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WILLIAMSON
STEPS DOWN AS
NZ TEST SKIPPER
11 SPORTRIJJU TARGETS SC
COLLEGIUM AGAINPresent system at
odds with spirit
of Constitution:
Law MinisterPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The ongoing face-off between the Supreme Court and the Government escalated further on Thursday with Union Law Minister Kiren Rijju flagging concerns over the Government's "limited role" in appointing judges and stressed that it is at odds with the spirit of the Constitution.

Rijju told Parliament that the issue of vacancies and appointments in the higher judiciary would continue to linger till such time a new system is created for the same.

"Currently, the Government has limited powers to fill the vacancies (in courts)," he said and added that the Centre cannot look for names other than those recommended by the collegium.

Rijju was responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha on the large number of pending cases when he doubled down on his criticism of the system of judges being appointed by a collegium or panel of senior most Supreme Court judges.

He said it was worrying that more than five crore cases were pending across the country and the basic reason for the pendency he attributed was to prevailing judges' vacancies.

"The Government took



Union Minister for Law and Justice Kiren Rijju speaks in the Rajya Sabha during Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

many steps to reduce the pendency of cases, but the Government has a very limited role in filling vacancies of judges. The collegium chooses names, and apart from that, the Government has no right to appoint judges," Rijju said on the floor of the Parliament's Upper House.

Several Rajya Sabha members like Pramod Tiwari, Akhilesh Prasad Singh, L Hanumanthaiah, Jebi Mather and Syed Nasir Hussain all from Congress, Shiv Sena's Priyanka Chaturvedi, AAP's Raghav Chadda had given adjournment notices on subjects related to concern over the Government's alleged attempt to interfere in appointment in

higher judiciary. The adjournment notices also mentioned other subjects like "misuse" of CBI, ED and other Government agencies, situation arising out of farmers' strike and "subversion" of democratic system and "threatening" of electoral process.

Rijju's statement of the floor of the Upper House of Parliament has come days after the Supreme Court reacted sharply to the maiden speech of newly-appointed Vice President of India and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar.

The Vice-president referred to the manner of judges' appointments and appeared to support the

demand for a greater say for the Government.

"Speeches made by the high constitutional functionaries in public, making comments on the Supreme Court Collegium, are not very well taken. You have to advise them," the Supreme Court had reacted.

The Rajya Sabha was informed that as on December 9, 777 judges are working in the High Courts against the sanctioned strength of 1,108, leaving a vacancy of 331 (30 per cent). In the Supreme Court (as on December 5), against the sanctioned strength of 34 judges, 27 are working, leaving seven vacancies.

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Pilibhit encounter: HC
cuts 43 cops' life term7-year RI for
convicts

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Thursday commuted life imprisonment awarded to 43 policemen in the 1991 Pilibhit fake encounter case, in which 10 Sikhs were killed after being branded terrorists, to seven-year rigorous imprisonment.

The court set aside the conviction of the police personnel by a trial court under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code, saying the case falls under Exception 3 to Section 303 of the IPC which provides that culpable homicide is not murder if the offender, being a public servant or aiding a public servant, causes death by an act which he thinks is lawful.

The Lucknow bench directed that the convicts serve their sentence in jail and also imposed a fine of ₹10,000 each on them. The bench held all 43 policemen guilty under Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the IPC.

Undoubtedly, the bench of Justices Ramesh Sinha and Saroj Yadav said, the police have to arrest accused persons and make them stand trial.

"It is not the duty of the police officers to kill the accused merely because he is a dreaded criminal," it said.

"In the present case, there was no ill will between the appellants — police personnel and the deceased persons. The appellants were public servants and their object was the



advancement of public justice.

"No doubt, the appellants exceeded the powers given to them by law, and they caused the death of the deceased by doing an act which they, in good faith, believed to be lawful and necessary for the due discharge of their duty. In such circumstances, the offence that was committed by the appellants, was culpable homicide not amounting to murder," the bench said.

"The case of the appellants is covered under Exception 3 to the section 303 of IPC which provides that culpable homicide is not murder if the offender, being a public servant, or aiding a public servant acting for the advancement of public justice, exceeds the powers given to him by law, and causes death by doing an act which he, in good faith, thinks to be lawful and necessary for the due discharge of his duty as a

public servant without ill will towards the person whose death he has caused," it said.

On July 12, 1991, the convicted policemen stopped a luxury bus carrying Sikh pilgrims and forced 10 passengers to get off. A chargesheet filed in the case said the passengers were divided into groups, taken to different areas in a jungle and killed in "cold blood".

The policemen claimed the next day that 10 Khalistani terrorists had been killed. They claimed that some of the Sikhs in the bus were facing criminal cases and were armed.

The trial court had on April 4, 2016 found 47 policemen guilty of killing the Sikh men in fake encounters and sentenced them to life imprisonment.

The policemen filed appeals against their conviction. During the pendency of appeals, four of them died.

Nirav Modi loses
appeal in UK
HC, extradition
to India likelyPNS/AGENCIES ■
NEW DELHI/LONDON

In a setback to fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India to stand trial on fraud and money laundering charges, the High Court in London on Thursday denied him permission to appeal against his extradition before the UK Supreme Court.

In its order, the Royal Courts of Justice in London, Lord Justice Jeremy Stuart-Smith and Justice Robert Jay ruled that "the Appellant's (Nirav) application for permission to appeal to the Supreme Court is refused".

The judges also ruled that the "certification of a point of law be refused" that would have allowed his plea to progress to the Higher Court.

An appeal on the grounds of a point of law of general public importance is a high threshold that is not met very often. This refusal significantly limits Nirav's remaining legal options in the UK against his extradition to India.

The latest High Court order also directs Nirav to pay the legal costs related to the latest application, assessed to be \$150,247.00.

Last month, Nirav lost an appeal on mental health grounds when the same two-judge High Court bench ruled that his risk of suicide is not such that it would be either unjust or oppressive to extradite him to India to face charges in the estimated USD 2 billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) loan scam case.

Meanwhile, Nirav remains behind bars at Wandsworth Prison in London since his arrest on an extradition warrant in March 2019.

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CAPSULE

AGNI-V WITH 5,000 KM
RANGE TEST FIRED

New Delhi: India on Thursday successfully test-fired nuclear-capable ballistic missile Agni-V that can strike targets at ranges up to 5,000 km. The Agni-V project is aimed at boosting India's nuclear deterrence against China which is known to have missiles like Dongfeng-41 having ranges between 12,000-15,000 km. Agni-V can bring almost the entire Asia including the northernmost part of China and some regions in Europe under its striking range.

MASTERMIND OF G'GRAM
MULTI-CRORE HEIST HELD

Gurugram: Gangster Vikas Lagarpuria, the alleged mastermind of a multi-crore heist here last year and accused in cases of murder and extortion, was arrested near the Delhi-Gurugram border on Thursday, a top special task force official said. B Satheesh Balan, IG of STF, Gurugram, said Lagarpuria was travelling in a cab when he was nabbed.

Jo piyega woh marega, ban response
to cries of women, says unfazed Nitish
Hooch toll 26PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA/NEW DELHI

After Bihar's hooch tragedy Atoll climbed to 26, and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday made a controversial matter of fact statement that if people drink spurious liquor they will die, his liquor ban policy came under sharp attack from the Opposition and even one of the allies of the Bihar's ruling Grand Alliance backed the demand to end the prohibition.

Unfazed by his growing criticism for the failure of the liquor ban, Nitish quipped that "jo piyega woh marega" (those who drink spurious alcohol will die), and defended the liquor ban law saying that prohibition was "not my personal wish but a response to the cries of the women of the State".

He said when he brought in prohibition had won praise from many women's groups who felt it would save their men-folk from the "curse of drunkenness and save homes from financial ruin".

He also expressed displeasure over criticisms from the Opposition BJP which has raised the issue "even inside Parliament". The BJP MPs from Bihar raised the hooch tragedy issue in Lok Sabha on Thursday and demanded "immediate action against the Bihar Government" and sending of a central team there to review situation in the State.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, BJP's Paschim Champaran MP Sanjay Jaiswal claimed spurious liquor sale has been flourishing in Bihar under the protection of police officers despite a prohibition in place. But the Chief Minister does not take any action against

any of them, he charged.

BJP's Aurangabad MP Sushil Kumar Singh termed the hooch tragedy deaths as "mass murder" and held the Bihar Government responsible for it. "There is no hope from Bihar Government," he said.

"More than 15 such incidents have taken place so far. But he (the Chief Minister) says those who drink liquor would die or go to jail, and those selling the poisonous liquor would become his party's candidate to contest elections on his party ticket," Jaiswal alleged.

"I urge the Central Government to take cognizance of the (prevailing) law-and-order situation and also take immediate action against the Mahagathbandhan Government of Bihar which is responsible for the murder of 37 people (in hooch tragedy)," he demanded.

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1,400 more CISF
personnel at IGIA
to ease congestion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has sanctioned deployment of additional 1,400 CISF personnel to provide security and regulate passenger traffic flow at the Indira Gandhi International Airport where expansion is going on at three terminals — 1, 2 and 3 — apart from its cargo hold area.

The decision was conveyed at a high-level meeting chaired by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla along with the representatives of the Civil Aviation Ministry, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), Bureau of Immigration among others.

The meeting was called to review measures taken to ease the recent congestion reported

at large airports, particularly in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

The home secretary discussed with stakeholders, including CISF and airport operator, continuous complaints from passengers about the rush at the entry gates, luggage drop and security check areas.

The Terminal 1 renovation and expansion was scheduled to be completed by December next year or January 2024 but the Government wants it to be expedited and finished by November 2023, the start of the holiday season.

More CISF personnel will be required to secure the expanding areas of the IGIA leading to the sanction of additional manpower.

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2002 Godhra train
carnage: SC bail to
convict after 17 yrsPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to a convict serving life imprisonment in the 2002 Godhra train coach burning case, noting that he has been in jail for the last 17 years.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha took note of the submission of a lawyer, appearing for one of the convicts Faruk, that he be granted bail considering the period undergone till now.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Gujarat Government, termed the offence as the "most heinous" in which 59 people,

including women and children, were burnt alive and sought hearing of the appeals of the convicts at the earliest. The top law officer opposed the bail plea and said usually stone pelting is an offence of minor nature, however, in the instant case, the train coach was bolted and stones were pelted to ensure that passengers cannot come out. Moreover, stones were thrown at fire tenders also, he added.

"The High Court had dismissed his appeal on October 9, 2017. The applicant has sought bail on the ground that he has been in custody since 2004 and has undergone imprisonment for about 17 year," the bench observed.

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It's Messi greatest vs Mbappé
superstar in Qatar WC final

AP ■ AL KHOR (QATAR)

Kylian Mbappé vs. Lionel Messi. Soccer's latest superstar against perhaps the sport's greatest player in the World Cup final just about everyone was hoping for.

France and Mbappé are headed back to the biggest game in soccer, and to a much-anticipated matchup with Argentina, after ending Morocco's historic run at the World Cup on Wednesday.

In front of the country's president, Emmanuel Macron, France beat Africa's first ever semifinalist 2-0, with Mbappé playing a part in goals by Theo Hernandez in the fifth minute and substitute Randal Kolo Muani in the 79th.

Mbappé became a global



phenomenon by leading France to the title in Russia in 2018 and has a chance to emulate Brazil great Pele as a champion in his first two World Cups when he comes up against the 35-year-old Messi, who has dominated the game with

Cristiano Ronaldo for the past 15 years.

It's the dream final for many, with France looking to become the first team to retain the title since Brazil in 1962 and Argentina on a mission to win soccer's ultimate prize for the

third time in what is likely to be Messi's last World Cup. Messi has carried his team to the final, almost in the same way as Diego Maradona — the man with whom Messi is so often compared.

"We need all our strength, all our energy to face a very competitive team with one of the legends in the sport with Messi," France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris said.

Morocco has been widely lauded for breaking ground for Africa and generated an outpouring of pride among Arab nations after topping a group containing Croatia and Belgium and eliminating two more European powers — Spain and Portugal — in the knockout stage.

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Indian PhD student in UK solves
2,500-year-old Sanskrit puzzle

PTI ■ LONDON

A grammatical problem which has defeated Sanskrit scholars since the 5th Century BC has finally been solved by an Indian PhD student at the University of Cambridge, it emerged as his thesis was published on Thursday.

Rishi Rajpopat made the breakthrough by decoding a rule taught by Panini, known as the father of linguistics, and is now encapsulated in his thesis entitled 'In Panini, We Trust: Discovering the Algorithm for Rule Conflict Resolution in the Astadhyayi'.

According to the university, leading Sanskrit experts have described Rajpopat's discovery as "revolutionary" and it could now mean that Panini's



grammar can also be taught to computers for the first time.

"I had a eureka moment in Cambridge," recalls Rajpopat.

"After nine months trying to crack this problem, I was almost ready to quit, I was getting nowhere. So, I closed the books for a month and just enjoyed the summer, swimming, cycling, cooking, praying and meditating. Then, begrudgingly I went back to work, and, within minutes, as

I turned the pages, these patterns started emerging, and it all started to make sense. There was a lot more work to do but I'd found the biggest part of the puzzle," said the 27-year-old scholar. Over the next few weeks, he was so excited that he couldn't sleep and would spend hours in the library, including in the middle of the night, to check what he'd found and solve related problems. It would take another two and half years before he would get to the finish line.

"Panini had an extraordinary mind and he built a machine unrivalled in human history. He didn't expect us to add new ideas to his rules. The more we fiddle with Panini's grammar, the more it eludes us," says Rajpopat.

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Actor files plaint
over photo mix-up
in report on senior
citizen's murder

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A non-cognisable case for defamation was registered on the complaint of an actor who said her photograph was used in a news report in place of that of a senior citizen who was murdered allegedly by her son in Mumbai's Juhu area, a police official said on Thursday.

Complainant Veena Kapoor (73) has claimed the photograph, which appeared in a news report on some social media sites, had distressed her, the Dindoshi police station official said.

The senior citizen who was killed allegedly over a property dispute and the actor share the same name, which may have caused the mix-up, he said.

Indo-Pacific a US bid to contain China, says Chinese diplomat

PTI ■ BEIJING

The "Indo-Pacific" concept has been created by the US to rope in India and its other allies as the Asia-Pacific is not enough to contain China, a top Chinese diplomat has said.

The Indo-Pacific is a bio-geographic region, comprising the Indian Ocean and the western and central Pacific Ocean, including the South China Sea.

The US, India and several other world powers have been talking about the need to ensure a free, open and thriving Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China's rising military manoeuvring in the resource-rich region.

"The Indo-Pacific concept is created by the US to contain China. In fact, there is no such concept as 'Indo-Pacific' in geopolitics," China's Ambassador to France, Lu



Shaye said during a media interaction on December 7.

"In the past, we used to talk about the Pacific or the Asia-Pacific region, never about the 'Indo-Pacific'," Lu, known as China's "wolf warrior" diplomat, was quoted by the Chinese Embassy website

in France.

"Why did the Americans include the Indian Ocean? Because they believe that their Asia-Pacific allies alone are no longer enough to contain China, they want to bring in India and other US Allies, such as France, which consid-

ers itself an Indo-Pacific country. This is wrong," he said.

China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all claim parts of it.

Beijing has built artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea. China also has territorial disputes with Japan in the East China Sea.

China and its diplomats have been attacking the Indo-Pacific concept from the beginning claiming that it is aimed at containing Beijing.

China has also been attacking the Quad grouping, saying building small cliques and stoking bloc confrontation is the real threat to a peaceful, stable and cooperative maritime order.

The Quad comprises India, the US, Japan and Australia.

DMRC launches ₹7,131 crore rights issue for stakeholders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has launched a Rights issue of ₹7131.28 crores for its equity stakeholders, i.e. Government of India (GOI) and Delhi Government. In the Rights issue, the DMRC is offering 7.13 crore shares with a face value of ₹1000 each.

The Rights issue opened on Thursday and will close on January 11, 2023.

The DMRC, which is a 50:50 joint venture of the GOI and Delhi Government, has requested both stakeholders to infuse ₹3565.64 crores each by way of their equity contribution. Under the Rights issue, a company issues new equity shares to the existing shareholders to raise fresh funds.

DMRC will use the proceeds from the rights issue to satisfy the Arbitral Award in

favour of Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt. Ltd. (DAMEPL).

The Rights issue was approved by the Board of Directors of DMRC in a meeting held on 13 December.

The DMRC decided to launch the Rights issue after it ailed to get any response from the GOI and Delhi Government on its request to share the total arbitration award as CAPEX expenditure.

The Supreme Court had upheld an Arbitration Award of ₹7,000 crores in favour of DAMEPL on 9 September 2021. Earlier, DMRC tried to raise loans from banks for the payment of award money to DAMEPL.

Later on it dropped the idea and informed the Delhi High Court that if the company raised debt from the banks, it will fall into a debt trap as it cannot service the debt through its revenue.

Sumo wrestling in Delhi mall today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

If Japan's centuries-old national sport, Sumo wrestling has always fancied you, then it's time to head to DLF Avenue Saket in the national Capital where on Friday where you can meet the two oversized athletes from the neighbouring country, Wakatenrow (real name Keisuke Kamikawa) and Kotohino (Kazuyuki Hino).

Hustling with each other in a mock fight, they will be in India for two days, participating in the "Nissan Konnichiwa Japan 2022," a cultural event to be inaugurated by Ambassador of Japan to India, Hiroshi SUZUKI, Embassy of Japan. Sumo wrestling is not only the most popular sport in Japan for centuries, but is also a prominent and significant cultural heritage.

Having specialization in thrusting and pushing tricks, Kamikawa (170 Kg) is a former

Sumo wrestler who was born in Nemuro city, Hokkaido and belonged to Magaki stable. His competitor will be Kotohino (138 kg) from Chofu City, Tokyo.

Besides, Sumo wrestling, the "Nissan Konnichiwa Japan 2022" will also have a wide range of cultural activities such as karate performance, Taiko performance (traditional Japanese drums), Japanese food tasting sessions, Japanese tea making ceremony, calligraphy, Okinawa dance performance, Japanese songs and dance among others.

Cosplay show, Japanese quiz, Bollywood dances by Japanese artists, and Kimono wearing show are other lines of events set to enthrall the Japanese culture lovers. The "Nissan Konnichiwa Japan 2022" is a part of the year-long celebration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Japan.

N-capable Agni-5 with 5K km range test-fired

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to its defence capabilities, India on Friday successfully test fired indigenously built Agni Prime missile off the Odisha coast in Balasore. The missile has a range between 1,000 km to 2,000 km and can carry nuclear warheads.

This weapon is a new generation missile built by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The sleek missile was test fired from a mobile launcher from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island around 9.45 am, officials here said.

The solid-fuelled canistered missile met all mission parameters during the test. All its navigation was tracked and monitored by radars and telemetry equipment posi-



tioned along various points.

The last trial of the missile was conducted on December 18 last year from the same base, which was also successful, officials said adding all test objectives were met and said that the third consecutive (and successful) test of the 'Agni Prime' had 'established the accuracy

and reliability of the system'.

Performance was validated using data obtained by many tracking systems, including radar, telemetry and electro-optical systems, the officials said.

These systems were deployed at different locations along the flight path, including two down-range ships at the terminal point, and covered the entire trajectory, officials added.

The first test was in June last year, with the second six months later - in December. On both those occasions too the missile 'followed textbook trajectory and met all mission objectives with a high level of accuracy', officials said.

The two-stage missile weighs nearly 50 per cent less than the Agni 3 missile besides having new guidance and propulsion systems. It can be fired from rail or road.

Jo piyega woh...

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BJP's MP from Saran Rajiv Pratap Rudy also hit out at the Bihar Government over the issue and demanded that the Union Home Ministry send a Central team without any delay

to take stock of the ground situation in the State.

He also demanded that the Home Ministry call for a report from the State, alleging that the Bihar Government has "completely failed" in fulfilling its responsibility.

The BJP MP claimed that the death toll in the hooch tragedy has gone up to reach 52 and the numbers may further increase.

After Rudy raised the issue, some Opposition members pointed out there have been deaths in hooch tragedy in Uttar Pradesh also in the past, asking the BJP MPs why these incidents are not being highlighted in the House.

Meanwhile, Civil surgeon and medical officer in charge Dr Sagar Dulal Sinha who

confirmed that the number of people dead from consuming the illicitly brewed liquor has increased to 26 from 21 on Wednesday, said deaths were being reported from those homes who had not reported hooch-related illness earlier out of fear of landing on the wrong side of the law.

