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THAN EXPECTED: PUTIN

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BJP RETAINS GUJ FOR 7TH TERM, LOSES HP

Party wins 156 of 182 seats
with 52.5% votes; Congress
reduced to 17 in worst-ever
show in Guj; AAP gets 5

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Riding on a pro-incumbency vote despite helming the State for 27 long years, the BJP delivered its “best-ever” performance on Thursday by storming back to power in Gujarat for the seventh straight time bagging 156 of the 182 Assembly seats and garnering 52.5 per cent of the votes.

In a stupendous performance in the home State of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP restricted its main challenger, the Congress, to its worst-ever tally of 17 seats as the emerging third force, the AAP, made a major dent into the latter's votebank but could win only 5 seats as against its tall claims of forming the Government.

At 27.3 per cent, the vote share of the Congress, which had bagged 149 seats in 1985, is almost half of BJP while the AAP cornered a decent 12.9 per cent. But even put together, their vote share does not surpass that of the BJP's, reflecting the enormity of the BJP's landslide win.

The ruling BJP surpassed its record of 127 seats which it won under Modi as Chief

Minister in 2002 and achieved the 150-seat target set for 2022 by its chief strategist Amit Shah. Before the BJP, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was the only party to have won seven straight Assembly elections but that it did with a front of coalition parties.

BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate Bupendra Patel, who will take oath on December 12, cornered over 80 per cent of the vote share in his Ghatlodia constituency winning the seat by a margin of about 1.92 lakh votes. Modi and Shah will participate in the oath-taking ceremony, said State BJP chief CR Patil. Another big winner was BJP's Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi, who won the Majura seat in Surat by a margin of over 1.16 lakh votes.

The huge victory of the BJP is electorally significant as bagging over 50 percentage votes is rare in State polls. With the seventh consecutive and emphatic win in Gujarat, the BJP could now showcase it as a curtain raiser to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls which are barely 16 months away.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, flanked by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda, during the celebrations of the party's victory in the Gujarat polls, at BJP HQ in New Delhi on Thursday
Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

Voters rejected dynasty, rabri politics, says Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of a landslide win in Assembly polls in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said he is overcome with a lot of emotions on the “phenomenal election results” and dedicated win to party workers.

Apparently taking a swipe at the dwindling stakes of the Congress in Gujarat, Modi said the support for the BJP is an indicator that the anger against dynasty rule and cor-

ruption are rising. Debunking the politics of AAP's freebies, the PM asserted, “Country understands the harms of shortcut politics, if a country is prosperous, everyone's prosperity is guaranteed.”

“People blessed politics of development and at the same time expressed a desire that they want this momentum to continue at a greater pace. I bow to Gujarat's Jan Shakti,” he said in a tweet.

Modi also lauded party workers in the State, saying each of them is a champion.

HP follows ‘change’ trend, votes Cong in

Cong wins 40, BJP
25, AAP zero in
68-member House

AMITABH SHUKLA ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh voted for a change as the ballot boxes were opened on Thursday with the Congress romping home comfortably and demolishing the BJP's hope of returning to power once again in the hill State.

Dev Bhoomi, as Himachal is called, did not spring any surprise as it has been throwing incumbent Governments out of power for the last four decades and it continued with this tradition by giving the Congress 40 seats and the BJP 25.

The Independents won 3 in the 68-member Assembly. Apart from other factors, what helped the Congress was the complete demolition of the AAP, which failed to eat into the Congress vote bank or get the anti-incumbency votes, failing to open its account in the State.

Chief Minister Jairam Thakur conceded the party's defeat later in the afternoon and submitted his resignation to the Governor but only after a see-saw battle that took a decisive turn towards the Congress.

The State president of the



Congress supporters celebrate the party's victory in Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections, at AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday
PTI

Himachal win face saver for Congress

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Though the hill State never repeats the incumbent Government, the Congress' win in Himachal Pradesh has come as a face saver for the grand old party whose worst-ever performance in Gujarat, remains a major worry.

More so since the AAP is gradually eating into its vote bank and occupying its space. Coming just a day after its

route in the MCD polls, the credit for the Himachal win goes to the likes of Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, general secretary Priyanka Gandhi and State leadership, including party chief Pratibha Singh.

With the party's tallest leader Rahul Gandhi staying away from campaigning, busy as he is in Bharat Jodo Yatra, the win in Himachal is the first under the watch of Priyanka.

BJP grabs Cong's ST vote bank in Gujarat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's extensive tribal outreach over the last one year helped it sweep Gujarat's tribal belt — traditionally Congress bastions — winning 24 of the 27 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

The Congress, which had won 15 ST seats in Gujarat in 2017, was confined to just two seats — Danta and Khedbrahma. And, if the AAP could corner a near 13 per cent overall vote share in the State then it could do so based on its performance in the tribal belt as it severely cut into the Congress vote bank to corner over 25 per cent votes in many seats like Bhiloda, Vyara, Chota Udaipur and Kaprada.

In fact, it won its lone seat, Dediapada, cornering a whopping 58 per cent votes. The seat was won by AAP's Chaitar Vasava, a former aide of BTP

Rebels bite dust in Gujarat, spoil BJP's chance in Himachal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP rebels in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh lost their elections but had a difference in their impact. In Gujarat, the rebels could not impact the party negatively, but they spoiled the BJP's party in Himachal Pradesh playing the role of vote-cutters. Politician, actor and producer Madhu Shrivastav and the Waghodia MLA since 1995, lost the poll badly. He had issued an open threat to the BJP after being denied ticket. Similarly, Kuldeep Singh Raulji lost from Savli.

founder and 7-time MLA Chotu Vasava, who himself was trounced from Jhagadia by the BJP candidate Ritesh Vasava.

Guj refuses Kejriwal's bait, but helps AAP get ‘national party’ tag

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP has come a cropper in Himachal Pradesh but its spirited performance in Gujarat will help it get the “national party” tag, one that will not only increase its standing among the Opposition ranks but also go a long way in building its credentials for taking on the BJP replacing the Congress as the principal challenger.

The AAP bagged 13 per cent of the vote share in Gujarat riding on its showing in the rural and tribal belts of Gujarat.

But then it could not touch even double digit figures in terms of seats in sharp contrast to its convener Arvind Kejriwal's assertion “in writing” that his party would form the next Government unseat-

ing the BJP.

The results clearly suggest that Gujarat didn't fall for the AAP's promises of freebies and sops and that it has a long way to go to win over the people in a State which has always seen a bipolar fight between the BJP and the Congress.

Dec 8 lucky in AAP's journey

New Delhi: December 8 seems to be lucky for the AAP in electoral politics. The AAP had bagged 28 of the 70 seats of the Delhi Assembly in 2013 when it first formed the Government with “unconditional support” from Sheila Dikshit. The result was declared on December 8. This time again, its win on 5 seats in Gujarat has given it a national party tag.

Dimple charms MSY's bastion; BJP captures Azam's citadel Rampur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Late Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Dimple Yadav won big in the Samajwadi Party bastion of Mainpuri parliamentary constituency riding on the sympathy for the party patriarch whose death necessitated the bypoll.

The SP, however, lost its other stronghold of Rampur Sadar Assembly seat, represented by its biggest Muslim face Azam Khan, to the BJP, which also won the Kurhani Assembly seat in Bihar in a direct fight with the JD(U) post parting of ways with its erstwhile NDA partner.

Overall, of the six Assembly seats that went for bypolls in five States, the BJP and the Congress won two seats each while the RLD and the BJD won a seat apiece.



Shivpal's party merges with SP

Lucknow/Etawah: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday presented his party's flag to his uncle and Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) founder Shivpal Singh Yadav in Saifai, indicating a merger of the two parties.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan being greeted by party functionaries after the party's victory in Gujarat State Assembly elections, at BJP State headquarters in Bhopal on Thursday
Pioneer photo

SC asks AG to stop Mins from picking on collegium

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The tussle between the Supreme Court and the Government over the appointment of judges intensified on Thursday with the apex court asserting that the collegium system is “law of land” and asking the Attorney General to advise the Union Ministers to desist from talking in public against the collegium system.

It comes a day after Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar

termed the SC striking down the NJAC Act as “glaring instance” of “severe compromise” of Parliamentary sovereignty and disregard of the “mandate of the people.”

Meanwhile, in the Lok Sabha, TMC MP Saugata Roy alleged the Central Government is “using a high dignitary” to run down the collegium system of appointing Supreme Court and high court judges as it wants to extend its powers everywhere, including the judiciary.

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Universities should adopt 5 villages each year: Governor

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that all private and government universities should conduct maximum employment-oriented courses. High quality standards of courses should be strictly followed. He said that representatives of private companies and industries should be invited to the convocation ceremony. Instructions have been given to take necessary action regarding the name of Kulpati being changed to Kulguru. Governor Patel was addressing the 100th meeting of the Coordination Committee at Sandipani Auditorium of Raj Bhavan.

Governor Patel said that government and private universities should adopt 5 villages each every year and run the

works of health, cleanliness and community service. They should contribute to the works of the service of humanity, in coordination with the Red Cross Society, similar to the work of the National Service Scheme and community service. He said that through the National Education Policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given the youth an opportunity to become capable of international competition while remaining connected to their roots.

For effective and integrated implementation of the policy, the work of amendment in University Acts as per the National Education Policy 2020 should be completed within the time-limit. Arrangement should be ensured in the time-limit for nomination of officers in the Chancellor, Vice-

Chancellor and Governing Council of private universities. Procedure and rules may be amended if necessary.

Governor Patel said that the universities of the state should have a name in the country and the world.

All universities should be recognized as centers of excellence. Efforts should be made for this with unity and uniformity. Admission, examination and results are declared as per the prescribed calendar.

Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav said that universities should be recognized on the basis of their performance. Universities should conduct courses related to regional resources and possibilities such as forests in Vananchal, tourism in scenic areas and industries in industrial areas. They should be familiarized with the society

with the excellent work, innovation and intellectual property being done in the university. Efforts must be made for qualitative improvement based on your resources and facilities. Initiative must be taken for incubation center, NAAC grading etc.

To make the National Education Policy effective at the grassroots level, hold discussions and seminars on various topics like curriculum revision etc. He informed that efforts have been made to set up research knowledge foundation and postgraduate colleges in each district headquarters. Recruitment initiative has been taken from the Public Service Commission for the appointment of Assistant Registrar.

In the meeting, it was decided to make provision

regarding the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor as per the instructions of the University Grants Commission and if necessary amendments will be made in the University Acts. It was also decided that the matter of conducting self-financing courses in the university should be discussed in the committee constituted under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary.

It was informed that the syllabus of 84 subjects at the graduate level has been displayed on the departmental website after constituting the Integrated Central Board of Studies. For the academic session 2022-23, the calendar has been issued along with guidelines for undergraduate and postgraduate classes in government, aided and private non-government colleges of Madhya Pradesh.



Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel addressing the 100th meeting of the Coordination Committee at Sandipani Auditorium of Raj Bhavan in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

BMC employees threaten strike from Dec 12

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Many essential services would be hit in the state capital from December 12 as employees protesting on Thursday warned if their demands are not met, employees protested at ISBT Habibganj.

On Thursday, the employees announced the movement at the corporation office located at ISBT. They claimed that if 13,000 employees are not regularised, they will start an indefinite strike from December 12. Neither they will clean nor supply water and will lockout from fire to ward-zone offices.

The employees have taken this stand regarding the six-point demands. With this, 12 employee

On Thursday, the employees claimed that if 13,000 employees are not regularised, they will start an indefinite strike from December 12

unions united and started a sit-in at the corporation office campus from 2 pm on Thursday. The employees who arrived with placards in their hands also shouted slogans.

Anil Shravan, Irfan Altaf, Ashok Verma of Officer-Employees United Sangharsh Morcha said that this is a kind of trailer for

the dharna. If the demands are not accepted, they will protest fiercely.

During the protest Leader of Opposition Shabista Zaki also reached the dharna and joined the dharna, justifying the demands. On the other hand, Mayor Malti Rai, Corporation Commissioner KVS Chaudhary Kolsani and MIC members were in the office only.

More than 12 employee organizations have joined the protest. Due to this, employees from sweepers to fire brigade, ward-zone offices joined the protest. Protestors also expressed displeasure over the attitude of the corporation administrator.

Among the major demands they want contractual workers to be made

permanent employees, promotion should be given to regular employees and eligible class III and IV employees.

Compassionate appointment should be given to the dependent without any delay in case of death of regular officer-employees. At the same time, on the death of a permanent daily wage worker, approval should be given to keep the dependent on daily wages under a special case on humanitarian grounds.

Officers and employees posted on deputation who have completed the duration and more than required, should be returned to the parent department.

The last installment of the seventh salary should be paid soon.

Chilling cold conditions witnessed in several parts of Madhya Pradesh, Nowgong records 5.3 degree

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chilling cold conditions were witnessed in the state after active systems movement impacting the weather conditions in the state, Nowgong recorded night temperature at 5.3 degree celsius which was the coldest temperature of the state in the night on Wednesday.

State capital recorded 8.6 degree celsius in the night while day temperature also recorded a dip and was recorded at 25.1 degree celsius. The weather in the state has changed with fog in most parts of the state in the morning. The cold has increased even during the day.

There has also been a change in the weather of many cities including Betul, Dhar, Raipur, Rewa, Umaria, Jabalpur,



Gwalior, Guna, Datia. The day temperature has reached 25 degrees and the mercury has reached below 10 degrees at night. The Met officer said that

there may be a further drop in the mercury in the coming days. Narsinghpur has a temperature of 23 degrees. At the same time, the day temperature in Betul, Dhar, Raipur,

area is active in the Bay of Bengal. Due to this, moisture incursion is witnessed in the state and clouds are being formed. Its effect will remain for the next one week.

Rewa and Umaria is below 25 degrees.

Fluctuations in the night temperature are being seen in many cities of the state. Damoh, Jabalpur, Kharajoh, Naugaon, Rewa, Satna, Umaria, Malajkhand, Datia, Guna, Gwalior, Raipur recorded a drop in night temperature. The temperature here is below 10 degrees.

A low pressure area is active in the Bay of Bengal. Due to this, moisture incursion is witnessed in the state and clouds are being formed. Its effect will remain for the next one week.

Author nabbed for promoting enmity, hurting religious feelings

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday said that the state police have arrested the author of a book who was charged with promoting enmity and hurting religious feelings.

Mishra was referring to Farhat Khan, who wrote the book titled Collective Violence and Criminal Justice System. The book was published by Amar Law Publications.

Khan was booked on December 3 after members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) had protested at the Government New Law College in Indore. The ABVP is the student wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Members of the ABVP



“Hindu communalism as a destructive ideology”. The book also mentions that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindutva outfits seek to establish a Hindu-majority state and want to

intended to outrage religious feelings) of the Indian Penal Code.

On Thursday, the Madhya Pradesh home minister said that Khan was arrested in Pune.

“The controversial writer, Farhat Khan, was arrested in Pune when she was undergoing dialysis in a hospital there,” Mishra told.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Rajesh Kumar Singh said that teams were sent to several places in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to trace Khan.

“On the basis of leads, we traced her to Pune and served her a Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) notice, as per which she was asked to cooperate in the probe and remain present in court at the time of submission of the chargesheet,” he said.

had alleged that Khan’s book contains objectionable content against Hindus and Hindutva outfits such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal and that it was being taught to students since 2017.

ABVP members had alleged that the book talks about the emergence of

“enslave other communities”, they had claimed.

Besides Khan, the police had filed a case against Amar Law Publications, the principal of the college Inam Ur Rahman and a professor named Mirza Mojiz Baig.

The case was filed under Sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups) and 295A (acts



Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) employees hold a demonstration demanding regularisation of jobs and hike in the salaries, at BMC headquarters in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Two cops of Piplani police station return Rs 31,500

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The honesty of two policemen of Piplani police station is being appreciated among the city police, the two policemen found a stack of notes of Rs 31500 lying on the road and returned the money by tracking the person in three days who owned the money.

Constables Narendra Singh Chauhan and Divyanshu Dwivedi, posted at Piplani police station, were on duty in the mini FRV on the night of December 4.

At around 11 pm, both of them left for patrolling towards Sonagiri Point and reached near Piplani petrol pump when they saw a bundle of currency notes lying on the roadside. Both counted the notes in the bundle which was Rs 31500.

The cameras of the nearby shops were seen, but the owner of the notes could not be traced.

In such a situation, the money was kept in the police station after giving

information to the station in-charge Ajay Nair.

Constable Narendra said that no one contacted for two days.

In such a situation, he gave the mobile numbers of the shops and hand carts near the place where the money was found and told them that if any person gives information about the missing money, then immediately inform the police.

Narendra got a call on the morning of December 7 and the caller identified himself as Shrinath Prasad(70) of Ballia, UP. He told that he is a retired teacher and came to Bhopal from UP for the marriage of brother's daughter in Bhopal.

On December 4, he came to Piplani area to buy fruits during which the cash which he was carrying fell from his pocket. After verification, the police called him to the police station on Thursday and returned the money. The retired teacher thanked the MP Police and appreciated the act.

National workshop organised on Neurodiversity

Bhopal: Tata Power Community Development Trust (Tata Power CDT) and the Indian Hotels Co Ltd (IHCL) jointly organized the first National Workshop on Neurodiversity in Mumbai with a focus on Autism Spectrum.

The workshop brought together representatives from the Tata Group, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India (GoI), The United Nations, practitioners and domain experts from the field of neurodiversity to deliberate and implement phygital interventions and support programs in Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities and rural India. A series of pre-consultation with experts from the field were carried out to put forward challenges and recommendations for working group to deliberate in the workshop.

Several ground visits to early intervention centers in different regions were also conducted, along with a Disability Tech Expo event with set of experts to get maximum possible range of insights from the sector. According to estimates by the Indian Council of Medical Research, India is home to more than ten million individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Crime branch arrest 2 bookies for accepting online bets

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Crime branch arrested two bookies accepting online betting, accused would also provide ID to others for betting. The police will block the two websites, Lakshmi-Batka Bull, on which stakes were placed, in the action police seized mobile phone and Rs 58,000 cash from the accused.

Additional DCP Crime Branch Shailendra Singh Chauhan said that information was received that a person was playing online betting on mobile in the street near Jain Temple on Jain Colony Housing Board and was part of online betting group.

The person was identified as Sheikh Salman (33), a resident of Ekta Nagar Jain Colony. On checking the mobile, an application was found named Lakshmi Batka Bull in which booking of staked was found. On inquiring about it, he said that he plays online betting on the website.

The accused told that earlier he used to play betting by writing on the betting slip. Due to this, there was a fear of get-

On checking the mobile, an application was found named Lakshmi Batka Bull in which booking of staked was found

ting caught by the police. A year ago, he met a boy named Bilal at Karond who asked him to feed betting by making online babeside. After that he generated an admin id password. Started booking online betting by adding customers. Money transactions are also done online. Police caught Bilal Sheikh from Pipariya Hoshangabad on Shaikh's information.

Bilal told during interrogation that he had got Sheikh generated the online ID password of the betting. He also gives him a share in the profits. Bilal told the police that he had studied till class 10 and due to not getting employment, he started betting online. Police are collecting information about further links of bookies from him.



Aniruddhe Mukherjee, PS, Public Asset Management Department MP Govt in the presence of Amitabh Saran, CEO and founder Alltgreen Propulsion lab during launch of advanced electric cargo and passenger vehicles at Sai Alltgreen, at JK road. Pioneer photo

CM with Balaghat College students plants saplings

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Ashoka, Kachnar and Harsingar in the Smart City Garden. The students of Government Kamla Nehru Girls College, Balaghat, who came to Bhopal on an educational tour, participated in sapling plantation. Along with Chief

Minister Chouhan, Sangeeta Nellore, Abhilasha Yadav, Vandana Telang and Uma Soni of Nellore Shiksha Samiti (Nellore Education Committee) also planted saplings.

The Samiti operates the Yashoda Old Age Home in Bhopal.

Activities are also conducted regarding assistance to needy children in education and other

activities, cleanliness and environment-protection. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, yoga teacher Bhavisha Solanki also planted a sapling. Bhavisha has played an important role during the Corona period in conducting Yoga se Nirog programme and in providing guidance for Yoga exercises to the people affected by Corona from the Command and Control Centre Bhopal.

Old illegal colonies in all 413 cities will be made legal: CM

PNS ■ MANDSAUR

Chief Minister Chouhan has said that like villages in the state, a complete framework is being prepared for the development of cities. Like the conference of panchayat representatives held recently, a state-level conference of representatives of urban bodies will also be held soon. About 20 thousand crore rupees will be spent on the development of the cities of the state. Old illegal colonies in all 413 cities will be made legal by taking a nominal amount. Pattas will be given to eligible persons under the Mukhyamantri Bhu-Awasiya Adhikar Yojana.

