending across multiple states. Each riparian state claims jurisdiction over these basins by the federal distribution of powers outlined in the Indian Constitution. The conflicts arising from utilising water resources stem from the fragmented governance of a naturally interconnected water system rather than being solely driven by the physical scarcity of the resource. The decentralisation of authority over water use to the state level has led to intense political disputes, characterised by conflicting perceptions of property rights concerning transboundary waters. This approach of fragmented water governance is inextricably linked to the dominance of traditional structural interventions and a reductionist approach in water governance that has defined India's water management architecture. This has shaped the evolution of hydrological projects, the management of water resources for irrigation networks that are linked with the country's food security measures, and the management of interstate water resources and potential disputes between states.

This paper identifies the knowledge gaps that inhibit the paradigm shift and explores the lacunae in the existing water-related institutional mechanisms and statutes. It also attempts to chart a path for combating the emerging challenges of water governance in India by identifying

the broad contours of a new national water policy.

Paradigms of Water Governance

India and other countries worldwide are experiencing a conflict concerning two contrasting paradigms of water governance—between choosing traditional structural interventions rooted in colonial-era engineering and adopting a more comprehensive and holistic water management system. This conflict emerged as Western nations recognised the detrimental effects of extensive dam construction and structural interventions, which were found to fragment river systems and cause irreversible damage to ecosystems on a basin scale. In 2000, the European Union (EU) responded to this by adopting the Water Framework Directive, leading to



the decommissioning of numerous dams across Europe. Since then, approximately 5,000 such structural interventions have been dismantled in countries like France, Sweden, Finland, Spain, and the UK. The directive also requires EU member states to enhance the ecological conditions of water bodies, resulting in a shift towards restoring natural hydrological flow regimes by maintaining water instream. Similarly, in the US, which experienced significant dam construction between the 1920s and 1960s, over 1,000 such structures have been dismantled in recent decades to rejuvenate basin ecosystems.

India, however, has yet to truly embrace the transition to Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). India's hydro-technocratic sector has continued to abide by outdated concepts of water resource development, prioritising immediate economic gains even at the expense of neglecting long-term sustainability issues. Furthermore, there has been resistance to any departure from the existing status quo.

Still, over the last decade, India has undertaken specific initiatives to adopt a comprehensive water governance framework. In 2016, two bills were proposed (the Draft National Water Framework Bill and the Model Bill for the Conservation, Protection, Regulation, and Management of Groundwater), and a report titled 'A 21st Century Institutional Architecture for India's Water Reforms' was published. All three were drafted by committees chaired by economist and water and rural

development expert Mihir Shah. In 2019, the Ministry of Jal Shakti set up a committee of independent experts led by Shah to draft a new National Water Policy. Despite the report being submitted in 2021, the draft policy is yet to be tabled for consideration in parliament.

To be sure, the advancement of modern civilisation is characterised by humanity's capacity to construct larger engineering structures capable of altering water flow patterns through storage and diversion. The widespread use of large dams, accompanied by the implementation of more powerful pumping technologies to manage aquifers, enabled substantial control over surface water. These dams served the dual purpose of flood control and the generation of hydroelectric power and were beneficial during seasonal water shortages and in addressing disparities in water availability across regions. The introduction of irrigation canals facilitated the cultivation of crops in new areas and also extended the growing seasons for agricultural produce. Over time, water scarcity was predominantly viewed as spatial, with the idea that water could be diverted from water-rich zones to water-scarce ones through appropriate supply augmentation plans. For water to be distributed equitably, the supply should be expanded through interventions in the natural hydrological flows. While these approaches successfully delivered

increased water resources to regions facing scarcity, the challenges evolved into more than just mere water scarcity. Pursuing a strategy solely focused on intensifying interventions in the hydrological cycle became counterproductive, causing adverse effects on basin ecosystems. Research has established that the conventional 'business-as-usual' approach to water management is no longer sustainable, and will likely result in significant stress and provoke conflicts among stakeholders. Instead, the narrow and engineering-focused water governance paradigm should be replaced by a fresh, holistic, and interdisciplinary approach (the IWRM).

Integrated Water Governance at the Basin Scale

Acknowledging that a comprehensive approach is essential for water management and the governance of river basins, many countries have enacted policies to decommission dams and implement alternative approaches to preserve river waters. For instance, Australia has established water markets over the Murray-Darling Basin, which is regulated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. This enables farmers to enhance water productivity and contribute to sustainable water management. In Chile, the National Water Code (1981) established a transferable system of water rights independent of land use and ownership. Water markets in Chile often involve transactions such as the 'renting' of water between neighbouring farmers with different water needs.

In December 2019, water derivatives trading have commenced at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange to mitigate water availability risks in the western US. This marked a noteworthy shift towards demand management following years of structural interventions that impacted river courses in the western US.

However, India has yet to put in place any such market practices. Although academic literature has discussed water markets as an important institution for demand management in India during scarcity, there are debates on whether water future markets will be beneficial in the Indian context. In 2022, reports suggested the NITI Aayog planned to place a draft recommendation paper of various instruments for water trading in bourses in the public domain for consultations; spot trading, derivative instruments like futures trading, and tradable licences were some of the instruments under consideration. Currently, the NITI Aayog has presented a document on exchanging treated wastewater rights and entitlements through a transparent platform. The pivotal role of water markets is efficient price discovery that can reflect on the scarcity value of the resource. This is never the case, with ad-hoc water charges often set by governments or water regulators. Water demand management can happen efficiently only when the market price signals the physical availability or future scarcity. This presents a clear case for India to consider such markets for efficient water governance.

