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CHHETRI DEFIES AGE TO PRODUCE A MASTERCLASS
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DEMOCRACY IS IN INDIA'S DNA: MODI

GE Aerospace-HAL to make jet engines for IAF, NASA-ISRO's mission to Space Station in 2024, new H-1B visa rules among several pacts inked

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

As India and the US wrapped up several major defence deals on Thursday, taking the ties between the two countries to new heights, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to his critics in the USA by insisting that there is no discrimination on the basis of religion or caste in India. He stressed the country is run on the basis of the constitution and strong fundamentals of democracy, which is in its DNA.

Modi made this categorical assertion in Washington when asked about the status of religious minorities, including Muslims, during a media interaction after the summit with President Joe Biden. He also said that relations with the US are at a stage where "the sky is not the limit," as he mentioned in the joint press conference with Blinken.

"We are a democracy... India and America both have democracy in our DNA. Democracy is in our spirit, and we live it. It's written in our Constitution. So, no question of discrimination on the grounds of caste, creed, or religion arises. That is why India believes in 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas' and walks ahead with it," Modi said when asked about steps the Government is willing to take to improve the rights of human values and human rights.

The PM said that India and the US have "overwhelming respect" for each other because "we are democracies, and it is in the US and India's DNAs to expand democratic institutions." When asked about religious minorities and dissent by a US reporter, Modi said, "Regardless of caste, creed, religion, gender, there's absolutely no space for discrimination." He also emphasised that resources and benefits are available to all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or gender, adding that there is no discrimination.

Biden said he discussed the issue of human rights in a straightforward manner with Prime Minister Modi, adding that democracy is in the DNA of both countries. He went on to add, "So, I am really surprised when people say so (discrimination against minorities). India is a real democracy," he said, adding there is no space for discrimination in a democracy, and India believes in moving forward by taking everyone along.

Answering a question on the effects of climate change, Modi said, "We do not believe



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a news conference with US President Joe Biden at White House on Thursday

AP/PTI

in the exploitation of nature. Of all the G20 countries, India is the only country that has fulfilled all the promises made during the G20 Summit. We are working to make India a green energy hub... The environment is an article of faith for us. We do not believe in the exploitation of nature."

Meanwhile, underlining some other issues discussed during the summit, the Prime Minister said that the two countries also agreed on the Artemis accord on space and remarked that "the sky is not the limit" in their relationship. Additionally, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have agreed to collaborate on a joint mission to the International Space Station in 2024.

The Artemis Accords, rooted in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, provide a framework of non-binding principles to guide space exploration and utilisation in the 21st century. Led by the US, the Artemis program aims to return humans to the moon by 2025, with the ultimate objective of expanding space exploration to Mars and beyond.

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PM highlights India's competitive advantages

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with CEOs of prominent US companies in Washington on Thursday, where he extended an invitation to American chip maker Micron Technology to bolster semiconductor manufacturing in India. Modi highlighted India's competitive advantages across various segments of the semiconductor supply chain. He also invited Applied Materials to invest in India for the development of process technology and advanced packaging capabilities. During his discussion with Gary E Dickerson, President and CEO of Applied Materials, Modi explored the potential of collaboration between the company and Indian academic institutions to cultivate a skilled workforce.

In terms of semiconductor development, US companies are partnering with India to establish an ecosystem that promotes supply chain diversification. Micron Technology, with support from the Indian National Semiconductor Mission, announced an investment exceeding \$800 million. With additional financial backing from Indian authorities, the total investment will amount to a \$2.75 billion semiconductor assembly and test facility in India.

In addition, Applied Materials unveiled plans for a new semiconductor center dedicated to commercialisation and innovation in India. Lam Research, another semiconductor manufacturing equipment company, is set to announce a training programme for 60,000 Indian engineers through its semi-sewer solution, aimed at accelerating India's semiconductor workforce development goals.

Modi meets US tycoons, invites Micron to boost semiconductor making in India

PM highlights India's competitive advantages

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden

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'Pipeline of talent' needed to maintain growth: PM

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Underlining the shared priorities of the two nations, including education and workforce, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said in order to maintain the momentum of growth, a "pipeline of talent" is needed for India and the US. Modi made these comments at an event hosted by First Lady Jill Biden in Virginia late on Wednesday.

Later, US President Joe Biden and Jill hosted Prime Minister Modi for a personal dinner at the White House, signalling the warm friendship between the two countries.

Modi also met the immediate family members of President Biden.

"Prime Minister's participation in this special engage-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US First Lady Jill Biden, India's Ambassador to US Tarunjit Singh Sandhu, US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti and others during the Skilling for Future event at National Science Foundation, in Washington, USA on Wednesday

ment reaffirms the warm friendship between our two countries," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a brief statement on the intimate dinner.

Taking to Twitter, Prime Minister Modi wrote, "I thank @POTUS @JoeBiden and @FLOTUS @DrBiden for

hosting me at the White House today. We had a great conversation on several subjects." The Ministry of External Affairs said the intimate dinner was an occasion for two leaders who share close bonds of friendship to cherish special moments together.

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CAPSULE

TIHAR INMATES INJURE SELVES TO RESIST CHECK
New Delhi: Over 20 inmates of Tihar jail allegedly inflicted injuries on themselves in a bid to resist the prison staff from carrying out searches in the barracks for recovering mobile phones, officials said on Thursday.

2 TOURISTS DIE FROM HYPOXEMIA IN MANALI
Manali: Two tourists died after falling ill on the high-altitude on Manali-Leh road, a police official said on Thursday. Doctors diagnosed the cause of death in the two separate incidents as hypoxemia, a drop in oxygen level in the blood.

KEDARNATH PILGRIMS MISS PATH, RESCUED
Rudrapur: Four pilgrims from Madhya Pradesh's Indore lost their way on the way back from Kedarnath but were rescued by SDRF personnel and moved to safety, officials said here on Thursday. The pilgrims, all in their 20s, got lost along a river between Garud Ghatti and Rambara in Uttarakhand while returning late on Wednesday night from the temple, an SDRF official said.

I appointed SEC, he failed Bengal, won't OK his joining: Guv

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose refusing to endorse the joining report of newly-appointed State Election Commissioner Rajiva Sinha — for what the Raj Bhavan sources said his apparent failure to discharge his duties impartially — Bengal panchayat elections could be heading for a constitutional crisis, political circles and experts feared.

"I appointed him (Sinha) but he disappointed the people of Bengal," was what Bose said, holding the State Election Commissioner responsible for "each drop of blood" shed during the violence that erupted before or during the filing of nominations, claiming 8 lives in less than two week's time.

Bose had twice summoned Sinha, a former State Chief Secretary — known for his proximity to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her family — to the Raj Bhavan apparently to remind him of his constitutional responsibilities during pre-panchayat violence but the latter would not turn up showing preoccupations. The Governor late on



Tuesday returned the SEC's joining report putting a question mark on his appointment in the midst of the poll process. The development came hours after the Calcutta High Court reprimanded the SEC, telling him that he should step down if he found it difficult to take orders for the deployment of Central forces in the State for the panchayat polls.