Chouhan has said that the rules and procedures are for the convenience of the public, not to stop the work. Public works should be done without any

hindrance. More centers should be made for distribution of fertilizers to the farmers. Farmers who are defaulters should also be given fertilizer from the society office on payment of cash.

Chouhan participated in Mandsaur Gaurav Divas celebrations today. He performed bhoomi-pujan and inaugurated development works worth more than Rs 1500 crore at the venue itself. Also distributed benefits to the beneficiaries of various schemes. Chouhan awarded "Dashpur Ratna" to the personalities who made invaluable contribution in the development of Mandsaur, Nirmala Kanosiya, Anamika Jain and Vijay Shankar Mishra by giving them shawl-shreefal, mementos and letters of appreciation.

Earlier, he also unveiled the life-size statue of Samrat

Yashovardhan of Mandsaur near Telia Talab. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan, through virtual medium, addressed the beneficiary of Mohana city of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Mrs. Meena Bai, the beneficiary of Prime Minister's Awas of Hanumana, Sangam Lal and beneficiary of Pradhan Mantri Swanidhi Yojana of Balaghat Anil Kumar and gave his best wishes.

The Chief Minister said that Emperor Yashovardhan made invaluable contribution in the development of Mandsaur and Malwa. He was brave and mighty. He defeated the foreign invaders Huns. Celebrating Mandsaur Pride Day in his name is a matter of pride for all of us.

Chouhan said that like Shri Mahakal Lok Ujjain, a grand complex will also be developed near Pashupatinath Temple. Babu Shivdas Agarwal, Pratikand

Maharaj and Mastram Maharaj have made invaluable contribution in the development of Pashupatinath Temple. Total Rs 28.91 crore will be spent on purification of Shivna river in Mandsaur. Under the Gandhi Sagar Group Water Supply Scheme, water will be supplied through pipe line to homes in 629 villages of Mandsaur district and 191 villages of Ratlam district.

Chouhan said that one lakh 10 thousand beneficiaries of various schemes have been selected in Mandsaur district under the Mukhyamantri Jan-Seva Abhiyan, to whom acceptance letters will be distributed soon.

CM Rise School is being built in Mandsaur at a cost of Rs 34 crore, which will be better than private schools. World class education will be given here. Chouhan said that medical and

engineering education has been started in Hindi in Madhya Pradesh. Laptops are being given to those who get 75 percent and above marks in class XII. The government is also paying the fees for higher education. Chief Minister Chouhan made everyone present in the program pledge to save the environment, plant saplings on auspicious occasions, save water, send every child to school and make villages and cities drug-free.

Chouhan said that Mandsaur is really a wonderful city. Where on one hand there is the temple of Lord Pashupati Nath, on the other hand this city is known by the name of emperor Yashovardhan who was brave and heroic. Today his statue has been inaugurated here. I congratulate and wish all those involved in the construction and installation of the statue.



Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan participated in Mandsaur Gaurav Divas celebrations today. He performed bhoomi-pujan and inaugurated development works worth more than Rs 1500 crore
Pioneer photo



Congress party workers celebrate the party's victory in Himachal Pradesh state assembly elections, at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Thursday.
Pioneer photo

Project 'Samagra' started for healthy MP

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Woman and Child Development Department is making constant efforts to end the level of malnutrition in the state. Along with this, many innovations are being done to achieve the goal of well-nourished and healthy Madhya Pradesh. In this series, on Thursday, an MoU was signed between the state government and the American India Foundation (AIF) for the implementation of the project 'Samagra'.

Director, Woman and Child Development Ram Rao Bhonsle and Director Public Health American India Foundation Mahesh Shrivastava signed the MoU in the presence of Additional Chief Secretary Women and Child Development Ashok Shah.

Additional Chief Secretary Ashok Shah said that it is our priority to root out malnutrition

in the state. The main objective of Project Samagra is to improve the nutrition level of children, enhance learning capacity and create opportunities for women empowerment and increase in their income.

Director Women and Child Development Bhonsle said that about 10,000 children in the age group of 0 to 6 years are being benefited in Gyaraspur block of Vidisha district under Project Samagra. This pilot project will reach 229 Anganwadis, 184 self-help groups and 112 SHG kitchens in Gyaraspur block.

Dr. Bhonsle informed that the American India Foundation will provide THR and hot cooked meals for children under 6 years of age in anganwadi centers, quality home-based care to sick children, and enhance skills of frontline and health workers to provide nutritional counseling through Project Samagra. Apart from this, it will also

work on strengthening linkages for timely referral of severely malnourished children and ensuring school readiness of children below the age of 6 years, as well as providing need-based learning material to Anganwadi centres.

AIF's Country Director Mathew Joseph said that with this partnership with the Women and Child Development Department in Madhya Pradesh, special attention will be given to women, children and youth. Along with this, our aim is also to take advantage of the specialty and innovation of government schemes to improve the quality of service at the community level. Joseph said that to assess the overall success of the project, an end-line survey would be conducted and progress would be regularly evaluated and periodic process reports would be prepared and shared with the state from time to time.

CEO MP receives 24.27 lakh applications for additions

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Total 24.27 lakh applications were received under the special verification campaign conducted by the Election Commission in Madhya Pradesh before the assembly elections.

In this, 15.55 lakh applications have been received for adding the name, whereas, 4 lakh 13 thousand names have been received for name corrections. Four lakh 58 thousand applications have been received for change in name and address. Final publication of voter list will be done on 5th January 2023 after processing these by 26th December.

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer conducted a special revision campaign for one month to add, delete and amend names in the voter list. In this the booth level officer went door to door on Saturday

and Sunday and collected details from eligible persons.

At the same time, Chief Election Officer Anupam Rajan, Additional Chief Election Officer Rajesh Kaul and other officials visited the districts. District Election Officers were given the responsibility of self-monitoring. Thursday, December 8 was the last day to receive applications.

Officials of the Election Office said that so far 24 lakh 27 thousand applications have been received. This number will increase further. Now they will be tested and a final decision will be taken by December 28. The final publication of the voter list will be on 5th January 2023. This will be followed by a brief revision of the voter list at the time of the election, in which the names of those left out will be added to the list.

Banks should ensure increasing the withdrawal limit of SHGs

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

There are 4.09 lakh self-help groups in Madhya Pradesh, with which about 45 lakh 90 thousand poor rural families are related. Continuous work is being done for their social and economic upliftment by providing regular training to these groups, providing loans from banks and connecting them with livelihood activities. Banks should ensure compliance of RBI norms for increasing the withdrawal limit of these groups.

Additional Chief Secretary Panchayat and Rural Development Malay Srivastava gave these instructions at the review meeting of bank credit linkage progress of self-help groups organized by

Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission and NABARD at Kushabhau Thakre Convention Center.

Additional Chief Secretary Srivastava instructed bankers to set up posts on priority basis for trained women of self-help groups to work as BCs. Banks should make loans available on time in the self-help schemes run by the state government. Regular review of this work should be done.

Srivastava said that self-help groups should be able to get maximum loans from banks for various economic activities, for this it is necessary that they have financial literacy. For this, training programs should be organized by RSETI centers in coordination with the Livelihood Mission.

It is necessary to be cautious about the quality of construction works

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

After the news of the death of the tiger in Panna Tiger Reserve, speedy action is being taken at the forest dep. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that public welfare schemes and development activities should be conducted transparently within the time limit. It is necessary to be cautious about the quality in construction works. People's representatives should also play an active role along with officers-employees in the implementation of government activities and be in constant dialogue with public. It is our priority to ensure a sense of satisfaction among the public towards government works.

Chouhan was virtually reviewing public welfare schemes, development activities

and law and order in Harda district from his residence office. Chief Minister Chouhan also gave necessary directions to public representatives, officers and employees. Minister in-charge of Water Resources and Harda district Tulsiram Silawat, Farmers-Welfare and Agriculture Development Minister Kamal Patel, Member of Parliament Durgadas Uike, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains along with Additional Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Collector Harda and other officers of various departments connected virtually..

Chief Minister Chouhan said that Harda district has to be made a model district in the implementation of all schemes. Remarkable progress has been made in the direction of providing 100 percent irrigation

facility in the district. Organizing of Jal Jyotirmay camps, Cyber ??Sakhi Yojana, development of course material in local language Gondi and Korku, innovation of cluster credit camp are commendable. The operation of Anganwadis is satisfactory. Officers-employees and people's representatives should make coordinated efforts to establish such procedures in the district which other districts should also follow.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that effective monitoring of activities conducted under Jal Jeevan Mission should be ensured. Top priority should be given to restoration of excavated roads and satisfactory supply of water should be ensured. Chief Minister Chouhan instructed to increase the speed of the mission's work.

Haj flight to start from Bhopal from next year

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

On the demand of MLA Arif Masood, Chairman of the Central Haj Committee, AP Abdullahkuty announced to start Haj flight from Bhopal next year.

Haj pilgrims of Madhya Pradesh got a big gift. Bhopal MLA Arif Masood today met the Chairman of the Central Haj Committee, A.P. Abdullahkuty and demanded to start flight again for Hajis from Bhopal to Jeddah, on which Chairman A.P. Abdullahkuty announced that Haj flight will be started from Bhopal from next year.

Earlier, MLA Arif Masood had also written a letter to the Union Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani regarding starting flights for Haj pilgrims from



Bhopal.

MLA Arif Masood has also written to the Chairman of the Central Haj Committee, A.P., regarding Rubaat for Bhopal Haji Saheban. Had a discussion with Abdullahkuty on which the Chairman.

Giving an assurance, he said that after talking to the Government of India in this regard, Rubat will soon be resumed for Bhopal Hajis. Mushtaq Ali Nadvi Qazi-e-Shehar

Bhopal, Abul Kalam Qasmi.

Today, in the presence of Mufti-e-Shehar Bhopal, a letter regarding Rubaat was sent to the officials of the Madhya Pradesh State Haj Committee, including Arif Masood, MLA and member MP State Haj Committee, Rifat Warsi, Chairman MP State Haj Committee, Shakir Jafri CEO M.P. Chairman of the Central Haj Committee, AP by the State Haj Committee.

Will develop Gwalior and Orchha while preserving culture and historical heritage

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the chairmanship of Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Sheo Shekhar Shukla, the final presentation meeting of "UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape Approach" in Gwalior and Orchha of UNESCO was held at Ravindra Bhavan, New Delhi. UNESCO presented a recommendation regarding carrying out development works in the city while preserving the culture and historical heritage of Gwalior and Orchha. In the year 2021, for the first time in South Asian countries, Gwalior and Orchha were selected by UNESCO for "UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape Approach".

It was inaugurated by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on July 20, 2021. UNESCO has done this project for Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. Principal Secretary Shukla stressed on inclusion of UNESCO's recommendation in the master plan being prepared by Town and Country Planning of Gwalior and Orchha. Along with this, instructions were given to Gwalior and Orchha to prepare a plan for development awareness and capacity



building as per the recommendations of UNESCO. Junhi han, Chief of Culture, UNESCO, New Delhi appreciated the efforts of the Tourism Board. She agreed to work with the Madhya Pradesh government in future and for the cooperation of UNESCO in organizing capacity building programmes.

In the second phase of the program, discussions were held to prepare Gwalior's proposal for UNESCO Creative City of Music. Tourism Board's Additional Managing Director Vivek Shrotriya highlighted the efforts made before preparing the proposal. Principal Secretary Shukla in Gwalior outlined a time-bound plan and necessary efforts.

UNESCO Consultant

Nishant Upadhyay made a presentation on UNESCO's final recommendation, implementation strategy and architectural guidelines for preserving the heritage and culture of Gwalior and Orchha.

In the meeting, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Satyanand, Commissioner Municipal Corporation Gwalior Kishore Kanyal, Chief Executive Officer Smart City Mission Gwalior Neetu Mathur and Joint Director (Planning) Prashant Singh Baghel, along with concerned officers of Gwalior and Orchha and others stakeholders were present. Be present online in the meetings of Commissioner Gwalior, Commissioner Sagar, Collector Gwalior and Collector Nivari.



Visitors go through stalls after the inauguration of Pari Bazaar, Heritage Festival Season-3 organised by Begums of Bhopal at Kamla Park in Bhopal on Thursday.
Pioneer photo



NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
L. No. JHS-ELG-W-T-11-2022-23
E-Tender Notice

Date: 05.12.2022

For and on behalf of President of India, the Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (Gen) North Central Railway, Jhansi invites open tenders through online (E-Tendering) for the following work :-

Description of work	Tender value	Bid Security
Part-A: Orchha-Development/Upgradation of railway stations to religious destination. Part-B: Chitrakut Dham-Karwi-Development/Upgradation of railway stations by uplifting of facade and circulating area and boundary wall to give religious look.	Rs. 38,11,646/- only	Rs. 76,300/- only

Tender No. : JHS-ELG-W-T-11-2022-23
Completion period : 06 months
Closing date of tender: 30.12.2022 (upto 15:00 Hrs.).
Tenderer will submit the tender online upto **30.12.2022 (upto 15:00 Hrs.)**. Complete details & for submission of tenders can be seen in Indian Railway website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.
1639/22(K)
@northcentralrailway f North central railways www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in @CPRONCR

एचडीएफसी म्यूचुअल फंड - निवेशक जागरूकता कार्यक्रम
म्यूचुअल फंड्स के बारे में और अधिक जानने के लिए इसमें अवश्य भाग लें.
दिनांक तथा स्थान :
बुधवार, 10 दिसंबर 2022 और रविवार, 11 दिसंबर 2022; शाम 6:30 बजे से.
होटल तानसेन रेसिडेंसी, गांधी रोड, वासियर - 474 011, मध्य प्रदेश.
रजिस्ट्रेशन करने के लिए, कृपया संपर्क करें: नवाकुंज बार्ना, मोबाइल: 97534 45764.
रजिस्ट्रेशन अनिवार्य है. रजिस्ट्रेशन का समय सुबह 9:30 बजे से शाम 8:00 बजे तक होगा.
कार्यक्रम के दौरान कोविड सुरक्षा दिशानिर्देशों का पालन करना अनिवार्य है.
वॉक-इन की अनुमति नहीं दी जाएगी.

HDFC MUTUAL FUND
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म्यूचुअल फंड में निवेश करने के लिए, एकलक्षित अपने प्राइम (KYC) की जांच करें और पूरा करने की प्रक्रिया के बारे में अधिक जानकारी हेतु <https://www.hdfcfund.com/information/know-how> पर विजिट करें. निवेशकों को केवल रजिस्टर्ड म्यूचुअल फंड के साथ वास्तव करना चाहिए, निवेश निवेश की सलाह नहीं दी जाएगी (www.sebi.gov.in/investor-education) पर किया जा सकता है. किसी जुमान, विकल्प या सलाह के अभाव में निवेश एप्लीकेशन या/ज निवेश करने की प्रक्रिया में रुकावट हो सकती है. इसके अलावा ही, अगर निवेशक एप्लीकेशन द्वारा दिए गए सवालन से संतुष्ट न हों तो <https://scores.gov.in> पर भी निवेशक दृष्टि कर सकते हैं. स्वतंत्र स्रोत निवेशकों को सही को अनिवार्य निवेशक दृष्टि करने याद रखना चाहिए इसकी प्रतिक्रिया को देखने की सुविधा प्रदान करता है.
म्यूचुअल फंड निवेश बाजार के जोखिमों के अधीन हैं, योजना से जुड़े सभी दस्तावेजों को ध्यान से पढ़ें.

DEBTS RECOVERY APPELLATE TRIBUNAL, ALLAHABAD
Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India
ऋण बसुली अपीलिय अधिकरण, इलाहाबाद
वित्त मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार
147-A-58/1, Jawahar Lal Nehru Road, Tagore Town, Allahabad.
147-A-58/1, जवाहर लाल नेहरू रोड, टैगोर टाउन, इलाहाबाद

Appeal No. 74/2017
(Summons to the parties through publication under section 18 of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 as amended up to date)
Asset Reconstruction Company (India) Ltd.Appellant
V/s.
Anita Mishra & OthersRespondent
To,
(1) Smt. Anita Mishra, W/o. Shri Mahendra Mishra, R/o. Guruwala Bungala, Mangal Singh Ti House, Morar, Gwalior (M.P.) - 474006.
(2) Mr. Shishupal Singh, S/o. Sh. Ramsevak Yadav, R/o. Thalpur, Near Sita Manor Hotel, Gandhi Club, Gandhi Road, Gwalior (M.P.) - 474001.

NOTICE
Take Notice that the appellant has filed an appeal against the order dated 15.02.2017 passed in S.A. No. - 162/2015 by the Debts Recovery Tribunal at Jabalpur the abovementioned appeal has been listed for appearance and further proceedings before the Appellate Tribunal at Allahabad on 16.12.2022 at 11:00 A.M. You may appear before this Appellate Tribunal on the date either in person or through legal practitioner duly appointed by you for this purpose.
Take notice that in default of your appearance on the date fixed, the appeal will be heard ex-parte.

Sd/-
REGISTRAR
Debts Recovery Appellate Tribunal, Allahabad

Rajya Sabha Chairman not ‘partisan’ but ‘national’: Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Stressing that Rajya Sabha Schairman is not “partisan” but “national,” Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday said he will give preference to experienced members like former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda to express their views in the House and not go by the rule book.

Giving this assurance on the second day of assuming responsibility of the Upper House during the ongoing Winter Session, he also urged the Elders to rise above political considerations regarding important issues.

While felicitating him as new Rajya Sabha Chairman on Wednesday, it was suggested by some that experienced members should be given adequate time to express views on legislations and issues of national interest.

"Believe in the Chair. The Chair is not partisan. The Chair is national," Dhankhar said while making an observation during the Question Hour on day two of the Winter Session of Parliament.

Rajya Sabha rules provide for the allocation of time during debates as per the strength of a political party - the larger the number of MPs more is time is given to the party. Gowda is the sole member of his party (JDS) in the House and hence is allocated the least time to put forth his views.

Observing that the House has two former prime ministers - H D Deve Gowda and Manmohan Singh - as MPs, the chairman said their views on important matters would serve as an input to the entire nation.

"If on an issue honourable former prime minister H D Deve Gowda would like to speak that will be an input to



the entire nation. I would first look at him, his vision and then the rulebook," said Dhankhar.

He further said senior MPs like Jairam Ramesh (Congress) too would be given time if they want to intervene on the subject of their expertise.

"The chairman is the ultimate custodian and protector," he assured the House.

He also said there is great interest about India after it

assumed G-20 presidency earlier this month as was evident during his two recent visits abroad as the Vice President. Dhankhar invited suggestions from the MPs regarding the year long programmes associated with G-20 in India.

Leader of the House Piyush Goyal said the G-20 presidency was not of one party or the government but of the entire country.

Dhankhar disallows Shiv Sena (UBT) to raise Maha-K'taka border row in House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday did not allow Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) to raise the Maharashtra-Karnataka border row in the House as the party had not presented it in a proper manner as per rules.

Elders, meanwhile, flagged issues including the recent cyber attack on the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) New Delhi and Safdarjung Hospital, plight of employees in the information technology sector due to reported lay-offs, Indians languishing in prison in some Gulf

countries and Tamil Nadu fishermen ill-treated by Sri Lankan defence forces.

On the Maharashtra-Karnataka border issue, when the House met for the day, the Chairman said he has received notices under Rule 267 but was disallowing them as they were not in order and did not specify the Rule. Notices under Rule 267 seek suspension of the business of the day to take up a discussion on the issue being raised.

Priyanka Chaturvedi of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray), who had given the notice under rule 267, said the border issue between Karnataka and Maharashtra is an important issue and needs



to be discussed at the national level.

Dhankhar, however, disallowed it, saying the requirements of invoking rule 267 were not met. "Now if the Honourable member seeks to make an issue which is tangential, it will be inappropriate,"

he said, adding the member could speak in respect of rigours of compliance of the rule.

"Come out with a formalised request, it will receive consideration and there will be a structured discussion," he said.

RS passes Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amid reservation from Opposition parties, the Rajya Sabha on Thursday passed the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill which claims to seek better management of protected areas and also provides for certain permitted activities like grazing or movement of livestock and bona fide use of drinking and household water by local communities.

Lok Sabha had already cleared the legislation in August during the Monsoon Session.

The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021, which had undergone scrutiny of a parliamentary panel, seeks to conserve and protect wildlife through better management of protected areas and rationalise schedules which list out species under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

According to the statement of objects and reasons of the bill, the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, was enacted to provide for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants with a view to ensure the ecological and environmental security of the country.

The bill, which was tabled by Environment Minister Bupender Yadav on Wednesday, also sought to include the aspects of "conservation" and "management" of wildlife which are covered by the Act and make amendments for better management of protected areas.

It proposes to rationalise and amend the schedules, which list out wildlife species, for the purposes of clarity, and ensure better care of seized live animals and disposal of seized wildlife parts and products.

