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TIME TO STAND UP
TO BULLIES

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US TO SELL TAIWAN
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'INDIAN ECO FLAUNTS RESILIENT
PICTURE AMID GLOBAL SHOCKS'

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY DECEMBER 30, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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AUSTRALIA BEAT
SOUTH AFRICA IN
2ND TEST MATCH
12 SPORT

Late City Vol.32 Issue 361

*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

CAPSULE

CBSE CLASS X, XII EXAMS
TO BEGIN ON FEB 15**New Delhi:** The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Thursday announced class 10 and 12 board examinations will begin from February 15.MUTILATED BODY OF HINDU
WOMAN FOUND IN SINDH**Karachi:** A 44-year-old Hindu woman was murdered and her mutilated body was found in a mustard field in Pakistan's Sindh's province, triggering fear and panic among the country's Hindu community, who held protests to voice their outrage over the brutal incident.MAN OBJECTS TO SISTER'S
HARASSMENT, KILLED**Harda (MP):** A 22-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by five members of a family at Harda in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday after he objected to one of them harassing his sister, a police official said.EXTENDED RANGE OF
BRAHMOS TEST-FIRED**New Delhi:** The Indian Air Force on Thursday successfully test-fired the extended range version of BrahMos air launched missile against a ship target from a SU-30MKI aircraft, the Government said. The missile achieved the desired mission objectives in the Bay of Bengal region, it said.125 SPOTS PRONE TO
DRINK-DRIVING IN DELHI**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police has identified 125 spots prone to drink-driving as part of efforts to keep a vigil on revellers on New Year's eve on Saturday and deploy nearly 1,900 traffic personnel to identify violators, an official said. Alcometers will be used to issue challans to violators, the police said.

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RT-PCR -ve report must
for arrivals from ChinaSame rule applies
to fliers from HK,
Singapore, Japan,
S Korea, Thailand
from January 1PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Passengers arriving in India from China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand will have to produce a negative Covid test report from January 1, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday.

The passengers must undertake the Covid test within 72 hours of flying to India and upload the negative report from the RT-PCR test on the Air Suvidha portal before their departure.

Already many countries, including the USA, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have announced testing requirements for passengers from China.

So far, Covid situation is under complete control in India and cases have remained within the range of 200-300 per day. According to the Union Health Ministry data on Thursday, India recorded 268 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases increased



to 3,552.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 0.11 per cent while the weekly positivity was pegged at 0.17 per cent, the Ministry said.

The Government has taken several precautionary measures to avert a possible explosion of Covid-19 in the wake of a surge in the number of cases in several Asian countries including China.

Covid protocol has been especially enforced on airports where random testing of international passengers on their arrival in India is being carried out irrespective of their port of departure.

Last week, the Government made random coronavirus test-

ing mandatory for two per cent of passengers arriving on each international flight.

Meanwhile, Mandaviya has asked pharma companies to ensure adequate stocks and availability of all drugs, including those for Covid management, in the supply chain up to the retail level amid rise in coronavirus cases in some countries.

The Minister reviewed the status, adequacy of Covid-19 management drugs and production capacities with representatives of pharma companies through a virtual conference here so that India is equipped to effectively handle any situation.

This review meeting was

taken in view of the spike in Covid-19 cases in some countries including China, an official statement said.

Through a presentation, the Minister was briefed regarding the evolving global scenario. Mandaviya appreciated the pharma companies for their invaluable contribution during the pandemic in the country, the statement said.

"India's pharmaceutical industry is robust, resilient and responsive. It is due to their strength that we could not only meet our down demand during the pandemic, but also be in a position to supply medicines to 150 countries," he said. This was achieved without any fall in quality and no hike in the price of the medicines, he stressed.

The pharma companies were asked to keep a close watch on the global supply chain scenario, the statement said. They were also asked to closely monitor production and availability of APIs as well as formulations of essential medicines for Covid management, it said.

They were asked to ensure adequate stocks and availability of all drugs including Covid drugs in the supply chain up to the retail level.

The pharma companies expressed confidence that they will be able to manage the supply chain of Covid drugs, the statement said.

India begins probes into
Uzbek cough syrup deaths18 kids died after
taking cough syrup
made by Marion
Biotech in NoidaPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation has initiated a probe into reports of death of 18 children in Uzbekistan from the alleged consumption of a cough syrup manufactured by a Noida-based company.

The Indian Embassy has contacted its counterparts in Uzbekistan and sought details of their probe into the deaths. "We are also providing consular assistance to some linked to Indian firm there," the MEA said on "cough syrup-death" row. In the centre of the row is Marion Biotech whose Dok-1 Max syrup is reportedly linked to the death. The company has temporarily stopped the production of the syrup, the company's legal representative said on Thursday.

The Uzbekistan Health Ministry's has alleged that that the children died after consuming Dok-1 Max. While Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said further action would be taken based on the inspection of the pharma company, an Uttar Pradesh Government official said that Marion Biotech does not sell Dok-1



Max in India and its only export has been to Uzbekistan.

As part of the health Ministry's probe, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation members have taken the samples of the cough syrup from the manufacturing premises in Noida and sent to the Regional Drugs Testing Laboratory (RDTL) in Chandigarh for testing, Mandaviya said.

The Health Minister said the CDSCO is in touch with the national drug regulator of Uzbekistan.

"Immediately on receipt of information, joint inspection of the NOIDA facility of the manufacturer, Marion Biotech, was carried out by UP Drug Control and CDSCO team and further action as appropriate would be initiated based on the inspection report," Mandaviya said in a series of tweets.

Marion Biotech is a licensed manufacturer and holds the licence for manufacturing Dok-1 Max syrup and tablet for export purpose granted by the Drugs Controller,

Uttar Pradesh, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

The Governments of both countries are looking into the matter, said Hasan Harris, legal representative of the Noida-based Marion Biotech.

"There is no problem from our end and no issue in testing. We have been there for the past 10 years. Once the Government report will come, we will look into it. For now the manufacturing has stopped," Harris told PTI.

Before Uzbekistan's claims, there were reports linking the deaths of 70 children in Gambia to cough syrups manufactured by Haryana-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals earlier this year.

The Drugs Controller General of India claimed the WHO drew a premature link.

Sources said the DCGI has sought more information from the Uzbek regulator regarding the latest allegation. According to the Uzbek Ministry, the chemical ethylene glycol was found in a batch of Dok-1 Max syrup during laboratory tests.

Threat to Dalai: Mystery
Chinese woman detained

PNS ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

Bihar Police on Thursday detained in Bodhi Gaya a Chinese woman who is allegedly overstaying in India and poses a reported threat to Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama.

Additional Director General of Police (Headquarters) JS Gangwar said the police have traced the woman (Chinese) and she has been detained.

"She is being questioned by various agencies. She is being interrogated from all angles, including visa violation norms. Her questioning is on and we would be able to share details on Friday only," the ADGP said.

The police had also issued a sketch of the woman, identified as Song Xiaolan, besides sharing her passport and visa details with the media.

Presently, the Dalai Lama is staying in Bodhi Gaya. He



Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama speaks during a sermon at Kalachakra Ground in Bodhi Gaya on Thursday

PTI

addressed a gathering at the Mahabodhi Temple Complex on Thursday morning.

With the Chinese woman posing threat to the Tibetan spiritual leader, security was upped around the Mahabodhi Temple Complex and screening of devotees was intensified. The number of CCTV cameras around the area has also been

increased, officials said.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi refused to comment on the development, saying, "It looks like a security issue, I don't have any update on it. I certainly don't think this is the right forum to talk about security-related aspects."

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No flaws in security
cover, Rahul flouted
protocol, says CRPF

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Congress alleged security breach during the Bharat Jodo Yatra in the national Capital, the CRPF on Thursday said full security arrangements have been made for former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and accused him of repeatedly violating security protocol.

In a note to the Union Home Ministry, the CRPF said Rahul himself "violated" security protocol 113 times since 2020. The paramilitary also blamed Rahul for breaching security guidelines during the Delhi leg of the yatra.

On Wednesday, the Congress wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, alleging security breaches during the yatra in the city and demanded immediate steps to ensure the security of Rahul

and others taking part in the march. "The security arrangements have been fully made for Rahul as per the guidelines," the CRPF said.

The security arrangements made for the protectee works fine when the protectee himself adheres to the laid down security guidelines. On several occasions, violations of laid-down guidelines on the part of Rahul have been observed and this fact has been communicated to him from time to time, officials said.

Since 2020, there have been 113 "violations" observed and duly communicated. During the Delhi leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul "violated" security guidelines and the CRPF, which provides his inner cordon of the Z-plus category security, will take up the matter separately, the note said.

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Censor orders changes in
Pathaan over 'sensibility'

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Close on the heels of a controversy over the saffron costumes worn in a dance sequence of the film by Deepika Padukone, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has advised the makers "Pathaan", starring Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika, to make certain changes in the film, including in its songs, and submit a revised version.

The film made by Siddharth Anand is slated for release in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu in January 2023.

CBFC chairperson Prasoon Joshi said in a statement, "Pathaan went through the due and through examining process as per the CBFC guidelines. The committee has guided the makers to implement the advised changes in the film including the songs and submit the revised version prior to theatrical release".



"CBFC is always committed to find the right balance between creative expression and sensibility of the audience and believe that we can always find solutions through meaningful dialogue between all stakeholders," Joshi said.

"Whilst the process is getting duly followed and implemented I must reiterate that our culture and faith is glorious, intricate and nuanced. And we have to be careful that it does not get defined by trivia

which takes the focus away from the real and the true. And like I have said earlier as well, that the trust between creators and audience is most important to protect and the creators should keep working towards it," Joshi said.

Joshi, who is considered close to the ruling establishment at the Centre, did not share the details of the changes suggested to the makers of film "Pathaan".

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UP challenges
HC verdict on
local body polls
sans OBC quota

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Thursday moved the Supreme Court challenging the Allahabad High Court order quashing its draft notification on the urban local body elections and directing the State to hold the polls without reservation for the Other Backward Classes.

The UP Government, in its appeal against the December 27 order, has said the HC cannot quash December 5 draft notification which provided for quota of seats in the urban body polls for the OBCs apart from those for the SC, ST and women. The appeal, filed through advocate on record Ruchira Goel, said the OBCs are a constitutionally protected section and the HC erred in quashing the draft notification.

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Now cast your vote from thousands of miles away

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The day is not far when migrant voters may not be required to travel to their home States to cast their vote during elections.

The Election Commission (EC) has developed a prototype of the Remote Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) for domestic migrant voters and has invited political parties for a demonstration on January 16.

The remote EVM can handle multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth. According to the EC, the multi-constituency remote EVM can handle up to 72 constituencies from a single remote polling booth.

The EC has invited representatives of eight recognised national and 57 State political parties for the demonstration and sought their written submissions by January 31 on various related issues, including changes required in legislation, changes in administrative

procedures and voting method or RVM technology, if any other, for the domestic migrants.

"Based on the feedback received from various stakeholders and demonstration of the prototype, the Commission will appropriately carry forward the process of implementing the remote voting method," it said.

According to officials, the idea was to implement voter portability as a pilot project in the upcoming Assembly elections in nine States in 2023. This means that if the pilot is successful then in the 2024 general elections voter portability can be fully implemented.

The EC concept note said that the migrant voter need not travel back to his/her home State/ district/ constituency to exercise his/her franchise of voting. According to EC, a remote voter has to pre-register for a remote voting facility by applying online/offline within a pre-notified time before



elections with his home constituency returning officer. Voter details will be verified at the home constituency and the voter's request for remote voting will be approved after successful verification by marking him/her as remote voter to participate as remote voter in a remote location (a location other than the voter's home constituency). Special multi-constituency remote voting polling stations will be set up

in the places of their current residence.

Terming counting of votes cast at remote booths and their transmission to the returning officer in other States as a "technological challenge", EC officials said RVMs will be developed as "a robust, fail proof and efficient stand-alone system" based on existing electronic voting machines and will not be connected to internet.

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Cong flays remote voting,
asks EC to first restore
trust in electoral system

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday opposed the Election Commission's proposal for a remote voting system and asked it to first work to restore trust in the electoral system.

"Trust in the electoral system is paramount for democracy to function. The German Federal Constitutional Court struck down EVMs in Germany in 2009 because the opacity of the machine cannot give a voter the confidence that his or her vote is being correctly recorded. In spite of their widespread use, EVMs have aroused much controversy in India.

Unfortunately, fears of their misuse have not been systematically addressed.

"Voters and parties must have confidence in the electoral system. However, this trust has been repeatedly violated in recent years on account of pressures being put on the Election Commission of India by the Modi Government," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said in a statement.

While criticising the new proposal, the Congress raised questions marks over the role of elections watchdog in scheduling the Gujarat poll.

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Puppies killed,
found hanging
in Dwarka

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a ghastly incident, two three-month-old stray puppies living on a secluded land in Dwarka area here were allegedly killed with the bodies found hanging from a noose on a tree, officials said Thursday.

The Delhi Police has registered an FIR in the matter on a complaint from a community dog feeder Vanessa Alphonso who had found their bodies on Wednesday morning, they said.

"The puppies were vulnerable as their mother was taken away by MCD officials for sterilisation surgery on Tuesday morning. Six puppies were living on a vacant land around the local elementary school. On Tuesday evening we could not spot two of them. We thought they could be playing around," said Alphonso.

Detailed report on P3

Hostility towards others not Hindu way: Tharoor

‘Vivekananda’s Hinduism all-inclusive’

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday said hostility towards others was not the Hindu way and pointed out that his favourite Hindu icon Swami Vivekananda’s Hinduism was all-inclusive.

The author-turned-politician, who has written two books on Hinduism, said that many right-wing politicians have been trying to appropriate Swami Vivekananda by selectively quoting him while ignoring “the totality of his message”.

“We are seeing some in the BJP selectively quoting Swami



Vivekananda to show they are following his path...(but) anyone who has read the totality of his message will understand that he is talking of an all-inclusive and all-embracing faith,” Tharoor told PTI.

He added Vivekananda’s vision was “not of a Hinduism which is intolerant”, while speaking of the “attempts” by the right wing to “appropriate” the late 19th-century religious reformer as an icon for their political movement.

The 160th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the

Ramakrishna Mission, was celebrated earlier this year.

Tharoor said he was shocked to see people “weaponising their faith” in the name of Hinduism in a manner that is “hostile and aggressive towards others”.

He stressed that “is simply not the Hindu way”. The Lok Sabha MP and best-selling author, who sported a plaster cast on an injured left foot, was speaking on the sidelines of an event organised as part of the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival.

“That is not what most of us Hindus were taught as we grew up in this country,” Tharoor added.

He went on to assert that the majority of Hindus did not see their faith as one which could be “brandished as a weapon against people of other faith”.

Delhi to work with Israeli experts to remove landfills

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Monday said that an action plan will be prepared with the help of Israeli solid waste management experts to improve the sewage system and eliminate the mountains of garbage from the national capital.

Delhi Jal Board (DJB) Vice Chairman Saurabh Bhardwaj interacted with Israeli solid waste management experts through video conference to develop world class sewerage and solid waste management system in the national capital.

According to the statement released by the DJB, experts from Israel informed Bhardwaj that 90 to 95 percent of sewage water is reused in Israel. The sewage treatment plants in Israel employ modern

technology for water treatment for this purpose.

“Sludge derived from sewage in the process is then converted into manure and used in the agricultural sector in Israel. Bhardwaj also showed interest in the sewage system of Israel and requested them to provide more information and details regarding this when the next conference takes place,” it said.

To eradicate the three landfill sites in the city, it said that the Israeli experts informed that waste is not dumped directly at landfill sites in Israel. In fact, waste is first collected from households and industries which are followed by proper segregation.

“In Israel, proper segregation plants have been built for the segregation of waste.”

‘Understanding’ to replace rote learning in Delhi schools: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Advocating the assessment systems, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday said the Delhi Government has taken measure to change the traditional assessment systems in schools through the Delhi Board of School Education, where students are assessed for understanding instead of rote learning ability.

“The most pressing reform in the Indian education system today is the change in the traditional examination and assessment systems. Until the current examination system is changed, the entire education system will remain a slave of the 3-hour annual examination,” he said.

While addressing the school leaders and teachers from all over the country, Sisodia said that today the entire education system has become a slave of examinations. In such a situation, if we have to reform our education system, then we must change the existing assessment system first. The education system has collapsed under the burden of examinations and we need to revive it through innovative assessment practices.

“The examination system has been a matter of discussion by various commissions for ages in India. The Kothari Commission in 1964 stated that examinations at the primary stage should help students improve their achievement in basic skills and develop the right habits and attitudes,” he stated.

“On evaluation, the



National Policy on Education 1986 stated that assessment of children’s performance is an integral part of any process of teaching and learning. Therefore, examinations should be conducted as a part of a better educational strategy to bring qualitative improvement in education,” Deputy CM said.

“The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasised that the primary objective of assessment would indeed be for learning which will help the teacher, student and the entire school education system to continuously modify the teaching-learning methods for the all-round development of students,” he said, informing the importance of the National Education Policy 2020.

He said that despite several discussions and recommendations of the commissions, these were never implemented on the ground. This is the reason why children, parents and all the stakeholders in the education system are scared of examinations.

Sisodia said that through DBSE we made five major changes in the traditional teaching and evaluation system including regular assessment of students over the year instead of a 3-hour annual examination, adoption of new assessment methods.

into an impossible 25-30 seconds being taken to cast each vote. You need a minimum of 60 seconds to cast a vote. Now imagine if these suspicious patterns can be extended via a multi-constituency voting machine to other locations. This would seriously undermine trust in the system,” Ramesh mentioned in his statement.

He recalled how the Congress made constructive suggestions in the past to increase confidence in the voting process by expanding the number of booths in which Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips are counted. “However this has also not been accepted.

“We call on the Election Commission to restore trust in the electoral system with transparency and via honest engagement with the Opposition’s concerns,” Ramesh said.

Man held for rape, forced conversion charge in Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 30-year-old Muslim man was arrested near Noida on Thursday in connection with the alleged rape and attempted religious conversion bid on a woman on pretext of marriage, police said.

His brother (24) and his father (52) have also been arrested for being party to criminal conspiracy, the police said.

Accused Intezar Khan and the woman had met in a gym where she worked as a manager but the man had hid his religious identity from her, a senior police official said.

The woman had alleged rape, assault and forced attempt of religious conversion in her complaint at the Biskrah police station, the official said. “The complainant informed the police that she came across Intezar at a gym in the Shahberi area. Intezar had initially hid his identity from her and identified himself as ‘Sonu’.”

Man dies in Kerala as mock drill turns tragic

PTI ■ PATHANAMTHITTA

A mock drill organised at a river in this central Kerala district to assess the disaster management agencies’ preparedness to deal with floods turned tragic on Wednesday after a volunteer died in an accident while participating in it, police said.

The police said Binu Soman, 34, was seen drowning while participating in the mock drill at Manimala river near Keezhvaipur. He was rescued and admitted to a private medical college hospital in Thiruvalla by the officials of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) but he died in the while undergoing treatment, they said.

Mock drills were held at various places in Pathanamthitta district on Thursday as part of assessing the disaster management team’s preparedness to deal with floods and landslides, officials said.

Censor orders...

From Page 1

This is the second major hurdle that the film ‘Pathaan’ has faced ahead of its much-awaited release when the film’s track ‘Besharam Rang’ went online on December 12.

The song track created quite a buzz on social media circles. While many people liked the peppiness in the track starring SRK and Deepika, others found the song objectionable over the use of saffron and green costumes, so much so that some activists staged a protest and burnt the effigies of Deepika and SRK

Threat to Dalai...

From Page 1

The Dalai Lama is in Bodh Gaya for his annual discourse which is being held after a gap of two years as the same was suspended due to Covid-19 pandemic.

“We have some preliminary information about this Chinese woman whose sketches we have released. But there is nothing concrete as of now. Security is very tight in the area around the Mahabodhi temple where the frisking is intensive and the number of CCTV cameras has also been raised,” Senior Superintendent of Police of Gaya, Harpreet Kaur had said earlier during the day.

