

OPINION 6
INDIA RISING BUT
CHINA STILL AHEAD

WORLD 9
NAWAZ SHARIF'S STATEMENT
IN TOSHAKHANA CASE

MONEY 10
STOCK MARKETS EDGE UP IN VOLATILE
TRADE ON DERIVATIVES EXPIRY

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12 SPORTS

BJP to retain MP, Congress Chhattisgarh

Congress puts up tough fight against BRS in Telangana, but neck and neck with BJP in Rajasthan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/ AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

Most exit polls on Thursday predicted an edge to the Congress in Chhattisgarh and Telangana, but they forecasted that the advantage was with the BJP in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Pollsters also indicated that in Mizoram, Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) was locked in a close race with the Mizo National Front (MNF), with the Congress and the BJP lagging behind. While the BJP holds power in the 230-member Madhya Pradesh Assembly, the Congress governs Rajasthan (200) and Chhattisgarh (90). In Telangana, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) led by K Chandrashekhara Rao has been in power for the past 10 years, and in Mizoram, the MNF is currently in government.

Elections in these five States were held between November 7 and November 30, with the counting of votes scheduled for December 3. In Madhya Pradesh, according to the India Today Axis My India, the BJP is predicted to secure 140-162 seats, while the Congress is expected to get 102-125 seats, but Jan Ki Baat exit poll predicted 100-123 seats for the BJP and 102-125 seats for the Congress in the State. The Republic TV-Matrise forecast suggests 118-130 seats for the BJP and 97-107 for the Congress, while TV9 Bharatvarsh Polstrat projects 106-116 seats for the BJP and 111-121 for the Congress. Contrastingly, Today's Chanakya predicts a significant victory for the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, forecasting 151 seats with a margin of plus or minus 12, whereas the Congress is



anticipated to secure 74 seats with a similar margin. According to Jist-TIF-NAI, the Congress appears to have a 2018-like edge in Madhya Pradesh, with a prediction of 107-124 seats for the party as opposed to the BJP's forecasted 102-119. In Rajasthan, India Today-Axis My India anticipates a close competition, with pro-

jections of 86-106 seats for the Congress, 80-100 seats for the BJP, and 9-18 for others. Jan Ki Baat pollsters forecast 100-122 seats for the BJP and 62-85 for the Congress, while TV9 Bharatvarsh Polstrat predicts 100-110 for the BJP and 90-100 for the Congress. Times Now ETG poll predicts 108-128 seats for the BJP and 56-72 for the Congress in

Rajasthan. Jist-TIF-NAI predicts a continuation of Rajasthan's revolving door tradition, forecasting 110 seats for the BJP and 70 for the Congress. In Chhattisgarh, ABP News-C Voter predicts 36-48 seats for the BJP and 41-53 for the Congress, while India Today-Axis My India forecasts 36-46 seats for the BJP and 40-50 seats for the Congress. India TV-CNX predicts 30-40 seats for the BJP and 46-56 seats for the Congress. According to Jan Ki Baat, the BJP is expected to secure 34-45 seats, while the Congress is anticipated to get 42-53 seats. Today's Chanakya predicts that the BJP will secure 33 seats (plus-minus 8), while the Congress is expected to achieve a clear majority with 57 seats (plus-minus 8). For Telangana, India TV-CNX

forecasts 63-79 seats for the Congress, 31-47 for the BRS, 2-4 for the BJP, and 5-7 for the AIMIM. Jan Ki Baat anticipates 48-64 seats for the Congress, 40-55 for the BRS, 7-13 for the BJP, and 4-7 for AIMIM. Republic TV-Matrise predicts that in Telangana, the Congress will secure 58-68 seats, BRS 46-56, BJP 4-9, and AIMIM 5-9. Meanwhile, TV9 Bharatvarsh Polstrat states that the Congress will gain 49-59 seats, and the BRS will secure 48-58 seats. In Mizoram, India TV-CNX forecasts that the MNF will get 14-18 seats, ZPM 12-16, Congress 8-10, and BJP 0-2. ABP News-C Voter suggests MNF will secure 15-21, ZPM 12-18, and Congress 2-8 seats. According to Jan Ki Baat, MNF is predicted to get 10-14 seats, ZPM 15-25 seats, Congress 5-9, and the BJP 0-2 in 40 members Assembly.

Make in India bolsters Defence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major boost to Indian defence industry, the Government on Thursday approved mega deals worth ₹2.23 lakh crore for acquiring more Tejas light combat aircraft, light combat helicopters, upgradation of SU-30 fighter jets, anti-ship missiles and towed gun systems. These approvals by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh here will also ensure availability of modern weapon systems for operational readiness. The DAC is the apex body for clearing procurement proposals put up by the Armed forces. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) gives the final clearance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "Excellent move towards bolstering our Armed Forces' operational prowess. The commitment to 'Make in India' in this decision marks a crucial stride in our pursuit of self-sufficiency in the Defence sector."

Giving details of the DAC decisions, the Defence Ministry officials said the apex body accorded approval in respect of Acceptance of Necessity (AoNs) for various capital acquisition proposals amounting to ₹2.23 lakh crore. Officials said out of the total amount, acquisition worth ₹2.20 lakh crore (98 per cent of total AoN amount) will be sourced from domestic industries. This will give a substantial boost to the Indian Defence Industry towards the aim of achieving the goal of "Aatmanirbharta". One of the major proposals given the nod include an order for acquisition of 97 Tejas jets and 156 Prachand light combat helicopters (90 for Army and 66 for IAF). The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will manufac-



ture these platforms for the IAF. While the Tejas deal is worth over ₹55,000 crore, the helicopter deal is about ₹45,000 crore. These two deals are under Buy (Indian-IndDM) category. 156 Prachand helicopters (90 for Army and 66 for IAF). In February 2021, the Defence Ministry sealed a ₹48,000 crore deal with the HAL for procurement of 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF. With the additional fleet, the number of indigenously-developed Tejas aircraft being procured by the IAF would go up to 180. A major upgrade of the Sukhoi Su-30 MKI was also cleared by the DAC. The IAF has over 260 Su-30 aircraft and the upgrade is expected to be an indigenous one, with India-developed radars, avionics and subsystems. Around 84 aircraft are expected to be upgraded initially. The AoNs have also been accorded by the DAC for upgradation of Su-30 MKI Aircraft indigenously from HAL. While procurement of these equipment will provide enormous strength to the IAF, acquisition from domestic Defence industries will take the indigenous capability to a new height. It will also reduce dependability on Foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) substantially, officials said. The DAC also accorded approval for procurement of two types of Anti-tank Munitions namely, Area Denial Munition (ADM) Type- 2 and Type-3, which are capable of neutralising Tanks and Armoured personnel carriers and enemy personnel.