The bill further seeks to

enable control of invasive alien species and allow for transfer or transport of live elephants by person having ownership certificates in accordance with conditions prescribed by the central government.

However, earlier during the discussion on the Bill in the Upper House, Congress member Jairam Ramesh opposed the bill in "its present form" and expressed apprehension over the provision related to transfer or transport of captive live elephant "for any other purpose", saying it could be misused. He asked the minister to specify the purpose in the Act.

"What is this 'any other purpose'? To provide an elephant for captive zoos in Gujarat? to provide for some private amusement parks in some other state?" Ramesh said, while suggesting that it should have been stated for "cultural and religious" pur-



poses, considering the significance of elephants in such events in many parts of India.

Congress Rajya Sabha member Kumar Ketkar also alleged that real estate sharks and corporates were devastating jungles and using their money and muscle power to avoid legal action. In order to protect wildlife, not only should the laws be strict but their implementation should also be equally stringent, he said.

Sushmita Dev of the All India Trinamool Congress, too, expressed similar sentiments and asked the minister why the Government did not vote against the motion to restart international ivory trade. On the other hand, Praful Patel of the Nationalist Congress Party supported the bill but drew attention towards the need to strike a fine balance between protection of wildlife and growth as man-animal conflict had been growing.

Sonia reached Sawai Madhopur district of the desert State on Thursday evening and according to a party spokesperson, she will celebrate her 76th birthday with Rahul and Priyanka on Friday. "Sonia Gandhi reached Jaipur in the morning in a routine flight from New Delhi. Thereafter, she took a chopper from Jaipur airport and reached Sawai Madhopur. A few hours later



Rahul and Priyanka joined her at a luxury resort near Ranthambore Tiger Reserve," the spokesperson said.

She may likely participate in the Bharat Jodo Yatra on December 10, a day reserved for women participants, the official said. "It is her personal visit and no leader is called or permitted to meet. There are chances that CM Ashok Gehlot and state party Chief Govind Singh Dotasra may meet on her birthday," the spokesperson said.

Sonia had participated in the Karnataka leg of the yatra last month.

The Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra, which is passing through the Kota district, was paused after the first half of Thursday. It will resume on December 10. The march entered its 93rd day on Thursday in which the Gandhiscion walked a 24 km stretch in one go. Later, he too flew to Ranthambore from Bundi in a chopper.

DCGI approves export of SII-made Ebola vax to Uganda for clinical trials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved Ebola vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute for export to Uganda. This is the first ebola vaccine made in India.

The vaccine has been developed by the Pune-based pharma firm in collaboration with Oxford University, UK. According to sources, this vaccine will be used for solidarity clinical trials in Uganda.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) had sought collaboration with man-

ufacturers of ebola vaccines for the prevention of the disease and has selected ChAdOx1 biBOV as a potential vaccine for participation in a solidarity clinical trial in Uganda.

Oxford University signed an agreement with Serum Institute of India to manufacture ChAdOx1 biBOV.

The approval for export comes after an application was submitted to the Drugs Controller General of India by Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, Serum Institute of India, on November 30.

"We, Serum Institute of India, under the visionary leadership of our CEO Dr Adar C



Poonawalla, are committed to making available various world-class life-saving vaccines to our country and the world at large in the line with the clar-

ion call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'Making in India for the World,' the official source quoted Singh as having said in the application.

ED attaches properties worth ₹8 cr of TMC MLA for money laundering

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached movable properties worth Rs 7.93 crore in the form of bank balance in 61 accounts and mutual funds belonging to TMC MLA Manik Bhattacharya and his family members in the Primary Teachers Recruitment Scam in West Bengal on money laundering charges.

"Sixty-one bank accounts were kept in the name of friends and relatives of Manik Bhattacharya who were induced by him and his fami-



ly members to open the same to avoid detection by law

enforcement authorities," the ED said in a statement.

"One such account used for money laundering activities was found existing in the name of Satarupa Bhattacharya, wife of Manik Bhattacharya, and late Mrityunjay Chatterjee who had passed away in 2016," it said.

Bhattacharya, former president of the West Bengal Board of Primary Education, was arrested by the ED in October in the teachers' recruitment scam of West Bengal.

The MLA from Palashipara seat in Nadia district is in judicial custody at present.

The ED is tracking the money trail in the scam, while the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is looking into the alleged irregularities committed in the recruitment.

It is alleged that several people who fared poorly in the recruitment examinations were hired as teachers in exchange for lakhs of rupees while the eligible candidates were overlooked.

In July, the ED had arrested former West Bengal education minister Partha Chatterjee in the School Service Commission (SSC) recruitment scam.



A member of ASC Tornado motorcycle display team performs a stunt through a fire-wheel during the 11th Reunion and 262nd Corps Day of ASC, at ASC Centre & College, in Bengaluru on Thursday

Master plan prepared to develop Naimisharanya as Vedic city by UP Govt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has prepared a master plan to develop Naimisharanya as a Vedic city and a global centre of spiritual, religious and ecotourism.

The master plan prepared by the Tourism Department is part of the ongoing mission of the State Government to develop all religio-cultural and spiritual centres of the State as attractive tourist destinations.

The master plan also includes rejuvenation of Misrikh-Neemars of Sitapur, along with Naimisharanya. Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra has given directions in this regard to top officials of the Tourism Department.

In a Cabinet meeting held recently, the Government had decided to develop Naimisharanya as a spiritual tourism centre in view of its mythological significance. In the meeting, the cabinet also decided to form the Naimisharanya Teerth Vikas Parishad.

A presentation was made in this regard by the architecture and planning faculty of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University, Lucknow, on behalf of the Tourism department,

before the chief secretary, explaining the complete master plan for the development of Naimisharanya.

According to the master plan, Naimisharanya has been divided into four tourism zones due to its diverse natural and man-made attractions.

During the meeting, Principal Secretary (Tourism) Mukesh Meshram talked about the problem of traffic congestion due to the presence of several gates in the Maa Lalita Devi temple and a variety of shops in the front and said that necessary work would be done to ease the situation.

Meshram further pointed out that the artificial lake (kund), which is currently not in use, would be restored, while attention would also be paid to the facilities and their maintenance necessary for the comfort of the common citizens.

Besides, from the entrance to the Chakra Teerth to the changing and toilet block all structures will be renovated. The master plan will also include cleaning and renovation of Chakra Teerth Kund, Gaukund, Satsang Bhawan, meeting place and waiting area, Godavari Kund and Brahma Kund. Similarly, Dadhichi Kund will also be renovated.

Nation pays tribute to CDS Rawat on his first death anniversary

Gen Rawat, his wife and 12 other military personnel were killed in helicopter crash near Coonoor.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The nation on Thursday paid tributes to India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) late General Bipin Rawat on the occasion of his first death anniversary. General Rawat, his wife Madhulika Rawat and 12 other military personnel were killed in a helicopter crash near Coonoor, Tamil Nadu on December 8.

As the first CDS, he was spearheading an initiative to bring convergence in the functioning of the Army, the Navy and the Indian Air Force and bolster the country's overall military prowess. Paying tributes to him National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval said "General Bipin Rawat's demise is a personal loss for the nation. I had a personal equation with him. His focus was always Indian Army and how the nation will shape in future."

"In 2017 when we had tough situation with Chinese. We used to plan and discuss. General Bipin Rawat was resolute. When we said we won't step back and we're going to stay put and make Chinese retreat, they did it after 74-75 days of tough time," Doval said.



Parliamentary panel suggests Centre explore permitting religious activities at ASI-protected monuments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Parliamentary Standing panel has suggested the Government explore the possibility of permitting pujas/worship/certain religious activities at centrally protected monuments of religious significance, subject to the condition that such activities should not have any detrimental effect on conservation and preservation status of the heritage structure.

The panel which submitted its report in Rajya Sabha on Thursday also suggested a string of steps including adequate security staff at monuments and immediate filling of vacant posts at various levels in the Archeological Survey of



India, assistance from the ISRO to locate the missing monuments as well as regular inspection by the officials to prevent encroachment at heritage buildings for their better conservation and protection measures.

On allowing religious activities, the panel said, "several historical monuments across the country hold immense religious significance to a large number of people and allowing pujas/worship/certain religious activities at such monuments can fulfill legitimate aspirations of the people."

BJP's strategy to change Cabinet, Guj CM, to fight anti-incumbency pays off

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's victory in Gujarat and earlier in Uttarakhand appears to have vindicated its strategy of changing Chief Ministers and resetting the Cabinet ahead of Assembly polls to thwart anti-incumbency, an exercise not done in Himachal Pradesh where the party suffered defeat.

With the strategy working in its favour, the BJP could be encouraged to undertake similar steps in States, including Karnataka, where elections are due next year, to counter factors that might work against it.

In September last year, the BJP appointed Bhupendra Patel, a first-time MLA as Gujarat Chief Minister to replace Vijay Rupani barely over a year before the state elections.

The party also changed the entire cabinet to reset the overall government.

A senior national-level leader of the BJP said the



Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel being garlanded during a public meeting after BJP's victory in the Gujarat Assembly elections, in Ahmedabad on Thursday. (R) Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jairam Thakur (file photo)

PTI



results clearly indicated that the change of Chief Minister in both Uttarakhand and Gujarat played a role in neutralising anti-incumbency. In Gujarat, the caste of the chief minister (Patidar) also came in handy.

While the opposition tar-

geted the BJP for removing its chief ministers, political watchers believe the changes highlighted the leadership's readiness to address feedback from the ground.

Similarly, in Uttarakhand, the BJP had changed chief

ministers twice before the assembly polls, held earlier this year. However, the party won in the hill state despite its new chief ministerial face, Pushkar Singh Dhami, suffering defeat.

The senior leader also

questioned why the same exercise was not done in Himachal Pradesh, where the party stuck with incumbent Jairam Thakur despite losing last year's bypolls.

Another senior BJP leader said three factors -- delivery on the ground, keeping the organisation in good humour and the leader's popularity -- were behind these changes of chief ministers in the last two-three years.

The recent spate of changes undertaken at the Centre or in states ruled by it has marked a return to more conventional politics with the standard political faultlines of caste identity pushing to the background the urge to experiment.

The BJP has even preferred those leaders who started their careers from other political outfits.

In 2023, assembly elections are due in BJP-ruled Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura, where the party recently changed its chief minister.

TMC presses for strong Opp to take BJP head on

Slams Cong for losing Guj, says only Didi can lead fight against BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide victory in Gujarat sweeping over the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party has inspired the Trinamool Congress to once again make tall claim of a strong Opposition leadership.

Though the Bengal ruling party would not mince words on AAP, its spokesperson Kunal Ghosh advised the Congress to go for an introspection and examine the causes of its multiple defeats not only in the western States but in other parts of the country as well.

At the same time he said BJP's clean sweep signalled that only TMC and its supremo Mamata Banerjee was

capable of taking head on the saffron outfit on national level the same way she did in the Assembly elections in Bengal in 2021.

"There is no point dreaming of or claiming the pan-Indian leadership against the BJP or the saffron forces ... the Congress' comprehensive defeat in Gujarat brings a clear message from the people ... it is time for the party to go for self-introspection of why they are losing every political ground in the country ... why they are being reduced to a nonentity in most of the States," Ghosh said adding "under such demoralising circumstances it will not be possible for the Congress to lead the opposition nationally or coordinate between them in Parliament."

Promptly interpreting Congress' loss as the Trinamool Congress' gain nationally, Ghosh said that "the Congress' poor show in Gujarat shows that only Trinamool Congress and

Mamata Banerjee can provide an effective leadership against the BJP nationally ... the way she did in the last year's Assembly elections in Bengal."

Ghosh would however not speak a word on AAP or its chief Arvind Kejriwal. But when asked about the other aspirants who too were trying to assume national leadership, he said "no one has the same strature as Mamata Banerjee."

Meanwhile, in a related development congratulating the saffron leadership for its stupendous victory in Gujarat BJP's Bengal president Sukanta Majumdar said that the BJP's conquest of India would never be complete till it humbled Bengal.

No amount of victory in other parts of the country will satisfy the BJP leadership ... our national leaders have already made it clear that until we win Bengal the BJP's conquest of India will remain unrealised," Majumdar said.



"I congratulate the BJP and PM Modi for the victory in Gujarat which is record-breaking and historic. The projects which were given away to Gujarat from Maharashtra also helped in the victory" — Shiv Sena(UBT) chief U Thackeray



"The grand victory of the BJP in Gujarat is an expression of the immense love of the people towards the development, security and good governance of Prime Minister Modi" — UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath



"The people of Gujarat have massively voted the BJP back to power because of the development efforts by it. People in Tripura should also do so" — Manik Saha Tripura Chief Minister



"We humbly accept the mandate of the people of Gujarat. We will reorganise, work hard and continue fighting for the ideals of the country as well as the rights of the people of the State" — Congress leader Rahul Gandhi



"I am thankful to the people of Gujarat for helping us attain the status of national party. Very few parties enjoy the status and now we are one of them. Ours is only a 10-year-old party" — Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal



"Gujarat Bugle for India! By showering (sic) this historic mandate out of their love and admiration for Hon PM Shri @narendramodi Ji, people have shown the path for 2024" — Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

Guj rejects fake-vows, freebies, appeasement: Shah BJP brass credit 'landslide win' to Modi's popularity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the BJP notching up a record tally in Gujarat, top BJP leaders and Union Ministers credited the historic win to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity and party's hard work.

Hailing his party's massive success in his home State, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said, "Gujarat has rejected those who do politics of hollow promises, revadi (freebies) and appeasement and has given an unprecedented mandate to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP, which worked for public welfare and development."

Shah, who represents Gandhinagar in Lok Sabha, said he salutes the people of Gujarat on this historic victory and congratulated BJP president JP Nadda, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and party State unit president CR Patil.

Echoing similar sentiments, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh asserted that the biggest credit for this victory goes to the trust reposed by the people in the leadership of Modi, his popularity and



credibility.

"The biggest credit for this victory goes to the public's trust in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his popularity and credibility. Congratulations to him and thanks to the public," Singh said.

In a series of tweets, he said the BJP's "historic victory" in the Gujarat elections is a victory of the party's commitment to development, good governance and public welfare.

BJP president JP Nadda said party's victory in the Gujarat Assembly polls is a testament to Modi's politics of development. Nadda mocked the Aam Aadmi Party saying both its chief ministerial candidate and state unit head lost the elections in Gujarat.

Nadda thanked the BJP workers for their hard work in Himachal Pradesh also, where the party lost to the Congress, saying the "raj may have



changed, but 'riwaz' also changed as there was a gap of less than 1 per cent in vote share of the top two parties".

In his address to BJP workers at the party headquarters in the presence of Modi and other senior leaders, Nadda also complimented the party workers from Delhi too for a spirited show in MCD elections, saying the AAP government in the national capital created hurdles in the functioning of civic bodies which were ruled by the BJP.

Highlighting the magnitude of the BJP victory in Gujarat, Nadda said the party got 52.5 per cent votes and 156 seats out of 182. "No party has been able to get so much votes and so many seats till date in Gujarat."

Nadda also took a dig at rival Congress, saying last time its vote share was 41.4 per cent, which has come down to 27.3 per cent this time in Gujarat



polls. Its seats also reduced from 77 to 17, he said.

On the AAP, he said a new party entered the election fray and its leaders used to write and claim that the "Aam Aadmi Party would get so many seats".

"Its chief ministerial candidate, state president and all other big leaders lost the election. This shows that the people of Gujarat do not believe in those who make false promises and do politics of freebies."

Hitting out at AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, Nadda said he used to carry the board, pronouncing himself to be "staunchly honest". "But he fooled the people and should apologise for the same."

Referring to the BJP's victory in the Kurhani assembly bypoll in Bihar, Nadda said it's a message for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar that the people of State are with Prime Minister Modi.

Delhi, HP wins teach Opp vital lessons Victories exposed limits of much-touted Modi factor: CPI(M)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With Opposition victories in Himachal Pradesh, different bypolls and the MCD, the Opposition sought to take a leaf out of it to ensure a united front to stop the BJP juggernaut in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are due.

Yadav congratulated Madan Bhaiya of the RLD, an alliance partner of the SP, for winning the Khatauli Assembly segment bypoll. He, however, claimed that people in the Rampur Sadar assembly segment were not allowed to vote.

Had there been a fair election in Rampur, it would have been the biggest win for the Samajwadi Party, Yadav added. The BJP won SP leader Azam Khan's stronghold Rampur Sadar assembly seat for the first time.

Opposition leaders like NCP supremo Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray, which are also allies of the Congress, congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the BJP victory in Gujarat while saying that projects "taken away" from Maharashtra contributed to the result.

"I congratulate the BJP and PM Modi for the victory in Gujarat which is record-breaking and historic," Udhav said.

He also took a jibe at the BJP government at the Centre by saying that "the projects which were taken away to Gujarat from Maharashtra also helped in the victory."

"The opposition parties in Maharashtra have been targeting the BJP over the state recently losing some big-ticket industrial projects to Gujarat. The Aam Aadmi Party divided votes in Gujarat and it clearly benefited the BJP, the Sena leader further remarked.

Addressing the NCP's state executive meeting, Pawar said, "The Gujarat verdict is on expected lines as the entire power machinery was used for the benefit of one particular state and projects were shifted there." "The Gujarat results don't reflect the mood of the country. The results of the civic polls in Delhi and Himachal Pradesh Assembly, where the BJP has been defeated prove that," the former Union minister said.

Accusing the BJP of deploying "all its resources and the state machinery to try to retain power", the CPI (M) said, "However, the popular discontent over BJP misrule prevailed."

About the MCD election

results which were announced Wednesday, the Left party said that the people of the national capital "withstood all the blandishments and manoeuvres of the BJP and the Central government."

"The results of Himachal Pradesh and Delhi have exposed the vulnerability of the BJP despite its huge money power and resources. The limits of the much-touted Modi factor have also come to the fore. The opposition parties should draw proper lessons from these results and draw up plans to put up an effective united opposition to the BJP state-wise by marshalling all the forces," the CPI(M) said in a statement.

"The projection of a pan-Hindu identity along with the rhetoric about Gujarati pride have overcome the more vital issues like price rise, unemployment and poor public health and educational facilities," the party added.

AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal thanked the people of Gujarat for helping his party breach the BJP's Gujarat "fortress", and hoped to win the state in next assembly elections.

Post Mainpuri win, Shivpal, SP merge to fight 2024 polls jointly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The day Samajwadi Party scored an emphatic win in Mainpuri by-election, Shivpal Singh Yadav merged his Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) with Akhilesh Yadav's SP, indicating that both the parties will contest the next Lok Sabha elections together.

"We have merged Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) with Samajwadi Party. In 2024, we will fight the elections together. From today, there will be a Samajwadi Party flag (on my car)," Shivpal Yadav said in Saifai.

Taking to their official Twitter handle, the SP also shared a picture of the pair of uncle Shivpal Yadav-nephew Akhilesh Yadav holding a Samajwadi Party flag, indicating their merger.

The indications of thaw between chacha and bhatija were palpable when Akhilesh met Shivpal Yadav at his residence after declaring Dimple



Yadav as the party's candidate from Saifai. The election to Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat was necessitated following the death of SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav. Shivpal was also present when Dimple Yadav filed her nomination papers and ahead of the Mainpuri bypoll, Shivpal Yadav had promised his support to SP and asked his party workers to ensure Dimple Yadav's victory in the election

After the victory of Dimple Yadav, Shivpal wrote in a tweet in Hindi, which roughly says: "Gratitude to well-wishers, friends and hardworking workers for their blessings, love and immense public support received from the voters of

Mainpuri parliamentary constituency. Heartfelt thanks to the residents of Jaswantnagar for the blessings given to Dimple Yadav."

Shivpal Yadav had formed the PSP in 2018, two years after his rift with nephew Akhilesh. He contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election separately but joined hands with SP as an ally for the 2022 assembly polls. After the election, chacha rued his decision to contest on SP ticket and said he made a political blunder by joining hands with Akhilesh.

After the demise of Mulayam Singh Yadav in October, the family made efforts to bring the two leaders closer and finally succeeded. Gripped with grief, they were also seen jointly paying respects to Mulayam Singh Yadav, fondly called "Netaji".

Shivpal had also extensively campaigned for Dimple after her candidature was announced for the constituency.

TMC rule in Bengal won't see new year dawn, says Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari has once again dropped his 'December bombshell' saying three days of this month would be crucial in the State politics.

"Wait and see what happens on December 12, 14 and 21 ... I won't say anything now," Adhikari told the media men on Wednesday.

"When asked to comment on his December deadline he reiterated, "I had told you about December ... just keep an eye on three days December 12, 14 and 21 ... I won't say anything more for now ... just wait and watch," he said.