Gurugram poised to make New Year celebration safe

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a bid to ensure foolproof security during New Year’s Eve, the Gurugram Police on Thursday issued an advisory to maintain law and order in the city ahead of New Year celebrations.

As per an advisory, a number of 4,000 cops along with additional police forces have been deployed under the supervision of the concerned assistant commissioner of police (ACP) and deputy commissioner of police (DCP).

The policemen will be equipped with necessary security equipment across the city. Traffic Police will be present at various places to facilitate traffic movement.

To ensure safety across the district, the Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs), Assistant Police Commissioners (APCs), station house officers (SHOs), all Crime Branch In-Charges and all Traffic Police In-Charges

have also been posted. Apart from this, the Special police forces including Police Riders, Police PCR, Intelligence Teams, the crime investigation team, female cops, Cranes, Fire Brigade and Ambulance Police Teams have also been deployed along with all the security equipment to tackle any situation.

“As like every year a new year celebration event will be organised in at least 100 locations.

These include hotels, clubs, restaurants and malls etc so as to avoid any unwanted incidents we have intensified security across the district. The Special Forces will keep an eye on anti-social elements to avoid any incident,” said Preet Pal Sangwan, ACP (crime).

Moreover, a number of police checkpoints have also been put up at Chakkarpur Road, MG Road, Cyber Hub, KOD Sector-29, Huda Ground, Bristol Chowk, Good Earth Mall, Sikanderpur, Iffco Chowk and Weston Hotel T-Point.

DTC bus services extended up to Badsa AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/HARYANA

After the request of the people of Haryana, the Delhi Government on Wednesday extended the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) bus services to AIIMS situated at Badsa. These buses services will start from January 2023.

Informing about the route of the buses, a senior transport department official said that the bus plying on this route will have a stop on several locations including Najafgarh

Terminal, Prem Nursery, Mitraon Village, Surhera Crossing, Ravata Crossing, Samaspur Khalsa, Ujwa, Malikpur Jar Crossing, Ravata, Daurala Border, Makrola Village, Makrola Factory, Kaliabas Mod, Kaliabas Village, Iqbalpur Village, and the final stop will be at AIIMS Badsa.

“It is worth mentioning that Badsa village of Haryana is located adjoining Najafgarh constituency in Delhi. Many people from here are daily commuters to Delhi. Many of them have jobs and other

work in Delhi, but due to lack of bus facility in this entire area towards Haryana, the local people are facing problems commuting for day to day work,” he said.

“When this issue was brought to the notice of Delhi Transport Minister, he took immediate action and got the route surveyed. “The new service is expected to start as early as January 2023. It may very well be the New Year gift to these people who will get to travel in safer, more convenient and affordable public transport,” he added.

UP challenges HC verdict on local body...

From Page 1

The Uttar Pradesh Government had on Wednesday appointed a five-member commission for going into the entire gamut of issues for providing reservation to the OBCs in urban local body polls. The panel will be headed by Justice (Retd) Ram Avatar Singh. The four other members are retired Indian Administrative Service officers Chaub Singh Verma and Mahendra Kumar, and former legal advisors to the State Santosh Kumar Viskarma and Brajesh Kumar Soni.

The Lucknow bench of the High Court had ordered that

the State Government should notify the polls “immediately” as the term of several municipalities would end by January 31, while annulling the December 5 draft notification.

The court had directed the State Election Commission to hold the elections by January 31 after transferring the OBC seats in the draft notification to the general category.

The HC order had come on the pleas challenging the preparation of the OBC reservation draft without following the “triple test” formula prescribed by the Supreme Court. The triple test requires setting up a commission to hold a “rigorous empirical inquiry” into the nature of the “backwardness” in the context of the local bodies, specifying the proportion of reservation based on the commission’s recommendations, and ensuring that it does not exceed the overall 50 per

cent quota limit.

The High Court had held the triple test condition formulated by the Supreme Court 11 years ago mandatory. “Until the triple test is completed in all respects by the State Government, no reservation for backward class of citizens shall be provided,” the order said. It had said the term of the municipal bodies in the state has either ended or shall end by January 31, 2023.

Since the process of meeting the triple test is “arduous and is likely to take considerable time”, it had directed the State Government and the State Election Commission to notify the elections “immediately” without the OBC quota. On the reason for immediate notification of the elections, it cited Article 243U of the Constitution on holding elections before the term of a municipality expires.

No flaws in security cover, Rahul flouted...

During the travel of the protectee, the required security arrangements are made by the CRPF in coordination with the State police and the security agencies in accordance with guidelines.

Advisories based on threat assessment have been issued by the Home Ministry to all stakeholders concerned including the State Governments.

An Advance Security Liaison (ASL) is also undertaken for every visit, the officials said.

For the Delhi leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra on December 24, the ASL involving all stakeholders was conducted on December 22 and all security protocols have been strictly followed, they said.

The Delhi Police has informed that sufficient deployment of security personnel was made for it, they said.

AICC general secretary K C Venugopal had said in the letter to Shah that the Government should not indulge in vindictive politics and ensure the safety and

security of the Congress leaders.

Referring to instances of “miscreants” entering the Yatra camp site illegally, Venugopal had alleged that they were Haryana’s intelligence security personnel, who interrogated people who took part in the Yatra.

“The security of the yatra was compromised on multiple occasions following its entry into Delhi on Saturday. Delhi Police completely failed to control the surging crowds and maintain a perimeter around Rahul, who has “Z+ Security,” he had alleged.

He said the situation was so severe that Congress workers and ‘Bharat yatris’ walking with Rahul had to form a security perimeter and “the Delhi Police remained mute spectators”.

Venugopal also sought improved security for the yatra as it is set to enter the sensitive states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

The Kanyakumari to Kashmir yatra is scheduled to resume on January 3, 2023, after taking a nine-day break in Delhi.

Now...

From Page 1

“The initiative, if implemented, can lead to a social transformation for the migrants and connect with their roots as many times they are reluctant to get themselves enrolled at their place of work for various reasons such as frequently changing residences, not enough social and emotional connect with the issues of an area of migration, unwillingness to get their name deleted in the electoral roll of their home/native constituencies as they have permanent residence/property,” it said.

Terming the EC’s initiative as an “excellent initiative”, former chief election commissioner SY Quraishi welcomed the move of the poll panel to carry out a pilot, saying it will help smoothen difficulties faced by the system. “If EC has found an electronic solution, that is very good and it is very important that they are doing it democratically. They have called all political parties for a demo which is a good thing,” he said.

“Inability to vote due to internal migration (domestic migrants) is one of the prominent reasons to be addressed to improve voter turnout and ensure participative elections,” the EC said.

The poll body has also floated a concept note on remote voting and sought the views of political parties on the legal, administrative and technological challenges in implementing it.

Among the laws and rules which would need an amendment to implement remote voting is The Representation of People’s Act of 1950 and 1951, The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

ponents of domestic migration. Out-migration is predominant among the rural population in overall domestic migration. Approximately 85% of the internal migration is within the States,” the EC said.

The voter turnout in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections was 67.4 per cent and the EC was concerned over the issue of over 30 crore electors not exercising their franchise and also differential voter turnout in various states and union territories, it said. “It is understood that there are multifarious reasons for a voter not opting to register in a new place of residence, thus missing out on exercising the right to vote. Inability to vote due to internal migration (domestic migrants) is one of the prominent reasons to be addressed to improve voter turnout and ensure participative elections,” the EC said.

The poll body has also floated a concept note on remote voting and sought the views of political parties on the legal, administrative and technological challenges in implementing it.

Among the laws and rules which would need an amendment to implement remote voting is The Representation of People’s Act of 1950 and 1951, The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

The EC noted that there were multifarious reasons for a voter not opting to register in a new place of residence, thus missing out on exercising the right to vote.

18K personnel to man Capital on New Year's eve

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Thursday said more than 18,000 of its personnel from district and traffic units will be deployed across the national Capital to ensure security during New Year celebrations. The traffic will be restricted at Connaught Place from 8 pm on Saturday and an alcometer will be used for the drunk driving challans.

Special Commissioner of Police (law and order) Dependra Pathak said, "Police have made adequate security arrangements. Over 16,500 personnel from local police will be deployed across the city on Saturday in view of the New Year celebrations.

More than 20 companies from outside forces will be given to different districts. Pathak further said more than 1,600 pickets for checking, over 1,200 mobile patrolling vehicles and 2,074 bikes will be deployed.

"This time, there will be anti-terror measures in high footfall areas where local police, in real-time coordination with the Special Cell, has made the arrangements. Our motive is



that the people in Delhi would celebrate New Year in a better and facilitated manner." "Women safety will also be our focus area and more than 2,500 women personnel will be deployed in the city," Pathak said.

Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) S S Yadav said, "Around 1,850 personnel from traffic police will be deployed along with local police staff for joint checking for which the points have been identified. We have identified around 125 points of drunk and drive.

The traffic will be restricted to enter Connaught Place after 8 pm on Saturday and only authorised vehicles will be

allowed there. Mobile teams will also be placed which will take action against anti-drunk-en driving, underage driving, black film on cars' glasses etc." The deployment this time will be divided into two shifts for giving adequate cover. The shifts will start from 4 to 5 pm till early morning and both the shifts will overlap each other.

There will be over 300 "arrest parties" at various locations which will take action against those who will break the laws, they said. "If you are going in a car or on bike, please make sure that the driver or rider is not in inebriated state. The comprehensive police presence will be in high

footfall and vulnerable areas," Pathak said. The city police has also issued an advisory related to traffic arrangements on the eve of New Year warning of strict action against drunken driving, stunt biking, over speeding, reckless driving, zig-zag and dangerous driving.

The advisory said special arrangements have been made for the areas in the vicinity of Connaught Place.

For Connaught Place, the commuters can park their vehicles near Gole Dak Khana on, Patel Chowk, Mandi House, Minto Road on DD Upadhaya Marg and Press Road area, Panchkuian Road, K.G. Marg-Ferozshah Road Crossing on Copernicus Lane as well as KG Marg towards C hexagon, round about Bengali Market, etc., it said.

Limited parking space will be available near Connaught Place on first come first serve basis. Vehicles parked in unauthorised manner shall be towed away and prosecuted, it stated.

The Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate traffic arrangements at and around India Gate for regulation of traffic — both pedestrian and vehicular.

Eateries decked up for guests

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEWDELHI

From decking up their outlets to hiring extra staff and setting things up for live musical performances, restaurants across the national Capital are gearing up to welcome guests for the New Year celebrations. With 2023 just two days away, the restauraners are excited for what they expect to be a bumper week for the hospitality industry, which was one of the worst-hit by the multiple waves of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the past three years, the pandemic forced many restaurants to shut down permanently or let go many of their staff. The celebrations were eclipsed for the past two years. Things have changed now!

Zen at Connaught Place, which is one of the longstanding Asian restaurants plating authentic Chinese, Japanese and Thai dishes, has hired extra staff and is in all readiness to welcome revellers. "We had



decorated all our restaurants during pre-Christmas celebrations keeping in mind new year. We are all geared up to receive people here in our restaurants. We have already hired extra staff since the turnover is expected to be much higher this festive season," Manpreet Singh, the owner of the Zen restaurant, said

"This period between Christmas and New Year is when we get maximum gross in the year. Now our daily sales have gone up to more than 50

per cent in this last few days," he said. Singh also owns Fujiya restaurant at Malcha road which serves Chinese, Japanese, Asian among other International cuisines.

"We have already started getting advance table bookings. So, we are expecting good sales. In fact, we have organised live music at our Chungwa restaurant in Greater Kailash - II," he added.

Restauraners said while many revellers, especially the youth, prefer parties and live music, there's also a section of

people who like to celebrate the festivities with their families and love to spend quality time with them. For those preferring a calm ambience can head to centres like Digging Cafe and Beer Cafe.

"Our restaurant will open as usual at 11:30 am. Our cafe is already decked up for the festive season. We are expecting good crowd and have already started maintaining Covid protocols be it wearing masks, putting gloves or using sanitisers.

"Christmas was good, and we are definitely expecting a good turnout for New Year as well and it is going to be first come first serve basis," KK Devnath, Group General Manager of Digging Cafe, said.

Rahul Singh, Founder of Beer Cafe said, "The idea of Beer cafe is always come as you are. A lot of people don't like loud music and prefer to go out with families. Most of the places don't allow that to happen. Ours is a place which is family friendly.

Noida Authority raises land purchase rate to ₹5,324/sqm

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

The Noida Authority has announced a hike in land purchase rate from farmers to Rs 5,324 per square metres from the existing Rs 5,060 per square metres. The authority also said that it would bring a scheme to facilitate resettlement of dues in group housing projects and sports city plots to help home buyers with the registry.

It further amended provisions related to time extension for completion of projects by real estate developers.

The decisions were taken during the 208th board meeting of the Noida Authority chaired by Uttar Pradesh Infrastructure and Industrial Development Commissioner Arvind Kumar.

Noida Authority CEO Ritu Maheshwari and Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation Managing Director Rajshekhar also attended the meeting held here on Wednesday. Regarding determination of rates of land to be purchased from farmers



by mutual agreement, the statement read, "On the basis of registered sale deed, purchase was being made by the Noida Authority at the rate of Rs 5,060 per sq m. It was decided to increase it to Rs 5,324 per sq m in public interest."

For facilitation of resettlement in residential projects of group housing, the Noida Authority said, "In order to solve the problems in the registry of flats owners, the facility of rescheduling will be brought from 01.01.2023 to 31.03.2023 for depositing overdues for residential and sports city plots in Group Housing, Commercial Department."

"Under the rescheduling facility, the instalments will be rescheduled by capitalizing the overdue amount of premium/interest/ or earlier rescheduled premium/interest and additional compensation, lease rent and overdue future instalments. The tenure of the rescheduled payment plan will not exceed two years."

It also announced bringing in a three months' amnesty scheme for exemption of interest on water charges and regularization of unauthorized water connections which will be applicable only till March 31, 2023 after which normal rates of recovery would apply, according to the statement.

On extension of time fixed for completion of work in builders plots, the Noida Authority said that in order to encourage speedy execution of sub-lease deed of flats in favour of home buyers, it has been decided that time extension fee would be charges on the basis of area constructed and the remaining area on the project.

2 stray puppies strangled, hanged at vacant plot in Dwarka; case filed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a shocking case of cruelty against animals, two stray puppies were strangled to death and the carcasses hanged at a vacant plot in Delhi's Dwarka Sector 9 on Wednesday.

The body of one of the dogs was found hanging from a tree, while the other was discovered lying near a wall.

The Delhi Police has registered a case under Indian Penal Code section 429 (mischievous by killing or maiming animal), the puppies were killed in an empty plot next to Azad Hind Apartments in sector 9 in Dwarka on the evening of 27th December when they were left alone after their mother was taken away for sterilization.

"The puppies were healthy, immunized, dewormed and well-fed. They used to remain inside the vacant plot itself. Four of their siblings who survived have been shifted to a local shelter till their mother returns after sterilization," the post added.

The Delhi Police has registered an FIR in the matter on a complaint from a community dog feeder Vanessa Alphonso who had found their bodies on Wednesday morning, they said.

The carcass of the other is lying on ground.

The Facebook post claimed that the incident took place on Tuesday evening.

"This is unbelievable. How. Anyone can think of doing this, much less do it, is unimaginable. Logic says no but the full force of the heart says the perpetrators must meet same fate as victims," Singhvi tweeted.

As per the post in the Facebook group ?SGACC (Sanjay Gandhi Animal Care Center), the puppies were killed in an empty plot next to Azad Hind Apartments in sector 9 in Dwarka on the evening of 27th December when they were left alone after their mother was taken away for sterilization.

"The puppies were healthy, immunized, dewormed and well-fed. They used to remain inside the vacant plot itself. Four of their siblings who survived have been shifted to a local shelter till their mother returns after sterilization," the post added.

The Delhi Police has reg-



istered an FIR in the matter on a complaint from a community dog feeder Vanessa Alphonso who had found their bodies on Wednesday morning, they said.

"The puppies were vulnerable as their mother was taken away by MCD officials for sterilisation surgery on Tuesday morning. Six puppies were living on a vacant land around the local elementary school.

On Tuesday evening we could not spot two of them. We thought they could be playing around," Alphonso said. The next morning, when she went to feed the puppies, she noticed something red lying in the

bushes which was the carcass of a puppy. The carcass of another puppy was hanging from a noose on a tree, she said as she broke down while narrating the grotesque discovery. She alerted the police, who rushed to the scene and took the carcasses for autopsy. According to the complainant, the crime was discovered when the feeders had gone in search of the dogs.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Harsha Vardhan said, a complaint was received on Wednesday regarding killing of stray dogs in a secluded park in Dwarka Sector-9.

"A case under Indian Penal Code section 429 (mischievous by killing or maiming animal) was registered on Wednesday at Dwarka South police station. The post-mortem of the carcasses was conducted. Efforts are being made to identify and arrest the accused," Vardhan said. The shocker in Dwarka is the latest in a series of animal cruelty incidents reported in recent past.

Vaishnavi park foundation laid by LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday laid the foundation stone of a park being built as part of a project that consolidates seven fragmented green pockets into one horticultural space.

Once completed, the project located in Ashok Vihar Phase II will turn the area into one large park, named 'Vaishnavi', spanning nearly 33 acres.

According to a senior official at Raj Niwas, the project consolidates seven fragmented green pockets at Ashok Vihar Phase II to develop one large park of approximately 33 acres that has been named 'Vaishnavi' — a name given to the plant Tulsi, the most sacred of all plants, also another name of "Goddess Parvati" and also "she who belongs to Lord Vishnu". The Landscape scheme captures the space symbolism from Samkhya Philosophy.

Rahul to resume Bharat Jodo from Yamuna Bazar on Jan 3

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will resume his Bharat Jodo Yatra from Hanuman Mandir in the Yamuna Bazar area on January 3 and head towards Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad. This has been stated by Delhi Congress president Anil Chaudhary said on Thursday.

Inspecting the routes with other senior party leaders, Chaudhary said enough security arrangements should be made when the yatra resumes from Delhi and moves towards Uttar Pradesh.

"We inspected the routes from where the Bharat Jodo Yatra will resume on January 3. Rahul Gandhi along with other leaders will resume the yatra from Hanuman Mandir in the



Yamuna Bazar area and head towards Loni in Ghaziabad," Chaudhary said.

The Congress on Wednesday had written to Home Minister Amit Shah,

alleging security breaches during the yatra in the city and demanded immediate steps to

ensure the security of Gandhi and others taking part in the march. Dismissing the allegations, the officials said the security arrangements made for the protectee works fine when the protectee himself adheres to the laid down security guidelines.

However, they alleged that on several occasions, violations of laid down guidelines on the part of Rahul Gandhi have been observed and this fact has been communicated to him from time to time.

Chaudhary alleged that there were loopholes in the security from Badarpur border itself and that the situation deteriorated at the Red Fort.

"There were loopholes in the security right from when the yatra entered via Badarpur border in Delhi. The situation

got worse as it reached Red Fort later in the day. The yatra has to go to Punjab and Kashmir too and hence, enough security arrangements should be made for it," he claimed.

The yatra, which is currently on winter break, will resume its journey on January 3 and enter Uttar Pradesh. The yatra covered over 130 km in the first phase in Haryana between December 21-23 when it passed through Nuh, Gurugram and Faridabad districts.

The yatra, a mass contact initiative of the Congress, started from Kanyakumari on September 7 and covered Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi in the first phase.

Govt plans to meet city's 25% power demand from solar energy by '25

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Thursday gave green single to a draft Solar Policy 2022 aiming to enable 25 per cent of the city's annual electricity demand to be met by solar by 2025, a jump of three times from 9 per cent in 2022.

The policy outlines a target of 6,000 MW of total installed solar capacity by 2025 which will make the national capital a leader in solar energy consumption. The operative period of the policy will be three years.

The draft policy said that to motivate consumers to use solar energy the government will provide various incentives such as Rs 3/kWh for residential solar systems up to 3 kW, Rs 2/kWh for residential solar systems above 3 kW, and up to 10kW, Rs 2/kWh for CGHS and RWAs with solar systems up to 500kW (at 10kW per house) will be provided to consumers.