The key here is recognising the necessity for the systems approach to water governance, encompassing both general water management and, more specifically, the governance of river basins. River basins operate as integrated systems where every component is interconnected, and alterations in one part can affect others across both space and time. These alterations may arise from either natural processes or human activities. River flows encompass not only water with dissolved chemicals, particularly in the conditions observed in India, but also carry sediments, energy, and biodiversity. Disturbing any of these elements will have repercussions on all others. Activities occurring in one segment of the basin, such as the disposal of wastewater or the deforestation of watersheds, will impact all downstream areas. For instance, the construction of the Farakka barrage on the lower Ganges in India, established in 1975, has impeded sediment flow into the delta, thereby limiting soil formation. The sediment accumulation behind the barrage has also been linked to subsequent flood damages in Bihar.

While the principles of an integrated approach on a basin scale continue to develop, the following summarised points (based on existing literature) are key:

Financing for Agenda 2030: Deepening India-EU Development Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

The year 2020 is a landmark of all sorts- marking the 'Decade of Action' to deliver on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) which ironically coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic unleashing a plethora of global challenges. Evidently, the current world order is under severe stress and strain. Consequently, the international development landscape is in a state of flux. Issues of staggered economic growth, rising debt burden, the triple trouble of 3Fs- food, fuel and fertilizer shortage, the looming threat of climate change along with the growing geopolitical fissures have resulted in a 'polycrisis.' In the light of this embroiling polycrisis, progress on the SDGs has been steady but fragile with major and persistent challenges. Financing for Agenda 2030 has emerged as a major bottleneck with several developing economies, especially the least developed countries (LDCs), low-income countries and the small island developing states (SIDS) suffering the most. For example, as per the estimates by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the gap to finance the SDGs has jumped from USD 2.5 trillion in 2020 to a staggering USD 4.2 trillion in 2023. As observed, a drop in external finance sources (mainly private agencies, remittances and foreign direct investment) and diversion of existing resources towards tackling the pandemic has impacted the capital outflow in developing countries. The Indo-Pacific is not left untouched. Here, sustainability and security have become intertwined- a region that is simultaneously the engine of global growth and also the location of consequential, even systemic competition. Moreover, it has come to occupy the new global strategic centre of gravity, attaining greater spotlight, owing to the rampant geopolitical tensions. Besides the strategic concerns, there are paramount issues plaguing the region, such as vulnerability to high climatic risks, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem disruptions, cascading natural disasters and an eroding economy. As a hotbed of sustainability challenges, this region is considered crucial for addressing the SDGs puzzle. Increasingly reeling under the acute impacts of climate change, it also lacks the wherewithal for addressing uncertainties concerning the wider sustainability issue. Moreover, the least developed countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and low-income economies have been bearing the disproportionate burden of the multiple crises. For instance, the 1.1 billion people of the world's 46 LDCs have contributed less than 4 per cent to the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, yet they suffer the worst impacts of extreme climate-related disasters.

In this context, development cooperation or partnership has gained currency in a post-pandemic world. As a fact, it can offer possible avenues for innovative and flexible financing mechanisms. Development cooperation can also prove to be a 'strong lever' for instilling an integrated approach towards implementation of the SDGs. The Indo-Pacific has naturally witnessed an upswing in cooperation programmes under different modalities i.e., North-South, South-South and triangular development partnerships. Though the region is marred with the growing U.S.-China tensions, shifting alliances and economic ebbs and flows, it also presents great prospects of cooperation and the opportunity for revamping of the North-South cooperation. Hence, the Indo-Pacific region should be viewed both as a geo-strategic and

geoeconomic platform. In this context, development partnerships play a pivotal role in building fruitful connections between the global North and the South. As a transformative modality, triangular cooperation brings innovative and flexible solutions to fast-changing development challenges, thereby helping to build synergies and complementarities between the various partnership models. Although India has been initially quite hesitant towards embracing this modality, it is now utilising this as a tool for realizing dual objectives- to maintain the strategic balance in global geopolitics and to address the pressing sustainability issues.

Thus, examining the Indo-Pacific from a broader lens of sustainability, beyond the geo-political contours, becomes essential, especially in a post-pandemic world. Here, the strategic partnership between India and the European Union (EU) is a key factor. As natural and like-minded partners with 'market economies, pluralistic societies and political democracies', India and the EU have vital stakes and interests in this region. Although the partnership spans six decades, it has been quite slow and fragmented in its uptake. On the other, India's relationship with the individual EU member states has witnessed more momentum and forward-looking engagements. However, the blurring of geopolitical fault lines and the increasing need to de-risk the global economy for creating reliable and resilient supply chains offer possible common grounds for greater convergence for India and the EU. This policy brief makes a case for a joint India-EU development partnership, in the SIDS to address the sustainability issues- particularly for building capacities in climate resilience, renewable energy and infrastructural connectivity.

Why India-EU Development Partnership?

