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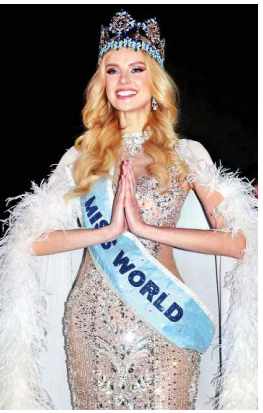
Hamara Sankalp Vksit Bharat



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### BRIEF



24-year-old Krystyna Pyszkova of the Czech Republic was crowned winner of the 71st edition of the contest in a dazzling ceremony held at Mumbai's Jio World Convention Centre, Saturday night.

### Oath

**New Delhi:** Former Supreme Court judge Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar was administered the oath of office as the Lokpal chairperson by President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Sunday, officials said. Justice (retired) Khanwilkar, 66, served as a judge of the apex court from May 13, 2016 to July 29, 2022.

### Dismissed

**Mumbai:** Two Railway Protection Force constables have been dismissed from service in connection with the shoot-out allegedly carried out by their colleague Chetansinh Chaudhary onboard the Mumbai-Jaipur Express train in July last year, an official said on Sunday.

### Mishap

**Rangia:** One person was killed and 10 others were injured in a road accident near Hajo in Kamrup district of Assam on Sunday, police said. According to a police officer, the accident took place early in the morning when a speeding pick-up van carrying fish collided head-on with a motorcycle at Borni.

### Greet

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the Central Industrial Security Force on its raising day, saying their dedication and vigilance in protecting the nation's critical infrastructure are unparalleled. One of the central armed police forces in India, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was set up in 1969 and is tasked with the security of vital government and industrial buildings.

### Arrest

**Pilibhit:** Five people suspected of killing gangster Rajesh Dogra in Mohali were arrested by a team of Punjab Police officials from Pilibhit district of Uttar Pradesh, local police officials said. According to them, the accused, residents of Jammu, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh's Meerut and Pilibhit districts, were arrested from the Madhotanda police station area.

# Centre aims to make 3 cr women 'lakhpati didi': PM

Raipur, Mar 10:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said his government has resolved to make three crore women in the country "lakhpati didi" and asserted that women's welfare is their priority. The PM was speaking after virtually inaugurating the 'Mahtari Vandan' scheme in Chhattisgarh to provide monetary assistance to women. "It is fortunate that today I got an opportunity to dedicate the Mahtari Vandan scheme aimed at empowering 'hari shakti'." Under the scheme, we had promised to give Rs 1,000 per month to more than 70 lakh women and today, the BJP government has fulfilled it," Modi said addressing the function via video conference. The first installment of Rs 655 crore was deposited into the bank accounts of beneficiaries (married women) under the scheme on Sunday, he said. "I should have been among you today for this programme, but due to some other engagements I



PM Modi digitally attends the launch of 'Mahtari Vandan Yojana', on Sunday.

### Govt working on 'Namo Drone Didi Yojna' ....

The government is also working on the 'Namo Drone Didi Yojna', under which drones as well training as drone pilot training will be provided, he added. The scheme by the Centre aims to provide drones to 15,000 select women self-help groups to provide rental services to farmers for agricultural purposes. PM Modi said the BJP has given a guarantee of happiness and prosperity and the Chhattisgarh government led by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has started working on it, he said. "We had given guarantees that we will construct 18 lakh pucca houses. The Sai-led government started work on it on the very second day of the government's formation," Modi said.

### Rs 655 cr transferred under 'Mahtari Vandan' scheme

Under the 'Mahtari Vandan' scheme, Rs 655 crore was transferred into the bank accounts of 70.12 lakh beneficiaries. Each beneficiary will get Rs 1,000 per month under the scheme, as per the state government.

am in Uttar Pradesh. I am speaking from Kashi, the land of Baba Vishwanath, who is also showering his blessings on you," he said. The PM said he offered

prayers to Lord Vishwanath on Saturday night and prayed for the well being of the country's people. "When mother and sisters are empowered,

then the entire family gets empowered. Therefore, the priority of the double-engine government (of BJP at the Centre and in the state) is the welfare of mothers and sisters," he said. "Today, families are getting pucca houses and that too in the name of women," the prime minister said. Through the Ujjwala scheme, women have been getting cooking gas cylinders at cheaper rates. More than 50 per cent of the Jan Dhan accounts are in the name of women. More than 65 per cent of Mudra loans were taken by women, he said. "In the last ten years, our government has changed the lives of more than 10 crore women through self-help groups," Modi said.

### Maoist camp busted

Phulbani, Mar 10 (PTI):

The Odisha Police busted a Maoist camp in Durgapanga reserve forest area in Kandhamal district and recovered a huge cache of grenades and other explosives, an official said on Sunday. The camp was unearthed following an exchange of fire between a team of the Special Operations Group (SOG) and the Maoists during a combing operation in the forest along the Kandhamal-Rayagada border area, Kandhamal SP Subhendu Patra said.

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### FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

# India, EFTA ink free trade agreement

### ■ USD 100 bn investment target in next 15 yrs

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA on Sunday signed a free trade agreement under which New Delhi has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion over the next 15 years to facilitate the creation of one million jobs. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The agreement was signed after a gap of al-

most 16 years as negotiations, started in 2008, but were put on hold in November 2013. Talks resumed in October 2016, and after 21 rounds of negotiations were held before its conclusion. For the first time in the history of FTAs (free trade agreements), a legal commitment is being made to promoting target-oriented investment and the job creation. Almost all the domestic industrial goods would get duty-free access in EFTA nations under the agreement, besides duty concessions on processed agricultural products. Switzerland, the major trading partner of India in

the bloc, already removed duties from January this year on almost all industrial goods. On the other hand, India is offering 82.7 per cent of its tariff lines or product categories, which covers 95.3 per cent of EFTA exports of which more than 80 per cent of imports is gold. On gold, India has not touched the effective customs duty (which is 15 per cent) but has reduced the bound rate by one per cent to 39 per cent. Bound and applied rates are used in international trade parlance. While bound tariffs or duties refer to the ceiling, the applied tariff is the duty, which is currently in place.

