

NAMAZ TIMINGS

FAJAR	6.00 AM
ZOHAR	1.30 PM
ASAR	5.00 PM
MAGHRIB	6.20 PM
ISHA	8.00 PM

WEATHER REPORT



GOLD RATE



PM Modi thanks Qatari Emir for welfare of Indian community in Qatar



Doha, Feb 15 (UNI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held talks with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani with a focus on shoring up bilateral ties, days after Qatar freed eight former Indian Navy personnel who were sentenced to death after being arrested in August 2022.

The discussions centred around bolstering bilateral relations, with a focus on deepening cooperation in areas of trade and investment, energy, space, cultural and people-to-people ties," Jaiswal said on

SC declares electoral bonds scheme 'unconstitutional'

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): The Supreme Court on Friday struck down the electoral bonds scheme, which provides blanket anonymity to financial contributions to political parties, and amendments made to the law allowing rich corporations to make unlimited political donations "unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary".

A five-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, in a unanimous judgment, held that the electoral bonds scheme and preceding amendments made to the Representation of People Act, Companies Act and the Income Tax Act violate the voters' right to information about political funding under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. The apex court ordered the State of Bank



of India to stop issuance of electoral bonds here-with. The bank was directed to submit details of bonds purchased from April 12, 2019, till date to the Election Commission of India (ECI). On April 12, 2019, the top court had ordered the ECI to submit, in a sealed cover, the records of bonds purchased till then. The "details" would include date of purchase of each bond, the name of

the buyer and the denomination of the bond. The bank would make a full disclosure to the ECI of political parties that had received contributions and encashed the electoral bonds from April 12, 2019.

The bank would furnish the information to the ECI by March 6, 2024. The poll body, in turn, has to publish the entire information given by the State Bank of India on its website by

March 13, 2024. Electoral bonds, with a validity period of 15 days and yet to be encashed, would be returned by political parties or purchasers to the bank, which must refund the amount to the purchasers' accounts.

The lead opinion authored by Chief Justice Chandrachud said the absolute non-disclosure of the source of political funding through electoral bonds promoted corruption and a culture of quid

pro quo with the ruling party to introduce a policy change or for bagging a licence. The scheme and the amendments authorised "unrestrained influence of corporates in the electoral process".

The scheme allowed the inflow of "huge contributions" by companies and multinational corporations with major business stakes in the country, overruling or even concealing the relatively small financial contribu-

tions of the ordinary Indian - the student, the daily wage worker, the artist or a teacher - who believes in the ideologies of a political party without expecting any substantial favours in return.

"Would we remain a democracy if the elected do not heed to hue and cry of the needy? We ask ourselves whether the elected would truly be responsive to the electorate if companies which bring

Sonia Gandhi pens emotional letter to people of Rae Bareli on her RS move



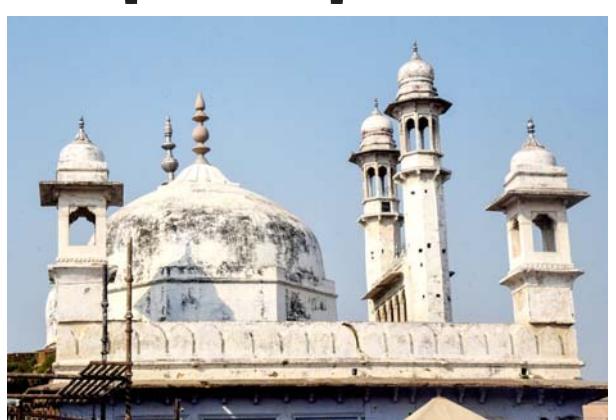
New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Thursday penned an emotional letter to the residents of her Parliamentary constituency Rae Bareli and shared reasons on why she decided not to contest the Lok Sabha elections. She cited 'health issues and increasing age' as the reason behind not contesting the elections from Rae Bareli.

Sonia filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha biennial elections from Rajasthan on Wednesday and was flanked by Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi

Vadra and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot at the electoral office.

In a letter shared on X, she expressed gratitude to the people of Rae Bareli for unflinching support to the Gandhi family, through thick and thin of things and wrote, "Whatever I am today is because of you." Recalling the family's ties with the Lok Sabha constituency, a Congress pocketborough for long, Sonia wrote, "Roots of our family in Rae Bareli is very deep. I know you will stand by me in future too."

Allahabad HC reserves order on plea against decision to allow puja in Gyanvapi mosque cellar



Prayagraj, Feb 15 (UNI) The Allahabad High Court on Thursday reserved its judgement on the appeal challenging the validity of the Varanasi District Judge's order for permitting 'puja' in the cellar on the south side of the Gyanvapi complex.

The order was reserved by the court of Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal after hearing the arguments of both the sides on the appeals challenging two orders of the Varanasi court led on behalf of the Committee Of Management Anju-man Intezamia Masjid Varanasi.

On behalf of the Committee, Senior Counsel SFA Naqvi assisted by Puneet Gupta argued that giving ? nal relief through an interim order without determining the rights in the civil suit ? led de-manding the right to worship is a violation of the legal procedure. It was argued that the District Judge

himself has given two contradictory orders. It was argued that in exercise of the inherent power of the district court accepted the application on January 17 and gave only one relief by not passing an order on the second demand which will be considered as denial of relief.

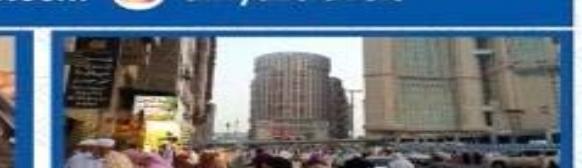
It was said that by the original order of January 17 the District Judge has also given instructions to protect and maintain the disputed building and not to allow any kind of change to be made and by the order of January 31 the barricading should be cut and a door for worship in the basement should be made. (UNI)

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Hyderabad, Feb 14 (IANS): Senior leader and former union minister Renuka Chowdhury and colleague Arif Kumar Yadav are the Congress candidates for Rajya Sabha elections from Telangana. Both the leaders were aspirants for party tickets for Lok Sabha

Rahul promises legal guarantee for MSP and caste survey

Aurangabad (Bihar), Feb 15 (UNI) Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday promised legal guarantee for MSP and caste survey which would help in changing the fates of farmers, backwards and deprived of the society.

Gandhi, while addressing a public meeting as part of his ongoing "Bharat Joro Nyaya Yatra", here said that farmers were demanding legal guarantee for MSP of their produce and marching towards New Delhi from Punjab. All sorts of police atrocities were being committed to stop them from marching ahead towards the Na-



tional Capital, he alleged. Congress will give legal guarantee for MSP of agro produce to help farmers across the country", the party leader said, adding that instead of accepting their demands, the Narendra Modi gov-

ernment was suppressing their agitation. In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had no concern for farmers, he alleged.

The former AICC President said that caste survey was a kind of social X-ray which would

help in scanning real picture of social and economic condition of the people of various sections across the country. It was a fact that more than 70 percent of the people were backwards, oppressed and tribals but their stake in government and top level administration was negligible, he added.

The Wayanad MP said his party would get carried out caste survey to determine socio economic condition of the people. Presenting the prevailing scenario, he said that only three top level IAS officials posted as secretaries in central government were belonging to backward

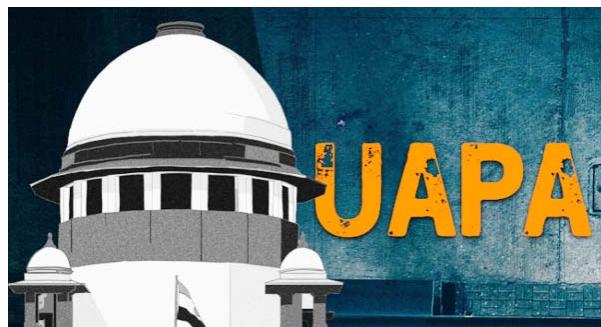
classes and had been shunted, he alleged.

Rahul said that out of 650 High Court judges in the country, only 100 of them were from backward classes. There were virtually no representation of backwards and deprived in top management of big corporate houses, he pointed out. The Congress leader said that annual budget of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranteed (MNREGA) scheme was only 70,000 crores meant for providing employment to poor. It was pathetic to point out that Narendra Modi government had waived off Rs 14 lakh crores.

SC allows withdrawal of pleas challenging validity of UAPA provisions

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): In a sudden turn of events, individuals and groups who had challenged the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in the Supreme Court withdrew their pleas on Thursday, saying they have decided to move appropriate forums.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mital, which had on Wednesday said it will not allow "proxy litigation" to challenge the vires of the anti-terror law UAPA, allowed as many as eight petitions to



be withdrawn, after the petitioners' counsels said they would like to approach the jurisdictional high courts for relief.

The bench had asked the counsel for petitioners to seek instruction by Thursday whether they want to approach the high court to quash the FIR in UAPA cases or they want to challenge

the vires of the law in the top court.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for three civil society members, including a journalist, who were booked under the anti-terror law by Tripura Police in 2021 over their social media posts on riots in the state, said he has received instructions from his cli-

ents to withdraw the petitions. Bhushan said that the interim order dated November 17, 2021 granting protection from arrest be extended by two weeks.