As one of the largest development providers, the EU and its member states offered about €70.2 billion in 2021, thereby occupying almost 43 per cent of the global Official Development Assistance (ODA) share. Although the EU is known for its political, economic and vast geopolitical clout, it has been encountering a number of issues which are often interwoven in nature. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict coupled with rising energy prices and climate change conundrum, to name a few. To the Indian observers, its complex and intricate institutional structure and mechanisms provide little clarity on its political and strategic dimensions. Also, experts have found inconsistencies in EU development assistance terming it as fragmented, resulting in inefficiencies, gaps and overlaps. Given that the Union has been playing a wider international role by announcing an ambitious climate plan like the European Green Deal or the Global Gateway project on building connectivity and linkages, it has remained somewhat undermined and low-key. For instance, more than a year since the launch of the trade and investment-centric Global Gateway initiative, there is lack of clarity in its set priorities and delineation of geographical locations. In fact, no visible attempt has been made in fleshing out the strategy to account for the rapidly changing global context. In the aftermath of the growing vulnerabilities to critical supply chains arising from both economic and environmental threats, nations are urgently looking to 'nearshore', 'reshore' or 'friendshore' their facilities to strengthen

their resilience for any unprecedented event. This makes it imperative for the EU to respond to the situation promptly by supporting the developmental needs of the global South and facilitating partnerships, in its true sense.

Moreover, according to a joint report published by a leading Indian and European think tank, owing to economic and security considerations, Brussels has kept its focus fixed on China for a long time. This has somewhat limited its potential to engage with other Asian economies, particularly India. These factors are now clearly encouraging the EU to be more open towards the global South. Nevertheless, as the report notes, post-2016 there has been a significant repositioning of the Union's approach towards New Delhi. This has been reflected by the visits of senior European delegates to India and also with the consistently held annual summit-level meetings with the Nordic countries.

On the other, India has been making strong interventions in representing and strengthening the voice of the global South. The inclusion of the African Union (AU) in the grouping is a case in point. Giving precedence to the developmental needs of the LDCs, SIDS and the low-income economies by hosting the 'Voice of the Global South Summit' earlier this year, India is attempting to create a new institutional platform for garnering solidarity in the developing world. In fact, its G20 Presidency came at a time when the world was experiencing unparalleled geopolitical, geoeconomic, developmental and social challenges. India's rise as a credible and effective development partner with strong delivery on the ground has also been recognized by the international community. In this context, fostering robust collaborations and sturdy partnerships has attained utmost importance.

Although the contemporary western-led models, such as the EU's and USA, emphasise on helping the 'partner countries on their own development journey to achieve self-reliance', they arose in the context of late colonialism and the Cold War. In spite of overtly focussing on poverty alleviation and pushing for economic growth, the western development models failed to yield positive results in reality. This was a major reason behind the prominence gained by non-DAC actors, especially during late 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Interestingly, the existing literature suggests the notion that the South is the 'disciplinary subject' and the North is the 'benevolent provider' was challenged with the rise of the southern donors. Here, India's development partnership model stands out from the rest. Driven by a vision of 'shared prosperity', India's model of development partnerships is unique and demand-driven in nature. As observed by experts, its partnership model is organic and need-based, unlike the Chinese or the West. Evidently, India is also emerging as a leader in forging innovative forms of cooperation and partnerships, which the international development cooperation ecosystem should integrate. Offering low-cost development solutions, it has been observed that several of its programmes have been organically inclined towards the SDGs, way before these targets came into the picture in 2015.

Moreover, India's foreign policy considerations are now progressively being structured around the notion of

'diplomacy for development', as pointed out by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar. This 'India Way' of foreign policy fits well for the larger Global South. During the 2021 BRICS Academic Forum in New Delhi, the Indian Foreign Minister underlined the necessity of putting in place 'human-centric globalisation' as a hallmark of the post-pandemic world order. There, he stated: "India is a constructive contributor to the efforts to create such an international order by sharing the developmental experience with partner countries in the Global South; undertaking humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, particularly during the pandemic; through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI); and by acting as a first responder (through Vaccine Maitri) and net security provider in its diplomatic environment." Till 2020, India's development cooperation touched US\$8.7 billion covering almost 160 countries and training more than 20,000 individuals annually. Also, it is important to note that India's flagship Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme was initiated in 1964, way before the UN's Technical Cooperation for Development came into the scene in 1978. In this context, PM Modi's address at the Parliament of Uganda in 2018 is important: "Our development partnership will be guided by your priorities. It will be on terms that will be comfortable for you, that will liberate your potential and not constrain your future... We will build as much local capacity and create as many local opportunities as possible." Through its partnership programmes, India has been expressing solidarity and responsiveness to the priorities of partner countries. As a developing nation with limited resources, India has willingly offered its development experience to countries that wished to engage. Initiatives such as Solar Mamas Project in Africa, setting up centres of excellence in information and technology in Fiji, Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Niue, the Youth Farm Initiative (YFI) in Fiji to promote sustainable livelihoods and food security, Jaipur Foot Camp in the health sector in the SIDS etc. prominently highlight the technical assistance offered by India. Despite India's development partnership model reflects a demand-driven approach, it is looking to ramp up its diplomatic outreach in the neighbourhood and beyond with an underlying strategic intent. Owing to the geopolitical competition coupled by the need to secure critical supply chains, development diplomacy is certainly emerging as one of the vital aspects of its partnerships programme.