The State Opposition Leader and even the State BJP president had on several occasions said that the TMC Government would not last beyond this year. "Come December and you will see

what happens ... there will be a big dhamaka (explosion) in the month of December beyond which the TMC Government will not last," Adhikari had told a couple of months ago.

Echoing his views Majumdar too had said that the TMC had lost its right to rule Bengal and it would fall by the months of December.

The two leaders' statements were partially corroborated by film star and BJP national leader Mithun Chakrabarty who on several occasions said how tens of TMC MPs and MLAs were in constant touch with him.

"I can tell you for now that at least 37 MLAs and other leaders are in touch with me personally ... I won't jeopardise their safety by revealing their name now ... things will be revealed when time comes," he said.

Thank you Guj ! AAP got national party tag in just 10 years: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday thanked the people of Gujarat for helping his party breach the BJP's Gujarat "fortress", and said the AAP has achieved the 'National Party' status in merely 10 years.

In a video message, Kejriwal said though the party has not won many seats in Gujarat but the votes it got helped it attain the national party status.

"I am thankful to the people of Gujarat for helping us attain the status of national party. Very few parties enjoy the status and now we are one of them. Ours is only a 10-year-old party," he said.

"AAP was formed just 10 years ago, today we have governments in two states and have become a national party, this is enough to frighten any rival. Gujarat is considered a BJP "fortress" and the people of the state has helped the AAP



make a dent in it, he said. "Hopefully, next time we will be able to win it."

Kejriwal also said that during the campaigning, his party and leaders never indulged in mudslinging or abusive politics. They only spoke about positive things and the work done by the party in Delhi and Punjab where the AAP is in power, he added.

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said the Aam Aadmi Party is on course to become a national party thanks to the votes given by the people of Gujarat.

With counting of votes crossing the halfway mark in most constituencies of Gujarat, the BJP has received 53 per cent

of the votes counted, while the Congress has 27 per cent and the AAP 13 per cent.

"Due to the votes given by the people of Gujarat, the AAP is today becoming a national party. The politics of education and health is making a mark for the first time in the country. Congratulations to the entire country on this," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said that his party gained national party status in just 10 years and thanked the people of Gujarat for it.

Singh said his party's leaders worked hard and "we are thankful to the people of Gujarat because of whom we got this recognition."

"The AAP managed to bag the status of national party in just 10 years. That's the pace of growth of this party. We got around 35 lakh votes in Gujarat. All leaders worked hard and visited rural areas in Gujarat," he said during a press conference.



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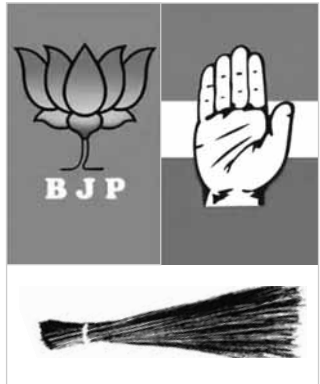
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Win-win-win

BJP, Cong and AAP have reasons to rejoice but they can't afford to ignore certain issues

Results of Assembly elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh and the MCD poll have pleased every party — at least, that's what leaders of the BJP, Congress and AAP are saying. The BJP is happy that it won Gujarat with an unprecedented landslide. Evidently, the Morbi cable bridge collapse, which was a case of monumental incompetence and corruption, had little impact on the poll. Also forgotten was the mismanagement during the deadly Delta wave of Covid-19. In the 2017 Assembly election, the saffron party had just managed to form Government with 99 seats, with the Congress not much behind with 77; this must have caused jitters in the BJP's State unit. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, along with other top party leaders, spared no effort to register a handsome victory. In the MCD election, too, where the saffron party was estimated to win around 50 wards, it crossed the three-digit mark.



This was again impressive, given 15 years of incumbency and its sub-optimal performance in local governance. While in both States, the BJP did better than what the exit polls had predicted, it was not so in Himachal. But again, given the magnitude of rebellion, the party did better than expected. For the Congress, the Himalayan State was the only bright spot as it shrunk in Gujarat and Delhi. But the win should come as a big morale booster for the party which has become accustomed to losing elections. Anti-incumbency and BJP rebels did help the Congress cause.

This is also Priyanka Vadra's first success in electoral politics; this may occasion an increase in her role. AAP also has reasons to be pleased with the overall results. Of course, it didn't get a landslide in MCD, but it won comfortably. Party boss Arvind Kejriwal had made tall claims about success in Gujarat but it didn't reach the double-digit mark. Still, it was able to dislodge the BJP from the local bodies in Delhi against a spirited campaign by the saffron party. Satyendra Jain's video clips, the charges against Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and AAP's alleged involvement in Liguorgate did little to harm the party's electoral prospects. Besides, AAP, by winning a few seats in Gujarat, has now graduated to becoming a national party. The three parties, however, should not lose sight of the challenges they will face. The grand old party can celebrate its victory in Himachal, but it should also be cognisant of the fact that its decline in several States is quite steep. In Gujarat, for instance, it got just about one-tenth of the seats that its arch-rival BJP got. The BJP must beware of the problem of rebellion, which seems to have been exacerbated because of the centralisation of powers in the party. And AAP has to look beyond freebies, which didn't find many takers in Gujarat and Himachal.

PICTALK



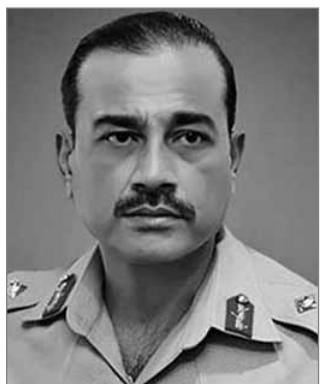
Devotees cover the Yamuna with sarees during the Chunar Manorath festival, in Mathura

PTI

Pak army chief

Gen Asim Munir, who is the new Army chief of Pakistan, has to battle its falling credibility

A new army chief has taken over from General Qamar Javed Bajwa. The new army chief is General Asim Munir. In Pakistan popularity of army Generals is as important as the popularity of politicians in their careers. General Qamar Javed Bajwa, had become quite unpopular during his last months in office. The reason of course is the role he played in the ouster of the former prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan. Imran had fallen off from the General and criticized him for orchestrating his ouster through a no-confidence vote in April on the behest of foreign powers. After the assassination bid on Imran Khan People turned rather sympathetic to the former Pakistan captain and little skeptic of General Bajwa who had overshot his tenure several times and continued in the office for the power he wielded in the army and the political circles of the country. However, it going to be quite a challenging job for General Munir. One of the biggest challenges he faces is the credibility of the army and his position.



After the ouster of Imran Khan, the Pakistan army is being seen as bad boys who dance to the tunes of Uncle Sam for all the monetary support they get from him. Besides, Imran has played his victim card rather well and painted the army as the culprit for his ouster. His scathing remarks have damaged the reputation of the army in a big way. General Munir must restore credibility to the army which has taken major popularity hit from Khan's large and growing support base. Another major task he has at hand is to bring some semblance of political order to the country. The present government in place right now is courtesy Pakistan army but it faces a huge trust deficit. General Munir would have to opt for early elections before he is also branded as an anti-democratic person happy to have a proxy army rule. But before that, he will have to devise a formula that both the government and Imran Khan can agree upon. This is not going to be easy as Imran Khan has emerged stronger and is in no mood to give concessions to the present government. Besides what makes his task even more daunting is that he doesn't have a good rapport with Khan who fired Munir as Pakistan's spy chief. The given scenario leaves not many choices for the new General and how he maneuvers would decide the future of Pakistan.

Every problem has a solution

Our attempts to resolve any number of socio-economic and political problems have to focus on behavioural changes and social engineering



SANGRAM MISHRA



Any effective reform in the electoral process has to take into account many factors including legal and legislative ones. The steps are discussed so as to bring a holistic change with an inclusive approach. Any change in the behavioural aspect of people solicits an endeavour for awareness building. Art 324 (1) of the constitution India vests the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission of India. As such ECI is the most important constitutional body having Superintendence, direction and control over the election process. This vesting of such large power also generates responsibility for ECI for smooth conduct of free and fair elections.

As a first step, ECI should also try to create awareness among people delineating the role/(voting) power of citizens to choose their representatives. Frequent publicity over print and visual media about dos and don'ts for the voters would create some awareness. Collectors as the agents of ECI also may be directed to carry and convey the voice and messages of the Commission in the nook and corner of the districts and also in the interior pockets.

The vulnerable groups (tribals etc.) should be guarded heavily against exploitation and intimidation. Frequent visits to these areas, especially the day/night before the election would foil the prank of the unethical elements to win by the force of money. Any violation of code of conduct in case of the candidates or followers should warrant disqualification. District and police administration's alertness, swiftness and sincerity can nip the criminal activities in the bud. The erring and non-performing district administration officials should be taken to task by the ECI. A strong ECI, effective district administration and strong police force can make the process smooth.

The fact that about one third of the population lives below the poverty line, makes the voters vulnerable and prone to the influence of money for unethical voting.

The first and foremost task for the government should be eradication of poverty. But it is not plausible to eradicate poverty overnight. But if abject poverty conditions are addressed properly, a major task would be accomplished. The distribution of freebies with taxpayers money (in my opinion) be stopped forthwith and the party indulging in such activities may be severely dealt with.

In any democratic set up criminality has no role to play as being anathematic. Hon'ble Apex Court has taken a very laudable step in regard to criminalization of politics — disqualifying a candidate on conviction. Revealing criminal antecedents at the time of filing nomination and disqualification on conviction have set the ball rolling. A strict vigil and strong implementation of stringent law would silence criminality.

Cleavage based politics — politics utilizing the divisive factors like caste, religion, language, gender and tradition, etc. should be discouraged strongly. Though it is easier said and done and the society is divided on many diverse points yet any beginning and approach to minimize would go a long way to



AS A FIRST STEP, ECI SHOULD ALSO TRY TO CREATE AWARENESS AMONG PEOPLE DELINEATING THE VOTING POWER OF CITIZENS TO CHOOSE THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

purify the process. Other spatial points should be cogitated and analyzed by ECI to introduce fairness into the process.

Do we need legislation for bringing up laws to ensure free and fair elections? Generally deterrent law has three major components such as severity (severe degree of punishment), Certainty (punishment follows as a certainty wherever there is occurrence of a criminal act) and Celerity (swiftness is essential). Crime would be deterred if punishment is awarded quickly and rapidly. In the opinion of Hobbes, people are driven due to their self interest and further he stressed the importance of deterrence to make the people law abiding. Cesare Beccaria stated that crime and punishment should both have a proportional deterring and deterrence value.

These three components not only attract people's faith and confidence in the system but are also most effective in electoral process and dynamics. As any strong prophylactic or curative medicine has side effects, any harsh law runs the risk of abuse. The most terrifying factor for a politician is disqualification and ban on contesting elections. If the

deterrent law would address this entailing disqualification then the success rate would still be higher and so it would deter other candidates from venturing into abuse of money power and criminality.

Strict implementation and prompt investigation and certainty of the punishment for the unscrupulous elements can bring back everything on a fair path. Electoral malpractices (Abuse of money power, intimidation of voters, post poll violence, offer of freebies, criminal use of caste card etc) should be associated with disqualification, fines and other penal provisions and that would go a long way for introducing fresh air into the system.

The role of bureaucracy is very important here. Impartiality, effectiveness, sincerity and honesty should be maintained at any cost under strict vigil of Election Commission of India. As stated previously, it is a herculean task. But search for solution for every difficult task should start at the earliest and sincerity and it can achieve the most complicated task.

(The author is a superannuated senior IAS officer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DOWNSIDE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Sir — Ever since the outbreak of the Coronavirus three years ago, while the hygiene measures remained the same as for previous pandemics, the social distancing norms, in particular, made the human experience unique. Notwithstanding the pandemic, social distancing presents the dangers of increasing social desertion, growing impersonality and individualism, and the loss of a sense of society as a whole. It prevents people from effectively socializing, which is a fundamental human need. When the pandemic was at its peak, social distancing measures had created a negative and psychological fear in one's mind to suspect that others were potential carriers of the deadly virus.

It made us worry that this cognitive effect could potentially remain in our society even after the disintegration of the virus. Whether at workplaces, in restaurants, or public spaces, our society has long been characterized by physical interactions between people. As we navigate through life, much of what fulfills us are the bonds we create with people, and more often than not, those bonds materialize through physical interactions. The Covid-19 pandemic is not intensely active these days, and if we still do not find ways to maintain physical and emotional connections in any kind of a situation, sadly it will make it more difficult for us to build and strengthen social bonds, and such an atmosphere apprehensively may lead to an unfortunate future for our society.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

LET US CONSERVE OUR SOIL

Sir — Soil erosion can have irreparable effects on both human and ecosystem health. India has taken several initiatives in this direction which need to be sustained and improved upon sustainably to ensure healthy soil and ultimately a healthy planet. The communication link between all the stakeholders for the management and restoration of degraded soils should be strengthened. Timely dissemination of evidence-based information is also essential. Citizens can con-

The raging border dispute



In the open war of border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka, activists of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction on Tuesday sprayed black and orange paints on Karnataka state transport buses in the Swargate area of Pune city and wrote "Jai Maharashtra" on these buses. A local leader of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) faction confirmed they painted the buses. Workers of the Shiv Sena, Uddhav Thackeray faction sprayed at least two-

three buses of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) with black paint.

The border issue dates back to 1957 after the reorganization of states on linguistic lines. Maharashtra laid claim to Belagavi, which was part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency as it has a sizable Marathi-speaking population. It also laid claim to 814 Marathi-speaking villages which are currently part of Karnataka. Belagavi district administration in Karnataka on Monday issued orders barring entry of the two Maharashtra ministers and leaders to the city. Prohibitory orders were issued under section 144 of CrPC, barring their entry, besides that of an MP, who is a member of the Maharashtra High Power Committee on the Border Dispute. With this, the ruling party of Maharashtra is silent on this issue and not taking very strong action.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

tribute by planting trees, developing and maintaining kitchen gardens, and consuming seasonal and locally sourced food. Soil erosion is taking place in 145 million hectares in India, it is estimated that 96.40 million hectares (about 30 percent of the total geographical area) are affected by land degradation. Globally, the biophysical status of 5,670 million hectares of land is declining, of which 1,660 million hectares (29 percent) are due to human-induced land degradation.

World Soil Day is celebrated every year on 5 December. The theme of World Soil Day 2022 is 'Soil: Where Food Begins'. Healthy soil helps in the growth of healthy plants, and increases both nutrition and water percolation to maintain groundwater levels. As consumers and citizens, we can contribute to protecting topsoil by planting trees, developing and maintaining home/kitchen gardens, and consuming primarily locally sourced and seasonal foods. Soil erosion can have irreparable effects on both human and ecosystem health. India has taken several initiatives in this direction which need to be sustained and improved upon

sustainably to ensure healthy soil and ultimately a healthy planet.

Priyanka Saurabh | Hissar

THE MAKING OF MODI

Sir — In today's international world, some people can be called smart for their actions. PM Modi is a very well-known example of this quality. Our PM works day and night hard to make our country stand out in the world, whether it is about motivating our soldiers, doing rallies, or meeting foreign delegates. PM Modi never abstains from doing menial tasks. No one knows who is the smartest, but what we should consider is that smartness is a way of achieving goals and not an end goal in itself. Politicians in themselves are very smart, who are smarter than others can only be known by the actions and the result of the action taker. There lies real success and simplicity plays a significant role in molding a man to greater heights.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

People like Poonawala will be born in every city if there is no strong leader like Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

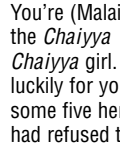


Assam CM — Himanta Biswa Sarma



Together the UK and the US will ensure the global price of energy and the security of our national supply can never again be manipulated by the whims of a failing regime.

UK Prime Minister — Rishi Sunak



You're (Malaika) the Chaiyya Chaiyya girl. But luckily for you, some five heroines had refused to climb on the train. Malaika was nowhere on the radar.

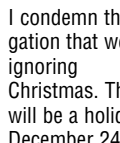


Filmmaker — Farah Khan



We are very very confident. This is not the first time we have lost the first game in the series. It's quite normal. We know how to bounce back from these situations.

Cricketer — Shikhar Dhawan



I condemn the allegation that we are ignoring Christmas. There will be a holiday on December 24 & 25.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister — P Joshi

FIRST COLUMN

COMMONALITIES IN G20 PRESIDENCY

Indian PM Narendra Modi has taken a whole-of-Government approach



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

he first round of meeting among G20 members got off to a rather colourful start earlier this week with traditional Rajasthani turbans, scarves and jackets gifted to visiting delegates in the western Indian city of Udaipur. The event kicked off several official dialogues, net-working opportunities for the G20 nation sherpas, 14 participating international organisations and nine guest countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken a whole-of-government approach to what it has dubbed as one of a kind event in the history of independent India. The narrative is of India finding its rightful place on global agenda setting tables, now being the fifth largest economy, moving quickly to be the third in a few years' time.

The current government has a lot at stake in getting the messages right to a global decision making group who are likely to be part of the 200 plus plenary discussions in the run up to the leaders' summit in New Delhi in September 2023. However, an equal stakeholder in the G20 presidency is the domestic audience, who in turn, will be gearing up for one of the largest exercises in the largest democracy of the world political map, the general elections of 2024.

Prime Minister, therefore, wasted no time after casting his vote in Gujarat assembly elections to rush back to Delhi for an all-party meet on India's G20 presidency. He has urged all key parties to be a stakeholder in India's presidency and showcase the strengths of India. A careful selection of venues dotted across the Indian subcon-



tinient from northeast, right into the islands of Andaman has been planned to ensure a full experience of India for the visiting delegates.

The central government offices, state government and every public institution has been requested to start displaying some branding related to India's G 20 presidency and carefully plan regional events, aligning them with proposed plenary meetings. Plenaries have been planned keeping in mind important religious, cultural or social events in the states across India. The message is that the delegates of today are tourists of tomorrow.

One will expect a large amount of G20 branded content in cities /districts hosting these meetings, subtly pushing the message of India taking its "rightful" place on the geopolitical map. The political dividends, at least domestically, have not been overlooked and Modi ensured he held a meeting with key post bearers of the ruling party.

India has been the voice of the global South (an informal alliance of developing nations primarily in Asia and Africa, who may not be aligned with West or Russia, China worldview). This may have looked like India revisiting the cold war non-aligned movement ideology.

However, it may be worth noting that the days of Non-aligned Movement kind of grouping may be over and India, as it champions about reformed multilateralism, could bring a new interpretation to agile diplomacy while it negotiates and finds commonalities with the developed western countries and put across the pressing needs of the developing world. India has highlighted key themes of its presidency earlier this week, including technological transformation, green development and lifestyle for environment, climate financing and associated reform for multilateral finance institutions.

India would highlight its indigenously developed digital public goods stack to the global audience in the coming days. On the domestic front, India has moved the needle to designing the legal framework for the digital ecosystem (a key showcase during its presidency). As of now it is going to be a busy season for all major airports across the country.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Development turns an emotive issue



The economic gains registered in Gujarat have translated into a number of improvements in social indicators, including the infant mortality rate

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be credited for bringing a tectonic shift in Indian politics. The Gujarat verdict has shown that development is now an emotive issue. The people in Gujarat cannot compromise on development. They rejected anyone who came to Gujarat to challenge the development model of the state. The people in Gujarat have given tight slaps on the faces of Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for questioning the development of Gujarat. The Gujarat verdict may prove to be a touchstone for Indian politics in decades to come.

Indian politics for the past few decades has seen religion and caste identities as emotive issues. The people have voted on caste lines. The people have in the past voted on religious lines. Caste and religious factors also dominated Gujarat politics for decades. Gujarati society was divided on caste and religious lines until the BJP arrived on the political horizon. Since then it has been 27 years of uninterrupted rule of the BJP in Gujarat. The people have again asked the BJP that there is no full stop in the development journey. The people, by giving an unprecedented verdict in favour of the BJP, have said that the development issue is too close to their hearts for them to consider even the moons that Congress and the AAP offered through freebies.

Congress and the AAP tried to trap the people with promises such as unemployment allowances, free electricity and water. But the people of Gujarat told Congress and the AAP to learn the art of development politics. The people don't need crutches to walk, as they have been socially and economically empowered by the development journey of the last 27 years. They stand on their feet with pride. Congress and the AAP tried to challenge the pride of the people of Gujarat. They have been served with tight slaps for trying to enter the homes of the people of Gujarat through backdoors.

In terms of the GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product), Gujarat was the fifth largest state in FY2017. At present the GSDP rank of Gujarat has improved to fourth position. Also, the GSDP grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10 per cent to Rs 19.44 lakh crores in FY2022 from Rs 13.29 lakh crore in FY2018, witnessing a growth of 46.47 per cent. The people of Gujarat are well versed with the power of compounding. They know that it creates a powerful force, which multiplies the gains over a time frame. This has yielded unprecedented social and economic gains to the people. This explains why the people in Gujarat showed no interest in the politics of freebies of Congress and the AAP.