While the Opposition BJP continued to create a ruckus inside the Assembly for the second consecutive day over the Saran hooch tragedy, the CPI (ML)-L which supports the "M a h a g a t h b a n d h a n" Government staged a demonstration outside before the commencement of proceedings, demanding a "review" of draconian provisions of the prohibition law and monetary compensation to the bereaved family members.

Backing the demand to end liquor ban policy poll strategist Prashant Kishor, a former confidant of the Chief Minister, demanded that the prohibition law be scrapped. He termed it as a "stupid" step and suggested allowing "regulated" sale of alcohol besides sustained social awareness campaigns to dissuade people from consuming all types of

intoxicants.

"Bihar has become a laughing stock because of prohibition. The law should be repealed forthwith. It is high time that all political parties, be it Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the BJP which shared power with him for years, and the RJD of Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav gave up their hypocrisy and took a decision without worrying about votes," Kishor fumed at a press conference in Sheohar district.

"The current law must be withdrawn at the earliest and a middle ground should be found. Those who drink inside their homes without creating a nuisance in public should not be penalised," he added.

However, in the State Capital, on the sidelines of a function organised on the occasion of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel's death anniversary, Kumar told reporters: "Prohibition has been of immense benefit to the society. I wonder how people are speaking against it".

"I am aghast at a link being drawn between hooch deaths and prohibition. People die upon consuming spurious liquor even in states where

there is no ban on alcohol," claimed the septuagenarian.

However, CPI(ML)-L MLA Sandeep Saurabh, who staged a demonstration outside the Vidhan Sabha along with other party MLAs, said, "Despite best intentions, the prohibition law has led to unwarranted consequences. The poor are being hit the worst. Consumption of liquor has been made a criminal offence, a reason why family members of hooch victims do not get any ex-gratia. This has to change. The law must be reviewed."

Anti-Government slogans by BJP MLAs greeted the Chief Minister when he reached the Assembly. The party, which has an axe to grind against the JD(U) leader, who abruptly snapped ties in August, tried to disrupt proceedings with many of its members entering the well, carrying placards and posters and raising slogans.

Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary got posters and placards snatched away with the help of marshals and went ahead with the proceedings, unfazed by the relentless shouting of slogans by the BJP MLAs.

It's Messi greatest...

From Page 1

Their players gave France a far-from-easy ride, too, before collapsing on the ground in despair after the final whistle.

"We are disappointed for the Moroccan people - we wanted to keep their dream alive," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said. "We felt we could have gone further but we have given a good image of Morocco and of African football. That was important to us."

Remarkably, Hernandez's early goal was the first scored against Morocco by an opposition player in the tournament - the other had been an own-goal in the group stage - but the team responded to that and injury issues in its defense with a fearless performance in front of tens of thousands of fans who dominated the 60,000-seat Al Bayt Stadium.

France was forced into some last-ditch defending at times but has developed a knack of pulling out victories despite not playing its best. The country will be playing in the final for the fourth time in the last seven World Cups, more than anyone else.

"It wasn't easy," France coach Didier Deschamps said, "and we showed our quality, experience and team spirit."

Mbappé failed to add to his five goals in the tournament but helped create the opener for Hernandez when his shot deflected off a defender and into the path of the left back. Hernandez let the ball bounce before driving a downward effort into the net from a tight angle.

Typically a defense-first team, Morocco was forced to come out and play even though it was reeling from losing Nayef Aguerd to injury in the warmup and another center back, captain Romain Saiss, after only 21 minutes because of a hamstring injury. Both players were doubts ahead of the game but were risked by Regragui along with left back Noussair Mazraoui, who has had the flu and only lasted until halftime.

Roared on by its red-and-green-clad fans, Morocco came closest to scoring when Jawad El Yamiq hit the post with an overhead kick in the 44th minute and forced France to defend in numbers, with Antoine Griezmann - the team's playmaker - effectively playing as a deep-lying midfielder and often clearing balls from inside his box.

apex court.

Mehta said the appeals were ripe for the final hearing and now they can be listed.

The CJJ then suggested the law officer provide the details such as that of the cases to be heard and assured that he will examine the details. Faruk along with several others was convicted for pelting stones at the coach of the Sabarmati Express. On February 27, 2002, 59 people were killed when the S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express was burnt at Godhra, triggering riots in the State.

Rijiju targets...

From Page 1

Earlier this month, Rijiju had also raised the issue at an event after which the Supreme Court warned against attempts to "derail the collegium system". Rijiju also told the House that requests, both verbally and in writing, have been made to the chief justices of the Supreme Court as well as High Courts to send names at the earliest for filling up the vacancies of judges. The Minister said somehow he feels that "we are not working as per the spirit of the House and feelings of the people of the country".

"We are giving our full support to reduce pendency of cases. But questions will keep arising on vacancy of judges and appointments till we create a new system for appointments," he added.

Asked if the Government will revive the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, Rijiju said sever-

al retired judges, prominent jurists, advocates, lawyers and leaders of political parties have opined that the striking down of the Act by a five-member Constitution bench of the Supreme Court was not correct. "But the current system did not reflect the sentiment of Parliament or the people. I don't want to say much as it may seem like the government interfering in the judiciary. But the spirit of the Constitution says it is the government's right to appoint judges. It changed after 1993," the Law Minister said.

Rijiju also referred to the NJAC Act, enacted in 2014 to give the Government a role in judges' appointments, which was scrapped by the Supreme Court in 2015.

"Unless the procedure of appointment of judges changes, the issue of high judicial vacancies will keep cropping up," he mentioned.

1,400 more CISF...

From Page 1

The increased manpower of 1,400 CRPF personnel, over and above the existing strength of about 5,000 personnel, has been recently approved after a four-month-long joint survey undertaken by security agencies. The proposal was finally moved by the BCAS and approved by the Civil Aviation Ministry, officials said.

The joint review had estimated creation of about 2,400 posts for the CISF to meet the changing needs at the IGI but the manpower was finally rationalised at 1,400 personnel, sources said.

With the latest sanction, the IGA will have a total strength of about 6,500 personnel at the airport.

The additional CISF strength will not only be used to render the core duty of providing anti-terrorist and anti-hijack cover at the hypersensitive facility but also to meet the challenge of the ever growing passenger footfall, both for domestic and international travel, the sources said.

The paramilitary force,

which is guarding 66 airports throughout the country at present, had deployed about 100 personnel on Wednesday at the Delhi and Mumbai airports to ease the current congestion and to meet further footfalls during the upcoming holiday season.

Officials said during the visit of Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia to the IGA recently, a total of 16 entry gates were operational. This has been increased to 18 and will be further brought up to 20 gates.

Similarly, the number of immigration counters and security check lines are also being increased, officials said.

The BCAS has also asked the airlines and the airport operators to put up posters and send awareness messages to passengers to carry only one cabin baggage and undergo web check-in before reaching the airport.

It has also asked the airport operator DIAL (for IGA), apart from other large airports, to look at the possibility of bringing in advanced 3D baggage scanners and more automatic tray retrieval systems (ATRS).

Over the last fortnight, passengers have been posting pictures and videos of long queues and crowding at the IGA in Delhi and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, prompting authorities to take note and tell airlines and airport operators to ease the congestion.

mond merchant can now apply to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to try and block his extradition on the basis that he will not receive a fair trial and that he will be detained in conditions that breach Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which the UK is a signatory.

The threshold for an ECHR appeal is also extremely high because he would also have to demonstrate that his arguments on those grounds have been previously rejected

before the UK courts.

According to UK Home Office sources, it is unknown when extradition may take place as Modi still has legal challenges open to him.

The dismissal of the High Court appeal last month marked a major win for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) case against the businessman.

There are three sets of criminal proceedings against the diamantaire in India - the CBI case of fraud on the PNB

which caused losses equivalent to over GBP 700 million, the ED case relating to the alleged laundering of the proceeds of that fraud and a third set of criminal proceedings involving alleged interference with evidence and witnesses in the CBI proceedings.

Then UK Home Secretary, Priti Patel, had ordered Nirav's extradition based on Judge Sam Goosze's Westminster Magistrates' Court ruling in April 2021. The extradition case is now in its final stages of legal appeals.

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"In view of the facts and circumstances of the case and the role attributed to the applicant, we direct the applicant to be granted bail subject to such terms and conditions as may be imposed by the sessions (trial court)," the bench said in its order.

The appeals against the conviction of several convicts are pending adjudication in the

DCW, police issue notice to e-commerce majors

Acid used to attack schoolgirl in West Delhi was procured from Flipkart

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) and Delhi Police issued a notice to e-commerce majors- Flipkart and Amazon after it was found that the acid used to attack the 17-year-old girl in west Delhi on Wednesday was procured from Flipkart. Meanwhile, Flipkart on Thursday condemned the acid attack on the schoolgirl and said it has blacklisted the seller from its platform and is extending all support to the probe agencies.

Three people -- prime accused Sachin Arora and two friends Harshit Aggarwal (19) and Virender Singh (22) -- have been arrested for the acid attack on the girl.

Meanwhile, doctors at Safdarjung Hospital informed that the acid attack survivor continues to remain in the Burns ICU and is conscious. "The patient is conscious, well-oriented and afebrile. She has suffered eight per cent chemical burns on the face. Her eyes have also been affected. Treatment is on. Ophthalmologists are also providing conservative and supportive treatment. She continues to be in the Burns ICU," a

senior doctor said.

In a show-cause notice to Flipkart and Amazon, the DCW said that the accused bought acid through Flipkart. The DCW said it has learnt that acid is easily available on leading online shopping platforms such as 'Amazon' and 'Flipkart' which is illegal. "The ease of availability of acid on online platforms is a matter of grave concern and needs to be checked urgently," it said. The DCW has sought urgent steps in this regard.

In the letter, the DCW chief Swati Maliwal women's panel has asked the online shopping giants: "Please inform the reason for the availability of acid on the e-shopping platform. Please provide complete details of the sellers who have placed acid as a 'product' on your platform."

"The commission has sought reasons for availability of acid on the e-commerce platform along with details of sellers who have placed 'acid' as a product on their platform. The Commission has also asked whether licence of the seller was checked before posting the acid product on the online platform. It has also sought a copy of the licence obtained by



the platforms for selling acid online," the statement added. It has asked whether the photo IDs of those purchasing acid online were sought. The DCW has also sought a complete list of the purchasers along with their photo IDs.

"The Commission has also sought a copy of the policy adopted by the platform regarding sale of Government regulated products online," it added. It has further asked the portals details of steps taken for removing restricted items, including acid from the online portal. The portals have been asked to furnish the information by December 20.

The Delhi Police had also issued a notice to Flipkart after it found that the acid was pro-

cured from the e-commerce firm.

"We strongly condemn this unfortunate incident, and our thoughts and prayers are with the victim and her family. The Flipkart marketplace platform closely monitors and delists products that violate expected standards. Strict action is taken against sellers who are found to be engaged in selling products that are illegal, unsafe, and prohibited. The concerned seller has been blacklisted, and we are extending all support to the concerned authorities in their investigation," Flipkart said in a statement. As outrage spread over the attack, many also raised questions over the availability of acid in markets despite a ban.

'In last 10 years, we don't think anybody except Nirbhaya got justice'

Sexual assault victims are speaking up now, says mom on anniversary of horrific gang-rape of daughter

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

It has been 10 years since the barbaric gang-rape of a 22-year-old woman in Delhi shook the country to its core. The national Capital was at that time labelled the 'Rape Capital' of India and the safety of women seemed to be in tatters in the city. Barely two days ahead of the 10th anniversary of the Nirbhaya gang-rape incident a 17-year-old girl was attacked with acid by two masked motorcycle-borne men in west Delhi's Mohan Garden area. The police have arrested the three accused in connection with the crime.

Nirbhaya, the woman who was brutally raped on December 16, 2012, got justice after eight years when on March 20, 2020, all her rapists -- Mukesh Singh, Vinay



Sharma, Akshay Thakur and Pawan Gupta -- were executed in Tihar Jail.

Since 2012, several steps have been taken by successive Governments to enhance women's security, not only in the national Capital, but all over the country. And now after almost a decade, the real question is -- are women really feeling safe in Delhi? Has there been any reduction in crimes against women? It is only the residents of Delhi who

can answer these pertinent questions.

However, NCRB data says that women are still not safe in the city. Two minor girls were raped every day last year in Delhi, which was the most unsafe metropolitan city for women across the country. Delhi also recorded 13,892 cases of crimes against women in 2021, a significant surge of more than 40 per cent compared to 2020 when the figure was 9,782, the data showed.

On the eve of the 10th anniversary of the incident, Nirbhaya's mother Asha Devi said more sexual assault survivors are speaking up now.

"In the last 10 years, we do not think anybody except Nirbhaya got justice. No change has come," she told the media. Her husband, Badri Narayan Singh, lamented that

women are not safe even today. However, one positive change that has come about after the December 16 incident is that more sexual assault survivors are now speaking out, Devi said.

The physiotherapy intern, who came to be known as 'Nirbhaya' (fearless), was sexually assaulted in a moving bus in south Delhi on December 16, 2012. She died a fortnight later due to her horrific injuries.

Six people, including a juvenile, were named as accused. While the juvenile was released in 2015 after spending three years in a correctional home, four convicts were hanged on March 20, 2020. Ram Singh, the sixth accused, allegedly killed himself in Tihar Jail days after the trial began in the case.

Multi-crore G'gram heist accused arrested, handed over to Haryana STF

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Gangster Vikas Lagarpuria who is the prime accused in a multi-crore heist in Gurugram was arrested and his custody was handed over to the Special Task Force (STF) of the Haryana Police on Thursday. Lagarpuria is the prime accused in a ₹30-crore heist from a residential society in Gurugram.

According to sources, he was deported from Dubai while trying to flee from the Emirate where he had been hiding after his escape. Several cases of murder, robbery, kidnapping,

and extortion have been lodged against the gangster in Delhi and Haryana. However, he was caught and was subsequently deported to India. Absconding for the past seven years, Lagarpuria had a Red Corner Notice issued against him by the Delhi Police.

However, later in the day, top STF officials claimed that Lagarpuria was arrested from the Delhi-Gurugram border. The officials said that an STF team led by Inspector Anil Kumar -- the in-charge of the STF unit Gurugram -- arrested the criminal after receiving a tip-off.

"During the preliminary interrogation, he introduced himself as Deepak a resident of Hissar. But on thorough interrogation of around two hours, he disclosed that his name was Vikas Lagarpuria," STF IG B Satheesh Balan told the media.

Lagarpuria, a native of Badli in the Jhajjar district of Haryana, had a reward of ₹2.50 lakh on his head. A reward of ₹2 lakh had been announced by the Delhi Police and ₹50,000 was declared by the Haryana police on his arrest. The criminal was involved in a theft of ₹30 crore that was reported on August 21, 2021. The money

was stolen from the flat of Alpha G Corp Management Services Pvt. Ltd at Sector 84, Gurugram. The case was registered at the Kherki Daula Police Station in Gurugram.

The incident had taken place on August 4 of the previous year, when gangster Lagarpuria's gang members broke into a flat in Sector-82 from where the office of a private company was being run. They had decamped with crores of rupees in cash. Balan said at least 15 people, including henchmen of the gangster and a Delhi Police ASI, two doctors have been arrested, and ₹5.78

crore, including foreign currency and gold, has been recovered.

"As many as 24 criminal cases were registered against him, including those of murder, attempt to murder, robbery, extortion, and kidnapping in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. He was also booked under MCOCA," Balan said. An IPC officer and the then Deputy Commissioner of police (south) of the Haryana Police Dheeraj Setia has been accused of taking a bribe from Dr Suchender Jain Nawal to hush up the matter.

During the investigation, it

was found that Lagarpuria, in connivance with another main accused, Dr Suchender Jain Nawal, had allegedly planned the heist. The investigation also revealed that the arrested ASI, Vikas Gulia, was Lagarpuria's childhood friend and allegedly sheltered him from the Delhi Police," the officials said. "The IPS officer's lie detector test was conducted a week ago in Delhi and the report is awaited. Meanwhile, the arrested accused will be produced before a local court for further investigations," Balan added.

The officer said, "We are yet to get information about



the remaining amount from the accused as the accused is frequently changing his statements and not cooperating

with the investigation agency. The accused took more than two hours to disclose his identity."

Newly-elected MCD's maiden meet on Jan 6

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The first meeting of the newly-elected Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will be held on January 6. In the first meeting, processes include oath and affirmation of 250 Councillors, election of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and election of the six members of the standing committee will take place. The development came after L-G VK Saxena approved a proposal to convene the MCD meeting on January 6.

The proposal to convene the first meeting of the civic body was moved by the Commissioner (MCD) on December 12, to the Urban Development Department, requesting the L-G's approval. On December 7, the AAP won the MCD polls with 134 seats, ending the 15-year rule of the BJP in the municipal corporation and reducing the Congress



to just nine seats in a House of 250.

"Delhi LG, VK Saxena, in the exercise of powers vested in him vide Section 73 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, has approved the proposal to convene the first meeting of the MCD on Friday, January 6, 2023," sources said.

"Thereafter, the file approved by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who is also Minister (Urban Development) and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, was received in Raj Niwas on December 14 and the LG accorded his approval on the same day itself," sources added. As per sub-Section (1) of

Section 35 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) Act, "The Corporation shall at its first meeting in each year, elect one of its members to the Chairperson to be known as the Mayor and another Member to be the Deputy Mayor of the Corporation."

As per Section 77 of the said act, the presiding officer at the meeting for the election of the Mayor shall be a councillor who is not a candidate for such election and shall be nominated by the LG.

As per Section (3) of the DMC Act, 1957, the corporation shall consist of the councillors, members of Lok Sabha and members of Rajya Sabha from Delhi, one-fifth of the members of the Delhi Assembly are nominated by the Speaker by rotation every year and 10 persons are nominated by the Administrator (Aldermen without voting rights).

Bones found in forest belong to Shraddha, confirms DNA report

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Forensic reports have confirmed that some of the bones recovered from the Mehrauli forest in Delhi last month belong to Shraddha Walker, who was allegedly killed by her live-in partner Aftab Poonawala in May this year.

The Delhi Police had received forensic reports from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL), Lodhi Road and the Forensic Science Laboratory, Rohini on Wednesday. The CFSL reports were on the DNA tests on bones collected by the police from the Mehrauli jungle and nearby areas.

"In the Shradha murder case, Delhi Police has received the DNA report from CFSL. The DNA report is helpful. We have also received a report of Poonawala's polygraph test from FSL, which will also help in investigation," Special

Commissioner of Police (Law & Order) Sagar Preet Hooda told reporters on Thursday. Police sources said few of the bones recovered from the forest belong to Shraddha, but some of the bones match Shraddha's father's DNA.

"These are bones from limbs and other body parts. They have marks on them which show assault from a sharp weapon. The bones matched Shraddha's father's DNA. It means they belong to the woman. These were recovered on the instance of Poonawala. This is critical evidence in the case," said sources in Delhi Police.

In a related development, Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) VK Saxena has approved a



proposal of the Delhi Police to appoint two Special Public Prosecutors in the case.

"L-G VK Saxena has approved the proposal of the Delhi Police for appointment of Special Public Prosecutors to represent the State in the Trial Court in case FIR No. 659 dt. November 10, 2022 u/s 365/302/201 IPC, registered at PS Mehrauli. The matter relates to the gruesome Shraddha murder case. Madhukar Pandey and Amit Prasad, advocates, will be accordingly representing the Delhi Police as Special Public Prosecutors in the matter," an official said.

L-G expresses displeasure over delay in Chief Secy's instructions to control, mitigate air-pollution

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Even as Delhi continues to grapple with worsening air quality in the middle of the peak air-pollution season, extremely critical Government orders to control and mitigate air-pollution in the city, that should have been issued by the Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar way back in October, have yet not been issued. Delhi Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) VK Saxena has expressed his "displeasure" over an alleged delay on the part of the Delhi Government in issuing an order on pollution control measures and directed that it be conveyed to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

In what Saxena termed "gross negligence", the critical order to mitigate air pollution in the city should have been issued by the Chief Secretary back in October but hasn't been issued yet, the sources

said. "The lapse on the part of the Delhi Government is due to the fact that Environment Minister Gopal Rai did not clear the file related to issuing such orders for about a month," sources claimed. "This unreasonable and unjustifiable antipathy towards people of Delhi resulted in toxic air quality in the city during the month of November and could have been avoided to a large extent," officials said.