Despite being placed at different tangents of development, both EU and India can effectively address the persistent sustainability challenges and potentially rebalance the global order in the post-2030 world. In fact, Agenda 2030 provides an important reference framework for development cooperation, which in turn is instrumental for achieving the global common good, as reiterated by several analysts. Combining the best features of the European development policy i.e., standards, norms and finance with India's proven prowess in capacity-building, knowledge sharing and technical assistance can possibly help in finding practical solutions to the sustainability challenges of the Indo-Pacific.

A matter of choice: Determining public transport systems for urban India

The rapid expansion of urban centres in India can be ascribed to the burgeoning industrial sector, heightened economic activities, and increased employment opportunities. According to the Census of India, metropolitan areas with a population exceeding one million increased from 35 in 2001 to 53 in 2011. This trend is set to continue, with the urban population of 282 million in 2011 projected to grow to 590 million by 2031.

Impact of urbanisation on mobility

Urbanisation has elevated travel demands and escalated the number of trips made in urban areas. Projections indicate that the per capita trip rate across all modes of transportation will increase from 0.8–1.55 to 1–2 by 2030. Nonetheless, this surge in urban travel can exacerbate adverse transport externalities, including traffic congestion, road accidents, suboptimal peak-hour travel experiences, overpopulation, and environmental degradation. The metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai incur congestion costs of approximately US\$14.7 billion annually. In 2022, States and Union Territories reported 461,312 road accidents, resulting in 168,491 deaths and 443,366 injuries, representing an 11.9 percent increase in road accidents, 9.4 percent in fatalities, and 15.3 percent increase in injuries over the previous year.

The peak hour travel speed within cities is projected to decline from 26–17 km per hour to 8–6 km per hour. Growing traffic congestion has also worsened air quality in cities.

Moreover, the peak hour travel speed within cities is projected to decline from 26–17 km per hour to 8–6 km per hour. Growing traffic congestion has also worsened air quality in cities. For example, in 2022, the air quality of Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai was categorised as Hazardous, Very Unhealthy, and Unhealthy, with Air Quality Index (AQI) values of 304, 233, and 158, respectively.

Addressing these challenges necessitates strategic planning for sustainable Mass Rapid Transit Systems (MRTS). Responding to this imperative, cities have invested or intend to invest in rail-based public transport systems, prioritising them over bus-based alternatives.

Guidelines for rapid transit systems in Indian cities

Public transport became a central focus area for several Indian metropolitan cities following the implementation of the National Urban Transport Policy in 2005. Subsequently, the 12th Five-Year Plan, National Transport Development

Policy Committee (NTDPC), Urban & Regional Development Plans Formulation & Implementation Guidelines–2017 (URDPFI), and Guidelines & Toolkits for Urban Transport Development developed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), prepared guiding principles for selecting suitable urban public transport modes.

Public transport became a central focus area for several Indian metropolitan cities following the implementation of the National Urban Transport Policy in 2005.

These guidelines consider peak hour peak direction traffic (PHPDT), population, density, and trip length. Additionally, they provide the threshold values associated

struggled to attain even 20 percent of the estimated ridership.

Conversely, an analysis of ridership data for bus-based transit systems done by the author in nine cities reveals substantial disparities, with most cities exhibiting higher bus commuter volumes than metro rail ridership. Passengers use public buses 0.9 to 19.7 times more in these cities than rail-based transit systems—despite all the cities having deficient bus fleet sizes.

Among rail-based transit systems, metro rail systems are currently operational in 16 cities, under construction in six cities, and at the evaluation stage in four cities.

Most Indian cities also do not comply with the MoHUA guidelines of

based option.

It is not to say that metro rail systems are not needed. Many Tier 2 cities in the country are witnessing a population surge and will require metro rail—but only when their bus-based systems reach saturation. The lack of well-defined regulations about the timing and quantum of investments in the urban transport system without considering augmenting and streamlining existing modes has driven much smaller cities to commit unwarranted finances to unsuitable public transport options. Consequently, the operating agencies have incurred substantial losses.

The lack of well-defined regulations about the timing and quantum of investments in the urban transport system without considering augmenting and streamlining existing modes has driven much smaller cities to commit unwarranted finances to unsuitable public transport options.

Various guidelines have considered population, density, trip lengths, and peak hour peak direction traffic (PHPDT) criteria to help cities opt for the most optimum mode but ignored other pertinent parameters, including trip time and trip cost, which are directly linked to individual affordability and collectively provide insights into the city's income pattern, convenience and accessibility when recommending different transportation modes. Moreover, the guidelines primarily emanate from a technological perspective inherent in these diverse modes without analysing the quantum of investments needed. A city's form and size are also critical in selecting the optimum mode.

The strategic planning of MRTS in Tier 2 and 3 cities necessitates a comprehensive approach, mainly through integration with the existing public transport infrastructure, notably the city bus system. This integration is crucial for optimising efficiency. In cities, where travel distances tend to be relatively short, a well-organised city bus system emerges as a cost-effective and expeditious alternative to constructing a metro rail system. The foremost priority lies in enhancing the city bus system, involving an augmentation of the fleet size and expanding its coverage area. Implementing high-capacity and capital-intensive rail-based MRTS must be considered only when the bus systems efficiently address demand and reach their threshold. Cities must accordingly go beyond the existing guidelines and focus on formulating knowledge-based policies and mechanisms to support the choice of MRTS technology in India.



with each criterion, serving as a basis for determining whether Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT), or Mono Rail is the most suitable for a given city.