Kejriwal seeks public opinion if he should run Govt from prison

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will initiate a referendum titled "Main Bhi Kejriwal" campaign starting on Friday to gather public feedback on whether Arvind Kejriwal should resign as the Delhi Chief Minister in the event of his arrest under an alleged "conspiracy by the BJP". As part of the campaign, AAP volunteers will distribute pamphlets and collect signatures from the public at all 2,600 polling stations across the city. These pamphlets will seek people's opinions on whether Kejriwal should step down from his role as Delhi Chief Minister if he faces arrest. Additionally, from December 21 to 24, MLAs and councillors will organise public dialogues in all wards to gauge the vox populi. Addressing a press conference alongside party MP Raghav Chadha, Delhi Minister and Delhi AAP convener Gopal Rai alleged the BJP has orchestrated a conspiracy to have Kejriwal arrested under the "fake" liquor scam case, with the intention of dismantling the Aam Aadmi Party. Rai mentioned that Kejriwal had consulted with AAP MLAs and councillors, seeking their opinions on the matter, and there was a consensus that he should not resign but rather continue to govern from jail. He said that from December 21 to December 24, the AAP will conduct "Jan Samvad" in every ward of the city to engage in discussions with the public about the alleged liquor scam and the BJP's purported conspiracy to have Kejriwal arrest-



ed. During these sessions, they will seek people's opinions on whether Kejriwal should resign as the Delhi Chief Minister in the event of his arrest or run the government from jail. "Modiji placed Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, and Sanjay Singh in jail through false cases. Even after that, since the BJP could not break the AAP, a conspiracy is being hatched to arrest Arvind Kejriwal. Despite ruling the MCD for 15 consecutive years, the people of Delhi, prioritising Arvind Kejriwal's work, uprooted the BJP from power. The way the AAP government under Kejriwal's leadership is working in Delhi has made BJP top leaders and PM Modi believe that at any cost, the BJP cannot form its government in Delhi. BJP intends that if its government does not form in Delhi, then Arvind Kejriwal should be eliminated, and the rapidly advancing caravan of the AAP should be halted," said Rai. Sharing details, Rai mentioned that in the second phase, a public dialogue would be initiated across Delhi starting from December 21. From December 21 to 24, public dialogues will be organised in all wards of Delhi, encouraging the participation of residents from entire wards.

TMC, BRS may skip all party meet

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

A few Opposition parties, including the Trinamool Congress, the BRS, and the AIADMK, may skip the all-party meeting convened by the Centre on Friday in view of the Winter Session of Parliament, which is scheduled to begin on Monday. The government has convened the customary meeting of floor leaders of political parties in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on Saturday. Sources say that the Opposition parties have also convened a meeting of members of the INDIA bloc coalition on Monday before the Session begins. The meeting has been called to prepare a strategy for the Winter Session against the backdrop of intense friction

over a range of issues, including targets by Central probe agencies on Opposition leaders. The Opposition meeting will be chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, who is also the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi will conduct the meeting, which is expected to be attended by senior party leaders, including Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh, and Piyush Goyal, who is also the Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha. Sources said while Telangana Chief Minister led Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS) will go unrepresented as acrimonious exchange of words have been there between the BRS and the BJP in the just concluded election campaign in the State, the



AIADMK too is likely to give a miss over verbal duel between the BJP leadership of Tamil Nadu and AIADMK which till last month was the largest and longest serving alliance partner of BJP in the NDA from southern India. Another major Opposition party that is certain to avoid participating in the all-party meeting is the TMC led by

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee. The party believes that its Parliament representatives, such as Mahua Moitra and Abhishek Banerjee, are being victimised by the Centre. Abhishek, who is Mamata's nephew, is facing a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), while Moitra has been implicated by the Parliament Ethics Committee over allegations of cash-for-query in the Lok Sabha question hour. While the party has defended Moitra, she now faces a probe by the CBI and the IT Ministry for sharing her Parliament login details beyond her jurisdiction. Sources said the report of the Ethics Committee on the "cash-for-query" allegations against Moitra will be tabled in Lok Sabha during the Session.

MLAs, organisations greet Pandian

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Anugul MLA Rajani Kanta Singh, Dhenkanal MLA Sudhir Kumar Samal and representatives of about 10 organisations on Thursday met 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman VK Pandian at the Naveen Niwas and wished him over his new responsibility.

They appreciated his spirit and efforts in the "transformation of Odisha".

Thanking them, Pandian said Odisha, under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, is going through a transformation drive. "Our only objective is to fulfil the dreams of the Chief Minister," he said.

The organisations which met Pandian included Periodical Editors' & Publishers' Association, Minority Development Parishad of Jayadev constituency, Lokaseva Foundation, Odisha Kendupatra Karmachari Sangha, All Odisha Upgraded School Guest Facul-



ties Lecturers' Association, Odisha Mamata Programme Coordinator Association, Bhadrak Muslim Jamat, VK Pandian Fan Club and Odisha Rajya Nigam Karmachari Mahasangha.

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Melanistic leopard spotted in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Wildlife lovers in Odisha have got elated as the Forest Department informed that it spotted a black melanistic leopard.

Taking to his X handle, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Susanta Nanda said, "Ongoing camera trap tiger census in Odisha is throwing up some exciting and unexpected presence of wild fauna in our State."

The PCCF, however, did not mention the exact location where the melanistic tiger was spotted.

Melanistic tigers are seen in the Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district. Odisha is



the only state to have melanistic tigers, which are rarely found in the world.

A melanistic tiger had first been reported in Similipal in 1993. The first photographic

evidence about the presence of a melanistic tiger was captured in 2007. Melanistic refers to having very dark skin/hair due to higher-than-normal level of the pigment.

CM launches health infra worth Rs 1,140 cr

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The people's confidence is increasing in government healthcare facilities, said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday while inaugurating health infrastructure projects worth Rs 1,140 crore in the State.

Patnaik inaugurated 103 projects worth Rs 140 core and laid foundation-stones for 372 projects worth Rs 1,000 crore through videoconferencing.

The CM said that under different steps taken under the 5T initiative, the govern-

ment hospitals have been transformed leading to an increase in people's faith on public healthcare.

He said the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana has become a boon for the people and they are getting good treatment free. More than 1 lakh patients are getting treatment every month. In the last five years, over Rs 12,000 has been invested in the State's healthcare sector.

The CM launched a special helpline- 1800-120-104 of the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana for the Odia people residing outside the State.

Cyclone over Bay of Bengal by Dec 3

No warning for Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said a cyclonic storm is likely form over the southwest Bay of Bengal around December 3.

If the system intensifies into a cyclone, it would be called 'Michaung'.