## 'Two ECs to be appointed by March 15'

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

Two election commissioners are likely to be appointed by March 15 to fill the vacancies created by the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey and the surprise resignation of Arun Goel, sources said on Sunday. Days before the poll panel is expected to announce the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls, Goel resigned on Friday morning. His resignation was accepted by President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday and the Law Ministry issued a notification to announce it. This leaves Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar as the sole member of the poll authority. Pandey had demitted office on February 14 on attaining the age of 65 years. A search committee

# Trouble for INDIA in Maha? Cong leader jabs Uddhav

Mumbai, Mar 10 (PTI):

A day after Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray announced his party candidate for Mumbai-North West Lok Sabha seat, Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam asked if it was violation of the "coalition dhama" or an attempt to show his party in poor light. Even as seat-sharing talks are still going on between the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) partners Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) and Congress, Thackeray on Saturday said Amol Kirtikar would be his party's candidate for the Mumbai North-West seat for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Amol's father and sitting MP from the seat Gajanan Kirtikar is affiliated to the rival Shiv Sena

### ■ Over announcement of Mumbai-North West LS seat candidate

headed by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Nirupam, who unsuccessfully contested the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from this seat, in a post on X said, "Chief of the leftover Shiv Sena announced his candidature as MVA nominee from Mumbai-North West. Despite having over two dozen meetings, the seat-sharing deal of MVA hasn't been finalised yet. I am told that whatever 8 to 9 seats are pending, this constituency is one of them." He sought to know if the unilateral announcement was violation of the "coalition dhama" or was it deliberately done to show the Congress in poor light. The Congress leadership should intervene in the matter, he said. "The candidate

announced yesterday is an accused in the khichdi scam. He took bribe by way of cheque from a supplier," Nirupam alleged. "What is khichdi scam? During the COVID-19 pandemic, BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) provided free food to labourers in transit and the candidate took commission in the scheme meant to provide relief to poor people. The ED is probing the case," Nirupam claimed in his post. In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress lost all the six seats in Mumbai. In 2019, the then undivided Shiv Sena contested three seats in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and won all of them.



Students of Law College Peroorkada celebrate their victory in the Oppana competition at the Kerala University Youth festival, in Thiruvananthapuram, Sunday.

### Man dies after falling into borewell

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

The body of a man who fell into a 40-foot-deep borewell at a Delhi Jal Board sewage treatment plant here was pulled out after a nearly 14-hour-long operation on Sunday, police said. The man is yet to be identified. Sources said the borewell was in a locked room and was abandoned. Delhi Water Minister Atishi visited the spot to take stock of the situation while the BJP targeted the AAP dispensation over the incident, calling it "shameful" and demanding compensation for the victim. Later, Atishi directed the Delhi Chief Secretary to conduct a time-bound enquiry and take strong and exemplary action against any officers found responsible for the incident.

# No tie-up with Cong? TMC names all 42 LS candidates

### ■ 7 MPs dropped, cricketer Yusuf Pathan among nominees

Kolkata, Mar 10 (PTI):

Trinamool Congress on Sunday announced candidates for all 42 Lok Sabha seats in Bengal, snubbing Congress which had just days earlier said that "doors are still open" for seat-sharing talks for the upcoming elections. The Congress and Trinamool are part of the INDIA bloc - an alliance of opposition parties that had come together to challenge the BJP in the upcoming elections. The snub today is in line with Mamata

Banerjee's declaration that only her party can challenge the BJP in Bengal. The breakdown in talks with Congress over seats was another reason. The Trinamool Congress maintained a harmonious blend of experienced leaders and fresh talent, amid the alleged power tussle between the old guards and the next-gen leaders. Film star-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, who won the Asansol seat in a by-poll on a TMC ticket in 2022, has been re-nominated, while former MP Haji Nurul Islam replaces actor Nusrat Jahan in the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, where the trouble-torn Sandeshkhali is situated.

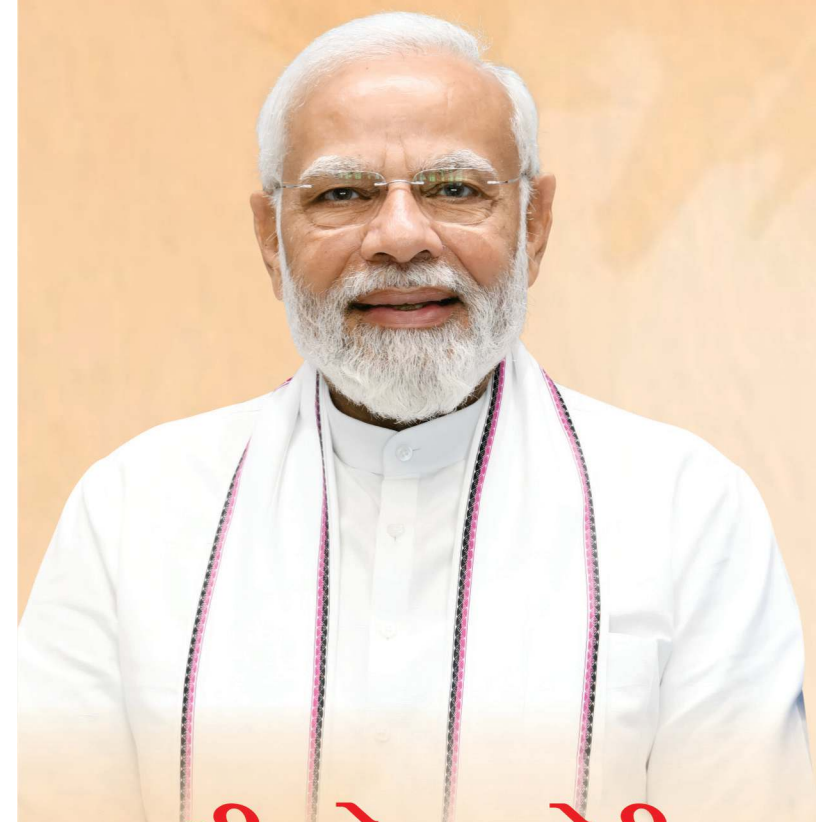
# Jets, helicopter demand to see 40% jump

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

As political parties prepare to fight it out in the Lok Sabha polls, the demand for chartered planes and helicopters is expected to jump by up to 40 per cent compared to the previous general elections, according to industry experts. Helicopters are anticipated to be more in demand compared to fixed-wing aircraft as choppers will help in providing accessibility to rural and remote areas in a shorter time. "There will be an exponential demand for private jets and the demand is expected to outstrip the availability of chartered planes and helicopters. There is a limited supply of chartered planes and helicopters," Club One Air CEO Rajan Mehra told PTI.

### Weather

High 36 Low 21



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माननीय प्रधानमंत्री



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**विष्णु देव साय का सुशासन**



**श्री विष्णु देव साय**  
माननीय मुख्यमंत्री, छत्तीसगढ़

# राज्य स्तरीय महापंचायत

**11 मार्च 2024,**  
**साइंस कॉलेज मैदान, रायपुर**

## श्री कपिल मोरेश्वर पाटिल

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- प्रधानमंत्री ग्रामीण आवास योजना के हितग्राहियों हेतु राशि का अंतरण
- 833 ज्ञानोदय वाचनालय हेतु 25 करोड़ रुपए की राशि का अंतरण
- अनुसूचित क्षेत्र की 600 ग्राम पंचायतों में कंप्यूटर प्रदाय हेतु राशि का अंतरण

### सम्मान समारोह

- सतत विकास लक्ष्यों के स्थानीयकरण के विविध कार्यों के लिए सरपंचों का सम्मान
- लखपति दीदियों का सम्मान
- ड्रोन दीदी का सम्मान
- नियद नेल्लानार ग्राम पंचायतों के सरपंचों का सम्मान

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करने के लिए  
यह क्यूआर कोड स्कैन करें



**सबका साथ, सबका विकास, सबका विश्वास और सबका प्रयास**

## Our govt has fulfilled another Modi's Guarantee: CM

**Raipur, Mar 10:** CM Vishnu Deo Sai expressed gratitude towards the PM Narendra Modi for dedicating his time to launch the Mahtari Vandan Yojana, stating, "The day for which these women were eagerly waiting has arrived today. Our visionary Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji, had pledged that if our government were formed in Chhattisgarh, we would initiate this scheme. Today, the first installment is being transferred to the bank accounts of 70 lakh 12 thousand 600 women."