Public transport scenario in Indian cities Presently, 24 Indian cities have MRTS and 16 have a single type of rapid transit system comprising either metro rail or BRT. Only five cities host two or more rapid transit systems, including a combination of suburban rail, metro, and BRTS. Among rail-based transit systems, metro rail systems are currently operational in 16 cities, under construction in six cities, and at the evaluation stage in four cities. Twenty cities are conducting feasibility studies for Metro Lite, while three are concurrently exploring the feasibility of Metro Neo.

However, the data conveys that ridership is not commensurate with the carriage capacity of the operational metro rail systems in any Indian city. Metro rail systems have not achieved the ridership forecast in their Detailed Project Reports (DPR). Mumbai (Phase 1) has achieved 89 percent of its estimated ridership, while Chennai and Hyderabad have reached 35 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Furthermore, the remaining 13 cities have

a minimum fleet size of 40–60 buses per lakh population. The number of buses per lakh population varies across cities, ranging from six in Lucknow to a maximum of 45 in Bangalore, with all other cities falling within this spectrum.

The higher ridership of bus-based transit systems despite inadequate bus fleets and low ridership of metro rail systems underscores the over-emphasis of Indian cities on the construction of mega rail-based projects rather than enhancing or optimising the existing modes of transportation, particularly buses. This has caused a situation where all modes of public transport within the cities compete with each other instead of complementing one another, leading to an unintegrated, and unsustainable operation of all modes of public transportation.

The way forward

How Indian cities achieve sustainable urban public transportation will be pivotal to its potential to be among the world's top three economies. Several cities have jumped the gun to embrace metro rail as a panacea for their urban transport problems without focusing on enhancing the bus fleets and networks or evaluating the felt need for the much more expensive rail-

Yami Gautam explains why being part of the scripting process is important for actors

Actress Yami Gautam Dhar, who is gearing up for her upcoming action-political-drama film 'Article 370', has shared that as an actor, she enjoys being part of the scripting process.

For an actor, being involved in the film right from the scripting stage, greatly helps to understand the evolution and arc of the character.

The upcoming film, which has been co-written and produced by her husband Aditya Dhar, sees the actress in the role of an intelligence officer.

The film follows the events in the lead up to the abrogation of the contentious Article 370 of the Indian constitution.

Elaborating on the same, Yami said, "I am an actor who enjoys being a part of the scripting process. Filmmaking is a collaboration of different creative minds coming together to create something as one. Working in 'Article 370' has been one of the most satisfying experiences."

The actress further spoke about her experience of working with the cast and the



crew, as she said, "Vaibhav (Tatwawadi), Ashwini (Kaul), all have done some amazing job in the film. They were all so easy to work with. It is always amazing to work with actors who are beaming with fresh energy. I even got an opportunity to work with some really good technicians. Based on my experience of working

with Aditya (Jambhale, the director), he has so much regard for his technicians. As a director, he believes in them."

Presented by Jio Studios and produced by Jyoti Deshpande, Aditya Dhar, and Lokesh Dhar, 'Article 370' is slated to release in cinemas worldwide on February 23.

Shruti Haasan wishes 'Teach for Change' expands to encompass the entire nation

Actress Shruti Haasan, who stole the limelight as the showstopper for the Teach for Change fundraiser fashion show, has commended Lakshmi Manchu for her relentless efforts behind this noble initiative, aiming for the expansion of this endeavour to encompass all of South India, and, eventually, the entire nation.

The ninth edition of the Teach for Change's annual fundraiser, which was held in Hyderabad on Sunday, saw participation from fashion maestros Amit GT for women's wear, and Shashank Chelmillla for men's wear. This extravagant event, known for its blend of glamour and social impact, saw a host of actors walking the



ramp. Shruti glided down the ramp for the fashion show in a black-hooded Indo-western lehenga by Amit GT.

About the event, Shruti said: "Lakshmi has been actively involved in Teach for Change's distinctive efforts within government schools, and I'm excited to join in this year. Ensuring every child receives quality education is paramount, and Teach for Change is making strides in Telangana." "I hope this initiative expands to encompass all of South India and eventually the entire

nation. Let's all contribute in our own small ways to make a significant impact together," she added.

Prime Video sets premiere date for 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' starring Sara Ali Khan



Sara Ali Khan-starrer 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' would start streaming on Prime Video from March 21, the platform announced on Tuesday.

Billed as a historical thriller drama, the upcoming Hindi film is directed by Kannan Iyer from a story he wrote with Darab Farooqui.

'Ae Watan Mere Watan' is a Dharmatic Entertainment production and is backed by Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta and Somen Mishra.

According to the makers, the movie—set during the Quit India Movement in 1942—is a fictional tale that draws inspiration from freedom fighter Usha Mehta.

Prime Video revealed the premiere date of 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' on the occasion of World Radio Day with a motion poster, featuring Sara's voice as Usha, urging the country to unite against the British Raj through a clandestine radio.

Aparna Purohit, head of Originals, India and Southeast Asia, Prime Video, described the film as "homage to the innumerable indomitable heroes" whose sacrifices defined India's path to freedom.

"The story struck a deep chord with us and we instinctively felt

the need to bring it to life. 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' further cements our long-standing relationship with Dharmatic Entertainment and underscores our collective commitment to telling stories that are not only entertaining and immersive but have a robust emotional core," Purohit said in a statement.