Following the Supreme Court and the HC orders the SEC had earlier requisitioned only 22 companies of Central forces to man more than 61,000 booths leading the Opposition parties to claim he had made mockery of the judicial orders. The High Court rap on his knuckles came hours later with the Division Bench of Chief Justice TS Sivaganam and Justice Uday Kumar directing him to requisition more CAPF than was used in 2013 panchayat elections when 820 companies were requisitioned. Continued on Page 2

Opp flock Patna to brainstorm anti-BJP front for 2024 battle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

Prominent Opposition leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, Mamata Banerjee, Bhagwant Mann, and Mehbooba Mufti, arrived in Patna on Thursday evening for a high-level meeting aimed at charting a roadmap for the formation of an anti-BJP front ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

The meeting is being touted as a brainstorming session to discuss strategies and build consensus among Opposition parties. Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Kejriwal has been advocating for a discussion on the Centre's ordinance regarding control of administrative services in the national Capital. He expects the Congress to respond positively and support the AAP's stance. However, the Congress has not yet clarified its position on whether it will back the AAP when the ordinance is put to test in Parliament by the BJP-led Centre. The possibility of an immediate walkout from the Patna meeting has been hinted at by certain sections of the AAP leadership if the Congress did



not support Kejriwal's demand. Kejriwal and Mann visited the Patna Sahib Gurudwara during their visit. In response to the developments, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit stated that Kejriwal would not be missed at the meeting if he chooses to skip it. The BJP has been capitalising on differences within the Opposition ranks and repeatedly questioning their leadership and prime ministerial face. The meeting takes place amid internal disagreements within the Opposition, with Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury staging a drama in Bengal's Murshidabad district, demanding action against Trinamool Congress activists who allegedly attacked Congress workers ahead of the State's panchayat polls. The Opposition meeting

Man gets ₹16L from builder for 5-year delay in flat possession

Delhi-based man has received around ₹16 lakh as a delay penalty from the promoter of a residential complex project in Noida that handed over the possession of a flat to him five years after the promised deadline. According to the Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA), the buyer had booked the flat in Mahagun Mezzaria in Sector 78 of Noida in 2017 and paid ₹1.35 crore to its promoter, NexGen Infracon.

"The promoter had promised to deliver the flat in December 2018. However, due to a delay in handing over the possession of the flat and with no resolution regarding the payment of a penalty, the buyer approached RERA in 2021," the authority said in a statement. Continued on Page 2

Airport Express to zoom at 110 kmph; New Delhi Stn to IGIA 16 min away



hour, passengers can now reach Airport (T-3) from New Delhi station in just 16 minutes. "This speed enhancement has also brought the airport much closer to the city centre Rajiv Chowk which is accessible within 15 minutes now. The total travel time from New Delhi to Dwarka Sec-21 metro station after the current increase will be around 20 minutes. Further, the total travel time on the entire AEL will be reduced to 19 minutes only, after the maximum speed limit of 120 kmph is ultimately implemented in coming days," it said in a statement. Continued on Page 2

Naturopathy mentioned in Vedas, Puranas: UP Guv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Governor Anandiben Patel inaugurated the 40th National Conference of the All India Naturopathy Council on the subject of 'Indian Knowledge Tradition and Gandhian Way of Naturopathy' at Gandhi Adhyayan Peeth auditorium in Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith (MGKV) here on Thursday.

Addressing the conference, the Governor said that naturopathy is an ancient system of medicine, which is mentioned in our Vedas and Puranas. 'Its emergence has happened with nature itself. It is not just a resource for the diagnosis of diseases but a philosophy of life.

The effect of the Indian system of medicine was seen during Covid pandemic where medicines were not working while herbs and yoga made invaluable contributions in saving life,' she said, adding that Gandhi has been considered the first doctor of naturopathy in the modern Indian system of medicine.

While presiding over the programme, Vice-Chancellor (V-C) of MGKV Prof AK Tyagi said that Indian knowledge tradition is amazing which needs to be presented in the right form.

'Naturopathy education is an important part of that knowledge tradition. Coordination with nature is very important in daily routine and food. There is a plan to conduct subjects related to yoga and naturopathy at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the university in the coming session,' he said.

The programme started with the offering of flowers on



Governor Anandiben Patel at a naturopathy conference at MGKV in Varanasi on Thursday.

ence and it is also based on five elements of nature, in which there is no risk. 'Naturopathy is very important in this era of environmental pollution,' he said.

The Governor also inaugurated the Kashi International

the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and 'Rashtra Ratna' Babu Shivprasad Gupta by the guests. The function was also attended by Shobhit University Chancellor Kunwar Shekhar Vijender, former MGKV VC and Director SHEPA Prof Prithvish Nag, Registrar Dr Sunita Pandey, Deputy Registrar Harishchandra, Finance Officer Santosh Kumar Sharma and Registrar of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University Rakesh Kumar. Earlier, the guests were welcomed by Prof Sushil Kumar Gautam (Director of the conference) while the vote of thanks was proposed by Prof NP Singh. The function was conducted by Dr Aarti Vishwakarma.

Art Exhibition-2023 (dedicated to Padmashree Baba Yogendra ji) organised at Ghamahapur, Gangapur under the joint aegis of Institute of Fine Arts and Sanskrit Bharti. Addressing the function there, she highlighted the need of fine arts for the proper and positive development of the society. Along with this, she gave certificates and prizes to the award-winning artists. On the occasion, IFA Director Dr Awadhesh Kumar Singh while welcoming the Governor gave detailed information about the Kashi International Art Exhibition. About 123 artists from India and abroad have registered their participation in this exhibition. Out of all the artworks that came in this exhibition, nine best creations were awarded.

After Ajit, Bhujbal stakes claim to NCP chief's post

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after senior state Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and current leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Maharashtra Assembly Ajit Pawar indirectly staked a claim for the State party president's post, senior NCP leader and former deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal said here on Thursday that an OBC leader should be considered for the State party chief's post.

A leading OBC leader and founder-President of Akhil Bhartiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad, Bhujbal made a counter-claim for the State NCP chief's post, saying: 'If the LoP is with Marathas, then the state party's chief should go to an OBC community or to a smaller community.'

Apparently alluding to remarks made by Ajitdada – as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles, Bhujbal said here on Wednesday 'Our party has internal democracy. Everyone has a right to express his right to express his opinion. We have someone who wants to occupy a different position and wants to work within the party. I also want to express my opinion. I was made the state party president in the past for a brief period of four months. As a consequence, the BJP also made an OBC leader like Babankule as the state party president.'

'Our party also has OBC leaders. We have leaders like Sunil Tatkare, Dhanjay Munde and Jitendra Awahad... If I am given responsibility in the party I will also work... I strongly feel that a leader from the OBC community should be made the state party president,' Bhujbal said.

Interestingly, party leaders like Tatkare and Awahad were vested with party posts at the national level, when NCP chief Sharad Pawar carried out an organisational re-jig on June 10.

While it is not clear yet if Bhujbal's claim for the post of state party chief is genuine one or an orchestrated one made with an intention to nullify Ajitdada's claim for the state party president's post.



On Wednesday, Ajitdada – apparently upset after Sr Pawar appointed party's senior leader Praful Patel and his daughter-

Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the State Assembly and instead he preferred to accept any responsibility in the party.

Speaking at a function organised to mark the NCP's 25th foundation day, Ajitdada – as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles – told the party leadership: 'I am not interested in continuing in the post of the leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly. Relieve me of the Opposition leader's post and give me any post in the party. I will do justice to the party post.'