The Chief Secretary, in compliance with a November 2019 order of the Supreme Court order and an order of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) dated August 5, 2022, sent the file for approval to Rai on October 22. "The file was returned to the chief secretary on November 17 without any observation of the minister. Afterwards, the chief secretary sent the file to the LG and was approved," the source said.

NDMC to beautify Lutyens' Delhi ahead of G-20 summit

SAURAV GUPTA ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the G-20 summit slated next year, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is carrying out all the modification and beautification works at the Lutyens Delhi area on the theme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project Central Vista.

"The Council is gearing up for the Summit in September 2023 which will be attended by delegates from across the world. The NDMC area is being developed in keeping with the theme of the Central Vista. For example, stones of the pathways will be matched with the colour, as used for the construction of the Central Vista," NDMC member, Kuljeet Singh Chahal said.

One of the most notable international events that India will host is the G20 summit. About 200 meetings in 32 different industries will be held in various cities all across the country.

"NDMC is also working in partnership with the public to carry out the beautification work. We have invited suggestions from the public through various social platforms to make them feel connected with the G-20 Summit preparation," he said.

Informing about the work on the agenda list of the Council, the BJP leader said that two flyovers - Raja Ranjit Singh flyover and Safdarjung flyover - which are the main entrance points in the NDMC area from the MCD jurisdiction will be illuminated with the multi-colour lights.

"A total of 30 flags will be posted with 15 on each side of the Raja Ranjit Singh flyover along with the lights. Similarly, around 30 decorative poles along with the multi colour lights will be placed with 15 on verge, each sides of the Safdarjung flyover to give an attractive look to attract the commuters of the city," said Chahal.

Apart from this, the coun-

cil in partnership with the National Gallery in Modern Art (NGMA) has plans to install the modern and traditional art sculptures at various roundabouts in the identified areas. A total of 52 roundabouts and 41 roads fall under the jurisdiction of the municipal council.

"Other than this, work of the horticulture, streets furniture such as benches etc, repairing of roads will also be undertaken," he said.

"Under the 'Make in India' light, the NDMC is taking steps to illuminate the parks, gardens pedestrian ways, flyovers, avenue roads, bazaar and markets with the dynamic lights," informed the NDMC leader.

Giving the details of the work being undertaken under the 'Green NDMC Mission', Chahal pointed out that roads and roundabouts will be beautified by landscaping, placing nearly one lakh potted plants at prominent places, floral boards and fountains.

Govt directs removal of beggars from Kashmere Gate to DUSIB night shelters before G-20 summit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the G20 Summit, the city Government has issued directions to remove and relocate beggars from the Hanuman Mandir area near the Kashmere Gate ISBT to night shelters of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), according to an official order issued on Thursday.

Delhi's Pragati Maidan is the main venue of the summit which will be held in September 2023.

A four-member committee, under the chief engineer of DUSIB, has been constituted to coordinate with government agencies, including deputy commissioner of police of the district concerned, and prepare an action plan by Tuesday "for shifting these beggars in night



shelters located at Dwarka and other places where spaces are available."

"(The) CM has directed that beggars around Hanuman Mandir near ISBT should be removed and relocated in the night shelters of DUSIB. This exercise is necessitated keeping in view the meetings of the G20 summit," an order issued by DUSIB CEO K Mahesh said.

It said that under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, which has been extended to Delhi, it is the mandate of the Social Welfare

Department to prevent begging and formulate schemes for the welfare of 'beggars'.

"However, as directed by the chief minister, DUSIB along with the Social Welfare Department shall take necessary action in the matter," the order read.

India took over the presidency of the G20 on December 1. The summit will be a culmination of all the G20 processes and meetings held throughout the year among ministers, senior officials, and civil societies starting in December.

The Group of Twenty (G20) comprises 19 countries and the European Union. Its members represent around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population.

Medical colleges rose from 387 to 648 in 8 yrs of Modi Govt: Min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the NDA Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken several steps to ease access to quality medical education in the country, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said that the number of medical colleges has increased from 387 to 648, MBBS seats by 87 per cent and that of PG by 105 per cent in the last eight years.

He said, change can be seen happening at every nook and corner of the country. With this momentum and coordination among stakeholders, a holistic ecosystem of education will be created in the country.

Highlighting the change in the medical education sector, Mandaviya said, "While India had a limited number of 387 medical colleges in 2014, the system was riddled with far too many problems."

"There is a paradigm shift from input-based to outcome-based approaches and reforms under the Modi government. Consequently, we now have 648 medical colleges in 2022

with a whopping 96 pc increase in the number of Government Medical Colleges (GMC) alone and a 42 pc increase in the private sector, since 2014," he said.

"At present, out of 648 medical colleges in the country, 355 are government and 293 are private," Mandaviya said adding that, "MBBS seats have also seen a massive 87 per cent increase from 51,348 in 2014 to 96,077 in 2022. Similarly, PG seats have observed an increase of 105 per cent with 31,185 seats in 2014 to 63,842 in 2022."

He said with a vision to create 10,000 MBBS seats in government medical colleges, 58 colleges across 16 states have been approved with an increase of 3,877 MBBS seats.

Similarly, to increase PG seats, 72 medical colleges in 21 states and UTs have been approved in phase I, with an increase of 4,058 PG seats, he said adding that similarly, to create 4,000 PG seats in the GMCs, in phase II, a total of 47 colleges have been approved with an increase of 2,975 PG seats.

To correct regional imbalances in the availability of



affordable and reliable tertiary healthcare, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) was launched, which targets the establishment of All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) like institutions and the upgradation of existing GMCs by establishing super-specialty blocks in a phased manner, the minister said.

22 new AIIMS and projects for the up-gradation of 75 government medical colleges were taken up under the scheme, he said. A common entrance test- National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for 'one country, one examination, one merit' system introduced in 2016 with a common counselling system allowed students from anywhere in India

an opportunity to study in any medical college in the country based on merit, he said.

The National Medical Commission (NMC) was also created to replace the highly corrupt body of the Medical Council of India (MCI). Before the NMC Act, there was no legal mechanism to regulate the fee charged by private colleges.

"Now the guidelines in respect of fees for 50 per cent seats in all colleges including Government, Private and Deemed Universities have been released by the NMC," Mandaviya said.

Parallely, reforms are ongoing in the sectors of nursing education, dental education and allied and healthcare professions, he said.

Furore in RS as Chair rejects Opp demand for LAC stand-off debate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Proceedings were affected for the second-consecutive day on Thursday in Rajya Sabha which faced several adjournments over Opposition members' uproar after the Chair disallowed adjournment notices on several issues including Indo-China border face-off, Government's alleged misuse of probe agencies and interference in appointments in higher judiciary. The Opposition has been demanding a discussion on these issues. Lok Sabha functioning was, however, normal with only a minor face-off between the Congress and the Government on different issues.

After the Congress led Opposition parties' strategy meeting, members from the entire Opposition Benches have been raising issues jointly. Soon after laying of papers in the Rajya Sabha, Opposition members sought clarifications on why their adjournment notices were not taken up and demanded discussions on various issues. This led to uproar following which Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh

adjourned the proceedings for 15 minutes first and then again for another 15 minutes when the House met.

While opposition members created uproar over not being allowed discussion on issues raised by them, BJP members were also on their feet raising the issue of the Bihar hooch tragedy. As the Deputy Chairman urged members to allow the Zero Hour to function, members raised strong objections leading to disruption of the proceedings.

Congress' leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury attacked the Centre over the recent Arunachal border face-off in the House and asked when will it show "red eyes" to China. Raising the issue during Zero Hour, he said while China is trying to "destroy" India, the Modi government is letting the imports from the neighbouring country rise.

Citing a media report, Chowdhury also said that the recent cyber attack on some of the servers of AIIMS in Delhi had been carried out from China, and demanded that the Centre come out with a white paper in Lok Sabha on these



issues. While there is a decline in trade between India and the US, it is always "profitable" for China when it comes to India's trade with the neighbouring country, the Congress member charged, saying such a trend makes him wonder what is the "intention" of the Modi government.

"When the Chinese government is an aggressor and trying to destroy India, what is the need of extending such help to China? When will you show the red eyes (to China)," Chowdhury asked the treasury benches.

The Congress accused the central government of evading a debate on India-China border face-off and asked why the Modi government has been running away from the issue.

Earlier, outside the house,

AICC head of media and publicity department Pawan Khara wondered why Prime Minister Narendra Modi is silent on China, and that whenever he does speak on it, he gives the country a clean chit.

Khara alleged that when Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he was very keen on introducing Mandarin in its government schools, a proposal that was opposed by the Congress. He also made the allegation that the BJP used a Chinese company in elections which, the central government had said, was a threat to Indian sovereignty.

A company which was blacklisted by World Bank, USA, and Europe was given the contract to install smart metres in the border district of Jammu and Kashmir, he alleged.

Public servant can be convicted for graft on circumstantial evidence: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said in cases charged under the Prevention of Corruption Act, a public servant can be convicted for illegal gratification on the basis of circumstantial evidence when there is no direct oral or documentary evidence against them.

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice S A Nazeer said complainants as well as the prosecution should make sincere efforts so that corrupt public servants are brought to book and convicted so that the administration and governance become unpolluted and free from corruption.

"In the absence of evidence of complainant (direct or primary), it is permissible to draw an inferential deduction of culpability," said the bench, also comprising justices B R



Gavai, A S Bopanna, V Ramasubramanian and B V Nagarathna. The top court said that even if direct evidence of the complainant is not available, owing to death or other reasons, there can be conviction of the public servant under the relevant provisions.

"In the event the complainant turns hostile or has died or is unable to let in his evidence during the trial, the demand of illegal gratification can be proved by letting in the evidence of any other witness

either orally or documentary evidence or the prosecution can prove the case by circumstantial evidence. The trial does not abate nor does it result in an order of acquittal of the public servant," said the judgment.

The apex court's verdict came while examining the issue whether in the absence of direct or primary evidence of demand of bribe, inferential deduction of guilt of a public servant can be drawn based on other evidence.

Cong-led Opp walks out of LS on fuel price hike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dissatisfied with Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri's reply on petroleum price hike, the Congress led the Opposition in walking out from the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Claiming that currently the petrol price in India is one of the lowest, Puri said six non-BJP ruled states — West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Kerala and Jharkhand— have not reduced the VAT on petroleum products, leading to higher prices of petrol and diesel there.

His remark was met with vocal protests by the opposition members. Not satisfied with his response, the Congress, DMK, TMC and NCP, staged a walk-out.

Puri said the Central government has reduced excise duty on petroleum products and some other states, following cues, and reduced their Value Added Tax (VAT).

He said the Oil Marketing Companies (OMC) together suffered losses of Rs 27,276

crore due to high prices of crude in international markets. "I suggest MPs from the opposition impress upon their state governments to reduce the VAT so that they can also join the celebrations," he said.

Puri said India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements. Therefore, the prices of petrol and diesel in the country are linked to their respective prices in the international market.

He said the retail prices of petrol and diesel depend on various factors like crude oil purchase price, exchange rate, shipping charges, inland freight, refinery margin, dealer commission, central taxes, state VAT and other cost elements.

While the average price of the Indian basket of crude oil increased by 102 per cent (from USD 43.34 to USD 87.55) between November 2020 and November 2022, the retail prices of Petrol and Diesel have increased in India by only 18.95 per cent and 26.5 per cent during this period respectively.

The minister said prices of



petrol and diesel have not been increased by public sector OMCs since April 6, 2022, despite record-high international prices. "As a result, against the combined 'Profit Before Tax' of Rs 28,360 Crore in H1 of the financial year 2021-22, the three OMCs IOCL, BPCL and HPCL have booked a combined loss of Rs 27,276 Crore in H1 of the current financial year 2022-23," he said.

Puri said to insulate Indian

consumers from the impact of high international crude oil prices, the central government reduced the central excise duty twice on November 21, 2021, and May 22, 2022, effecting a cumulative reduction of Rs 13 and Rs 16 per litre for petrol and diesel respectively, which was fully passed on to the consumers.

Following these reductions in central excise duty, some of the States and UTs also reduced

Value Added Tax (VAT) rates on petrol and diesel.

He said India imports more than 60 per cent of its domestic LPG consumption. The price of LPG in the country is based on the Saudi Contract Price (SPC), the benchmark for the international price of LPG. Saudi CP rose from 236 USD /MT in April 2020 to 952 USD /MT in April 2022 and continues to prevail at elevated levels currently.

Rebuff Centre's bid to centralise administration, power via co-op route, CPI(M) urges States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) has urged State Governments to come together to "rebuff" the Centre's attempts to centralise administration and power through the multi-state cooperative society route.

The editorial of the party organ People's Democracy has said that one of the ways in which the Narendra Modi Government attempted to violate the constitutional powers of the States was by forming a Ministry of Cooperation.

The party stated that after the Supreme Court ruled in October 2022 that the 97th Amendment would not be



applicable to local Cooperative societies but only multi-State Cooperative societies, the Government decided to use the multi-state cooperative society route to intervene in the States. "The proposed 2022 Bill is a dangerous legislation. It is a blatant attempt to thrust the decisions of the central government on to cooperatives societies functioning under state laws."

"All these amendments are

explicitly intended to insert multi-state cooperative societies into the cooperative structures of states. This will allow the central government to strain and strangle local cooperatives and take control of the whole cooperative structure in states through penal actions, mergers, board takeovers, and interventions in elections," the party said.

The CPI(M) organ also raised the issue of how under the Central Government's directions, AMUL is either joining hands, or being merged, with five local cooperatives to form a multi-state cooperative society. "This society would be engaged in certification of products of 'natural farming'

and export of milk. Such politically motivated steps will only weaken state-level dairy cooperatives as well as a professionally run cooperative like AMUL," it alleged.

The editorial also alleged that the government was infusing funds into defunct multi-state cooperative societies based in Gujarat and Maharashtra and sending them to establish new bases in far-away States like Kerala.

"With centralisation, as attempted in the proposed 2022 Bill, the objective appears to be to undermine and destroy them. States must join hands — both politically and legally — to rebuff this unconstitutional step," it said.

‘Over 22,000 second appeals, complaints pending with CIC’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 22,000 second appeals and complaints were pending with the Central Information Commission as on December 5, 2022, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday. The CIC is mandated to deal with second appeals and complaints filed by RTI applicants in case they are aggrieved with the responses provided to them by Government departments.

Of the total pendency of 22,442, 19,178 were second appeals and 3,264 complaints, Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said in



reply to a written question.

To a question on whether the government was aware of cases where personal information of some RTI applicants have been made public, the minister said the Centre has from time to time issued guidelines or office memorandums "bringing to notice of all ministries/departments of government of India that personal information of an RTI applicant should not be disclosed".

IAF carries out exercise in Northeastern region as last of 36 Rafales join force

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force, bolstered by its full complement of Rafale combat jets, on Thursday launched a major exercise covering the Northeastern region amid a fresh spike of border tension with China along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh.

The two-day mega exercise is involving almost all its front-line fighter jets and other assets deployed in the region, people familiar with the drill said.

In a tweet, the IAF said the last of the 36 Rafale jets joined the force. The IAF inducted the Rafale aircraft into its 101 Squadron of the Eastern Air Command at the Hasimara in



July last year.

The first Rafale squadron with around 18 jets is based in Ambala air base.

"FEET DRY! 'The Pack is Complete'. The last of the 36 IAF Rafales landed in India after a quick enroute sip from a UAE Air Force tanker," the IAF said.

Sources said the French-manufactured jet joined the second Rafale squadron in Hasimara that increased its strength to 18 aircraft.

High Court reserves judgment on petitions challenging Agnipath scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday reserved its judgment on a batch of petitions challenging the Centre's Agnipath scheme for recruitment in armed forces. Besides pleas directly challenging Agnipath, the High Court also reserved its verdict on petitions concerning the recruitment processes for the armed forces under certain previous advertisements.

A bench of Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Subramonium Prasad asked the counsel for petitions and the Centre to file written submissions by December 23, after which the court will go on vacation.

Life-threatening infections rising due to drug-resistant bacteria: WHO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A new World Health Organisation (WHO) report has revealed high levels of resistance in bacteria, causing life-threatening bloodstream infections, as well as increasing resistance to treatment in several bacteria causing common infections in the community based on data reported by 87 countries in 2020.

For the first time, the Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS) report provides analyses for antimicrobial resistance (AMR) rates in the context of national testing coverage, AMR trends since 2017, and data on antimicrobial consumption in humans in 27 countries.

Within six years, GLASS

achieved participation from 127 countries with 72% of the world's population. The report includes an innovative interactive digital format to facilitate data extraction and graphics.

AMR is already a global threat that contributes to almost 5 million deaths per year, while disproportionately affecting low- and middle-income countries. It poses serious threats to human, animal, plant and environmental health, and severely undermines the sustainability of agri-food systems.

The report shows high levels (above 50%) of resistance were reported in bacteria frequently causing bloodstream infections in hospitals, such as Klebsiella pneumoniae and Acinetobacter spp. These life-threatening infections require

treatment with last-resort antibiotics, such as carbapenems. However, 8% of bloodstream infections caused by Klebsiella pneumoniae were reported as resistant to carbapenems, increasing the risk of death due to unmanageable infections.

Common bacterial infections are becoming increasingly resistant to treatments. Over 60% of Neisseria gonorrhoea isolates, a common sexually transmitted disease, have shown resistance to one of the most used oral antibacterials, ciprofloxacin. Over 20% of E.coli isolates — the most common pathogen in urinary tract infections — were resistant to both first-line drugs (ampicillin and co-trimoxazole) and second-line treatments (fluoroquinolones), said the report.

IN-BRIEF

NO MOVE TO GRANT CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS TO NCM: IRANI
New Delhi: Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani on Thursday told the Lok Sabha that there is no proposal at present to grant constitutional status to the National Commission for Minorities. She said the NCM was established as a statutory body with the enactment of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 by Parliament.

ISRO LAUNCHED 177 FOREIGN SATELLITES IN LAST 5 YRS
New Delhi: ISRO has successfully launched 177 foreign satellites during the last five years, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, Singh said the forex generated through the launch of these foreign satellites was approximately USD 94 million and Euros 46 million.

GOVT'S EFFORT TO RAISE IMPACT OF GOVERNANCE: MODI
New Delhi: In his message on 'Second Sushasan Saptah' (good governance week) to be observed from December 19 to 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said it has always been his government's endeavour to increase the impact of governance and reduce the interference of the government in every citizen's life.

SC ASKS BENGAL GOVT TO APPROACH HC CHIEF JUSTICE
New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday declined to entertain the West Bengal Government's plea seeking registration of an FIR against BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari and others in connection with a stampede at a blanket distribution programme in Paschim Bardhaman district. The top court asked the State government to approach the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High court instead.

CENTRE SEEKS TIME FOR PAYING OROP ARREARS
New Delhi: The Centre has moved the Supreme Court seeking extension of time till March 15, 2023 for payment of arrears of One Rank-One Pension (OROP) scheme to all eligible pensioners of the armed forces. This is the second extension sought by the Union government.

1.47L APPOINTEES INDUCTED THROUGH ROZGAR MELAS
New Delhi: As many as 1.47 lakh new appointees were inducted by various central government departments, autonomous bodies and banks among others through 'Rozgar Melas', MoS Personnel Jitendra Singh informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

LOK SABHA PASSES CONSTITUTION ORDER BILL 2022
New Delhi: Lok Sabha on Thursday passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022, which seeks to grant Scheduled Tribe status to Narikoravan and Kurivikaran communities in Tamil Nadu.

SC SETS DATE TO HEAR PILs CHALLENGING PARTY FUNDING LAWS
New Delhi: The Supreme Court said on Thursday it will hear in the last week of January 2023, a batch of PILs challenging laws permitting funding of political parties through the electoral bond scheme.

ENSURE NO DISABLED STUDENTS DENIED ACCESS TO CLAT: SC
New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Consortium of National Law Universities to ensure no physically disabled student is denied access to the upcoming CLAT examination and all necessary facilities, including a scribe to write the papers, are made available to the deserving candidates.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Data punctures pride

Twenty women were killed by dowry seekers every day in India between 2017 and 2021

Statistics is a subject that has often attracted the ridicule of great thinkers and writers. "There are three types of lies—lies, damn lies, and statistics," wrote Benjamin Disraeli. "Facts are stubborn things, but statistics are pliable," said Mark Twain. Yet, it still does something that many journalists and intellectuals don't do these days: it speaks to power. So, the Government said in Parliament on Wednesday that twenty women are killed by dowry seekers every day in India. Between 2017 and 2021, as many as 35,493 dowry deaths took place in the country. Do the sanctimonious nation-worshippers, who keep extolling the great and glorious Bharat ad nauseam, ever look around themselves? Don't they ever come across such horrible murders? Have their dogmas numbed their cognitive capabilities? Jinhe naaz hai Hind par woh kahaan hain? Typically, backward states Uttar Pradesh and Bihar top the list. UP had 11,874 dowry deaths during the five years, followed by Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal, and Rajasthan. In fact, UP and Bihar had almost (48 per cent) of the total dowry deaths in India. On the other hand, Gujarat, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, and Manipur had fewer than 50 annual cases in the five-year period.