Justice Trivedi said the court is not going to pass any such order but orally asked the Tripura police to not take any coercive action.

"Normally, we would have not entertained such petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution. We are not going to pass any such order. We are not saying anything in the order but you (Tripura police) don't do anything," she said.

"New Direct to Mo-

NC belongs to Ajit Pawar, rules Maha Speaker

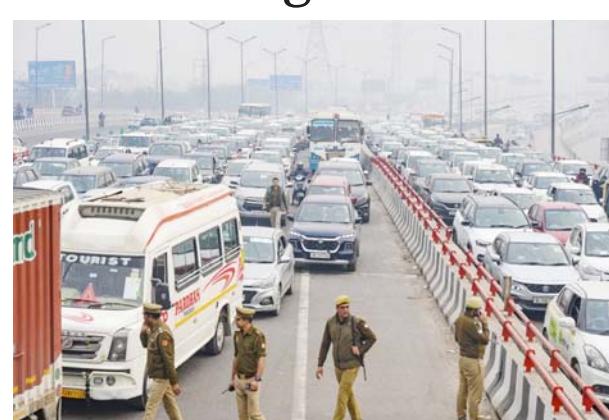


Mumbai, Feb 15 (UNI): Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Eknath Shinde and Deputy Speaker Ajit Pawar here on Thursday ruled that the 'real Nationalist Congress Party' belongs to Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

In his order on the disqualification of MLAs filed by the two rival factions after the NCP split in July 2023, the Speaker referred to the Shiv Sena

disqualification case involving Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and CM Uddhav Thackeray. The Speaker said that the two factions of the NCP emerged on June 30, 2023, and nobody had left any faction, so no action could be taken against any group. "Prior to joining the (Maharashtra) government, the Ajit Pawar faction outnumbered,

Farmers' protest: Police beef up security on Delhi-Gurugram border



Gurugram, Feb 15 (UNI): Gurugram Police as well as Delhi Police have been put on high alert in view of the ongoing farmer's protest.

On the third day of farmers' agitation, tightened security arrangements were witnessed on the Delhi-Gurugram border on the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway, also known as NH-48, on Thursday. Three-layer security arrangements made by the Delhi Police and speed breakers were also installed at the Delhi-Gurugram border area. Although the situation at the Gurugram-Delhi border is normal, despite the security on

the border, the problem of light traffic also persists. During rush hours, vehicles move bumper to bumper on the expressway due to security checks by the police.

Senior officials of the Gurugram Police said they have intensified

their security arrangements and special instructions have been given to the police force to keep a check on suspicious elements. "Multiple police checkpoints have been erected across the district and along with border areas.

NC to contest Lok Sabha polls 'on its own', says Farooq Abdullah



Srinagar, Feb 15 (UNI): The National Conference, biggest regional party of Jammu and Kashmir, on Thursday announced it would contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections and possible assembly polls in the Union Territory "on its own". This was announced by the party chief and Lok Sabha MP Farooq Abdullah here. It comes as yet another setback to the INDIA bloc as well as the regional PAGD alliance.

"Elections will happen and I think both assembly and Parliament elections will be held together. As far as seat sharing is concerned, I

want to make it clear that the National Conference will contest elections on its own. There are no two views about it," Abdullah told reporters here.

The National Conference has been a part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive

Bengal. The decision of the National Conference also signals an end to the People's Alliance on Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), which was formed ahead of the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. Earlier, the regional grouping had indicated that it will fight elections jointly.

While there is no word about holding of Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, which was downgraded from the state to a Union Territory, the parliamentary elections are scheduled to be held. This would be the first major democratic exercise after the special status of the erstwhile state.

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 15 (UNI): With Congress legislator Mathew Kuzhalnadan criticising Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for allegedly favouring the mining firm CMRL in lieu of illegal gratification to his daughter's IT firm, a purported document surfaced on Wednesday suggesting that "Vijayan took almost five years to cancel the license to CMRL, and it was done after Kuzhalnadan first raised the matter last year".

The CM's daughter, Veena Vijayan, is the sole director of Bengaluru-based IT firm Exologic which is currently in a "dormant state".

TN Govt won't be cowed down by Guy Ravi's childish behaviour: Stalin

Chennai, Feb 15 (UNI):

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, MK Stalin said on Thursday that his government was challenging autocratic rule and would not be cowed down by the "childish behaviour" of Tamil Nadu Governor, RN Ravi. Chief Minister Stalin said this in the legislative Assembly while giving a Motion of Thanks to the Governor's address.

Stalin accused the Governor of using the Assembly for the extension of his political activities. Stressing on his Dravidian roots, Stalin



said that his 'Dravidian Model' government had overcome many obstacles in the past and would continue to "pulverise obstacles".

Referring to the re-

Explore innovative options for broadcasting: Anurag Thakur

New Delhi, Feb 15

(UNI):

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday made a strong pitch for exploring innovative options of broadcasting such as Direct-to-Mobile to ensure wider reach of content to all strata of the society and also become self-reliant in the sector.

Inaugurating the annual Broadcast Engineering Society Expo here, Thakur also stressed the need for encouraging indigenous research and development by nurturing scientific talent and fostering partnerships between industry and academia.

"Normally, we would have not entertained such petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution. We are not going to pass any such order. We are not saying anything in the order but you (Tripura police) don't do anything," she said.

"New Direct to Mo-

bile (D2M) technologies offer exciting content possibilities for terrestrial broadcasting not only to television but also on handheld devices such as mobile phones, notepads

Broadcasting Minister said. "We must explore and embrace innovative options of broadcasting like Next Gen broadcasting which shall not only ensure wider reach to cater to all strata of our society but also serve as a catalyst for ever evolving user experience."

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"We must explore and embrace innovative options of broadcasting like Next Gen broadcasting which shall not only ensure wider reach to cater to all strata of our society but also serve as a catalyst for ever evolving user experience."

NASA-backed private US firm's lander finally launches to Moon

New Delhi, Feb 14 (UNI):

NASA backed private US company Intuitive Machines' lander has finally launched to the Moon on Thursday. The lander was earlier scheduled to launch on February 14, but was delayed over a methane fuel issue. The Houston-based Intuitive IM-1 lunar lander lifted off atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket at 1.05 a.m. ET from pad 39A at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida.

Today's mission to the Moon is just the first our Falcon fleet will launch for NASA's CLPS program which will help enable humanity to explore the Moon, Mars, and be-



yond, bringing us one step closer to making life multiplanetary," SpaceX wrote on X.com. In January, another NASA-backed company, Astrobotic Technology's lunar lander suffered "critical" fuel loss and could not make it to the Moon. If successful, the robotic Nova-C lander "Odysseus" will become the first-ever private spacecraft to land softly on the lunar surface on February 22. The lander carries six NASA instruments that will investigate the lunar environment and test technologies for NASA Artemis missions.

'Vijayan cancelled mining license after illegal gratification matter surfaced'



Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 15 (UNI): With Congress legislator Mathew Kuzhalnadan criticising Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for allegedly favouring the mining firm CMRL in lieu of illegal gratification to his daughter's IT firm, a purported document surfaced on Wednesday suggesting that "Vijayan took almost five years to cancel the license to CMRL, and it was done after Kuzhalnadan first raised the matter last year".

The CM's daughter, Veena Vijayan, is the sole director of Bengaluru-based IT firm Exologic which is currently in a "dormant state".

ments to terminate all mining lease agreements granted to private companies engaged in mining materials used by the atomic energy department, no action was taken. However, on Wednesday, a purported document surfaced that the Vijayan government cancelled the mining lease agreement of CMRL on December 18, 2023, several weeks after the controversy first surfaced. Kuzhalnadan on Wednesday said that Vijayan has been interfering in providing gratis to CMRL. "Vijayan has to tell why even as the license could have been cancelled in 2019.

پٹریاٹک ویوز

PATRIOTIC VIEWS

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Exodus from Rafah as Israel ramps up strikes on south Gaza

UN aid chief says notion that people in Gaza could evacuate to a safe place is an 'illusion'.

Rafah, Feb 15 (UNI): The Israeli military has launched a new wave of air raids and artillery fire in southern Gaza, forcing Palestinians to flee overcrowded Rafah in advance of a feared ground invasion that world leaders have condemned.

The United Nations humanitarian agency, OCHA, said on Thursday that people, already displaced several times in the four-month conflict, were heading to Deir el-Balah and the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. Rafah was a designated "safe zone" and the last refuge for Palestinians forced to escape Israel's attacks by land, air and sea across

the rest of the enclave. An estimated 1.4 million Palestinians found some measure of security there in tents and makeshift shelters.

UN aid chief Martin Griffiths warned that Palestinians in Rafah might be forced into Egypt if Israel launches its planned military operation against the border city. "The possibility of a military operation in Rafah, with the possibility of the [border] crossing closing down, with the possibility of spillover ... a sort of Egyptian nightmare ... is one that is right before our eyes," Griffiths told diplomats at the UN in Geneva on Thursday. He said the notion that people in Gaza could evacuate to



a safe place was an "illusion". "We must all hope that friends of Israel and those who care about Israel's security give them good counsel

at this moment," Griffiths added. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his goal on Wednesday to eradicate Hamas by all

means, including a military operation in Rafah. "We will fight until complete victory, and this includes a powerful action also in Rafah after

we allow the civilian population to leave the battle zones," he said.