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ICICI Home Finance

Corporate Office: ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ICICI HFC Tower, Andheri - Kurla Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400059, India. Branch Office: 1st floor, Vishwakarma Complex, Plot No 17/18, Behind Yashoda Hospital, Koushombi, Ghaziabad- 201010. Notice for sale of immovable assets. E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Maurya reviews progress of rural development schemes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya reviewed the progress of the schemes being run by the Rural Development department in Varanasi and Vindhya-chal (Mirzapur) divisions here on Thursday and gave necessary guidelines to the officials. Interacting with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs (heads) and block development officers (BDOs) of both the divisions, Maurya laid special emphasis on the implementation of public welfare schemes with quality and timeliness as per the intention of the government to help the public get their benefits properly and quickly.

He stressed the need for better coordination between the BDOs and block pramukhs so that the projects can progress well. 'The work of MNRREGA should be ensured through the blocks in any case. Gram Pradhans, Gram Vikas Adhikaris and Gram Panchayat Adhikaris regularly sit jointly and review the progress of works among themselves,' he said, adding that now there should be talk of smart village, so that the development of the villages can be done with the schemes of the government on the basis of priority.

'Corruption-free governance and development of the last person are the aims of the present government,' he said, asking the concerned officers to



Deputy CM KP Maurya reviewing progress of rural development schemes in Varanasi on Thursday.

ensure availability of water in Amrit Sarovars. 'By identifying 100 backward blocks deprived of development in the state, the government will pay full attention to them so that they too can be brought up in terms of development,' Maurya said. Regarding the problems of paucity of funds in small gram sabhas, the CDOs and BDOs were asked to suggest measures so that their development could be ensured.

While interacting with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs, many apprised Maurya of the

problems in their areas apart from raising demands of some development works. Maurya said that after the formation of our government at the centre in 2014 and in the state in 2017, there has been rapid progress in development. 'No obstacle in development will be accepted. The government will make efforts in this direction that the elections of district panchayat and kshetra panchayat pramukhs should also be held directly through the public,' he said. On the occasion, UP Minister of State (Independent

Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal, Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLAs Saurabh Srivastava, Dr Awadhesh Singh, Tribhuvan Ram and Sunil Patel, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, District Magistrate S Rajalingam, senior officers of the Rural Development department were present along with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs of both the divisions. The programme was coordinated by Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal.

Sena (UBT) accuses Shinde's family of role in Covid-19 fake bill scam

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided 14 locations in Mumbai, including the premises of those close to him and his party leader Aaditya Thackeray in connection with an alleged Covid-19 scam related money laundering case, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP and spokesperson Sanjay Raut on Thursday charged that the family members of Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde benefitted from a scam of severe crore of rupees in his home district of Thane.

Talking to media persons here, the Sena (UBT) spokesperson alleged that Shinde's family members were involved in were related purported fake bills which were issued by certain companies for Covid-19 facilities at Thane and the neighbouring Kalyan-Dombivali towns.

'I am speaking on the basis of evidence. Fake bills for crores of rupees were raised for providing the facilities. The alleged fake billing benefited Shinde's family at that time,' Raut said, adding that the ruling Shiv Sena should first introspect themselves and their alleged involvement in the scam before hurling allegations at others.'

Raut's allegation came on the heels of the ED raiding several locations in connection with the Covid-19 scam related money laundering case and also the State government's decision to order an SIT probe into the large-scale financial irregularities that took place during the Covid-19 period.

Rush on last day of Rathayatra Mela

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Despite a good rain that gave a lot of relief to the people from heatwave and cloudy weather conditions, rush was seen on the last day of the three-day famous Rathayatra Mela here on Thursday. During the wee hours on Friday, the idols of Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, whose idols were kept on the traditional wooden Rath (chariot) based on 14 wheels and placed near Rathayatra crossing, were brought back to Jagannath temple at Assi to mark the conclusion of the festival. On the last day, good number of locals reached there and offered prayers. Many of them also pulled the Rath to seek the blessings of the Almighty.

With the wish of public welfare, the activists of Namami



Namami Gange activists offering aarti on last day of Rathayatra Mela in Varanasi on Thursday.

Gange led by its regional coordinator (Kashi) Rajesh Shukla also reached there and performed the aarti of Lord Jagannath. They also distrib-

uted saplings of Tulsi plant and jute bags to give the message of environmental protection. They appealed to the shopkeepers there not to use poly-

these bags. Shukla also appealed to the visitors to keep the city clean saying that all types of worship are incomplete without cleanliness.

City co-coordinator Bina Gupta, city in-charge Pushpalata Verma, Sunita Jaiswal, Rita Patel, Geeta Sachdeva, Nidhi Agrawal, Krishnamohan Pandey, Suryanshu Shukla and many others were also present.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made in the fair areas during the last three days and no vehicles were allowed to move to Rathayatra crossing from any of the corners including Bhelupur, Luxa, Mahmoorganj and Siga. The history of this fair is old as since 1802 it has been celebrated here. In 1780, Pandit Nityanand, the chief priest and manager of Jagannath temple in Puri visited this holy city and then set up a temple of Lord Jagannath near Assi.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Democracy at gunpoint

Violence is rampant and threats are flying in the air in West Bengal before the panchayat elections

After the Supreme Court's Vacation Bench's decision to uphold the Calcutta High Court decision, West Bengal would have the Panchayat elections under the shadow of central security forces. The central forces would ensure free and fair panchayat elections on July 8. They would not be deployed on the polling stations alone but across the state to maintain law and order. The SC Bench maintained that the state has a "history of violence" during local polls. The Panchayat elections in Bengal are a mammoth exercise involving elections to 75,000-odd seats. The polling would take place across 61,636 booths in the State in just one day. The supreme court maintains that "Holding an election cannot be a license for violence." The supreme court order effectively takes away the state's role in maintaining the law and order in the state. The apex court summarily rejected the West Bengal contention that only 189 booths out of 61,000 were identified as sensitive and ignored the fact that the State had over 50,000 police personnel to watch over the 189 booths. It is unfortunate that the courts have to intervene at every step to ensure free and fair elections which is ideally the duty of the election commission which can direct the central and the state government to make adequate arrangements for providing an atmosphere where people can cast their vote without fear.

But, there is definitely merit in Congress's contention that there is an atmosphere of fear in the state. Around 4,800 candidates - 1,500 of them from BJP backed off from contesting panchayat elections on the last day for withdrawal of nominations; many of them citing "pressure" as a reason for their withdrawal. Now just over 2 lakh contestants are left in the fray amid continued violence in some rural pockets. Five Congress workers, including a former MLA, were wounded in a clash in front of the block development office at Murshidabad's Burwan after goons snatched poll documents from candidates. BJP and Congress drove candidates into party offices or set up camps to protect them from TMC cadres who were allegedly threatening them to withdraw their candidature. A total of 670 Independents, mostly disgruntled TMC workers who had decided to go solo after being denied tickets, also backed out of the poll. The situation is so bad that Bengal Congress chief Adhir Chowdhury sat in protest outside the BDO's office, accusing "TMC-backed miscreant" of fomenting trouble to win seats in Burwan. The violence in West Bengal's Panchayat elections is a grim reminder of the challenges faced by the democratic process. Breaking this cycle of violence requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses political polarisation and strengthens law enforcement. The Onus lies with the Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who should ensure that TMC cadre does not hamper the voting process. Bengal is one of the few states in the country where grassroots democracy thrives but it must be ensured that it is free and fair and not achieved through intimidation which smears the whole process.