Releasing the draft policy, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that the Delhi government has come up with a draft solar policy 2022. "The policy will now be put in the public domain for 30 days for comments from stakeholders. Subsequently, it will be tabled in Cabinet for final approval," he said.

"Apart from this, the government will give an early-bird GBI of Rs 1/kWh shall be offered for the first time for C&I consumers for the first 200 MW of solar deployment, For residential consumers, a capital subsidy for mounting structures will be provided at the rate of Rs. 2,000 per kW up to



a maximum of Rs 10,000 per consumer and adjusted against electricity bills, and taxes and duties will not be levied on generation from RTS, whether for self-consumption or supplied to the grid," Sisodia added.

"New solar policy will provide a host of benefits through Generation Based Incentives (GBI) and capital subsidy for residential and commercial consumers in Delhi, besides introducing innovative models of solar deployment.

With this policy, our aim is to make Delhi a leader in solar energy consumption in not only India but also the world," said Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, while speaking about Delhi's Draft Solar Policy.

"The policy has been prepared by Delhi Dialogue and Development Commission (DDCD) after extensive stakeholder consultations with the industry, consumers, government entities, financing institutions, and clean energy think tanks. Along with increasing solar energy consumption, the policy also aims to generate over 12,000 green jobs in Delhi," Deputy CM said.

MCD allocates ₹13 cr for desilting of drains

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Thursday announced it has allocated more than Rs 13 crore for desilting of drains under its jurisdiction for the next year. The desilting will be done in two phases at an interval of six months — June 5 and January 15.

New Delhi will be hosting eight G20 events starting from March 1, 2023 with the meeting of G20 foreign ministers and culminating with that of heads of governments and states on September 9-10.

According to a senior MCD official, the Corporations



in its budget for 2023-2024, have allocated Rs13.76 crores which will be spent across all 12 zones. The MCD has fixed June 5 for the first phase of desilting of drains and January 15 for the second phase.

"The civic body has been carrying out desilting of drains during pre monsoon period and completing the exercise by end of June every year. However, in order to combat problem of water logging, the

municipal corporation has decided to carry out desilting of drains in two tranches. Now, desilting will be carried out in the months of June and January every year," he said.

"Not only this, the corporation has decided that after completion of first phase of cleaning of drains by June 20, the citizens will be asked for their feedback or to register their complaints along with the photographs through MCD's toll free number or on MCD311 Application," he said.

"Upon receipt of such complaint, a period of 15 days will be granted to contractor to desilt or cleanse the drains as per feedback," he underlined.

BJP MLA abused, slapped sanitation worker: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Thursday alleged that BJP MLA Abhay Verma has abused and slapped a sanitation worker in the national capital. However, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) asked the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), East District to lodge a First Information Report (FIR) against the culprits.

Releasing a purported video of Verma, AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar alleged that the BJP, which was in power in the MCD earlier, had "halted the salaries of the sanitation workers".

"In this video, a BJP leader, Abhay Verma, who is the MLA

from Lakshmi Nagar, can be seen beating up a safai karamchari along with his men and also abusing him very badly. He has used words which we cannot tell the media present over here. That's how vulgar his language is in this video. Also, in the video you can see how ruthlessly Verma beats up a safai karamchari. This is the true face of this MLA and of the BJP," Kumar said.

"It is clear that BJP is an anti-Dalit party. The saffron party is rattled with its defeat in MCD and is venting out its anger on the sanitation workers of the underprivileged sections of society. It is clearly visible in the video that Abhay Verma is slapping the worker,

abusing his mother." He said.

Kumar said that this is very unfortunate that the BJP, which still has not recovered from the shock of the MCD loss, is now taking its revenge against the safai karamcharis. Most of these people come from marginalised communities and are not very well off. The BJP did not pay their salaries on time during its 15-year tenure and did not clear their arrears. Now they reached a point where it is attacking these safai karamcharis.

Senior AAP leader Rakhi Birla said they will meet Delhi Police and ask them to provide security to the safai karamcharis in Delhi.

Ahmedabad Cantonment gets 3D-printed shelters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to provide robust dwelling units to soldiers, the Army has inaugurated its first ever 3D-printed accommodation at Ahmedabad Cantonment.

Some such units are also functional in Ladakh and the coming months will see more such facilities coming all along the Line of Actual Control(LAC)facing China.

Giving details of the unique endeavour to boost operational readiness of the troops, defence ministry officials said here on Thursday the units in Ahmedabad were inaugurated on Wednesday. The houses were built in just 12 weeks.

The 3D printing technology uses complex software and a robotic unit that helps in creating a structure through multiple stages from a digital model.

The Indian Army inaugurated its first 3D-printed house dwelling unit (with ground-plus one configuration) for soldiers at Ahmedabad Cantonment, officials said. The dwelling unit has been constructed by the Military Engineering Services (MES) in collaboration with MiCoB Pvt Ltd incorporating the latest 3D rapid construction tech-



nology.

Construction work of the dwelling unit measuring 71 sqm with garage space was completed in just 12 weeks by utilising the 3D-printed foundation, walls and slabs, officials said.

The disaster-resilient structures comply with zone-3 earthquake specifications and green building norms. The 3-D printed houses are symbolic of the modern-day rapid construction efforts to cater for growing accommodation requirements of the armed forces personnel.

The technique utilises a concrete 3D printer that accepts a computerised three-dimensional design and fabricates a 3D structure in a layer-by-layer manner by extruding a specialised type of concrete specifically designed for the

purpose. Ahmedabad-based Golden Katat Division of the Army has been instrumental in pursuing the project with manifold applications even in operations, the statement said.

The Army units have already dovetailed 3D printing technology in the construction of pre-casted permanent defences and overhead protection meant for operations. These structures are currently being validated over a period of one year and can be seen being incorporated in all terrains, the recent being in Ladakh.

Sources in November had said the Indian Army has envisioned the construction of "permanent defences" along the LAC in eastern Ladakh using cutting-edge 3D printing technology, a move that will save time and improve its defence preparedness.

IAF drills in Northeastern region, gets last of 36 Rafale fighter jets

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. They said the second squadron of Rafale jets was to be part of the mega air exercise along with other key assets such as Sukhoi-30MKI aircraft under the

Eastern Air Command.

An IAF official said the exercise was planned well in advance and it is not associated with recent developments in the Tawang sector. On Monday, the Indian Army said troops from the two sides clashed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Tawang sector and the face-off led to "minor injuries" to a few personnel from both sides.

The face-off took place amid the over 30-month border standoff between the two sides in eastern Ladakh. All frontline air bases and some key Advanced Landing Grounds in the Northeast are set to be involved in the exer-

cise, said a source. The Army and IAF have been maintaining a high state of operational readiness along the LAC in the Arunachal Pradesh and the Sikkim sector for over two years following the eastern Ladakh row.

The IAF scrambled fighter jets last week following China's increasing air activities on its side of the LAC in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh.

The deployment of some aerial platforms including drones by China in the region preceded the Chinese attempts on December 9 to unilaterally change the status quo in the Yangtse area of the Tawang sector, the sources said.



Cong's Hindu tilt only for vote; when in power, it terms Hindus 'terrorists': BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi on Thursday made twin attack on Congress and its president Mallikarjun Kharge, saying that he is only the party's 'face mask' and that the 'real leader' is the Gandhi family as he also claimed that the Opposition party's 'Hindu tilt' was only for their votes and to gain power.

The BJP leader cited senior Congress leader A K Antony's statement here a day before and alleged that Congress "Hindu tilt" was only for gaining Hindu community's vote and regaining power.

"Congress acts to be pro-Hindu when out of power and when in power it conspires to portray Hindus as terrorists", alleged Trivedi. The BJP leader



was responding to Antony's comments on his party's foundation day. Addressing an event marking the party's foundation day here, Antony, a member of the Congress Working Committee, said the Congress should take the majority community along with it to bring down the BJP from power in the 2024 General Election, and that minorities are "not enough in this fight". The senior Congress leader had further said that majority of the peo-

ple in India are Hindus, and this majority community should be marshalled in the "fight against Narendra Modi". Trivedi also quodt report of a committee presided by Antony which after 2014 electoral defeat said that the main reason for their party's poll reversal was its "tilt towards Muslims" and emphasized on the need to be identified with the Hindu community.

In another attack on the opposition party, the BJP leader said its incumbent president is only a mask while the real powers are being held by the Gandhi family.

"Salman Khurshid said that Mallikarjun Kharge has been elected as Congress chief for work only but the real leader is Gandhi family", Trivedi pointed out.

Pak responsible for safety of minorities there: EAM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst reports that a Hindu woman was beheaded and her body mutilated in Pakistan on Wednesday, Ministry of External Affairs said here on Thursday it did not have specific details adding Pakistan is responsible for safety and security of minorities there.

Making this assertion here, ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said "We don't have any specific details on this report. Pakistan is responsible for the safety and security of minorities in their country."

This reaction came in the backdrop of reports a 40-year-old woman, Daya Bhel, was killed in Sinjhor town of Pakistan. This alleged incident was highlighted in a tweet message by Krishna Kumari, Pakistan's first female senator

from the Hindu community. The Pakistan Peoples Party(PPP) leader said skin was peeled off from the victim's body and face. The woman is survived by four children. She was a widow.

The lawmaker's tweet said "Daya Bhel 40 years widow brutally murdered and body was found in very bad condition. Her head was separated from the body and the savages had removed flesh of the whole head. Visited her village. Police teams from Sinjhor and Shahpurchakar also reached."

Jiyala Amar lal Bheel(PPP) claimed that the mutilated body was found in an agriculture field on Wednesday and police have gathered details from the woman's family.

As per the PPP leader, a post-mortem has been done and further investigation is underway.

Ineligible foreign medical graduates practising in India: CBI raids 91 spots

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Thursday conducted searches at 91 locations across the country in connection with its investigation against several State medical councils and foreign medical graduates who were allowed to practise in India without qualifying a mandatory test.

The agency had registered an FIR against unknown officials of 14 State medical councils and erstwhile Medical Council of India (MCI) besides 73 foreign medical graduates who were allowed to practice medicine in India without qualifying the mandatory Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE), officials said.

According to norms, a foreign medical graduate must qualify FMGE/Screening Test conducted by the National Board of Examination in order to get provisional or permanent registration with the National Medical Commission or a state medical council to practice medicine in India.

The NBE sends its results to candidates as well as councils. When fake eligibility certificates were produced by these candidates, medical councils could have verified it from the results directly sent to them by NBE, they said.

The CBI has registered the case of alleged corruption, criminal conspiracy, forgery and cheating against unidentified officials of state medical councils, the erstwhile Medical Council of India, and 73 foreign medical graduates, the officials said.

The agency conducted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday called upon all Union Territories to exchange best practices while stressing on safe UTs, completion of flagship schemes, minimum Government and maximum governance and zero tolerance against corruption.

He said the Union Territories should become models of self-reliance and every Union Territory should be proud of its heritage.

The Home Minister also said that immense tourism potential will be developed in Union Territories. He was addressing of Union Territories here.

In his address, the Home Minister emphasized on making Union Territories a role model for the country and said that if the potential of Union Territories is fully harnessed, India will be able to achieve the goal of becoming the third largest economy in the world.

Shah also directed the Union Territories to prepare their vision for 2047. He said that Union Territories should take inspiration from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's motto of "vocal for local" and



"Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" while striving to become a hub of tourism, development and welfare.

"The conference provided an opportunity for cross learning and knowledge sharing between Union Territories and other stakeholders, as well as a platform for Union Territories to voice their aspirations, achievements, local priorities and unique challenges....."

The three working areas - economic development, tourism and flagship plans and best practices were discussed in detail and shaped the agenda of the conference," said Home Ministry in a statement.

The conference was attended by the Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, Cabinet Rajiv Gauba Secretary, Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Chief Secretaries /Advisor to the Administrator and other officers of the Union Territories, the Ministry of Home Affairs and senior officers from the concerned Central Ministries.

NIA raids 56 locations in Kerala PFI case

Searches led to recovery of sharp edged weapons, incriminating material, says probe agency

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday conducted searches at 56 locations in Kerala in connection with the case related to unlawful and violent activities being carried out by Popular Front of India (PFI), its office bearers/cadres/members and affiliates.

"PFI has been found justifying the use of criminal force and encouraging vulnerable youth to join terrorist organi-

zations," the NIA said in a statement.

The searches led to the recovery and seizure of sharp edged weapons, incriminating material and digital devices. This case was registered su-moto on September 19.

Searches were conducted at residences of seven State Executive Committee members, seven Zonal Heads of PFI, 15 Physical Training Instructors-Trainers of PFI, houses of sevenPFI cadres trained in use of knives, dag-

gers, swords and other types of weapons to carry out murderous violent acts and 20 other suspects in the districts of Trivandrum (3), Kollam (3), Pathanamthitta (3), Kottayam (2), Alappuzha (3), Ernakulam (13), Thrissur (2), Palakkad (1), Malappuram (7), Kozhikode (4), Kannur (9) and Wayanad (6), the agency said. Searches today have led to the recovery and seizure of sharp edged weapons, incriminating material and digital devices. Earlier on September 22, the NIA had



conducted searches at 24 locations in Kerala, including

offices of PFI and residences of 13 accused persons.

Report sought on fliers fight aboard

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of a viral video which shows two air passengers in a heated argument that eventually turns into a scuffle and fisticuffs, while the flight attendant looks on helplessly, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has sought a detailed report from the concerned authority. The ugly incident took place in Bangkok to Kolkata flight of Thai Smile Airways early this week.

In a viral video on social media, shows two men on a Thai Smile Airway flight arguing, while the air hostess is trying to mellow them down.

A few moments later, one of the men says "haath neeche rakh [put your hands down]" and starts incessantly slapping and turning the other on his face, hitting it into a fight, alarming fellow passengers amid panic stroked air staff.. At

one point, the flight attendant can be heard saying "just stop" on the microphone while other people gather around trying to come between them and stop the fight. A few other passengers also got involved in the scuffle.

The reason for the fight was not clear. According to report, the scuffle that turned physical on the Bangkok-India flight started after the passenger refused to follow the cabin crew's safety instructions.

According to a passenger who was onboard the plane, the incident happened on December 26, just before the plane was taxiing to the runway for takeoff.

The plane landed at Kolkata early morning on Tuesday, the passenger, who was travelling with his mother, said. He said that he was worried about his mother who was sitting near the seat where the incident happened. According

to the passenger, the reason for the scuffle was not clear. Later, other passengers and airhostesses pacified the individuals involved in the scuffle, he added. It could not be immediately ascertained whether the incident was reported to the authorities in Kolkata after landing.

"BCAS has taken cognisance of the video. We have started inquiring and further action will be taken depending on the inquiry outcome," BCAS Director General Zulfiquar Hasan said on Thursday.

This is not the first time a fight has happened mid-air this month. In an IndiGo flight from Istanbul to Delhi a passenger got into a brawl with a flight attendant that involved yelling.

The heated exchange over choice of meals onboard the flight happened on December 16. IndiGo and DGCA, last week, said they were looking

into the incident. Social media users were left aghast after a video of a physical altercation between passengers on a Bangkok-Kolkata Thai Smile Airways flight went viral. Users took to Twitter to say that these passengers should be put on a no-fly list. They also wondered how could anyone behave in such a manner on a flight.

A Twitter user named Sayan Dutta pointed out: "Hope they were arrested and passports confiscated. They should also be barred from domestic flights and sent to police remand for a few days with the same treatment being provided."

A user tagged Thai Airways and other airlines like IndiGo, Tata-owned Vistara, and SpiceJet, and wrote: "What kind of behaviour is this... pathetic... all airlines should ban these customers from travelling and set an example!!"

IAF successfully test-fires extended range version of BrahMos air-launched missile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Boosting its operational capabilities, the IAF on Thursday successfully test-fired the extended range version of the BrahMos air-launched missile, which can hit targets at a range of about 400 km. The test was carried out when a Su-30 MKI fighter jet launched the missile against a ship target.

The supersonic cruise missile achieved the desired mission objectives in the Bay of Bengal region and with the successful test, the Indian Air Force achieved a capability boost to carry out precision strikes from Su-30 fighter aircraft against land/ sea targets over long ranges, the defence ministry said. "The extended range capability of the missile coupled with the high perfor-

mance of the SU-30MKI aircraft gives the Indian Air Force a strategic reach and allows it to dominate the future battle fields," the ministry statement added. The successful test firing was a joint effort by the Air Force, Indian Navy, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and the BrahMos Aerospace Limited(BAPL).

In May this year, the extended-range version of the supersonic missile was successfully tested from the SU-30. The extended range was reported to have increased to 350 km from 290 km. The successful test conducted in May was the first instance in which the missile was test fired from the Su-30MKI fighter jet. The BrahMos supersonic cruise



missile has a two-stage solid propellant booster engine as its first stage which takes it to supersonic speed. The second stage is the liquid ramjet engine which takes it closer to Mach 3 (3 times the speed of sound) speed in the cruise phase.

BrahMos missile is universal for multiple platforms and can be launched from air, land, and sea platforms. The missile works on the 'Fire and Forget principle' and maintains a high supersonic throughout the

flight. The missile has a low radar signature. Brahmos supersonic missile is a joint venture between Russia and India.

The sophisticated missile is already inducted into the Army and Navy. Many Brahmos missiles are now deployed along the Line of Actual Control(LAC)facing China. On November 30, the Army test fired the extended range Brahmos from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Cong, BJP, SP cheated Dalits, says Mayawati

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati has accused Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party and Samajwadi Party of cheating the backwards and Dalits from time to time in giving them reservation.

In a series of tweets on Thursday, the BSP chief wrote, “The Congress government in the past did not allow the implementation of the Mandal Commission’s report on reservation for Backward Classes. Along with this reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was also made ineffective and now, the BJP is also following in the footsteps of Congress in this matter. This attitude is very serious.”

She further said, “The SP government also did not give full rights, especially to the



Most Backward Classes. The SC, ST reservation in promotion was abolished by them while they tore the Bill related to this in Parliament and did not allow it to be passed. People of all these classes should be careful of the SP”

Mayawati said the BSP had given SCs, STs as well Backwards the rights of reservation when it was in power in UP. “But now people should be aware of the double faces of these political parties,” she said.

Modi’s Kolkata visit triggers political slugfest

State Cong alleges new nexus between BJP, TMC after Didi said she’ll attend PM event

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Political slugfest begun in Bengal ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Friday visit to Kolkata with the Left and Congress rekindling the “setting” theory between the BJP and Mamata Banerjee.

This, after the Bengal Chief Minister — who has more often than not skipped invitations to attend Prime Ministerial meetings in Delhi — almost volunteered to attend his programme on Friday.

The Chief Minister had on Wednesday told a delegation of Port authorities that she would attend the Prime Minister’s programmes in Kolkata.

Modi during his one day visit of Kolkata would unravel a slew of projects worth more than ₹7,000 crore besides flagging off eastern India’s first semi-high speed Bande Bharat train from Howrah to New Jalpaiguri. He is also likely to inaugurate the Taratala-Joka metro railway service.

Referring to an expected meeting between the two leaders CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty said, “Mamata Banerjee’s politics is clear ... the Chief Minister



File photo

who had skipped most Niti Ayog meetings, avoided most of the meetings chaired by the Prime Minister in Delhi ... launched personal attacks against him from most public rallies is today volunteering to attend his programme even before receiving the formal invitation ... kuch to hai (it smells rat) ... if this is not a setting then what is.”

Reminding how Banerjee, who earlier praised Atal Behari Vajpayee and LK Advani but cursed Modi the

Left leader said, “today she is praising Modi (saying the Prime Minister is good and Home Minister is bad) but attacking Amit Shah for the ED-CBI actions in Bengal.”

Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury too alleged a new era of settings between the BJP and the TMC saying “considering the wide array of scams that her Government has committed in every field it has touched, Mamata Banerjee will not be able to continue in power for a single day

without the tacit blessings of the Central Government.”

With a plethora of scams — like the ones involving school service recruitment, cattle smuggling, Prime Minister Awas Yojna and MNREGSchemes — exploding in the face of her Government sending a number of senior leaders including ministers and MLAs to jail, Banerjee has been forced to tone down her anti-Modi rhetoric during the past several months, the Left and Congress leadership say.