The BJP government in Gujarat has kept its fiscal deficit at 1.51 per cent of the GSDP, which is way below the Finance



THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN GUJARAT STANDS AT 2.5 PER CENT WHILE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE STANDS AT 8.2 PER CENT. THE STATE GOVERNMENT OF GUJARAT HAS MAINTAINED THIS RATE AT A LOW LEVEL FOR NEARLY THE PAST 10 YEARS

(The author is Director, Public Policy Research Centre)



Commission's prescribed limit of four per cent since 2018. Along with this, low levels of debt have been maintained by switching to the National Pension Scheme (NPS) from Old Pension Scheme (OPS) to reduce financial burden on state exchequer. The financial discipline of Gujarat has been for the benefit of the people only, which Congress and the AAP sought to destroy by promising to revive the Old Pension Scheme and frittering away the gains with freebies.

The Congress and AAP definitely didn't do their homework. If they had been honest about homework they would not have raised the issue of unemployment in the Gujarat Assembly election campaign. The unemployment rate in Gujarat stands at 2.5 per cent, while the national average stands at 8.2 per cent. The state government of Gujarat has maintained this rate at a low level for nearly the past 10 years. Meanwhile, other states have recorded an unemployment rate in double digits. The unemployment rate in Gujarat mirrors the levels seen in advanced economies such as the US and the UK. Yet, Congress and the AAP tried to fool the people of Gujarat by raising the issue of unemployment, which portrayed them as non-serious political entities in the eyes of the people in the state.

Economic gains of Gujarat have also translated into improvements in the social indicators

such as infant mortality rate (25 per 1000 live births), maternal mortality rate, literacy, nutrition, school enrollment and so on. In fact, the Gujarat model of development has essentially been based on utilizing the resources of the state exchequer to create assets which work for the social and economic empowerment of the people. Works done in ensuring availability of water in Gujarat stand out as examples for other states to mobilise their resources for the long term asset creations, which the people reward also in elections.

It must now be accepted that the development model of Gujarat is all inclusive, which has made the past narrative of identity politics irrelevant. This was reflected in the BJP victory from Dariapur Assembly seat in Gujarat, which is dominated by Muslims. The BJP candidate Kaushik Jain won from here, and he must overwhelmingly have got the Muslim votes.

The BJP has also served a warning message to the AAP in the national capital. Even while the BJP lost the MCD elections after 15 years of rule, the party improved its vote share to over 39 per cent. The AAP vote share has come down from 53 per cent two years ago to 42 per cent now. The BJP is now raring to go for the next Assembly elections to overthrow the AAP by building the development plank of the party against the politics of freebies.

What is more important is that

the corruption charges against the AAP government have resonated with the people in the national capital. The BJP won the municipal wards in the Assembly constituencies of the Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, jailed minister Satyendar Jain, transport minister Kailash Gehlot, Amannullah Khan, who is accused of taking money for party tickets, Akhilesh Tripathi, who also allegedly sold the AAP tickets.

This augurs well for Delhi politics, as the people in the national capital have given the message to the BJP to work hard to throw the anarchists out of power in the next Assembly elections, which would be held in 2025. At the same time, the people blessed the BJP with 104 wards in the MCD to keep a check on the AAP in the MCD and the party would not allow the anarchist politicians to fritter away all the gains made by the MCD in the last 15 years. Unlike Delhi Assembly, the AAP will not be able to throw the BJP members from the MCD meetings, and that has been ensured by the people.

The BJP faced reversal in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections on account of the rebel factor. But the BJP's vote share was almost at par with Congress. The BJP may have turned the tide and changed the tradition of Himachal Pradesh of voting out the incumbent government if the candidate selection had been better.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

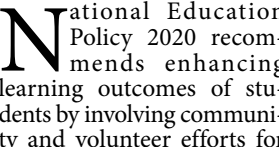
THE TIME HAS COME TO TAKE A STAND AFTER ASSESSING WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE BORDER AREAS. THE SITUATION THERE IS WORRISOME. — NCP LEADER SHARAD PAWAR



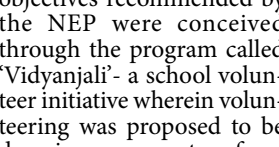
I WILL ASK MAHARASHTRA CM EKNATH SHINDE NOT TO SEND HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES TO BELAGAVI AS THEIR VISIT MAY DISRUPT THE LAW AND ORDER SITUATION IN THE BORDER DISTRICT. — KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER BASAVARAJ BOMMAI

Volunteerism through Vidyanjali for education

Experiments of volunteers coming out to help in imparting education have been immensely beneficial in strengthening school infra



A SRIJA



ABDUL MOMIN

(A Sria is an Economic Adviser to and Abdul Momin is Consultant in the Ministry of Education)

education. The volunteers could be local individuals, civil societies or corporates, people from the Indian diaspora and NRIs. Vidyanjali seeks community involvement in the efficient functioning of the schools in the neighbourhood, especially government and government aided schools.

Though volunteering for a social cause has been an integral part of Indian culture, the uniqueness of the Vidyanjali initiative is that it provides a tech-enabled smooth platform which connects the schools with the volunteers located in any part of the country. Very often, a common citizen is left wondering how to volunteer for a social cause and schools on the other hand look out for assistance to meet the diverse

yet small needs of the school which does not get covered in through their annual budget allocations.

Many a time, shortage of teachers leaves students deprived of education. Vidyanjali provides an opportunity to address these gaps. Launched in September 2021, with active volunteers participation, the programme is gradually gaining traction among citizens. It has proven its strength by successfully managing to attract a good number of volunteers and onboarded schools on the portal. As on date, there are over 3.87 lakh government and government-aided schools on board and over 102683 volunteers have registered on the Vidyanjali portal. The volunteers under Vidyanjali have

shown great deal of enthusiasm by contributing to the schools in terms of assets as well as services. For instance, there are cases where volunteers have donated about 52122 ceiling fans/water purifiers/drinking water facility and other services to schools in Assam.

Similarly, in Delhi we have volunteers providing subject assistance, mentoring, teaching art & craft and music to the students. Moreover, school girls are getting self-defense training, while volunteers are providing assistance in developing basic civil infrastructure and other classroom needs, including ICT-based learning material and devices such as tablets, mobile phone, LCD, stationary, books, laptop, and flip white board, etc., to the

schools across the country.

Almost 9.27 lakh children have benefitted from this volunteering programme. The next step is to rope in bulk contributions from corporations, civil societies to schools across the State to strengthen them. The success of the programme rests on the effort put in by the states/UTs in getting the program on board through regular training sessions rendered to district/block level functionaries, as well as heads of schools to onboard the schools on the portal and place their request. The volunteers can contribute only if the schools are registered on the portal and place their request.

Volunteers could even be common citizens like us. We all have the urge to contribute back to the schools that we

passed out from. People having expertise in sports can impart sports training to the children, doctors can organize medical camps and conduct health/mental wellbeing lectures/workshops.

Companies/groups/organizations can assist schools in building additional classrooms/toilets for girls/ ramps for children with special needs/ICT labs/Smart classroom /residential hostels for students/electricity/water and internet connections etc. As alumni, self-employed or salaried professionals all of us can support our alma-mater in various ways. The exhaustive list on which volunteers can contribute is available on the Vidyanjali portal.

Beneficially, the programme does not minimize

the responsibilities of the Government rather it supplements/complements and strengthens the efforts of the Governments taken for the betterment of the whole education continuum in the country. The people volunteering under Vidyanjali do it selflessly. They cannot claim their services as full-time experience, while the schools cannot treat them as full-time teachers/staff of the school. The programme is fully based on the true spirit of volunteerism and with a very clear intention to tap the resources available with the community for catalyzing the needs of schools and volunteers connected through extensive use of technology and community outreach programs on a single platform.

Ukraine fight taking longer than expected: Putin

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged Wednesday that his "special military operation" in Ukraine is taking longer than expected but said it has succeeded in seizing new territory and added that his country's nuclear weapons are deterring escalation of the conflict.

"Of course, it could be a lengthy process," Putin said of the more than 9-month-old war that began with Russia's invasion Feb. 24 and has displaced millions from their homes, and killed and wounded tens of thousands. Despite its length, he showed no signs of letting up, vowing to "consistently fight for our interests" and to "protect ourselves using all means available." He reiterated his claim that he had no choice but to send in troops, saying that for years, the West responded to Russia's security demands with "only spit in the face."

Speaking in a televised meeting in Russia with members of his Human Rights Council, Putin described the land gains as "a significant result for Russia," noting that the Sea of Azov "has become Russia's internal sea." In one of his frequent

historic references to a Russian leader he admires, he added that "Peter the Great fought to get access" to that body of water.

After failing to take Kyiv due to fierce Ukrainian resistance, Russia seized broad swaths of southern Ukraine at the start of the invasion and captured the key Sea of Azov port of Mariupol in May after a nearly three-month siege. In September, Putin illegally annexed four Ukrainian regions even though his forces didn't completely control them: Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in the south, and Donetsk and Luhansk in the east. In 2014, he had illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

In response to an increasing influx of advanced Western weapons, economic, political and humanitarian aid to Kyiv and what he saw as Western leaders' inflammatory statements, Putin has periodically hinted at his potential use of nuclear weapons. When a member of the Human Rights Council asked him Wednesday to pledge that Russia would not be the first to use such weapons, Putin demurred. He said Russia would not be able to use nuclear weapons at all if it agreed not to use them first and then came under



a nuclear strike.

"If it doesn't use it first under any circumstances, it means that it won't be the second to use it either, because the possibility of using it in case of a nuclear strike on our territory will be

sharply limited," he said.

Putin rejected Western criticism that his previous nuclear weapons comments amounted to saber-rattling, claiming they were "not a factor provoking an escalation of con-

licts, but a factor of deterrence."

"We haven't gone mad. We are fully aware of what nuclear weapons are," Putin said. He added, without elaborating: "We have them, and they are more advanced and state-of-the-

art than what any other nuclear power has."

In his televised remarks, the Russian leader didn't address Russia's battlefield setbacks or its attempts to cement control over the seized regions but acknowledged problems with supplies, treatment of wounded soldiers and limited desertions.

Russian troops have withdrawn not only from the Kyiv area and around the country's largest city, Kharkiv, but from a large part of the Kherson region. Another problem for Putin are attacks this week against air force bases deep inside Russia. He put much of the country, especially border areas, on security alert recently, and fresh signs emerged Wednesday that Russian officials are strengthening border defensive positions.

In the Kursk region bordering Ukraine, the governor posted photos of new concrete anti-tank barriers — known as "dragon's teeth" — in open fields. On Tuesday, the governor had said a fire broke out at an airport in the region after a drone strike. In neighboring Belgorod, workers were expanding anti-tank barriers and officials were organizing "self-defense units." Belgorod has seen numerous fires and explosions, apparently from

cross-border attacks, and its governor reported Wednesday that Russia's air defenses have shot down incoming rockets.

In brazen drone attacks, two strategic Russian air bases more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) from the Ukraine border were struck Monday. Moscow blamed Ukraine, which didn't claim responsibility.

Moscow responded with strikes by artillery, multiple rocket launchers, missiles, tanks and mortars at residential buildings and civilian infrastructure, worsening damage to the power grid. Private Ukrainian power utility Ukrenergo said temperatures in eastern areas where it was making repairs had dropped to as low as minus 17 degrees Celsius (near zero Fahrenheit).

At his meeting, Putin discussed the mobilization of 300,000 reservists that he ordered in September to bolster forces in Ukraine. He said only about 150,000 have been deployed so far to combat zones and the rest are still undergoing training. Addressing speculation that the Kremlin could be preparing another mobilization, Putin said: "There is no need for the Defense Ministry and the country to do that."

US: Russia looking to Iran to supply more drones, missiles



AP ■ WASHINGTON

Struggling to maintain a steady supply of arms for its war in Ukraine, Moscow is looking to Iran once again to resupply the Russian military with drones and surface-to-surface missiles, according to two officials familiar with the matter.

There is growing US concern that Russia may seek to acquire additional advanced conventional weapons from Iran, according to a National Security Council official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss US intelligence. The official said the administration is particularly concerned that Russia may seek to acquire surface-to-surface missiles from Iran.

Separately, a UN diplomat said Iran has plans to sell Russia hundreds of missiles and drones in violation of the 2015 Security Council resolution that endorsed

the nuclear deal between Tehran and six major powers. Russia, as a signatory of the 2015 agreement, would be undermining the resolution, and a key question is what Russia will be giving Iran in return for the drones and missiles, the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal information.

The diplomat added that the sales would mark a significant increase in the depth of defense cooperation between Russia and Iran and could have "massive implications for security of the region." It did not appear the weaponry has been shipped yet but it is "clearly on the order books," the diplomat said.

Concerns about new weapon sales to Russia come after Iran sold hundreds of attack drones to Russian over the summer. The Biden administration says Russia has also turned to North Korea

for artillery as the nine-month war grinds on.

On Wednesday, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that the US has not yet seen Iranian missiles transferred to Russia. But he underscored the impact that previous arms sales have had in the war, as Russian forces have increasingly targeted Ukraine's civilian infrastructure with the cold winter months setting in.

"We have seen continued provision of Iranian drones from Iran to Russia. You can see those drones continuing to hit civilian targets and kill innocent Ukrainians nearly every day," Kirby said. "So we know that they're involved in the efforts that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin has been expending lately to try to bring the Ukrainian people to their knees with respect to power and water and other resources."

The White House has repeatedly sought to spotlight Russia's reliance on Iran and North Korea, another broadly isolated nation on the international stage, for support as it prosecutes its war against Ukraine.

The Biden administration recently unveiled sanctions against Iranian firms and entities involved in the transfer of Iranian drones to Russia for use in Putin's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. It all comes as the administration has condemned the Islamic republic's violent squelching of protests that erupted throughout Iran after the September death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while being held by the morality police.

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

After its searches of holy sites belonging to Ukraine's historic Orthodox church, the nation's security agency posted photos of evidence it recovered — including rubles, Russian passports and leaflets with messages from the Moscow patriarch.

Supporters and detractors of the church debate whether such items are innocuous — or increase suspicions the church is a nest of pro-Russian propaganda and intelligence-gathering.

What's unambiguous are other photos shared by the agency, known as the SBU, posted as recently as Wednesday — some showing an armed Ukrainian officer standing outside a church building, others showing brawny, camouflaged officers questioning clerics in long beards and cassocks.

They illustrate the increased pressure the Ukrainian government is putting on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, with its centuries-old ties to Moscow, as the brutal Russian invasion slogs

into the 10th month of a war that has had religious dimensions from the start.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday announced measures primarily targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is one of two major Orthodox churches in Ukraine following a 2019 schism. Even though the UOC declared independence from Moscow in May, such a declaration is easier spoken than accomplished amid the complexities of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Besides, many Ukrainians don't believe it's really free from Moscow.

Zelenskyy called for legislation that would forbid "religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation to operate in Ukraine."

He also wants a review of the "canonical" connection between the UOC and the Moscow Patriarchate — the center of the Russian Orthodox Church — and of the status of the revered, millennium-old Pechersk-Lavra monastery in Kyiv, now government-owned



but largely used by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The government also placed sanctions on its abbot, another wealthy churchman and several bishops in Russia or Russian-held parts of Ukraine.

"We will ensure, in particular, spiritual independence," Zelenskyy said. "We will never allow anyone to build an empire inside the Ukrainian soul."

The matter is testing whether the young republic can survive Russia's attacks — and as a pluralistic state respecting freedom of conscience. It also

raises the stakes as the two rival Orthodox churches vie for the loyalties of the nation's majority Orthodox population and for church properties.

Prominent Ukrainian Orthodox Church leaders say it has loyally supported Ukraine from the start of the war and that a government crackdown will only hand a propaganda coup to the Russians, who claim to be defending Ukraine's Orthodox against persecution.

"It is national suicide when they slander and try to 'ban' a part of their own people," said

the Rev. Mykolay Danyilevich, who has often served as a Ukrainian Orthodox Church spokesman.

But a bishop in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine — the similarly named rival church, with no ties to Moscow — supported Zelenskyy's measures.

"Maybe it is hard psychologically that this is happening now in monasteries and temples," said Metropolitan Oleksandr of the Transfiguration of Jesus Orthodox Cathedral in Kyiv. He spoke to The Associated Press by candlelight as portraits of church elders looked on, amid controlled power outages.

"But I think it is better that there will be searches than some people who help guide enemy missiles."

The Biden administration says it supports Ukraine's self-defense while expecting it to comply with international law on protecting freedom of religion.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been loyal to the Moscow patriarch since the 17th century.

Ukraine ex-lawmaker, alleged Russian agent, faces US charges

AP ■ NEW YORK

A former Ukrainian lawmaker who U.S. Authorities say acted as a Russian agent for over a decade and tried to influence the 2020 presidential election through meetings with Rudy Giuliani has been criminally charged in New York in connection with purchases of luxury Beverly Hills real estate.

The charges against Andrii Derkach, 55, of Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, were announced Wednesday in Brooklyn by U.S. Attorney

Breon Peace.

Derkach has been characterized by the U.S. Government as an "active Russian agent" for over a decade. Authorities say he met multiple times during the 2020 race with Giuliani, a close Trump ally, and released heavily edited recordings of Democrat Joe Biden in an effort to disparage him. Prosecutors also say Derkach sought to fund a lavish lifestyle for himself and his family through the purchase of two Beverly Hills condominiums even as he hid his interests in the transactions from banks.

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday described the country's nuclear arsenals as a deterrent factor in the Ukrainian conflict but demurred when challenged to make a pledge that Russia would not be the first to use them.

Asked by a member of the presidential Human Rights Council to commit Russia to forswearing a first strike, Putin responded that such an obligation might prevent Russia from tapping its nuclear arsenal even if it came under a nuclear attack.

"If it doesn't use it first under any circumstances, it means that it won't be the second to use it either, because the possibility of using it in case of a nuclear strike on our territory will be sharply limited," Putin said.

He noted that Russia's nuclear doctrine was based on the so-called "launch on warning" concept, which envisages the country employing nuclear weapons in the face of an imminent nuclear attack.

"It means that if we come



under strike, we strike back in response," he said.

Russia's nuclear doctrine states the country can use nuclear weapons if it comes under a nuclear strike or if it faces an attack with conventional weapons that threatens "the very existence" of the Russian state.

Putin, who has repeatedly said during the fighting in Ukraine that Russia was ready to use "all available means" to protect its territory, rejected Western criticism of nuclear saber-rattling. He pointed at former British Prime Minister Liz Truss' statement about her readiness to use nuclear weapons, saying he felt obliged to respond to that.

"I had to emphasize certain things in response," Putin said. "Her comments went largely

unnoticed, but they immediately emphasized our statements and used them to scare the world."

The Russian leader further argued that Russia's nuclear weapons serve as a tool of deterrence amid the military operation in Ukraine, which is in its 10th month.

"We haven't gone mad. We fully understand what nuclear weapons are," Putin said. "We have them, and they are more advanced and state-of-the-art than what any other nuclear power has."

He added: "We aren't going to brandish those weapons like a razor running around the world, but we naturally proceed from their existence."

"It's a factor of deterrence, not a factor provoking an escalation of the conflict," Putin said.

The Russian leader characterized the tactical nuclear weapons the United States deployed to Europe as a destabilizing factor. Russia, by contrast, hasn't deployed any nuclear weapons outside its territory, Putin said, adding that "we naturally will defend our allies with all available means, if necessary."

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client that Mr. Ankit Malhotra is the owner of Property bearing No. 4/11, Unit I D No. 89-1134-98, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No. 3173/2513, 3176/2541, 3179/2521, Situated in vaka Swara Maja Hillayat Pari, Chhivari, Abadi Shikhi Nagar, Gurgaon, Haryana, by virtue of a Transfer deed dated 29.08.2022, Doc. No. 6729. All persons are hereby informed that above mentioned owner wants to mortgage the said property and intend to obtain a loan from our client with the name of Mr. Rakesh Malhotra against the said property. If anybody has any objections upon the ownership of above owners over the said property, its mortgage/litigation, and any other objections, kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

PUBLIC NOTICE
TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN
This is to notify the public at large, that Late Shri Mahendra Kumar S/o Late Shri Prem Nath, R/o B-1/9, Ashok Vihar, Phase-II, Delhi had entered into an Agreement to Sell with Ms. Deepa Batra, W/o Shri Harbajan Singh, R/o B-59, Ground Floor, New Rajender Nagar, Delhi with respect to property bearing No. 10, Sawan Park, Delhi-110052, admeasuring, 800 square yards. Payment qua the same had been made by Shri Mahendra Kumar to Ms. Deepa Batra. The Agreement to Sell now holds good in favour of legal heir of Late Shri Mahendra Kumar. The public at large is hereby informed that any dealing with regard to the said property will be rendered null and void and any person dealing in the said property shall do so at his/her own risk and responsibility for any claims qua the said Ms. Deepa Batra. **Dated: 07.12.2022**

Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)
200, First Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Kot Nagar, II, Delhi-15
Ph: 011-412527-38 kumarassociatesadvocates@gmail.com

Ref. : MD/MK/04/NT/ 2290
Date : 08.12.2022

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
(Through E-Tendering)

Name of Work with its Location	Provision of Coach Guidance System PWL, DSA, & MOZ Railway Station.
App. Cost of the work (₹)	₹ 1,39,22,374.64/-only
Earnest Money Deposit (₹)	₹ 2,19,600/-only
Address of the Office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055.
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of tender	Tender uploading / closing date & time - 04.01.2023 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.ireps.gov.in & Notice board at S & T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM Office, State Entry, New Delhi-110055.