PICTALK



A foreign tourist with a camel on World Camel Day, in Bikaner

The question of accountability

The very foundation on which democracies thrive is the rule of law, and that hinges on the simple premise that nobody is above the law



DEEPAK SINHA

Comparisons of where we stand in the rankings as a democracy, based on the likes of the Economist's Democracy Index, are obviously subjective and possibly biased to an extent. The only test that truly counts in these matters is whether those elected can be held accountable for actions while in office. The very foundation on which democracies thrive is the rule of law, which is premised on the belief that actions have consequences and nobody is above the law.

Former President Trump is finally learning this the hard way. Facing trial for allegedly stealing classified government documents, which if proved, may well see him behind bars. This is what accountability looks like in a working democracy, though Americans are not without their own set of challenges. Mr Trump remains extremely popular with the vast majority in the Republican Party, mainly white Anglo-Saxons, who, fearful that their power is rapidly slipping away as the country becomes more diverse, are willing to overlook his transgressions and forego their democratic values.

On applying similar norms to ourselves, despite our claims of being the largest democracy, we are clearly on life-support. Blatant obfuscation of facts, police connivance and judicial apathy, to give the judiciary the benefit of the doubt, ensure that our leaders are never held accountable, however revolting, corrupt or self-serving their actions may have been. In fact, the rule of law remains a mirage for the vast majority of our citizens. Examples over the years are too numerous to quote, the latest being that of Mr Brij Bhushan, the Chairman Wrestling Federation of India, and his alleged misbehaviour with women wrestlers.

Similarly, heads have not rolled over the tragic Orissa train accident. A foreign hand is suspected of sabotage, opening an escape avenue for those responsible. The fact that the Railway Board had pointed out shortcomings in the maintenance of signalling equipment that led to five similar incidents earlier, of vary-



ing degrees of seriousness, has been blithely ignored. As has been the CAGs report points out the misuse of funds, meant for maintenance and replacement of tracks, on items unconnected to maintenance. Despite this rather grim state of affairs, the Railways are busy promoting the Prime Minister's pet project, flagging off more Vande Bharat train sets, travel on which, to use Mr Tharoor's obnoxious phrase, the 'Cattle Classes', can ill afford. Instead of accepting responsibility and resigning, the railway minister seems comfortable, shamelessly meddling in the CBI investigation.

For that matter take the events unfolding in Manipur. Clearly, this is the "Bhindranwale moment" for Mr Modi's government, as their man on the spot has gone rogue. Allegations that the Chief Minister, Mr Biren Singh's, tacit support of hard-line Meitei groups has turned an insurgency on its last legs into a full-fledged ethno-religious civil war, akin to events in Africa, are being bandied about. Manipur's economic progress has now hit a wall, and events here will spread like wildfire to the rest of the North East, adversely impacting security in this strategic region. The influence wielded by tribal loyalties and trans-border criminal enterprises,

involved in drugs and arms smuggling and human trafficking, should not be underestimated.

In military circles, civil war is seen as the culmination of any insurgency, with insurgents confident enough to forsake guerrilla tactics and take on government forces head-on, with secession being their ultimate goal. While the situation in Manipur may not yet be so dire, instances of militants, especially Meitei Groups, confronting Army/Assam Rifle contingents openly have been reported. Undoubtedly, the huge quantity of sophisticated arms "looted" from police armouries gives these militants confidence, as must the fact that the military has not been given a free hand to act.

Yet, despite the ongoing violence, the significance of the government has made no serious efforts to salvage the situation, by either sacking the Chief Minister or declaring President's Rule, as well as the Prime Minister's unwillingness to engage or address the situation cannot be lost on anybody. Ironically enough, he has offered to mediate between Ukraine and Russia and his loquaciousness on his American sojourn is difficult to miss. Clearly, the government appears to be complicit in pushing through some mis-

conceived ideological agenda, despite the cost to the Nation, a cost that our Security Forces and citizens will continue to pay in blood and shattered lives in the coming months and years.

Let there also be no doubt that given the strategic importance of the region, it is only a matter of time before the Chinese commence pouring oil on troubled waters, if they have already not begun doing so. It seems that the Prime Minister is deliberately avoiding involving himself, in the vain hope that either the troubles will resolve themselves over time, or they can be left to his underlings to solve. Like many before him, he appears to have fallen into the Nehru trap of wanting to gain international recognition and respect by focusing on larger issues afflicting our world. Unsurprisingly, just like Nehru, he is likely to be overwhelmed by firestorms at home and find his legacy tarnished by his reluctance to confront China as it continues with its depredations on our sovereignty.

(The author, a military veteran is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with Peninsula Foundation, Chennai)



LET THERE ALSO BE NO DOUBT THAT GIVEN THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION, IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE CHINESE COMMENCE POURING OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEEP WOUND

Sir — It's heartwarming to see Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi said that the ongoing violence in Manipur had left a "deep wound" on the conscience of the nation. Like every peace-loving citizen, Ms Sonia Gandhi also said that she was "deeply saddened" to see people "forced to flee" (when "our brothers and sisters who have coexisted peacefully turn against each other") from their homes, and leave behind all that they had built over their lifetime. Sonia Gandhi very rightly said that she could understand the pain the people of Manipur were going through being a mother herself, and appealed to the women of the state to lead the way in bringing peace.

Whereas, our Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi who gives 'gyan' (sermons) on so many issues has sadly not said a word for over 50 days on the tragedy that has engulfed the state. More shockingly even the PM has not given an appointment to representatives of political parties who sought time from him and has given no indication whatsoever that he even cares or is concerned. Modi may have forgotten that when under his nose Gujarat carnage had continued, in that period then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited a riot-shaken Gujarat and advised then Chief Minister, Narendra Modi to follow 'Raj dharma'. Alas! There is nothing wrong if one said his behaviour in Manipur is most shocking and beyond comprehension. Without a doubt, Manipur is burning today because of the divisive politics of the RSS/BJP. Hope, after the US and Egypt visit Modi not only opens his mouth and also follows the 'Raj dharma' to save a beautiful double-engine state.

Bidyut K Chatterjee | Faridabad

DELHI ORDINANCE

Sir — Before holding a high-intensity meeting in Patna about the 2024 general election led by Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Delhi's Chief

India lashes out at China



India hit out at China for blocking a move to designate Pakistan-based LeT leader Sajid Mir as a "global terrorist" the UN, saying it shows a lack of genuine political will to fight the scourge of terrorism. China on Tuesday blocked a proposal moved by the US and co-designated by India to blacklist Mir under the 1267 AI Qaida Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council as a global terrorist and subject him to assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo. Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist Mir is wanted for his involvement in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. In a strongly-worded statement, Joint Secretary

Minister Arvind Kejriwal convinced the non-BJP government for supporting Rajya Sabha the Transfer Posting bill. He blamed the BJP for wanting to snatch all power from the opposition, it will be tried in Delhi even if a verdict in favour of Delhi's people was given by the Court. But it was overturned by the Centre through the ordinance. When this law comes in the Rajya Sabha, it should not be allowed to pass under any circumstances. If they succeed in Delhi, automatically it would be imposed in all non-BJP states.