The latest Modi-Mamata setting is collateral to her changing politics of saving her own skin,” CPI(M) State secretary Md Salim said.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh however refuted the allegations saying “Mamata Banerjee will meet the Prime Minister not as a Trinamool leader but the Chief Minister of the State.” Meanwhile, Government sources detailed Modi’s engagements for Friday whence he would flag off the Bande Bharat Express and a portion of southern Kolkata metro railway service besides laying the foundation stone of a multiple other projects.

He will lay the foundation stone

of the redevelopment of New Jalpaiguri Railway station apart from inaugurating Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee National Institute of Water and Sanitation.

According to Eastern Railway sources the Prime Minister will also dedicate four railway projects including — Boinchhi-Shaktigarh 3rd Line, Dankuni-Chandanpur 4th Line Project, Nimitta-New Farakka DoubleLine, and Ambari Falakata-New Maynaguri-Gumanihat Doubling Project, developed at a combined cost of more than ₹2304 crore — to thenation.

Modi is also likely to lay the foundation stone and dedicate to the nation multiple sewerage infrastructure projects for Bengal under National Mission for Clean Ganga.

Later in the day the Prime Minister will chair the second meeting of the National Ganga Council scheduled to be attended by Union Minister for Jal Shakti, other Union Ministers who are members of the council besides Chief Ministers of Bengal, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand — the States through which the mighty river flows.

Municipal offices of political parties sealed after Sena factions clash

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The political temperatures began to shoot up in Mumbai ahead of the crucial Birhanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls on Thursday, as the civic administration sealed offices of all the political parties, following a ruckus between the factions led by the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

In what is being seen as an unprecedented development, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner also ordered the sealing of chairmen’s offices of the various civic committees. The development came after the civic leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena (known as the Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena—BSS) attempted to gain control of the party offices in the BMC.

The civic headquarters witnessed as massive showdown between the factions of the Shiv Sena as the Shinde Sena leaders attempted physically to take over the parent Shiv Sena’s office at the BMC on Wednesday evening. The stand-off between the corporators and leaders of the two Shiv Sena factions after the BSS ex-corporators met Mumbai Municipal Commissioner I S Chagal and staked claim for the original Shiv Sena’s party office.



After the Shinde-led former corporators’ delegation, the Uddhav-led Sena’s former corporators confronted the rival corporators when the latter tried to enter the office of the Sena’s original party office.

On their part, the Sena (U)’s former corporators shouted slogans of “Khokhe, Khokhe” against the BSS ex-corporators and accused them of trespassing into and attempting to ‘grab’ their party office illegally. The Shinde Sena leaders raised counter slogans.

The Sena (UBT) and BSS leaders clashed and indulged in fisticuffs to establish right over the office of the parent party at the civic headquarters ahead of the BMC elections. A team of police personnel that arrived on the scene immediately afterwards and the BMC security quelled the clashed and removed them out of the BMC headquarters. Taking serious cognisance of the clashes between the former corporators and leaders of the two factions of the

Shiv Sena, the Municipal Commissioner directed the administration to seal all the party as also the offices of civic committees’ chairmen. After the sealing of all the party offices at the BMC, a delegation of the Uddhav-led tried to meet the Municipal Commissioner I S Chagal.

Since he did not give them immediate appointment, the Uddhav Sena leaders staged a sit-in dharna in front of the Commissioner’s office. Later, Chagla met and received their memorandum requesting them to re-allot their party office.

The Shinde-led Sena leaders subsequently met the civic chief and submitted him memorandum, staking a claim over the ruling Shiv Sena at the BMC.

On his part, Shiv Sena (UBT)’s chief spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut slammed the BMC Commissioner Chahal’s decision, dubbing it as “high-handedness” and demanded to know under what rules he had ordered the sealing of the party offices at the BMC.

The developments at the BMC should be seen in the backdrop of the rebellion within the ruling Shiv Sena in June this year, when then former senior minister in the Sena-led MVA government walked out of the parent parent, joined hands with the Opposition BJP and formed a new Government in the State.

Probe into death of 2 Russians begins

Investigation on as per Indian laws: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Odisha CID has stepped up its investigation into the deaths of two Russian travellers who died under mysterious circumstances within a span of two days in a hotel in Raygada district.

The Ministry of External Affairs said here on Thursday that investigations are taking place as per the Indian laws.

The State is set to host the prestigious World Cup Hockey tournament in January and hoteliers have urged the Government to ensure security of all foreign tourists.

“We are aware of it and Odisha Police are investigating it as per our laws,” says ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said here. His reaction came days after Director General Police of Odisha Sunil Kumar Bansal on Tuesday ordered a CID probe into the deaths as mystery still shrouds the incident.

The two deceased were identified as Vladimir Bidenov and Pavel Antov. The latter, a lawmaker in Russia and business magnate, reportedly was a critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Russian embassy had said the Odisha police had found “no criminal aspect” Vladimir Bidenov, 60, died of a stroke, while Pavel Antov, 65, was found lying in a pool of blood outside the hotel last Saturday.

The incidents took place in a hotel Raygada district within days of each other.

“The Consulate General of Russia in Kolkata is following the case in touch with local authorities. According to information available to the police, no criminal aspect is seen, the embassy had stated on Tuesday.

Pavel Antov died after allegedly falling from a hotel’s third floor on December 24, and Vladimir Bidenov, his fellow traveler, was found dead in his room at the same hotel on

December 22.

They were part of a four-member group, which along with their Delhi-based travel guide had checked in to the hotel on December 21.

The post-mortem report of the Russian MP indicates that he died of internal injury after a fall, while that of Bidenov points to a heart attack as the cause of death, the police said.

According to reports in a section of the media, Antov, the founder of the Vladimir Meat Processing Plant, ranked among the rich list of lawmakers in Russia.

Antov had reportedly come to Raygada along with Bidenov and two other friends on tourist visas to celebrate his 66th birthday, reports said.

Meanwhile, expressing concern over the impact of the deaths of two Russian tourists in the Raygada district, the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Odisha (HARO) wrote to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik urging him to ensure a

proper investigation.

In a letter to Patnaik, it said a strong action plan should be chalked out for the safety and security of visitors, especially foreign tourists, coming to the state during the Hockey Men’s World Cup, which will begin on January 13.

“We request your esteemed office to kindly examine the case of two Russian tourists who died under mysterious circumstances and necessary steps and investigation may kindly be taken immediately to avoid further spreading of the negative news,” HARO chairman JK Mohanty said in the letter.

Noting that the deaths of the two tourists were having a negative impact on the prospects of tourism in Odisha in terms of safety, he said the incident is likely to slow down the arrival of foreign tourists to the state. Prior to the pandemic, Odisha witnessed around 1.5 lakh foreign tourist arrivals each year, Mohanty said.

I’m going to kill my love, man informs mom before killing girlfriend

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a bizarre incident, a youth accused of killing his girlfriend by strangulating her to death had informed his mother about his plan to kill her.

“I am going to kill my love, don’t wait for me,” he told his mother just before the murder.

The policemen investigating the case have recovered the purported audio clip from his possession.

The victim’s body was found lying in her rented home by her landlord the day after the crime, which occurred last Saturday, according to police reports.

Shiva Singh, the accused, was taken into custody on suspicion and after recovery of the audio clip in which he is heard informing his mother about



killing his girlfriend, the cops arrested him, a senior police officer disclosed on Thursday.

He said that Shiva Singh was in a relationship with one Sonia for the past eight months. Sonia lived in a rented accommodation in Shivpuri area and used to make idols to meet her expenses.

He recently learned of her friendship with another young person, and this really riled him to the point where he finally killed her.

Popular tourist spots Narkanda, Kufri, Manali witness snowfall

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Popular tourist spots Kufri, Manali and Narkanda in Himachal Pradesh received snowfall on Thursday, bringing cheers to tourists who have thronged these places to ring in the New Year.

Keylong and Hansa in tribal Lahaul and Spiti received 2 and 1 cm of snow respectively. Kufri on the outskirts of Shimla received 0.5 cm of snow, while Manali reported traces of snow.

The sky remained heavily overcast and high velocity icy winds lashed the region making people shiver even in heavy woollens.

The local MeT office has predicted rains at isolated places in low and mid hills and snow at many places in higher reaches of Chamba, Kullu, Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti districts on Friday and dry weather on New Year eve on December 31.

Team Yogi to woo domestic investors ahead of Global Investor Summit

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To ensure that the Global Investors’ Summit scheduled to be held in Lucknow in February fulfils its objectives, Team Yogi is all set to visit seven major cities of the country in January to woo domestic investors.

The Yogi government will hold high-level meetings with domestic giants in seven metropolitan cities of the country. In Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai and Bengaluru, Team Yogi will not only contact 42

companies through roadshows but will also invite them to invest in UP.

“The Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) will aid the government in organising roadshows in all seven cities,” a government spokesman said here on Thursday.

Moreover, two cabinet-level ministers will lead the roadshows to be organised in each city. The chief minister, both deputy chief ministers, finance minister, IT and elec-

tronics minister, industrial development minister and other ministers will mainly hold talks with domestic investors.

The chief secretary, six additional chief secretaries and 10 principal secretaries will also participate in these roadshows.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath himself will lead the team in Mumbai, while Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak will take charge in Hyderabad and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya in Kolkata.

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on “AS IS WHERE IS BASIS” and “AS IS WHAT IS BASIS” for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI BANK LTD VS ISHAR KHAN , CS (COMM) NO. 2441/21	Vehicle No. DL8CAF8216, Make and Model- RENAULT DUSTER, Manu Year -2014
ICICI BANK LTD VS GOURAV VERMA, CS (COMM) NO.6/21	Vehicle No. UP14DC7750, Make and Model – HONDA SIEL CARS INDIA LTD JAZZ, Manu Year -2017
ICICI BANK LTD VS MONTU SINGHAL, CS (Comm) No. 1161/2020	Vehicle No. UP16BA7338, Make and Model- MARUTI UDYOG LTD WAGON R, Manu Year -2015
ICICI BANK LTD VS NAVEEN, CS (COMM) 1467/21	Vehicle No. DL4CAX2396, Make and Model- HONDA SIEL CARS INDIA LTD AMAZE, Manu Year -2017
ICICI BANK LTD VS RANJAN KUMAR, CS SCJ 1640/18	Vehicle No. DL1LW3803, Make and Model - TATA ACE, Manu Year-2015
ICICI BANK LTD VS WAJIHA , CS (Comm) No.2055/2019	Vehicle No. DL3CCQ5072, Make and Model- HYUNDAI MOTORS INDIA LTD MAGNA, Manu Year -2019

Auction Date: January 09, 2023 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Place of Auction: Godara Yard, Khewat No. 166/1, Near Atul Kataria Chowk, Behind Gyan Devi, School, Sec – 17, Sukhrail, Gurugram - 122022 Contact Person – Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI BANK LTD VS ASLAM KHA, CS(Comm) No.3444 of 2021	Vehicle No. UP14HT7751, Make and Model- ASHOK LEYLAND LTD PARTNER, Manu Year -2019

Auction Date: January 09, 2023 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Place of Auction: Mahakal Parking yard, Kharsa No 527 Village Banthla Near Indane Gas Plant Loni Ghaziabad-UP, 201102
Contact Person – Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI BANK LTD VS BHARAT SOMASTAMB, OA 494/ 2019, IA 2240/2019	Vehicle No. HR51Y0945, Make and Model DIAMLER CHRYSLER INDIA PVT LTD BENZ, Manu Year -2006 Reserve Price - 1,40,000/- EMD -14000/- EMD to be made in favour of ICICI Bank Limited payable at Delhi from any Nationalised Bank

Auction Date: January 21, 2023 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Auction Portal Name & URL Link: Car Trade <https://www.cartradeexchange.com/>
Contact Person – Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI BANK LTD VS NAVEEN BHATI, CS (Comm) No. 63-22	Vehicle No. UP16CK8114, Make and Model – MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA LTD Swift, Manu Year -2019

Auction Date: January 13, 2023 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Auction Portal Name & URL Link: Car Trade <https://www.cartradeexchange.com/>
Contact Person – Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)

Terms of Sale

The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participants are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves / itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids. All bidders are required to come at auction site with original KYC documents to participate in the auction. Successfully bidder shall have to deposit sale amount (excluding EMD amount wherein applicable) within 5 days from the approval date by the way of pay order/demand draft/RTGS/NEFT. If you fail to deposit sale amount within 5 days your EMD (wherein applicable) shall be forfeited. The intending bidders may visit ICICI Bank Ltd, Shal Towers, Plot No. 23, New Rohatk Road Karol Bagh Delhi – 110005 for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicles.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E - TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority’s official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

S. No.	Jobs No.	Name of the Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1	35/DGM/SM(WC-2)/2022-23	D/o Village (Laying of C.C. Pavement on Masjid road near Hydant in Village Nithari sector-31), Noida.	35.13
2	38/DGM/SM(WC-2)/2022-23	D/o Village & M/o Village (P/L Retro Reflective sign Board in Village Motra and repair of C.C. road in front of Primary School Raghunathpur road to Haldhar Medicos Morna), Noida.	44.47
3	68/DGM/SM(WC-5)/2022-23	M/o Drain (R/o Internal Drain, Raising of Culvert and P/F M.S. Jaal & SRFC cover in Pocket-9, Udaigiri-2 of sector-34), Noida.	69.15

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated **12.01.2023** up to **5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated **13.01.2023** at **11.00 AM**.

B) Re-Tender Work:

S. No.	Jobs No.	Name of the Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
4	32/GM/SM(WC-5)/2022-23	M/o Building (Repair of Community Centre in sector-61), Noida.	30.71
5	51/DGM/SM(WC-8)/ET/2022-23	D/o Village (Reconstruction of Pond in Village Salarpur) Noida.	70.18
6	54/DGM/SM(WC-8)/ET/2022-23	M/o Village (Renovation of Primary School and Secondary Primary School and C/o Toilets for boys & girls with the repairing of roof top etc. in Village Salarpur) Noida.	57.30
7	55/DGM/SM(WC-5)/2022-2023	D/o Village (Under Operation Kayakalp Renovation of Primary School in Village- Mamura, Sector-66), Noida	33.04
8	22/GM/SM(WC-5)/2022-2023	M/o Road (Repair and Raising of Drain and Culvert & P/F M.S. Jal in Sector-61), Noida	83.76
9	57/DGM/SM(WC-5)/2022-2023	D/o Village (Under "Operation Kayakalp") P/L C.C. Pavement, R/o School Building, Toilet/Urinal Blocks, Painting and other Maintenance work in Primary School, Village-Chaura, Noida	36.12
10	61/DGM/SM(WC-5)/2022-23	M/o Drain (Construction of R.C.C. drain on Internal/External road in Janta Flats, Sector-71), Noida.	97.37

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated **05.01.2023** up to **5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated **06.01.2023** at **11.00 AM**.

Dy. General Manager
NOIDA
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

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BUDGET IN TIMES OF A GLOBAL SLOWDOWN

Expect a dose of political pragmatism in the Budget




KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would be presenting her fifth Budget in about a month's time. It used to be one of the most anticipated days for many, especially from the middle class, when they would know if the cost of accessing trusted goods and services would go up or down depending on the taxes and duties announced during the budget. Now, it is more of a policy document which talks broadly about the focus areas of the government in the upcoming fiscal year and priority sectors or sections of the society or industry.

The upcoming budget for 2023-24 would be the last full year budget for the current government. Expectations are for a rather populist budget. However, the external world is going through a huge financial gloom with energy prices blowing a hole into the pockets of the richest consumers in Europe and the US. The war in Ukraine and its direct impact on prices of fuel and subsequently food grains is a concern. This has led to the central banks in western geographies pushing up interest rates.

The war in Ukraine doesn't seem to die down in the next couple of months. Assuming a best case scenario, the road to recovery would be long drawn. It is safe to assume that even with a "fractured, suspended in animation" peace in Ukraine, the world won't go back to having the kind of energy prices it did pre-invasion any time soon.



Meanwhile, China is going through one of the worst Covid infection stages in the last two years. It had managed to keep the virus under a physical prison in a limited way by restricting mobility of its citizens and enforcing hard lockdown measures with its zero covid policy in the last two years.

However, the nature of the virus is such that it can't be restricted by limiting mobility. China had to eventually open up (there were the first of its kind protests on Chinese streets) and now the virus is having a run. This means more temporary lockdowns of important factories feeding into the critical global supply chains and a slowdown of demand from China (which also happens to be a large importer of global goods and services)

The dark clouds on global growth would have a telling impact on the Government of India's flexibility in announcing big ticket items in the upcoming budget. The government could have expected private enterprise investment to pick up and a considerable push in exports (as was the case in last two years). However, the global growth story could dampen the move. This means the government would have to depend on keeping the rural and small town Indian economy wheels churning out healthy numbers. This means renewed commitment on already existing schemes of the government such as rural employment guarantee, housing, etc.

Chances are the government may also have some sops lined up for the urban poor, who have already in some way been factored in, through one nation one ration card, and the Ayushman Bharat insurance health benefits. This could possibly include having concrete houses for the slum dwellers with basic water and regular electricity supplies. The government is also likely to continue exploring new sectors which can be brought under the production linked incentive schemes, some of which such as mobile phones have worked headline worthy mentions across media. Expect a dose of political pragmatism in Budget 2023-24.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

India can make G20 harbinger of harmony



KAMAL NARAYAN OMER

Lessons learnt during the pandemic should be used to drive home the message that countries need each other

A world devastated by the pandemic and global rivalries needs the healing touch of harmony as emphasised in India's philosophy of Vasudeva Kutumbakam. India, the largest democracy in the world, finds itself once again at the centre stage of world diplomacy with the passing of the gavel of G20 Presidency. In the words of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself the G20 Agenda will be inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented and decisive, based on the ancient Indian Philosophy of "Vasudeva Kutumbakam".

In the background of a post-Covid world, mitigating the aftermath of the pandemic by building sustainable and resilient ecosystems along with a peaceful favourable political environment is a priority for all. However, the last year saw a host of geo-political tensions amongst the member states that not only put the agenda of economic development at a halt but also resulted in slowing the financial progress of many nations and amplifying the food and energy crisis.

In the words of India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, Covid, climate change and conflict are the 3C's confronting India's tenure as the host nation for G20. As India starts working on the G20 Presidency agenda next year, the focus would be on prosperity and peace in the Global South for economic progress. This need has been evident from PM Modi's acceptance speech at the time of being handed the Presidency and the theme of 2023 "One Earth, One Family, One Future", emphasising on the need of mutual understanding and oneness amongst nations.

To effectively handle the crisis that is being faced by the world, it is imperative that a conducive environment is created to address all humanitarian issues in a holistic manner by bringing member nations on a common platform. Piloting consensus on key global issues could help de-escalate tensions and also help in economic cooperation and rebuilding of a newer world and better future, besides a thought process that needs to be further accelerated by India while chairing the prestigious G20 in 2023.

Prime Minister Modi's remark in Bali on the rising tension between Russia and Ukraine that "Today's era must not be of war" found resonance with member states. The G20 nations reiterated PM Modi's message at the concluding summit of 2022. Hopes are high that India can play a significant role in initiating peace building and harmony in the region, with its rich cultural legacy of brotherhood and universal solidarity. Given the close camaraderie that the Indian Prime Minister shares with most heads of member states of G20, hopes are high that India will play a vital role in




peacekeeping in the region.

It is no secret that for mitigating the chaos and damage caused by the pandemic the world would need sustainable efforts to build back better and a prerequisite for that is a peaceful environment where nations develop consensus on critical global issues through dialogue and diplomacy instead of aggression and hostility.

The strategic position that the country finds itself in presents unique and unprecedented diplomatic opportunities for the Indian government. The government is also striving to leverage its position as a world leader when it comes to conflict resolution and tackling other threats to mankind, including economic slowdown as well as food and energy crisis. Though India is pitching for accelerated progress towards achieving SDG's and their contribution towards greater human health, wellbeing and progress at the same time the Prime Minister's penchant for traditional and cultural Indian ethos is known by all.

Modi has time and again used his global clout and charisma to show the world an alternative route to a better and harmonious world. The opportunity that chairing the G20 offers should be rightly utilised to promote the wellbeing of all through harmony and understanding. The concept of the world being one big family should be followed in action and spirits. The G20 should witness the Indian push for the



need for a new world order with the core vision enshrined in the cultural ethos of serving humanity and mankind for the benefit of all.