It is quite evident from the data that there is a correlation between prosperity and literacy on the one hand and poverty and illiteracy on the other. In general, the Hindi-speaking belt, often coterminous with what were earlier called Bimaru states, doesn't appear to be very enlightened in social terms. Which is not very surprising, given the fact that the socio-religious reforms of the 19th century were not very influential in this belt. But we cannot ignore the fact that the problem of dowry and murders related to it are also reported from those parts which are relatively more prosperous and literate. There are laws to curb dowry, but the use of laws to eliminate social ills is not without limitations. At best, laws can be force multipliers, not prime movers. Even the efficacy of laws to catalyse social change is directly proportional to the soundness of policing and the justice system. It is a well-known fact that both the police and justice systems are in urgent need of large doses of reforms. Owing to the inadequacies of policing and courts, misuse of dowry laws, which are quite harsh, has widely been reported. The need of the hour is police and judicial reforms, but the problem is that reforms are not politically sexy; emotive issues are. The Bharatiya Janata Party does that all the time; when it's not Gyanvapi Mosque, it is the name change game. Mandalite politicians keep focusing on caste. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has found a new vocation for himself: uplifting the moral standards of Biharis. This is surely easier than raising their living standards. Making women safe, however, is not an easy job, so our netas are not very keen on it.

PICTALK



Fishermen release a huge whale-shark into the sea which got entangled in a fishing net, in Thiruvananthapuram, PTI

Governors' slugfest

It is most unfortunate that the governors are denigrating their office by their conduct

The stand-off between the Centre and the three southern States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana took a new turn early this week with P S Sreedharan Pillai, Governor of Goa jumping into the fray by indirectly admonishing his Kerala counterpart Arif Mohammed Khan for breaching the Lakshman Rekha. Arif Mohammed Khan during the last two years spent a staggering 223 days outside Kerala making him the Non-Resident Governor. He is waging a legal battle against the CPI(M)-led Government for its impropriety over the appointment of vice-chancellors and senior faculty members to the universities in the State. The Governor, instead of playing the role of a match referee, surges ahead with the ball and starts firing shots at the Marxists' goalpost.

Neighbouring Tamil Nadu is witnessing a similar scenario as the Governor, a highly venerated former Indian Police Service officer, returned/kept in abeyance many Bills passed by the DMK Government. The Dravidians had the shock of their lives when the Governor described the Aryan-Dravidian theory as bunkum because this was the only raison d'etre for the DMK's existence. The party reacted most violently by lampooning the Governor. Its senior leaders sang in unison that a sheep does not need a beard and similarly the State does not require a Governor. The party forgot the fact that it was in power at the Centre for almost 15 years and could have forced the then governments to do away with the post of Governors. The Sarkaria Commission

appointed by the Indira Gandhi regime had termed the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister as the epitome of scientific corruption. R N Ravi is not a run-of-the-mill Governor, unlike Arif Mohammed Khan or Pillai. The last named was the Kerala BJP chief and has not won even a panchayat election. The Telangana Governor too was a former chief of Tamil Nadu BJP and occupies the Hyderabad Raj Bhavan only because of the blessings of Sangh Parivar. It is commendable that Pillai has come out in the open lambasting Khan though it should be seen as the former's far-sightedness to ensure his survivability in the post-2024 landscape of the country. It is time the policymakers held a review on the relevance of Governors and their roles. The Governors, whether recommended by Sangh Parivar or Congress should get the respect due to them. Otherwise, the best thing to do is to shut down the Raj Bhavans which would save the exchequer of crores every year.

Hidden gems of rare language cinema

Rare Language Indian Cinema section of the 28th Kolkata International Film Festival cherishes good cinema made in lesser known languages.



SANTANU GANGULY

The journey of the section Unheard India - Rare Language Indian Cinema was started in 2015 at the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF). The veteran filmmaker Gautam Ghose, who is also an active member of KIFF, has always encouraged it and took the great initiative to approve the proposal of the Unheard India.

In our childhood days, around late 80s, every Sunday afternoon there was screening of films made in regional languages, like - Assamese, Bengali, Odiya, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi on Doordarshan, the only available TV channel at that time. Once in a while, films on Konkani, Bodo languages were also shown.

Language always fascinates me and the diversity we see in the Indian languages is amazing. It is sad that many languages are going to be extinct due to lack of patronage and the influence of other languages. Besides the literature, it is also important to describe the local folklore and fables to be documented in audio visual format. So, it is my effort to convey the due respect to all the Indian languages through cinema.

Days after I chose Film Festival Curation or Programming as my profession, I discovered that many filmmakers were making films in various lesser known languages. There are some languages which are spoken only among some small communities or in a very small region, like - Mising, Sherdukpan among several tribal languages from Arunachal Pradesh. Filmmakers from the northeast are making short and feature length films in many languages like- Rabha, Mizo, Khasi, Garo, Nagamese, Dimasa, on a regular basis. In the southern part of India, Karnataka states presents a bouquet of Bayri, Konkani, Tulu, Kodava, Banjara languages apart from Kannada, from Kerala Paniya, Irulu and Adivasi languages are also there. Jasari from Lakshadweep is another example.

In north India filmmakers are making films on various dialect like Haryanvi, Rajasthani, from



FROM THE HEART OF NORTHERN INDIA, FILMMAKERS ARE MAKING FILMS ON VARIOUS DIALECTS LIKE HARYANVI, RAJASTHANI, FROM UTTARAKHAND - KUMAUNI, GARHWALI, FROM JAMMU AND KASHMIR, LADAKH, AND HIMACHAL PRADESH REGION

Uttarakhand -Kumaoni, Garhwali, from Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh region- Dogri, Kashmiri, Ladakhi, Gaddi, Pahari, etc. From the tribal part of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh - Santhali, Kurmali, Rajbanshi, Chhotanagpuri, Chhattisgarhi etc. are regularly making good quality feature films to tell their stories and trying to keeping alive their art - culture - rituals - traditions and of course their dialect and language. So many good quality films are coming from these invisible parts of India, but very few of them get their due recognition. Unfortunately our system is not allowing those incredible creations to reach the film loving audience. Some of the filmmakers are not even aware about the procedure to participate in film festivals. Phalke is considered as a piece of history then why not "Tanyabi Firti" as the first Chakma language film in the history of Indian Cinema?

The Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee has been very supportive since the beginning, she has requested the audiences to come to watch the Unheard India section at the Opening Ceremony

of KIFF. Veteran filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt particularly mentioned about the Unheard India section. As he described how important the section is. "Through the feature length cinema made in the rare or aboriginal Indian languages, one can preserve their own mother-tongue, literature, culture, heritage," Bhatt said from the stage where the galaxy of stars were present - from the legendary Amitabh Bachchan to iconic Kamal Hasan to the heart throb Shah Rukh Khan, as well as the stars of Bengali film industry.

In the bouquet of the Unheard India: Rare Language Cinema of the 28th Kolkata International Film Festival this year there will be three aboriginal languages - Rajbanshi, Kurmali and Santhali from host state West Bengal itself, other languages are Maithili, Byari, Sanskrit and Rabha.

The Rajbanshi film Mansai directed by Ashutosh Das, Kurmali film Tusu by Biswajit Roy, Shishir Jha's Santhali film Dharti Latar Re Horo (Tortoise under the earth), Praatiek Sharma's Maithili film Lotus Boom, Aditya R. Chiranjeevi's Byari film Dharya, Yadu Vijaykrishnan

Parameshwaran's Sanskrit film Bhagavadajjukam and National Award-winning filmmaker Hiren Bora's Rabha film Nasimai (Darling) the only representation from the North East would also be screened.

Interestingly three films made in the rare languages - Deepankar Prakash's Rajasthani film Naanera, selected for the Indian Language Competition Section, while Kodava film Pommale Kodagu (Incredible Coorg) directed by Kottukattira Prakash Kariappa, produced by Yeshoda Prakash and Tulu film Munni directed by Ismail Moodushedde and produced by Venkat Gowda has been selected for the prestigious Asian Select NETPAC Award section of the forthcoming 28th Kolkata International Film Festival to be held between 15 & 22 December 2022.

The writer is a Film Festival Curator, filmmaker, producer and freelance writer. He is the Curator of the Unheard India: Rare Language Indian Cinema section of the 28th Kolkata International Film Festival. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OIC HAS NO LOCUS STANDI ON KASHMIR

Sir — India has rightly condemned the visit of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) secretary general Hissein Ibrahim Taha's visit to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). This amounts to interference by a third country on bilateral matters of India and Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir is an inalienable part of India. In the past many countries including the US and the UK have offered to mediate in the matter for resolution of the 'dispute' on Kashmir which India has rejected outright. India has rightly termed that the 57-member group of largely Muslim majority nations has lost its credibility by taking a blatantly communal, partisan and factually incorrect approach to important issues. The support is not based on any merit. Pakistan sowed the seeds of cross-border terrorism. It has now grown as a very big tree. India has been cutting that tree for the benefit of not only India but to the world as a whole. Taha says that the OIC has been working on a plan to find a channel of discussion. India is never averse to the channel of discussion on issues of bilateral importance. But India's condition to Pakistan to desist from the activities supporting and nursing terrorists and terrorism has not yet been met with.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

NITISH KUMAR CALLING IT A DAY

Sir — It is better to call it quick rather than being kicked off from the Grand alliance leader. Nitish Kumar has taken a wise decision in getting out of the grand alliance. The combination of 7 parties may break away any time and put the leader in his place by showing the door once results are not forthcoming. Thus Nitish Kumar put to rest all speculation to rest on his political heir, declared that his deputy and RJD leader Tashvsvi Prasad Yadav will lead the 7 parties grand alliance in the 2025 Assembly elections. He confided that enough is enough. So the leader of the so-called Grand Alliance or the Ghatbandan will be

Ruckus in Parliament



After the ruckus in Parliament over the recent clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh, 17 opposition parties staged a walk-out to protest the government's refusal to allow discussion on the matter. Led by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and senior

leader Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary, Congress MPs of the Lok Sabha walked out of parliament after the government denied discussion on the matter on Wednesday December 14. Similarly, in the Rajya Sabha, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge led a similar walkout for members of the upper house. The opposition repeatedly asked for a debate on the Chinese transgression, but the government refused to allow it. The defence minister left without giving any clarification to the House. The senior Congress leader said there was "no point" sitting inside the House if the government refuses to give any clarifications. The Opposition sought clarification after defence minister Rajnath Singh's statements, but the government rejected this demand.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Tejashwi for all practical purposes. Furthermore he appealed to the leaders of the 7-party alliance to support him as the leader from here on Tejeshwi will be their tall leader.

CK Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

MESSI'S EARLY RETIREMENT

Sir — 35 years old Lionel Andrés Messi, also known as Lionel Messi, world's one of the greatest football players who has won six FIFA world player of the year awards, has announced that the FIFA World Cup final will be his last game for Argentina. Though the World Cup football final will be held on Sunday 18 December, even then after the retirement announcement Messi said, "I feel very happy to be able to achieve this, to finish my World Cup journey by playing my last game in a final."

Messi now has 11 goals to his name in 25 matches. Not only with goals, but also with assists, Messi set a new record. He is the first player in World Cup history to score a goal and provide an assist in the same game in four matches. He has done this three times

in the ongoing World Cup and once back in 2006 against Serbia. He led Argentina to the final in which Messi, who is playing his "record-equaling" fifth FIFA World Cup in Qatar this year, will play the FIFA World Cup final for the second time in his career. The 2014 edition as well, but had to settle for a second-place finish. But this year, he will hope to end the 36-year wait for his country and win the first ever World Cup title. Besides, Messi has been on fire in this edition of the FIFA World Cup. He has won four Player of the Match awards and has found the back of the net in five out of the six matches played so far. Compared to modern day players, Messi's decision of retirement may be slightly too early. True legend of the game, we will miss his magic. But still all the best to Messi. He deserves a legendary farewell.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

SOUND BITE

(Rahul Gandhi) was lucky that his parents allowed him to pursue what he wanted, while for most people it's either medical or engineering -- as imposed by the parents

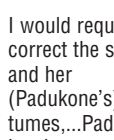


Congress leader —Jairam Ramesh



We should have societal guilt for taking too long to deal with this problem. We have a moral obligation to pass and enforce laws that can prevent these things from happening again.

US President —Joe Biden



I would request to correct the scenes and her (Padukone's) costumes....Padukone has been a supporter of the "Tukde Tukde gang."

MP Home Minister —Narottam Mishra



I am really happy today and not bothered about not getting a three-figure mark. I have been batting well and if I carry on like this, it will come soon.

Indian cricketer —Cheteshwar Pujarar

He (KCR) is the richest bandit in the country as he is involved in the Kareshwaram (irrigation project) corruption scam.

YSR Telangana Party chief —YS Sharmila

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

ASSET ALLOCATION KEY IN HEATED EQUITY MKT

Neither falling nor rising markets should be chased



S KALYANASUNDARAM

On December 1, the Bombay Stock Exchange equity index Sensex reached a peak of 63583 points and closed at 63284 points, which is an all-time high. The NSE NIFTY index also peaked correspondingly.

Experts attribute many reasons for the current uptrend of Indian equity market. Broadly, it may be because of heavy investments on the part of the foreign portfolio investors, which in turn is due to positive outlook of the Indian economy in comparison to other emerging markets.

The Indian economy is perceived as a better managed one with best productivity in terms of GDP growth and also with better managed inflation compared to other countries.

Bull and bear markets are nothing unusual. From our experience we have also seen that the bull market or bear market will also have its own peak and reverse from there. Wrong entry or exit will ruin the investors' wealth. There are standard tools to manage one's investments during such phases.

Asset allocation is an investment strategy by which an investor attempts to balance risk versus reward by adjusting the percentage of amount invested in an asset of a portfolio according to the risk tolerance of the investor, his/her goals and the investment time frame.

When the equity market is rising, your equity investment balance will go up. To maintain the original asset allocation plan (as percentage), there should be diversion of funds from equity investment to fixed income securities. But investors generally get impressed by the equity portfolio performance and start pumping more funds towards equity when the market is rising.



This will be a risky proposition as the original purpose of asset allocation based on risk parameters will be defeated.

Any person may be holding some dud stocks. It is time to get rid of such stocks when you perceive the price is far above its intrinsic value.

On seeing the market galloping and some friends are making money, some people who have never invested in stocks are tempted to invest afresh. Mostly they do this based on tips from share brokers and friends. This is a very dangerous way to invest. Peter Lynch will say that investing in a falling stock is like catching a falling knife. In the same way, trying to catch the rising market is like catching a moving train. Slow and steady investment will only win in the long run.

When we analyse the Sensex for the last 25 years, we can notice that out of 25 years, barring six years, all the years a new peak was reached. In all these years, the previous year's peak was not fully maintained in the subsequent year and there were always lows (less than the previous year's high). For example in 2021-22, the high was 62245 but in the current year the low was 50921.

Out of 25 years, in three years the low was less than the previous year's low. In the long term, the market will go up. A year's peak may not sustain throughout next year. Ups and downs are part of the market and new highs and new lows are nothing unusual. One need not enter an overheated market in a hurry. One need not get out when the market falls. Investment time in the market is more important than timing the market. Regular and periodical investment based on one's risk appetite is important and discipline in maintaining the asset allocation will be crucial to reduce risk for optimum return.


(The author is a retired banker)

Pak can follow UP on the cottage industry

One District One Product Scheme has transformed the cottage industry in UP, while it languishes in Pakistan



BISWAJEET BANERJEE



TAHIR AMIN

Quasar Jahan, 28, throws a glance at the design of foliage and starts embroidery, humming a Hindi movie song that talks about a better future. She is part of a group of women who are busy with embroidery work. She looks around and says: "Everyone here is giving shape to their future through these designs."

Anum, 26, sitting near Quasar, responds to her with a smile radiating the courtyard with positivity. Both are among thousands of women who work as 'chikankari' artisans in Lucknow, who embroider intricate designs on clothes that are much in demand in big cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, and even in Europe and the US.

Quasar has a traumatic past, which she wants to forget. Married at the age of 15, she was divorced when she was 22, while she was a mother of two children – a son aged five years old and a daughter, who was three years old. Quasar never went to a school. She was pushed into an early marriage, and then had to go through the heartbreak of a broken relationship. She took up chikankari to support herself and her children. She learned the centuries-old art of embroidery and with practice and perseverance, she now works magic with her nimble fingers.

Chikan embroidery is not new for Quasar as she has seen women at different centres, which could even be the courtyard of a house, where women sit down to embroider after finishing their chores. She learned the artwork painstakingly and started working with the ladies. Initially, she earned Rs 100-125 per day after almost 8-10 hours of work.

As per the government record, chikan embroidery provides employment to over 350,000 artisans, mostly Muslim women, around Lucknow. Besides, close to a million people are associated with the chikan trade, as raw material suppliers, contractors, manufacturers and retailers.

"Poverty liberated me. It forced me to come out of the confines of the four walls of my house to earn money. This gave me confidence and I used my earnings to educate my son and daughter," said Shahida Khatoon, another chikankari artisan.

The transformation in her life came in 2017 when the chikan embroidery work was adopted by the provincial government of Uttar Pradesh under the 'One District One Product (ODOP)' Scheme, which aims to preserve, develop and boost the demand of local arts and crafts.

Quasar and women like her have now found a market and even have learned new words like "exhibition" and "boutique" – and now they know their chikan embroidery is much in demand. Last week she went to Pune, a city in western India, and returned home earning a profit of Rs 27,000.

“

UTTAR PRADESH IS HOME TO 230 MILLION PEOPLE, EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF PAKISTAN. UNDER ODOP SCHEME, ITRA (PERFUME) OF KANNAUJ, CARPETS OF BHADOHI, BRASSWARE OF MORADABAD, KALA NAMAK RICE FROM KUSHINAGAR, ARE BEING TAKEN TO THE GLOBAL MARKET

(Biswajeet Banerjee is based in Lucknow and Tahir Amin in Islamabad)



Almost at the same time, Seema Babar, an embroidery artisan in the Nowshera district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, rues that despite getting appreciation for training illiterate women in embroidery there is no government support. "Different government departments have appreciated our efforts in imparting vocational training to women but are reluctant in releasing funds," she said.

Seema, an Islamic scholar, had started a skill training centre in the verandah of her house. They impart training in tailoring and embroidery. She used this centre to provide employment to women.

"Most of these women are illiterate housewives. Some of them have diplomas (in embroidery) from government centres. Still, they come here because they do not have employment opportunities in those centres," Seema said.

The centre takes tailoring and embroidery orders from garment shops. These women complete the orders and this way they earn some money. "Had the government supported us, we would have done better. What we need is cheap raw materials and government help in finding buyers. It is a big struggle to keep this trade afloat without any support," she said.

Mehreen, another artisan, has been in this trade for the last four years. Her intricate designs have won laurels across Pakistan. "People like my embroidery and I am getting orders from people. Now, I am planning to export readymade garments to the Middle East and Europe. The problem is I do not have a space where I can make women sit and work for me. I have hired eight women who work from their homes. I get orders and pass it on to these women. Once I complete the order, I get money. The profit margin is very less as the middleman takes the major portion of the profit," she said.

She recounts that once a non-governmental organisation (NGO) approached her with the proposal that it would finance and provide the raw materials but the profit would be shared. She rejected the offer.

"We are facing a severe challenge in the form of high input costs, bad transportation, and unavailability of raw material, frequent power outages, and lack of skilled workers. No government institution extends a helping hand," Mehreen said.

Nazeer Ahmad Ansari who runs his power loom in Tando Adam Khan in Sindh province of Pakistan, is now thinking of closing down his shop because of high input costs and load shedding.