Johar said 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' has been a dream in the making.

"At Dharmatic Entertainment we have always taken pride in bringing forth stories that are told from the heart and 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' exemplifies that.

"Kannan and Darab have taken inspiration from a poignant point of India's history and woven a rich story with a strong emotional core that is further enriched by Sara's exceptional portrayal of a young revolutionary," the producer added.

'Ae Watan Mere Watan' would also be available on the streamer with dubs in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

Actors Sachin Khedekar, Abhay Verma, Sparsh Shrivastav, Alexx O'Neil and Anand Tiwari also round out the cast of the film, which also has a special guest appearance by Emraan Hashmi.

The Indrani Mukerjea Story: Buried Truth trailer is a peek into sensational murder of Sheena Bora

The trailer of the upcoming true crime documentary *The Indrani Mukerjea Story: Buried Truth* was unveiled on Monday. It gives audiences a glimpse of the infamous alleged murder case that sent shockwaves across the country.

It also features Indrani Mukerjea, who has been accused of murdering her daughter Sheena Bora, answering the questions with regard to the case.

What unfolded after shook Mumbai's high society and the country at large, forever altering the lives of the Mukerjea and Bora families.

Indrani, who was an accomplished media executive and socialite, was married to media baron Peter Mukerjea.

In 2015, she was arrested for murdering Sheena Bora. After her arrest, Indrani was sent to judicial custody at a women's-only prison in Byculia Jail, Mumbai.

Directed by Uraaz Bahl and Shaana Levy, this

gripping four-episode docu-series examines the complexities of the highly-debated Sheena Bora case. The US-based MakeMake and the India

Today Group produced the series, which premieres on February 23.

As the shocking story unfolds, viewers will get to witness the unseen family photographs and unsettling call recordings, providing insights into the motives behind young Sheena's mysterious disappearance and casting doubt on each person's version of the truth.

Navigating through conflicting initial reports, the docuseries presents both sides of the narrative, offering a glimpse into the dysfunctional dynamics of

an elite Indian family and the secrets that unravelled and destroyed lives.

The *Indrani Mukerjea Story: Buried Truth* drops on February 23, on Netflix.



Rachana Mistry steps into the shoes of Arya in 'Dabangii – Mulgi Aayi Re Aayi'

The viewers will witness a 14-year leap in Sony Entertainment Television's, *Dabangii – Mulgi Aayi Re Aayi*, and stepping into the shoes of a grown-up Arya will be talented actress Rachana Mistry.

Rachana shared, "Arya embodies the same Dabangii spirit from her childhood, yet her maturity now grants her a deeper understanding

of the world. Her acts of kindness and empathy illuminate her path, prioritizing human connection over material pursuits; a reflection of all that her Baba, Ankush, has taught her. Despite the deep loss she has gone through, Arya's courage remains steadfast, fueled by a quest to face Satya, to avenge the death of her parents and his wrongdoings. The



show and Arya's character have been loved by all; embracing this role comes with great responsibility though, following the benchmark set by the little dynamite Maahi Bhadra."

Arshad Warsi, Maria Goretti register their marriage after 25 years

Bollywood actor Arshad Warsi is married to his wife Maria

silver jubilee celebrations of their union on Valentine's Day.

As per media reports, the couple registered their marriage in court on January 23.

Arshad and Maria got married on February 14, 1999. The two walked down the aisle in a church ceremony, followed by a traditional nikah.

The actor said that they registered their marriage for legal reasons, realising its importance when dealing with property matters and for the future.

The two registered their marriage under the Special Marriage Act.

Their kids couldn't come because only witnesses were allowed.



Goretti for 25 years. However, the couple recently registered their marriage in court ahead of the

Javed Akhtar and Sukhwinder Singh on 'Indian Idol Season 14'

Sony Entertainment Television's singing reality show, *Indian Idol 14*, will present the Suro Ka Sultan episode, in the presence of the famous singer, Sukhwinder Singh. The contestants will sing some foot-tapping numbers while also embracing Sukhwinder's glorious legacy in the music industry. The charming Manushi Chhillar and South Indian Superstar Varun Tej will be a part of this fun-filled episode too.

But it will be Kanpur's Vaibhav Gupta, who will steal the spotlight with his rendition of Sukhwinder Singh's hit song, *Dil Haara* from the movie *Tashan*. In an act of humility and respect

for his idol, Sukhwinder, Vaibhav took off his shoes before coming on to the stage. While complimenting his performance, Sukhwinder Singh exclaimed, "He sang with such joy (mauj mein gaya)." Judges



Shreya Ghoshal and Vishal Dadlani also praised Vaibhav and acknowledged his overall act.

Also get ready to be a part of *Gaane Aur Afsane* with Javed Akhtar on *Indian Idol Season 14*. The special episode will see the contestants pay tribute to Javed sahab's contribution to the Indian film

industry. Week after week, contestant Subhadeep Das has impressed one and all with his performances, and, yet again, he will own the stage by singing *Kal Ho Na Ho* in his melodious voice. Before the performance, Kavita Krishnamurthy, who previously sang with Subhadeep during the mega-auditions, will send him a



special video message where she expresses how proud she was of him for reaching the top eight contestants on the show.