No doubt, India's tenure as the host of the G20 should essentially leverage on prospects focusing on economic development and energy and food crisis. But to effectively address the issues that the global community is facing, the world needs to bring all nations on a single platform and strategize on a collective agenda for a more prosperous future for all.

It must be noted that any consistent effort for the benefit of human beings cannot produce sustainable results as long as they are not in conjunction with a peaceful environment and global co-operation. It is quite evident that the Indian government has already realized the significant role of global harmony and it needs to ensure that India's hosting of the G20 should essentially echo the same sentiment.

The G20 member nations account for nearly 60 per cent of the world's population, including 85 per cent of global GDP and 75 per cent of international trade. Economic regulations and policies will form a substantial part of deliberations. Hence, it is not a secret that the tentative agenda of the G20 has important indicators that are invariably drawn towards the co-operation and shared harmony between all, in the absence of which there cannot be true economic or social progress.

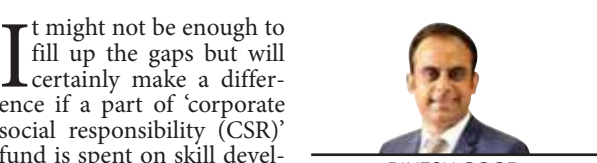
Integrated effort is thus required by India during its presidency tenure to encase upon the opportunity and show the world its diplomatic skills to ensure that geo-political tensions do not lead to humanitarian crises and issues are resolved through mutual understanding. The lessons that were learnt during the pandemic should be used as opportunities, to drive home the message that nations need the support of each other to safeguard the needs of their less privileged population and to avert humanitarian crisis in future.

The move towards SGD's cannot be successful if it fails to safeguard the interest of all thus the call for the support and solidarity can act as a catharsis for ensuring global harmony and rapport among all.

India can give a collective call towards a new paradigm of a human-centric system for accelerating and amplifying the discourse around global understanding and empathy amongst all. As the world looks on, let's strive to make the G20 of Indian presidency as a harbinger of Harmony20. The essence of G20 in 2023 lies in promoting the universal virtue of oneness and mutual co-operation amongst the member countries and India should make sure that it leaves behind a legacy of that caters to the wellbeing of all based on the principles of healing, harmony and hope for a better future for all.

CSR funds should be used to scale up skilling

By utilising CSR funds in a planned way, companies can not only boost Skill India Mission but help create a robust workforce



DINESH SOOD

It might not be enough to fill up the gaps but will certainly make a difference if a part of 'corporate social responsibility (CSR)' fund is spent on skill development in a focused manner for employment generation. The proposal is certainly not a tall order and can easily be implemented with some amount of will power from all stakeholders. Companies have resources, infrastructure, machinery, and expertise that can support the endeavour of skill development in the country.

With due respect to all stakeholders and ongoing efforts aimed at creating a skilled workforce in the country, let us vouch for the fact that there is an emergent need to revisit our strategies

(The author is training partner with National Skill Development Corporation)

and be more focused. We have around 600 districts in the country. The Government of India had launched 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' initiative in January 2018 with a vision of a 'New India' by 2022 where the focus was to improve our ranking under the Human Development Index, raising living standards of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth of all.

A total of 117 Aspirational Districts (ADs) have been identified by Niti Aayog, the top think-tank which is headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, based upon composite indicators from health and nutrition, education, agriculture, water resources, financial inclusion, skill development

and basic infrastructure, which have an impact on the Human Development Index.

The year 2022 is about to end now. Certainly, we have made a great stride in these four years but a lot is yet to be achieved. Each CSR funded SDC will also be more particular about the empowerment of our poor fellow citizens.

A report published by the United Nations Development Programme in India — 'Corporate Engagement in Women's Economic Empowerment' — in 2019 found that top 100 firms' CSR expenditure on women empowerment was just four per cent of the total spend of Rs 6,314.30 crore. Post-Covid restrictions, several business groups seem to be working more in this direction. For

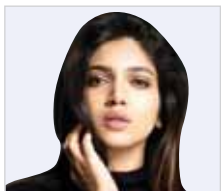
instance, software companies such as Microsoft and Google have joined hands with several state governments to help women gain industry skills in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, digital marketing, etc., so that they can benefit from Digital India.

According to an official estimate, Rs 21,231 crore was spent by 21,349 companies on CSR funds in 2019-20, up from Rs 13,909 crore in 2017-18. India has seen the sharpest growth among the Asian economies, with a six-position jump from 43rd to 37th rank on the annual World Competitiveness Index 2022. The Index has been compiled by the Institute for Management Development (IMD). The top-performing Asian economies are

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

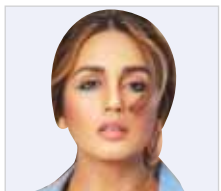
...THE MALES GET A GOOD TWO-DIGIT FIGURE BUT THEN THEY WANT ME TO BE THANKFUL. YOU HAVE COME TO ME BECAUSE I ADD A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CREDIBILITY BUT THEY MAKE IT SOUND LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY.

— ACTOR BHUMI PEDNEKAR



BUT WE SHOULD ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT MALES HAVE CREATED A MARKET OVER YEARS. WE CANNOT PITCH 10 FEMALE FILMS WITH THE 100S THEY HAVE.

— ACTOR HUMA QURESHI



Ukraine targeted in another Russian missile barrage

AP ■ KYIV

Multiple regions of Ukraine, including its capital, faced a massive Russian missile attack on Thursday, the biggest wave of strikes in weeks targeting power stations and other critical infrastructure during freezing weather.

Air raid sirens rang out across the country. Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Russia launched over 120 missiles. There were no immediate reports of any deaths.

Russia dispatched explosive drones to selected regions overnight before broadening the barrage with “air and sea-based cruise missiles launched from strategic aircraft and ships” in the morning, the Ukrainian air force reported.

The widespread attack was the latest in a series of Russian strikes on power and water supplies that have increased the Ukrainian population's suffering.

Moscow has launched such

attacks on a weekly basis since October, while its ground forces struggle to advance.

On Thursday, air defence systems were activated in the capital Kyiv to fend off strikes, according to the regional administration. Sounds of explosions were heard in the city. At least three people were wounded and hospitalised, including a 14-year-old girl, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. He warned of power outages in the capital, asking people to stockpile water and to charge their electronic devices.

After more than 10 months of fighting, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a grinding battle of attrition. The Ukrainian military has reclaimed swathes of Russian-occupied territory in the country's northeast and south, and continues to resist persistent Russian attempts to seize all of the industrial Donbas region.

At the same time, Moscow has methodically targeted Ukrainian power facilities and other key infrastructure in a bid to weaken the country's resolve



and force it to negotiate on Russian terms.

While the Ukrainian military reported success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones after earlier attacks, some still reached their targets.

Most cities have gone without heat, internet service and

electricity for hours or days at a time.

Anastasia, a medic who took shelter on Thursday at a central Kyiv subway station and gave only her first name, said she was tired of the war.

“We don't know how long the war will last. It's hard to be afraid every day and put your

life on hold,” she said.

Numerous explosions also took place in Kharkiv, which is located in eastern Ukraine and the country's second-largest city, and in the city of Lviv near the border with Poland, according to their mayors.

About 90 per cent of Lviv was without electricity, Mayor

Andriy Sadovyi wrote on Telegram. Trams and trolley buses were not working, and residents might experience water interruptions, he said.

Ukrainian authorities in several regions said some incoming Russian missiles were intercepted.

The governor of southern Ukraine's Mykolaiv province, Vitaliy Kim, said five missiles were shot down over the Black Sea. The Ukrainian military's command North said two were downed over the Sumy region, located on the border with Russia in the country's north-east. Fragments from downed Russian missiles damaged two private buildings in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv, the city administration said.

An industrial facility and a playground in neighbourhoods located across the Dnieper River also were damaged, city officials said. No casualties were immediately reported.

As the latest wave of Russian strikes began on Thursday, authorities in the Dnipro, Odesa and Kryvyi Rih

regions said they switched off electricity to minimize the damage to critical infrastructure facilities if they were hit.

Earlier this month, the United States agreed to give a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine to boost the country's defense. The US and other allies also pledged to provide energy-related equipment to help Ukraine withstand the attacks on its infrastructure.

Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, said that Russia was aiming to “destroy critical infrastructure and kill civilians en masse”.

“We're waiting for further proposals from 'peacekeepers' about peaceful settlement,' security guarantees for RF' and undesirability of provocations,” Podolyak wrote on Twitter, a sarcastic reference to statements from some in the West who urged Ukraine to seek a political settlement of the conflict.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Monday that his nation wants a “peace” summit with-

in two months at the United Nations with Secretary-General António Guterres as mediator.

Kuleba said Russia must face a war-crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow. He said, however, that other nations should feel free to engage with the Russians.

Commenting on the summit proposal on Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed it as “delirious” and “hollow,” describing the proposal as a “publicity stunt by Washington that tries to cast the Kyiv regime as a peacemaker”.

“It's an attempt to give a semblance of legitimacy to a meaningless discussion that will not be followed by any concrete steps,” Zakharova said during a briefing.

Russian officials have said that any peace plan can only proceed from Kyiv's recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the regions it illegally annexed from Ukraine in September.

French defense chief visits Ukraine, pledges more support

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

France's defense minister on Wednesday pledged further military support for Ukraine, insisting his government's backing is unflinching while efforts are also being made with Moscow to reach an eventual negotiated end to Russia's invasion. Minister for the Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu said support will include French army equipment and a 200 million euro (US\$212 million) fund that would allow Ukraine to purchase weapons.

While France has been less vocal about its military backing for Ukraine than the United States and Britain, the country has sent a steady supply of weapons to Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

France hosted two aid conferences for Ukraine this month. But many in Ukraine remain critical of Paris' response to the war because of President Emmanuel Macron's efforts to maintain contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin and seek a negotiated solution.

Lecornu said France was giving military equipment from the French army to the Ukrainian army, but highlighted that this would not weaken France's defense. France could deliver a new air-defense system in the future, officials said, without revealing details, though Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov added that France would immediately begin training Ukrainian air officers on how to use it.

Lecornu and Reznikov did not specify which new air defense system France could give Ukraine in the near future. But Lecornu later mentioned the MAMBA anti-missile sys-



tem developed together with Italy, describing it as the European equivalent of the Patriot air defense system that the US has given Ukraine.

Unlike the U.S. government, which announced it was giving the Patriots before teaching Ukrainians how to use them, France will train Ukrainians first so that it could potentially deliver a new system, such as the Mamba SAMP/T together with Italy, once they are ready to use it, Lecornu's office explained to the AP. Reznikov said Ukraine's top priority remains “air defense, anti-missile defense, anti-drone defense, that is, the task of protecting (the) Ukrainian sky.” French Crotale air-defense systems already are “on combat duty,” said Reznikov.

“And accordingly, we agreed that we will increase (the) capabilities of our air force,” he said.

Lecornu arrived a week after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the U.S., Ukraine's chief ally, and amid fighting focused mostly in

the country's east but with neither Moscow nor Kyiv reporting major gains in recent weeks.

After a meeting with Lecornu, Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to France on social media “for the already provided military assistance aimed at protecting the Ukrainian sky and strengthening the capabilities of the defense forces.”

Earlier on Wednesday, in his annual speech to Ukraine's parliament, Zelenskyy urged the European Union to open membership talks with his country after granting it candidate status in June. He also praised relations with the U.S., saying its decision to send Patriot missiles is “a special sign of trust in Ukraine.”

While both Russia and Ukraine have said they were willing to participate in peace talks, their stated conditions remain far apart. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated Wednesday that any peace plan must acknowledge four regions of Ukraine that Russia illegally annexed as Russian territory, a demand

that Kyiv flatly rejects.

Russian forces have pressed their offensive to capture all of eastern Ukraine by concentrating in recent weeks on Bakhmut, a city in Donetsk province. Ukrainian forces were pushing a counteroffensive toward Kreminna, a city in neighboring Luhansk province, in hopes of potentially dividing Russia's troops in the east.

France has supplied Ukraine with a substantial chunk of its arsenal of Caesar cannons, as well as anti-tank missiles, Crotale air defense missile batteries and rocket launchers. It is also training some 2,000 Ukrainian troops on French soil. Macron pledged last week to provide a new injection of weapons in early 2023.

Western military aid to Ukraine has angered Moscow. On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Washington and NATO of fueling the war with the aim of weakening Russia and warned the conflict could spin out of control.

Bulgaria summons Russian envoy over warrant for scribe

AP ■ SOFIA, BULGARIA

The Bulgarian foreign ministry on Thursday summoned Russia's ambassador to explain why Moscow has placed a Bulgarian journalist working for an international investigative website on a list of wanted persons. Christo Grozev, the leading Bellingcat researcher on Russia, who carried out investigations into the poisonings of opposition politician Alexey Navalny and former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, has focused this year on alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Galab Donev said Thursday that his country has not been informed through official channels by Russia about any charges brought against Grozev.



“This act is unacceptable ... it constitutes an encroachment on the freedom of speech and an attempt to intimidate a Bulgarian citizen,” he said.

Grozev, who doesn't share his location for security reasons, said in a tweet on Monday that he had no idea on what grounds the Kremlin has put him on its

“wanted list” and added: “In a way it doesn't matter — for years they've made it clear they are scared of our work and would stop at nothing to make it go away.”

Speaking to local TV channels by video link from an undisclosed location, Grozev expressed fear for his and his

family's life, and said that he expects support from the Bulgarian state.

He said he has already been offered help by several European countries, including Austria, where he has been living in the last decade.

Grozev said that in the last couple of years he and his colleagues from Bellingcat have travelled “with last-minute ticket purchases so that it is not easy to find out where we are going and what we are investigating.” Now, he added, “we have to avoid getting into the territory of a country that might do the Kremlin a favor.”

Thursday's move to summon the Russian ambassador came after the main parties in Bulgaria's parliament called for support for Grozev.



A police patrol talks to a street performer wearing an angel costume and earning money by posing for photos, to check his documents in St Petersburg, Russia, (AP photo)

Sarajevo's agony echoes as Ukraine braces for dark winter

AP ■ SARAJEVO

Vildana Mutevelic huddled in her apartment with her two young children and elderly cousins. They had no heat, electricity or running water as artillery shells tore the roof off their building and almost took their lives.

To survive, she improvised. Mutevelic made a lamp out of used engine oil, water and a shoelace for a wick. She cooked on a fire fueled by books, furniture, shoes or clothes. A plastic spoon, she discovered, when lit, worked well as a temporary flashlight if she ventured outside. Plastic sheets covered the blown-out windows, a flimsy buffer against the bitter cold. Her news of the world came from a neighbour who powered a radio with a car battery.

“The electricity failed right away,” Mutevelic, 70, said through a translator. “And everything we had in our freezers, it melted. Those were our stocks,



basically. That's all.”

For Mutevelic, these are memories from three decades ago, when Bosnian Serbs besieged Sarajevo, causing thousands of civilian casualties. But it's all happening again in Ukraine. Russia's armed forces have aimed their firepower at Ukraine's energy infrastructure as winter weather sets in.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has accused Russia of “energy terrorism,” said earlier this week that about 9 million people were without electricity. The

country's prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, told The Associated Press that Russia's deliberate targeting of Ukraine's essential utilities is another act of genocide, the most heinous of war crimes.

“We are convinced that the crimes (Russia) is committing in Ukraine bear all the hallmarks of genocide,” Kostin said in a statement. “The aggressor state is weaponising winter, depriving Ukrainians of the basics — electricity, water and heating.”

To make civilians suffer and die as a way to force their gov-

ernment to yield isn't a new wartime strategy. But it's prone to rigidity. Families, neighbours and entire communities band together, brainstorm and resist. As Sarajevo did. And as Britain did when the island nation refused to buckle under Nazi Germany's withering assaults 80 years ago.

“The ability of a modern population to survive under duress and under aggression because of the mere willingness to continue to exist is sometimes underestimated,” said Bruno Tertrais, adviser for geopolitics at the Institut Montaigne, a Paris-based think tank.

Ukrainians are displaying the same resolve and ingenuity. Larysa Shevtsova's apartment in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson lost its electricity and water. But gas still flowed into a stove in the cramped kitchen. With two fire-resistant bricks and advice from a family friend, she and her husband were able to keep the temperature bearable

in their home without being confined to the kitchen.

They'd set a brick directly on one of the stove's four burners, the three others covered by large pots and a kettle. When the rectangular brick was hot enough, it was carried carefully into the living room and set on top of a Soviet-era space heater that no longer worked. Shevtsova, her husband and two sons, one of them 3 years old, huddled around the brick for warmth that would last for about 30 minutes.

“We use this method to heat the room,” Shevtsova said. “Before that we just froze.”

The extent of Russia's path of destruction is not limited to one region of Ukraine. From the east to west, Russia has unleashed an onslaught of drone and missile attacks meant to inflict maximum damage to Ukraine's energy infrastructure with a drastic uptick in strikes since September, according to AP's analysis of the data.

Fallen colossus: USSR's terror, triumphs began 100 years ago

AP ■ MOSCOW

With its brutality, technological accomplishments and rigid ideology, the Soviet Union loomed over the world like an immortal colossus.

It led humankind into outer space, exploded the most powerful nuclear weapon ever, and inflicted bloody purges and cruel labour camps on its own citizens while portraying itself as the vanguard of enlightened revolution. But its lifespan was less than the average human's; born 100 years ago, it died days short of its 69th birthday.

The Soviet Union both inspired loyalty and provoked dismay among its 285 million citizens. The dichotomy was summarised by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who served in its notorious KGB security agency.

“Anyone who doesn't regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart,” he said. “Anyone who wants it restored has no brains.” On the centenary of the treaty that formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, The



Associated Press reviews the events of its rise and fall.

ESTABLISHMENT

Five years after the overthrow of Russia's czarist government, four of the socialist republics that had formed in the aftermath signed a treaty on December 30, 1922 to create the USSR: Ukraine; Byelorussia; Transcaucasia, which spread over Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; and Russia, including the old empire's holdings in Central Asia. The USSR, which later expanded to include Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, left the republics with their own governments and national languages, but all subordinate to Moscow.

LENIN DIES

Vladimir Lenin, the first Soviet leader, was already in poor health when the USSR was formed and died little more than a year later. Josef Stalin outmaneuvered rivals in the ensuing power battle.

COLLECTIVISATION

Stalin incorporated private landholdings into state and collective farms. Resistance to collectivisation and the policy's inefficiencies aggravated famines; Ukraine's 1932-33 “Holodomor” killed an estimated 4 million people, and many term it an outright genocide.

GREAT PURGE

Driven by Stalin's fear of rivals, Soviet authorities in the 1930s launched show trials of prominent figures alleged to be enemies of the state and conducted widespread arrests and executions often based on little more than denunciation by neighbours. Estimates say as many as 1.2 million people died in 1937-38, the purge's most intense period.

US to sell Taiwan anti-tank system

Amid rising China threat

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US State Department has approved the sale of an anti-tank mine-laying system to Taiwan amid the rising military threat from China. The department on Wednesday said the Volcano system and all related equipment would cost an estimated USD 180 million.

It's capable of scattering anti-tank and anti-personnel mines from either a ground vehicle or helicopter.

The announcement indicated Taiwan would be buying the vehicle-borne version, the kind of general-use weapon many experts believe Taiwan needs more of to dissuade or repel a potential Chinese invasion.

To advertise that threat, China's military sent 71 planes and seven ships toward Taiwan in a 24-hour display of force directed at the self-ruled island it claims is its own territory. Taiwan's Defence Ministry said on Monday.

China's military harassment of Taiwan has intensified in recent years, along with



rhetoric from top leaders that the island has no choice but to accept eventual Chinese rule.

That has seen the ruling Communist Party's increasingly powerful military wing, the People's Liberation Army, send planes or ships toward the island on a near-daily basis.

Between 6 am Sunday and 6 am Monday, 47 of the Chinese planes crossed the median line of the 160 kilometre (100 mile) -Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary once tacitly accepted by both sides, according to the Defence

Ministry.