Tender No.: 558-Sig-16-Telo-OT-961 Dated:08.12.2022

3275/22

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE



M.P. MADHYA KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN COMPANY LIMITED
(Government of M.P. Undertaking)
NISHTHA PARISAR, BIJALEE NAGAR, GOVINDPURA, BHOPAL-462023
Phone No. : 0755-2602033-36, Fax : 2589821, 2586636

Ref. : MD/MK/04/NT/ 2290

Date : 08.12.2022

TENDER NOTICE

MPMKVVCL, Bhopal, invites following bids from manufacturers through e-tendering :

Tender Specification Number	Particulars	Tender Fee including GST (In Rs.)	Date of Pre-Bid Conference	Date of Opening of Tender
MD/MK/ 04/845	Expression of Interest (EOI) For Submission of Technical proposal for "Fencing of Distribution Transformer and provision of Advertisement on DTR fencing at various locations in Bhopal City under Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model"	590/-	16.12.2022 at 3:00 PM	02.01.2023 at 3:00 PM

Other details and full Tender documents would be available on Company website <https://portal.mpcz.in> & Govt. website <https://mptenders.gov.in> shortly.
M.P. Madhyam/107621/2022

CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (PROC.)

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that We (1) SH. ANIL KUMAR VERMA, S/O SH. JUGAL KISHORE VERMA, & (2) SMT. RASHMI VERMA, W/O SH. ANIL KUMAR VERMA, BOTH R/O SFS FLAT NO. 1-A, GROUND FLOOR, POCKET-D, MAYUR VIHAR PH-III, DELHI-110026, VIDE DDA FILE NO-F-160101791/SFS-IX/L/II has applied for conversion of the aforesaid flat from lease hold to free hold in DDA. All the original documents i.e. Demand Cum Allotment Letter, Mutation Letter, Possession Letter, Site Possession Slip, NOC for water and electricity connection etc. issued by the DDA of the above flat have been lost. An FIR/NCR/LR to this effect has lodged in Police Station, Crime Branch, New Delhi-110003. The above said flat is being possessed by the allottee in my favour in respect of the aforesaid flat & an FIR/NCR No. LR104191/2022 dated 02/12/2022 to the said effect has been lodged with the Police Station Crime Branch, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Any person (S) Claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of the aforesaid original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9818254383 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to the Dy. Director (LABJH or Director) (H)-1, D-Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
Jammu and Kashmir Power Transmission Corporation Ltd
Office of the Executive Engineer
Transmission Line Maintenance Division-I (TLMD-I), Bemina, Srinagar
Ph. No. 0194-2492427, Email: xen-tlmd1@jk.gov.in/ xen-tlmd1psdf@gmail.com/ tlmd1tech@gmail.com
Tender Extension Notice-I

Subject: Tender Extension Notice for e-NIT No: 13/JKPTCL/TLMD-I/SGR/2022-23, Dated: 03.11.2022 (Tender Ref ID: 2022_PDD_194688_1) for the Work namely "HTLS Re-conductoring of Transmission line including supply of HTLS Conductor, Insulator, Hardware fittings and Accessories, dismantling of old Conductor and hardware for 132 D/C Bemina-Zainakote Transmission Line by way of replacing existing 0.2 ACSR Panther by High Tension Low sag (HTLS) Conductor equivalent in size to ACSR Panther"

Due to poor response, the last dates for submission of e-bid and opening of Techno Commercial bids for e-NIT No: 13/JKPTCL/TLMD-I/SGR/2022-23, Dated: 03.11.2022 are hereby extended as under:

1. Last date for submission of E-Bid	15.12.2022 (02:00 PM)
2. Last date for submission of Hard Copy of e-Bid in the office of Executive Engineer TLMD-I, Bemina, Srinagar.	17.12.2022 (04:00 PM)
3. Date for online opening of Techno- Commercial e-Bid	19.12.2022 (02:00 PM)

All other terms and conditions remain same.

No.: TLMD-ITS/3007-11
Dated:- 25.11.2022
DIFK-NB-5429/22

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
TLMD-1st Bemina Sgr
Transmission (Kashmir), JKPTCL, Bemina

Norway acquits Putin ally's son who flew drone

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

The son of a Russian businessman close to President Vladimir Putin has been acquitted in Norway of violating a law that bars Russians from flying drones.

Andrey Yakunin, who holds both a Russian and a British passport and who lives in Italy, was arrested in Hammerfest, in Arctic Norway, on Oct. 17, after he had sailed around the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard and along the coast of Norway.

When off Svalbard, he was responsible for two drones that he owned, and which were used several times for flights

over the archipelago which sits more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) north of the Norwegian mainland. On some occasions he piloted them himself, the court said.

The 47-year-old Yakunin had been filming with the drone while mountaineering, glacier walking and sailing.

Under Norwegian law, it is prohibited for aircraft operated by Russian companies or citizens "to land on, take off from or fly over Norwegian territory." Norway is not a member of the European Union but mirrors its moves and decided on the ban earlier this year after the invasion of Ukraine.

US appeals ruling that would lift asylum restrictions



AP ■ SANTA FE

The US government said on Wednesday it is appealing a court ruling that would lift asylum restrictions that have become the cornerstone of border enforcement in recent years. But there was no indication that the appeal would scuttle a December 21 deadline set by a federal judge to end asylum restrictions that have been used to expel asylum seekers. The disputed enforcement rule first took effect in March 2020, denying migrants' rights to seek asylum under US and international law on grounds of preventing the spread of

COVID-19. The Homeland Security Department said it would file an appeal with the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, challenging some aspects of the November ruling by US District Judge Emmet Sullivan that ordered President Joe Biden's administration to lift the asylum restrictions. Biden officials say the Department of Homeland Security continues to prepare for the December 21 deadline set by Sullivan to lift restrictions. The restrictions were put in place under former President Donald Trump at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice was autho-

Biden releasing USD 36B to aid pensions of union workers

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Thursday is announcing the infusion of nearly USD 36 billion to shore up a financially troubled union pension plan, preventing severe cuts to the retirement incomes of more than 350,000 Teamster workers and retirees across the United States. The money for the Central States Pension Fund is the largest amount of federal aid provided

for a pension plan, the Biden administration said, and comes from the American Rescue Plan, a USD 1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package that he signed into law in 2021. Many union retirement plans have been under financial pressure because of underfunding and other issues. Without the federal assistance, Teamster members could have seen their benefits reduced by an average of 60 per cent starting within a couple of years.

Iran executes first known prisoner held in protests

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran said on Thursday it executed a prisoner convicted for a crime allegedly committed during the country's ongoing nationwide protests, the first such death penalty carried out by Tehran. The execution comes as other detainees also face possible death penalty for their involvement in the protests, which began first as an outcry against Iran's morality police and have expanded into one of the most serious challenges to Iran's theocracy since its 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Activists warn others could be put to death as well soon since activists say at least a dozen people so far have received death sentences over their involvement in the demonstrations. The "execution of #Mohsen Shekari must be me with STRONG reactions otherwise we will be facing daily executions of protesters," wrote Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the director of the Oslo-based activist group Iran Human Rights. "This execution must have rapid practical consequences internationally." Iran's Mizan news agency reported the execution. It accused the man of blocking a street and attacking a security force member with a machete in Tehran. The Mizan news agency, run by the country's judiciary,



identified the executed man as Mohsen Shekari. It said he had been convicted in Tehran's Revolutionary Court, which typically holds closed-door cases that have been internationally criticised in other cases for not allowing those on trial to pick their own lawyers or even see the evidence against them. Mizan said Shekari had been arrested September 25, then convicted November 20 on the charge of "moharebeh," a Farsi word meaning "waging war against God." That charge has been levied against others in the decades since 1979 and carries the death penalty. Iran has been rocked by protests since the September 16 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died after being

detained by the country's morality police. At least 475 people have been killed in the demonstrations amid a heavy-handed security crackdown, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that's been monitoring the protests since they began. Over 18,000 have been detained by authorities. Iran is one of the world's top executioners. It typically executes prisoners by hanging. Already, Amnesty International said it obtained a document signed by one senior Iranian police commander asking an execution for one prisoner be "completed in the shortest possible time" and that his death sentence be carried out in public as a heart-warming gesture towards the security forces.



South Korea's truth body to probe foreign adoptions

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission will investigate the cases of dozens of South Korean adoptees in Europe and the United States who suspect their origins were falsified or obscured during a child export frenzy in the mid-to late-1900s. The decision Thursday opens what could be South Korea's most far-reaching inquiry into foreign adoptions yet. Frustration over broken family connections and laundered child statuses and identities grew and demanded government attention. The adopted South Koreans are believed to be the world's largest diaspora of adoptees. In the past six decades, about 200,000 South Koreans — mostly girls — were adopted overseas. Most were placed with white parents in the United States and Europe during the 1970s and '80s.

After a meeting Tuesday, the commission decided to investigate 34 adoptees who were sent to Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and the United States from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The adoptees say they were wrongfully removed from their families through falsified documents and corrupt practices. They were among the 51 adoptees who first submitted their applications to the commission in August through the Danish Korean Rights Group, led by adoptee attorney Peter Moller. The applications filed by Moller's group have since grown to over 300, and dozens of adoptees from Sweden and Australia are also expected to file applications on Friday, which is the commission's deadline for investigation requests, Moller said. The investigation will likely expand over the next few months as the commission reviews whether to accept the applications submitted after August. Cases that are seen as similar will likely be fused to speed up the investigations, commission official Park Young-il said.

China begins implementing relaxed anti-Covid measures

AP ■ BEIJING

China began implementing a more relaxed version of its strict "zero COVID" policy on Thursday amid steps to restore normal life, but also trepidation over a possible broader outbreak once controls are eased. The country reported 21,165 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, though it was unclear whether the lower number reflected fewer infections or a reduction in testing. The National Health Commission issued relaxed anti-pandemic regulations on Wednesday, including a loosening of lockdowns and the elimination of a requirement that a recent negative COVID-19 test be shown to enter most public places. The commission said it was due to "positive results" in fighting the virus and because of a recognition that the current omicron variant is less dangerous than earlier versions of the

virus — a fact long embraced by other countries that have reopened their societies. The relaxation also follows street protests — the largest in decades — by people fed up with the draconian controls, which have been blamed for hobbling the economy, upending millions of lives and causing the deaths of some people refused hospital treatment because they lacked proper test results. "This is an inevitable trend. We must let go sooner or later, and we can't always stick to previous measures," said Xin Guijun, a 70-year-old Beijing resident. "However, one thing is that we are on our own to protect ourselves, and we must cultivate our own awareness of personal protection," Xin told The Associated Press. While the relaxation sent a wave of relief through Chinese society, much uncertainty remains and the move was not met with universal acclaim.



Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. Infectious disease expert and a critic of China's reliance on lockdowns, said China risked unleashing a new wave of virus mutations on the world if it

doesn't "mount and implement a proactive vaccination campaign." "Whenever you have a large wave of transmissions of a virus, you give it ample opportunity to

mutate," Fauci said Wednesday at an event organized by the Financial Times newspaper. "And when you give a virus opportunity to mutate, that allows it to form potentially new

variants. And once you get a brand-new variant, that could have an impact on the rest of the world," Fauci said. Fauci and other foreign health officials have urged Beijing to import Western COVID-19 vaccines based on mRNA technology, considered more effective than the inactivated vaccines developed by China. Chinese officials have so far ignored such calls. The changes announced Wednesday include a renewed commitment to vaccinate vulnerable groups and the elderly, whose levels of immunization are far lower than the population as a whole. China has administered 3.4 billion doses to its 1.4 billion people, or about 2.4 doses per person, indicating that large numbers have not received the recommended three shots. China's difficulties are compounded by the fact that only a small number of people have been exposed to the virus under "zero COVID," leaving most

with no natural antibodies. In an editorial on the Wednesday announcement, the official Xinhua News Agency said the changes were "introduced based on the latest epidemic situation and mutation of the virus to contain the epidemic in a more science-based and targeted manner." Xinhua emphasized the need to "rectify oversimplified or one-size-fits-all approaches and excessive policy steps, oppose and curb pointless formalities and bureaucratism." China has not formally abandoned "zero COVID," which seeks to track and eliminate all infections, but its recent steps seem to indicate it is dropping it in all but name. The ruling Communist Party credits the policy with sparing China the large numbers of cases and deaths seen in other countries. China's official death toll is 5,235 since the start of the pandemic, versus a U.



China's Xi at Saudi palace to meet royals

AP ■ DUBAI

Chinese leader Xi Jinping met on Thursday with Saudi Arabia's king and the crown prince while on a visit to the kingdom, solidifying ties with a region crucial to his country's energy supplies as sanctions intensify on Russia over its war on Ukraine. Xi arrived at Al Yamama Palace in Riyadh and was greeted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the king's assertive son who stands ready to rule the oil-rich kingdom in the decades to come. Xi shook hands with the prince as an honour guard on horseback carried Saudi and Chinese flags. It wasn't immediately clear what the two focused on in their discussions, though Xi in a newspaper column published by Al Riyadh newspaper said "exchanges between China and Arab states date back more than 2,000 years." The column also quoted a saying by Islam's Prophet Muhammad: "Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China." "The Arab people value independence, oppose external

interference, stand up to power politics and high-handedness, and always seek to make progress," Xi's column read. He also noted that the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, serve as "an energy tank for world economy." China, the world's largest crude oil importer, relies heavily on Saudi oil, paying tens of billions of dollars annually to the kingdom. Gulf Arab states are trying to re-calibrate their foreign policy as the United States turns its attention elsewhere in the world. Russia's war on Ukraine — and the West's hardening stance on Moscow — has also left the Arab countries wanting to cement ties with China. For Prince Mohammed, hosting Xi boosts his own international profile after being linked to the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Beyond China's oil purchases, its construction expertise could be tapped as well for Prince Mohammed's planned USD 500 billion futuristic city of Neom on the Red Sea.

German 'coup' plot spawns dozens of arrests

AP ■ BERLIN

German police rounded up dozens of people including a self-styled prince, a retired paratrooper and a former judge on Wednesday, accusing the suspects of discussing the violent overthrow of the government but leaving unclear how concrete the plans were. A German official and a lawmaker said investigators may have detected real plotting, drunken fantasizing, or both. Regardless, Germany takes any right-wing threat seriously and thousands of police officers carried out pre-dawn raids across much of the country. "We're talking about a group that, according to what we know so far, planned to violently abolish our democratic state of law and an armed attack," on the German parliament building, government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said. Sara Nanni, a lawmaker with the Green party, part of the German government, suggested the group may not have been capable. "More details keep coming to light that raise doubts about whether these people were even clever enough to plan and carry out such a coup," Nanni said in a post on the social network Mastodon. "The fact is: no matter how crude their ideas are and how hopeless their plans, even the attempt is dangerous!" Federal prosecutors said the group is alleged to have believed in a "conglomerate of conspiracy theories consisting of narratives from the so-called Reich Citizens as well as QAnon ideology." Adherents of the Reich Citizens movement reject

Germany's postwar constitution and have called for bringing down the government, while QAnon is a global conspiracy theory with roots in the United States. The Reich Citizens scene has been under observation by Germany's domestic intelligence



agency since 2016. Authorities estimate that the loose-knit movement has about 21,000 adherents. Prosecutors said the suspects also believe Germany is ruled by a so-called "deep state." One of the alleged ring-leaders arrested on Wednesday

is Heinrich XIII Prince Reuss, a 71-year-old member of the House of Reuss who continues to use the title despite Germany abolishing any formal role for royalty more than a century ago. Federal prosecutors said Reuss, whom the group planned to install as Germany's new leader, had contacted Russian officials with the aim of imposing a new order in the country once the German government was overthrown. There is no indication that the Russians responded positively. Police also detained Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, a judge and former lawmaker with the far-right Alternative for Germany party. Alternative for Germany, which is known by its acronym AfD, has increasingly come under scrutiny by security services due to its ties with extrem-

ists. AfD's co-leaders, Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel said they had only learned of the alleged coup plans through the media, and condemned them. "We have full confidence in the authorities involved and demand a swift and comprehensive investigation," they said in a statement. Chief federal prosecutor Peter Frank said some 3,000 officers were involved in the raids conducted at 150 sites in 11 of Germany's 16 states. Officers detained 22 German citizens on suspicion of "membership in a terrorist organisation," prosecutors said. Three other people, including a Russian citizen, were held on suspicion of supporting the organisation, they said. An additional 27 people were under investigation.

Nepali Cong-led coalition intensifies talks with like-minded parties to form Govt

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress-led five-party coalition, which is two seats away from a simple majority after securing 136 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives, has intensified negotiations with like-minded parties to form the new government. Nepali Congress (NC) has emerged as the single largest party with 89 seats after the election commission allocated seats to all the political parties under the proportional voting system on Wednesday. The other partners of the



ruling alliance have together secured 47 seats — CPN-Maoist Centre (32), CPN-Unified Socialist (10), Loktantrik Samajwadi Party (4) and Rashtriya Janamorchha one. The C.K. Raut-led Janamat Party, which secured only one seat in the House of Representatives (HoR) under the first-past-the-post category, got 5 seats under the proportional

representation (PR) category, which means that the party will have a total of six members in the House. Last week, Prime Minister Deuba met Raut at the PM's residence and discussed matters relating to forging cooperation in the days ahead, sources said. If the Janamat Party backs the NC-led coalition, the ruling alliance will have the support of 142 lawmakers - four more than 138 required to form a government. On Sunday, NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel said that the government to be formed now will provide political stability, good governance, development

and employment in the village. Meanwhile, former prime minister K P Sharma Oli-led CPN-UML has received the highest votes under the proportional voting system while the NC and CPN-Maoist Centre have secured second and third positions, respectively. The CPN-UML has secured 34 seats under the proportionate voting followed by the NC with 32 seats and CPN-Maoist Centre with 14 seats. Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has received 13 seats while Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) and Janamat Party have received 7, 5 and 5 seats respectively.

NYT journalists, other workers on 24-hour strike

AP ■ NEW YORK

Hundreds of journalists and other employees at The New York Times began a 24-hour walkout Thursday, the first strike of its kind at the newspaper in more than 40 years. Newsroom employees and other members of The NewsGuild of New York say they are fed up with bargaining that has dragged on since their last contract expired in March 2021. The union announced last week that more than 1,100 employees would stage a 24-hour work stoppage starting at 12:01 a.m. Thursday unless the two sides reach a contract deal. The NewsGuild tweeted



Thursday morning that workers, "are now officially on work stoppage, the first of this scale at the company in 4 decades. It's never an easy decision to refuse to do work you love, but our members are willing to do what it takes to win a better newsroom for all." Negotiations took place Tuesday and some on Wednesday, but the sides remained far apart on issues including wage increases and remote-work policies.

SENSEX SNAPS 4-SESSION LOSING RUN AFTER BJP'S RECORD SHOWING IN GUJ

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex ended four days of losses on Thursday, buoyed by gains in select banking and auto counters, after the ruling BJP headed for a record victory in Gujarat but failed to retain Himachal Pradesh.

Persistent selling by foreign investors and mixed global cues capped the gains, traders said.

The 30-share index opened lower but gained momentum as the session progressed, before finally ending 160 points higher at 62,570.68. A total of 13 of its components advanced while 17 declined.

On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 48.85 points to settle at 18,609.35, with 27 of its constituents closing in the red. Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, L&T, ICICI Bank, Infosys, SBI, Bajaj Finserv and M&M were the major gainers among Sensex stocks, climbing up to 2.71 per cent.

Sun Pharma fell the most by 3.57 per cent after the USFDA listed its Halol facility under an import alert, with products manufactured at the unit now subject to refusal of admission in the US market. PowerGrid, TCS, Nestle, Wipro, Kotak Bank and Bajaj Finance were among the other losers.