Footballer dies after being hit by lightning on field playing friendly match in Indonesia

Septain Raharja, was struck by the lightning--has gone viral.

The terrifying video showed Raharja, from Subang, collapsing soon after the incident.

According to standard.co.uk, Septain Raharja, was playing a friendly match between 2 FLO FC Bandung and FBI Subang, when lightning struck him at around 4:20pm local time on Saturday.

The footballer was breathing when the incident occurred and rushed to a local hospital, but died soon afterwards, according to Indonesia's PRFM News.

A footballer has been hit by lightning while he was playing



a match on the field Indonesian.

A video--capturing the moment when the 35-year-old,

Skipper Uday Saharan, three other Indians named in team of World Cup

Benoni (South Africa)

Four Indian players, including

after a 79-run loss to Australia in the title clash, which brought to

the Tournament Kwena Maphaka —and West Indies and Pakistan have one player each.

India's Musheer takes the number three spot as the only batter to register two centuries during the competition. Top run-scorer for the event, Saharan played a pivotal role in India's dominance through to the final.

Dhas also earns a place in the team for his ability to relieve pressure situations and the innovative and aggressive strokeplay. Completing the line-up is Pandey, whose left-arm spin yielded 18 wickets — the most by any spinner in the tournament.

Future is bright:

Kanitkar

India U-19 head coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar is confident that at least a couple of players from the 2024 batch will go on to play for the senior team. "Definitely (the future of India is very bright). As a bowling side and as a batting side, there have been standout performances by quite a few players. They have shown maturity in tough situations and that bodes well for Indian cricket," Kanitkar said.

an end their unbeaten run in the tournament.

Australia captain Hugh Weibgen is given the honour of leading the line-up. Champions Australia have three players in the line-up, South Africa have two names — including Player of

skipper Uday Saharan and star batter Musheer Khan, featured in the U-19 World Cup's Team of the Tournament announced by the ICC today. Batter Sachin Dhas and spinner Saumy Pandey are the other Indian players in the team. India finished runners-up

Another blow to India: KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, Padikkal named as replacement



reached 90 per cent of match fitness and is progressing well under the supervision of the BCCI Medical Team," the BCCI said in a press release.

Rahul will continue his recovery at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru as he looks to return for the fourth and fifth Tests. The series is currently locked 1-1.

The selectors had earlier named both Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja in the squad subject to clearance from the BCCI's medical team. "KL Rahul hasn't yet reported in Rajkot. Ravindra Jadeja, the local boy, has linked up with the team. It was always a case of subject to fitness and the BCCI medical team is still not confident that he is match fit," a BCCI source said.

In his most recent Ranji Trophy match, the 23-year-old Padikkal scored 151 with the chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar watching his knock from the stands.

Padikkal has been in excellent form this season. Having started with a 193 against Punjab in the opening game, he struck 103 against Goa. Besides his exploits in Ranji, Padikkal also scored 105, 65 and 21 in his three innings for India A in the two unofficial four-day games against England Lions.

In Virat's absence, great chance for England: Broad

Cape Town: Former pacer Stuart Broad says the India-England Test series is the most evenly-matched contest that he has seen between the two sides but the visitors have a strong chance of emerging triumphant as the "fire, passion and competitiveness" of Virat Kohli is missing from the home team's arsenal. "The first two matches were very competitive and it is one of the most exciting India-England Test series that I have seen," said Broad, who is now a commentator. "India won the last Test but England's playing style is quite effective in India. With Virat not in the team, it is a great opportunity for England," he added.

India have real battle on their hands: Chappell

Melbourne: Former Australia skipper Ian Chappell feels England under Ben Stokes will give India tough competition in the remainder of the Test series but backed the hosts to win it. "As the home side, India should eventually win a tough series, but it has a real battle on their hands," Chappell wrote in a column. "England under the aggressive leadership of Stokes are a far cry from the poorly captained Joe Root team that capitulated against spin on their last tour of the country," he added. "India is a strong side and they also have a good leader in Rohit Sharma. This contest is shaping up as it should: a tough five-match encounter between

Kohli to miss entire series, Iyer not considered, Akash gets call-up



New Delhi

Star batter Virat Kohli has pulled out of the remainder of the Test series against England for personal reasons, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) confirmed today, ending speculation around the premier player's availability for the high-profile contest.

Kohli had missed the first two Tests, and that he could be unavailable for the remaining three matches was earlier reported.

"Virat Kohli will remain unavailable for selection for the remainder of the series due to personal reasons. The board fully respects and supports his decision," BCCI stated. Kohli is currently abroad for a "pressing

personal family matter".

The third match is scheduled to start on February 15 in Rajkot.

The national selection committee included senior players Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul in the squad but their finding a place in the XI would depend on them getting a go-ahead from the BCCI medical team. Jadeja had injured his hamstring during the opening Test while Rahul had a right quadriceps niggle. Jadeja (87) and Rahul (86) were India's two top-scorers in Hyderabad.

"Rahul is already fit and ready to come back in the playing XI. He had a bit of tightness in his quadriceps and the medical team didn't want it to get aggravated.

In case of Jadeja, it is a strain and he is getting better. There are still five days to go before the game and if he shapes up well, nothing like it," a BCCI source said.

If both Rahul and Jadeja return to the team, then Rajat Patidar, who made his debut in Vizag, will have to make way as Shreyas Iyer has already been dropped.