That came after China expressed anger at Taiwan-related provisions in a US annual defense spending bill in what has come to be a standard Chinese practice.

China also conducted large-scale live-fire military exercises in August in response to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Beijing views visits from foreign governments to the island as de facto recognition of Taiwan as independent and a challenge to China's claim of sovereignty.

Lack of info on China's Covid surge stirs global concerns

AP ■ BEIJING

Moves by several countries to mandate COVID-19 tests for passengers arriving from China reflect global concern that new variants could emerge in its ongoing explosive outbreak — and that the government may not inform the rest of the world quickly enough.

There have been no reports of new variants to date, but China has been accused of not being forthcoming about the virus since it first surfaced in the country in late 2019. The worry is that it may not be sharing data now on any signs of evolving strains that could spark fresh outbreaks elsewhere.

The US, Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have announced testing requirements for passengers from China. The US cited both the surge in infections and what it said was a lack of information, including genomic sequencing of the virus strains in the country.

Authorities in Taiwan and Japan have expressed a similar concern.

"Right now the pandemic situation in China is not transparent," Wang Pi-Sheng, the head of Taiwan's epidemic command centre, told The Associated Press. "We have a very limited grasp on its information, and it's not very accurate."

The island will start testing everyone arriving from China on January 1, ahead of the expect-



ed return of about 30,000 Taiwanese for the Lunar New Year holiday later in the month. The new Japanese rules, which restrict flights from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao to designated airports beginning Friday, are already disrupting holiday travel plans.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin noted Thursday that many countries have not changed their policies for travellers from China and said that any measures should treat people from all countries equally.

Every new infection offers a chance for the coronavirus to mutate, and it is spreading rapidly in China. Scientists can't say whether that means the surge will unleash a new mutant on the world — but they worry that might happen.

Chinese health officials have said the current outbreak is

being driven by versions of the omicron variant that have also been detected elsewhere, and a surveillance system has been set up to identify any potentially worrisome new versions of the virus. Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at China's Center for Disease Control, said Thursday that China has always reported the virus strains it has found in a timely way.

"We keep nothing secret," he said. "All work is shared with the world."

German Health Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Guelde said authorities there have "no indication that a more dangerous variant has developed in this outbreak in China," but they are monitoring the situation. The European Union is also assessing the situation, though its executive branch noted that a prevalent variant in China is already active in Europe.

Nepal witnessed turbulent 2022 that dramatically turned political rivals into allies

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal witnessed political turbulence in 2022 that dramatically turned rivals into allies and throned former guerrilla leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" as the Prime Minister for a third time, as Kathmandu made efforts to balance ties with immediate neighbours India and China with high-profile talks and visits.

Prachanda, the 68-year-old CPN-Maoist Centre chairman, surprisingly left his pre-poll alliance with the Nepali Congress and joined hands with rival CPN-UML led by former premier K P Sharma Oli and five other smaller parties to become prime minister.

Elections to the lower house and seven provincial assemblies were held last month to end the prolonged political instability that had plagued the Himalayan nation. However, the polls resulted in a hung parliament, with the Nepali Congress emerging as the single largest party, followed by CPN-UML and Prachanda's CPN-Maoist.

No party in the 275-member House of Representatives got 138 seats required to form a government.

The wheel turned full circle since Prachanda and Oli were allies till the former broke away last year and backed Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba for the post of prime minister.

Restricted access to abortion linked with higher suicide rates: US Study

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Restricting abortion access is linked to increased suicide risk for women of reproductive age, a study conducted in the US found.

The interdisciplinary team from the University of Pennsylvania and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), US, did not find the same association for older women or death due to motor vehicle accidents, the study said.

"Stress is a key contributor to mental health burden and a major driver of increased suicide risk," said Ran Barzilay of the Perelman School of Medicine and CHOP.

"We found that this partic-

ular stressor - restriction to abortion - affects women of a specific age in a specific cause of death, which is suicide. That's the 10,000-foot view," said Barzilay.

The findings have been published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Psychiatry.

When the Dobbs v. Jackson Supreme Court decision came down in June, overturning the right to abortion in the United States that Roe v. Wade had bestowed in 1973, conversations about access to reproductive care took on a renewed urgency.

The prior work of Jonathan Zandberg of the Wharton School, US, had shown that more restricted access to reproductive care creates a costly



trade-off for women's career aspirations and their family formation choices. The researchers decided to examine other aspects of this dynamic, looking at the mental health implications of enforcing strict reproductive rights and more specifically, risk of suicide, the third leading cause of death for 25- to 44-year-olds in the US.

Massive fire at Cambodia hotel casino kills 19

AP ■ PHNOM PENH

A massive fire at a Cambodian hotel casino that lasted more than 12 hours killed at least 19 people and injured more than 60, while other victims were apparently not yet accounted for Thursday.

Neighbouring Thailand sent firetrucks and emergency workers to help cope with the crisis in the bustling border town of Poipet.

Some victims were believed to still be under debris or in locked rooms that rescue teams could not immediately access, so the death toll was expected to rise, said Sek Sokhom, head of Banteay Meanchey province's information department. He said more than 60 people were injured.

The dead and injured comprised people of several nationalities, including Thai, Chinese, Malaysian, Vietnamese and Cambodian, he said. A local Buddhist temple was being used to receive their bodies.

Videos posted on social media showed people falling from a roof after they were trapped by the fire at the Grand Diamond City casino and hotel in the town of Poipet. Many of those inside, both customers and staff, were from neighbouring Thailand.

In a video posted by Cambodia's firefighting agency, onlookers could be heard shouting pleas to rescue people trapped on the roof of the hotel complex, which is more than a dozen stories tall at its highest point. The video showed at least one man

falling as the flames reached the roof.

"Oh, please help rescue them. Pump water, pump water!" shouted the onlookers.

The Department of Fire Prevention, Extinguishing and Rescue posted that calls for help were heard from the 13th, 14th and 15th floors at 4 a.M. And hands were seen waving from windows as well as a mobile phone's flashlight signalling from inside the complex.

"The fire was massive, and was inside the casino, so it was difficult for our water cannons to reach it," observed a firefighter on the video posted online by the fire department. He said that was the reason the fire continued burning for such a long time.

The blaze, which started around midnight Wednesday,

was finally put out at 2 p.M. Thursday, said Sek Sokhom, adding that the rescue operation was continuing.

He also said an initial investigation found that the fire may have been caused by an overload due to New Year's decorations drawing increased electricity, causing wires to overheat and burn.

Banteay Meanchey police chief Sithi Loh said earlier that 360 emergency personnel and 11 firetrucks had been sent to the scene of the fire, whose cause was not yet known.

"Right now, we are trying to bring the dead bodies from the building down. I don't think there will be any survivors because of very thick smoke. Even we all (the rescue staff) have to wear proper gear when we go inside the building, otherwise we cannot

breathe at all," Montri Khaosard, a staff member of Thailand Ruamkatanyu Foundation, a social welfare organisation that sends volunteers to disaster scenes, said Thursday afternoon.

Thai and Cambodian rescue teams worked side by side in Thursday's search of the badly burned premises.

Thailand's public television network, Thai PBS, reported that 50 Thais, both staff and customers, had been trapped inside the casino complex. It

reported that Cambodian authorities requested help to deal with the fire from Thailand, which sent five firetrucks and 10 rescue vans.

Poipet in western Cambodia is opposite the city of Aranyaprathet in more affluent Thailand, and there is busy cross-border trade and tourism.

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that I, Subhash Chand Barjatya S/o Late Shri G. I. Barjatya R/o G-52, Lajpat Nagar-II, New Delhi, am the Owner of Flat No. 709, 3rd Floor Pocket-A with Scooter Garage, Sarita Vihar New Delhi-110076 Under SFS Category, vide DDA's File F-127(2601)1986/SFS/SV/II. The all original documents viz (1) Demand Letter (2) Allotment Letter (3) Site Possession (4) DDA Possession (5) NOC for Electricity & Water Connection issued by DDA in respect of Flat No. 709, 3rd Floor, Pocket-A, Under SFS Category, Sarita Vihar New Delhi-110076 has been lost the said property. An Information Report of this effect has been lodge in Police Station Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No.127150/2022 on 27.12.2022.

Any person(s) claiming any right, interest having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9810036319 within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy. Director, LAB(H) or Director (H)-2, D-Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Kanwal Nain Sawhney S/o Late Tilak Raj Sawhney R/o BU-94, Pitampura, Delhi holder of 165 shares of (ICICI Bank 'Folio No.1085576 & 1085576 Certificate No.00076318 and 00963018 Distinctive No. 0022122806 to 0022122955 & 5831730769 to 5831730783 have mislaid/lost these shares. This is for information of all for applying issue of duplicate shares to ICICI Bank. An information report of this effect has been lodge in Police Station Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No.1026193/2022 Dated on 28/11/2022. Finder please contact above address.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-AUCTION

The Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Northern Railway, Firozpur for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Auction for various Railway Station lot over Firozpur Division as per detail given below:-

Name of Work	Allotment for Operation and Maintenance of Normal Pay & Use Toilets for the period of Three years.
A) Auction Catalog No.	EA-FZR-PNu-22-7
Auction Start Time	12/01/2023, 10:00
Lot No.	Name of Station
PnU-FZR-JGN-Toi-9-22-1	Jagraon
PnU-FZR-FDK-Toi-54-22-1	Faridkot
PnU-FZR-BRML-Toi-63-22-1	Baramulla
PnU-FZR-ANT-Toi-59-22-1	Anantnag
PnU-FZR-QG-Toi-58-22-1	Qazigund
PnU-FZR-BDGM-Toi-61-22-1	Budgam
PnU-FZR-SXZM-Toi-62-22-1	Sopore
B) Auction Catalog No.	EA-FZR-PNu-22-8
Auction Start Time	13/01/2023, 10:00
PnU-FZR-PTK-Toi-70-22-1	Pathankot

Only registered Vendors can participate. For other details please visit Railway website www.ireps.gov.in

75 Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Netanyahu sworn-in as Israel's new Prime Minister

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Benjamin Netanyahu was on Thursday sworn-in as Israel's prime minister for a sixth time, leading the Jewish state's most right-wing government to date.

Netanyahu, 73, already Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, has the support of 63 lawmakers in the 120-member Knesset (Israeli parliament). In the house, 54 lawmakers voted against his government.

He returned as prime minister with the formation of his sixth government, which is composed of a number of far-right allies, a prospect that many fear would put the new



government at odds with large parts of its own population and its closest allies abroad.

The lawmakers supporting the new government are all right-wing, including

Netanyahu's Likud party supported by the ultra-orthodox Shas, United Torah Judaism, the far-right Otzma Yehudit, Religious Zionist Party, and Noam.

Shortly before the confidence vote for Israel's 37th government, the Knesset elected Likud lawmaker Amir Ohana as its new Speaker.

A former justice minister and public security minister in past governments, Ohana is the Knesset's first openly gay speaker.

Speaking at the Knesset ahead of the swearing-in of the new government, Netanyahu said that the three "national goals" of his government would

be to prevent Iran from going nuclear, launch a bullet train that runs across the length of the country and bring more Arab countries into the Abraham accords fold.

Amid repeated heckling by opposing members who called Netanyahu "weak" and "racist", he told them to "respect the will of the voters," and that "this is not the end of democracy or the end of the country."

"In a democracy, you don't climb over the walls of the Capitol nor those of the Knesset," he said.

He promised to improve the personal safety of the citizens and lower the high cost of living.

S Korea stages drills simulating downing of North drones

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea staged large-scale military drills on Thursday to simulate shooting down drones as a step to bolster its readiness against North Korean provocations, three days after the North flew drones into its territory for the first time in five years.

South Korean warplanes and helicopters failed to bring down any of the five North Korean drones spotted south of the border Monday before they flew back home or vanished from South Korean radars.

One of them travelled as far as northern Seoul. That caused security jitters among many people in the South, for which the military offered a rare public apology on Tuesday.

Thursday's training involved land-based anti-air guns, drones playing the role of enemy drones, and a total of 20 fighter jets, attack helicopters and unmanned assets. While there was no actual live-fire, it was still the country's first set of major anti-drone drills since 2017, according to military authorities.

The drills near Seoul set up diverse scenarios of border infiltrations by small enemy drones, under which the mobilized South Korean military assets practised how they could detect, track and shoot them down, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Also on Thursday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol reiterated his push to build a stronger air defense and get tough on North Korean provocations.

The North's drone flights followed its record number of missile tests this year that some experts say is part of an effort to pressure the United States and its allies to make some concessions like sanctions relief.

"Whether they have nukes or whatever weapons of mass destruction they have, we must send a clear message to those who repeat provocations. We must not be frightened of (their nukes) and we must not hesitate," Yoon said during a visit to a weapons development agency.



"To obtain peace, we must prepare for a war that (we can win) overwhelmingly."

Yoon said on Tuesday his government will advance the planned establishment of a military drone unit and introduce high-tech stealth drones.

North Korea's state media hasn't commented on South Korea's announcement of its reported drone flights. But some observers say North Korea likely sent those drones to test South Korean and US readiness.

They say North Korea also likely assessed that drones could be a cheap yet effective method to trigger security concerns and an internal divide in South Korea.

In response to the North's drone flying, South Korea said it sent three of its surveillance drones across the border in a rare tit-for-tat measure. North Korea didn't make any reaction, according to South Korean defense officials.

This week, North Korea is under a key ruling party meeting to review past projects and determine policy objectives for 2023. During its third day on Wednesday, leader Kim Jong Un expressed hopes that local Workers' Party officials would report successes on their jobs and duties to live up to the party's trust in them, state media reported on Thursday, without elaborating what their tasks are.

In an earlier session, state media cited Kim as setting forth new goals to solidify his country's military power, an indication that he would continue his run of weapons tests.

UJVN Limited
H.O. : "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephone: 0135-2763808, Fax No.: 0135-2763508
CIN No.: U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvn.com

R.O. No. 974 e-Procurement Corrigendum No.-01 Dt. 29.12.2022

e-Tender Notice Reference: 04/EE(E&M)/Maneri Dam/2022-23 (Tender ID 2022_UJVN_52601.1).

Name of work: Supply, Installation, testing and commissioning of Automatic Early Warning System (EWS) for Maneri Dam.

Corrigendum-1 has been uploaded on the e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>. Other terms and conditions will remain unchanged. For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>.

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity" **Executive Engineer (E&M)**

छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल
पर्यावास भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, रायपुर (छ.ग.) 492002

// सर्व संबंधित को सूचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली की अधिसूचना दिनांक 14.09.2006 (यथा संशोधित) के तहत सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेसर्स कोलमेन बिलॉजिकल (इंडिया) प्राइवेट लिमिटेड, ग्राम- गतौरी / जलरोल, तहसील व जिला - बिलासपुर के Proposed coal washery of 1.2 MTPA along with (expansion of existing coal crusher 0.6 MTPA) in an area of 6.46 ha based on heavy metal cyclone technology के पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति हेतु लोक सुनवाई बाबत छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल में आवेदन किया गया है। उक्त प्रस्तावित परियोजना के संबंध में आपत्ति / सुझाव / टीका-टिप्पणी इस अधिसूचना के जारी होने के दिनांक से 30 दिवस के अंदर क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, बिलासपुर के कार्यालय में मौखिक अथवा लिखित रूप से कार्यालयीन समय में प्रस्तुत की जा सकती हैं। इस परियोजना के लिए लोक सुनवाई दिनांक 03/02/2023 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे शासकीय नवीन प्राथमिक स्कूल मेदान, ग्राम- गतौरी, तहसील - बिलासपुर, जिला - बिलासपुर (छ.ग.) में नियत की गई है। यह भी सूचित हो कि लोक सुनवाई के दौरान भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली के आफिस मेमोरेडम F No. 22-25/2000-IA, III दिनांक 14.09.2020 तथा कोरोना वायरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेतु शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिश-निर्देश का अक्षरशः पालन कराया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

ई आई.ए. अधिसूचना दिनांक 14.09.2006 (यथासंशोधित) के प्रावधानों के अनुसार डाफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालकसार की प्रति (हिन्दी व अंग्रेजी में) एवं इसकी सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी) जन सामान्य के अवलोकन / पठन हेतु कार्यालय कलेक्टर बिलासपुर, मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, कार्यालय, जिला पंचायत बिलासपुर, अनुविभागीय अधिकारी (रा.), कार्यालय, अनुविभागीय अधिकारी (रा.) बिलासपुर / कोटा / तखतपुर / बिल्हा / मस्तुरी, जिला- बिलासपुर, कार्यालय महासंबंधक, जिला व्यापार एवं उद्योग केन्द्र बिलासपुर, क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, व्यापार विहार पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय पार्क के पास, बिलासपुर, संरक्षक / सचिव कार्यालय, संरक्षक / सचिव, कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत - गतौरी, जलसों, सेमरताल, भदोरीयाखार, मोहतराई, सेदरी, पौंसरा, बिरकोना, लखराम, समतला, नागाई, कछार, अमतरा, तहसील - बिलासपुर, कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत- कलमीटार, खराहना, खराहनी, बरपाली, नवागांव, तहसील-कोटा, कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत-भुटकु, निरतु, लोखण्डी, परसदा, तहसील- तखतपुर, कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत- मस्तुरी, खैरा, बनियाडीह, तहसील-मस्तुरी, कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत- पेण्डरवा, तहसील- बिल्हा, जिला- बिलासपुर डायरेक्टर, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन, मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार, इंदिरा पर्यावरण भवन, वायु विंग, जोरबाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, मुख्य वन संरक्षक, एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर- 19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर एवं मुख्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावास भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर (छ.ग.) में रखी गई है।

सदस्य सचिव
छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल,
नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

‘Indian eco flaunts resilient picture amid global shocks’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Amid global shocks and challenges, the Indian economy presents a picture of resilience and the regulators are ready to take appropriate actions to preserve financial stability, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday.

In his foreword to the 26th Financial Stability Report (FSR), Das said the international economic order stands challenged and financial markets are in turmoil due to monetary tightening in most parts of the world.

Food and energy supplies and prices are under strain, debt distress is staring at many emerging market and developing economies, and every economy is grappling with multiple challenges, he said.

“Amidst such global shocks and challenges, the Indian economy presents a picture of resilience. Financial stability has been maintained. Domestic financial markets have remained stable and fully functional. The banking system is sound and well-capitalised,” Das said.

In spite of formidable global headwinds, he said that India’s external accounts



remain well-cushioned and viable.

Going forward, Das said that core issues of management of climate change, dealing with unanticipated and fresh shocks, if any, further strengthening the buffers of financial system, harnessing fintech innovations and deepening financial inclusion will continue to receive priority attention from regulators and policy makers.

In 2023, India is well positioned to play a leading role in the world stage as part of its G20 presidency. The biggest challenge for G20 as a group is

to re-ignite the efficacy of multilateralism, the Governor said.

Further, Das said the central bank recognises the destabilising potential of global risks even as it draw strength from the robust macroeconomic fundamentals of the Indian economy.

“The Reserve Bank and the other financial regulators remain vigilant and in readiness to ensure the stability and soundness of our financial system through appropriate interventions, whenever necessary, in the best interest of the Indian economy,” he said.

Sensex rebounds on fag-end buying; Airtel, banking stocks spurt

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks closed in the positive territory after trading lower for most part of the session on Thursday on fag-end buying in telecom, banking and metal stocks amid expiry of monthly derivative contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 223.60 points or 0.37 per cent to settle at 61,133.88. During the day, it had declined 431.22 points or 0.70 per cent to 60,479.06.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty gained 68.50 points or 0.38 per cent to end at 18,191.

Bharti Airtel topped the Sensex gainers’ chart with a jump of 1.99 per cent, followed by SBI, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Sun Pharma and ICICI Bank.

In contrast, Tata Motors, Titan, UltraTech Cement, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv and Larsen & Toubro were the prominent laggards, shedding up to 1.41 per cent.

The market breadth was in favour of the bulls, with 19 advances and 11 declines.

“Markets shrugged off intra-day volatility as last hour buying helped key indices end



in the green. Investors covered their positions on the last day of the December monthly expiry, fuelling an upsurge in metals, banking and oil & gas shares on hopes of a demand revival after China lifted Covid-related restrictions.