Mirjana Spoljaric, the head of the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC), said the absence of a clear evacuation plan, including for the sick and elderly, would bring suffering to a new level.

"The suffering on both sides, the carnage we have seen since the seventh of October, will reach unimaginable depths if operations on Rafah are intensified the way they have been announced," Spoljaric said.

As Israeli forces are also engaged in military operations in central and northern Gaza, any mass movement further north would be fraught with danger.

On Thursday, the Israeli army stormed the Nasser Hospital, the main medical facility in Khan Younis, southern

Gaza. The military described the attack as "precise and limited", adding it was based on "credible information" that Hamas fighters were hiding in the facility and kept captives there. A spokesperson for Hamas denied the allegations, calling them "lies".

"It is a continuation of the war of extermination, targeting hospitals and destroying civilian structures in the Gaza Strip, and the occupation continues to challenge international laws that make hospitals protected places," Hamas said in a statement, adding that "the whole world is watching without any serious and effective action to stop it".

North Korea test-fires new surface-to-sea missile



Seoul, Feb 15 (UNI): North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has supervised the test-firing of a new surface-to-sea missile and ordered a tighter defence posture near the western maritime border, Pyongyang's state media reported on Thursday.

The South Korean military said Wednesday it detected several cruise missile launches near the western maritime border, saying that South Korean warships have frequently violated it, KCNA said.

North Korea test-launched the new missile, named Padasuri-6, on Wednesday, Yonhap news agency reported, citing the Ko-

rean Central News Agency (KCNA). The missile hit a target after flying over waters in the East Sea for around 1,400 seconds, KCNA said, without disclosing other details such as how many missiles were fired.

It marked North Ko-

rea's fifth cruise missile launch this year. The provocation came two days before the 82nd birthday of late former leader Kim Jong-il, the father of the current leader Kim Jong-un.

The North Korea's

leader ordered a stronger defence posture near the western maritime border, saying that South Korean warships have frequently violated it, KCNA said.

French former President Nicolas Sarkozy found guilty of illegal campaign financing

Paris, Feb 15 (UNI): Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of illegal campaign financing by a Paris appeal court which gave him a one-year prison sentence, half of which was suspended.

The court found that Sarkozy spent 42.8 million euros (\$45.9 million) for his presidential campaign in 2012 while the maximum amount allowed in France at the time was 22.5 million euros, Xinhua news agency reported.

To conceal the massive overrun, a system of double invoicing had been set up, according to French press.

Sarkozy "undoubtedly benefited from frauds that gave him far great-

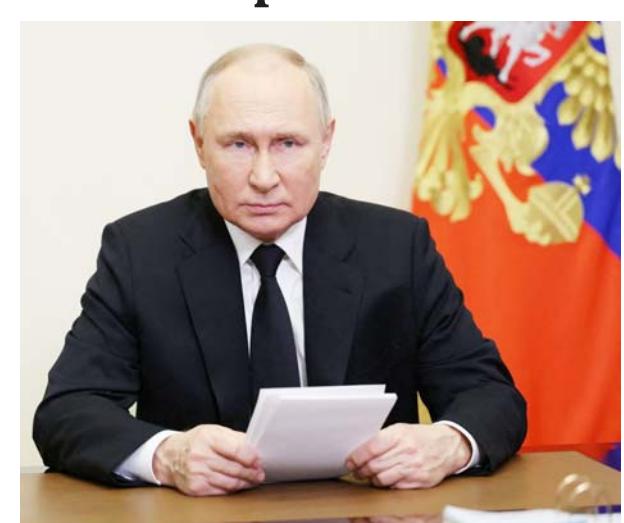
er means than those authorized by law" though "the investigation did not establish that he had ordered them, or that he had participated in them, or even that he had been informed of them," reported the French daily newspaper Le Monde quoting the judge's ruling.

Sarkozy will take the case to France's highest court, his lawyer told reporters. President from 2007 to 2012, Sarkozy faces multiple legal cases. A trial will start in 2025 over allegations that he had accepted money from Libya to fund his 2007 campaign. In 2021, a court handed him a prison sentence of three years, including two suspended, for "corruption and influence."

Moscow, Feb 15 (UNI): Russian President Vladimir Putin said he preferred Joe Biden as the next U.S. president over Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, who fell under intense scrutiny for his relationship with the Kremlin during his presidency.

"[Biden] is more experienced and more predictable. He is an 'old school' politician. But we will work with any US leader, elected by the people of America," Putin told journalist Pavel Zarubin late Wednesday, according to Russian state-controlled news outlet Tass. The Trump and Biden presidential campaigns did not immediately respond to NBC's requests for comment. Putin's remarks followed a week of international controversy over

Russia's Putin says he prefers 'more predictable' Biden over Trump in U.S. election



Trump's recent NATO comments and mounting tensions between U.S. Democrats and Republicans over a \$95 billion aid package that includes military aid to Ukraine.

The Kremlin head of state will stand in his own election on 15-17 March, but is widely expected to clinch another presidential mandate after leading Russia as prime minister or head of state since 1999.

In the same interview, Putin also appeared to dismiss recently mediated concerns over Biden's mental acuity after Department of

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Patriotic Views

Editorial

Tensions escalate in Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

With recent attacks by Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the strait, the region faces heightened security risks which could disrupt world economy

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a narrow passage linking the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden, has thrust itself into the international spotlight. Situated on the northern side of the Red Sea lies the renowned Suez Canal, a monumental feat of engineering connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This vital waterway, spanning approximately 193 kilometres in length and nearly 200 meters in width, serves as a lifeline for global trade and maritime transportation.

However, recent events have cast a shadow over the tranquillity of these waters. The Houthis, a rebel group from Yemen, have launched a series of attacks targeting vessels passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. These assaults, primarily aimed at ships with ties to Israel, have sparked concerns over maritime security and the free movement of goods through this crucial chokepoint. In response to these escalating tensions, Operation Prosperity Guardian, spearheaded by the United States, was initiated to safeguard the Bab-el-Mandeb and ensure the unimpeded flow of maritime traffic. Over 20 nations have expressed their support for this initiative, underscoring the collective effort to protect this strategic waterway.

The motives behind the Houthi attacks are rooted in geopolitical complexities, with their actions perceived as retaliation against Israel's military operations in Gaza. Houthi leaders have explicitly stated their intent to target any ship associated with Israel, leading to a spate of attacks on vessels carrying goods to or from the region. The Houthis contend that peace in Gaza is intrinsically linked to stability in the Red Sea, warning of further conflict if hostilities persist.

The significance of the Red Sea extends beyond its immediate vicinity, serving as a conduit for maritime trade connecting Europe to the rest of the world. The Mediterranean Sea, accessed through the Suez Canal, plays a pivotal role in global shipping routes, facilitating trade between continents and enabling vital economic exchange. Traditionally, ships traversed the African tip to reach their destinations, but the recent turmoil has complicated maritime navigation. With a substantial portion of goods bound for Israel passing through the Suez Canal, disruptions in this route have reverberated across global supply chains. The increased travel distance and associated costs pose significant challenges for shipping companies and commodity markets alike.

The strategic importance of the Suez Canal has historical roots, dating back to its inception in the 19th century. However, its relevance has endured through numerous conflicts, including both World Wars, underscoring its status as a linchpin of global maritime trade.

The economic ramifications of disruptions in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait are far-reaching, affecting industries reliant on the timely delivery of goods and materials. Major shipping companies, such as the Mediterranean Shipping Company and Merk and Hapag Lloyd, have suspended operations in the region, exacerbating supply chain disruptions and logistical challenges.

Amidst these geopolitical tensions, the concept of the blue economy emerges as a beacon of sustainable maritime development. Championed by advocates of ocean conservation, the blue economy emphasizes the responsible utilization of marine resources for economic growth while ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests.

However, divergent perspectives on maritime sovereignty and strategic alliances complicate the geopolitical landscape. While India and the United States share a strategic partnership, differences in maritime policies and military operations underscore the complexities of navigating international waters.

Russia's stance on maritime cooperation underscores the need for inclusive approaches to ocean governance, emphasizing collaboration over competition. As global leaders grapple with the challenges of maritime security and sustainable development, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of oceanic ecosystems and geopolitical dynamics. In conclusion, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait stands at the intersection of geopolitical rivalries and maritime commerce, symbolizing the challenges and opportunities inherent in our interconnected world. As nations navigate these turbulent waters, cooperation and dialogue remain essential to ensuring the security and prosperity of maritime nations and the preservation of our oceans for future generations.

Indian Navy Conducting Exercise In Gulf Of Eden

By Girish Linganna

The Indian Navy is currently conducting its largest-ever deployment in the Gulf of Aden and Western Arabian Sea. This mission operates independently of the US-UK military campaign against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

An unprecedentedly large Indian Navy fleet of 12 warships is now operating in the region, with two advanced vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the remaining 10 in the Northern and Western Arabian Sea. This deployment is much larger and more powerful than those in the past. In contrast to its previous focus on defence and localized operations, the Indian Navy has been deployed with significantly enhanced resources and a wider mission scope amid the present regional challenges.