Md Ismayeel | Mumbai

ADIEU SYLVESTER DACUNHA

Sir — The passing away of Advertising-czar Sylvester daCunha, who was behind the iconic creation of the 'Amul Girl', with the tagline Utterly Butterly Delicious, is a huge loss to the advertising industry. For close to six decades, the Amul Girl's charismatic appeal has

made it into hoardings and on the front pages of Indian newspapers to stay in the hearts of millions of Indians. It was Dr Kurien, the late Chairman of Amul, who suggested a mischievous little girl as a mascot for the product, and the rest is history. Thanks to Sylvester daCunha, the 77-year-old brand which is synonymous with butter and has made its way into the kitchen of every Indian house, has a lot to do with the blue-haired girl with long lashes, in a polka-dotted dress. A brand doesn't stay relevant just by its logo or a celebrity endorsing it. It needs to consistently cater to the audience uniquely, and the concept of 'Amul Girl', linked with current topics, has caught the eye of the Indians powerfully and still does so.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Smart home technologies that raise your home's IQ

By automating and connecting devices in your home, you can enjoy more convenience, comfort, and control in your living environment

As a homeowner in today's world, you have access to technology that can raise your home's IQ and transform the way you live. Smart home technology is enhancing homes with automated systems, energy management, and security features that provide convenience, efficiency, and peace of mind. The rise of smart homes is rapidly changing the real estate landscape as more homeowners demand intelligent living spaces. If you want to keep up with the latest trends in home automation and experience an upgraded lifestyle, integrating smart home technology into your space may be the next step. With smart home devices and systems becoming increasingly affordable, accessible, and advanced, now is the perfect time to make your place a little bit smarter.



home security systems provide enhanced protection for homeowners. With features like smart doorbells, security cameras, and motion sensors, homeowners can monitor their property remotely and receive real-time alerts on their smartphones.

Building Management: Smart home technology enables centralized control and management of various aspects of a building. Building automation systems can regulate lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, ensuring optimal comfort and energy efficiency.

Unmatched Luxury: From voice-controlled virtual assistants that can manage various tasks to automated blinds and curtains, smart homes offer unparalleled

comfort and sophistication. **Parking Solutions:** Smart parking solutions are becoming increasingly popular in the Indian real estate industry. Automated parking systems utilize sensors and advanced algorithms to optimize parking space utilization, reducing congestion and providing a seamless parking experience.

By automating and connecting devices in your home, you can enjoy more convenience, comfort, and control in your living environment. While the initial investment may be high, smart home technology can provide long-term savings, security, and energy efficiency benefits for homeowners. The rise of smart homes is transforming the way we live and interact in our homes. As a homeowner, reducing energy usage and costs is likely a top priority. Smart home technology allows you to efficiently manage energy consumption through automated control and monitoring systems. Smart lighting systems, such as Philips Hue, allow you to control lights remotely or on a schedule. Smart garage doors can also

be opened or closed from anywhere. While the initial costs of a smart home system may seem high, the long-term savings in energy, security, and insurance can offset expenses over time. The advanced automation and convenience these technologies provide are invaluable. For homeowners looking to improve home efficiency, smart home systems are an investment in the future that will pay off for years to come.

Smart home security provides an added layer of protection and peace of mind. With smart locks, you can control who has access and when. The latest technology integrated into smart security systems helps make your home as safe as possible. The rise of smart homes is transforming how we live and interact with our properties. Though technology will continue progressing, a smart home allows you to keep up with the pace of change and have an intelligent, forward-thinking space to call your own. The future is automated, and smart homes are leading the way. (The writer is Director & Co-Founder InfraMantra.)



GARVIT TIWARI

FIRST COLUMN

INDIA-US RELATIONS:
HEADING NORTHPM's state visit takes India-US
relations to the next

KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

It was nearly a decade and a half ago, when US President Barack Obama, chose to have PM Manmohan Singh as the first state visit of his administration, thereby underlining a significant upgrade to the India-US bilateral relationship. Many officials at that time had described the invite to India, not as an accident but as a carefully thought gesture, to bring a friend closer to Asia. 2009 wasn't the time when the US-China relationship, or the India-China bilateral was unstable, yet, both countries realised the future threat and started deepening their bonds.

This week the spectacle that unravelled before citizens of both countries with PM Modi's state visit to the US, the address by the Indian PM to the joint Congress, the curated business meetings with top CEOs and the rock star level diaspora events, are a couple of decades of relationship reset, now, visible. It may be worth remembering that just two and half decades back India was under US sanctions and there was almost a diplomatic freeze in relations, haunted by memories from the cold war. There was resistance (perhaps there is still some resonance of the initial fears) nursed by some old-world think tanks, academicians and strategists on both sides.



However, the relationship, one which is transformational and crafted for the 21st century has been expanded to include a vast spectrum of shared interests, which are difficult to be ignored in the next couple of decades. The political economy of both democracies has also accepted the new reality and there is bipartisan support for enhanced closer India-US partnership.

If one of the key opposition leaders, Rahul Gandhi was in the US a fortnight before the PM's visit, engaging with think tanks, government officials and the diaspora on the state of Indian democracy, the US congressional leaders meanwhile, led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives Mr Kevin McCarthy and Senate Majority leader Mr Charles Schumer, extended a rare invite for an Indian PM to address the joint sitting of congress, for the second time. The political message was loud, both countries acknowledge the relevance of each other in the new world order.

This state visit underscored the shift in India-US bilateral from primarily being focussed on a strategic defence partnership to taking giant steps towards a meaningful technology partnership. As PM Modi in his remarks before flying to the US noted "India-US ties are multifaceted, with deepening engagements across sectors. The USA is India's largest trade partner in goods and services. We collaborate closely in science & technology, education, health, defence and security fields. The initiative on Critical & Emerging Technologies has added new dimensions and widened collaboration to defence industrial cooperation, space, telecom, quantum, Artificial Intelligence and biotech sectors."

One of the most significant fillips to this new age partnership has been the creation of iCET (initiative on critical and emerging technologies), a platform, supervised by the Indian Prime minister and US President's office directly. US National security advisor, said "ICET is foundational, fundamental, critical because we believe that the future of our economies, societies security sectors will be determined by the extent to which we can effectively harness emerging technologies on behalf of our people and on behalf of our national interests." The markers have been set, the sprinters are in position, and perhaps the gunshot has been fired for the long haul US India cross country run for decades to come.

(The writer is a policy analyst.
The views expressed are personal)

MSP guarantee will
spell disaster for farmers

UTTAM GUPTA

The hapless farmers must be liberated from the stranglehold of cartel licenced
traders by giving them options to sell their produce wherever they want

Union leaders may have called off farmers' agitation in Haryana over Minimum Support Price (MSP) for sunflower seeds following the State government's decision to agree to their demand. However, they maintain that their protest for securing legal guarantees for MSP across the country will continue.

A legal guarantee for MSP was a major demand of the farmers mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh during the year-long protest in 2020/2021 over the three Central farm laws. That protest ended when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on November 19, 2021, the repeal of those laws. Do the farmers understand the implications of this demand? MSP is a "minimum price" for any crop that the government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of "support". It fixes MSP for 23 crops grown in Kharif and Rabi seasons based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a statutory body that works under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

The agencies of the government, such as the Food Corporation of India (FCI), buy wheat, rice/paddy, and coarse cereals, from farmers at the MSP. They also purchase other crops such as pulses and oilseeds which are procured by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED). However, not all crops for which MSP is announced are purchased.

The procurement of food crops by state agencies is meant for giving to over 800 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) at a subsidized price of Rs 1/2/3 per kg. The excess of MSP, plus handling, storage and distribution costs over this price is paid as a subsidy by the government.

The government pays MSP to farmers under an 'executive order' introduced in the 1960s. It is not backed by any law. What would happen if the government decides to give a legal guarantee for MSP? The farmers would want it for all 23 crops for which MSP is fixed. The demand could be extended to cover all crops; in fact the entire agricultural produce.