Wednesday's well-marked low-pressure area over south-east Bay of Bengal and adjoining

south Andaman Sea moved west-northwestwards and lay over southeast Bay of Bengal. It is likely to move west-northwestwards and intensify into a depression over southeast Bay of Bengal during next 24 hours.

Continuing to move further west-northwestwards, it would intensify gradually into a cyclonic storm over southwest Bay of Bengal around December 3, the weather office said.

Thereafter, it would move north-westwards and reach north Tamil Nadu and south

Andhra Pradesh coasts around the early morning of December 4 as a cyclonic storm.

There are no weather warnings for Odisha during next four days till December 4, the Regional Office of the IMD here said.

Though there is no weather warning for Odisha, the State Government has put seven coastal districts on alert amid the likelihood of the formation of cyclonic storm over the Bay of Bengal. However, under the influence of the system, squally wind speed reaching 40-50

kmph gusting to 60 kmph is likely over southwest Bay of Bengal from December 1 morning and 50-60 kmph gusting to 70 kmph from December 2 morning. It would increase becoming gale wind speed reaching 60-70 kmph gusting to 80 kmph from December 3 mornings for subsequent 24 hours. Fishermen are advised not to venture into deep sea areas of southwest Bay of Bengal from December 1 and west central Bay of Bengal from December 2 till further notice, the IMD said.

Sambalpur youth dupes WB girl of Rs 64L

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

A youth of Sambalpur district has allegedly duped a girl of West Bengal of a whopping Rs 64 lakh on the pretext of marrying her. The incident came to the fore on Thursday after the victim, identified as Shoma Ghosh, lodged an FIR in this connection with the Town police here.

The girl is a resident of South Subhash Palli in Hooghly district. The accused was identified Rahul Rakshit, a resident of the Town police station area.

According to the FIR, Shoma had come in contact with the youth in 2021 through a matrimonial site. Gradually, the youth lured the girl by pretending to be from an upper class family. After they became close friends, Rahul started fleecing money from the girl saying that he was facing financial difficulties.

Shoma helped the youth and lent him a total of Rs 64 lakh in different phases through Google Pay and PhonPe. Later, Rahul avoided the girl and did not receive her phone calls.

JE runs away as Vig team visits house



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

High drama occurred during the process of conducting a raid on Junior Engineer Sunil Kumar Padhy on Thursday on the allegation of possession of disproportionate assets as the 'corrupt' official allegedly fled from his residence on seeing a Vigilance team.

According to reports, Padhy, who is a Junior Engineer of Rural Water Supply and

Sanitation (RWSS) in Bhubaneswar, went to the terrace of his house and ran away by jumping to a nearby building at Jagamara when the Vigilance team knocked at the door of his house in the morning.

The Vigilance officials, including six DSPs, three Inspectors and seven ASIs conducted simultaneous raids on properties belonging to Padhy at five places in Bhubaneswar and Ganjam to unearth assets that

Ex-Forest Ranger raided by Vig

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Vigilance police on Thursday carried out simultaneous searches at five different places connected with former Forest Ranger Jagabandhu Padhy in Aska of Ganjam district on the allegations of possession of disproportionate assets (DA) to his known sources of income. The searches were con-

ducted in a house of Padhy in Sunam Sahi and another near the Government bus-stand in Aska and three others in Bhanjanagar, Brahmapur and Bhubaneswar..

The raids started by multiple teams in the morning and were still ongoing till filing of the report.

Earlier, Padhy was also under the Vigilance scanner in a DA case.

are disproportionate to his known sources of income.

Till the last report came in, the raids were underway at a triple-storey building at Jagamara in Bhubaneswar, a

market complex at Aska in Ganjam district, a paternal house at Sunambo street, Aska, a house of his relative located at Bhanjanagar and his office chamber in Bhubaneswar.

In Puri NMA inspects renovation of 4 mutts

PNS ■ PURI

A team of the National Monuments Authority (NMA) on Thursday inspected the renovation of four mutts located within 100 meters of the Meghanada Pacheri of Shreemandir in Puri.

The team inspected the renovation works of Badachhata Mutt, Chhauni Mutt, Uttaraparswa Mutt and Kakudikhai Mutt.

Culture Department Director Dilip Routray, Puri Sub-Collector, Chief of Puri Circle ASI and Chief of State Archaeological Department were part of the NMA team.

Routray said that other than the beautification of the mutts, no other construction work would be made in the

prohibited area.

"As per the NMA guidelines, the four mutts located within the prohibited area could only be renovated and repaired. No new construction can be carried out within the area," said he.

"There has been no violation of NMA guidelines in the renovation works. The redevelopment of four mutts is carried out as per the guidelines issued by the NMA," he added.

Earlier, the NMA had issued no objection certificates (NOCs) to the State Government for the redevelopment of 15 mutts around the Jagannath Temple that were demolished as part of the Shree Jagannath Parikrama project.

Manisha Padhi country's 1st woman ADC



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Indian Air Force officer Manisha Padhi from Odisha has become the country's first woman Aide-De-Camp (ADC).

Mizoram Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati on Wednesday appointed Squadron Leader Manisha Padhi, a 2015-batch Indian Air Force officer, as the first woman ADC from the Indian Armed Forces. "Her appointment is not just a milestone but a testament to the power of women break-

ing gender norms and excelling in different fields. Let's celebrate this remarkable achievement and continue to champion women's empowerment in every sphere," the Governor said.

Previously, Padhi had been posted to three postings, Air Force Station, Bidar; Air Force Station, Pune; and Air Force Station, Bhatinda.

Hailing from Brahmampur, Padhi is an alumnus of the CV Raman College of Engineering, Bhubaneswar. Her parents reside in Bhubaneswar.

Thinkers' Club 89th webinar 'Let's rethink on NJAC appointing judges'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Presiding over the 89th webinar of the Thinkers' Club, Professor Surjya Narayan Mishra underscored the necessity to rethink on the process of appointing judges through the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). The present inclusion of members in the commission is promoting confusion and discontentment among the knowledgeable circles, he said. Besides, he spoke elaborately on the Preamble of the Constitution, Parliamentary system and transparency in the operation of the present Judiciary.

Additional Government Advocate, Bibhu Prasad Tripathy joining the meet as a speaker, was of the opinion that the topic needs to be discussed by the law colleges and

the Bar Councils for effective results.

Senior journalist Nageswar Pattanaik was of the opinion that for strengthening democracy, the judiciary needs to play a vital role.

Former Secretary of the Works Department Dr Nanda Nandan Das said it is necessary to amend the Constitution every 20 years.

The meeting was organised and managed by club president Barada Prasanna Das. He also commented that the system of collegium is not in the interest of Constitutional democracy.