The Indian Navy's primary focus is to stop piracy and hijacking in the region. The navy has also deployed a substantial special operations force to support this mission. After almost six years of quiet, there has been a sudden increase in pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Northern and Western Arabian Sea. This resurgence of piracy directly reflects the ongoing instability in West Asia, requiring the Indian Navy to maintain a state of heightened vigilance.

Pirate groups based in Somalia were very active between 2008 and 2018. However, since 2018, there were almost no pirate at-



The Indian Navy's primary focus is to stop piracy and hijacking in the region. The navy has also deployed a substantial special operations force to support this mission. After almost six years of quiet, there has been a sudden increase in pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Northern and Western Arabian Sea. This resurgence of piracy directly reflects the ongoing instability in West Asia, requiring the Indian Navy to maintain a state of heightened vigilance.

tacks until late-2023. But, taking advantage of the regional instability created by the Israel-Hamas conflict and Houthi attacks on commercial vessels, pirates have resurfaced in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. While the recent increase in pirate attacks is a cause of concern, the frequency and severity of these incidents are still significantly lower

than the peak observed between 2008 and 2018.

The sheer size of the 2.5-million-square-nautical-mile (85.75-lakh-square-kilometre) area—almost the size of Argentina—targeted for anti-piracy operations underscores the challenges for any individual navy. However, the Indian Navy's present deployment signals an evolution in both capacity and

expertise, allowing for effective and decisive counter-piracy actions across this wide maritime expanse.

During the late-2000s, the Indian Navy's presence in the North-Western Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden was insufficient to fully address piracy threats. Single-ship deployments achieved limited success, revealing a need for greater resources

and stronger cooperation with East African nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other navies for effective counter-piracy operations.

The current deployment surpasses the scale of its initial 2008 anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. India now boasts the largest naval presence off the East African coast and in the Gulf of Aden. This assertive posture reflects a change within the Indian Navy, demonstrating greater operational confidence and expanded capabilities.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar emphasizes India's geopolitical responsibility with this statement: "Inaction during regional instability would undermine our standing as a responsible nation." This underscores New Delhi's commitment to shouldering a greater role in safeguarding commercial shipping and maintaining open, vital waterways.

With pirate attacks having significantly impacted shipping and resulting in hostage situations, the Indian Navy has taken decisive action in response, demonstrating its ability to effectively counter these threats and protect lives. This marks a clear shift in capability and engagement compared to past operations. Examples include the successful MARCOS rescue operation aboard the Liberian-flagged vessel bound for Bahrain and the Indian Navy's swift response to the Houthi missile attack on a UK-linked tanker.

Develop skills with experimental learning

Embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the changing world

Kiranjit Singh Pannu

In an ever-evolving world, the ability to acquire and adapt skills is crucial for success. While traditional learning methods hold value, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development. By immersing individuals in real-world scenarios, it fosters deeper understanding, boosts knowledge retention, and cultivates essential soft skills.

Experiential Learning?

Experiential learning, rooted in the work of David Kolb, emphasizes learning through active engagement and reflection on experiences. It's a hands-on approach, contrasting with passive knowledge absorption. Individuals "learn by doing," applying theoretical concepts to practical situations, whether through simulations, projects, internships, or real-world challenges.

Key Components:

Engagement: Experiential learning places a strong emphasis on engagement. Students are actively involved in the learning process, whether through experiments, projects, field trips, or interactive activities. This engagement helps capture their attention and encourages a sense of curiosity.

Reflection: A crucial as-



pect of experiential learning is the reflective process. After engaging in an activity, students are prompted to reflect on their experiences, analyse the outcomes, and connect the practical knowledge gained to theoretical concepts. This reflective phase enhances their critical thinking skills.

Application: Experiential learning encourages the immediate application of knowledge. By directly applying what they have learned in real-world scenarios, students can see the practical relevance of their education, leading to a deeper understanding and retention of information.

Experiential Learning in Skill Development:

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving: Experiential learning challenges students to think critically and solve problems on their own. Through hands-on experiences, they learn to analyse situations, make decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances—essential skills for success in both academic and real-world settings.

Teamwork and Communication: Collaborative projects and group activi-

ties inherent in experiential learning help students develop strong teamwork and communication skills. They learn to express their ideas, listen to others, and work cohesively towards common goals, mirroring the dynamics of the professional world.

Creativity and Innovation: Hands-on experiences stimulate creativity and innovation by encouraging students to think outside the box. When faced with real-world challenges, students are prompted to generate unique solutions, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and adaptability.

In the 21st century, where adaptability and a diverse skill set are crucial for success, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development in schools. By integrating this pedagogical approach, educators can foster not only a deep understanding of academic concepts but also the critical skills needed for future success. As schools continue to evolve, embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the rapidly changing world.

Globalisation has failed to spur cosmopolitanism

Globalisation has bred apprehension among self-appointed custodians of religion that their people are losing faith in old orthodoxies

Neera Chandhoke

IT is, perhaps, the greatest paradox of our times that the advent of globalisation in the 1980s and liberalisation/privatisation in India in the early 1990s has not been accompanied by the expansion of imagination and cosmopolitanism, but by the closing in of community boundaries. From the 1950s onwards, scholars and statesmen focused on 'composite' or 'syncretic' culture.

In his 1987 essay, Prof Rasheeduddin Khan, who taught at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, had written that the Indian civilisation was profoundly influenced by the Indo-Aryan stream, which provided the Vedic philosophy, and the Indo-Muslim strand, which was based on the intertwining of the Bhakti Movement and Islamic Sufism. He wrote: "It is not surprising... to realise that the composite culture in India originated in an environment of reconciliation rather than refutation, cooperation rather than confrontation, coexistence rather than mutual annihilation of the politically dominant Islamic strands."

Khan and other authors, including Aziz Ahmed, did not deny that there was violence between Hindus and Muslims in the medieval period. They creatively drew our attention to the fusion of two cultures in the creative field and in everyday life. The former was manifest in architecture and painting, the latter in shared worship at Sufi shrines and the increasing adoption of Urdu as the language of communication across vast swathes of India.

Since the 1990s, the eruption of ethnic wars across the world and the rise of Hindutva in India have consigned this notion to the margins of history. No one wants to remember the syncretism that the postcolonial generations were brought up on. Religious communities have shut their doors and hatched them down against the Other — now defined as the enemy.

This seems paradoxical in the context



of the rapid transmission of the trans-border flow of information, new symbols, new ways of communication and new ways of producing and consuming things. We witness an immediacy to history. It brings wars in Ukraine and the Gaza strip right into our homes. We see the Oscars along with audiences in the west, read the same books, watch the same television series and movies and listen to the same music. Conflict zones in critical sites, as well as celebrations, are as real to us as our own sites of conflict, award ceremonies, sports, reading habits and music. We participate in political protests across the world; we

follow the same fashion styles; we add here to the same canon of aesthetics. There is no refuge, no safe haven against the violence we witness on our television screens. But globalisation, which has produced its own discontent, has also intensified insecurity and anxieties about collective identity. We are back to the early decades of the 19th century, when Raja Ram Mohan Roy asked the question: Who are we? Roy used the wisdom of ancient sacred texts to critique extant practices, such as rituals, superstitions, fasts and belief in false prophets. He initiated a major movement of social reform against Brahmanical domination, gender discrimination and irrational customs. Today, we

see the reinforcement of the same Brahmanical domination in the return of rituals, temple worship, fasts and the entry of saffron-clad 'godmen' in politics. The rediscovery of Hinduism in the 19th century brought social reform; the Hindutva campaign of the contemporary era has reinforced orthodoxy amidst globalisation.

Analysts of early globalisation told us that the unimpeded progress of a homogenising juggernaut of culture would sweep everyone up in a common coil. But the process has also produced an intensified, even irrational, sense of a religious community and hostility towards others who are our fellow citizens, our neighbours,

our friends, and our allies. The closing in of the Indian mind has pushed away syncretism and embraced tribalism around totems. Communities are, however, an invention. The hardening of boundaries is a reaction to factors that range from the insecurity that the community's identity is in danger to the silver tongue of demagogues. This community rejects 'strangers'. We have lost our syncretic culture and, alongside, we have lost our ability to be human: to suffer the pain of others, to shed tears with them, to rejoice in their victories, to be saddened by their defeats. We have, above all, lost the spirit of tolerance enunciated by Emperor Akbar.

Akbar's tolerance was described in the memoirs of his son and successor Jahangir: "Followers of various religions had a place in the broad scope of the peerless empire — unlike other countries of the world, like Iran, where there is room for only Shi'ites, and... Turan (Central Asia), where there is room for only Sunnis. Just as all groups and practitioners of all religions have a place within the spacious circle of God's mercy, in accordance with the dictum that the shadow must follow its source, in my father's realm, which ended at the salty sea, there was room for the practitioners of various sects and beliefs, both true and imperfect, and strife and altercation were not allowed. Sunni and Shiite worshipped in one mosque and Frank and Jew in one congregation. Utter peaceableness was his established way." We ignore this message only at our own peril.

Globalisation has not spurred cosmopolitanism; it has bred apprehension among self-appointed custodians of religion that their people are losing faith in old orthodoxies, and that the radical project of challenging caste, class and patriarchal hierarchies in a global civil society will strip these 'defenders of the faith' of power. In the process, we have become lesser human beings.