**Devp of Ch'garh is crucial for a prosperous India:**

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai mentioned that our Sanatan tradition states, "Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devta," which implies that where women are accorded respect, even deities prefer to reside, and where they are not respected, all endeavours remain fruitless. This adage is reflect-



ed in the Mahtari Vandan Yojana. This bold step towards women empowerment represents a significant stride towards realising the aspirations of half the population of Chhattisgarh.

Chhattisgarh's Minister of Women and Child Development, Laxmi Rajwade, stated that the Mahtari Vandan Yojana will be beneficial for women to achieve economic self-reliance as well as for continuous improvement in health and nutrition levels. This will greatly assist in empowering women. The scheme is a symbol of commitment to equal opportunities and social justice.

School Education Minister Brijmohan Agrawal stated that launching the Mahtari Vandan Yojana is a significant step towards enhancing the dignity of women in the state. This amount will be useful for small joys for women.

Agriculture Minister Ramvihar Netam also addressed the gathering on this occasion. He stated that, in consonance with Prime Minister Modi's guarantee, the state government has promptly taken action and provided concrete shape to the Mahtari Vandan Yojana.

Chief Minister Sai unveiled the "May Mahtari Haw" coffee table pictorial

book dedicated to Chhattisgarh Mahtari, prepared by the Public Relations Department. This coffee table book features 36 stories of 'Khushiyo ke notifications'. On this occasion, the Chief Minister also pledged to eradicate child marriage in Chhattisgarh. Before the conference, the Chief Minister also visited the stalls set up by women's self-help groups and encouraged them. MP Sunil Soni, MLAs Guru Khushwant Saheb, Purandar Mishra, Indrakumar Sahu, Anuj Sharma, various public representatives, and a large number of women were present.

## Police issues traffic advisory for March 11

• **For Panchayat representatives sammelan at Science College ground**

**Raipur, Mar 10:** The Panchayat representatives conference is going to be organized at Science College ground on March 11 and in this Chief Minister along with the Union Panchayat Minister are expected to take part. Apart from this, in this conference Panchayat representatives from many districts of the state too

are expected to take part and for safe and convenient arrival and parking of vehicles for VVIPs and Panchayat representatives, the district administration and police has traffic advisory with fixed route plan and parking venue for vehicles coming to state capital from different places.

For the vehicles coming from Durg, Bhilai and Rajnandgaon the vehicle route is from Tatibandh Chowk in front of AIIMS to NIT ground and parking there.

For the vehicles coming

from Bilaspur route, the vehicles should come from Siltara by-pass and reach Tatibandh Chowk and park vehicle at NIT premises coming via AIIMS hospital road to NIT.

For the vehicles coming from Balodabazar, the vehicles should come from Ashram triangle to Anupam Garden and reach CSEB office ground and park their vehicle.

For the vehicles coming from Mahasamund, Dhamtari, and Bastar; the vehicles should come from Pachpedhi Naka chowk to Ring Road-1, to Sarona

Chowk to Kanger Valley School and reach University Ground to park their vehicles.

The general public has been issued information in advance that due to this Panchayat representatives conference, there could be heavy pressure of traffic from AIIMS to Ashram triangle from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm an do not use the road from Ashram triangle to Science College Road, Tatibandh, AIIMS from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm and use alternative routes or diverted routes to reach respective destinations.

## Ch'garh's Raghavendra Singhania elected AICF Vice President

**Raipur, Mar 10:** Raghavendra Singhania, President of Chhattisgarh State Chess Association, has been elected Vice President of All India Chess Federation (AICF). The election of AICF was held on March 10 at Hotel Leela Ambience Convention, Delhi. Raghavendra Singhania's election into the All India Chess Federation will give a new impetus to the state's chess players and the game.

"We are determined for the development of chess. In the coming days, we will set a new record of



chess in all the states of the country as well as Chhattisgarh", Singhania said after his nomination. Singhania further said that an action plan will be chalked out to train the

budding players of Chhattisgarh in an effort to help them enhance their talent. Talented players will make the state and the country proud by winning medals in chess competitions. To connect players from remote and tribal areas, division level competitions will be organized for Bastar and Surguja divisions and in the coming days, chess will be organized at school levels, he said.

Vinod Rathi, General Secretary, Chhattisgarh State Chess Association hoped that hardworking, loyal and dedicated play-

ers will work with more enthusiasm. Chess will now develop at a faster pace in the state, he said. "Our journey together has been remarkable and we are all committed to building on the progress we have made. Together, we will explore new avenues of development, strive to win more medals and achievements at the highest level competitions by providing world-class facilities", he said. Chhattisgarh State Chess Association office bearers have congratulated the newly elected office bearers of AICF.

## MiC meeting today

**Raipur, Mar 10:** Mayor-in-Council (MiC) meeting of Municipal Corporation Raipur is scheduled on Monday, March 11, 2024 at 4 pm. Mayor Aijaz Dhebar will preside over the meeting to be held at Municipal Corporation Headquarters, said Vinod Pandey, Additional Commissioner and Secretary of Municipal Corporation.

## Party workers demand cancellation of ticket to Tamradhwaj Sahu

• **For LS seat from Mahasamund; instead raise demand for ticket to Dhanendra Sahu**

**Raipur, Mar 10:** The problems in Congress are not coming an end after losing the last Vidhan Sabha polls. With hardly a day after issuing of list for Lok Sabha (LS) polls, there is unrest among other viable candidates for

Congress for few LS seats and party workers have started openly protesting against the ticket distribution. There is demand to cancel the ticket to Tamradhwaj Sahu from Mahasamund LS seat and instead the party workers are demanding ticket to Dhanendra Sahu.

It is learnt that party workers and supporters of Dhanendra Sahu reached party's head office in Raipur on Sunday and demanded

PCC Chief Deepak Bajj to cancel ticket of Tamradhwaj Sahu from Mahasamund Lok Sabha (LS) seat. On the other hand, Congress has already opened its cards for LS Polls and it has declared list of six out of 11 candidates so far and fielded many stalwarts in the first list issued. The most crucial is that the former CM Bhupesh Baghel would be contesting LS polls and he has been fielded from Rajnandgaon LS seat.