Among others, Prof Umasankar Misra, Er Sudhakar Patri and Dr Rajat Kumar Satapathy participated. Bibhudutta Mohanty looked after the technical aspect of the meet.

Cong to hold Tulsi Yatra to Puri today

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Naveen Patnaik Government, despite repeated warnings, is not paying heed to the demands for opening of all the four doors of the Shreemandir, carrying out inventory of the Ratna Bhandar and return of the lands acquired for the Vedanta University project, said the Congress here on Tuesday.

This has hurt the sentiments of lakhs of Jagannath devotees. As the four doors of the Shreemandir are not being opened, the devotees are facing untold difficulties. As they

have to stand for hours in queues to have darshan, many of them are becoming unconscious or sometimes even they are losing their lives. The Shree Jagannath Temple Chief Administrator has advised the elderly devotees not to come for darshan of the Lords. This is highly unfortunate, said Congress spokesperson Rajani Mohanty and other leaders.

So, the party has decided to agitate till the six-point charter of demands is met. On the instructions of PCC president Sarat Pattanayak, the party would organise a Tulsi Yatra to Puri on Friday (December 1).

In Sambalpur KV student sexually harassed; teacher arrested

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Police have arrested a teacher of an English-medium school for alleged sexual harassment of a girl student in Bareipali in Sambalpur district.

The accused was identified as Arun Kumar Joshi, an English teacher at the Panchagachia Kendriya Vidyalaya under the Bareipali police limits.

As per reports, two days back, the girl along with her friends was inside a classroom when Joshi came up to them. He asked the other girls to go out of the room and then allegedly misbehaved with the victim. Unable to bear the trauma, the girl went home and shared the ordeal with her family.



As the news spread, the association of parents and guard-

ians raised protest and approached the school chairper-

son for immediate and stringent action against the teacher while questioning the safety of girls in the institution.

Assessing the seriousness of the situation, the school authorities then informed police. Meanwhile, Sambalpur Sub-Collector Puspanjali Panda along with a female IIC reached the spot for examination of the victim after getting orders from the Collector. A case was registered.

The Sub-Collector said, "We received complaint from both parents and school authorities today. We are exploring legal options after hearing the girl's account and have initiated necessary action. An FIR has been lodged and exemplary action will be taken against the accused if found guilty."

Rs 1,246 cr spent for hassle-free power supply in twin cities

Under SCRIPS

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

To ensure round-the-clock quality power to citizens in the capital region, the State Government has already spent Rs 1,246 crore under State Capital Region Improvement in Power System (SCRIPS).

Electricity is an essential component of modern-day life. With increase in population and rapid industrialisation, the power

demand of the State capital region (Bhubaneswar-Cuttack) has been on a rise, said Energy Department officials.

In order to meet the increasing power demand as well as to ensure quality and reliability of power supply, the Energy Department in the year 2015-16 had approved execution of state-of-the-art distribution and transmission infrastructure under SCRIPS with a total project cost of Rs

1,492.07 crore.

The scope of the scheme includes construction of GIS grid/ primary sub-stations along with associated lines, UG cabling at prominent locations of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar and implementation of modern technology such as Smart grid etc.

Some of the underground cabling in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar have been completed while some of the projects are under execution.

State owned OPTCL is implementing the scheme, which now comes under the umbrella scheme-Chief Minister's Power Development Programme (CMPDP).

Of the Rs 1,492.07 crore approved by the Government, of which Rs 1,429.52 crore has already been released to OPTCL, till now, Rs 1,246 crore has been spent.

Highest Rs 305.10 crore has been utilised in the year 2018-19 while Rs 247.96 crore was

spent in 2017-18, Rs 174.36 crore in 2016-17, Rs 129.43 crore in 2020-21 and Rs 115.57 crore in 2021-22. Similarly, the Energy Department has made an expenditure of Rs 70 crore in the launching year 2015-16 whereas Rs 99.08 crore was spent in 2019-20, and Rs 77.50 crore was utilised in 2022-23.

Due to change in scope of the scheme, the project cost increased by Rs 469.39 crore, over and above the amount

earlier approved by the State Government. Therefore, the total cost of the projects under the scheme now has reached Rs 1,961.46 crore.

The State Cabinet led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has recently approved the expansion of the project cost under the scheme. As per estimation, Rs 364.98 crore will be sanctioned to OPTCL during the current year 2023-24 while Rs 166.96 crore will be given in 2024-25.

SOCIAL CANVAS

Sharecroppers, marginal farmers still denied subsidy benefits

Land and ownership has a strong link with agriculture production and data shows the agriculture sector of India is mostly dominated by small and marginal farmers in rural India who are the real cultivators mostly belonging to the socially marginalised sections. These farmers mostly cultivate their own land and also take up sharecropping. But unfortunately, most of the inputs subsidy policies such as land development, purchasing of agricultural appliances, seed, fertiliser, pesticide, low interest credit, insurance support, compensation against loss and damage, tax exemption over agricultural income, and many other benefits of the Government have been designed to help the rich farmers. The sale of agriculture produce by the small farmers mostly has been a major problem as they are deprived of right MSP and a host of other benefits available to rich farmers.

The Land and Livestock Hold-



MANAS JENA

ing Survey conducted in the 70th round of the National Sample Survey in the year 2013 reveals that the average size of land per household ownership holding was 0.592 hectares(ha) in rural India. The share of land owned by different social groups shows that it was 9.23 % for scheduled castes, 13.06% for Scheduled Tribes, 45.68% for other backward classes and 32.03% for others out of a total 92.369 million ha distributed among 20.06% SC households, 11.89 ST households, 44.82% OBC households and 23.23 others.

It further says that the average area of land owned per household was 0.272 ha for SCs, 0.603 ha for OBCs, 0.650 ha for STs and 0.816 ha for others. Within the social groups, only 0.03 % of SCs and STs, 0.23% of OBCs and 0.55 % others have large holdings of more than 10 ha of land, whereas marginal and small holdings of all social groups together constitute 85% and medium and semi-medium constitute about 7% only. The highest proportion of households belong to the marginal and small holdings and the lowest proportion of 0.24% of households belong to large holding, which is common across all social groups. The survey report says more STs are self-employed in agriculture in comparison to other social groups. The fact is in spite of land reform laws, land distribution and redistribution remain an unfinished task with the Government affecting a vast number of farmers.

With the increase in input costs and wage rates in non-agriculture

sectors, it has been increasingly difficult for the small holding farmers to continue self-employment in agriculture. It has been reported that during the last few years, a majority of distressed farmers who committed suicide in Odisha were sharecroppers and small and marginal farmers. The self-help groups (SHG) which have emerged as new money lenders, are mostly exploiting the small and marginal farmers and sharecroppers, who have very limited access to formal credit institutions, with their high interest rates.