"After touching a record



high, the domestic market experienced significant volatility as global markets tumbled due to fear of an economic slowdown and worries over a Fed rate hike. Recession fears weighed on IT and pharma stocks while banks, especially PSBs, continued to support the bourses.

"This volatility is expected to sustain in the global market as we await the Fed policy decision and US inflation numbers due next week," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

On the political front, the BJP was on Thursday poised to retain power in Gujarat for a record seventh straight term but was set to be dethroned by the Congress in Himachal Pradesh, where the hill state followed its long history of an incumbent government being voted out. Riding on the charis-

ma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who addressed 31 election rallies in his home state and continued to hold sway over voters, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) steamrolled the opposition that included the new entrant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) by winning or leading in 157 of the 182 seats in Gujarat with a vote share of nearly 53 per cent.

If the trends continue, the BJP would not only beat its best showing till date -- 127 seats in 2002, but also surpass the all-time record set by the Congress party in 1985, when it won 149 seats under the leadership of late Madhavsinh Solanki.

In winning a seventh term, the party would also equal the Left Front's feat in West Bengal. "Markets are seeing time-wise correction and weak global cues are delaying the recovery. We feel the consolidation may

continue for some time however buoyancy in the banking pack coupled with buying in select index majors may result in a further rebound.

"Meanwhile, we recommend continuing with stock-specific trading approach and focusing on buying opportunities," said Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

Shares were mixed in Europe and Asia ahead of the release of US jobless data on Thursday and inflation numbers on Friday. US futures turned higher and oil prices rebounded. In Asian trading, the Shanghai Composite lost 0.1 per cent, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 declined 0.4 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose by 3.4 per cent. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 0.8 per cent and South Korea's Kospi declined 0.5 per cent.

Brent crude oil gained 28 cents to USD 77.45 per barrel.

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled 3 paise higher at 82.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, supported by positive domestic equities.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in capital markets as they offloaded shares worth Rs 1,241.87 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

RBI may effect one more rate hike; repo rate may rise to 6.5%: Kotak

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the RBI raised the benchmark lending rate by 35 basis points, Kotak Mahindra Bank Managing Director Uday Kotak on Thursday said the central bank may go for one more rate hike to bring inflation below its upper tolerance level of 6 per cent.

Yesterday, the RBI indicated that it wants inflation to be within the band first and then move towards the target of 4 per cent, Kotak said at the CII Global Economic Policy Summit 2022.

"My sense is that there could be one more rate hike and that may be the time for thinking about a pivot, but we got to watch very closely the data, and maybe around 6.5 per cent as it looks today, subject to what happens to the world, subject to what happens to oil, subject to what happens to many other things," he said.

Kotak further said the US Federal Reserve's decision on interest rates this month will be a signal for other central banks.

"I think that is going to be a very crucial signal about what is the interest rate trajectory in the largest market and the largest



pool of money in the world, which is the US," he said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Wednesday hiked the key repo rate by 35 basis points to 6.25 per cent, the fifth straight increase since May.

In all, the RBI has raised the benchmark rate by 2.25 per cent since May this year.

On the potential of the Indian economy, Kotak said the country has become the fifth largest in the world at about USD 3.2 trillion and has huge potential.

There are opportunities to move up the ladder, to be among the top three in the world, and its realisation would depend on certain metrics, including economic performance in terms of absolute GDP and absolute per capita income instead of the PPP comparison, he said.



Road transport Min to launch surety bonds insurance product for infra sector on Dec 19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) will launch India's first-ever surety bonds insurance product on December 19 to boost liquidity in the infrastructure sector, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Thursday.

Addressing an event organised by industry body CII, Gadkari said Indian highways infrastructure is developing at a rapid pace.

"On December 19, our ministry is launching India's first-ever surety bond insurance product...That is going to give a good relief to the contractors," he said.

Surety bonds are different from corporate bonds and financial guarantees.

While surety bonds refer to the performance or delivery obligation to complete the insured project, the corporate bonds refer to financial obligation to repay the debts or loans.

"The surety bonds will help in boosting the liquidity in the infrastructure sector by freeing the contractors working capital stuck in bank guarantees.

"Contractors can utilise these funds for growth of their business," the road transport and highways minister said.

Gadkari said he wants to launch a mass rapid transport system on electricity.

"I want to launch 30 funicular railway system projects in Ladakh and Leh," he said.

The minister said that the most economic viable sector today in India is highway construction sector.

"To work on the highway sector is not a charity, it is really a good profitable sector," Gadkari, who is known for his frank views, said.

The minister, however, lamented that he has not achieved decent success in reducing road accidents and basic problem is faulty road engineering.

Air India to invest over USD 400 million on wide-body aircraft refurbishment



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tata group-owned full service carrier Air India on Thursday said it plans to refurbish its legacy wide-body fleet, comprising 40 Boeing planes, at an investment of over USD 400 million (about Rs 3,295 crore).

The company has mandated London-based product design companies JPA Design and Trendworks to assist with the cabin interior design elements of the refurbishment exercise, the airline said in a statement. Of the 40 planes which are set to go for refurbishment, 27 are Boeing 787-800s and 13 Boeing 777s.

All these planes were acquired when the airline was under state ownership. The Tata Group regained control of Air India in January this year.

The first such refurbished aircraft is expected to be in service by mid-2024, as per the release. With this significant investment, Air India said it is

committed to providing its passengers with a comfortable, modern, and technologically advanced cabin.

In September, the airline announced a transformation plan, focusing on growing both its network and fleet, developing a completely revamped customer proposition, improving reliability and on-time performance.

It also aims at taking a leadership position in technology, sustainability, and innovation, as well as aggressively investing in the best industry talent.

Air India said as part of the refurbishment exercise, it will carry out a complete overhaul of existing cabin interiors, including the addition of latest generation seats and best in-class inflight entertainment across all classes.

In addition, the refurbishment will see the introduction of premium economy cabins on both fleets, it said, adding that first class cabins will also be

retained on the Boeing 777 planes.

"We are working closely with partners to accelerate the refit process as fast as possible and, in the meantime, leasing in at least 11 new widebody aircraft with brand new interiors to improve our offering at the earliest opportunity," Air India Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Campbell Wilson said.

After announcing it will lease 30 planes, including five Boeing 777 in September this year, the airline earlier this week disclosed its plans to add on lease six more Boeing 777s in its fleet.

"The complete interior refurbishment entails significant regulatory and engineering preparation, which commenced earlier this year. This lengthy but necessary process, and the time required to manufacture seats, is expected to lead to the first aircraft entering service in mid-2024," it said.



Arogya Expo draws footfalls at World Ayurveda Congress

PTI ■ PANAJI

Ayurveda products and services have a fast-growing market in the West with increased awareness about their holistic solutions to various health challenges, say participants at the Arogya Expo organised as part of the four-day World Ayurveda Congress (WAC) which began here on Thursday.

"Now is the time for Ayurveda. More and more people in the West are becoming aware of the vital role of traditional healthcare systems in keeping the world healthy," says Raitis Bullits, Chief Executive Officer, Alveda, a platform that connects people across continents with leading Ayurveda practitioners in India.

"Initially many in the West were sceptical about the traditional health solutions. It was so when the yoga and meditation came to the west. Many initially thought that these were associated with a particular faith system. But these misgivings eventually gave way to acceptance.

The same is true of Ayurveda as well," said Bullits, who is from Switzerland.

Noting that the Union ministry of Ayush has been doing "an amazing job" in popularising Ayurveda in India and abroad, Bullits said this edition of WAC especially will put across the message effectively.

A major theme that the 9th edition of WAC and Arogya Expo is leveraging the potential of this time-tested wellness system in boosting immunity of the society as a whole by going for completely side-effect free health products, said Poonam Dabholkar, Product Manager, Shree Dhootapapeshwar Ltd, a leading Ayurveda institution.

"Apart from scholarly deliberations, this conclave will help give a fair idea about Ayurveda to common people and remove many a misconception. This is a scientific system that is entirely granthoktha (text-based) and which has proved its efficacy for centuries. This message is being clearly put out by WAC," said Dabholkar.

India achieves 166GW of renewable energy capacity till October



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has achieved 165.94GW of renewable energy capacity till October as against the target of 175GW by 2022, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

"Against the target of achieving 175 GW of Renewable Energy installed capacity by 2022, a total of 165.94 GW of renewable energy capacity (including large hydro) has been installed in the country as on October 31, 2022," Power and New & Renewable Energy

Minister R K Singh stated in a written reply to Lok Sabha on Thursday.

A capacity of 76.13 GW (of renewables) is under various stages of implementation and a capacity of 36.44 GW is under various stages of bidding, Singh informed the House.

In line with the Prime Minister's announcement at COP26, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is working towards achieving 500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.

Singh further elaborated that so far, a total of 172.72 GW capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources has been installed in the country as on October 31, 2022, which includes 119.09 GW Renewable Energy, 46.85 GW Large Hydro and 6.78 GW Nuclear Power capacity.

This has a share of 42.26 per cent of total installed generation capacity in the country i.e. 408.71 GW as on October, 31, 2022.

Samsung to collaborate with tech startups working on Gov's Digital India stack

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer electronics maker Samsung on Thursday said it will partner with startups working on technologies around the government's Digital India stack, to accelerate its digital journey in the country.

The company is inviting startups to collaborate on technologies which include UPI, DigiLocker, Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN), and Unified Health Interface (UHI) among others, a statement issued by Samsung said.

As part of this, startups will partner with Samsung's R&D centres and business units in India on domains such as wallet, health, and fitness, where products and services will be integrated with the company's ecosystem, it added.

It will also provide funding support to some of these startups, helping them to scale with their solution.

The South Korean major held a Startup Collab event in Bengaluru earlier this week,



where around 25 startups from across India interacted with its leadership.

"Samsung's R&D centres and business units in India will work closely with startups to co-build solutions for a specific product or service that has the potential to be integrated with Samsung's product ecosystem," it said.

The company's engineers, who work on domains such as Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT), big data, metaverse, will also provide these startups with

technical mentorship as well as guidance in protecting their intellectual property, wherever relevant, it added.

Samsung R&D Institute Bengaluru Managing Director Dipesh Shah said: "The Government's Digital India stack is revolutionary, and has the potential to transform the way many sectors work. We wish to collaborate with startups who have cutting-edge technologies in this space, which, when integrated with the Samsung ecosystem, can transform the lives of people, our consumers."

Power deficit declines to 0.1% in October from 2% in April



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Power deficit or gap between electricity required and supplied has fallen from two per cent in April this year to 0.1 per cent, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

"The gap between energy requirement and energy supplied has been reduced from two per cent to 0.1 per cent between the month of April, 2022 and October, 2022," Power Minister R K Singh stated in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

The data showed that the deficit was 2,752 million units (units) in April this year which came down to 124 MU in October, 2022.

The power deficit was 609 MU (0.4 per cent) in May, 796 MU (0.6 per cent) in June, 434 MU (0.3 per cent) in July, 465 MU (0.4 per cent) in August and 312 MU (0.2 per cent) in September.

In another reply to the House, the minister informed that as on March 31, 2022, the coal stock position was 25.6 Million Tonnes (MT), or 9 days of stock, and it increased to 26.1 MT on September 30, 2022 and further increased to 30.9 MT, or 11 days of stock, as on November 30, 2022.

The coal stock available at coal-based thermal power plants of the country is monitored by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) on a daily basis.

The minister informed that as on November 30, 2022, there are 75 plants (56 per cent) out of 180 plants are having coal stock of less than 8 days as per their consumption pattern.

The gap between energy requirement and energy supplied has been reduced from two per cent to 0.1 per cent between April and October, 2022, primarily on account of various steps taken by the government, Singh stated.

According to the draft National Electricity Plan published in 2022 by CEA, the projected new coal capacity addition requirement during the period 2022-32 is 35,014 MW, which includes under-construction coal-based capacity totalling to 25,580 MW, Singh stated in another reply to the House.

BUSINESS BRIEF

PFC DONATES CRITICAL CARE AMBULANCES
New Delhi: Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC), a maharatna company, has donated four advanced critical care ambulances with a view to upgrading the public health infrastructure in Nubra Sub-Division, Leh District, through Rogi Kalyan Samiti (Nubra) under its CSR. The flag-off ceremony took place today at Ladakh Bhawan in the presence of the Member of Parliament Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, RS Dhillon, CMD, PFC, Manoj Sharma, Director (Commercial), PFC, Deputy CEC Tsering Angchuk and other senior officials from UT Ladakh and PFC.

MIN OF SOCIAL JUSTICE DISTRIBUTES SEED GRANT WORTH ₹16 LAKH TO 75 DIVYANGJAN FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT
New Delhi: The 6-day Divya Kala Mela, organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on the Kartavya path of India Gate, concluded on Wednesday. On this occasion, the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Dr Virendra Kumar, launched the online business portal www.nhfdcfoundation.org for the disabled and distributed a seed grant amount of more than 16 lakh to 75 Divyang by IDEA-SAKSHAM for their self-employment. Along with this, employment letters from various companies were also been provided to a dozen Divyangs.

Inclusion of iron and steel products in RoDTEP scheme will expand global presence: Jyotiraditya Scindia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government's move to include iron and steel products under the tax refund scheme — RoDTEP — will help Indian steel players to expand global footprint, Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Thursday.

The move follows removal of export duty on steel products to nil effective November 19, 2022, the steel minister said terming it a "progressive decision".

The government on Wednesday extended export benefits under the tax refund scheme to products of iron and steel along with chemicals, pharmaceuticals for a specified period with a view to boost shipments of these goods, amidst exports growth recording a contraction of 16.65 per cent in October.

These sectors were left out in the earlier exercise which was



conducted in August 2021. Under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme, benefits will be given to exports made during December 15 this year till September 30 next year.

"A welcome move following the removal of export duty on steel products. This would boost steel exports, helping our players expand their footprint in international markets. Thank you, @narendramodi ji, @nsitharaman ji & @PiyushGoyal Ji for the progressive decision!," he said.

Rupee gains 3 paise to close at 82.44 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled 3 paise higher at 82.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, supported by positive domestic equities.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.34 and touched an intra-day high of 82.26 and a low of 82.47 against the greenback.

It finally settled at 82.44, registering a rise of 3 paise over its previous close of 82.47.

"Rupee consolidated in a narrow range even after the RBI raised rates by another 35 bps. It lowered its FY23 GDP forecast to 6.8 per cent from 7 per cent," said Gaurang Somaiya, Forex & Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"We expect the USD-INR (Spot) to trade sideways and quote in the range of 82.20 and 82.80," he added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, advanced 0.29 per cent to 105.40.

BRAZIL HOPING TO DANCE PAST CROATIA



AP ■ DOHA

Brazil head into Friday's World Cup quarter-final against Croatia brimming with confidence after Neymar's return inspired a performance laced with swagger and arrogance in the last 16.

Their eye-catching 4-1 victory against South Korea, which featured goals by Vinicius Junior, Richarlison and Lucas Paqueta as well as a Neymar penalty, sent out an ominous message to their rivals in Qatar.

The football, for 45 minutes at least, was free-flowing and full of joy, the players celebrating their goals by showing off their dance moves and even getting Tite, their 61-year-old coach, to join in.

So thrilling were the Seleccion at Doha's Stadium 974 that their performance drew comparisons in some quarters with the very best and most entertaining Brazil sides, from the 1970 team of Pele to the 1982 vintage led by Socrates.

Yet it was just one game, and it came after the five-time champions scored just three goals in three group matches and also lost to Cameroon, their first defeat in the opening round at a World Cup since 1998.

Brazil will surely settle for a simple victory without the exhibition football when they take on 2018 runners-up Croatia at Education City Stadium, mindful of results at recent World Cups.

Since they won their fifth title in 2002, Brazil have gone out each time to European opponents, including a 7-1 humilia-

tion at the hands of Germany on home soil in 2014 and a defeat by Belgium four years ago in Russia.

Neymar returned to the starting line-up for the last 16 after suffering an ankle injury in the opening 2-0 victory over Serbia, while the return of Danilo at left-back was almost significant.

Tite has lost another full-back, Alex Telles, for the rest of the tournament but another, Alex Sandro, is training again and hopes to be back.

If that is the case then Danilo will switch over to right-back and Eder Militao should drop out of the side.

Croatia made it to the final four years ago after being taken to extra time in three consecutive matches and they required an extra half hour as

well as penalties to get the better of Japan in the last 16 on Monday.

The fear now is that this game might be a step too far for Zlatko Dalic's resilient side, who have much the same spine as four years ago and are still led by the 37-year-old Luka Modric.

"I think everyone in the world knows the value of Luka Modric. He's our leader, our best player, and we're proud to have him on the field," said Mateo Kovacic.

"We are accustomed to very tough physical games in the Premier League and that's something that we want to show against Brazil," the Chelsea player added.

"We want to show our technical quality too but we want to show our physical quality in every duel and in possession."

Croatia coach hails new generation

AP ■ DOHA

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic hailed his country's new generation of players just for making it to the World Cup quarter-finals but skipper Luka Modric believes they can pull off a shock result against tournament favourites Brazil.

The Croatians have followed their remarkable run to the final in Russia in 2018 by reaching the last eight at this year's tournament in Qatar after qualifying from their group ahead of Belgium and then ousting Japan on penalties in the last 16. Only four of the players



who started the defeat in the final against France four years ago, including Modric, were in the line-up at kick-off against Japan, while the emerging star of the new team is 20-year-old centre-back Josko Gvardiol.

"This is a new national team. We have 18 new players who were not here four years ago," Dalic said of his squad on



Tite defends Brazil World Cup goal celebrations

AP ■ DOHA

Back at criticism of his players' dancing goal celebrations in their World Cup win over South Korea, dismissing suggestions they showed a lack of respect.

The tournament favourites produced some carnival football as they crushed the Koreans 4-1 on Monday and celebrated their goals with choreographed moves, while even Tite himself joined in at one point.

The celebrations divided opinion outside Brazil and the dancing by Neymar and his teammates has been one of the main talking points going into Friday's quarter-final clash with Croatia in Doha.

"This is not my national team. It is the Brazilian national team for which I have responsibility as coach," Tite said when asked about the celebrations at a press conference on Thursday.

"I am sorry for people who

don't know the history and culture of Brazil and our way of being."

The 61-year-old, who is at his second World Cup as Brazil coach and is set to step down at the end of the tournament, hinted that he was not comfortable joining in the dancing but admitted he wanted to have a connection with his players.

While Neymar and full-back Danilo returned from ankle injuries to play against South Korea, Brazil have been sweating on the fitness of Alex Sandro for the meeting with Croatia.

The Juventus left-back has missed the past two games in Qatar with a muscle injury.

"It looks unlikely that he will play because he has not yet done enough work on the training ground," Tite admitted, adding that a decision would be taken after Thursday's session.

If Alex Sandro cannot play, Danilo will continue at left-back, with Real Madrid's Eder Militao, usually a centre-back, again filling in on the right.

Dutch hoping to 'change' memories of 2014 heartbreak



AP ■ DOHA

The Netherlands will be bidding to "change" the memories from their semi-final loss on penalties in 2014 when they face Argentina again at the World Cup on Friday, said forward Memphis Depay.

One of the tournament's most storied rivalries will add another chapter in the quarter-final clash at Lusail Stadium, eight years after Louis van Gaal's side were a shootout away from reaching the final in Brazil.

Depay was a unused substitute that day, but is expected to start this time around.

"In 2014 I was there and things ended slightly differently (to how we wanted) but I'd like to change that now," the Barcelona forward told a pre-match press conference.

"It was an amazing moment for the country and what a goal," said Depay.

"The game will be decided on moments in the game. So if we believe we can catch a moment we can go through."

Novice Scaloni looks to outwit master Van Gaal

AP ■ DOHA

Argentina's Lionel Scaloni is the youngest coach at this World Cup, but the 44-year-old intends to prove his relative inexperience is no obstacle against Louis van Gaal and the Netherlands in Friday's quarter-final.

Having witnessed firsthand Argentina's World Cup campaign unravel in 2018 as the assistant to Jorge Sampaoli, Scaloni was not an obvious choice to take over the top job in the wake of a last-16 exit.

Without any previous senior head coach experience, Scaloni was initially appointed on an interim basis as the Argentine federation searched for Sampaoli's successor, but he eventually earned a permanent deal — recently extended to 2026.

He brushed off the disapproval from those who felt he lacked the qualifications to lead the two-time world champions, but Scaloni also had to win over the trust of the play-

Seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi is hoping to finally end his wait for a World Cup title with Argentina, after losing the final to Germany in extra time eight years ago.

The Paris Saint-Germain star has dazzled in Qatar and the Dutch will have to nullify his effect on the game.

"We're not going to reveal our tactics to you (about stopping Messi). It would be pretty stupid to reveal your own tactics," Van Gaal told reporters.

"But it's not difficult to come up with an answer, you want to block and close the passing lines."