The attitude of the governments of the two countries – India and Pakistan – reflects their approach. On the one hand, the Indian government is alive to the problems of the people involved in small-scale industries and has formulated policies, on the other, the government in Pakistan is still grappling with the issue and it still uses Small and Household Manufacturing Industries (SHMIs) census of 2015 to formulate its cottage industry.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in Pakistan in its report says that cottage and small-scale industries have a great scope in Pakistan. It generates employment for the nation and improves the balance of trade in the country and employs about 81 per cent of the total labour force.

Government officials vouch that the cottage industry has a job creation potential which in turn can help in the reduction of poverty, but no government in Pakistan has taken this sector seriously. "The negligence is evident from the fact that Pakistan still uses the census of 2015," said an official. Uttar Pradesh is home to 230 million people, equivalent to that of Pakistan. Under this ODOP scheme, Itra (perfume) of Kannauj, carpets of Bhadohi, brassware of Moradabad, Kala Namak rice from Kushinagar, are being taken to the global market.

"More than 20 million ODOP products worth \$12.19 billion have been sold in 2020-21 on the Flipkart portal which has helped artisans of UP in a big way," Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.

In ODOP more than 10 lakh beneficiaries were given loans of about Rs 30,000 crore (US dollars 368.45 billion) through four online fairs.

Quasar is one of the beneficiaries of the ODOP scheme. "Initially, I did not have funds. The loan provided by the government helped me purchase raw materials. The government initiative also helped me find a market. Now, I can say with pride that I too am an entrepreneur who has a business of my own," she says.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THEY DID NOT MAKE BJP PART OF THE GOVT. WHAT WAS MY ROLE IF I COULDN'T ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF THE PARTY CADRES, SO I RESIGNED.
—SIKKIM PRESIDENT OF THE BJP
DB CHUAHAN



I WAS AWARE THAT THE BJP MLAS WANTED TO JOIN THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THAT THE HIGH COMMAND MAY HAVE HAD "OTHER" CONSIDERATIONS.
—BJP SIKKIM GENERAL SECRETARY
SUDEEP PRADHAN


BJP to focus on UCC and other emotional issues

BJP has begun setting the tone for 2024 elections, ensuring that emotional issues, not economy, will be in limelight

Prime Minister Narendra Modi helped the Bharatiya Janata Party with a record victory of 156 seats in Gujarat. Now it may be an intense Hindu makeover surpassing the economy to continue the spree till 2024 Lok Sabha poll

The party prefers to go beyond economics and politics. It is setting the agenda for an open debate before the poll process begins in February 2023. The BJP starts methodically to pave the pitch for the national elections to be preceded by elections to nine state assemblies and four with the Lok Sabha.

The economic rhetoric of a \$5-trillion economy would remain there as it was also in Gujarat for a state GDP of one trillion, though it could not



SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The author is a member of advisory committee of Ministry of Shipping)

create the mood that the party may have liked. That led its leaders to walk the extra – 50 km and 10 km patch for the astounding victory. The magic attraction of Modi finally did the trick as also the party's capability to muster over 16 lakh people at the polling stations in a jiffy in the second phase on December 5. The party's financial and manpower strength virtually wiped out the opposition parties, particularly Congress and the AAP.

The 2024 elections once again may not be contested on economic blueprints. India may be doing better with over six per cent growth, but it may not be enough to lure voters.

The BJP proceeds with the cafeteria approach of campaigning. It would be different in each of the nine states in 2023 in North East – Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura; South – Karnataka, Telangana; centre – Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and west – Rajasthan.

Andhra, Arunachal, Odisha and Sikkim are likely to go to polls with the Lok Sabha elections in April 2024.

The controversies, the BJP poll organisers know, are vote catchers. It may again gamble on polarisation, population or the divide with unique packs in each state.

It has almost now centred on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to create a wave all over the country. The discussion on the issue of personal laws touches almost all Indians. A small instance of larger import was witnessed in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, December 9, with introduction of a private member's Bill by BJP MP, Kirodi Lal Meena. He demanded a panel to prepare and implement the UCC. It divides the house. Expectedly the Congress, TMC, DMK, CPI-M, CPI, IUML, MDMK, Samajwadi Party and RJD lodged strong protests amid uproar.

Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar called for division and the motion was cleared with 63 votes in favour and 23 against.

The UCC would be garnished with the population control policy for sharpening the campaign. If the BJP concentrates on scrapping the junking of ten-year-new cars, started by UPA-Congress, in all the states, it would touch the hearts of several crore people and families. It can be a game changer as Switzerland has taken the first step to do away with improper tech electricity guzzler electric vehicles -EV. Seething anger against the forced junking of cars and tractors is witnessed among kisans of UP, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Punjab and several other states.

Once again there may be freebies or not, the free food dole is likely to get an extension till the Lok Sabha polls along with many other programmes for the tribals, and disadvantaged groups. The programme is likely to be extended to May 2024, in phases.

The minorities are to be given special favour in allotments of PM Avas Yojana houses, jobs in EWS quota, allocations to religious schools, madrasas and some other programmes. It is interesting to note that backward minority communities are gradually being attracted to the Hindu party. The subtle campaigning among minority groups of different religions by RSS leader Indresh Kumar has caught the fancy.

The minority denominated constituencies in the North East, Telangana, Andhra and Karnataka would be approached by party cadres for the next one year continuously to lure them to vote for the BJP. It is in touch with different churches. Various programmes tailored for each of the states are aimed at swinging the mood for the saffron party. The approach, packaging and methods are special to each state concentrating on welfare and popular imaging.

The local religious icons too would be projected in many ways. In Arunachal, Donyi-Polo, the Sun-Moon Temple, is getting keen attention. Modi opened the Donyi-Polo airport sometime back. Nagaland is varied and so are other states in the region. An RSS leader says that the Sangh had been catering to NE tribals groups for decades.

The novel campaign plank has been designed to surpass the economic issues and capture the electorate's imagination to win over the elections with a mix of emotions, connect and divide to perpetuate its rule till 2047 or centenary of Independence.

Russia warns ‘consequences’ if US missiles sent to Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

Russia's Foreign Ministry warned Thursday that if the United States confirms reports that it plans to deliver sophisticated air defense missiles to Ukraine, it would be “another provocative move by the U.S.” that could prompt a response from Moscow.

Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a weekly briefing Thursday that “the U.S. Has effectively become a party” to the war in Ukraine, following reports that it will provide Kyiv with Patriot surface-to-air missiles, the most advanced the West has yet provided to help Ukraine's military repel Russian aerial attacks.

Zakharova added that growing amounts of U.S. Military assistance, including the transfer of such sophisticated weapons, “would mean even broader involvement of military personnel in the hostilities and could entail possible consequences.” She did not specify what the consequences might be.

U.S. Officials said Tuesday that Washington was poised to



approve sending a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine, finally agreeing to an urgent request from Ukrainian leaders desperate for more robust weapons to shoot down incoming Russian missiles that have crippled much of the country's vital infrastructure. An official announcement is expected soon.

A Patriot battery can need

as many as 90 troops to operate and maintain it, and for months the U.S. Was reluctant to provide the complex system because sending forces into Ukraine to operate it is a non-starter for the administration of President Joe Biden.

Yet concerns remain that even without the presence of U.S. Servicemen to train Ukrainians on how to use the

system, deployment of the missiles could provoke Russia or risk that a fired projectile could end up hitting inside Russia, further escalating the conflict.

Even before reports emerged on the delivery of Patriot systems, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council which is chaired by President Vladimir Putin, warned that if

Patriots enter Ukraine “along with NATO personnel, they will immediately become a legitimate target for our armed forces.”

Asked Wednesday whether the Kremlin backs that threat, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov answered yes, but added in a conference call with reporters that he would refrain from more detailed comment until the U.S. Officially announces the Patriot delivery to Ukraine. White House and Pentagon leaders have said consistently that providing Ukraine with additional air defenses is a priority, and Patriot missiles have been under consideration for some time. Officials said that as the winter closed in and the Russian bombardment of civilian infrastructure escalated, that consideration took on increased priority. Ukraine's electricity provider said Thursday that the country's energy system was suffering a “significant deficit of electricity, and that emergency shut-downs had been applied in some areas of the country as temperatures hover around or below freezing.

Lawmakers reviewing Qatar files: EU Parliament chief

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union's Parliament is reviewing its files involving Qatar to see if any pressure was exerted on lawmakers, the assembly's president said Thursday as a corruption scandal rocked the EU's only directly elected institution.

Parliament President Roberta Metsola said the work under review includes an agreement to allow Qataris with biometric passports to have short visa-free stays in the EU. On Monday, the agreement was “sent back to committee for a full investigation,” she said.

Metsola said questions also have surfaced about a separate EU-Qatar air agreement on which the European Parliament must be consulted. Talks have started with the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, to assess whether the accord should be suspended.

The agreement, signed in October 2021, would allow all EU airlines to operate direct flights to Qatar from any airport in the 27-nation bloc and give Qatari airlines the same access to European capitals. EU member countries have yet to approve it.

Metsola vowed that this



would not be all. “We will look into everything. We will look into any undue pressure and any undue influence that we see that takes place,” she told reporters after talks with EU leaders in Brussels.

Belgian prosecutors have charged four people with corruption, participation in a criminal group and money laundering on suspicion of trying buy political favours at the parliament with money or gifts.

They include a former vice president of the European Parliament and her partner. Greek lawmaker Eva Kaili remains in custody awaiting a hearing on December 22 and whose term in office was terminated by lawmakers this week. Her partner, Francesco Giorgi, who is a parliamentary

advisor. The heads of two charity groups have been charged. Pier Antonio Panzeri, head of the Fight Impunity campaign group and a former member of the EU parliament, and Niccolò Figatellamanc, secretary-general of another non-governmental organisation, No Peace Without Justice.

Metsola promised sweeping reforms in coming months to crack down on corruption and influence peddling at the assembly.

Referring to the institution's transparency register, she said: “yesterday, an NGO called No Peace Without Justice, which is allegedly connected to this investigation that is ongoing, which had 11 persons accredited on it, was suspended.

Home-grown supply operation outfits Ukraine’s women soldiers

AP ■ KYIV

When 25-year-old Anastasia Mokhina donned fatigues and rushed off with her husband to help Ukraine defend itself as Russia invaded on February 24, she quickly realised the military wasn't well prepared for an influx of women volunteers.

So her elder half-brother Andrii Kolesnyk, who was prevented from doing military service by a childhood disability, and his wife, Kseniia Drahaniuk, mobilised at home to ship her needed items.

Word spread fast inside the ranks that amateur quartermasters were focusing on women's particular needs, and a home-grown supply operation for female soldiers was born.

Now, a volunteer group called “Zemliachky” — roughly translated as “women compatriots” — is serving many of the 57,000 women in the Ukrainian military with boots, uniforms, stand-to-pee tubes, wireless bras, thermal underwear, medicines, right-sized bulletproof plates for their flak jackets, and care packages with items like lotions, shampoo, toothpaste, and feminine hygiene products.

In short, the group fill unantic-

ipated gaps in the Ukrainian military's own supply operation.

“Our army was not prepared for the fact that so many women would appear in the army,” said Drahaniuk, a 26-year-old journalist from Yalta, in now-occupied Crimea, sitting in front of metal shelves stocked with army boots and uniforms.

Today, at least 6,000 Ukrainian women have deployed on or near the front lines, in roles like paramedics and intelligence officers — but also snipers and artillery gunners.

They have joined the fight in a country where all men aged 18 to 60, with some exceptions, have been barred from leaving under martial law enacted after Russia's invasion.

When it got started, the association outsourced manufacturing of uniforms for women, but has since designed and produced them from a factory in the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

It all began with a need expressed by Mokhina, recalled Drahaniuk: “I need lip balm and hand cream, because my hands crack in the cold, and it's a pain.”

Zemliachky has helped distribute more than USD 1 million worth of support — about one-fifth of that through direct donations, the rest in in-kind support.



Its corporate contributors include medical supply firms, beauty salons and the gaming industry, Drahaniuk said.

All Ukrainians have been impacted by President Vladimir Putin's war in their country, which widened a conflict that began in 2014 when pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbas rebelled against the Kyiv government, and Russia illegally annexed Ukraine's southern peninsula of Crimea.

Women, in ways large and small, have borne the brunt: Millions fled the country, often with children or elderly relatives in tow.

Human rights monitors say some who remained were raped, sexually abused, or otherwise brutalised. As with many Ukrainian civilians, an untold number were injured or killed in Russian attacks.

“I didn't know what to do. I just

wanted to do something,” said Mokhina, who has worked as a signals and communications specialist and with territorial defence units in Kyiv.

“We just wanted to fight back. So my father and I said, We will go’ — and went straight to the nearby army post.”

After the war broke out, Ukraine's military outfitted many women with small-sized men's uni-

forms or boots.

In recent months, as part of its response, Zemliachky has crafted its designs to account for women's bodies, sizes and needs.

Dozens of orders come in and go out by truck, train and courier daily, and a converted two-room warehouse stall in northeastern Kyiv serves as a showroom where women on leave can pick up the wares — made available for free — themselves.

Once, Drahaniuk recalled, she got a call indicating that an order for 10 uniforms and pairs of shoes needed to be reduced to five — after a Russian attack one night cost five lives.

“They really give their lives for the freedom of our country,” she said.

Last week, a pair of women in fatigues drew a joyful hug from Drahaniuk as they entered the supply room to collect new gear, raving about Zemliachky's support, which goes beyond equipment — like posting personal portrait stories of women soldiers or training videos online.

“Ksyusha gave us everything we wear. ... She is our saviour,” said Maria Stalynska, who joined the military in August and has been on an unspecified front line, using a nickname for Drahaniuk.

“There are even cases when we need medicine or a hospital. We immediately go to Ksyusha.”

“We are really grateful. These people really do a lot for us women, for the army, for protection,” she added. “They support us in everything.”

Kateryna Pryimak, co-founder of Ukraine's Women Veteran Movement, says groups like Zemliachky and another whose name translates roughly as “Arm Women Now” provide a crucial role because for years, “material support of women in the army” — uniforms, shoes, underwear — “was a problem.”

“Our organisation, as a community of military women and veterans who have been taking care of these issues for a long time, is very glad that we have allies,” she said.

The military activities of volunteers like her could reshape the image of women in what many see as a male-dominated society.

“After the victory of Ukraine, the behaviour of men toward women will change,” said Drahaniuk.

“In civilian life, there will be the women who fought, and the men who didn't, and it could change things like professional advancement, salaries, even the culture of women in society .

Jesuit case underscores secrecy, leniency for abuse of women

AP ■ ROME

Revelations that the Vatican let a famous priest off the hook twice for abusing his authority over adult women has exposed two main weaknesses in the Holy See's abuse policies: sexual and spiritual misconduct against adult women is rarely if ever punished, and secrecy still reigns supreme, especially when powerful priests are involved.

The Jesuit order, to which Pope Francis belongs, was forced to admit Wednesday that its initial statements about the Rev. Marko Ivan Rupnik, an internationally recognised religious artist, were less than complete. The order had said Rupnik was accused in 2021 of unspecified problems “in the way he exercised his ministry” but that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith determined the allegations were too old to prosecute.

But under questioning by journalists, the Jesuit superior general, the Rev. Arturo Sosa, acknowledged the Congregation had prosecuted Rupnik for a separate, prior case from 2019 that ended with his conviction and temporary excommunication for one of the gravest crimes in the church's in-house canon law: that he used the confessional to absolve a woman with whom he previously had sexual relations.

The case dates from 2015, when Rupnik was in Rome, and also included an accusation of false mysticism that wasn't prosecuted, according to a person familiar with the case who was not authorised to speak about it. Rupnik quickly admitted



to the confession-related crime and formally repented, and the Congregation immediately lifted his excommunication from the church, Sosa said in response to a question from The Associated Press.

While the Jesuits barred Rupnik from hearing confessions or giving spiritual direction, the restrictions on his ministry did not prevent him from celebrating Mass or preaching. He continued writing and making his art without the public, the consecrated women in his community or even his own Jesuit confreres knowing the truth.

Rupnik is unknown to most Catholics but is a giant within the Jesuit order and the Catholic hierarchy because he is one of the church's most sought-after artists. His mosaics depicting biblical scenes decorate the basilica in Lourdes, France, the Vatican's own Redemptoris Mater chapel and the John Paul II institute in Washington, and are due to grace the new basilica in Aparecida, Brazil. He designed the Vatican logo for the 2022 World Meeting of Families, and was featured in a Vatican News television interview to describe the religious inspiration behind it.

Explainer: What can Patriot missile do for Ukraine?

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Patriot missile systems have long been a hot ticket item for the US and allies in contested areas of the world as a coveted shield against incoming missiles. In Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific, they guard against potential strikes from Iran, Somalia and North Korea. So it was a critical turning point when news broke this week that the U.S. Has agreed to send a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine — something Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has sought for months to augment his country's air defenses. U.S. Officials have confirmed the agreement, and an official announcement is expected soon. But experts caution that the system's effectiveness is limited, and it may not be a game changer in the war.

A look at what the system is and what it does:

WHAT IS THE PATRIOT?

The Patriot is a surface-to-air guided missile system that was first deployed in the 1980s and can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles.

Each Patriot battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator. The Army said it currently has 16 Patriot battalions. A 2018 International Institute for Strategic Studies report found those battalions operate 50 batteries, which have more than 1,200 missile interceptors.

The U.S. Batteries are regularly deployed around the world.



In addition, Patriots also are operated or being purchased by the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Taiwan, Greece, Spain, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Romania, Sweden, Poland and Bahrain.

The Patriot system “is one of the most widely operated and reliable and proven air missile defense systems out there,” and the theater ballistic missile defense capability could help defend Ukraine against Iranian-supplied ballistic missiles, said Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

PATRIOT COST

Over the years the Patriot system and missiles have been continually modified. The current interceptor missile for the Patriot system costs approximately \$4 million per round and the launchers cost about \$10 million each, CSIS reported in its July missile defense report. At that price, it's not cost effective or optimal to use the Patriot to shoot down the far smaller and dramatically cheaper Iranian drones that Russia has been buy-

ing and using in Ukraine.

“Firing a million-dollar missile at a \$50,000 drone is a losing proposition,” said Mark Cancian, a retired Marine Corps reserves colonel and senior adviser at CSIS.

DEPLOYMENT CONCERNS A Patriot battery can need as many as 90 troops to operate and maintain it, and for months the U.S. Was reluctant to provide the complex system because sending forces into Ukraine to operate it is a non-starter for the Biden administration.

But there were also concerns that deployment of the system would provoke Russia, or risk that a missile fired could end up hitting inside Russia, which could further escalate the conflict. According to officials, the urgent pleadings of Ukrainian leaders and the devastating destruction of the country's civilian infrastructure, including loss of electricity and heat as winter drags on, ultimately overcame U.S. Reservations about supplying the Patriots.

A key hurdle will be training U.S. Troops will have to train Ukrainian forces on how to use and maintain the system. Army

solders assigned to Patriot battalions get extensive training to be able to effectively locate a target, lock on with radar and fire.

The U.S. Has trained Ukrainian troops on other complex weapons systems, including the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, known as HIMARS. In many cases they've been able to shorten the training, getting Ukrainian troops out to the battlefield in weeks. Officials have declined to provide details on how long the Patriots training would take and where exactly it will be done.

PATRIOT CAPABILITIES

Ukraine faces a range of Russian threats, and the Patriot is good against some and not that useful against others.

One former senior military official with knowledge of the Patriot system said it will be effective against short-range ballistic missiles and it represents a strong message of U.S. Support, but one battery isn't going to change the course of the war.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the Ukraine deal has not yet been made public, noted that one Patriot battery has a long firing range, but can cover only a limited broad area. As an example, Patriots can effectively protect a small military base, but can't fully protect a large city such as Kyiv. They could only provide coverage for a segment of a city.

Patriots are often deployed as a battalion, which includes four batteries. This won't be the case with Ukraine, which officials said would be receiving one battery.

Covid curbs in Chinese iPhone factory to be eased

AP ■ HONG KONG

The company that assembles Apple Inc.'s iPhones has announced it is easing COVID-19 restrictions at its largest factory in China that led thousands of workers to quit and drastically slowed production.

Foxconn Technology Group said in a statement on one of its official WeChat social media accounts that it would end the so-called “closed loop” system at the facility in Zhengzhou, central China, that required workers to say in their workplaces and dormitories to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections.

The move announced Wednesday came about a week after China began easing harsh COVID-19 curbs despite signs the number of infections is rising.