So, in the near future, it may not be economically viable to become self-employed in agriculture with a small holding. The increase in huge subsidies to the farmers will have wider ramifications in public spending and lead to an increase in direct tax burden on all sections of people. The continuation of a vast number of people in the traditional agriculture sector symbolizes the features of backward economy and subsistence living. It is a fact that

the backwardness of Odisha and the marginalized sections' underdevelopment lie with overdependence on agriculture sector in the absence of inadequate development of non-agriculture sector such as manufacturing, industry, mining, tourism, communication, service, health, education, banking, finance, insurance etc which still remain underdeveloped. These sectors have a much wider scope of organised employment as well as a scope of self-employment. There must be a plan by the Government to shift the surplus labour in agriculture to industry and the service sector. But both sectors are not growing well to meet the demand.

The traditional agriculture system needs to be changed, especially its feudal character which is quite exploitative based on caste-based social hegemony in rural areas. Most of the land owning castes belong to the socially dominant groups, whereas the vast majority of agricultural labourers and sharecroppers,

small and marginal farmers are from SC, ST and other backward communities. These sections of people are over represented in agriculture but very marginally represented in non-agriculture sectors. They continue to suffer in agriculture with low wages and without any social security. The agriculture sector has failed to provide employment throughout the year, which is a major cause of distress seasonal migration of agricultural labourers. The inhuman suffering and plight of migrant labourers is known to everyone, but nothing has been done yet to change their misery.

The so-called farmer movements never demands for increase in wages of agricultural labourers and for any kind of benefit for them to improve their social and economic condition and quality of life as they continue to live without homestead land and basic amenities for life such as housing and drinking water. Rather, many farmer leaders blame the increase in agriculture wages as

a cause of agriculture distress in States such as Odisha. The majority of agricultural labourers belong to Dalit communities who are still untouchables in rural villages and deprived of human dignity and continue to face all kinds of social humiliations and atrocities in the hands of the land-owning dominant castes. The social prestige and human rights of Dalit agricultural labourers have never been an issue being addressed in the farmers movements.

It is expected that the farmers movement must be inclusive of the interests of all sections of people engaged in agriculture but not just for the benefit of rich farmers. It is also time to look into the future of the agriculture sector without self-glorification of farmers and increase agricultural productions with use of science and technology. Also, the Government must change its policy towards farmers by recognising the real farmers. (manasbbsr15@gmail.com)

Similipal spots shut for tourists as locals hold Rasta Roko

Agitators protest long apathy by Govt
KAVI VISHNU SATPATHY
■ BARIAPADA

Tourists here in Mayurbhanj continue to face trouble, as Similipal residents' Rasta Roko agitation against Government negligence has entered the sixth consecutive day on Thursday.

Road blockades at three different places have thrown normal life out of gear in tourist spots like Joranda, Chahala and Barehipani, since Saturday. Consequently, authorities, since Sunday, have closed these three tourist spots for the visitors.

According to the agitators, they have been long neglected by the Government and the administration. The existing conditions in the Gram



Panchayats of Astakuanr, Gudgudia and Barehipani inside Similipal, even after 75 years of the country's independence, remain very much pitiable and deplorable. Their demands like construction of a permanent road from Kalikaprasad to Gadsimilipal, establishment of mobile tower in the area, conversion of wooden roads into concrete roads in Similipal, implementation of Prime Minister

Gram Sadak Yojana in these deprived villages and according top priority to local youths in employment in these areas have not been met so far, the agitators alleged.

Similipal Vikash Parishad president Mohanty Birua, Barehipani Sarpanch Parvati Alda, Panchayat Samiti Member Jujhar Bansingh, former Gudgudia Sarpanch Mataram Ho and Astakuanr's Kerse Banra and Rameswar Badra,

presently leading hundreds of protestors of Astakuanr, Gudgudia and Barehipani Panchayats, have now urged the authorities for immediate attention and intervention to end the stalemate in the larger interest of the common people and tourists of Similipal.

In the three Panchayat areas inside Similipal, it may be noted, about 20,000 people, comprising mostly tribal Kohla community, have been, since long, living and languishing in a very poor, far-from-satisfactory conditions. Though some time back a survey, at the initiative and instance of Mayurbhanj MP and Union Minister B Tudu, was conducted to build a Kalikaprasad-Lulung 80-k.m.-long tourists corridor, no follow-up action was visible on the ground in the matter. State Government's laxity and indifference is responsible for this, it is alleged.

In Malkangiri Malyabanta Mahotsav kicks off



PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

The Malyabanta Mahotsav -2023 commenced with fervour and traditional grandeur at Jaduguda Shaiva Peetha in Padmagiri panchayat of Malkangiri district on Tuesday.

District Culture Council Chairman and District Magistrate Vishal Singh marked the auspicious beginning, leading the ceremonial 'Kalash' procession. In the morning, ADM Vedabar Pradhan conducted the initial puja, setting the spiritual tone for the festival. Sub-Collector Akshay Kumar Khemundu welcomed the guests.

Under the guidance of BDO Prabhati Jhodia, the Block Group orchestrated the festival, adhering to traditional tribal customs. The festivities

would cascade to seven blocks, symbolising unity and cultural richness.

The Kalash procession witnessed large public participation, featuring mesmerising folk dance performances by Koya, Gadaba, and Dhemsra troupes from the district.

In the afternoon, the procession from Bhairavi temple to Jagannath temple, Malkangiri captivated the audience, involving Self-Help Group mothers, college students, club members and the general public.

Malkangiri SP Nitesh Wadhwani, DFO Pratap Kattapalla, ZP Chairperson Samari Tangul, Chittarakonda MLA Purna Chandra Baka, SDC Chairman Adma Raba, and Malkangiri block Chairperson Gauri Padhiani were among others present.

Chaos in Rayagada Chaiti preparatory meet

Rs 92 lakh bungling of last year's fest dissented

RAYAGADA ■ BADAL TAH

As Chaiti is a local people's festival, specially of tribals, several issues were pointed out by Rayagada public during a preparatory meet held in the presence of Minister Jagannath Saraka, Rayagada MLA Makaranda Muduli, Gunupur MLA Raghunath Gomango, former Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang, SP Vivekananda Sharma, ADM Rameswar Pradhan, ADM Bhaskar Raito, Rayagada Sub-Collector Kalyani Sanghamitra Devi and BSKY advisor Sudhir Das.

Though around Rs 92 lakh was spent in the Chaiti held during January, 2022, no account statement was shared with the public assembled in



the preparatory meet as the cash book is yet to be finalised with audit report even after passage of almost 10 months of the event. According to the participants of the meeting, the then ADM Dharmananda Behera and present DCO Sasmita Bauri are involved in massive corruption as there was numerous cash transactions. Unaccounted cash was received by the duo, which have not come to the cash book and money receipts were not issued to the donors.