The 71-year-old Van Gaal returned to coaching after a five-year absence in 2021 to lead the Netherlands at the World Cup.

He will stand down after the tournament, but would not rule out taking another job.

"If I'm presented with a wonderful opportunity, say a country with a great challenge, it could well be that I continue to work as a coach for a bit."

"I'm 71, of course I look marvellous, I look young."

ers. Scaloni did just that by helping end Argentina's 28-year trophy drought with victory at the 2021 Copa America after a 1-0 win over hosts Brazil in the final.

He succeeded where the likes of Daniel Passarella, Marcelo Bielsa, Alejandro Sabella and Gerardo Martino did not, without also forgetting Diego Maradona's colourful, but unfruitful two-year spell in charge.

Awaiting Scaloni and Argentina next are a Dutch side led by a coach he already idolised when he was still a player.

"I was at Deportivo La Coruna when he was Barcelona coach and he was already an leading figure, I'm proud to take him on, everyone knows what he's done for football," said Scaloni of the 71-year-old Van Gaal, the oldest coach at this tournament.

Scaloni was actually part of the Deportivo side that pipped Van Gaal's Barcelona to the Spanish league title in 2000.

Sterling to return to Qatar



AP ■ DOHA

England forward Raheem Sterling is to return to the World Cup in Qatar on Friday after spending time in England following a robbery at his home, England's Football Association said on Thursday.

"Raheem Sterling will return to England's World Cup base in Qatar. The Chelsea forward temporarily left to attend to a family matter but is now expected to rejoin the squad in Al Wakrah on Friday ahead of the quarter-final with France," the FA said in a statement.

Sterling did not feature in England's squad for

the 3-0 win against Senegal with Phil Foden and Bukayo Saka playing either side of striker Harry Kane.

It would be a surprise should Sterling be picked to start against France although his return does increase manager Gareth Southgate's options from the bench.

British media reports had said that Sterling's home was broken into by armed intruders while his family were in the property on Saturday night.

However, Surrey Police later said that no-one was at home at the time of the burglary and no threats of violence were involved.

The police said the house's occupants were away on an 'international trip' and discovered on their return that a number of items of jewellery, including watches, had been stolen.

Southgate had been supportive of Sterling's decision to leave the camp and return to England.

"At the moment clearly the priority is for him to be with his family. We're going to support that and leave him to have as much time as he needs," he had said.

Sterling has been a key player for England during Southgate's six years in charge.

The 28-year-old has 20 goals in 81 caps for his country, including one at the 2022 World Cup in a 6-2 victory over Iran.

PORTUGAL DENY RONALDO REPORTED WORLD CUP WALKOUT THREAT

AP ■ DOHA

The Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) on Thursday denied Cristiano Ronaldo threatened to abandon the World Cup squad after being benched against Switzerland.

The 37-year-old striker was surprisingly dropped for the last 16 clash on Tuesday, with his replacement Goncalo Ramos netting a hat-trick in the 6-1 victory.

Ronaldo appeared from the bench, but a report from Portuguese publication Record said the striker had previously threatened to leave in a tense conversation with coach Fernando Santos.

"The FPF clarifies that at no time did the captain of the Seleccion, Cristiano Ronaldo, threaten to leave the national



team during the stay in Qatar," said the federation.

"Every day Ronaldo is building up a unique track record at the service of the national team and the country, which must be respected."

The FPF said Ronaldo's appearance against Switzerland was a further demonstration of his commitment to the cause.

Ronaldo is the most-capped Portuguese player and the top men's international goalscorer of all time.

Portugal face Morocco on Saturday in the quarter-finals, where Ramos may again get the nod over Ronaldo.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner did not train with the other substitutes on Wednesday after the game, instead taking part in a gym session alongside the starters against Switzerland.

Spain sack Luis Enrique after WC exit

AP ■ DOHA

Luis Enrique was replaced by Luis de la Fuente as Spain's coach on Thursday, two days after the national team was eliminated in the round of 16 at the World Cup.

Spain lost to Morocco 3-0 in a penalty shootout after a scoreless draw in regular and extra time.

The Spanish football federation thanked Luis Enrique, but said it was time to "start a new project" to keep the growth achieved by the coach in recent years. It said the change was made after a recommendation by its sporting officials.

The 61-year-old De la Fuente, a former left back with Sevilla and Athletic Bilbao, helped Spain's under-19 squad win the European Championship in 2015, and the under-21 team win

Euro 2019. He also coached Spain's squad, which won a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

De la Fuente had coached the senior national team once, when youth players were used in a friendly against Lithuania because the main squad had to go into isolation because of the coronavirus.

Other candidates who had been considered besides De la Fuente, who was Spain's under-21 coach, included former Belgium manager Roberto Martinez and former Athletic Bilbao coach Marcelino Garcia Toral.

Luis Enrique took over the national team in 2018 to start revamping the squad after its elimination in the round of 16 of the World Cup in Russia. He temporarily left because of the illness and eventual death of his young daughter, but returned in 2019.



He helped Spain reach the last four of the Nations League twice, including this season and last year, when it lost the final to France.

He also led Spain to the semifinals of the European Championship last year, losing to Italy in a penalty shootout.

Luis Enrique's contract ended after the World Cup. The former Barcelona player and coach had said moments after the loss to Morocco that he would take some time to rest before starting talks with the federation about his future. He said he would have liked to stay with the national team "forever," but knew that it might not be possible.

De la Fuente is expected to make his debut with the senior team when Spain resumes playing in qualifying for Euro 2024 in March next year.

Flick to remain Germany coach

AP ■ BERLIN

Germany coach Hansi Flick will keep his job and lead the team at Euro 2024 despite their crushing World Cup disappointment, the German Football Association (DFB) said on Wednesday.

"We have full confidence in Hansi Flick that he will master this challenge together with his team," Bernd Neuendorf, president of the DFB, said in a statement after a crisis meeting with Flick.

The move means Flick, 57, will get the chance to seek redemption at the Euros on home soil in Germany.

"My coaching team and I are optimistic about the European Championship in our own



country," Flick said.

"We as a team can achieve much more than we showed in Qatar. We missed a great opportunity there," he added.

"We will learn our lessons from this."

Flick took over as Germany coach from former mentor Joachim Loew after the European Championship in 2021.

He had previously served as deputy to Loew in Germany's 2014 World Cup triumph as well as leading Bayern Munich to a treble in 2020.

He made a flying start to the job with eight wins, leaving Germany confident heading into the tournament in Qatar.

However, the four-time World Cup winners crashed out in the group stages after losing to Japan in their opening game.

Flick had said on the night that he wanted to remain in the job and see out his contract.

INDIA FACE SOUTHERN STARS IN 1ST T20I

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

The build-up to the series has been far from ideal but the Indian women's cricket team will be keen to give a tough time to the all-conquering Australia in the five-match T20 rubber beginning here at Dr DY Patil sports academy in Navi Mumbai on Friday.

With two months go for the T20 World Cup in South Africa, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side should also exactly know where they stand following the five games.

Head coach Ramesh Powar was suddenly sacked three days before the series opener.

Former India batter Hrishikesh Kanitkar is now in charge of the support staff as the designated batting coach.

India managed to win the Asia Cup in October though they were guilty of experimenting a tad too much which cost them a league game against Pakistan.

In the recent past, India have managed to compete against the mighty Australia but failed to get over the line. One such case was their last meeting in the Commonwealth Games final in August when India threw it away after a blinder from Harmanpreet in the run chase.

The batting has a settled look with star batter Smriti Mandhana expected to score



the bulk of the runs.

Her opening partner Shafali Verma, who will lead in the U-19 World Cup next month, will be put under pressure by the Australian pacers considering her weakness against the short ball.

Jemimah Rodrigues has shown good form ever since returning to the national side. While skipper Harmanpreet too has regained consistency. Harleen Deol and Yastika Bhatia have made a comeback after their prolific run in the Challenger Trophy.

Leg-spin bowling all-rounder Devika Vaidya has made a return to the T20 side after eight years.

Her presence lends variety to the spin attack full of left-armers and offies.

Renuka Thakur has been

the standout pacer for the team over the past six months and she would be hoping for support from uncapped left-arm seamer Anjali Sarvani.

Australia, who will be led by Alyssa Healy in Meg Lanning's absence, too have fresh faces in the line-up. Expectations are high from 19-year-old batter Phoebe Litchfield who is expected to fill the retired Rachael Haynes' shoes.

The southpaw had spent a lot of time with Mandhana during the WBBL last year.

Ex-Ireland pacer Kim Garth and Heather Graham are also expected to make their Australia debut.

Lanning is not part of the touring party as she has taken an indefinite break from the game.

Don't have an ego when it comes to leadership: Healy

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Alyssa Healy is excited to lead the team in a five-match T20I series in India, a country which has a special place for her as she scored her maiden international century here four years ago.

The wicketkeeper, who also opens the batting, notched her first international hundred during Australia's 2018 tour of India, when she scored a 115-

ball 133 in a 97-run win in the third ODI in Vadodara.

"It's a great place to travel. For me personally, it's nice to be back here. The place holds nice memories; the maiden hundred will last a lifetime," Healy said on the eve of their five-match T20I series opener here.

For both the teams, the series will start the countdown to the T20 World Cup in South Africa in February next year.

In their last meeting,

Australia defeated India en route to the Commonwealth Games gold medal in Birmingham.

"I'm really excited to play against a quality side. It's great to be back, it's been a long time we have been here. It's exciting to me as the captain," said Healy who has taken over the reins after regular skipper Meg Lanning took an indefinite personal break.

"We are obviously aware of the danger of power they

(India) possess, so it's great for cricket as well. We know we are in for a battle."

Captaincy is an added responsibility but she's relishing every bit of it.

"It's an added challenge, opening, wicket-keeping and captaining. But I love high pressure situations, it's about managing workloads. I'm fortunate to have good leaders, whom I can lean on. I don't have any ego when it comes to leadership."

No intensity or passion in this Indian team: Madan Lal



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former coach Madan Lal on Thursday lashed out at India following their ODI series loss in Bangladesh, saying the team lacked "intensity and passion" and was heading in the wrong direction.

India lost to Bangladesh by five runs in the second ODI in Mirpur on Wednesday to concede the series 0-2 after having suffered a one-wicket defeat in the first ODI.

"Definitely the Indian team is not going in the right direction. I have not seen the intensity in the team off late. I have not seen 'Josh' in them in the last couple of years," Lal said.

"They are not looking like an Indian team at all. That passion of playing for the country is missing. Either their bodies are too tired or they are just going through the motions. And this is a serious concern."

Deepak Chahar, who has been bothered by injuries this year, couldn't complete his quota of overs during the second ODI. The Indian players

are dealing with fitness issues with star pacer Jasprit Bumrah and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja too out of the team owing to injuries.

Highlighting fitness issue of players, skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday said that India "can't have guys coming in to play for the country half-fit."

Referring to Rohit's observation, Lal, who is a member of the 1983 World Cup winning team, said: "It is a very sad thing. If the captain is saying this then something is wrong somewhere."

"Who is responsible for this? Are trainers responsible for this? Why are unfit players going? You are playing international cricket and the result is in front of you."

"If they want to take rest they can take rest during IPL matches. Your country comes first. If you are not going to win ICC trophies, your nation's cricket is going to go down."

Lal put the blame on top-order batters for India's not-so-impressive performance in

recent times.

"If you see the record, how many centuries they (seniors) have scored in the last three years? And how many in the last one year? With age factor, your hand-eye coordination slows down."

"But they are experienced players and they should have performed. If your top order does not perform you are not going to win."

The 71-year-old former all-rounder also pulled up the bowlers for their lack of intensity. "Your bowling unit has become very weak suddenly. It looks like they are not going to get any wickets. After 69 for 6, Bangladesh managed to score 271. So what is all this going on?"

Asked if there was a need to have different players for different formats, Lal said: "Every country is playing like that. Must have specialised cricketers for different formats. Why not have different players for different formats? All countries are doing it and India should also do the same."



Labuschagne, Head centuries lift Oz to 330-3

AP ■ ADELAIDE

Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head posted unbeaten centuries in a 199-run stand to lead Australia to 330-3 against West Indies at stumps on day one Thursday of the second cricket Test. Labuschagne scored his third century in as many innings against West Indies and was 120 not out at Adelaide Oval.

Head was 114 not out after making his first test century on his home ground in the day-night match.

Both teams made injury-enforced changes following Australia's 164-run win in the series-opener in Perth last weekend. Marquino Mindley, one of three changes for the depleted West Indies, left the field with a hamstring strain after bowling just two overs on debut.

The Australians got on top early after stand-in captain Steve Smith won the toss and opted to bat first. Usman Khawaja shared a 34-run opening stand with David Warner (21) and 95 with Labuschagne for the second wicket before his dismissal for 62 triggered the only slight wobble in Australia's innings.

Part-time seamer Devon Thomas was the unlikely bowler to break the second-wicket

stand, trapping Khawaja lbw from around the wicket on the first ball of the 42nd over.

Khawaja was given out and immediately reviewed the decision, but the third umpire confirmed the dismissal and Australia was 129-2.

In the next over, former skipper Jason Holder took a return catch off his own bowling to dismiss Smith for a duck as Australia lost two wickets for two runs in 11 deliveries.

But Labuschagne and Head counter-attacked in quick time, restoring Australia's dominance. Labuschagne cut Thomas to the point boundary to raise his 10th century in his 30th test, and third in succession in this series following his 204 and 104 not out in Perth.

Head was next, reaching triple figures for the fifth time in a test with a driven boundary through mid-off, continuing his dominance through the off-side. His century came off 125 deliveries and contained 10 boundaries.

West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite cycled through seven bowlers in pursuit of a wicket on a pitch that favored the bat, with only Joseph (1-81), Holder (1-42) and Thomas (1-43) getting any rewards.

PTI ■ SYLHET

India A put themselves in a commanding position by posting a mammoth first-innings total of 562 and then reducing Bangladesh A to 49 for two at stumps on the third day of the second unofficial Test match here on Thursday.

Still ahead by 261 runs, the visitors will look for an innings victory on the final day. At the close of the penultimate day's play, Shadman Islam was batting on 22, while Mominul Haque was on 4.

Zakir Hasan, who got a maiden call-up in the upcoming first Test against India, was out for 12, while Mahmudul Hasan Joy was dismissed

for 10. Saurabh Kumar (1/10) and Umesh Yadav (1/16) were the wicket takers for India A.

Earlier, resuming their first innings at 324 for five, skipper Abhimanyu Easwaran (157) added 13 runs to his overnight score while Jayant Yadav made 83. Saurabh smashed a 39-ball 55 and Navdeep Saini scored an unbeaten 50 off 68 deliveries as India A tailenders gave a good account of themselves to propel the side to 562 for nine before declaring. Jayant decorated his 150-ball stay with 10 boundaries while Saurabh hit seven fours and two hits over the fence during his entertaining knock.

Saini struck five fours and two sixes during his half-century.

Right-arm pacer Mushfiq Hasan



(3/129) and left-arm spinner Hasan Murad (3/145) picked up three wickets apiece for Bangladesh A.

Pacer Sumon Khan (2/119) also chipped in with a couple of wickets.

Bangladesh A will have to bat out of their skin to save the match as India A have a full day's play to dislodge the remaining eight wickets.

Brief scores:

Bangladesh A 1st Innings 252, 49 for 2 in 30 overs (Shadman Islam 22 not out; Saurabh Kumar 1/10) vs **India A** 1st Innings 562/9 declared in 147.1 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 157, Jayant Yadav 83, Saurabh Kumar 55, Kona Bharat 77, Cheteshwar Pujara 52, Navdeep Saini 50 not out; Musfik Hasan 3/129, Hasan Murad 3/145).

INDIA-OZ TEST SERIES TO BEGIN AT NAGPUR FROM FEB 9

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nagpur, Delhi, Dharamsala and Ahmedabad have been chosen as the venues for the much awaited four-Test series between India and Australia from February 9 to March 13.

The BCCI on Thursday announced the schedule for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as the limited overs home series against Sri Lanka and New Zealand in January-February.

The Test series will be part of the World Test Championship cycle.

"This will also be the last edition of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy which will be a 4-match Test series feature," said the BCCI in a statement with the two teams battling out in a five-match series thereafter.

The VCA Stadium in Jamtha will host the opening Test from February 9-13 before the caravan moves to Delhi for the second Test from February 17-21.

There is a week's gap between the second and third



Test which takes place in Dharamsala from March 1-5.

The final game of the series will be played at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad from March 9-13.

The two teams will also play a three-match ODI series with the games being played at Mumbai, Vizag and Chennai on March 17, 19 and 22 respectively.

January will see India host

Sri Lanka and New Zealand for limited overs series comprising three ODIs and three T20s each.

Sri Lanka will be the first team to visit with the T20Is scheduled in Mumbai, Pune and Rajkot on January 3, 5 and 7.

The subsequent ODIs will be played in Guwahati, Kolkata and Trivandrum on January 10, 12 and 15.

After a two-day gap, the

hosts take on New Zealand in a three-match ODI series with the games to be played at Hyderabad, Raipur and Indore on January 18, 21 and 24.

The following T20Is will be played in Ranchi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad on January 27, 29 and February 1.

T20Is versus Sri Lanka: 1st T20I (Jan 3, Mumbai); 2nd T20I (Jan 5, Pune); 3rd T20I (Jan 7, Rajkot); **ODIs vs Sri Lanka:** 1st ODI (Jan 10, Guwahati); 2nd ODI (Jan 12, Kolkata); 3rd ODI (Jan 15, Trivandrum).

ODIs versus New Zealand: 1st ODI (Jan 18, Hyderabad); 2nd ODI (Jan 21, Raipur); 3rd ODI (Jan 24, Indore); **T20Is versus NZ:** 1st T20I (Jan 27, Ranchi); 2nd T20I (Jan 29, Lucknow); 3rd T20I (Feb 1; Ahmedabad).

Tests versus Australia: 1st Test (Feb 9-13; Nagpur); 2nd Test (Feb 17-21; Delhi); 3rd Test (Mar 1-5; Dharamsala); 4th Test (Mar 9-13; Ahmedabad); **ODIs vs Australia:** 1st ODI (Mar 17; Mumbai); 2nd ODI (Mar 19; Vizag); 3rd ODI (Mar 22; Chennai).

Prannoy loses to Lu in BWF World Tour Finals, out of semifinal race

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's HS Prannoy went down fighting in three games to China's Lu Guang Zu in his second Group A match to bow out of the semifinal race at the BWF World Tour Finals here on Thursday.

The 30-year-old from Kerala, who had lost to the same opponent in his only meeting at the French Open this year, put up a brave effort but couldn't go the distance, losing 21-23, 21-17, 19-21 in a gruelling 84-minute contest. It was his second loss in



Group A following the opening match defeat to Japan's Kodai Naraoka. The world No. 12 Indian will face world number one and Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen in his final Group A match on Friday.

Axelsen topped the group after beating Naraoka 21-5, 21-15 in a lop-sided contest. The Dane had also defeated Lu in straight games on Wednesday. With the top two players in the group making it to the knock-out stage, it will be either Naraoka or Lu joining Axelsen in the semifinals.

England add pace of Wood for 2nd Test

AP ■ MULTAN

England brought in fast bowler Mark Wood and shrugged off Pakistan's attempt to make the Multan pitch friendlier for spin in the second Test from Friday.

Wood was the only change England made after its landmark, 74-run win in the first Test at Rawalpindi on Monday.

Wood replaced allrounder Liam Livingstone, who returned home after injuring his knee during the first Test.

"Having someone in your squad who can bowl at 150 kph is a massive bonus for any team," England captain Ben Stokes said of Wood on Thursday.

"Having someone of this caliber and what he brings, the way in which he bowls, is going to be massive for us. He



is going to add to our ability to take 20 wickets."

Wood hasn't played a test since March when he sustained an elbow injury. He missed the entire English county season and returned to international cricket during England's seven-match T20 series in Pakistan in September. But a hip injury sidelined him from the climax of the triumphant T20 World Cup campaign in Australia.

Ollie Pope was retained behind the wickets after replacing an ill Ben Foakes for the first Test. Pope scored a century and made six catches and a stumping.

Stokes stressed Foakes remained their prime glovesman but at the moment Pope's role as a batter and wicketkeeper perfectly suited the team com-

bination.

"The performance that Pope put in was outstanding," Stokes said. "To stand behind the stumps for the amount of time that he did after scoring a hundred and then standing in the field . . . Especially as someone who's not used to doing that role."

With Shaheen Afridi injured and out of the entire three-match series, Pakistan's bowling resources were further depleted when paceman Haris Rauf was ruled out of the remaining two Tests after injuring his right thigh during his debut Test at Rawalpindi.

"We are facing injury problems because most of our fast bowlers are playing in all the three formats and that is very tough on them," Pakistan captain Babar Azam said.