## Girl's body found hanging from the noose

• **Panic spreads in the area**

**Raipur, Mar 10:** The dead body of a girl was found hanging in 'Babul' (acacia) tree in Abhanpur area of Raipur today. The news about the dead body hanging in a tree caused panic in the area. The cause be-

hind the incident has not been known yet. The police are investigating the matter thoroughly.

According to information available body of a girl was found hanging from the noose of her dupatta in a tree near Kopedih Khar of village Chandi of Abhanpur po-

lice station area. Abhanpur police reached the spot and started investigation. Abhanpur police station in-charge Aditya said that prima facie the case seemed to be a suicide. The cause of death will be known only after investigation of the case. During police investiga-

tion, the girl was identified as Jitendri Sahu, a resident of Dhamtari district. According to the information, the girl's missing report was lodged with Rudri police station on 9th March. Whether it is a case of suicide or murder will become clear only after the PM report.

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### Operation Kaveri

Safe return of 3,900 nationals from Sudan

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Government of India









# Asif Ali Zardari sworn in as Pakistan's 14th President

Islamabad, Mar 10 (PTI):

Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday took oath as Pakistan's 14th President, a day after the veteran politician was overwhelmingly elected as the next head of state.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to the 68-year-old Zardari at Aiwane-e-Sadr, the Presidential Palace.

Zardari will replace Dr Arif Alvi, who stayed in office for five more months despite completing his five-year term in September 2023.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, all three service chiefs, senior officials and diplomats.

Zardari, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) co-chairman, the joint can-

didate of the ruling alliance, was elected as the country's president for the second time on Saturday after he defeated PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai by a huge margin.

He secured 411 electoral votes in Parliament and all four provincial assemblies with the backing of allied parties mainly Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P).

His rival, Achakzai bagged 181 votes as he was only able to secure

the majority of votes in the PTI-backed SIC-dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

This is the second time Zardari has won the presidency.

He earlier served as the 11th president of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 and has been a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan since August 2018.

Born in 1955, Zardari was brought up and educated in Karachi. He was married to Pakistan's former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in December 2007.

## PARACHUTES DROP FOOD SUPPLIES



Parachutes drop supplies into the northern Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, Sunday, March 10.

# Gunmen kidnap 300 students in northwest Nigeria

Kuriga, Mar 10 (AP):

Rashidat Hamza is in despair. All but one of her six children are among the nearly 300 students abducted from their school in Nigeria's northwest, riddled with Islamic extremists and armed gangs.

It has been more than two days after her children ages 7 to 18 went to school in the remote town of Kuriga in Kaduna state only to be kidnapped by gunmen. She was still in shock Saturday.

Authorities said at least 100 children aged 12 or younger were among the abductees in the state known for violent killings, lawlessness and dangerous roads where people get regularly snatched.

"We don't know what to do, but we believe in God," Hamza told The Associated Press during a visit to the town.



Parents wait for news about the kidnapped LEA Primary and Secondary School Kuriga students in Kuriga, Kaduna, Nigeria. Security forces swept through large forests in Nigeria's northwest region on Friday in search of nearly 300 children who were abducted from their school a day earlier in the West African nation's latest mass kidnap which analysts and activists blamed on the failure of intelligence and slow security response.

The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week; a group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another northwestern state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days

earlier 200 people, mostly women and children displaced by conflict, were kidnapped in northeastern Borno State.

The kidnappings are a stark reminder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous

country. No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school abduc-

tions on herders who are in conflict with the settled communities.

It's not the first time for a student kidnapping in Nigeria to shock the world. In 2014, Islamic extremists abducted more than 200 schoolgirls from Borno's Chibok, sparking the global #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign.

A decade later, at least 1,400 Nigerian students have so far been abducted from their schools in similar circumstances. Some are still held captive, including nearly 100 of the Chibok girls. Recalling Thursday's kidnapping, Nura Ahmad, a teacher, told the AP that students were just settling into their classrooms at the government primary and secondary school when gunmen "came in dozens, riding on bikes and shooting sporadically."

# Omar Ayub named leader of opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly

Islamabad, Mar 10 (PTI):

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's PTI and the Sunni Ittehad Council have jointly nominated his party leader Omar Ayub Khan as the leader of the opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly.

The PTI-SIC formalised the nomination by submitting his documents to the office of National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper said on Sunday.

Incidentally, Omar Ayub Khan was also the joint candidate who lost to Imran Khan's rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party's Shehbaz Sharif in the prime ministerial election last week.



Riaz Fatyana, Dr Nisar Ahmad Jatt and others, the newspaper said.

Achakzai was the PTI-SIC's candidate against Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) candidate Asif Ali Zardari, who was on Saturday elected as the president. He took the oath on Sunday.

Responding to a question, Dr Jatt expressed the hope that Ayub would become the opposition leader in the NA through nomination, instead of election, on March 13 or 14.

The leader of the opposition enjoys the status of a federal minister. He gets a separate office, where usually opposition parties hold meetings. The Public Accounts Committee is usually headed by the leader of the opposition.

# PML-N & PPP to scrap caretaker system in Pakistan

Islamabad, Mar 10 (PTI):

Pakistan's ruling PML-N party and its coalition partner PPP have reached a consensus to abolish the caretaker system and reform the politically volatile and cash-strapped country's electoral system, a media report said on Saturday.

Three-time ex-premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and ex-foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have eliminated the need for a caretaker government, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

The two parties agreed that the outgoing government's head will

remain in office until the new general elections, and the prime minister's cabinet will be dissolved after completing its term, while the premier will continue to serve.

The PML-N and PPP have also endorsed the drafting of legislation for electoral reforms to make the electoral process "simple and easy", the report said.

It added that both parties will take other parties into confidence on the proposed reforms.

The PML-N-led alliance is also aiming for major constitutional amendments, which will include abolishing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

A PML-N leader said that abolishing the NAB

and changing the wording of Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution back to the original were included in the party's manifesto as well, according to the report.

In January, Nawaz Sharif declared while launching the PML-N's manifesto that if his party secured victory in the February 8 general elections, the NAB would be abolished.

At that time, the PML-N supremo also faced disqualification under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution. Under Article 62(1)(f), a person cannot be qualified as a member of the national or provincial legislatures if he is not Sadiq (truthful) and Ameen (trustworthy), the report said.

# Nepal PM 'Prachanda' to seek third vote of confidence by March 13

Kathmandu, Mar 10 (PTI):

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is planning to seek a vote of confidence in Parliament by March 13, days after he forged a new alliance with the CPN-UML.

The third round of vote of confidence comes after Prachanda, a former guerilla leader, dumped the Nepali Congress and forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) the second-biggest party led by former premier KP Sharma Oli on Monday.