Today, apart from government agencies, farmers' produce is picked up by private traders, processors, aggregators, exporters etc. When there is a law on MSP requiring that no purchase can be made at a price less than this minimum, they will all be scared of buying from farmers. Who will take the risk of landing in jail? A big chunk of private players (in fact, 'all') would desert farmers. The latter will be stuck with the crop only to rot in the fields. The ball doesn't stop here.

In view of a sizeable chunk of the crop produce not coming to the market (inevitable when there is no purchase/sale by private entities), there would be acute shortage resulting in an 'astronomical' rise in food prices and inflation. No measure fiscal or monetary aimed at reining in price rise would work. In such a scenario, farmers would expect the government/agencies to pick up their entire produce albeit at MSP - pointing at the 'legal guarantee'. Can the



AT APMC MANDI, A CARTEL OF LICENSED TRADERS AND COMMISSION AGENTS KNOWN AS ARTISANS RULE THE ROOST. THEY MAKE SURE THAT THE FARMER DOESN'T GET A FAIR PRICE

(The writer is a policy analyst)



latter respond to their call? This is next to impossible.

The value of agricultural produce being about Rs 33,00,000 crore (estimated level for 2023-24), the Union government will have to spend nearly 75 per cent of its annual budget of Rs 45,00,000 crore (2023-24) on buying farmers' agri-produce. The remaining amount Rs 12,00,000 crore won't pay for bare essentials such as defence, maintaining law and order and payment of wages and salaries forget infrastructure, other development works and running welfare schemes.

Hundreds of thousands of crore are spent every year on subsidies for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, irrigation, seeds, credit etc. All this goes towards helping farmers reduce production costs. With little money left after paying MSP, all this support would cease. Apart from financing, state agencies don't have the wherewithal to handle and store even the 'limited' quantities currently procured by them leading to huge wastages. One shudder at the very thought of a scenario where they will have to procure, handle and store the mountain of produce farmers offer for sale.

A related question is what would the state agencies do with this stuff? They can't hang on to it forever. The stock has to be offloaded to private trade sooner than later. This will entail huge losses due to sales at below MSP and the cost of handling and carrying it as long as they hold. These losses will have to be paid from tax payer's money. Moreover,

this will be a totally avoidable distraction for the government whose prime responsibility is delivering on governance.

There will be other collateral damage. Under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), aggregate measurement support (AMS) - a WTO nomenclature for agricultural subsidies - is capped at 10 per cent of the value of agricultural production for a developing country. If a member country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, it is a violation. Already, with limited purchases from farmers, India is facing a daunting challenge at the WTO due to AMS exceeding the 10 per cent threshold. Imagine, what would happen when the government/agencies buy the entire produce from farmers albeit at MSP? Defending our subsidies at WTO would become impossible.

It is abundantly clear that a legal guarantee for the purchase of farmers' produce at MSP is a despicable idea. The government should not even look at it. True, farmers don't get a good price. But, a solution to that problem lies elsewhere. The state laws viz. APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) Act permit the sale of agri - produce only at designated APMC mandis whose capacity is extremely limited. These mandis can't even cope with the quantities brought by large farmers even as small and marginal farmers who constitute 86 per cent of total land-owning farmers are forced to come to private local markets where 'sales are legally barred'.

At APMC mandis, a cartel of licensed traders and commission agents (known as artisans in local parlance, their job is to facilitate transactions between farmer and the buyer) rules the roost. They make sure that the farmer doesn't get a fair price. At local markets also, this very cartel forces the more vulnerable farmers (read: small and marginal) to sell their crops at throwaway prices. Having come to the mandi travelling a long distance, the poor fellow has no option but to sell and get whatever is possible.

All that needed to be done was to liberate hapless farmers from the stranglehold of this cartel by giving them 'multiple options' to sell their produce wherever they like. This is precisely what the three farm laws sought to do. Unquestionably, farmers would have got a good price probably even higher than MSP depending on the demand-supply scenario while artisans/traders needed to surrender a portion of their hefty margin. But, the latter masquerading as champions of the former spearheaded a year-long protest forcing Modi to withdraw the laws. The Supreme Court (SC) did its bit in letting this happen.

Meanwhile, Modi - government has taken several steps including an increase in MSP, hiking fertilizer subsidies and so on to help farmers but all this comes to naught as long as they remain strangled. The irony is that these very saboteurs castigate the Prime Minister for not fulfilling his promise of 'doubling farmers' income'.

Opposition must embrace political nationalism

The Opposition habitually opposes any decision taken by the government. It does not come up with positive agenda for the progress of the nation

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had gate crashed into an ongoing presser at the Press Club of India in the politically fragile months of 2013. He tore apart a copy of an Ordinance promulgated to get around the Supreme Court verdict on barring elected representatives convicted with a jail term of two or more years. At that time Manmohan Singh, the prime minister who headed the UPA-II, was visiting the US on an official visit.

The political impulses of Rahul Gandhi sent him on a path to rob the credibility of the prime minister of the day. Manmohan Singh was rumoured to have seriously considered resigning from the office. But he was persuaded to stay in the office. It is an irony



SUMEET BHASIN

(Author is a political analyst.
Views expressed are personal)

that Rahul Gandhi went on the US visit 10 days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official tour of Washington. Not heeding the political consensus that domestic politics should not seek foreign shores for mud-slinging, Rahul Gandhi launched personal attacks on PM Modi. The comparison of the two incidents is too relevant to ignore to read the prevailing mood of Indian politics.

The opposition parties have decided to hold a meeting in Patna on June 23. Even before the meeting takes place, the leaders from the opposition camp have begun saying that their agenda is not to win the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The agenda of the opposition parties is clearly negative. It

also clear that the opposition parties seek to cause political instability in the country, as has been the habit of the Congress.

India is projected by the United Nations to emerge as the most populous nation in the world. Demographic bias favours the youth. The young population of India is aspirational. This section looks upon the political class to fulfil their aspirations. The opposition parties could have considered positive agenda for the aspirational people. Yet, it's not a surprise for the political observers in the country. The opposition parties are in a compulsive obsession with negative agenda. For them, it's immaterial that India is holding the G20 presidency. For them, it's also immaterial that India is emerging as an economic power-

house. For the opposition parties, what matters most is the question, of how to stop Modi from becoming the prime minister of the country once more after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Former Prime Minister H D S Deve Gowda also faced the no-confidence motion. At that time, the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was the leader of the opposition, had asked the Congress to shed light on circumstances leading to the motion in the Lok Sabha, as several internationally significant events were taking place in the country. Late Vajpayee had wondered in his speech while taking part in the debate on the motion that the timing of the event was perplexing. It begs an answer and the opposition parties must answer

that India is hosting the presidency of not only G20 but also of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and yet they invented reasons to boycott the inauguration of the new building of Parliament. Former Prime Minister H D S Deve Gowda did not join the boycott call and he very strongly rejected the move of the opposition parties.

The opposition parties cannot just invent reasons to disrupt historical events such as the inauguration of the new Parliament building. This politics of boycott has ulterior motives. This was proved as the chief ministers of the states ruled by the opposition parties stayed away from the eighth meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog, which was held at the newly-

built convention centre at the Pragati Maidan.

India is now a \$3.5 trillion economy. India will hit the \$5 trillion economy milestone in the next few years going ahead of Germany to become the fourth-largest economy. By 2047, India is aspiring to become the second-largest economy. There are 25 years before us to achieve the goal.