BJP faces problem of plenty, Opposition losing ground

Until the Congress sheds its delusions of grandeur, there is little hope for INDIA

Radhika Ramaseshan

AS the pieces fall into place on the political chessboard in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the developments are upending logic and expediency. The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc is up against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The saffron party has set itself a target of 370 Lok Sabha seats (and 400 for the NDA), going by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's declaration in Parliament. INDIA needs as many allies as it can mobilise to fortify its ranks against an overbearing party that determinedly tries to pulverise Opposition-ruled dispensations that lend heft to the coalition. Fiscal injustice by way of inadequate aid from the Centre even to deal with calamities (for instance, the Tamil Nadu floods) and the selective crackdown on ministers for alleged malfeasance are some of the complaints levelled against the NDA government to fuel the 'Centre versus states' debate. On the other side stands the BJP, a behemoth characterised by a powerful leadership, a charismatic PM who purportedly bests his global peers in periodic rankings, a stranglehold over statutory institutions and a formidable party machinery. The BJP more than holds its own against a ragtag, rapidly dwindling Opposition coalition.

The supreme irony lies in the BJP's unstinting efforts to court and co-opt as many regional forces as it possibly can in the NDA despite their roots in dynastic or identity politics, which is avowedly anathema to the party. In the last five years, the BJP lost its once-valued partners, such as the undivided Shiv Sena, the Janata Dal (United) and the Shiromani Akali Dal. The NDA's ambit has widened now with the inclusion of the smaller parties, even as the BJP, through calculated manoeuvres, split the Sena in Maharashtra and appropriated a dominant section from the original leader, Uddhav Thackeray, as well as Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party. The faction headed by Pawar's nephew Ajit is NDA property. The ownership of former legatees



(Ajit) and an Uddhav confidant like Eknath Shinde of the breakaway Sena gave legitimacy to the post facto charges the BJP levelled against Pawar and Uddhav. The BJP got back the JD(U) in a dramatic coup that brought the downfall of a 'secular' coalition government and its return to power in Bihar with an allegedly discredited Nitish Kumar continuing at the helm. It has restarted a dialogue with the SAD to upstage the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab.

The most intriguing aspect of the BJP's coalition push is wooing the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in Uttar Pradesh, apparently to consolidate its gains in the state's western region, which has never let down the BJP, even in bad spells. The idea is to hollow out the Opposition, which last June seemed earnest about raising a joint front to challenge the BJP, although the question of who would lead INDIA — the Congress or a provincial leader — remains

unresolved. INDIA's leadership vacuum was significantly highlighted in last December after the BJP vanquished the Congress in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and re-established its supremacy over the Hindi heartland. Hobbled by the defeats, the Congress looks to the south for succour, with strong allies in Tamil Nadu and Kerala as crutches. Undaunted by a relatively marginal presence in the south, the BJP went ahead and made common cause with the Janata Dal (Secular), virtually a private estate of the Deve Gowda clan, after its defeat in the Assembly polls. In Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu Desam Party and its adversary, the YSR Congress Party, want to get on the BJP's side, while in neighbouring Telangana, the leadership is undecided over tying up with the Bharat Rashtra Samithi. In this lopsided landscape, the BJP faces a problem of plenty, with a cornucopia of allies in Bihar and

UP, while INDIA stares at a drought after the exit of the JD(U) and important Congress leaders, the latest being former Maharashtra CM Ashok Chavan. The plenitude could potentially cause wrangles over seat-sharing in the NDA, but the BJP's strategists have a proven knack for overcoming such hitches.

Why did things come to an unhappy pass for INDIA? The alliance's predilection seemed predetermined from the inception because neither the Congress nor the regional constituents could define their equations. The Congress' allies — the JD(U), Trinamool Congress and the Samajwadi Party — regarded themselves on a par with the grand old party. But Congress wanted to assume the stewardship without spelling it out in that many words. The state parties, on the other hand, couldn't agree on a unified command. The proposal to appoint Nitish as the convener was opposed by the TMC

On the other side stands the BJP, a behemoth characterised by a powerful leadership, a charismatic PM who purportedly bests his global peers in periodic rankings, a stranglehold over statutory institutions and a formidable party machinery. The BJP more than holds its own against a ragtag, rapidly dwindling Opposition coalition.

and AAP because their leaders suspected that the post was a stepping stone to his projection as INDIA's PM candidate. On his part, Rahul Gandhi never scotched the speculation that he was in the running for the PM's job. The Congress' ambitions were vastly disproportionate to its ground strength. The Assembly election results announced in December last year effectively sealed its fate in view of reversals in three Hindi heartland states. Had the Congress swung two of the three states, it could have legitimately hoped to helm the INDIA bloc. The Telangana win was not good enough to recompense for the loss of power in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan and the failure to reclaim MP.

Coalition-building has never been the Congress' metier. When push came to shove and it did not secure a majority in the Lok Sabha, it reluctantly backed non-BJP coalitions, only to pull them down on a whim as though it were a sport. Rahul Gandhi fits into the tradition. It was public knowledge that Nitish was restless in INDIA and the RLD sought greener pastures. Rahul did not reach out to the leaders to find out why they were unhappy and what they wanted. He has also been indifferent to the departure of his party colleagues, even a close associate like Milind Deora. Until the party sheds its delusions of grandeur, there's little hope for INDIA.

Stress a significant risk factor in heart attacks among youth

The corporate sector should create an environment to reduce stress and the govt must build social support.

KK Talwar

RECENT times have seen a surge in sudden death/heart attacks among relatively young people, including celebrities. This has led to a debate about the possible causes and the preventive steps that can be initiated. One view is that such cases are possibly happening more frequently across the world after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nearly 20 per cent of acute heart attacks in India occur in people in the under-40 age group as compared to only 5 per cent in the Western population. The most common cause of sudden death is acute myocardial infarction/acute heart attack. Smoking is considered to be the most important risk factor contributing to heart attacks in young people. Other risk factors include excessive consumption of alcohol, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, high cholesterol, substance abuse and the use of junk food and oral contraceptives (in case of young women).

There has been concern about whether Covid infection or its vaccine has something to do with this rise. There is no scientific data to blame the Covid vaccine. Some data was, however, published indicating higher risk of the cardiovascular complications, viz myocarditis, related to the mRNA vaccine. But this vaccine was not used in India. Recently, the Indian Council of Medical Research published a study stating that there was a high risk of heart attack/sudden death among those who had undergone symptomatic Covid-related hospitalisation.

Stress is another powerful risk factor. The New York Times once highlighted that stress may be your heart's worst enemy. It is possible that psychological stress associated with the aftermath of the Covid pandemic — job losses and financial problems — may also be a contributory cause. People who are worried about losing their job are nearly 20 per cent more likely to have



heart attack, as per medical observations. At times, stress may also make a person indulge in unhealthy habits, like smoking and eating junk food; it can also lead to lack of sleep.

A hectic work schedule, target-driven jobs and job insecurity are major triggers for stress. It is a scientifically proven fact that stress takes a significant toll on the heart's health. Stress produces neuroendocrine activation with the increased production of catecholamines and cortisol. There is also increased plasma proinflammatory cytokines/prothrombotic and immune system activation. All this can increase the heart rate, blood pressure and myocardial oxygen requirement. The inflammatory process

may induce the rupture of atherosclerotic plaque in the coronary arteries, resulting in acute heart attack. Mental stress may also result in coronary artery spasm and vasoconstriction and compromise blood flow in an already diseased vessel. Amygdala, the part of the brain that contributes to stress, has been seen to experience an increased activity under stress. It possibly activates the neuroendocrine system to release chemicals to either face stress or make you flee, depending on the kind of stress and the individual's tolerance levels.

Stress is a part of the process of growing and achieving something substantial in life. A bit of stress is important as it makes you work harder to fare

better in examinations or advance in career. But problems such as job losses and marital discord affect one's mental stability and strength to face such situations and result in serious cardiac problems in the absence of strong family or social support. Thus, while advising preventive steps, like avoiding smoking, adopting a healthy diet and doing regular exercise, it is also important to talk of the stress levels and how to handle them.

The fact is that it is not easy to manage stress. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Reducing stress is not like flipping a switch. It requires persistent efforts and support from family, friends and the social system. Exercise is useful in raising the threshold levels

of bearing stress and should be advised as a regular practice. When you exercise, you virtually burn some of your stress. Aerobic exercises, yoga and meditation are also useful in strengthening the mind. Sharing one's thoughts and feelings with friends/relatives helps in the adoption of a positive attitude. To stay connected with the people you love, reading motivational books, listening to music and undertaking some hobby help raise the threshold of bearing stress. Unfortunately, the trend of nuclear families is weakening traditional family support. In its absence, stress may induce in some people serious medical issues like depression and insomnia, which also make one susceptible to heart attack and sudden death. Most of the developed countries have a social system to financially support people when they lose jobs.

It is time for the corporate sector to create an environment to reduce stress and for the government to build some mechanism of social support in such stressful periods. To prevent heart diseases, there is also a need to work on the basic amenities — sanitation, a pollution-free environment and the availability of safe drinking water. Youngsters in schools and colleges should be educated about the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle, including doing regular exercise, avoiding junk food and smoking and reducing the intake of alcohol. Medical advice must be taken in case of hypertension, diabetes mellitus or high cholesterol level.