Following a spate of protests across the country last month many “zero-COVID” restrictions were lifted. That means people no longer need to take frequent COVID-19 tests to travel on public transport. If they do test positive for the virus, they can isolate at home if they have only mild or no symptoms instead of being sent to a quarantine centre.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission. But the government's latest moves suggest authorities will tolerate more infections without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses.

Thousands of workers at the huge factory in Zhengzhou



walked out in late October over complaints of unsafe working conditions — such as food shortages due to closed cafeterias — and a virus outbreak at the plant.

The last quarter of the year is typically a busy season for companies like Foxconn as they ramp up production ahead of the end of year holiday rush. Apple has warned that iPhone 14 deliveries would be delayed due to manufacturing disruptions.

Foxconn, headquartered in New Taipei City, Taiwan, has been trying to rebuild its workforce after the massive walkout in late October. The company then ended up apologising after a pay dispute triggered protests by workers who said Foxconn had changed the terms of wages offered to attract them to the factory.

In its announcement, the company said it would no longer provide free meals to workers because factory cafeterias would reopen. Instead, meal expenses will be deducted from employees' wages as usual, though workers who must quarantine after testing positive for the virus will still get free meals.

China reels under massive Covid wave

Official blames anti-zero-Covid protests on foreign forces



PTI ■ BEIJING

Nearly a fortnight after China lifted the much-despised 'zero-Covid' restrictions following a spate of protests, the country is reeling under a massive coronavirus wave, with a Chinese diplomat blaming "foreign forces" for the anti-government demonstrations.

Videos circulating in China's social media showed clinics in Beijing and some other cities flooded with patients with queues extending onto footpaths with people patiently waiting for their turn in the cold winter.

Videos also showed many hooked on to IV drips waiting in their cars and in the parking

outsides of the clinics.

While many with heavy fever waited outside the clinics, the Omicron virus is having a field day with most of the apartment blocks, which were earlier under the cover of zero-Covid reported fast-increasing cases.

The virus is not sparing anyone, including Chinese Foreign Ministry officials, Beijing-based diplomats and journalists.

Meanwhile, a senior Chinese diplomat has alleged that last month's anti-zero covid protests, which included slogans against President Xi Jinping and the ruling Communist Party, were caused by the local government's failure to manage the epidemic but were soon "taken advantage of" by "foreign

forces."

The remarks by Lu Shaye, China's Ambassador to France, were the first by a Chinese official after rare protests erupted in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and other cities, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Thursday.

A transcript of Lu's comments made at a reception on December 7 was published on the Chinese embassy's website.

"In the beginning, I think the Chinese public initiated the protests to express their dissatisfaction (with) how local governments have failed to fully implement the central government's policies. But the protests were soon being taken advantage of by foreign forces," Lu said.

"I think the 'real protests'

only happened on the first day. Foreign forces came into play already on the second day," said Lu, whose fiery remarks in the past have made him one of the high-profile "wolf warrior" diplomats of China, the report said.

Under the zero-Covid policy, anyone testing positive for covid and their contacts would immediately have sent, in some cases dragged to government-run quarantine homes where people complained about poor conditions.

However, the government apparently peeved over the protests in several cities including Beijing, announced on December 3 the lifting of various restrictions including mandatory interning in quarantine centres.

The government also removed scores of testing centres and the results of those who underwent testing in community centres stopped showing in official Apps.

Instead, people were advised to treat themselves at home for mild symptoms with official epidemiologists suddenly assuring people that the Omicron variant, currently sweeping across the country, is not dangerous unlike the Delta virus and will subside after a few days of rest and medicines.

Biden tells African leaders US is 'all in' on continent



AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden told dozens of African leaders gathered in Washington that the United States is "all in on Africa's future," laying out billions in promised government funding and private investment Wednesday to help the growing continent in health, infrastructure, business and technology.

"The U.S. is committed to supporting every aspect of Africa's growth," Biden told the leaders and others in a big conference hall, presenting his vision at the three-day U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit of how the U.S. Can be a critical catalyst.

Biden, who is pitching the U.S. As a reliable partner to promote democratic elections and push critical health and energy growth, told the crowd the \$55 billion in committed investments over the next three years — announced on Monday — was "just the beginning".

He announced more than \$15 billion in private trade and investment commitments and partnerships.

"There's so much more we can do together and that we will do together," he said.

The United States has fallen well behind China in investment in sub-Saharan Africa, which has become a key battleground in an increasingly fraught competition between the major powers. The White House insists this week's gathering is more a listening session with African leaders than an effort to counter Beijing's influence, but the president's central foreign policy tenet looms over all: America is in an era-defining battle to prove

democracies can out-deliver autocracies.

That message was clear in Wednesday's events. In his speech, Biden spoke of how the U.S. Would help in modernizing technology across the continent, providing clean energy, moving women's equality forward through business opportunities, bringing clean drinking water to communities and better funding health care. First lady Jill Biden's office also laid out \$300 million for cancer prevention, screening, treatment and research in Africa.

On Wednesday there also was a smaller presidential sitdown with some of the continent's leaders whose countries will hold elections in 2023. Thursday is to be dedicated to high-level discussions among leaders; Biden will open the day with a session on partnering with the African Union's strategic vision for the continent.

The president and first lady were hosting a White House dinner for all the leaders and their spouses Wednesday night. Gladys Knight and the St. Augustine Gospel Choir of Washington, D.C., were to perform, and the food done by Mashama Bailey, the executive chef of The Grey, a Southern cooking spot in Savannah, Georgia.

Jill Biden hosted a program for spouses Wednesday morning at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, where she told the crowd "my hope is that the way we make each other feel will last beyond this summit."

The summit is the largest international gathering in Washington since before the start of the pandemic. Roads all around the city center were blocked off, and motorcades zoomed by gridlocked traffic elsewhere, ferrying some of the 49 invited heads of state and other leaders.

Africa, whose leaders often feel they've been given short shrift by leading economies, remains crucial to global powers because of its rapidly growing population, significant natural resources and sizable voting bloc in the United Nations. Africa also remains of great strategic importance as the U.S. Recalibrates its foreign policy with greater focus on China — the nation the Biden administration sees as the United States' most significant economic and military adversary.

But Biden invited several leaders who have questionable records on human rights, and democracy loomed large.



Hacker claims breach of FBI's critical-infra forum

AP ■ BOSTON

A hacker who reportedly posed as the CEO of a financial institution claims to have obtained access to the more than 80,000-member database of InfraGard, an FBI-run outreach program that shares sensitive information on national security and cybersecurity threats with public officials and private sector individuals who run U.S. Critical infrastructure.

The hacker posted samples they said were from the database to an online forum popular with cybercriminals last weekend and said they were asking \$50,000 for the entire database.

The hacker obtained access to InfraGard by posing as the CEO of a financial institution, they told independent cybersecurity journalist Brian Krebs, who broke the story. They called the vetting process surprisingly lax. The FBI did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. Krebs reported that the agency told him it was aware of a potential false account and was looking into the matter.

InfraGard's members include business leaders, IT professionals, military, state and local law enforcement and government officials involved in overseeing the safety of everything from the electrical grid and transportation, to health care, pipelines, nuclear reactors, the defense industry, dams and water plants and financial services.

UN council ousts Iran from UN commission backing women

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The U.N. Economic and Social Council voted Wednesday to immediately oust Iran from the U.N.'s premiere global body fighting for gender equality because of its systematic violation of the rights of women and girls, a decision the United States hailed as "historic" and Iran claimed was based on "fabricated allegations".

The U.S.-sponsored resolution was sparked by Iran's ongoing brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters who took to the streets in September after the death of a 22-year-old woman taken into custody by the morality police.

At least 488 people have been killed since the demon-

strations began, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that's been monitoring the protests, while another 18,200 people have been detained by authorities.

The vote in the 54-member council known as ECOSOC to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women for the remainder of its 2022-2026 term was 29-8 with 16 abstentions.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield called the vote "historic," the first-ever ouster of a commission member and "the right thing to do."

"I think we sent a strong message to the Iranian government and we sent a strong message to Iranian women," she told reporters after the vote.



Before the vote, Thomas-Greenfield cited the death of Mahsa Amini who was accused of wearing her headscarf improperly by the morality police; the solitary confinement of two women reporters who told her story; and the young women and girls who have been

killed or disappeared for speaking out along with thousands of protesters reportedly detained and tortured.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the vote shows a growing consensus among the United States and its allies and partners around the

world that Iran must be held accountable for "atrocities" such as the recent "horrifying executions" of protesters in Tehran.

Established in 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women plays a leading role in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives around the world and shaping global standards to empower women and achieve gender equality.

Its 45 members, from all regions of the world, are elected for four-year terms by the Economic and Social Council. Iran was elected from the Asian region with 43 votes.

Before Wednesday's vote, Iran's U.N. Ambassador Amir Saied Iravani accused the United

States of using its "longstanding hostility toward the Iranian people" under "the guise of human rights" to remove Iran from the commission. He then cited efforts by the U.S. And its allies to topple "multiple legitimate governments," implying that it is also trying to topple Iran's.

Iravani said the U.S. Resolution would impede the advancement of Iranian women who he said are "strong, dynamic, self-sufficient and intelligent" participants in the country's economic, social and political life.

He called the U.S. Resolution "illegal" because the Commission on the Status of Women has no rules on terminating an elected member and warned that it might "create a

dangerous precedent with far-reaching consequences."

After the vote, Iran's deputy ambassador Zahra Ershadi categorically rejected the resolution and what she called "the baseless and fabricated allegations" made against Iran. She insisted the government protects women's rights, "condemns any politicization of women's rights, and rejects all falsehoods and accusations made in particular by the US."

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice to be known to all that: I, Sujel Kumar S/o Shri Hare Ram Singh R/o DDA MIG Flat No.51-B, First Floor, Site-II, Pocket-6, Dwarka Ph-1, New Delhi-45, are the owners of DDA MIG Flat No.51-B, First Floor, Site-II, Pocket-6, Dwarka Ph-1, New Delhi-110045, has applied conversion of aforesaid property from lease hold to free hold in DDA. The original (1) Possession Letter (2) NOC for Water & Electricity Connection issued by DDA of the above said flat have been lost, An FIR / NCOR No.LR/0819/2022, Date: 14 Dec. 2022. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contract with above named person at above address/phone no.9891196231, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy. Director LAB(H) MIG, D-Block, Second Floor, or Director (H) MIG, DDA Vikas Sadan INA, New Delhi-110023.



Dozen hurt in Balochistan as Afghan border forces open fire

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

At least 15 people were injured on Thursday when Afghan border troops resorted to "indiscriminate firing" across the border into Balochistan province, Pakistani defence sources said, the second such firing in less than a week.

According to the sources, the firing took place in Balochistan province's Chaman area, and "children and women" were also injured.

Dr Abdul Malik of District Headquarters Hospital Chaman told Pakistani media that at least 15 injured civilians were brought to the facility.

It was the second cross-border attack by the Afghan troops. They had resorted to a similar act on December 10, which killed seven civilians and injured another 16.

Pakistan had condemned the incident at the highest level, but the Afghan authorities expressed regret, following which Islamabad decided not to pursue it any further.

The latest firing, however, shows the mistrust between the two sides.

The Chaman border crossing, also known as Friendship Gate, connects Balochistan province to Afghanistan's Kandahar. It was closed last month after an armed Afghan crossed onto Pakistan's side of the border and opened fire on security troops, killing a soldier and injuring another two.

Seoul: UN agency to boost efforts to monitor N Korean nukes

AP ■ SEOUL

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency said Thursday his organisation will push to bolster its capacity to verify North Korean nuclear activities and raise international awareness of the urgency of its weapons programme.

Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, made the comments during his meeting in Seoul with South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin, according to the South Korean Foreign Ministry.

Grossi flew to South Korea on Wednesday for his first trip to the Asian country since he took office in 2019.

During their meeting Thursday, Park appraised what he called IAEA's persistent efforts to convince North Korea to return to an international nonproliferation regime. Park said South Korea will coordinate with IAEA more closely to try to achieve North Korea's denuclearization, Park's ministry said in a statement.

Grossi said IAEA will keep closely monitoring North Korean nuclear activities. He said IAEA will push to promote member states' awareness of the seriousness of the North's nuclear programme while trying to strengthen capabilities to verify its nuclear activities, the statement said.

In remarks open to the media at the start of the meeting, Grossi said that "concerns around and about the nuclear programme" of North Korea are among "so many important issues" that IAEA and South Korea are working on together.



During a separate meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol earlier Thursday, Grossi said IAEA will make efforts to help curb North Korea's nuclear programme while the South Korean leader called for IAEA's support for a push for North Korea's denuclearization, according to Yoon's office.

Worries about North Korea's nuclear arsenal have grown in recent months as the country has tested nuclear-capable missiles in a record pace and threatened the preemptive use of nuclear weapons. South Korean and US officials have said for months that North Korea has been ready to perform its first nuclear test in five years.

In late October, Grossi said IAEA also saw preparations for a North Korea nuclear test. He said the test "would be yet another confirmation of a programme which is moving full-steam ahead in a way that is incredibly concerning."

The IAEA has not had access to North Korean nuclear facilities since the country kicked out IAEA inspectors in 2009. The agency has said it uses satellite imagery and open source information to monitor developments in North Korea's nuclear programme.



Nurses seek better pay in biggest strike in UK health service history

PTI ■ LONDON

Thousands of nurses employed in the UK's state-funded National Health Service (NHS), many of them Indian, are joining picket lines up and down the country on Thursday in the biggest strikes in history to demand better pay and working conditions amid a cost-of-living crisis.

Up to 100,000 nursing staff are taking part in strikes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales in protest against what they say is years of real-terms pay cuts due to inflation and concerns over patient safety. A further day of strike action is also planned for next Tuesday.

"For many of us, this is our first time striking and our emotions are really mixed. The NHS is in crisis, the nursing profession can't take any more, our loved ones are already suffering," said Pat Cullen, General Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).

"It is not unreasonable to demand better. This is not something that can wait. We are committed to our patients and always will be," she said. RCN has been campaigning for a pay rise and demanding that the government allow the NHS to recruit and retain the nursing staff it desperately needs.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	37A-22-23-W-2 Dated 15.12.2022
1	Name of work with its location: A) Augmentation/Provision of old worn out chequered tiles on coping of PF No. 1 & 2 at MTC & PF No. 1 at MDNR & Improvement of Facade at MTC & MDNR.
2	Approx. Cost of work NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 As per IREPS Notice
3	Earnest Money NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 As per IREPS Notice
4	Completion period of Work NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 As per IREPS Notice
5	Cost of tender on cash/by post NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 As per IREPS Notice
6	Date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender 27.12.2022 to 10.01.2023 upto 15:00 hrs Opening of tender 10.01.2023 at 15:00 hrs. on
7	Similar nature of Work NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 As per IREPS Notice
8	Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc. Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

No. NIT-37(A)-22-23-W-2 Dated, 15.12.2022

G2 **75** **75**
Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

Serving Customers with a Smile 3338/2022

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Materials Management Department
PUBLIC NOTICE No. 12/2022
Sale of Locomotives "As is Where is Basis"

On behalf of President of India, Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway proposes to sell Broad Gauge Locomotives through e-auction in working condition on "As is Where is Basis".

Details of Diesel Locomotives on Sale	The E-Auction of these Locomotives is expected to be held in the month of December, 2022 or January, 2023. These Locomotives are available at Alambagh Shed, Tughlakabad Shed as well as at Shakurbasti (in Delhi) of Northern Railway. The Locomotives are stabled in the Locomotive Sheds and are to be disposed in the present same condition. For physical appreciation of the bidders, a site visit is also being organized on 26.12.2022 at 11:00 hrs. at Tughlakabad Diesel Locomotive Shed. Attention of the interested Bidders is also invited to participate in the E-Auction. Interested Bidders may register at www.ireps.gov.in after obtaining the Class-III Digital Signature for participation and submission of bids in E-Auction. You may please also log on at www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in for relevant details of these Locomotives. A brief details of these Locos are given in the table below:			
S Locomotive No.	Locomotive Type	Quantity (in Nos.)	Location	Age of Loco (Years)
1.	WDP1	20	Alambagh, Tughlakabad & Shakurbasti	24 to 26

Contact address Office of the Chief Materials Manager/Sales, Northern Railway, Headquarter Office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001. Contact No. 9717630785

G2 **75** **75**
Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

Dy.CMM/S&P For Principal Chief Materials Manager 3331/22

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UJVN Limited
H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, G.M.S. Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephones: 0135-2763808, Fax: 0135-2763508
CIN No.U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvn.com
Letter No: 921 **e-Tender Notice** Date: 15/12/2022
Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M), Maneri Dam, Maneri, Uttarkashi invited online bid from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below:
Tender No.04/EE(E&M)/Maneri Dam/2022-23
Name of work: Supply, Installation, testing and commissioning of Automatic Early Warning System (EWS) for Maneri Dam
Estimated cost: ₹ 2,75,41705.00 (excluding taxes)
Date of availability of bid document on website: 17.12.2022 at 10:00 hrs.
Last date of submission of bid on website: 07.01.2023 at 17:00 hrs.
For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>, **Executive Engineer E&M**
"AVOID WASTEFUL USE OF ELECTRICITY"

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001)
Corporate Identity Number U46109PB2010SGC033813
Website: www.pspcl.in Mobile No.96461-10914
E-Tender Enq. No. 419/P-1/EMP-W-12143 dated 12-12-22
Dy. Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-3) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-tender ID No.2022_POWER_93566_1 for Providing and laying 100mm thick factory made cement concrete interlocking paving blocks of M-50 grade at Outer Road from Gumti toward Plant at GGSSTP Ropar.
For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://proc.punjab.gov.in> from 14-12-2022 05:00 PM onwards.
Note: Corrigendum & amendments, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>
76155/12/1287/2022/19575 RTP-101/22

Gujarat Maritime Board
TENDER NOTICE NO. - 1 of 2022 - 23

Gujarat Maritime Board invites online for the appointment of Consultant for Planning, Engineering and Implementation support for the development of additional Ship Recycling Plots at Alang-Sosiya Ship Recycling Yard, District: Bhavnagar.

Tender Document to be downloaded from website https://gmb.nprocure.com and www.gmbports.org	From 17/12/2022 at 12:30 Hrs.
Pre-bid meeting	05/01/2023 at 11:30 Hrs.
Last date and time for the online tender submission	20/01/2023 up to 18:00 hrs
Tender fees (Non-refundable)	Rs. 29,500/-
Bid Security	Rs. 10,03,000/-
Online Opening of Technical bid	01/02/2023 at 12:30 hrs

For further details please contact Alang Branch, GMB Office, Sagar Bhavan, Sector-10A, Opp. Airforce Station, Chh Road, Gandhinagar or log on www.gmbports.org or <https://gmb.nprocure.com>
NO/INF/VPN/2022/G/2003

‘Wheat stocks seen at 159 lakh tonnes on Jan 1, 2023’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Thursday said wheat stocks in the central pool will be about 159 lakh tonnes on January 1, 2023 as against the buffer norm of 138 lakh tonnes. “Government of India has sufficient food grain stocks under central pool to meet the requirement of NFSA (National Food Security Act) and its other welfare schemes as well as for additional allocation of PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana),” an official statement said.

About 159 lakh tonnes of wheat will be available as on January 1, 2023, which is well above the buffer norm requirement of 138 lakh tonnes. As on December 12, around 182 lakh tonnes of wheat is available in the central pool.

“Government of India is well aware of the price scenario of wheat and is constantly monitoring it regularly on weekly basis along with other commodities and taking corrective measures, as and when required,” it said.

The Centre has taken proactive steps to ward off any further price rise and export regulations were imposed with effect from May 13, 2022.

Further, the allocations under the NFSA as well as PMGKAY have also been revised in favour of rice for



having sufficient wheat stock in the central pool to cater to the requirements of welfare schemes, the statement said.

The Centre has enhanced the MSP (minimum support price) of wheat crop this year to ₹2,125 per quintal against the last year's MSP of ₹2,015 per quintal for RMS (rabi marketing season) 2022-23.

Thus, an increase in MSP of ₹110 per quintal coupled with fairly good climatic conditions, it is expected that the production and procurement of wheat during the next season will remain normal.

“Procurement of Wheat next season would commence from April 2023 and as per initial assessment, there has been a fair increase in the sowing of wheat crop as compared to last year,” the statement said.

The government said it has ensured that sufficient stock of food grains are available in the Central Pool to meet the

requirement of all the welfare schemes and prices remain under control.