Modi's agenda for the country is before the people. The onus is on the opposition parties to reveal their agenda. To state that their agenda is to just stop Modi from becoming the prime minister of the country once more will be disrespectful to the people, as they want positive agenda from the political parties, as well as a credible roadmap to bring definitive changes in their

lives. The Opposition unity is not a new slogan. The people in Uttar Pradesh saw it in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and they gave a verdict against the politics of negative agenda.

The Gandhi Peace Award was bestowed upon the Geeta Press for years of selfless service. Yet, the Opposition faulted the decision of the government without any cogent reason. The message is clear that the Opposition will just oppose any decision taken by the government. At the same time, the Opposition falls short of bringing a positive agenda for the progress of the nation. This calls for introspection from the leaders of the constituents of the Opposition camp to ponder what agenda they have to offer to the people of the country who are aspirational.

Indian contingent cross 50-medal mark at Special Olympics World Summer Games

PTI ■ BERLIN
The Indian contingent continued its medal rush at the Special Olympics World Summer Games, crossing the 50-medal mark here.
At the end of the day's action, SO Bharat had 55 medals, including 15 gold, 27 silver, 13 bronze spread across five different sports -- athletics, cycling, powerlifting, roller skating and swimming.
India registered five medals in swimming (3 golds, 1 silver and, 1 bronze) and six on the cycling course (3 Gold, 2 silver, one bronze) on Wednesday.
Every member of the cycling team won a medal with Neel Yadav being the first to do so with a bronze in the 5km road race.
Later Yadav, Shivani and Indu Prakash won golds in the 1km time trial, while Kalpana Jena, and Jayaseela Arbuttharaj took home the silver.
In the pool, India's medals almost doubled in number



thanks to the exploits of the freestyle swimmers, Diksha Jitendra Shirgaonkar, Pooja Giridharrao Gaikavada and Prashadhi Kamble winning golds, with Madhav Madan adding another medal to his tally (gold, 25m freestyle) and Sidhanth Murali Kumar winning bronze in the 25m freestyle.
Among others, Sonepat's Saket Kundu won silver in the mini javelin Level B.
The Little Angels School student is a multi-sport athlete, who has competed in table tennis, figure skating and athletics at the national level.
Among the probables for the 2023 Special Olympics World Winter Games, Kundu lost his chance to represent India when the Games were cancelled.
Shrugging his disappointment off he switched to mini javelin, an event that made its debut at the World Games in Berlin, and his medal was the first India has won in the event.

Rayaan wins bronze in Asian U-21 snooker

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Indian cueist Rayaan Razmi signed off with a bronze medal after suffering a heart-breaking 3-4 defeat at the hands of Milad Pourali Darehchi of Iran in the semi-finals of the Asian Under-21 Snooker Championship in Tehran, Iran.
The 21-year-old Mumbai-based cueist had topped Group-D and finished as the top ranked player in the knockout phase.
However, Darehchi on Wednesday managed to clinch the semifinal with the frame scores reading 23-86, 80-50, 71-11, 1-81, 24-59, 47-33 and 70-32 in his favour.
Pakistan's Ahsan Ramzan emerged champion after recording an authoritative 5-2 win.
The Pakistan cueist compiled breaks of 47 and 52 during his 48-46, 70-5, 61-6, 62-29, 30-71, 55-67 and 101-27 victory in the summit clash.
Rayaan started on a promising note, rolling in a break of 75 points to pocket the first frame, but was unable to carry on the momentum and lost the next two to trail 1-2.
He constructed a break of 41 to win the fourth frame before taking the fifth to gain a 3-2 lead. But, the Iranian showed great fighting qualities to win a tight sixth frame to level the frame scores at 3-all and take the contest the distance.
In the decider, Rayaan once again failed to grab his chances while Milad pounced on every opportunity and with small efforts gathers the points to come out on top.
Ahsan defeated Tirdad Azadipour of Iran 4-2 in the other semi-final.
Earlier, Rayaan with breaks of 60 and 75 beat compatriot Ranveer Duggal 4-1 (70-50, 110-27, 49-86, 100-4 and 75-0 in the quarter-finals.
Results:
Semifinals: Rayaan Razmi (IND) lost to Milad Pourali Darehchi (IRN) 3-4, Ahsan Ramzan (PAK) beat Tirdad Azadipour (IRN) 4-2.

Lebanon start campaign with 2-0 win over Bangladesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Strong contenders Lebanon opened their SAFF Championship campaign with a nervy 2-0 win over former champions Bangladesh at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Thursday.
Hassan Maatouk netted the all-important goal in the 74th minute for Lebanon while Khalil Bader added a second in the injury time. But before those decisive moments, both the teams traded blows in equal measures to keep the match in balance.
Despite the massive gulf between the teams in the FIFA Rankings - Lebanon are 99th and Bangladesh stand at 192 - there was no dearth of excitement in the match.
The first half, though, was relatively less eventful as the teams could have been sussing up each other and the turf. Lebanon was the more dominant team in that phase as they created a couple of chances but lacked the finesse to convert them.
However, the nature and speed of play changed considerably in the second half. Both Lebanon and Bangladesh went at full tilt to break the deadlock.
As the intensity of the play went up, there were few



rough moves too by either side. Referee John Crystal had to pull out yellow cards twice in quick succession to book Ali Tneich of Lebanon and Bishwanath Ghosh of Bangladesh for some harsh tackling.
The first clear chance post the half-time came Lebanon's way. Zein Al Farran received a quick pass from the left-wing and evaded a couple of Bangladesh defenders, but could not go past the stretched arms of goalkeeper Anisur Rahman.
Lebanon custodian Ali Sabeh was also pressed into service very soon as he had to put his body on the line to save an advancing Mohammad Foysal, who was stopped a kick away from netting the goal.
Foysal was the standout player for Bangladesh as he remained a constant threat through his speedy runs.

Rose seeking to follow win in her pro debut with major at Women's PGA

AP ■ SPRINGFIELD
After stunning women's golf by winning in her first event as professional, Rose Zhang will try to take the next big step when she goes for her first major victory in the Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol.
And it's been just a month in the making for the 20-year-old Californian, who many believed was going to be the next big celebrity in her sport, similar to when Annika Sorenstam and Lorena Ochoa returned in a two-year span ending in 2010.
Zhang has gone from winning her second straight NCAA individual title to turning professional and then living up to all the hype by winning the Mizuho Americas Open earlier this month. It made her the first LPGA Tour winner in a pro debut in 72 years.
What followed was whirlwind of national television appearances, phone and in-person interviews, endorsement offers and then back to Stanford for a study week and finals, including a tough computer science test, in which all she wanted was to get a passing grade. She passed.
After some rest at home and little work on her game, Zhang



returns to work Thursday, when she takes on a field that includes all 11 LPGA Tour winners this year in the second major in women's golf.
While that might intimidate some, not Zhang. Walking up the microphone on Wednesday, there was a wide smile on her face. When the questions fol-

lowed, she was personable, humble, thoughtful and composed, a breathe of fresh air for any athlete.
"Biggest adjustment, I will say that I haven't been able to work on my game as much as I was able to before as an amateur," Zhang said.
"There's a lot more obligations that you have to do as a professional. You have a lot more press interviews, conferences, and it does take a lot out of you and a lot out of your time and energy. Therefore, I haven't been able to grind like I usually have been."
Grinding for Zhang was going out on the range and smashing balls around for four hours. She hasn't done that recently because she was tired after a long college season and then the move into the pro ranks. This week is more fine tuning for the fourth women's event in New Jersey in seven weeks. Other than handling the demands on her time, Zhang believes she has not changed much. She credits that to her family and friends, who have not changed in their approach to her.
Socially, she is getting more tweets, including one from Warriors guard Steph Curry, one of her role models growing up. It left her speechless.