According to constitutional provisions, prime ministers have to take a vote of confidence after any ally withdraws support. Prime Minister Prachanda informally discussed the matter within his close circle in the party on Saturday and the parliamentary party meeting of the CPN-

Maoist Centre decided to issue a whip to all of its lawmakers to be present compulsorily in the Lower House during the voting on March 13, according to the party's secretary Ganesh Shah.

A formal decision to this effect will be taken during Sunday's Office Bearers' meeting of the party, he said.

The lower House of Representatives - has been summoned for a session on March 13.

According to Nepalese media, the new coalition has enough seats in the 275-member Parliament.

After the change in power equation and withdrawal of support to the government by the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the Lower House, it has become mandatory for Prachanda to seek a vote of confidence within 30 days to prove his majority.

# Xi Jinping greets new Pak President Zardari

● Says close China-Pakistan ties 'choice of history'

Beijing, Mar 10 (PTI):

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as the Pakistan President, saying that the "iron-clad" friendship between the two countries is a "choice of history" and the strategic significance of their ties has become more prominent considering the current changes in the world. Zardari, the husband of late Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto was overwhelmingly elected as the 14th President of Pakistan on Saturday, becoming the only civilian president of the country for a second time. Zardari, the co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party, was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance of the

PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

In his message to Zardari, Xi said "China and Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers, adding that the two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples." Xi said that "the two countries have in recent years maintained close high-level exchanges, supported each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations," state-run Xinhua news agency reported. India has objected to China over the USD 60 billion CPEC connecting

China's Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Balochistan as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Xi in his message said that as the world is confronted with accelerated changes unseen in a century, the strategic significance of China-Pakistan relations has become more prominent. Xi said he highly regards the development of China-Pakistan relations, and is ready to work with President Zardari to carry forward the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan, advance practical cooperation in various fields, push for greater development of China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, to better benefit the two peoples.

## WOMEN CLIMATE ACTIVISTS



Women activists upon reaching the Everest Base Camp at an altitude of 5,364 metre to spread awareness about alarming impacts of climate change, on International Women's Day.

# At least 19 dead and 7 missing as landslide and flash floods

Padang, Mar 10 (AP):

Torrential rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 19 people and leaving seven others missing, officials said Sunday.

Tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees rolled down a mountain late Friday, reaching a river that burst its banks and tore through mountain-side villages in Pesisir Selatan district of West Sumatra province, said Doni Yusrizal, who heads the local disaster management agency.

Rescuers by Saturday pulled out seven bodies in the worst-hit village of Koto XI Tarusan, and recovered three others in two neighboring villages,



Damaged houses are seen in a village affected by flash flood in Langgai, West Sumatra, Indonesia, Sunday, March 10. Torrential rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island leaving a number of people dead and missing, officials said Sunday.

Yusrizal said.

Rescuers retrieved six bodies in Pesisir Selatan and three more in the neighboring district of

Padang Pariaman, bringing the death toll to 19, the National Disaster Management Agency said on Sunday.

# 2 killed, 1 injured in suicide blast in Peshawar

Peshawar, Mar 10 (PTI): At least two persons were killed and one injured in a blast on Sunday in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said.

The incident occurred in Board Bazar, Nasir Bagh Road Peshawar. The bomb was planted on a motorcycle.

The dead bodies and those injured have been admitted to the Khyber Teaching Hospital.

"As per preliminary and unconfirmed reports, explosives were planted in a motorcycle parked in the area," the official said, adding that the blast site had been cordoned off and a rescue operation was underway.

However, no group has claimed responsibility for the blast so far.



## CENTRAL Chronicle

Since 1974 Volume 11 No. 342

### New Economic Dawn

#### India-EFTA Free Trade Agreement

In a momentous leap forward for India's economic landscape, the signing of a free trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nations marks a significant stride towards fostering robust international trade relations. Led by the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the dedicated efforts of Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, this landmark agreement underscores India's commitment to embracing global economic integration and fostering shared prosperity. The culmination of extensive negotiations and meticulous planning, the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenste in EFTA bloc signifies a turning point in our economic trajectory. With the aim of attracting substantial investments totaling \$100 billion over a span of 15 years, this agreement is poised to unleash a wave of economic opportunities, driving growth and employment generation across diverse sectors. At its core, the TEPA embodies the principles of openness, fairness, and mutual benefit. By streamlining customs procedures and reducing trade barriers, the agreement promises to create a conducive environment for businesses to thrive, facilitating seamless trade and investment flows between India and the EFTA nations. Moreover, the inclusion of provisions aimed at promoting sustainable development and safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders underscores a commitment to fostering inclusive growth and prosperity. The significance of this agreement extends beyond mere economic transactions. It symbolizes a deeper commitment to fostering strong bilateral ties and promoting dialogue and cooperation between India and the EFTA nations. As Prime Minister Modi aptly noted, this agreement represents not just a trade deal but a "new turn" and a "watershed moment" in India's engagement with the global economy, laying the foundation for a more robust and inclusive partnership. The sectors poised to benefit from this agreement span a wide spectrum, ranging from pharmaceuticals and medical devices to processed agricultural products and textiles. With enhanced market access and reduced tariffs, Indian exporters are poised to gain a competitive edge in the EFTA markets, while consumers stand to benefit from a greater variety of high-quality goods at competitive prices. Indian processed agricultural products may also receive greater market access in the four nations under the EFTA. Also, sectors such as pharma, medical devices and processed food items are likely to figure in the agreement. Under free trade agreements, two trading partners significantly cut down or omit customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to foster trade in services and investments. It is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role played by Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein in forging this agreement. As key trading partners of India, these nations have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to fostering deeper economic ties and promoting mutual prosperity. The significant investments and trade volumes between India and the EFTA nations underscore the immense potential for further collaboration and growth.

### India's Test Glory

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee



India's triumph over England in the five-match Test series deserves hearty applause and commendation. The victory, under the leadership of Rohit Sharma, showcased India's dominance and prowess in the realm of Test cricket. Indeed, India stands as a formidable force, particularly on home soil, and this victory reaffirms their status as one of the toughest teams to beat in the Test format. A significant factor contributing to India's success is their world-class bowling attack. From spin maestros like Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav to pace sensations like Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, India boasts a diverse and skillful bowling arsenal. Each time the team faced adversity, there emerged a hero to steer them to victory. Notably, Ashwin's remarkable performance, clinching a five-wicket haul in his 100th Test match, places him in the esteemed company of spin legends like Muttiah Muralidaran, Shane Warne, and Anil Kumble. In the batting department, India has unearthed promising talent that bodes well for the team's future. Players like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, and Devdutt Padikkal exhibit immense potential and offer hope for sustained success in the years to come. However, the series also sheds light on England's shortcomings. With a 4-1 defeat, it is evident that the English side fell short of expectations. This marks England's first series defeat under the captaincy of Ben Stokes, reflecting a disappointing performance overall. The middle-order batting proved to be lackluster and uninspiring, with players like Ollie Pope and Jonny Bairstow failing to make significant contributions. Even the seasoned campaigner Joe Root struggled to find his form in the initial matches. Moreover, England's batting lineup faced scrutiny, particularly the opening partnership, where Rory Burns failed to impress. While there were glimpses of promise from players like Tom Hartley and Baseer Ahmed, the team's overall batting display was underwhelming. On the bowling front, however, England had a standout performer in Jimmy Anderson, whose skill and experience continue to shine bright even at the age of 41. Anderson's pursuit of 700 Test wickets is a testament to his remarkable career and enduring impact on the game. Looking ahead, India's triumph, achieved even in the absence of key players like Virat Kohli and KL Rahul, instills confidence and optimism for the team's future endeavors. As they continue to strive for excellence, let us rally behind our team and wish them continued success on the international stage.