Iyer axed?

Iyer, who complained of groin and lower back stiffness, has not been picked. However, his medical update has not been provided by BCCI. It is believed that Iyer would have been dropped in any case and his injury made the decision easier for the selectors.

"If Shreyas was to be rested because of injury, the BCCI medical bulletin would have had an update. Since there are no updates, it can be concluded that he has got the axe," the source said.

The only new face in the 17-man squad is Bengal speedster Akash Deep, who has been rewarded for his consistent show in First-Class cricket and in the recent series between India and England Lions.

Shot putter Karan handed four-year ban for doping

New Delhi

Shot putter Karanveer Singh and discus thrower Kirpal Singh were among several sportspersons who were handed bans for four years by the National Anti-Doping Agency's (NADA) disciplinary

gold in last year's National Inter-State Championships, had tested positive for stanozolol.

Meanwhile, quartermiler Nirmala Sheoran has been handed an eight-year ban. The 28-year-old had returned to competition



panel. NADA issued the list of the athletes who were handed bans by the panel today.

Kirpal's ban period began on July 7, 2023, while Karanveer will serve his ban from July 26, 2023. The 25-year-old Karanveer, who had won a bronze in the Federation Cup last year, had returned positive for methandienone and SARMS enobosarm. He was pulled out of the Indian team for the Asian Championships last year. Kirpal, who had won

at the National Inter-State Championships in June last year in Bhubaneswar after serving a four-year ban for a doping offence in 2018.

"It's an out of competition test and her sample was taken in Jaipur," an athletics team source said.

Sheoran's ban starts from August 7, 2023. She had tested positive for "Anabolic Androgenic Steroids (AAS) and Testosterone (T)".

A leader must earn respect with deeds: Dhoni



Mumbai

MS Dhoni's captaincy and man management skills are part of cricket's urban legend, and the former India skipper today said earning respect and loyalty of players with deeds formed the primary layer of leadership.

"Loyalty has a lot to do with the respect factor. It is actually about what you are doing and not about what you are speaking. You may not actually speak anything but your conduct can earn that respect," said Dhoni.

'I worry England may become a team who do all the great work only to not win much': Michael Vaughan

London

Former skipper Michael Vaughan is worried England will become a side that doesn't win much despite putting in the hard yards, adding that the team's batting unit needs to strike a balance between playing aggressive and traditional cricket to succeed in India.

Since adopting the 'Bazball' approach, England have enjoyed a good run but the same no-holds-barred approach has also cost them several matches and series, including the Ashes last year.

"England have become a difficult team to criticise too much because they are so good to watch. Every game they play has us all absolutely gripped, and they have improved massively under Ben Stokes," Vaughan wrote in his column for 'The Telegraph'.

"However, I do worry that they might become a team who do all this great work only to not actually win very much. They

didn't win the Ashes when they should have done and now they have let India back into a series when they still have a load of big names, including Virat Kohli, to come back."



England had taken a 1-0 lead in the five-Test series in India but Ben Stokes and his men let the hosts draw parity in the second Test as all their batters, barring Zak Crawley, were unable to get big scores.

"England will not win the series if they bat the way they did in Visakhapatnam. I actually think the batsmen need to take a leaf out of the bowlers' book. With ball in hand, they have been quite traditional at times, aggressive at others, and they have gone up and down the gears in terms of how attacking their fields have been."

England had pulled off a dramatic 28-run win in the series opener on the back of vice-captain Ollie Pope's epic second-innings knock of 196 and left-arm spinner Tom

Hartley's seven-wicket haul in the second innings.

"The young spinners have been fantastic but, for me, James Anderson's brilliant performance shows that they have to get another seamer, probably Ollie Robinson, in the side with him.

"The batsmen, meanwhile, look like they only have one way to play. They are in fifth gear from ball one. I don't mind some of them playing like that because they are better for it.

"But Joe Root should forget it. He has 10,000 Test runs playing like Joe Root. He doesn't need to be a 'Bazballer'. It is time for someone in the management to put an arm around Joe and say "please just be yourself". I think it's as simple as the fact that he is too wrapped up in 'Bazball', the whole ethos of excitement and entertainment."

One of England's best batters in the format, Root has collected over 10,000 runs (11,468) against his name.

अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
संजय मंगेश भैरे
सुचिता संजय भैरे

सोहम

दिग्दर्शक पुंडलिक यशोदा लक्ष्मण धुमाळ

छायांकन करण तांदळे संकलन विजय पांडुरंग खोचीकर क्विक्टव्ह निर्माता मांतेस जमादार

संगीत आणि पार्श्वसंगीत रवींद्र खरात नीत विपीन जाधव सहदिग्दर्शक शंकर धुलगुडे

गायक सुरेश वाडकर, अनुसाधा पौडवाल, ज्ञानेश्वर मेश्राम, सायली कांबळे, सुहास सावंत रंगभूषा माधव म्हापणकर, मयुरी चव्हाण

डॉ. आय. कलरिस्ट हितेंद्र परच घनिआरेखन केविन गाला कास्टिंग डायरेक्टर वैभव वाघ

व्हिज्युअल प्रमोशन अरीयर्मेटीक क्रिएटर्स जाहिरात रचना मिलिंद मटकर पोस्ट प्रोडक्शन डिजिटल स्टुडिओ मुंबई

लवकरच सिनेमागृहात