There are several instances of cheques drawn in the name

of Sasmita Bauri, DCO, Rayagada. She was also instrumental in involving a Government teacher in criminal activities. Though lakhs were spent towards souvenir "Chaitali", not a single copy was distributed to the public. Misappropriation was done in food distribution and engagement of an event management company.

A committee representing the public has rendered a few suggestions for conducting the ensuing Chaiti-2023, including constituting a finance committee involving compe-

tent public persons including senior citizens, mediapersons and retired Government servants, etc to scrutinise and ratify all the bills and vouchers of Chaiti-2022 in the audit process and a plan and budget for Chaiti-2023.

As per the decision, the three-day Chaiti will start from December 26 followed by Pallishree Mela on December 29 and 30. This year, Chaiti will be inaugurated on December 11 from Devagiri in K Singhpur block and Chaiti Idital from Marichaguda in Padmapur block.

Rally for plastic-free environ held at B'pur



By City College under IYDP
PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A public awareness programme on plastic-free environment under the Integrated Youth Development Programme (IYDP) was launched at the City College here on Thursday. Deputy Mayor of Brahmapur Municipality E Vivek Reddy (chief guest), senior journalist Shaktidhar Rajguru (guest of honour) and Principal Dr Anita Kumari Panda inaugurated the event.

The students of +2 and +3 wing of the college participated in a rally which was held to sensitise the villagers of the local Ambapua village and the general public of Krishna Bihar about the plastic-free environment. Head of Education Department of College and Program Officer of IYDP Dr Ajay Kumar Kumar Penthoi conducted the programme, while faculty members Dr Sasmita Kumari Patnaik, Manini Pradhan, Lt Meghnad Pradhan, Pradeep Das and Sudam Charan Bishoyi were present.

INBRIEF

EXPRESS TRAIN DERAILS AT SAMBALPUR

Sambalpur: In a minor train accident, the Sambalpur-Jammu Tawi Express derailed at the Sambalpur railway station late on Wednesday night. Fortunately, no one was injured in the derailment as it took place at the washing line while passengers were not present in the train. A wheel of a coach derailed from the track, following which the concerned workers swung into action and restored it. The derailment had no impact on train services as the train departed from the station on Thursday morning.



BJD WINS G UDAYAGIRI NAC CHAIRPERSON BY POLL

Bhubaneswar: The BJD on Thursday won the by-election for the post of G Udayagiri Notified Area Council (NAC) Chairperson. While the BJD got 3,111 votes, the BJP secured 756 votes and the Congress 614 votes. BJD candidate Debasmata Satpathy emerged victorious with a margin of 2,355 votes. The BJD also won the elections for the posts of Chikiti NAC Ward-3 Councilor, Jagatsinghpur Municipality Ward-6 Councilor and Joda Municipality Ward-8 Councilor.

MIDDAY MEAL RICE STOLEN IN BALANGA

Balanga: The Pipili police seized stolen midday meal rice from a rice merchant of Mauzigeb Chhak under the Balanga police station on Thursday. On Wednesday night, Yudhisthir Lenka of Beraboi village under the Balanga police station had stolen the rice from the Dandamakundapur Primary School of Pipili block. He was also caught by local people at the time of theft. Locals handed him over to police at the time of investigation Yudhisthir informed the name of rice merchant. Then, police raid the rice merchant's shop and detained him.



BHARGAVI YOUTH CLUB'S BOITABANDAN ENDS

Balanga: A three-day-long Boitabandan Utsav organised by the Bhargavi Youth Club concluded in a colourful function at Nahamanga village on Tuesday evening. Pipili MLA Rudra Pratap Maharathy, former MP and actor Siddhanta Mohapatra, Odisha Food Commission Member Priyabrata Samantaray, social worker Jagurti Panda, Pipili block Chairman Debaswini Nanda, Rupadeipur Sarapanch Rina Mishra, PS Member Raghunath Sahoo joined as guests. Youth Club president Dhaneswer Behera, secretary Santosh Behera and all members organised the function.



AMA BANK FACILITY LAUNCHED IN NIMAPADA

Balanga: To provide banking facilities to rural area, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has inaugurated four nationalised bank branches in Nimapada through virtual mode under the Ama Bank scheme. The banks were launched at Kothakusanga, Sainsa, Alanda and Miteipur GPs. At Sainsa, Nimapada MLA Samir Ranjan Dash was present.

LEAP AHEAD STARTUP SUMMIT

Bhubaneswar: STPI and TiE Delhi-NCR along with the Government of Odisha organised a LEAP AHEAD Startup Summit in



Bhubaneswar in the presence of Odisha E & IT, Sports & Youth Services Minister Tusharkanti Behera. It aspires to nurture an ecosystem capable of supporting a minimum of 5,000 startups in the State by the year 2025. Behera announced support for Women-Led Startups with a financial backing of Rs 22,000 per month at the idea stage and Rs 16 lakh for product development and marketing assistance.

IFGL REFRACTORIES UNVEILS RESEARCH CENTRE

Bhubaneswar: IFGL, the largest Indian owned multi-national refractories company, has unveiled a state-of-the-art Research Centre in Kalunga, Odisha in the presence of IFGL Refractories Limited chairman Shishir Bajoria and Managing Director James McIntosh.

ICICI PRUDENTIAL LIFE TOPS CLAIM SETTLEMENTS

Bhubaneswar: For the second quarter of FY2024, the ICICI Prudential Life Insurance leads in claim settlement ratio among private sector life insurers. The company achieved the best claim settlement ratio of 97.9% in the first quarter of FY2024, showcasing its commitment to delivering on promises made to customers and their families.

SUNFEAST MARIE LIGHT PARTICIPATES IN BALI YATRA

Cuttack: ITC's Sunfeast Marie Light continues to connect with consumers of Odisha by participating this year in the iconic Bali Yatra festival. Through this unique initiative, the brand aims to celebrate and showcase the rich cultural heritage of Odisha.



KALINGA SUPER CUP IN ODISHA FROM JAN 9

Bhubaneswar: The Kalinga Super Cup will be organised in Odisha from January 9, 2024. This has been announced by the All India Football Federation. The matches will be held in two venues.