“But sideways movement will continue going ahead as recessionary fears in the West continue to loom large in view of more likely rate hikes and tempered growth going ahead,” said Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said negative closing of the US market pushed Indian bourses to a poor start.

Expect to sign at least two more FTAs in 2023: Goyal

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said he expects at least two more free trade agreements to be signed up in 2023.

Negotiations are scheduled with the UK, European Union and Canada, Goyal said at an event here, adding that his ministry does not have the bandwidth to tend to requests by smaller trading partners like New Zealand with which the bilateral trade stands at USD 350 million.

“India today works from a position of strength, we negotiate with confidence,” Goyal said, adding that the country will sign at least two such free trade agreements.

Speaking at the event to mark the operationalisation of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement signed in April this year, Goyal said January itself is filled with meetings between Indian Commerce Ministry officials and their counterparts abroad. After handing over certificates of origin to the first among the Indian goods being sent to Australia after the agreement, Goyal said the FTA will benefit a slew of sectors,



including textiles, gems and jewellery and also information technology, which gets aided by the dropping of double taxation. Goyal said he expects Indian IT companies’ billing to Australia alone growing to USD 1 billion in the next 5-7 years from USD 200 million at present.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which India walked out of in 2019, would have become a free trade agreement with China in effect, Goyal said, adding that Indian industry was “petrified” with the earlier UPA government’s move to start negotiations on the same.

He called the walkout an economically prudent and wise

decision.

As of now, with the agreement with Australia, India has separately struck trade agreements with 13 of the 15 countries in the RCEP, while only New Zealand and China remain. He said on a conservative basis, the ministry expects the bilateral trade between India and Australia to increase to \$31 billion in five years with the free trade agreement in place.

The agreement is a win-win document that has the complementarities as its fundamental building block, Goyal said, adding that India will get access to cheaper raw materials like coal from Australia while the finished Indian goods will have a market there.

Gross NPA ratio falls to 7-yr low of 5%; banking system remains well capitalised: RBI



16 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively.

“Their GNPA ratio have been steadily trending down to a seven-year low of 5 per cent in September 2022, while net non-performing assets (NNPA) have dropped to ten-year low of 1.3 per cent of total assets,” it said.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Thursday said banks’ gross NPA ratio has fallen to a seven-year low of 5 per cent and the banking system remains sound and well-capitalised.

The declining tendency in the Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio is likely to continue and under the baseline scenario of the stress testing framework, it is projected to fall further to 4.9 per cent in September 2023, the 26th issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR) said.

The report further said the capital positions of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) remained strong in September 2022. The Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) and Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) ratio of SCBs stood at

Coal Minister launches ₹300-crore Angul-Balram rail link



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi on Thursday inaugurated the ₹300-crore Angul-Balram rail line that connects Odisha’s Talcher Coalfield.

The rail link is the first phase of a total 68-km-long Inner Corridor - Angul-Balram-PutugadiaJarapada-Tentuloi — which will cater to the coal mines of Talcher coalfields in the Angul district of Odisha.

“Coal evacuation from Talcher coalfields got a major boost with the inauguration of the 14-km-long Angul-Balram rail link, which would enable Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd

(MCIL) to increase daily despatch of coal to the consumers by about 40 thousand tonne,” the coal ministry said in a statement.

The commissioning of the first phase Angul-Balram rail link has increased the potential of Coal India arm MCL to despatch coal by 10 more rakes daily. The rail link was constructed by Mahanadi Coal Railway Ltd (MCRL), a joint venture company of MCL, IRCON International Ltd and IDCO.

The rail link will also help in the evacuation of the dry fuel from the coal blocks allotted to miners other than Coal India in Talcher coalfields.

Gross NPA ratio falls to 7-year low of 5%: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Thursday said banks’ gross NPA ratio has fallen to a seven-year low of 5 per cent and the banking system remains sound and well-capitalised.

In the 26th issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR), the RBI also said the global economy is facing formidable headwinds with recessionary risks looming large.

The interplay of multiple shocks has resulted in tightened financial conditions and heightened volatility in financial markets, it pointed out.

“The Indian economy is confronting strong global headwinds. Yet, sound macroeconomic fundamentals and healthy financial and non-financial sector balance sheets are providing strength and resilience and engendering financial system stability,” the report said.

In the foreword to the report, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the central bank recognises the destabilising potential of global risks, even as it draw strength from the robust macroeconomic fundamentals of the Indian economy.

Gold falls ₹21; silver declines ₹464

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price fell ₹21 to ₹54,963 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had ended at ₹54,984 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also declined ₹464 to ₹69,117 per kilogram.

“Major central banks, including the Bank of Japan have showed concerns regarding inflation and are expected to raise rates further in the next year. Focus today will be on the US weekly jobless claims data,” Navneet Damani, Senior VP - Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

In the overseas market, gold was trading higher at \$1,809 per ounce while silver was down at \$23.65 per ounce.

“Comex gold price traded marginally up in the Asian trading hours on optimism about improvement in demand from China,” an analyst at HDFC Securities said.

Rupee drops 7 paise to 82.87 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled 7 paise lower at 82.87 against the US dollar on Thursday despite softening crude oil prices and a weak greenback overseas.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened weak at 82.77 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 82.77 and a low of 82.87. It finally ended at 82.87 against the American currency, registering a fall of 7 paise over its previous close of 82.80. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.19 per cent to 104.26.

“Rupee remained flat... As the holiday week of Christmas and New Year kept volumes away. The range for rupee is narrow between 82.50-82.95 with undertone of weakness,” said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities. On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 223.60 points or 0.37 per cent higher at 61,133.88, while the broader NSE Nifty advanced 68.50 points or 0.38 per cent to 18,191.00. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 1.71 per cent to USD 81.84 per barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth ₹572.78 crore, according to exchange data.

BUSINESS BRIEF

SRMNCC HOLDS SUSTAINABLE GREEN AWARENESS PROG Chennai: The cadets of SRMNCC have been conducting a series of awareness events under the banner of Thairi which is conducted by Tamil Nadu Ambedkar Law University as part of the 14th CADO FIESTA 2023. On the 27th of November, 2022 an event was organized at the Guindy National Park, Chennai. The theme of the event was “The 4R’s - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover” The event began with about 20 cadets explaining the importance of a sustainable environment through colourful posters. A rally was also held around the park with cadets raising awareness through slogans. The cadets also gifted plants to the public and they planted them at the park.



GOLDS TO VIT-AP IN TAEKWON-DO-2022 CHAMPIONSHIP Amaravati: Kambham Vinay, a mechanical engineering student of VIT-AP, university, Amaravati won 2 gold medals with his splendid performance at the 25th AITA (All India Taekwon-do Association) National ITF Taekwon-do championship -2022 held in Ongole, Prakasham District of Andhra Pradesh. Kambham Vinay who hails from the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh is a 2nd-year mechanical engineering student of VIT-AP, university, Amaravati. He won a gold in 64kgs power breaking category and clichéd another gold in sparring category of the Taekwon-do championship - 2022. Last year (in 2021) he won one Gold and One bronze in a kyorogi event held in Saroor Nagar stadium in Hyderabad.



DK MADAN ASSUMES CHARGE AS POWERGRID CVO Gurugram: DK Madan has assumed the charge of Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSU of Government of India. Prior to this, he was working as Director (Chemical) in Ministry of Chemical and Fertilizers, Govt. of India. An IOFS - 1994 Batch Officer, Madan has worked for around 21 years in three major defense production units of Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), Department of Defense Production, Ministry of Defense, located in different parts of the country and looked after administration, production, planning, procurement. He had also been on the board of PSUs- HOCL, HIL & HFL as “Government Nominee Director”.



KRIBHCO LAUNCHES BIO-STIMULANT ‘SIVARIKA’ Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO), one of the pioneer fertilizer organization of India having its manufacturing unit at Hazira, Surat, has launched another innovative and sustainable product, SIVARIKA — a Seaweed Bio-stimulant. The SIVARIKA granules are fortified with seaweed extract derived from red and brown algae. The SIVARIKA Seaweed technology provider CSIR-CSMCRI. The SIVARIKA Seaweed functions as a metabolic bio enhancer as it contains proteins, carbohydrates, inorganic salts and other inherent nutrients, vitamins, plant growth hormones like auxin, cytokinin and gibberlins, betaines and mannitol etc.

CBIC tells taxmen to recover only reduced tax dues in IBC cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC has asked tax officers to abide by the NCLT order in insolvency cases and recover only that much GST dues as has been finalised by the tribunal.

In a circular, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said the proceedings at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) will be covered under Section 84 of the Central GST Act — which deals with recovery proceedings.

The CBIC on December 27 issued a clarification in response to representations received from the trade as well as tax authorities regarding



the modalities for implementation of the order of the adjudicating authority under the IBC with respect to the demand for recovery against the such corporate debtor.

“In cases where a confirmed demand for recovery has been issued by the tax authorities...Against the cor-

porate debtor, and where the proceedings have been finalised against the corporate debtor under IBC reducing the amount of statutory dues payable by the corporate debtor under CGST Act..., the jurisdictional Commissioner shall issue an intimation reducing such demand, to the taxable person...” the CBIC said.

EY Tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal said the circular clarifies the treatment of statutory dues under GST law in respect of taxpayers for whom proceedings have been finalised under IBC.

Section 84 of the CGST Act deals with the procedure where original tax, interest or penalty stands reduced under an appeal, revision or other proceedings.

India’s mineral output rises 2.5% in Oct

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country’s mineral production increased 2.5 per cent in October over the same month a year ago, the mines ministry said on Thursday.

The index of mineral production of mining and quarrying sector for the month stood at 112.5, up 2.5 per cent as compared to October last year. As per provisional figures of the Indian Bureau of Mines, the cumulative growth during April-October 2022-23 over the corresponding period of previous year is 4 per cent.

The output of important minerals in October includes coal (662 lakh tonne), lignite (35 lakh tonne), natural gas (utilized) 2,829 million cubic metre and petroleum (crude) 25 lakh tonne.

New tractor emission standard to impact 7-8% of domestic volume: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new emission standard, Bharat Stage TREM IV, for tractors of engine power of over 50 horse power set to kick in from January 2023, will impact around 7-8 per cent of the domestic volume and manufacturers are expected to gradually pass the cost increases to customers, according to ratings agency ICRA.

A big proportion of the overall industry, less than 50 horse power (HP), constituting around 92 per cent of sales in FY22 would continue to be governed by Bharat Stage TREM IIIA norms, ICRA said in a statement.

The implementation of the

revised emission norms for the over 50-HP segment were initially slated to be implemented from October 2020, but was deferred multiple times with the government taking cognisance of industry representations amid the disruptions brought about by the pandemic.

“India remains a medium-to-high HP tractor market, with around 80 per cent of the sales coming from the 30-50 HP categories. The revised emission norms applicable from January 2023 would apply only to more than 50 HP tractors, impacting around 7-8 per cent of the overall industry volumes,” ICRA Vice President, Corporate Ratings Rohan Kanwar Gupta said.

‘Frontloaded monetary policy actions to bring inflation further under control’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India’s retail inflation has moderated after remaining above the upper tolerance level since January, and frontloaded monetary policy actions are expected to bring it further under control, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a report on Thursday.

The RBI’s Financial Stability Report (FSR) also said the persistence and broadening

of core inflation may continue to exert pressure going forward.

“Frontloaded monetary policy actions are expected to bring inflation into the tolerance band and closer to the target while anchoring inflation expectations,” the FSR noted.

The Indian economy is confronting strong global headwinds but the sound macroeconomic fundamentals and healthy financial and non-financial sector balance sheets

are providing strength and resilience and engendering financial system stability, it added.

“Inflation, though elevated, is retreating in response to frontloaded monetary policy actions and supply side intervention,” the report noted.

The RBI said the increase in the value of the US dollar also tends to raise inflation by driving up import prices, mainly of commodities which are



invoiced in the greenback.

Currency depreciations have kept commodity prices in local currency at still elevated levels and much above their averages over the last five years in many economies, said the

report.

For poorer economies, this is a “double blow” as commodity-driven inflation is likely to precipitate a “humanitarian crisis”.

On the domestic financial situation, RBI said the conditions have tightened in response to the focus of the monetary policy stance on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward,

while supporting growth.

The RBI has been mandated by the government to keep inflation in a band of 2-6 per cent. RBI takes into account the retail inflation to review its monetary policy every two months.

After remaining above the upper tolerance level since January this year, retail inflation slipped to 5.88 per cent in November 2022 on softening food prices.

Mbappe delivers for PSG

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe scored an injury-time penalty to seal a 2-1 win for Paris Saint-Germain over Strasbourg in Ligue 1 on Wednesday before admitting he will never get over France's World Cup final defeat to Argentina.

Mbappe was back in action 10 days after scoring a hat-trick in the final but then seeing the South Americans win in a penalty shootout.

PSG had Neymar sent off for two yellow cards as the Brazilian made an unhappy return to action following his country's elimination in the World Cup quarter-finals.

Captain Marquinhos had put the hosts ahead with an early header but the Brazilian defender scored an own goal after 51 minutes as some of PSG's stars appeared to be suffering a post-Qatar hangover.

Neymar picked up a yellow for a petulant flick in the face of a Strasbourg player and then earned another for a blatant dive in the penalty area just after the hour.

Mbappe had been a constant menace for PSG but was unable to find the target with two clear-cut chances.

But deep into second-half injury time he was brought down in the penalty area and converted the winner from the spot in the 96th minute.

After the game, Mbappe said of the World Cup defeat: "I think I'm never going to get over it."

"As I said to my teammates, there is no reason why the club



should pay the price for the failure of the national team, they are two very different situations," he added.

Argentina superstar Lionel Messi was absent from the PSG lineup after his World Cup-winning exploits.

The victory put PSG eight points ahead of Lens, who must beat Nice on Thursday to keep up.

PSG also announced that their 30-year-old Italian midfielder Marco Verratti has extended his stay at the club

Kylian says will 'never' get over WC heartbreak



AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe said he will never get over the disappointment of losing the World Cup final after the France star scored the winner on his return to action for Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday.

"I think I'm never going to get over it," Mbappe said, speaking 10

days after he scored a hat-trick in the final against Argentina which the South Americans won in a penalty shootout.

"As I said to my teammates, there is no reason why the club should pay the price for the failure of the national team, they are two very different situations," Mbappe said.

until 2026.

In other games, Lille beat 10-man Clermont 2-0 thanks to an Angle Gomes penalty and a late settler from Mohamed Bayo deep in time added on.

Lyon thrashed Brest 4-2 away from home as they push for the European places.

MEMORIES OF HENRY

France may have had a glimpse of the future earlier on Wednesday when 17-year-old Monaco forward Eliesse Ben Seghir secured all three points in a 3-2 win over Auxerre on his Ligue 1 debut.

Thierry Henry was two months younger when he scored his first double for Monaco against Lens aged 17 years and 8 months back in 1995, but the brilliance of Ben Seghir's brace brought back memories of the Arsenal and France star.

Ben Seghir, who does not turn 18 until February, came on as a second-half substitute for Wissam Ben Yedder, who had scored from the spot just before half time but was replaced anyway.

The newcomer unleashed his first goal within 12 minutes with an unstoppable shot to put Monaco 2-1 up.

He then delivered a solo effort to savour, delivering a curling winner from outside the box to make it 3-2.

After the final whistle the Monaco players led Ben Seghir to be serenaded by the away fans on a night that will live long in the teenager's memory.

The win lifts Monaco up to fifth place on 30 points.



Haaland returns to haunt Leeds

AP ■ LEEDS

Erling Haaland lamented not scoring five times in the city of his birth as the Norwegian struck twice in Manchester City's 3-1 win at Leeds to lift them back up to second in the Premier League.

Haaland spent his early years in Yorkshire as his father Alfe Inge played for Leeds, but showed no mercy as City got their title challenge back on track.

Pep Guardiola's men moved to within five points of Arsenal at the top of the table as they bounced back from a shock defeat to Brentford before the World Cup.

Haaland now has 20 Premier League goals in just 14 appearances since joining City, but was still left unsatisfied after failing to beat Illan Meslier with three one-on-ones.

"I could've scored five, that's the truth," Haaland told Amazon Prime.

Haaland should have made his mark inside 45 seconds as he was denied by a fine save from Meslier when clean through.

That set the tone for a first half of frustration for City as a series of glorious chances came and went.

Meslier won another battle with Haaland, while two glaring misses from Jack Grealish left Guardiola with his head in his hands.

However, Leeds crucially failed to hold out until half-time on level terms as the visitors finally made their dominance count in first half

stoppage time.

Kevin De Bruyne opened up the Leeds defence for the opener and when Riyad Mahrez's shot was parried by Meslier, Rodri swept the rebound into the net.

Grealish made some amends for his earlier misses by creating the second with a smart interception and unselfish pass for Haaland to roll into an empty net.

The City star acknowledged his Leeds past by refusing to celebrate, but it did not stop him adding a second on the night from another Grealish cutback.

"I have to say, it's a really special moment in my career," Haaland said of playing at Elland Road.

"It was in my craziest fantasy I could think of to be at Elland Road and score for Manchester City against Leeds."

Leeds remain perilously poised just two points above the relegation zone, but did at least get a goal to show for their efforts when Pascal Struijk headed in from a corner 17 minutes from time.

Haaland did at least spare the home side his fourth Premier League hat-trick with an uncharacteristically weak finish with just Meslier to beat once more.

At the other end Joe Gelhardt's curling effort was inches away from setting up a grandstand finish.

But a two-goal margin of victory was the very least City's display deserved as they leapfrogged Newcastle into second in the table.



Aus Open prizemoney hits record high

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Pay rises are in store for players at January's Australian Open with organisers on Thursday announcing a 3.4% boost in the total purse to a record Aus\$76.5 million (US\$51.6 million).

The winners of the men's and women's titles at the first Grand Slam of the year will both take home Aus\$2.975 million with players beaten in earlier rounds faring better than ever.

Anyone crashing out in round one will receive Aus\$106,250, up 3.2%, while second-round players get a similar increase to Aus\$158,850.

Tournament director Craig Tiley said the total prize pool for the Australian summer of tennis, which includes Grand Slam warm-up events like the United Cup, would exceed Aus\$100 million for the first time.

"It is critical to the continued success of the Australian tennis summer that we provide strong and relevant playing opportunities and ensure that the best players in the world are compensated appropriately," he said.

"At the Australian Open, we've upped prize money for every round from qualifying, through to the finals, with the major increases in the early rounds.

"These substantial rewards help players invest in their own careers and in many cases, set themselves up for success throughout the year."

Australian Open prize-money has increased by more than 321%, or Aus\$58.32 million, in the last 20 years, when it was Aus\$18.18 million

The Australian Open gets underway at Melbourne Park on January 16.

Liverpool confirm Gakpo deal

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool confirmed the signing of Cody Gakpo, subject to a work permit, on Wednesday with the Dutch international forward joining from PSV Eindhoven.

The 23-year-old, who scored three goals at the World Cup for the Netherlands, had previously been linked with a move to Liverpool's rivals Manchester United.

But the Reds have acted decisively to bolster a forward

line currently depleted by injuries to Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota.

"Liverpool Football Club have reached an agreement for the transfer of Cody Gakpo from PSV Eindhoven, subject to a work permit," Liverpool said in a statement.

"The 23-year-old forward will officially become a Reds player at the start of the January transfer window after agreeing personal terms and successfully completing a medical."

According to reports,



Liverpool will pay an initial fee of £37 million (\$45 million) with Gakpo signing a contract until 2028.

"I think this is a great club for me to come in and try to show what I can (do) and try to help the team to achieve more beautiful moments that they already did in the past years," Gakpo told the Liverpool website.

"I think for me personally it's also good to develop here and there's a lot of great players here who I can learn a lot of things from."

PTI ■ DUBAI

Swashbuckling Indian batters Suryakumar Yadav and Smriti Mandhana were on Thursday nominated for the men's and women's T20 Cricketer of the Year awards, respectively, for their exploits in 2022.

Suryakumar has been nominated alongside T20 World Cup-winning England all-rounder Sam Curran, Pakistan wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan and Zimbabwe's batting all-rounder Sikandar Raza for the top honours in the men's category.