Some young people may have hereditary arrhythmic or myocardial disorders, which may also result in sudden cardiac arrest. Thus, those with such a family background should have cardiac evaluations done and take preventive treatment. Indeed, stress happens to be an enemy of the heart and we need to educate our youngsters on how to deal with it effectively.

Tough road ahead for India at WTO

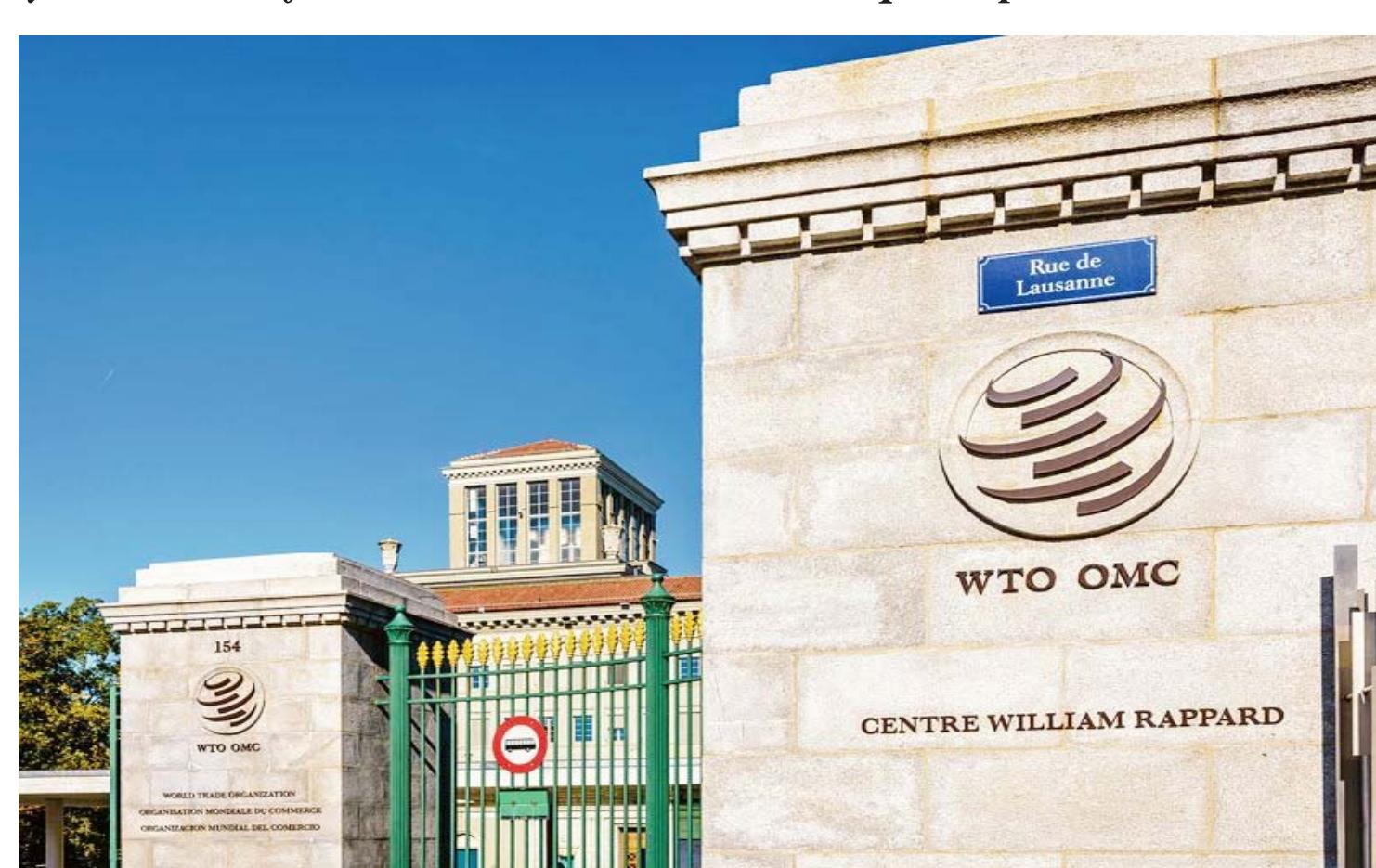
The country must play the role of a leader, but this will require political will and deft trade diplomacy

Sushma Ramachandran

INDIA will find it hard to push its agenda at the forthcoming 13th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Abu Dhabi. This is largely because the conference, which represents the highest decision-making conclave of the multilateral trading body, has in recent years been unable to move forward on several issues owing to the intransigence of the North. One of the main problems has been the deadlock over the crucial two-layer dispute settlement mechanism. It has been paralysed for the past four years owing to the US decision to block appointments to the appellate body. There is also much talk about WTO reforms, but so far little has been done to give more support to emerging economies in an entity that was originally meant to provide a level playing field for both the haves and the have-nots.

For India, there are many issues that need to be resolved at the conference, but much will depend on the political will to move ahead with them aggressively. It will surely have to take a more forceful stance than at the last meeting in 2022. At that time, it did not vigorously advocate the proposal to allow patent waivers for the production of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics meant to meet the potential demands of any future pandemic. A partial waiver only for vaccines was agreed upon, with the Joe Biden administration also having softened its stance on the issue. But the wider proposals meant to avoid expensive imports by the developing world that had been mooted by India and South Africa in October 2020 and supported by 108 countries were given a quiet burial.

Ultimately, the negotiations at the 12th ministerial conference in June 2022 ended with merely a temporary patent waiver to manufacture Covid-19 vaccines for a period of five years. On therapeutics and diagnostics, talks were to be held under the purview of the waiver, ensur-



ing that there would be no early decision.

Indications are that India may not have much leeway to move ahead aggressively in Abu Dhabi in view of the deepening bilateral ties between the host nation (UAE) and India. Given the growing bonhomie, India would not like to adopt an intransigent attitude at the WTO conference.

Nevertheless, New Delhi is bound to raise some critical issues. Among the most significant ones is the 'peace clause'. This was extracted after protracted negotiations in 2013. It allowed subsidy on public stockholding based on government procurement of foodgrains at prices meant to support Indian farmers. It was successfully argued at the Bali ministerial conference that public stockholding of foodgrains — which is at the core

of the procurement system — ensured food security for around 80 crore people.

The 'peace clause' stipulated that no country would be legally barred from food security programmes for its people even if the subsidy breached the limits specified in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. The clause has been sought to be made a permanent provision by India since it involves the livelihood of crores of farmers, largely in the subsistence category. But so far it has only been extended on a temporary basis at every subsequent ministerial conference. In contrast, developed countries remain rigid on maintaining their enormous food subsidies.

The issue will be taken up at a time when foodgrain procurement has become a politically sensitive issue in the country. Protesting farmers are demanding a le-

gal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP) for all crops. It is this very MSP that is considered an excessive subsidy by the WTO. The 'peace clause' has ensured that other countries will not raise the issue as a dispute, but till it becomes a permanent provision, it hangs over this country like the sword of Damocles.

The second big item on India's agenda is to ensure that non-trade issues are not brought into the negotiations. This is largely in regard to labour and environment issues, but also in respect of gender and small industry's concerns. Trade barriers in the guise of sustainable development are being brought on the table to curb the competitiveness of developing economies. The European Union (EU) has enacted the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism along with laws on de-

forestation. Both could have an impact on India's exports to the EU. The carbon tax envisages a levy on carbon embedded in emission-intensive sectors such as steel and aluminium and could thus affect a wide range of products.

While the Commerce Ministry has indicated that it will discuss these non-trade barriers with the EU, it needs to show the way to the South in opposing their introduction at the WTO. The battle to bring non-trade issues to the multilateral arena has been on for many years. The effort to bring labour standards into trade talks was made by the North shortly after the trade body was formed in a bid to raise non-tariff barriers for developing economies. The ambit of such non-trade issues has widened over the years to include gender and environment. This is continuing, even though it is a stretch to bring women's empowerment into trade talks. India must join hands with other developing economies to resist the inclusion of such extraneous issues into multilateral trade discussions.

The third issue of concern for the country is the moratorium on imposing import duties on electronic transmissions. This has been a longstanding policy, but India is now reported to be in favour of reversing it in order to raise import revenues. The strategy needs a second look, given the rising electronics exports from the country which could be hit by tariffs imposed by others in case the moratorium is lifted. The 13th ministerial conference is likely to be of significance if India is able to get the proposals on its agenda implemented. Much will depend on the health of the trade body, which has lost much of its sheen, with nations opting for regional trade agreements. It needs more support in terms of reviving the crucial dispute settlement mechanism. It also needs to ensure that reforms give primacy to the concerns of emerging economies. India must play a leader's role, but this will require both political will and deft trade diplomacy.