Central Chronicle invites articles, write-ups, and comments on a wide range of issues for our editorial page. Submissions should be between 800-900 words in length. In addition, we welcome letters to the editor for this page. While letters may be edited for clarity, we aim to preserve the integrity of the original message, and ask that they be kept to around 50-60 words. Submissions can be sent via email to editorcentralchronicle@gmail.com.

### EXERCISE CUTLASS EXPRESS



INS Tir, the lead ship of First Training Squadron (1TS) participated in Exercise Cutlass Express - 24 (CE - 24) held at Port Victoria, Seychelles from 26 Feb - 08 Mar 24.

## Focus on Amrit Peedhi: Empowering Youth through Education and skills



A. SRIJA



The overarching theme of the Union Budget 2024-25 centers around transforming India into a developed nation, referred to as "Viksit Bharat," by the year 2047. The budget places a special emphasis on the Amrit Peedhi—the youth—and highlights the significance of the National Education Policy 2020 in initiating transformative reforms to skillfully equip and empower the younger generation. In pursuit of this objective, considerable attention has been directed towards the PM SHRI Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI), designed to provide high-quality education, foster holistic development, and shape well-rounded individuals. Approved in September 2022, the PM SHRI scheme is designed to serve as a model for the effective implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. These schools are envisioned to evolve into exemplar institutions, setting a benchmark over time, while also assuming a leadership role by guiding other schools in their vicinity. The mandate extends to offering leadership in their respective regions, ensuring

the provision of high-quality education within an environment that is equitable, inclusive, and imbued with joy. This educational approach caters to the diverse backgrounds, multilingual needs, and varying academic abilities of students, actively engaging them as participants in their own learning journey, aligning with the vision outlined in the NEP 2020. The scheme provides for setting up of more than 14500 PM SHRI Schools by strengthening the existing schools from amongst schools managed by Central government/State/UT Government/local bodies. The first phase of selection process of PM-SHRI Schools has already been completed and a total number of 6,207 schools have been selected as PM-SHRI schools. A total of Rs. 3395.15 crore has been approved for 6,207 PM SHRI Schools in 27 States/UTs along with KVS/NVS in the Project Approval Board (PAB) Meeting for FY 2023-24. The 1st installment of Central share of Rs. 630.11 crore for FY 2023-24 has been released to all the States/UTs/KVS/NVS for implementation of the scheme.

The Budget Estimates for FY 2023-24 has been revised from Rs.4000 crore to Rs.2800 crore. The Budget Estimates for FY 2024-25 is 6050 crore.

Apart from PM-Shri, the total budget approved for the Department of School Education & literacy is Rs.73008.10 crores in 2024-25 as compared to Rs.72473.80 crores in 2023-24.

Table-1 Outlay for Major schemes in the Budget 2024-25 (Rs. In Crores)

Program	R.E 2023-24	B.E 2024-25
Samagra Shiksha	33000	37500
PM-Poshan	10000	12467.39
STARS	700	1250
PM Shri	2800	6050
NILP	100	160
National Means cum Merit Scholarship Scheme	358.00	377.01
Autonomous Bodies	14470	15638.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>72473.80</b>	<b>73008.10</b>

The Budget also highlights the Skill India Mission through which 1.4 crore youth have been trained, 54 lakh youth have been upskilled and reskilled, and 3000 new ITIs have been established. A large number of new institutions of higher learning, namely 7 IIITs, 16 IIITs, 7 IIMs, 15 AIIMS and 390 universities have been set up. Skilling of youth in the new age technology models will pave the way for new start-ups and entrepreneurship on the part of our youth. As the budget focuses on new avenues such as digital infrastructure, innovation, conference tourism, spiritual tourism, gati shakti, food processing etc., skill training emerging from

the job profiles related to these upcoming sectors need to be focused upon in the curriculum for skill training in senior secondary schools as well as in ITIs.

The budget also highlights the increase in female enrolment in higher education by 28 percent over ten years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 per cent

of enrolment - one of the highest in the world. All these measures are getting reflected in the increasing participation of women in workforce which is reflected in the increase in female participation rate in the labour force rising from 23.3 percent in 2017-18 to 37 percent in 2022-23. (PLFS). In short, for India to become Viksit Bharat by 2047 education and skilling of the youth is the foremost task, where our demographic advantage lies.

(Author: Smt. A. Srija, Economic Adviser, Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education.)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Ban packaging of hot food in plastic bags

Despite the ban on plastic bags and compostable plastic bags for carrying or dispensing commodities across the country, they are still extensively used, especially for packaging food in hotels. Items like tea, coffee, milk, sambar, rasam, and hot curry are commonly packed in plastic bags within hotels. Many doctors cite a worry that there is an increase in the number of people suffering from kidney and throat ailments, cancer, and infertility in the city due to the consumption of hot food items carried in low-quality plastic bags or boxes. When hot food or liquid is packed in a plastic bag, toxic chemicals like styrene and bisphenol can leach into the food, potentially leading to cancer, heart diseases, and other reproductive problems. Therefore, the Department of Food Safety must enforce a ban on packing hot edible items, including beverages, in plastic bags and harmful containers, particularly in cities.

Dr. Vijaykumar H K, Raichur, Karnataka

#### Migration Realities: Answering Hypocrisy

If migration by Bengalis to other Indian states get dubbed as "failure of Bengal"; then the hypocrites of BJP must answer whether mass migration of poor Indians towards civil-war raged Israel and violence-prone West Asia and North/Central Africa to take up menial jobs, by risking their own precious lives, bear proof of the "Vikas" engineered by the harbingers of "Good Days" in "New India". What a disgrace to notice the country which can't ensure livelihood and other basic human necessities for its citizens, thereby compelling them to leave the shore by endangering their lives; shamelessly squandering precious time energy and resource towards Temples, Cows, Statues, Bullet trains, VISTAS and all things which glitter just to draw applause of the privileged class.