Vidhatri takes massive 9-shot lead in 9th leg of Hero WPGT

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Vidhatri Urs is all set to join the elite list of amateurs to register a win on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour even before joining the pro ranks as she built up a massive nine shot lead with just one round to go in the ninth leg of the 2023 season at the Prestige Golfshire here on Thursday.
Following up on her first round 7-under 65, Vidhatri, whose best on the Hero WPGT as an amateur has been a third place finish, added a 5-under 67 to get to 12-under 132, while rookie pro Kriti Chowhan added even par 72 to her first



round 69 to get to 141.
Lying third was another amateur Saanvi Somu, who shot 69 after her first round 73. She was tied third alongside Sachika Singh (70-72) and Seher Atwal (69-73).
Jasmine Shekar (69), Sneha Singh (72) and Jyotsana Singh (72) were sixth, seventh and eighth respectively, while Hitaashee Bakshi (70), Ananya Datar (71) and Shweta Mansingh (73) were all tied ninth with a total of 146.
After a great first round, Vidhatri was once again fast off the blocks with birdies on first, third and fifth and added a fourth on eighth to make the turn in 4-under. A birdie on 12th was followed by a bogey on 14th and then she closed the day with a birdie on 18th for a 67. In two days Vidhatri has dropped just one shot per day while picking up 14 birdies.
Kriti had four birdies against two bogeys and a double. Saanvi, another promising amateur, had four birdies on the front nine and two more on the back stretch but she dropped one shot on the third and two more on the back nine for a 69.
Sachika had three birdies on the front nine but three bogeys on the back nine negated that in her 72.



IOC banishes boxing governing body from Olympics, but sport will still be at Paris Games

AP ■ GENEVA
The International Boxing Association was banished from the Olympic family on Thursday, ending a years-long dispute fuelled by defying advice and instructions from the IOC. Boxing, however, will keep its status as an Olympic sport at the 2024 Paris Games.
The International Olympic Committee voted to de-recognize the IBA at a specially called meeting - an outcome that was inevitable after being recommended two weeks ago by the executive board, a body chaired by IOC president Thomas Bach.
The vote was 69-1, with 10 members abstaining.
Boxing was never really in danger of being kicked out of the Olympics over the four years since the IOC suspended the sport's governing body in an effort to force changes.
"We highly value the sport of boxing. We have an extremely serious problem with IBA because of their governance," Bach told IOC members during their online meeting.
The dispute centered on the IBA's management under pres-

Chhetri defies age, conditions to produce masterclass

PTI ■ BENGALURU
A huge banner tied across the West Block Blues Stand read: 'Immortal No 11'. It was a heartfelt tribute to Sunil Chhetri by the fans, who cheered every move the Indian captain made on the field.
Some of them invaded the turf multiple times trying to get close to Chhetri even as he was leading India's 4-0 buccaneering against Pakistan during the SAFF Championship match at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium.
What makes Chhetri a crowd-puller, then? He is 38, a stage when players generally think of pursuing less stressful options than playing football and follow rigid fitness plans.
But his performance on the field still does not have any reflection of his age. Last Saturday, India conquered Lebanon, a team that stands higher on FIFA Rankings, 2-0 in the Intercontinental Cup final at Odisha, and it was Chhetri who put the team on the track to win with the first goal.
The situation was no different on a rain-blanch Wednesday at Bengaluru.



Crowd that filled the stadium to the rafters did not want anything less than a win, and Chhetri could not have missed that vibe.
The whole India vs Pakistan narrative that has been running for decades now too might have fuelled Chhetri's desire to own the grand stage. He had offered us a peek at that feeling inside of him.
"Before the Pakistan match, whenever we met the boys, it was all hunky dory. Even when I was in Pakistan once or twice... we were all fine and friendly. They speak Punjabi and we speak Punjabi, the moment the whistle blows I don't know what happens," Chhetri had said in an ISL video.

PGA Tour's top golfers travel across country for \$20M purse at Travelers Championship

AP ■ CROMWELL
Nathan Grube, the tournament director of the Travelers Championship, used to worry about the years when the U.S. Open took place on the West Coast.
Many of the world's top golfers would make a decision to take a break the week following the major or head to Europe to begin preparing for the Open Championship, rather than travel across the country to play at TPC River Highlands in Connecticut.
But this year, in response to LIV Golf, the Travelers was elevated to one of 17 so-called "designated" PGA Tour events, with a much bigger purse and a near mandate for top golfers to play, giving the tournament the guarantee of a strong field.
"I can tell you with certain confidence that I probably wouldn't have been here even though I love the tournament so much," Masters champion Jon Rahm said Tuesday. "With that said, they've done a great job



making players comfortable. Having a charter flight always makes it a lot easier, maybe not for the best two or three players in the world, but for other people that are high quality players as well that come and compete in this event."
petition, they are the defending champions," said Fernandes.
"It won't at all be easy, but it's not impossible."
"Funny things have happened in football, and you never know. We will go into the game as the underdogs, no doubt, but if a couple of chances go our way, and we play to the plans, we can get what we were looking for," he said.

This week's tournament field includes the top eight golfers in the world rankings and 38 of the top 50.
Grube and his team have gotten a reputation of pampering golfers in an effort to get them to Connecticut, including running those free charter flights for players from the Open.
Once in the state, there are perks including free laundry and hair cuts for caddies, day care on site, and day trips for spouses and children to amusement parks. This year, the tournament added a coffee and ice cream bar and lounge on the driving range.
Grube said it was in part because of its player-friendly reputation that the Travelers was chosen last fall to be among the first events to win elevated status.
"We've been auditioning for this for 16 years," Grube said, a reference to the length of time Travelers has been the event's title sponsor. "And when it came time to go... We showed up."

U-17 Asian Cup: India up against mighty Japan in do-or-die battle

PTI ■ BANGKOK
India head coach Bibiano Fernandes is aware of the mammoth task that lies in front of his side, but feels that it is one that his boys can scale, if they stick to the plan.
"It's quite simple for us. We need to win against Japan, and that should be enough to take us through to the quarter-finals. However, that is easier said than done. Japan are one of the best teams in this com-

Group D is still an open affair on the final matchday, as all four teams stand a chance to make it to the last eight. For India, it is a rather difficult equation, where they have to defeat Japan and hope for Uzbekistan to get at least a draw against Vietnam.
"It's difficult, but the boys are really motivated to do well against Japan. It's an opportunity to play against one of the best teams in Asia, and I am happy

to say that that is not lost on them," said Fernandes.
"We have to believe with all our heart, and hopefully providence will favour us once the match comes to an end."
The Blue Colts failed to win their first two games, drawing 1-1 against Vietnam and losing 0-1 to Uzbekistan. Fernandes has been working on certain areas where he feels India have been lacking. "The last game was not a good result for us, though the boys tried their best. We know we have to do better, we know what is required in the game and how to approach it," he said.
"It's just a matter of putting ourselves together as one unit and executing those plans. We have been lacking some pace on the wings as well. We've worked on that before the Japan game, and we will try to achieve what we want to."