“Though procurement of wheat during last season was on lower side due to lesser production coupled with selling by farmers at prices higher than MSP in the open market consequent to geo-political situation, yet enough stock of Wheat will still be available in central pool to cater to the needs of the country till the time next Wheat crop arrives,” it added.

Wheat procurement in rabi marketing season (April-June) of 2022-23 fell to 187.92 lakh tonnes as against 433.44 lakh tonnes in 2021-22 as market price of wheat was higher than the ruling MSP.

India's wheat production declined to 106.84 million tonnes in the 2021-22 crop year (July-June) from 109.6 million tonnes in the previous year due to heat waves in certain states like Punjab and Haryana.

Sensex slumps 879 pts as hawkish Fed floors global markets

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Sensex plummeted 879 points while the Nifty crashed below the 18,415 mark on Thursday, in tandem with a global sell-off after the US Federal Reserve increased the interest rate and signalled more hikes in its fight against inflation.

A depreciating rupee added to the gloom, traders said.

Reversing its two-day winning run, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 878.88 points or 1.40 per cent to finish at 61,799.03.

The broader NSE Nifty plummeted 245.40 points or 1.32 per cent to end at 18,414.90.

Tech Mahindra was the biggest laggard among Sensex components, tumbling 3.98 per cent, followed by Infosys, Titan, HDFC, ITC, HDFC Bank, Tata Steel and TCS.

Only Sun Pharma and NTPC managed to close in the green, rising up to 0.08 per cent.

The US Fed on Wednesday increased interest rates by 50 basis points on expected lines and signalled more hikes ahead to fight inflation even as the world's largest economy stares at a possible recession. The US central bank raised the interest rate to 4.25-



4.50 per cent to the highest level in 15 years.

“The Fed has startled the market by maintaining its hawkish tone, as investors were expecting a softer approach after the release of better-than-expected inflation numbers.

“IT stocks led to pessimism in the domestic market as recession fears grew in the global economies following the Fed's comments. The market now awaits the BoE (Bank of England) and ECB (European Central Bank) decisions, which are likely to follow a half-point hike,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

India growing faster than official data shows, says Credit Suisse

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India is growing faster than what is captured by the country's official data, and it presents a case for an upgrade of equities outlook, a Swiss brokerage said on Thursday.

Upgrading Indian equities to ‘benchmark’ from ‘underweight’, Credit Suisse said there is a scope for a growth of up to 14 per cent on the benchmark indices. The brokerage firm's head of research Neelkanth Mishra said the country will grow at 7 per cent in FY24, as against the consensus estimates which peg the real growth to slip below 6 per cent. Mishra told reporters that the consensus estimates are based on official data alone, whereas the brokerage analysis has taken into account a broad data set to arrive at its expectation.

Mishra said the growth in dense fuels -- which is typically below the real GDP growth



as fuel efficiencies go up -- is over 4 per cent per annum for the last three years. Similarly, revenue growths of the BSE500 companies also point out to a faster growth, he said.

“We are expecting a stronger acceleration in India's GDP growth in 2023 owing to several domestic growth drivers. Revival in government spending, increase in low-income jobs and easing of supply-chain bottlenecks should partly offset the impact of rate

hikes, a slowing global economy and the need to reduce the balance-of-payments (BoP) deficit,” he said.

The risk factors continue to be dependent on imported energy, reliance on foreign capital and a slowing global economy, he said. The present inflation situation and outlook does not necessitate more rate hikes, but the RBI may hike purely to thwart any damage on the balance of payments front, he said.

Petronet LNG to set up floating LNG terminal at Gopalpur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Petronet LNG Ltd, India's largest liquefied natural gas importer, will set up a floating LNG receipt facility at Gopalpur port in Odisha at ₹2,306 crore.

The company has signed an agreement with Gopalpur Ports Ltd for the facility that will have a capacity of about 4 million tonnes per annum, it said in a tweet.

“We are pleased to inform that @PetronetLNGLtd is heading forward in establishing its presence on the east coast of India by signing a term sheet with Gopalpur Ports Limited on 14th December 2022 for establishing and operating LNG terminal at Gopalpur port in Odisha,” it said.

Last month, the company's board had accorded investment approval for setting up the floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) based LNG terminal at Gopalpur.

LNG is natural gas that has been supercooled, changing it from a gas into a liquid that is 1/600th of its original volume. This helps in easy transportation through ships. At the receipt facility, it is turned back into gas before being supplied to factories to produce fertiliser, generate electricity at power plants, or turned into CNG for running automobiles.

Petronet's project in the Ganjam district in Odisha,



which is expected to be operational before the end of 2025, will be financed by a combination of debt and equity.

Gopalpur will be the third LNG terminal on the east coast — Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) operates a 5 million tonnes a year facility at Ennore in Tamil Nadu while Adani Group in partnership with TotalEnergie of France is building a facility at Dhamra port.

Petronet management had previously stated that the FSRU-based receiving and regasification scheme has the provision to be converted in the future to a land-based terminal - with an expected capacity of 5 million tonnes per annum.

The firm is planning to charter hire an FSRU for the Gopalpur terminal with a target to meet the increasing gas demand of the eastern and central parts of the country.

It, currently, operates the 17.5 million tonnes per annum terminal at Dahej in Gujarat and a 5 million tonnes facility at Kochi in Kerala. The Dahej terminal is undergoing expansion to a capacity of 22.5 million tonnes.

Rupee falls 27 paise to end at 82.76 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined by 27 paise to close at 82.76 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday after the US Federal Reserve's interest rate hike and its hawkish stance dented investor sentiments.

A massive sell-off in domestic equities and a strong greenback overseas also weighed on the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened sharply lower at 82.63 against the greenback and witnessed a high of 82.41 and a low of 82.77.

It finally settled at 82.76, down 27 paise over its previous close of 82.49.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.56 per cent to 104.35.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, dropped



0.76 per cent to USD 76.54 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 878.88 points or 1.40 per cent lower at 61,799.03. The broader NSE Nifty fell 245.40 points or 1.32 per cent to 18,414.90.

The US Fed on Wednesday increased interest rates by 50 basis points on expected lines and signalled more hikes ahead to fight inflation. The US central bank raised the interest rate to 4.25-4.50 per cent to the highest level in 15 years.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net buyers in capital markets on Wednesday as they bought shares worth ₹372.16 crore, according to exchange data.

Indegene files draft papers with Sebi, eyes ₹3,200 crore via IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indegene Ltd, a healthcare tech firm focused on the global life sciences industry, has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise as much as ₹3,200 crore through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to ₹950 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 3.63 crore equity shares by existing investors, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP).

The OFS consists of up to 27 lakh equity shares to be sold by individual selling shareholders — Manish Gupta, Rajesh Bhaskaran Nair, and Anita Nair — and up to 3.36 crore equity shares by existing investors, including Carlyle, Brighton Park Capital and the Nadathur Family Office.

According to merchant banking sources, the company is expected to mobilise ₹3,200 crore through the initial share-sale.

The funds raised through the fresh issue would be used to pay debt, funding capital expenditure requirements, payment of deferred consideration for one of its past acquisitions, funding inorganic growth and general corporate purposes.

The company may consider a pre-IPO placement of equity shares to the tune of ₹190 crore and if such placement is undertaken, the



fresh issue size will be reduced.

Indegene had raised \$200 million from The Carlyle Group and Brighton Park Capital in February 2021.

Founded in 1998, Indegene offers solutions that help enable biopharmaceutical, emerging biotech and medical devices companies to develop products, launch them in the market, and drive sales throughout their life cycle.

The company reported revenue from operations of ₹1,665 crore in FY2021-22, growing at a 61 per cent CAGR from FY2019-20 to FY2021-22 and posted a profit after tax of ₹163 crore in FY2021-22, increasing at an 81 per cent CAGR from FY2019-20 to FY2021-22.

Kotak Mahindra Capital, Citigroup Global Markets India, J P Morgan India, Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) are the book running lead managers to the issue.

Airtel deploys captive private network at Mahindra's Chakan unit in partnership with TechM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel has deployed 5G based captive private network at Mahindra's Chakan manufacturing facility in partnership with IT firm Tech Mahindra, the companies said in a joint statement on Thursday.

This deployment makes Mahindra's facility India's first 5G-enabled auto manufacturing unit.

“Our 5G solution for enterprise will transform manufacturing operations in the country. We are thrilled to partner Tech Mahindra and Mahindra Auto to demonstrate this transformation and have made the Chakan manufacturing facility India's first 5G-enabled auto manufacturing unit. This is just the beginning, and I am certain we will showcase many more innovative use cases that will help redefine manufacturing in India,” Airtel Business Director and CEO Ajay Chitkara said.

The company claimed that its ‘5G for Business’ solution has significantly enhanced Chakan's network connectivity that has resulted in improved speeds for software flashing, a critical operation for all vehicular dispatches.

ICAR-IARI develop drought tolerant, high yielding chickpea variety ‘Pusa JG 16’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government's research organisations ICAR and IARI have developed drought tolerant variety of chickpea ‘Pusa JG 16’ that has potential to boost yield of chickpea in central India.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwa Vidyalaya (JNKVV) Jabalpur, Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia Krishi Vishwa Vidyalaya, Gwalior and ICRISAT, Patancheru, Hyderabad have developed drought hardy and higher yielding chickpea variety ‘Pusa JG 16’, according to a statement.



The variety will enhance productivity in the drought prone areas of Central Zone consisting of Madhya Pradesh, Bundelkhand area of Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Southern Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat, where terminal drought is a major problem and sometimes leads to 50-100 per cent loss of yield.

“Pusa JG 16 variety was developed by using genomic assisted breeding techniques that allowed precision transfer of drought tolerant genes from ICC 4958 in the parental variety JG 16. The drought tolerance of this variety was affirmed through national level testing by the All India Coordinated Research Programme of Chickpea,” it added.

This variety is resistance to fusarium wilt and stunt diseases, having short duration maturity (110 days) and a yield potential of 2 tonnes per hectare under drought stress conditions over the recurrent parent JG 16 (1.3 tonnes/hectares).

NBFCs grow at 10-12%, to keep momentum

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Led by retail-focused players, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) are likely to close the current fiscal and the next with a loan growth of 10-12 per cent and see around 50 basis points improvement in profitability, a report said.

According to Icara Ratings, retail-focused NBFCs are expected to grow 12-14 per cent while the housing finance companies may grow at 10-12 per cent. The forecast is based on the asset quality improvement and the overall pick up in credit demand.

However, microfinance and personal loans, which together constitute a quarter of the ₹25-lakh crore shadow



banking sector, will continue to grow at high pace.

Sectoral profitability will improve by 40-50 basis points (bps) this fiscal, supported by stable margins and lower credit cost, and will reach the pre-pandemic levels, the report said.

While growth will be broad-based across various sub-sectors, microfinance and

personal loans will be leading the growth chart. On the other hand, vehicle financing loans (commercial vehicle finance, passenger vehicle finance), which has remained significantly subdued since FY20, are also expected to report higher growth numbers, following an improvement in the operating environment.

Manushree Saggara, a vice-president and sector head - financial sector ratings at the agency, said, disbursements of NBFCs (excluding infra-NBFCs) and HFCs (Housing Finance Companies) have been higher than the pre-pandemic levels for three consecutive quarters, indicating that the industry has finally come out of the long trough.

have also made the year-end announcements to hike prices from next month to partially offset the impact of rising input costs.

In a statement, Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said, “The company has continued to absorb rising costs, however (it) will now pass on a part of the input cost increase through a revision in prices across its model range.”

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor India Ltd on Thursday said it will increase prices of its vehicles across models from next month citing rising input cost.

The company joins the likes of market leader Maruti Suzuki India, Tata Motors, Mercedes-Benz, Audi, Renault, Kia India and MG Motor, who

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited (KPTL) on Thursday said it has bagged new orders worth Rs 1,397 crore in the transmission and distribution (T&D) segment. The orders have been secured in India and overseas markets in the T&D business, KPTL said in a statement.

“KPTL and its interna-

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

tional subsidiaries have secured new orders/notification of awards of Rs 1,397 crores,” it said.

Manish Mohnot, Managing Director & CEO, KPTL, said these orders in addition to the orders declared earlier during the year have significantly enhanced the company's T&D order book and provide visibility for future growth.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BLS International Services Ltd. (BLS)— one of the top three global tech-enabled services provider for governments and citizens—crossed the \$1 billion market cap benchmark this week to become the latest unicorn in India. At the last count in 2021, India had ranked third globally with 42 unicorns. Since 2005, BLS International Services Ltd. (BLS) has been a go-to services provider for governments and embassies around the world in need of outsourcing visas, passport, consular, attestation, and citizen services. They work with India's largest bank, State Bank of India (SBI), as a national business correspondent to provide financial services in India's urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Last-mile banking services help the Indian government to achieve its goal of direct credit of grants in farmers' bank accounts.

BLS Int'l crosses \$1 bn market cap mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BLS International Services Ltd. (BLS)— one of the top three global tech-enabled services provider for governments and citizens—crossed the \$1 billion market cap benchmark this week to become the latest unicorn in India. At the last count in 2021, India had ranked third globally with 42 unicorns. Since 2005, BLS International Services Ltd. (BLS) has been a go-to services provider for governments and embassies around the world in need of outsourcing visas, passport, consular, attestation, and citizen services. They work with India's largest bank, State Bank of India (SBI), as a national business correspondent to provide financial services in India's urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Last-mile banking services help the Indian government to achieve its goal of direct credit of grants in farmers' bank accounts.

THEO STEPS UP IN BROTHER'S ABSENCE

AP ■ DOHA

Theo Hernandez's goal against Morocco on Wednesday set France on their way to a second successive World Cup final. But it could have been very different if his brother had not been injured minutes into the tournament.

Lucas Hernandez tore an anterior cruciate ligament in France's opening 4-1 victory over Australia, ruling the Bayern Munich defender out for several months.

The injury blow came days after Les Bleus lost Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema to a thigh problem, with France coach Didier Deschamps already deprived of first-choice midfielders Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante.

But it could have been a blessing in disguise of sorts for Deschamps, who ditched his experiment with a three-man defence and reverted to a 4-3-3 formation just before the World Cup in Qatar.

While Lucas Hernandez started every game in France's 2018 World Cup-winning campaign, Theo is a more natural fit at left-back than his brother, who is a left-sided central defender by trade. Voted as part of the Serie A team of the season three times in a row, Theo Hernandez helped AC Milan end an 11-year wait for the Serie A title last season.

Playing behind Kylian Mbappe down France's left, he gives the team added potency in attack — contributing two assists



in the group stage, but has at times also been exposed defensively. Theo, 25, who once considered playing for Spain, did not make his international debut until September 2021 but he scored the winning goal in just his second match.

He dropped in and out of the team before earning a run in the side in Qatar because of his brother's misfortune.

Let off the hook after Harry Kane blazed over a penalty he needlessly conceded in the pre-

vious round against England, Hernandez scored in just the fifth minute on Wednesday.

QUICK REACTIONS

Quickest to react to a looping deflection from Mbappe's shot, he expertly finished past Yassine Bounou to put France ahead and silence the pro-Morocco crowd.

"I was all alone. I saw Kylian wanted to shoot, there was a rebound and I pounced on it to score," said Hernandez.

Substitute Randal Kolo Muani doubled France's lead in the 79th minute, giving them a welcome cushion.

Deschamps' team now have the chance to become the first side in 60 years to successfully defend their World Cup title.

"I'm proud to have won the game and it's a very proud moment to have scored the goal," said Hernandez. "It's amazing to play two World Cup finals in a row, we've done a great job." But his task is only going

to get harder, with Lionel Messi and Argentina lying in wait on Sunday.

"It's a huge match. We're going to work hard to win the final," said Hernandez, who revealed his brother, watching from Munich, had called to congratulate him after the game.

"The most important thing now is to recover well in the next four days and be ready for the final. Argentina are not just Messi, they have loads of players, they're a great team."

Regragui salutes Morocco effort after semis defeat

AP ■ DOHA

Morocco coach Walid Regragui had only praise for his team's efforts after their fairytale run at the World Cup ended in a 2-0 semi-final defeat to France on Wednesday.

"We gave our all, that's the most important thing. The boys fought until the last minute," said Regragui, whose team shocked Spain and Portugal in the previous two rounds. Theo Hernandez put France ahead in the fifth minute of the match and Regragui said that early blow had a huge impact on the match.

"If I have any regrets about this game, it would be mainly conceding that goal quickly — it gave the French team even more certainty to stick with their approach," he said.

Morocco had progressed through the tournament in Qatar by winning games despite often ceding possession.

It was a different story at the Al Bayt stadium, where Regragui's team enjoyed 51 percent possession but were unable to break through the French defence.

"We said that if they gave us the ball, we would take it. We did that but we made too many technical mistakes in the first half," said the Morocco coach.

"In the second half we were smarter, we gave away fewer balls and we caused them problems, creating a lot of



opportunities but we weren't decisive in that final 30 metres.

"We wanted to get a goal and give them some doubts. But with their attacking talents, we knew we could be punished at any moment and that's what happened with the second goal."

Regragui had to deal with a number of injury concerns. Centre-back Nayef Aguerd withdrew after the warm-up, with Achraf Dari stepping in.

Fellow defender and captain Romain Saiss, who had been a doubt, started but had to go off in the 21st minute.

"We lost a lot of players who did their best. (Noussair) Mazraoui was ill but he played, Saiss too. I have nothing to say when the players give their

maximum," Regragui said.

"We could have scored, but unfortunately a goal didn't come. May the Moroccans forgive us. We wanted to go to the final but... next time, God willing."

Regragui, born in France, was proud that his team had made their presence felt on the biggest stage.

"We gave the maximum, that's the most important thing," he said. "The most important thing is to have given a good image, to have shown the world that Moroccan football exists and that we have beautiful supporters."

"To reach the very, very highest level, to win a World Cup, we still have to work but we are not very far away."

Jubilation on Paris Champs-Elysees after France makes World Cup final

AP ■ PARIS

There were jubilant scenes on the Champs-Elysees avenue in central Paris on Wednesday as French supporters waved tricolour flags and let off flares to celebrate the win over Morocco which put Les Bleus into the World Cup final.

Some 10,000 police were mobilised across France to ensure the match and its aftermath went off peacefully, given the potential of a tension between French supporters and those backing France's one time North African colony.

But there was little sign of tension as supporters thronged the end of the avenue leading up to the Arc de Triomphe in impassioned but largely good-natured scenes with Moroccan supporters accepting defeat.

"We are in the final. We are in the final," hundreds of French supporters chanted as drivers sounded horns and anti-riot police lurked in vans lining the area.

"What pleasure it will be to play Argentina in the final," said Sylvain Badin, 24, clutching a



French flag. "I came to share a moment of joy," he added.

Dozens of Moroccan fans had also made themselves heard during the match in the area, swathing themselves in the national flag and following the match on their phones.

"We lost but it's only football and we made history by making the semi-finals. We are proud of our country and happy for France," said Kamal Seddiki, a

Moroccan student, 22.

There had been 170 arrests nationwide, including 100 in Paris, when both Morocco and France made the semi-finals at the weekend.

But celebrations appeared free of tension and a van of the French anti-riot police even used one of its sirens to mark the moment when Kolo Muani scored the goal to give France a decisive 2-0 lead.

Anti-riot police did however move to disperse a group of fans who were setting off fireworks around the Arc de Triomphe.

In the southern city of Nice, trash cans were however set on fire after the game where thousands had gathered in the centre of the city.

In Lyon, police also used tear gas when supporters began to let off firecrackers in the central Place Bellecour.

The relationship France has with Morocco is not nearly as traumatic as with neighbouring Algeria, which fought Paris in a bloody seven-year War of Independence that scars both nations to this day.

But as in any post-colonial relationship, Morocco, which won independence in 1956, has its grievances with France, most notably over the question of visas.

Over a million Moroccans are believed to live in France and security forces had been on alert for any clashes like those in Brussels that marked Morocco's shock win over Belgium in the group stages.

Dream of World Cup final is over but Moroccans hail heroes

AP ■ DOHA

They may have fallen just short of reaching the World Cup final, but Moroccans on Wednesday hailed their team's historic run as it ended with a 2-0 defeat to reigning champions France.

"They played a great game but luck wasn't on our side," said supporter Oussama Abdouh in Casablanca.

"Still, we stood up to the title-holders, that was great."

"Beyond the World Cup, this team made us dream until the end and just for that I raise my hat to them."

But for Hakim Salama, the 2-0 defeat to France was too much.

"We missed the opportunity of the century," he said.