Pakistan bowling all-rounder Nida Dar, New Zealand's Sophie Devine and Australian Tahlia McGrath will give Mandhana competition in the women's category.

Suryakumar had a sensa-

Suryakumar, Smriti nominated for ICC T20 Cricketer of the Year award



tional 2022 in the shortest format of the game, becoming just the second batter to score more than 1000 runs in a year in the format.

He ended the year as the highest run-getter, scoring 1164 runs at a ridiculous strike-rate of 187.43. His tally of 68 sixes in the calendar year in T20s is the highest anyone has recorded in the format in a year by a fair distance.

Suryakumar's incredible consistency in the format is reflected in his average which stood in the mid-40s. With two hundreds and nine half-centuries in the year, Yadav was the

standout men's T20 batter.

In the T20 World Cup in Australia, he recorded three fifties in six innings, averaging nearly 60 in the tournament while going at a strike-rate of 189.68. He continued his stellar year after the tournament too, recording his second hundred in T20s in the year in the bilateral series in New Zealand.

The year also saw Suryakumar become the top-ranked men's T20 batter, achieving a career-high 890 rating points.

Last year's ICC women's T20 Cricketer of the Year, Mandhana was once again a

picture of consistency in the shortest format.

From smashing the quickest fifty by an India woman (off just 23 balls) to breaching the 2500-run mark in T20s, Mandhana enjoyed a good run this year.

She left her mark on the Commonwealth Games, the T20 Asia Cup and a memorable five-match home series against Australia towards the business end of a fruitful year.

Mandhana's most exciting innings of 2022 came in the second T20 of the bilateral series against Australia in December.

Djokovic can't forget Australian deportation but wants to move on

AP ■ SYDNEY

Novak Djokovic admitted on Thursday that being deported from Australia was an experience he will never forget, but it was time to move on, as he enjoyed a warm welcome in Adelaide.

The Serbian star, who will bid for a men's record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam crown at the Australian Open next month, returned to the country on Tuesday, almost a year after being kicked out after a legal battle for refusing to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

He was banned from returning for three years, but Australia has since lifted its requirement for visitors to show proof of vaccination status and a new government in Canberra confirmed last month that the Serb was no longer barred.

"It's one of those things that sticks with you, stays with you

for, I guess, the rest of your life," Djokovic said in his first comments since arriving for the Adelaide International.

"As I said, (it's) something that I've never experienced before and hopefully never again.

"But it is a valuable life experience for me and something that will stay there, but I have to move on.

"Coming back to Australia speaks to how I feel about this country, how I feel about playing here."

Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley said this week he hoped local fans would embrace Djokovic's return, and the nine-time Australian Open champion said he had so far felt no animosity.

"I've been here only two days but from the people in the hotel to the airport to people at the tournament and at the club, everyone has been really pleas-



ant, really, really nice to me so all good for now," he said.

"I always felt great in Australia, always, you know, played my best tennis, received a lot of support, so hopefully I can have another great summer."

The 35-year-old was unable to compete in two of the four majors this year, with his vaccination stance meaning he was also forced to sit out the US Open.

However, he finished his 2022 campaign with a bang, winning titles in Tel Aviv, Astana and the ATP Finals in Turin, as well as reaching the final of the Paris Masters.

He also picked up trophies in Rome and Wimbledon and tallied up a 42-7 win-loss record throughout the season.

"I always have faith in myself and believe that I can win every tournament that I play in and I think with the career that I had, I feel like I deserve to have that kind of mental approach," he said.

"Things are obviously different (now). Lots of young guys on the tour, a kind of shift of generations but you know, Nadal and myself, still going strong from the older guys."

Fritz, Keys give US strong start at United Cup

AP ■ SYDNEY



American world number nine Taylor Fritz and 11th-ranked Madison Keys cruised through their opening ties against the Czech Republic to get their seasons off to a winning start at the inaugural United Cup on Thursday.

The mixed team tournament features 18 countries playing in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, with each tie consisting of two men's and two women's singles rubbers along with a mixed doubles match as players warm up to the Australian Open.

Fritz got his country away to a flying start with a 6-3, 6-4 win over world number 74 Jiri Lehecka at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena before Keys saw off Marie Bouzkova 6-4, 6-3.

The 25-year-old Fritz had a breakthrough year in 2022, beating 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal in the

final at Indian Wells to go with titles in Tokyo and Eastbourne.

He broke into the top 10 in 2022, reaching a career-high eight in October.

Fritz had too much firepower for Lehecka, facing only two break points on his way to

a comfortable 75-minute win.

The American admitted he had felt some nerves before the match.

Keys, who made the Australian Open semi-finals this year, came back from an early break of serve in both sets to see off Bouzkova in 80 minutes.

The former US Open finalist overpowered her Czech opponent from the baseline, taking full advantage of the quick conditions on centre court.

In Brisbane, Italy and Brazil were locked at one rubber apiece after the early session.

Beatriz Haddad Maia, the Brazilian world number 15, was far too strong for Martina Trevisan, dropping just two games on her way to a 6-2, 6-0 victory.

Lorenzo Musetti levelled the tie at one-all when he downed Felipe Meligeni Alves 6-3, 6-4.

Oz hammer SA to win 2nd Test & series

AP ■ MELBOURNE

South Africa were on the wrong end of a "hammering" against rampant top-ranked Australia on Thursday, losing the second Test by 182 runs and with it the series.

The loss capped a dismal first two Tests for the visitors who slumped by six wickets in the opener at Brisbane inside two days, with a potential face-saving third match at Sydney still to play.

"It is not easy at the moment. That was bit of a hammering," Proteas skipper Dean Elgar said.

Australia declared on Wednesday at 575-8 built on the back of man-of-the-match Warner's 200 and a gutsy 85 from Steve Smith in searing heat, in reply to South Africa's first innings 189, and then took complete control with the ball.

South Africa resumed day four on 15-1 after Elgar went for a duck before rain halted play early on Wednesday.

But their resistance didn't last long with three wickets falling before lunch at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the rest in the second session as they succumbed for 204.

Temba Bavuma top-scored with 65 while Nathan Lyon took 3-58 in a depleted, injury-hit, attack.

"The win is right up there. We have had a number of great contests against South Africa over the years. It's really sweet and something to be proud of," said Australian skipper Pat Cummins.

"I thought how Warner and Smith batted in the heat was pretty gutsy. (Mitchell) Starc and (Cameron) Green as well, put



their injuries behind them and turned up."

It leaves South Africa facing a trip to Sydney next week for the final Test with only pride to play for and potentially some changes to a batting line up that has largely failed to fire.

"We have got to do a lot of reflection going ahead once again. There are a few positives coming out of this Test but not a lot," Elgar said.

"There's lot to play for (in Sydney), South Africa are a proud cricketing nation and 2-1 sounds a lot better than 3-0," he added.

Australia will have a new-look team with Green and Starc already ruled out with finger injuries as they race the clock to be ready for a blockbuster series in India in February.

Josh Hazlewood is set to return for Starc after recovering from a side strain, with Green's replacement to be decided.

UNHAPPY STARC

Australian pace bowler Mitchell Starc on Thursday made his displeasure known to South African batter Theunis de Bruyn for backing up at the non-striker's end during the second innings of the Boxing Day Test.

The 32-year-old Australian quick, after jokingly telling de Bruyn that he was "half way down Punt Road", became more strident later, warning the Proteas top-order batter that if he continued to leave the crease, he would be forced to "Mankad" him.

"I had a word with him (De Bruyn) last night (Wednesday)

because he was doing it yesterday. And then he was half way down Punt Road when I was stopped," Starc said on Fox Cricket after the hosts wound up the Test inside four days, inflicting an innings and 182-run defeat on Dean Elgar's side.

De Bruyn was eventually dismissed on 28, caught by Steve Smith off Scott Boland.

"He said he's not doing it on purpose. (If) I've got to keep my foot behind the line (while bowling), so you could at least keep your bat behind the line," Starc said.

"There's no need for it (backing up too far). You saw how far down he was," added Starc, who will need a prolonged break to recover from the injury to his left hand finger.

Green set to undergo surgery

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Young Australian all-rounder Cameron Green will require surgery to repair a fractured right index finger, though surgeons are hopeful the 23-year-old should recover in time to be considered for selection for the Border-Gavaskar series in India beginning on February 9.

However, pace spearhead Mitchell Starc faces a potentially longer stay on the sidelines and will be in a race against time to prove his fitness for the four-Test series in India after he too suffered a finger injury while fielding during the Boxing Day Test against South Africa.

The pair is already out of the third and final Test against South Africa at Sydney. A report in *cricket.Com.Au* said on Thursday after Australia's innings and 182-run win against the Proteas in the second Test that Green had consulted a specialist, who had recommended surgery.

Green was hit on the finger by an Anrich Nortje bouncer and was forced to retire on day two, but he batted through pain on the third day to score an unbeaten half-century.

Starc, though, does not require surgery for the tendon damage to his left middle finger, but the 32-year-old quick might not be available for the series opener against India in Nagpur on February 9.

Pakistan in trouble after Williamson hits 200*

AP ■ KARACHI

New Zealand pushed Pakistan onto the backfoot in the first test after Kane Williamson hit a marathon unbeaten double century on Thursday.

Williamson's 200 not out in 10 hours earned New Zealand a meaningful 174-run lead as the visitors declared at a monumental 612-9 at tea, with tailender Ish Sodhi scoring a career-best 65.

New Zealand spinners Michael Bracewell and Ish Sodhi made early inroads in the final session to reduce Pakistan to 77-2 at stumps. Pakistan still trails by 97 runs on a wicket which has some encouragement for spinners from the bowlers' footmarks.

Imam-ul-Haq saw off the session with an unbeaten 45 while nightwatchman Nauman Ali survived an umbrella of fielders around him in the last over to go not out on 4.

Abdullah Shafique once again threw away his wicket as he was caught low down at short mid-on for 17 after attempting a needless drive against off-spinner Michael Bracewell.

Shafique had fallen cheaply in Pakistan's first innings score of 438 when he came down the wicket off Ajaz Patel in only the fourth over of the game and got stumped. Lefthander Masood was out lbw for 10 after he went onto the backfoot against Sodhi's sharp delivery.

Captain Tim Southee ended Pakistan's long frustrating time in the field when he declared just after Williamson lifted mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed over extra cover for his 21st boundary and then raised his fifth double hundred with a single that also featured a six.

Abrar, who took 17 wickets in two Test matches against England earlier this month, finished with 5-205 but not before Williamson and Sodhi had extended the lead with a 159-run seventh-wicket stand on a slow turning wicket.

Williamson and Sodhi dug in for well over 1 1/2 hours into the second session after New Zealand resumed on 440-2 before Pakistan claimed three quick wickets through spinners.



Both put on 79 runs in the first session and batted with determination even when Pakistan took the second new ball. They stood firm against the googlies and legspin of Abrar while left-arm spinner Nauman (3-185) couldn't pose problem from the footmarks.

Sodhi finally holed out soon after crossing his previous test best of 63 – also against Pakistan in 2014 – while Southee and Neil Wagner followed without scoring.

Williamson was on 186 when last man Ajaz Patel walked in but went into the 190s with a straight six over the head of Abrar before eventually reaching his second double hundred against Pakistan in a 395-ball knock.

It was Williamson's first international score of over 100 in almost two years since he made 238 against Pakistan at Christchurch in January 2021.

Williamson fully capitalized on two stumping chances early in his innings and also twice successfully overturned onfield lbw rulings against him through television referrals as Pakistan rued the missed opportunities.

Sodhi batted with a lot of patience and hit three boundaries against seamer Mir Hamza on the off side of the wicket after Pakistan took the third new ball.

Rashid appointed Afghanistan T20 captain

PTI ■ KABUL

Star leg-spinner Rashid Khan was on Thursday named Afghanistan's new T20 captain, replacing veteran Mohammad Nabi.

Rashid, 24, was appointed captain ahead of the 2021 T20 World Cup as well but had stepped down following the announcement of the squad, claiming he was not consulted over selection.

Nabi had stepped down post the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia.

"Rashid Khan is a massive name in Afghanistan Cricket. He has colossal experience of playing the format around the world which will help him take the team to a new level in the format," said Afghanistan Cricket Board chairman Mirwais Ashraf in a statement.

"Rashid Khan has the experience of leading AfghanAtalan



in all three formats before and we are happy to have him as our skipper for the T20I format again. I am sure he will come out on top and will bring more glo-

ries to the nation."

T20 superstar Rashid said captaining the national team is a massive honour.

"Captaincy is a huge respon-

sibility. I have the experience of leading my country before, there is a great bunch of guys with whom I have a good understanding and feel pretty comfortable.

"We will try to stick together, will work hard to put things on the right track and bring pride and joy to our country and nation," said Rashid.

Rashid has so far represented Afghanistan in 74 T20Is and has 122 scalps to his name in the format, which makes him the third leading wicket-taker in the format behind Tim Southee (134) and Shakib Al Hassan (128). He has also been in very high demand in franchise cricket, playing 361 T20 matches for 15 different teams around the globe from 2015 onwards and has bagged a mammoth 491 wickets which makes him the second bowler behind Dwayne Bravo (614) with the most scalps in the format.



Hardik has ingredients to be successful: Sanga

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Transition period in an international team is always "difficult to handle" but India has abundant talent and a potentially good leader in Hardik Pandya to smoothly see through the phase in T20 cricket, feels former Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara.

India will play six white ball matches against Sri Lanka in the new year with Pandya replacing Rohit Sharma as captain for T20Is starting January 3.

The squad also doesn't have KL Rahul and Virat Kohli which is an indicator that Indian cricket will undergo transition from this series.

"Transition is inevitable. You have to be always ready for it. But you need supporting players to come through the system for it to be effective smoothly," Sangakkara said.

"Every side goes through difficult transitions and we saw that in Australia. Saw that in NZ for considerable period some time back, even England. So you have all these sides go through transition and difficulty is a common theme," he cited the common phenomenon.

For the Lankan legend, it is important to give the fresh faces a long rope.

"You have to have trust in players that you select, trusting them for long periods, giving them exposure and grounding they require, so that they can settle in international cricket and understand what it is all about."

For Sri Lanka especially, transition has been really difficult ever since the likes of Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene retired.

"India has a throng of young players coming through so it is just about the selecting

the best among them and giving them a longer run," Sangakkara observed.

However, he waxed eloquent about Pandya having watched his captaincy for Gujarat Titans while being a mentor for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL.

"There is no doubt that his leadership is excellent and we all saw that in IPL. Now he has to melt that with on-field captaincy at national level. He has all qualities to be a leader although you don't necessarily need to be a captain to be a leader."

But there are aspects of captaincy that Pandya has to be mindful of and Sangakkara handed a checklist for the Baroda man.

"Now captaincy on the field can be a different thing. To read moments, win moments and strategize, you have to be sharp, and I think Hardik has all ingredients to be a good captain. "Hardest part is to inspire, talk and manage his players in a group together to play with a vision and rest will come with experience, captaining in close games," he added.

As far as new the Indian T20 team is concerned, Sangakkara would follow Ruturaj Gaikwad and Sanju Samson.

"I love watching Ruturaj Gaikwad's batting and he is one player who can bat correctly and yet have enormous impact in T20 cricket and of course Sanju Samson as I want to see Sanju getting a long run in this Indian side.

"Because he is a very special player, so they have got a good mixture of pace, spin and utility players. It will be a tough challenge for Sri Lanka but in T20 they have tools to match them."

Tamil Nadu eye outright win over Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Young left-hander Pradosh Ranjan Paul showed admirable character while notching up his maiden first-class ton, keeping Tamil Nadu firmly in sight of their first outright win against a circumspect Delhi on day three of the Ranji Trophy Group B game here on Thursday.

Courtesy a career-best 124 from Pradosh along with useful contributions from all-rounder Vijay Shankar (52) and tailender Aswin Crist (32), Tamil Nadu declared their first innings on 427 for 8.

Delhi lost Anuj Rawat by close of play to reach 28 for 1 and are still 96 runs behind going into the final day.

Only one team can log home full points from this game and that is Tamil Nadu, provided they can bundle out Delhi within two sessions keeping the light-factor in mind.

On three days, 76, 75.1 and 70 overs of play has been possible due to poor visibility as the light deteriorates quickly in this part of the country during the winter.

Tamil Nadu captain Baba Indrajith rightly declared even though they had a chance of stretching the lead in the region of 175 but the sporting declaration was more about keeping the time factor in mind.

BAD LIGHT, DHAWAN & AKASH FRUSTRATE UK

Dehradun: Weather and Himachal Pradesh middle-order batters, Akash Vasisht and Rishi Dhawan, continued to frustrated hosts Uttarakhand's push towards victory on day three of the Group A match with the visitors reaching 327 for four at stumps.

After being bundled out for just 49 in the first innings and staring at an innings defeat following Uttarakhand's 336, Himachal have made amends in the second innings by wiping out the deficit and also taking a small 40-run lead.

For the visitors, Vasisht and Dhawan continued from where they had left off on Wednesday on 277 for 4, with the former just eight runs short of his century, while Dhawan completed his half century in the 14 overs that were possible on Thursday due to bad light. Himachal are still not out of the woods as a flurry of early wickets on the last day of the match on Friday will be enough to send them hurtling towards defeat.

GUJARAT IN COMMAND

Ahmedabad: Skipper Priyank Panchal hammered an unbeaten 257 to help Gujarat take a massive 292-run first innings



lead against Chandigarh on day three of their Elite Group D match.

Resuming at an overnight score of 249 for 3, Panchal marched on to score a superb double century and his mammoth 307-run unbeaten stand for the fifth wicket with M A Hingrajia (151 not out, 12 fours, 2 sixes) put Chandigarh on the mat.

At stumps, the home team had reduced Chandigarh to 46 for 2, still 246 runs behind and staring at an innings defeat.

In Nagpur, left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq bowled Jammu & Kashmir to a 39-run win over Vidharbha, returning with a eight-wicket haul.

K'TAKA SET FOR BIG LEAD AGAINST GOA

Porvorum: Karnataka looked set to secure a big first innings lead against Goa despite fighting half-centuries by three of the home team's batters on day three of their Elite Group C match.

At stumps, Goa were 321

Want a game against SL to impress Hardik: Mavi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having overcome his fair share of injuries and done the hard yards in domestic cricket, all Shivam Mavi wants from India skipper Hardik Pandya is an opportunity to shine in the upcoming home series against Sri Lanka.

A week after he was snapped by Gujarat Titans for a whopping Rs 6 crore in the IPL mini-auction, Mavi celebrated another big moment of his career when he was selected in India's T20 squad for the upcoming three T20s against Sri Lanka, starting January 3 in Mumbai.

The 24-year-old is supremely confident that he won't let Hardik down.

"Hardik Pandya supports every player. He is a great

leader. It is very difficult to be the IPL champions in the first outing but he managed to do it. He led Gujarat Titans from the front and became champions. He is a calm leader but took some bold decisions," the 24-year-old said.

"As a captain Hardik bhai is very shrewd and a master tactician. He knows exactly whom to bowl when and whom to promote in the batting order. I know it is not going to be easy for me but I am just hoping to get a game, perform there and be a regular for India."

"I didn't do anything different. I just worked hard in the nets. I know I can generate speed, so just concentrated on bringing variations into my bowling. It paid off as I became more consistent this year," Mavi said.

IPL changed our lives forever: ABD

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

The start of Indian Premier League changed his life and Ab de Villiers is hoping the inaugural SA20 at home does the same for the younger generation of cricketers in South Africa.

The inaugural SA20, featuring six newly-constructed teams, will launch on January 10 at Newlands with the opening local derby between MI Cape Town and Paarl Royals setting up an explosive start to South African cricket's new-kid-on-the-block.

All teams are owned by IPL franchises.

De Villiers, who played in the IPL since its inception in 2008 till last year when he retired, says the SA20 is just the boost the game requires in South Africa.

"I think the SA20 comes at a really good time for South African cricket. We have seen the amazing things that these leagues have done to cricket in particular nations," De Villiers told Cricket South Africa.

"To give our youngsters this base and the foundation to get exposure at the highest level against the best players in the world is what it's all about."