DSPL-427

KONARK FESTIVAL

OPEN AIR AUDITORIUM
KONARK, ODISHA

1st to 5th December 2023
6.00 PM to 8.30 PM

1st December

ODISSI
Soor Mandir
Jyotsnarani Sahoo
& Group, Cuttack

2nd December

KUCHIPUDI
Kuchipudi Dance
Academy
Jay Rama Rao & Group
New Delhi

3rd December

ODISSI
Debadasi
Rojalin Mohapatra & Group
Bhubaneswar

4th December

MOHINIYATTAM
Lasya Academy of
Mohiniyattam
Pallavi Krishnan & Group
Kerala

5th December

ODISSI
Geeta Govinda Charitable Trust
Kumkum Mohanty & Group,
Bhubaneswar

BHARATNATYAM
Chithakala School
of Academy
Praveen Kumar
& Group, Bengaluru

SATTTRIYA
Kalpabriksha
Dance Ensemble
Anwesha Mahanta & Group
New Delhi

ODISSI
Utsav Educational &
Cultural Society
Ranjana Gauhar & Group,
New Delhi

KATHAK
Prerna Centre for
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Luna Poddar & Group, Kolkata

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INTERNATIONAL
SAND ART FESTIVAL

1ST-5TH DECEMBER 2023
CHANDRABHAGA BEACH, KONARK, ODISHA

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Centre's policies have taken economy to new heights: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said his Government's policies and decisions have taken the economy to new heights, creating immense possibility for employment and self-employment generations. Speaking to newly inducted employees in different government departments at the Centre and in some states after distributing nearly 51,000 appointment letters as part of 'Rozgar Mela', he asked them to ensure that welfare initiatives reach the most deprived people wherever they are and said this will lead to the realisation of goal of making India a developed country by 2047. Modi said their biggest priority should be people's ease of living, and took a swipe at past governments saying they ignored the equality envisaged by B R Ambedkar, the key figure behind the



Constitution, among all citizens. A big section of society was denied even basic facilities till 2014 when his government came to power, he said. The prime minister said his government prioritised the marginalised and adopted their development as a mantra, asserting that it reached out to those who for decades had not got any facility from any government. "We have been trying to change their lives," he said. The same bureaucracy and system are in place but the

mindset and work culture has changed, changing the lives of people, he said. Citing a report, Modi said over 13 crore people moved out of poverty in the last five years. Many global agencies have come out of positive reports about the Indian economy, he said, adding that this also is an evidence of the immense possibility for employment and self-employment in the coming years. The prime minister told the new employees through video conferencing that they should

make a note of any hardship they might have faced due to some government employees and ensure that they never treat anyone in the same manner. His government, he said, has been spending lakhs of crores of rupees in building modern infrastructure, including expressways, airports and in rail sector, which have obviously created a lot of employment. India is witnessing an "infrastructure revolution", he said. Development projects hanging fire for years and decades were accomplished by his government, he said, citing the construction of an airport in Sikkim and Paradip refinery. Real estate sector was headed to sure shot destruction when his government came to power but it ushered in reforms through the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act to restore its good health. The sector creates a lot of employment, he noted.

Rajnath lauds Coast Guard for ensuring maritime security

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday called upon the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) to continue working with dedication and professionalism towards bolstering the coastal defences and maritime capabilities of the country. Inaugurating the 40th Coast Guard Commanders' Conference here, he also complimented the ICG for ensuring maritime security by being in the vanguard in the field of search and rescue and pollution response. "The ICG, since its inception, has rendered a yeoman service to the seafarers by ensuring their safety and security in all circumstances," said Rajnath. He stressed on the need to continue the drive against contraband and drug trafficking. During the conference, the defence minister was given an overview on the ongoing development projects, opera-



tional readiness and future expansion plans of the ICG by Director General Rakesh Pal. The three-day conference aims at addressing contemporary maritime challenges and fortifying the country's coastal surveillance mechanisms. It is being attended by senior officers of the Ministry of Defence and the ICG. The conference agenda

encompasses a wide spectrum of crucial topics, including enhancing maritime safety and security such as search and rescue operations, maritime pollution response, drive against contraband/drug trafficking, safety of fishermen/seafarers at sea, optimising coastal security measures, fostering inter-agency coordination,

and promoting Maritime Domain Awareness. The conference is held annually, where all the officers put forth the roadmap for the future and discuss various policy and strategic issues. It aims to carve out a futuristic vision for the service and to determine the modalities to overcome the challenges efficiently.

PM interacts with beneficiaries of Viksit Bharat Sankalp, launches Mahila Kisan Drone Kendra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Launching programme to increase the number of 'Jan Aushadhi Kendras' in the country from 10,000 to 25,000, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday affirmed that his work in the last 10 years has led to people having immense confidence in his government as he said the "vote bank" considerations of past dispensations guided their development initiatives. Interacting with beneficiaries of the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' via video conferencing, the Prime Minister also launched 'Pradhan Mantri Mahila Kisan Drone Kendra'. During the program, the Prime Minister dedicated the landmark 10,000th 'Jan Aushadhi Kendra' at AIIMS, Deoghar, Jharkhand. He also launched the programme to increase the number of Jan Aushadhi Kendras in the country from 10,000 to 25,000. According to Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Prime Minister interacted with beneficiaries from Deoghar in Jharkhand, Raigarha in Odisha, Prakasam in Andhra Pradesh, Namsai in Arunachal Pradesh, and Arnai in Jammu and Kashmir. In his address to beneficiaries of different schemes as part of the government's Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra for saturation coverage of welfare schemes, he said four biggest "castes" for him are the poor, youth, women, farmers, and their rise will make India developed. The yatra, under which government 'raths' (chariots) are travelling to all corners, has generated huge enthusiasm among people with some describing the vehicles as



"Modi ki guarantee wali gaadi" (vehicles carrying Modi's guarantees), the prime minister said, asserting that the masses know that he will fulfil all his promises. For this he needs their blessings, he said, underscoring that the programme will identify everyone left out of welfare schemes aimed for them and that he will ensure their saturation coverage in the coming years. A voice is emerging from people across the country that Modi's guarantee begins from where people's expectations from others end, he said. In his remarks after interacting with the beneficiaries, Modi said Bharat is neither going to stop nor tire as the people have resolved to make the country developed. "In various corners of the country there is such enthusi-

asm for the yatra and there is a reason for it, as people have seen Modi, his work, in the last 10 years and therefore, they have immense confidence in the government and its efforts." "People have also seen that period when past governments used to consider themselves 'mai-baap' of the people. Therefore, even after decades of independence, a big portion of the population was deprived of basic facilities," Modi said. Mai-baap is a Hindi term which loosely translates here as a government having a feudal mindset. More than half the population had lost faith in government as they had to depend on middlemen and running around offices to seek any benefit while his dispensation is reaching out to the masses to enrol them for various welfare measures, he said. Earlier govern-