Kajal Chatterjee, Kolkata

#### Reinstating J&K Statehood

The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 led to both praise and protest, yet notably improved law and order in Jammu and Kashmir. Stone-pelting incidents have decreased, aiding in counterterrorism efforts. However, it's now crucial to restore J&K's statehood and conduct elections by September. This move will further integrate the region into India's democratic framework, ensuring local governance and representation. Restoring statehood honors the region's historical status while fostering stability and progress.

MK Nair, Raipur

### India's Quadruple Triumph

## Reigning Supreme in Cricket's Global Arena

Manoj Kumar Nair

In a cricketing saga that unfolded like a thrilling epic, Team India scripted a remarkable tale of triumph, conquering the cricketing world across all formats and etching their name in the annals of sporting history. With a series of scintillating performances, India's cricketers showcased their mettle, resilience, and unyielding spirit, capturing the imagination of millions of fans and reaffirming their status as the undisputed champions of the game. The journey to this historic triumph began with a captivating series against England, where India faced a stern test of character and skill on their home turf. After a heart-wrenching defeat in the opening Test in Hyderabad, the Indian team, led by the dynamic Rohit Sharma, rose from the ashes like a phoenix, displaying a masterclass of cricketing prowess in the subsequent

matches. Wins in Vizag, Rajkot, Ranchi, and Dharamsala propelled India to a resounding 4-1 series victory, catapulting them to the summit of the ICC Test Team Rankings enabled them to overtake Australia with an impressive tally of 122 rating points. Australia now trails behind India, occupying the second position with 117 rating points, while England follows closely at third with 111 rating points. India will remain at the top regardless of the outcome of the second New Zealand-Australia Test in Christchurch. The ICC World Test Championship 2023 winners Australia currently lead the two-Test series 1-0 following their 172-run victory in Wellington. With this, India is now at the summit of rankings in all three formats. They have 121 rating points in the ODI rankings, with Australia sitting a close second with 118 rating points. In the T20Is, India has

266 rating points, with England (256) at the second place. India is also at the top of the ICC World Test Championship Standings table, with a points percentage of 68.51. At the heart of India's success was their formidable batting lineup, led by the inimitable Rohit Sharma. The skipper's sublime century in the final Test epitomized his class and leadership, providing the perfect platform for India's dominance. Alongside him, the precocious talent of Yashasvi Jaiswal, the audacity of Devdutt Padikkal, and the solidity of Sarfaraz Khan bolstered India's batting arsenal, laying waste to the opposition's bowling attack with consummate ease. But it was not just the batsmen who stole the show. India's spin twins, Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav, spun a web of intrigue and deception, bamboozling the English batsmen with their guile and craft.

Their relentless pursuit of wickets and unwavering accuracy made life miserable for the visitors, ensuring India's dominance with the ball. As the dust settled on the Test series, India's supremacy extended beyond the traditional batting format of the game. With towering ratings in the ODI and T20I rankings, India's dominance in white-ball cricket was undeniable. The likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Jasprit Bumrah spearheaded India's charge, stamping their authority on the global stage with their breathtaking performances. Moreover, India's impeccable record in the ICC World Test Championship reaffirmed their status as the torchbearers of Test cricket. With a commanding points percentage and a string of emphatic victories, India surged ahead in the race for supremacy, leaving their opponents in awe of their cricketing prowess.

But beyond the statistics and rankings, India's triumph was a testament to their unwavering passion, dedication, and team spirit. It was a collective effort, fueled by the relentless pursuit of excellence and a burning desire to succeed against all odds. The coaching staff, support staff, and players worked tirelessly behind the scenes, pushing the boundaries of their capabilities and striving for greatness with every passing game. Looking ahead, India's quest for cricketing glory shows no signs of abating. With a wealth of talent at their disposal and a hunger for success that knows no bounds, Team India is poised to scale even greater heights in the years to come. As they continue to inspire millions of fans and redefine the parameters of excellence, India's cricketing saga is set to unfold as a captivating tale of triumph, resilience, and unbridled passion.









## 'PM, what he stands for, will be at centre of LS polls'

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI)



Kapil Sibal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be at the centre of the Lok Sabha polls and whether what he stands for is for the good of the people of the country would be the subject matter of the elections. Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal said on Sunday. In a video interview with PTI, Sibal also said the opposition INDIA bloc needs to come out with a joint vision document which entails what key issues are there before the country which need to be addressed.

Asserting that no election is a done deal, Sibal quipped, "I don't know whether picture baki hai ki nahi lekin jo picture chahi hai woh desh ke liye theek nahi hai (I don't know whether or not there is more to the film but the one that is playing is not good for the country)."

Asked about the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) losing its way with JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar crossing over to the NDA and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee saying her party will go solo in the polls, Sibal said negotiations with Banerjee were still on and that was not an issue.

"As far as Nitish Kumar is concerned, the nature of politics in this country

today allows for all this to happen, nobody trusts anybody else. It is unfortunate that the level of politics has reached its nadir as reflected by not just one individual but by the nature of politics in this country where people just cross over for reasons you and I know which need not be stated publicly," the Rajya Sabha MP said.

"As long as politics of this nature thrives in India, I don't think we have much hope for the delivery of essentials to those people who are at the bottom of the pyramid," he asserted. Expressing confidence that the INDIA bloc has the wherewithal to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, Sibal said battles will be fought depending on the kind of candidates the opposition fields in particular constituencies and the narrative it would project. Noting that seat sharing among opposition

parties will be over soon, Sibal said they will have to get together to build a narrative with which they can persuade the people to vote for them in the course of this election.

That narrative has not yet started being built, he added.

Sibal asserted that the INDIA bloc needs a vision for the future which is different from what the BJP is relying on.

Asked if the opposition needs a joint vision document, Sibal said, "I think they need something like that. I think they are talking about a joint minimum programme. A joint minimum programme, according to me, is not enough."

"It is a minimum programme as far as what you will do. A broad vision of what the issues are before this country that needs to be addressed (is what is required)."

## Oppn 'concerned' as Arun Goel resigns abruptly as EC

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

A day after Arun Goel resigned as election commissioner, the Congress and other opposition parties on Sunday asked whether he did so due to any differences with the chief election commissioner or the Narendra Modi government.

Taking potshots at the BJP, some opposition leaders also wondered if Goel resigned to contest the Lok Sabha polls on its ticket like former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay.

"The resignation of Arun Goel as Election Commissioner last evening raises three questions," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

"Did he actually resign over differences with the Chief Election Commissioner or with the Modi Government, which does the front-seat driving for all supposedly independent institutions? Or did he resign for personal reasons?"

"Or did he, like the Calcutta High Court Judge a few days back, resign to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls on a BJP ticket," Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress leader said the Election Commission has for eight months now refused to meet with INDIA parties on the issue of

the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) that is essential to prevent "electronic voting manipulation".