Rain lashed the capital Rabat on Wednesday evening and the atmosphere was far from the exhilaration of the historic victories that brought the Lions of the Atlas to within sight of a World Cup final — the first Arab or African team to ever get so far.

This time, the car horns and the drummers were muted. "The national team has been performing miracles since the start of the World Cup," said Rachid Sabbiq, a street trader in the working-class Derb Sultan district of Casablanca before the match.

"It doesn't matter whether they win or lose — they've won the respect and admiration of all Moroccans, and that's priceless," he said.



Sabbiq had swapped his usual fare of sweets to sell Moroccan flags.

All over Morocco, shops have been selling team jerseys and flags.

"Not only have the Lions made us happy but they also allowed us to get business going again" despite rough economic times for many Moroccans, said trader Khalid Alaoui.

Touria Matrougui braved cold and torrential rain to buy jerseys for her four nephews. "They held the Moroccan flag high and for that, we can never thank them enough," she said.

The team's success has also won it support far across the continent.

"Morocco has made an entire continent proud," said Sidibey Zoumana, from the Ivory Coast, who has lived in the country since 2018.

"I've been watching their progress as if it was my own country."

From Gaza to Senegal, the team's success has transformed the image of Morocco.

"They proved that an African team can go places, and really compete," said Said Mouhssine, 48, after the match.

OTHER SPORTS

Williamson steps down as New Zealand Test captain

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Kane Williamson stepped down as New Zealand Test captain on Thursday after more than six years in charge but will remain skipper of the ODI and T20 teams.

Cricket New Zealand said that the 32-year-old will be replaced as Test captain by veteran fast bowler Tim Southee.

"Captaining the Black Caps in Test cricket has been an incredibly special honour," said the 32-year-old Williamson who has led New Zealand since 2016.

"Captaincy comes with an increased workload on and off the field and at this stage of my career, I feel the time is right for this decision."

He said that following talks with New Zealand Cricket, he will remain captain of the white-ball team with two World Cups looming in the next two years.

He will also continue to play all three formats. Williamson signs off as skipper having led New Zealand to 22 wins in 40 Test matches.

Eleven of his 24 Test hundreds came when he was skipper — a record for a New Zealand captain.

Southee, 34, will lead the team on their forthcoming tour of Pakistan with Tests in Karachi, starting on December 26, then in Multan beginning January 3.

Tom Latham has been confirmed as Southee's vice-captain having previously leading the side in Williamson's absence.

Southee has played 346 internationals and has skippered New Zealand's T20 team on 22 occasions. He is New Zealand's 31st Test captain.



"It's been a surreal few days and it's just a massive honour to be appointed as Test captain," said Southee.

"I love Test cricket, it's the ultimate challenge and I'm really excited by the opportunity to lead the team in this format."

Like Michael, Mick Schumacher goes from Ferrari to Mercedes

AP ■ MARANELLO

Mick Schumacher is leaving Ferrari for another of the teams his father raced for.

Mercedes announced on Thursday that Schumacher will be its reserve driver for 2023 behind Lewis Hamilton and George Russell.

He had been racing in Formula One with Ferrari-powered Haas.

"I take this as a new start, and I am just excited and grateful to Toto (Wolff, Mercedes team principal) and everybody involved for putting their trust in me," Schumacher said.

"F1 is such a fascinating world, and you never stop learning, so I look forward to absorbing more knowledge and putting in all my efforts for the benefit of the Mercedes team."

The move ends Schumacher's four-year association with Ferrari, the team for which his father, Michael Schumacher, won five Formula One titles.

Michael also drove for



Mercedes from 2010-12.

"Mick is a talented young driver and we're delighted to have him join the team," Wolff

said.

"We also know that with two years of experience racing in Formula One under his belt, he will be ready to step into the car at short notice to replace either Lewis or George, should that need arise."

The move came two days after Ferrari announced Frédéric Vasseur as its new team principal, replacing Mattia Binotto.

"Scuderia Ferrari and Mick Schumacher have mutually decided not to extend their collaboration," Ferrari said.

The 23-year-old Schumacher joined Ferrari's young driver program in 2019 and competed in Formula Two for two seasons with the Prema Racing team. He won three races and secured the 2020 title.

Mick Schumacher then made his Formula One debut with Haas and started 43 races but scored just 12 points. His top finishes came this year with sixth in the Austrian Grand Prix and eighth in the British GP. He was also Ferrari's reserve driver.



'Oz will pose big challenge for India in hockey WC'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey great Ajit Pal Singh believes Australia will likely pose the biggest threat to India's quest for World Cup glory at home, saying the hosts will have to play to their full potential to overcome the challenge of the Kookaburras.

Australia had thumped India 7-0 in the gold-medal match at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games and Singh said the hosts can counter the Kookaburras' challenge by "playing together as a unit".

India ran close against Australia in the recent five-match series though they lost the rubber 1-4 (4-5, 4-7, 4-3, 1-5, 4-5). India recorded their first win (4-3) in six years against the Kookaburras in the third match

in Adelaide on November 30.

The World Cup will be played in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela from January 13 to 29 with 16 teams vying for the trophy. India are clubbed in Pool D with Wales, Spain, England.

"The Indian men's team should consider every single game as extremely important. Yes, Australia is a difficult team, but they must play to their full potential. Winning or losing is a part of the game, but you do your best at all times," said Ajit Pal, the captain of the gold-winning team in the 1975 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur.

"And India can do it if they play well and together as a unit. And I wish they can do it because many years have passed since we have touched the World Cup trophy."

KULDEEP'S DREAM COMEBACK PUTS B'DESH ON MAT



PTI ■ CHATTOGRAM

Kuldeep Yadav sizzled with an all-round performance as he put India in the driver's seat on day two of the opening Test against Bangladesh here on Thursday.

Playing his first Test after more than 22 months, Kuldeep continued his 'birthday' party a day after turning 28, in his sensational run with the bat and ball.

Batting at number nine, the left-hander first came up with a career-best 40 from 114 balls (5x4) in a 92-run eighth wicket partnership with veteran Ravichandran Ashwin (58; 113b) to push India to 404 in their first inning from an overnight score of 278/6.

Coming into bowl in the 25th over, the left-arm wrist spinner struck off his second ball as he flummoxed the Bangladesh batters with his wrong ones to end the day with figures of 10-3-33-4, a performance that is certain to regain his confidence.

At stumps on day two, Bangladesh were 133 for eight, trailing India by 271 runs. With two wickets in hand, the hosts still need 72 runs to avoid a follow-on.

First, it was Indian quick Mohammed Siraj who was on a song, as he rattled the Bangladesh top-order, dismissing the left-handed opening duo of Najmul Hossain Shanto (1), Zakir Hasan (20) and Litton Das en route to 9-1-14-3.

Siraj struck in the very first ball when he induced an edge off Shanto with an away going delivery.

Leading the pace department in absence of Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah,

Umesh Yadav then reduced Bangladesh to 5 for 2 inside the fourth over after inducing an inside edge off Yasir Ali.

Litton Das (24) showed glimpses of his form with some fluent drives but Siraj had the last say.

Both teams were also involved in a bit of banter especially after Das gave a 'I can't hear you' gesture after an elegant drive off Siraj.

The Indian pacer cleaned him up of the next delivery as he

along with Kohli gave him a fiery send-off.

On a roll, Siraj also ended the dogged resistance of Hasan to reduce Bangladesh to 56/4.

The stage was just apt for Kuldeep to make inroads and the Indian did just that, dismissing Shakib Al Hasan when the Bangladeshi senior all-rounder played against the spin.

He then surprised newcomer Nurul Hasan with a wrong one and in the next ball nearly dismissed him LBW but

the 'umpire's call' rule gave a breather to the Bangladeshi wicketkeeper.

It was not a rank-turner but he spun the ball square, extracted awkward bounce and the Bangladeshi batters looked all at sea negotiating Kuldeep at the fag end of the day.

"I was a bit nervous, I was very lucky to get the first wicket in the first over. Got the momentum back. After a couple of overs, I started feeling well, mixed my pace and variations,

tried both the angles - over the wicket and round the wicket," Kuldeep said.

"I was getting proper turn, I was actually loving it. After I got injured, I started working on my rhythm, trying to be a bit quicker - that's helping me a lot. I am not compromising with the spin.

"I didn't face any discomfort while batting. I thought it'll be good for batting. When you're a wrist-spinner bowling with the Kookaburra ball, you'll defi-

nately get turn and bounce on such wickets," he added.

The opening session was all about Ashwin and Kuldeep who seized the opportunity with both hands coming up with an all-round show in absence of Ravindra Jadeja.

Kuldeep, who has a century and six fifties averaging 22-plus in first class cricket, got off the mark after 18 balls as he looked solid with his defence.

His slog sweep and reverse sweep shots also caught the attention in his knock off 114 balls with five fours.

Ashwin, who has five Test centuries including four against the West Indies, showed a lot of composure and maturity en route to his 13th Test half-century. Ashwin smashed two sixes and two fours in his 113-ball knock.

Ashwin made his intent clear stepping down to Mehidy for a six. Luck also favoured Ashwin when he survived an 'umpire's call' after left-arm spinner Taijul Islam had him trapped in front of the leg stump when he was on 34.

The duo hardly took a foot wrong pushing India past the 400-mark after the visitors resumed the day at 278 for 6 and lost overnight batter Shreyas Iyer (86) with the addition of just four runs to his total.

Having batted India out of a tricky spot on the opening day, Iyer once again failed to get to a well-deserved hundred.

That pace spearhead Ebadot Hossain was taken out of the attack after his impressive spell of 4-1-7-1 in the morning also helped the Indian cause.

Kuldeep also oozed confidence as Ashwin was happy to take singles and give him the strike.

My approach was to bowl consistently at one spot: Siraj

PTI ■ CHATTOGRAM

India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj on Thursday said his approach to bowl consistently at one spot yielded rich dividends for him in the opening Test against Bangladesh here.

The Indian bowling unit, led by left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav (4/33) and Siraj (3/14), reduced Bangladesh to 133 for 8 in their first innings at stumps on the second day on Thursday. India had posted 404 in their first innings.

Siraj attributed his success to bowling consistent line and length.

Ed ball is my favourite. I'm more consistent in red ball because it's all about concentrating on line and length. The credit goes to all the bowlers," he said in the press conference after second day's play.

"My approach was to bowl



consistently at one place because it is such a wicket that if you try more there are chances to leak runs. My only plan was to hit one spot and got successful."

The 28-year-old said a fast bowler needs to bowl stump-to-stump to get success in five-day cricket.

"I think the more you bowl

stump line it is better, because sometimes it is getting lower from there as well as turning. For a fast bowler, it is better to bowl stump line because then you can have LBW chances," he said.

Siraj is known for bowling with a wobble seam often and the speedster said he went for the option after discovering

Bhambri enters Tata Open Maharashtra qualifying event

PTI ■ PUNE

Indian tennis player Yuki Bhambri will compete in the qualifying event of the Tata Open Maharashtra, country's only ATP 250 event, by using his Protected Ranking of 127, the organisers said on Thursday.

The 30-year-old Yuki, who is now placed outside top-500 in the ATP singles chart, still has to chance to make the singles main draw in case there are withdrawals. The qualifying event, beginning on December 31 at the Balewadi stadium, has two wild cards to offer and it being an Indian event, the organisers are expected to award them to the home players. The organisers are also expected to award wild card entries to other top singles players from the country in the singles main draw.

Sasikumar Mukund is the top-ranked Indian at number 342, followed by Prajnesh Gunneswaran (349), Ramkumar Ramanathan (437), Sumit Nagal (506) and Bhambri. It remains to be seen who gets the wild card out of these players. The last edition's semi-finalist Elias Ymer will also battle it out in the qualifiers along with American Christopher Eubanks and the former World No. 39 Peter Gojowczyk.

Kohli knows when to be aggressive and when to control the game: Dravid



PTI ■ CHATTOGRAM

Virat Kohli, with his incredible understanding of the game, can easily decipher when to switch gears and when to control the proceedings, said head coach Rahul Dravid, who was also mighty impressed with the way the Indian premier batter maintains his intensity during training.

Kohli found form during the Asia Cup in the UAE earlier this year after enduring an extended lean patch. He continued his magnificent run in the T20 World Cup in Australia. Last week, the former India captain brought up his 44th ODI hundred.

"He (Virat) knows when to be aggressive and

when to control the game, it's incredible to watch and a good sign for us if he can build up," Dravid said in a video released by the BCCI on its website.

"Virat has an incredible template in 50-over cricket. His record speaks for itself. It's phenomenal the number of games he's played."

Dravid added that Kohli's training intensity never wanes whether he is in form or not, and that's something the youngsters in the team can learn.

"He feels he's back and is training as hard as I have ever seen him. For me, that has been a stand out, watching him train this past year, that never changes irrespective of whether he is doing well or not and that is a great lesson for a lot of the young players in the group," added Dravid.

The former Indian batter felt teams have become more aggressive and are pushing for results as the race for the World Test Championship final spots heats up.

"Teams have already been more aggressive over the last bit; we have seen a lot more results. Teams are playing for results a lot more now, especially with the World Test Championship points at stake."

Dravid believes teams must be able to adapt to every situation to succeed in Test cricket.

"I still think adaptability is going to be very important in Test cricket, the ability to play aggressively when you need to... Or you can play aggressively with the kind of squad you have or the position you find yourself in the game... And then the opportunity to play a difficult period or day of Test cricket either with the bat or ball and knuckle down and play some hard cricket."

"The teams that have that adaptability or the ability to switch even in between a Test match are the ones that are going to be very successful," he added.



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian women's team is badly missing a bowling coach, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said after her team lost the third T20I against Australia to concede a 1-2 lead in the five-match series. The captain, though, is pleased with the way bowlers are stepping up and taking charge of the situation.

India don't have a full-time bowling coach as Ramesh Powar was moved to National Cricket Academy (NCA) and Hrishikesh Kanitkar was named the batting coach of the side two months before the T20 World Cup in South Africa.

Playing Australia is part of team's preparation for the T20 showpiece. India won the sec-

ond T20 via Super Over but lost the third game by 21 runs on Wednesday. "I know we are definitely missing a bowling coach but our bowlers are taking charge," Harmanpreet said in the post-match press conference.

"They are participants in the meetings. They have full responsibility and today (it was) all their plans and they were leading the way, I was just supporting them in the middle."

India conceded more than 170 runs in each of the last three T20s. Medium pacer Pooja Vasthakar's injury ahead of the Australia series has only added to the team's woes. ("We are missing) Pooja for sure. On these tracks you need a medium pacer," Harmanpreet said.

"Definitely when you bowl

back-to-back spin bowling, it allows opposition batters to settle easily. We are definitely missing Pooja because she has the experience of death-overs bowling. We tried Meghna in the first two games but it didn't click."

In Pooja's absence, Renuka Singh, who has played 30 international since making her debut just over a year ago, is leading the pace attack.

"Renuka has the experience because she has done well in the past six-seven months and has got good results. Whenever we set plans for pace bowlers she takes the lead and our video analysts give us a lot of information," Harmanpreet said.

"Talking about spin bowlers, almost all spinners have played a lot of T20 cricket like Deepti,

Radha, Rajeshwari. Devika (Vaidya) is new to the team but she also has the experience of international cricket and has done a lot of homework with respect to international cricket."

India also handed a debut to left-arm pacer Anjali Sarvani in the series. She snapped up two wickets in the third T20 after going wicket-less in the first T20 games. In fact, Australia could manage just 26 for 2 in the first four overs with Sarvani and Renuka bowling in tandem.

"The way we bowled in the powerplay, especially Renuka and Anjali (was commendable). They were swinging the ball and bowled according to the plan. They were not giving easy runs to the batters," the India skipper said.

BENGAL CLOSE IN ON OUTRIGHT WIN OVER UP

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Opener Koushik Ghosh hit an unbeaten 69, while Anustup Majumdar also remained not out on 44 as Bengal closed in on an outright win over Uttar Pradesh in a Group A Ranji Trophy match here on Thursday. Bengal were 156 for 2 in their second innings at stumps on the third day, still needing 101 runs on the final day on Friday.

Ghosh hit 10 boundaries during his 121-ball unbeaten knock, while Majumdar struck six fours.

Besides the duo, Sudip Kumar Gharami made 22. Right-arm pacer Shivam Mavi (2/46) picked up both the wickets.

Earlier, resuming Uttar Pradesh's second innings at 122 for 4, Rinku Singh added 45 runs to his overnight score before being dismissed for 89, while Akashdeep Nath made 53.

Opener Madhav Kaushik (19) was the only other Uttar Pradesh batter to register a double-digit score.

UP added 105 runs for the loss of six wickets in their overnight score to be bowled out for 222 in 65.3 overs.

ARJUN BAGS TWO

Ranchi: Ishan Kishan continued his impetuous run as he smashed a second century in as many matches to script Jharkhand's fight back against Kerala in their Group C match.

Less than a week after he blazed away

to the fastest ODI double century against Bangladesh, Kishan was a picture of grit and determination in a 195-ball 132 (9x4) as he led Jharkhand's recovery from being 114/4 to 340 all out.

Giving him support was Saurabh Tiwary who missed out on a well-deserved century by just three runs after being cleaned up by Jalaj Saxena.

The duo put on 202 runs for the fifth wicket to revive Jharkhand after Basil Thampi (3/55) and Vaisakh Chandran (2/81) rocked the top-order to have them reeling at 56/3.

For Kerala, Jalaj Saxena grabbed a splendid 5/75. At close, Kerala were 60/1 with an overall lead of 195 runs as the match hung in balance at the JSCA International Stadium here.

In other game, a day after scoring a century in his maiden first-class match to emulate his legendary father, left-arm seamer Arjun Tendulkar grabbed 2/77 on day three of Goa's match against Rajasthan.

Arjun dismissed a well-set Mahipal Lomror (63) and Salman Khan (40) in his four overs. Mohit Redkar returned with 3/46 as Rajasthan ended the day at 245/6, trailing Goa by 302 runs.

Goa earlier declared their first innings at 547 for 9.

MAHA HOLD EDGE OVER DELHI

Pune: Maharashtra hold the edge over Delhi with their bowlers restricting the Yash Dhull-



led side to 233 for 5 on the third day of a Group B match.

With a lead of just 100 runs and five batters in the dugout, Delhi could find themselves in trouble if they lose the remaining wickets early on day four.

Maharashtra bowlers would look to utilise the early-morning freshness of the wicket on the last day to keep Delhi's lead to below 200 runs and then make a strong push for victory.

Earlier on day three, Maharashtra could add just 19 runs to their overnight score before losing the three remaining wickets to be bundled out for 324.

However, 33-year-old Ashay Palkar, who was on 94 at stumps on day two, completed his maiden first-class century before being dismissed on 100, caught by Lalit Yadav off Simarjeet Singh.

Pace bowler Simarjeet emerged as the most successful bowler for Delhi, claiming four wickets for 69 runs, while Mayank Yadav and Vikas Mishra took two wickets apiece.

MP THRASH J&K

Jammu: Madhya Pradesh bowlers, led by Avesh Khan, produced yet another impressive performance to notch up a massive innings and 17-run win over Jammu and Kashmir with a day to spare in their Group D match.

Khan took three wickets for 53 runs to help MP bowl out J&K for 193 in 60.5 overs

in their second innings on the third day after following on.

J&K were all out for just 98 in their first essay on Wednesday in reply to MP's 308.

Khan, who has played five ODIs and 15 T20Is for India, was the wrecker-in-chief, helping MP bundle out J&K for 98 in their first innings with figures of 5/33.

MP got seven points from the win. Outright-winning team gets six points while a victory an innings or 10-wicket fetches seven points.

BIHAR THRASH AP

Patna: Sachin Kumar impressed with an all-round show, while Malay Raj (5/35) grabbed a five-for as Bihar thrashed Arunachal Pradesh by an innings and 221 runs in their Ranji Trophy Plate Group match.

Following up his 3/29, the left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Sachin smashed three sixes and 17 fours en route to a 198-ball 156 as Bihar posted a huge 517 to take a first innings lead of 305.

Sakibul Gani fell early without any addition to his overnight score of 66. But thereafter, it was Sachin who took control of the proceedings lower down the order and was the last wicket to fall to take Bihar to 517.

In their second essay, only three Arunachal batters managed double-digit scores as medium pacer Malay Raj reigned supreme with 5/35 to skittle them out for 84 in just 29.4 overs. Bihar secured seven points, inclusive of one bonus point.