RBI Governor calls for global pacts on critical minerals & food security corridors

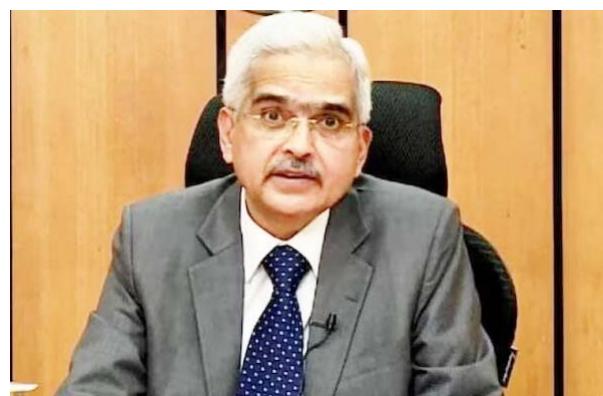
Mumbai, Feb 15 (UNI): RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday emphasised the need to chalk out an effective strategy for global cooperation and coordination to deal with multiple challenges afflicting the global economy.

Addressing the South East Asian Central Banks (SEACEN) Governors Conference here, Das said, "Multilateralism must be re-energised. In this regard, agreements on a 'critical minerals corridor' and a 'food corridor' for safeguarding food security are necessary. Such arrangements have to be

Heavy selling by FIIs neutralised by domestic funds buying

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): A significant feature of a bull market is its ability to bounce back from a steep fall. This was evident on February 14 when Nifty bounced back by around 300 points from the lows, says V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services. The heavy selling by FIIs, which was expected in response to the spike in US bond yields, didn't impact the market since it was neutralised by DII and individual investor buying, he said.

A significant feature of the market now is the change in leadership.



fair and equitable." He also pointed out that there was a need to develop cooperation in areas of common interest and urgent needs, such as climate change where no country can devise strategies on its own. Smooth and orderly

green transition was necessary to avoid disruptions to economic activity and loss of growth potential.

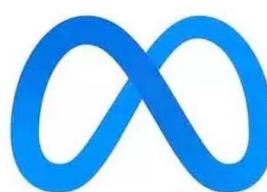
While the investment needs for smooth green transition are large, the actual financial flows to green projects are high-

ly skewed and are, by and large, concentrated in advanced economies. As a result, there is a need to enhance green capital flows to EMEs. At the same time, we have to be mindful of potential financial stability implications of green transition.

Das stated that improving infrastructure remains key to long-term growth. While investment in hard infrastructure (roads, ports, airports, electricity, water) is important, there has to be equal emphasis on creating soft infrastructure (education, health, legal, financial, institutional). The RBI Governor

noted that India's experience has shown how Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) can be utilised for advancing financial inclusion and productivity gains through cost reductions. He mentioned the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and its potential to become an international model for cross-border payments. He also said that new technological developments like artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) can bring about significant improvements in efficiency and productivity of businesses.

Russia-based spam accounts not gaining traction on our platforms: Meta



New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): Russia-based spam accounts have grown on Meta platforms in recent years but these are not gaining as much traction or increase in followers as earlier, the company has said.

The social network found a growing number of accounts and pages linked to coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) from Russia, but they're not gaining as

Meta

many followers as before. "Our enforcements against Russian state controlled media led to posting volumes declining by 55 per cent and engagement levels by 94 per cent compared to pre-war levels globally and across languages, according to the latest research by Graphika," Meta said in a statement.

For covert influence operations, since 2022, "we've seen fewer at-

tempts to build complex deceptive personas in favour of thinly-disguised, short-lived fake accounts in an effort to spam the internet, hoping something will 'stick.'

Despite these noisy attempts, the company saw a consistent decline in the followings of Russian-origin CIB campaigns. The main way that CIB networks get through to authentic communities.

3rd Test: India's batsmen lead fightback against England

Rajkot, Feb 15 (UNI): Captain Rohit Sharma and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja smashed centuries each, while Sarfraz Khan sparkled on his Test debut with 62 off 66 balls as India reached 326/5 in 86 overs at stumps on Day One of the third Test against England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium here on Thursday. While Rohit made 131, Jadeja was unbeaten on 110, as the duo added 204 runs for the fourth wicket, after India were reduced to 33/3 in the 2nd 45 minutes on a pitch which attended out as the day progressed.

The early morning moisture on the Rajkot pitch benefited Mark Wood, who came into England's playing eleven in place of spinner Shoaib Bashir. He drew 20 runs when he angled across a delivery which caught Yashasvi Jaiswal at the crease and the left-hander could only edge behind to 2nd slip. In his next over, Wood had an un-



com-fortable Shubman Gill nicking behind a good length delivery which nipped away to wicket-keeper Ben Foakes. England had their third wicket in the ninth over when Hartley got a delivery to jump off a length, which gripped and turned very sharply to take Rajat Patidar's edge towards cover.

After being hit on the helmet grille by Wood in a short-ball play, with three elders stationed deep in the leg-side, Rohit tried to unsettle Hartley with cut and sweep for boundaries. He even got a life at 27 in the same over when Joe Root dropped his catch at 2nd slip on an attempted slog. Luck continued to favour Rohit when survived a close lbw shout while dancing down the pitch against Anderson. Rohit then brought out his good-looking punch, loft down the pitch, pulls

and sweeps to reach his century in 71 balls. From the other end, Jadeja, promoted to No.5, remained rock-solid, driving and punching Root for a brace of fours to be an ideal partner for Rohit in leading the recovery act for India.

After lunch, Rohit and Jadeja were in control of their approach, rotating the strike well and putting the bad balls away to get runs easily as the pitch began to soften out. Jadeja edged a four off Wood while Rohit danced down the pitch to loft Hartley over long-on for six, before glancing Anderson for a boundary, as the duo continued.

Bajrang Punia writes open letter to UWW over revoking of WFI suspension

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): Olympic medalist wrestler Bajrang Punia wrote an open letter to United World Wrestling (UWW) on Thursday, demanding the world Wrestling body to take action against the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). In a letter, Punia wrote that the decision to lift WFI suspension has put the "wrestlers under threat again" by WFI members.

UWW, the global governing body for the sport, had placed the WFI under provisional suspension on August 23 last year after the Indian body failed to hold an election in due course. However, the UWW de-



cided to lift the suspension on Tuesday with immediate effect.

The UWW Bureau met on February 9 to review the suspension among other topics and considering all the elements and information, it decided to lift the suspension under the condition that WFI has to immediately provide

WFI was suspended by Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYAS) dated 27 December 2023 due to serious anomalies after a couple of days of taking charge. MYAS also formed an Ad Hoc Committee to overlook and conduct wrestling activities. "Even after this suspended WFI members took blatant decisions to conduct sporting activities without any recognition from sports ministries under the same leadership. Wrestlers all over India have lost trust and belief in functioning of Wrestling Federation of India. Because of this MYAS took diligent steps and issued a circular dated 7th January 2024.

In a letter to UWW, Punia wrote: "This decision has again put Indian wrestlers under threat and harassment by WFI members. This is to bring to your notice that this

India slip to 117 in latest FIFA rankings after Asian Cup debacle



New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI): The Indian men's national football team fell to 117th place in the latest FIFA rankings after its AFC Asian Cup debacle. India slipped 15 spots from 102 in the latest edition of the FIFA men's world ranking released on Thursday, following the team's first-round exit from the continental tournament in Doha, last month.

There is plenty of movement further down the standings following the matches contested in the CAF Africa Cup of Nations and the AFC Asian Cup. Amongst the African sides, Ivory Coast jumped 10 spots to be placed 39th, reaping

the rewards of their continental triumph on home soil, secured following an eventful AFCON campaign. AFCON runners-up Nigeria sit at 28th after jumping 14 places making significant strides but are no match for Angola (93rd, up 24), a

side they ousted in the last eight, who are the biggest climbers in the latest instalment of the global ranking. Two-time Asian Cup winners Qatar (37th, up 21) chalk up the biggest tally (92.04 points) after capitalising on home comforts to

successfully defend their continental crown. Elsewhere, Jordan (70th, up 17), who were edged out in the Asian Cup final, make good ground, as do Thailand (101st, up 12), whose journey came to an end at the last-16 stage.

Bharat Dal now has 25% market share of gram lentil within 4 months of its launch: Piyush Goyal



New Delhi, Feb 15 (PIB): Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Textiles and Commerce & Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal has expressed happiness at the rise in the production and quality of Agriculture products to make India self-sufficient and for also enabling export of over \$50 billion of agri-related products. He said that over the last decade due to the commitment and capabilities of the farmers, pulses production has grown by 60% from 171 lakh tonnes in 2014 to 270 lakh tonnes in 2024.

"The partnership between NAFED and GPC will continue to grow to make pulses not only India's wonder-diet but to make the wonder-diet of the world", said Shri Piyush Goyal.

Speaking on Bharat Dal, the Minister said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi the government launched the India pulse to support the farmers of the country and ensure the availability of reasonably-priced pulses for Indian citizens.

He said that this has led to expansion both in pro-

duction and quality of different food products to make India an exporter of over \$50 billion of agri and related products. He said that over the last decade due to the commitment and capabilities of the farmers, pulses production has grown by 60% from 171 lakh tonnes in 2014 to 270 lakh tonnes in 2024.

"The partnership between NAFED and GPC will continue to grow to make pulses not only India's wonder-diet but to make the wonder-diet of the world", said Shri Piyush Goyal.

Goyal noted that in 2015 the government introduced buffer stock to ensure moderate prices and price stability shielding the consumers from the food inflation that hit many countries including the developed world reeling with a 40-year high of inflation. "India was the bright spot with among the lowest inflation.