"Each passing day in Modi's India deals an added blow to democracy and democratic institutions," he alleged.

Asked about Goel's resignation, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said one has to wait to see what he does in the coming days.

"I was thinking that after the high court judge resigned and joined the BJP the next day and started abusing the TMC. It shows that the BJP has appointed people with such a mindset."

"Now the election commissioner has resigned, let us wait for some time to see what he does," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut alleged the Election Commission has become an "extended branch of the BJP".

It is not the same Election Commission that it was during TN Seshan's time, which functioned as a watchdog over the elections and remained impartial, he claimed.

"In the last 10 years, the Election Commission has been privatised. It has become a branch of the BJP," he alleged.

He said two people have gone and only one remains in the Election Commission.

## Stone laid for Barethi Solar Power Project

● OF NTPC REL

New Delhi, Mar 10: Minister of Power and New & Renewable Energy, R K Singh and Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Dr. Virendra Kumar together laid the foundation stone for Barethi Solar Power Project of NTPC REL in Madhya Pradesh on 10th March, 2024.

Located at Barethi RE Park in Chhatrapur District of Madhya Pradesh, the 630-MW solar project entails an investment of Rs 3,200 Crore and would be sufficient to light over 3 lakh households upon completion. It is being developed as part of MNRE RE Park under UMREPP Mode-8.

A step towards sustainable power generation, the project will reduce 12 lakh tons of CO2 emission annually, thereby helping in achieving country's climate commitments and green energy targets.

Commissioning of this project will not only supply green power to the grid, but will also ensure affordable power to the beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the construction of the project is helping in creation of direct and indirect employment opportunities in the region.

On the occasion, Hon'ble Minister of Power and New & Renewable Energy spoke about the need to keep adding further power capacity in line with the growing power demand. He said



"Ours is the fastest growing large economy in the world and our power demand too is growing fast. We need to add more power capacity to meet the growing demand. The Barethi solar power project is very important since it is 630 MW and further it is clean energy".

He further said that "NTPC is among the world's biggest power companies which is setting up renewable energy plants in addition to thermal plants".

Addressing the occasion, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment said "Barethi

## DMK now 'Drug Marketing Kazhagam': BJP

New Delhi, Mar 10 (PTI):

A day after a former DMK functionary was arrested in connection with an international drugs trafficking racket, the BJP on Sunday demanded that party chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin explain his relationship with the accused.

The party charged that the arrest shows that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has now become "Drug Marketing Kazhagam".

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Saturday

arrested 36-year-old Jaffer Sadiq, an expelled DMK functionary in Tamil Nadu, in connection with its investigation into the drugs trafficking racket estimated to be worth more than Rs 2,000 crore.

Reacting to the development, BJP Mahila Morcha chief Vanathi Srinivasan targeted Stalin and alleged that "it seems" the Tamil Nadu chief minister's family members are closely associated with the accused.

"Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi, daughter-in-law of Chief Minister M K Stalin has directed a film produced by

## TIBETAN UPRISING DAY



Members of the Tibetan community during a rally to commemorate the 65th anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day, in Dehradun, Sunday.

## Nita Ambani receives Humanitarian Award

● A Testament to the Power of Compassion

Mumbai, Mar 10:

Founder & Chairperson Nita Ambani received the prestigious 'Beauty With a Purpose Humanitarian Award' on the occasion of the 71st Miss World Finals, held at the Jio World Convention Centre.

Accepting the highest award conferred by the renowned international pageant, she highlighted the importance of empowering women in making the world a better place, reaffirming her own lifelong commitment to the cause.

With illustrious former recipients such as Late South African President Nelson Mandela and Founder of Operation Hunger Ina Perlman, the



Nita Mukesh Ambani after receiving the prestigious Humanitarian Award during the grand finale of the 71st Miss World pageant at the Jio World Convention Centre, in Mumbai.

award serves as an acknowledgment of Nita Ambani's work with Indian women and girl children across the spheres of education, healthcare, art and culture, sports, philanthropy and beyond.

## Cheetah Gamini gives birth to five cubs



● At Kuno National Park

Bhopal, Mar 10 (PTI):

Cheetah 'Gamini' on Sunday gave birth to five cubs in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, taking the total number of the big cats in the country to 26, Union Minister Bhupendra Patel said. Taking to social media platform X, the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change said, "High Five, Kuno! Female cheetah Gamini, aged about 5 years, brought from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa, has given birth to 5 cubs today." The number of cheetah cubs born in India now stands at 13, the minister added. This is the fourth cheetah litter on

Indian soil and the first litter of cheetahs brought from South Africa, Yadav informed.

Congratulations to all, especially the team of forest officers, vets, and field staff who have ensured a stress-free environment for cheetahs, which has led to successful mating and birth of the cubs.

**कैंसर सर्जरी**  
**पश्चात अंगों का पुनःनिर्माण**  
 (जबड़ा, स्तन व अन्य)  
 च.ग. शासन से मान्यता प्राप्त  
**कालड़ा बर्न एंज**  
 प्लास्टिक कंसल्टेंट सर्जरी सेंटर  
 आर.के.सी.के. सामन्ने, चौथे कालोनी एच पचपेटी  
 नाका, धर्मपुरी रोड, कलर्स मॉल के पास, रायपुर  
 कॉल: 9827143060/8871003060  
 Adv 9827144337

## TMC PUBLIC RALLY



WB CM supremo Mamata Banerjee walks with party candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, during party's 'Janagarjan Sabha' rally, at Brigade Parade Ground, in Kolkata, Sunday.

## NGOs receive grants for sustainable rural development

Noida, Mar 10:

HCLFoundation, which drives the corporate social responsibility agenda of global technology company HCLTech in India, announced the winner NGOs of the 2024 edition of its flagship program HCLTech Grant. HCLTech Grant supports pioneering projects in sustainable rural development in India across the themes of environment, health and education. So far, ₹146.95 crore (approx. \$18 million) has been committed by the HCLFoundation through HCLTech Grant. The program has helped transform nearly 2 million lives in over 27, 500 villages in India. This year, three NGOs — The Corbett Foundation (environment), Sangath (health) and Makkala Jagriti (education) — will receive ₹5 crore (approx. \$609,000) each for their projects of four-year duration. For Health: ECHO

India (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) and Social Revival Group of Urban Rural and Tribal — Korba will receive grant of Rs 25 lakh for their project of one-year duration.

"HCLTech Grant is not just about a CSR fund; it is about providing global exposure to Indian NGOs that are doing path-breaking work in the field of rural development. It promotes sharing of best practices in the field of Environment, Health and Education — practices that are transformative in nature.

A robust year-long application process comprising shortlisting of applications, due diligence, field visits, audits and jury proceedings ensures complete transparency in the selection of the winners," said Ms. Robin Ann Abrams, Chairperson, HCLTech Grant Jury and Board Member, HCLTech.