Rajiv Gandhi or Telangana Talli: Row over statue at Secretariat

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (IANS): The foundation stone laid by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for installing a statue of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in front of the State Secretariat has triggered a row.

Main Opposition Bharat Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) has demanded the government to drop the move, saying the land was earmarked for installing a statue of Telangana 'Talli' (mother).

BRS leaders opposed the installation of Rajiv Gandhi's statue, saying the former Prime Minister has no specific relevance to Telangana while the statue of Telangana Talli symbolises the state's cultural identity.

BRS leader K. Kavitha on Thursday raised her concern over the proposed statue in front of the Secretariat.

In a letter to Telangana Legislative Council



Chairman, the BRS MLC said that as an elected representative, she is deeply committed to preserving the cultural identity of Telangana.

She added that the previous government had planned to install a Telangana Talli statue at the Secretariat and that the decision had widespread support because it was seen as a way to honour our state's rich cultural heritage and make us proud of our Telangana roots.

Kavitha, the daughter of BRS President and former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, said that she was troubled to hear

that the present government has changed this plan. Instead of the Telangana Talli statue, they have decided to lay the foundation stone for a statue of Rajiv Gandhi.

She said while she respects Rajiv Gandhi's contributions to the nation, putting his statue ahead of Telangana Talli is not the right decision.

"It goes against the wishes of the people of Telangana and disrespects our cultural identity. The Telangana Talli statue is incredibly important to us. It represents our unique cultural identity and reminds us of the struggles and as-

pirations of our ancestors. Replacing it with a statue of a national figure, no matter how important, would erase what makes Telangana special," she added.

Kavitha urged the state government to reconsider the decision and prioritise the erection of the Telangana Talli statue in front of Telangana Secretariat.

The statue would inspire political leaders to follow his ideology of serving the people, he added. "Rajiv Gandhi gave his life for the integrity of the country. His statue is not just for garlanding on birthdays and anniversaries. All political leaders must take inspiration.

MLC nomination: Telangana HC reserves orders on BRS leaders' petitions



Hyderabad, Feb 15 (Patriotic Views): The Telangana High Court on Thursday reserved its orders on the petitions filed by two BRS leaders challenging Governor's action in rejecting their nomination to the Legislative Council.

Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice S. Nanda reserved their orders on the petitions of Dasoju Sravan Kumar and Satyanarayana.

Sravan Kumar and Satyanarayana were nominated to the Legislative Council by the previous BRS government but the Governor had rejected the nominations.

The recommendation passed by the then state Cabinet in July last year

was sent to the Governor. However, she rejected the nominations on September 19 on the ground that the two were "politically aligned persons".

Following the change of guards in the state due to the defeat of BRS in Assembly elections, the BRS leaders filed petitions challenging the Governor's action.

The petitioners contended that the decision taken by the Governor to reject the recommendations of the Council of Ministers was due to 'lack of personal satisfaction' and not due to any ambiguity in the recommendation itself, which is arbitrary therefore illegal. The petitioners

called 'the order passed by the Governor as malafide, arbitrary, unconstitutional and in excess of her jurisdiction. On January 30, the High Court stayed the swearing-in of Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) president M. Kodandaram and journalist Amer Ali Khan as members of Telangana Legislative Council.

Ruling Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) is under pressure from the opposition for failing to deliver on its promise despite the landslide victory in the 2019 elections. Five years after YSRCP made SCS a major issue to target then ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the former is now facing the same situation.

SCS has been dominating the state politics ever since the bifurcation in 2014. In fact, this issue has led to coalition partners parting ways a few years ago.

At the time of bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the then

UPA government at the Centre had promised in the Parliament that SCS will be conferred on the residuary state. In 2014 elections, the BJP had promised to confer SCS, which entitles a state to vast financial assistance and tax rebates from the Centre.

The BJP had then contested the polls in alliance with TDP and Jana Sena leader and actor Pawan Kalyan had campaigned for the combine. However, two years after coming to power, the BJP made it clear that SCS can't be conferred as it was following new stricter guidelines about financial assistance to states. It instead offered a special package to Andhra Pradesh. Angry over this, Pawan Kalyan snapped ties with BJP and slammed the TDP for what he called accepting "stale laddus" offered by the Centre.

In 2018, the TDP too

Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)



Hyderabad, Feb 15 (Patriotic Views): Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) Hyderabad centre celebrated its silver jubilee on 13th and 14th February 2024. It is a scientific society under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India. C-DAC Hyderabad was established in the year 1999. C-DAC Hyderabad team has diversified strengths focusing on R&D, Solution/Product development, Training, Services and Outreach Programs. Technology verticals of Hyderabad centre are Cyber Security, Embedded Systems & Internet of Things (IoT), AI/ML, Quantum Computing, High Perfor-

mance Computing, VLSI Design, Blockchain Technology, e-Learning and ICT for Social Development. Centre actively contributes to various skilling activities. Various research labs are created in these focus areas of the centre.

As part of silver jubilee celebrations, inter C-DAC centre sports events, technology symposium, product exhibi-

tion, cultural program and foundation day formal program were organized. Panel discussions in different technology areas were planned with experts from academia, industry, premier R&D institutes. Shri Jayesh Ranjan, IAS, Principal Secretary, Government of Telangana, Industries & Commerce (I&C) Department, & Information Technology, Electronics and Communications (ITE&C) Department and Prof. Rajat Moona, Director, IIT Gandhi Nagar, Dr. N Sarat Chandra Babu Founder Director, C-DAC Hyderabad and Shri. Raja Neravati Chief Product & Technology Officer, Wearables, Titan Company addressed during C-DAC Hyderabad the event. Three products namely C-Forms software, M-Prabandh and

Binary Vishleshak (Bin-V) were launched during the event. C-DAC Forms Simplifying Form Creation, anyone can utilize C-DAC Forms to generate and manage forms for gathering data related to different tasks such as event sign-ups, feedback acquisition, surveys, polling, and more. M-Prabandh is a Mobile Device Management (MDM) security solution and Bin-V is used for converting MIPS binaries to LLVM Intermediate Representation (IR) for enabling sophisticated security analysis of binaries. C-DAC signed MoU with Railtel Corporation as a marketing partner to proliferate the identified products of C-DAC Hyderabad.

Journalism in Hyderabad is based on quality, honesty and candor

Hyderabad community based in Muscat, Oman addresses the IJFF event



Hyderabad (15 Feb 2024): Journalism in Hyderabad is based on quality, honesty and candor, which is the reason why the news published and presented by the journalistic institutions here are trusted worldwide, especially in the city's multi-circulation newspapers. Newspapers & Channels news are read and watched by Hyderabadi community with interest on social media in Gulf countries.

These views were expressed by the Hyderabadi community based in Muscat, Oman, while addressing the event organized for the purpose of publishing the year IJFF 2024 diary. The event was organized by the Hyderabadi community based in Muscat, Oman. This event was presided by Sohail Khan while journalists Dr. Muhammad Asif Ali President IJFF and Naeem Ghori Vice President who arrived in Oman from Hyderabadi participated as special guests. Muhammad Mansoor Sabri, Syed Shah Saeeduddin Qadri, Syed Faseehuddin, Masihudin Ahmad and Zaheeruddin Muhammad were among those who expressed their views. Dr. Muhammad Asif Ali President IJFF highlighted the aims and objectives of the forum and said that every year at the same time, the annual diary is being released by the six chapters of the international forum. It is presented as a gift to dignitaries apart from journalists. Mementoes were presented to the guests as and finally the event came to an end with the thanks of Syed Azimuddin Ahmed.

NutriAIDE - An App that promotes healthy and sustainable food choices launched at NIN



Hyderabad, Feb 15 (Patriotic Views): NutriAIDE, an innovative and comprehensive MobileApp designed to empower the users for a healthy and sustainable nutrition has been launched today by Dr. Hemalatha R, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition and Prof. Markus Keck, Chair of Urban Climate Resilience at Augsburg University, Germany, in the presence of the entire team of scientists and professors working on transformation of urban food environments. NutriAIDE is an AI based photo recognition tool that can identify the likely foods one is consuming by just clicking a picture of the food for intake assessment. In addition, the app enables to keep track of micro and macronutrient content and also dynamically calculates the carbon footprint of food choices of an individual. The app is developed as part of a collaborative project by Institutes of global repute from India and Germany.

The app is an outcome of an ongoing collaborative research project titled "NutriAIDE- Building smart food environments for improved nutrition". Developed in an Indo-German collaboration with leading institutes including the ICMR- National Institute of Nutrition (India), University of Augsburg, the German Institute of Human Nutrition Potsdam-Rehbrücke, and the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, Energy, and Chandigarh based start-up Calvry Wellness Solutions Pvt Ltd, NutriAIDE aims to investigate and address crucial aspects of food practices and nutrition-related decision-making. The research team comprises Human Geographers, Health Communicationists, Neuropsychologists, Sustainability Scientists, Nutritionists and Public Health Researchers. It is completely developed in India with a technology partner - a start-up based out of Chandigarh.

In the initial phase the app has been piloted on a sample of 720 in Hyderabad city. With this, the entire NutriAIDE project is entering its second