ments were driven by political calculations and vote bank considerations, he said. "Therefore, the people never used to trust the announcements of such 'mai-baap' governments. We have changed this and the government in place now considers people as form of God and we work with 'seva bhav' not 'satta bhav'," Modi said. He said that in just 15 days of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, people are walking along and joining it. Until now, the vehicle of 'Modi ki guarantee' has reached over 12,000 panchayats and more than 30 lakh people have benefited from it, the prime minister said. "Mothers and sisters are reaching out to this vehicle of 'Modi ki guarantee'. The initiative has taken the shape of a people's movement and people are tak-

ing it forward," he said. Many panchayats have received saturation coverage without any discrimination, he said, asserting that the youth are taking the lead in popularising the exercise and spearheading the goal to make India developed. Underscoring his commitment, he said he went to a remote tribal region in Khunti to launch the yatra instead of doing it at a place like Vigyan Bhawan, a venue associated with official programmes. The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is being undertaken across the country with an aim to attain saturation of flagship schemes of the government by ensuring that the benefits of these schemes reach all targeted beneficiaries in a time bound manner, according to the PMO. He also launched the 'Drone Didi Yojana'. The scheme aims to provide drones to 15,000 select women Self Help Groups during the period 2024-25 to 2025-2026 for providing rental services to farmers for agriculture purpose. He said he wanted these women to receive 'naman' (respect) in their villages and that some people have suggested the name of 'Namo Drone Didi' for the initiative. Women trained as drone pilots will be financially empowered and receive people's respect, he said. "My dream is to make 2 crore women living in villages and working with self-help groups lakhpati," he said. Noting that the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna, which provide free grains to over 80 crore people, has been extended for another five years, he asserted that "Modi's guarantee means the guarantee of fulfilling all guarantees".

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that India has 'walked the talk' when it comes to climate action, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for supporting developing countries with adequate climate financing and technology transfer to enable them to deal with climate change. As he heads to Dubai to attend the World Climate Action Summit, a high-level segment of the COP28, Modi said, "During our G20 presidency, climate was high on our priority. The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration includes numerous concrete steps on climate action and sustainable development. I look forward to the COP28 taking forward the consensus on these issues." The United Nations 'Conference of the Parties' on climate, known as COP28, is being held to discuss ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and effectively combat climate change. In his departure statement, the Prime Minister said the COP28 will provide an opportunity to review progress made under the Paris Agreement, and chart a path for future course on climate action. "At the Voice of Global South Summit convened by India, the Global South spoke for the need for climate action based on the principles of equity, climate justice, and common but differentiated responsibilities, as well as a greater focus on adaptation," Modi said. The two-week-long meet comes at a time when the world for the first time witnessed a 2 degrees rise in temperature from the pre-industrial level (1850-1900)



and nearly 200 cities – more than half of them are in India which are set to become regions where extreme temperatures will persist for nearly half of the year. "It is important that efforts of the developing world be supported with adequate climate financing and technology transfer. They must have access to equitable carbon and development space to achieve sustainable development," said Modi. "Our achievements in different sectors like renewable energy, energy efficiency, afforestation, energy conservation, Mission LIFE are testament to the commitment of our people towards mother earth," he said. The prime minister said he was looking forward to joining special events including on climate finance and green credit initiative. "In keeping with our civilizational ethos, India has always laid emphasis on climate action even as we pursue social and economic development," Modi said. The prime minister is scheduled to participate in three other high-level side events as well. Earlier, Foreign Secretary

Vinay Kwatra at a press meeting said that India expects a "clear roadmap" on climate finance at the ongoing COP28 in Dubai. "Our clear perspective and priority has been that climate finance and also climate technology are a very crucial segment of all the global efforts in addressing this challenge of environmental degradation," Kwatra said at a media briefing. "We expect a clear roadmap to be agreed at COP28 on climate finance which would be important for delivering on the new, collective, quantified goals," he said. "India has taken a leadership role in shaping the global agenda on climate and environment including through focusing on this issue in two Voice of Global South Summits organised by India," he said. "Our approach to climate action is reflected in our principled positions in international negotiations and our global efforts to help the rest of Global South in combating this serious challenge of climate change as also its impact on the development framework of the developing countries," said the official.

Panel for reduced punishment for assault on public servants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament standing committee has recommended that the two-year imprisonment given to anyone who assaults or uses criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty should be reduced to one year after taking into account submissions of some MPs that the law is widely "misused". The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs headed by BJP member Brij Lal made the recommendation after examining the three proposed criminal laws. In its report, the panel noted that some members of the committee submitted that section 353 under Indian Penal Code (IPC), which corresponds to clause 130 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) is "widely misused by public servants in the name of deterrence". "As the political demonstrations are the soul of democracy and there are instances in the past when political leaders were harassed and falsely con-



victed for offences under this section of IPC while demonstrating, therefore, it was suggested that the punishment under this clause may be reduced. "The committee agrees with the submission made before it and recommends that the punishment provided under clause 130 may be reduced from two years to one year," it said. The clause 130 of BNS says: Whoever assaults or uses criminal force to any person being a public servant in the execution of his duty as such public servant, or with intent to prevent or deter that person from discharging his duty as such public servant, or in consequence of anything done or

attempted to be done by such person in the lawful discharge of his duty as such public servant, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS-2023) bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 11 along with Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS-2023) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA-2023) bills. The three proposed laws seek to replace the Code of Criminal Procedure Act, 1898, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, respectively.

Toxic air in metros taking toll on lungs, says WHO

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Toxic air quality pervading in the air almost in all metros is taking a toll on the lungs of the people with health experts noticing a rise in lung cancer among non-smokers too besides tobacco smokers. As per the World Health Organization (WHO), outdoor air pollution is a Group 1 carcinogen. "There are environmental and occupational determinants of lung cancer," said Dr. Abhishek Shankar Assistant Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, AIIMS, Delhi, mentioning the rise in incidence of lung cancer among non-smokers. Lung cancer screening implementation can be part of a larger effort to educate the population about preventive healthcare and the benefits of early screening, he suggested at the ASSOCHAM 2nd Conference on 'Lung Cancer- Enabling Innovations in Treatment Pathways' held recently here to mark the ongoing lung cancer awareness month.



Dr Sudhir Kalhan Chairperson ASSOCHAM National Digital Healthcare Task Force focused on strong condemnation of deteriorating environment causing air pollution. "There is a definite link of rising incidence of lung cancer in non-smokers due to air pollution," he said, underscoring the need for effective implementation of the policies to curb air pollution. The Five major air pollutants are Ground-level ozone (O3), Particle Pollution (also known as particulate matter, including PM2.5 and PM10), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Sulphur Dioxide (SO2), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2). "By integrating advanced diag-

nostics, accessible treatments, education, research, and support services, we aim to empower both healthcare professionals and patients in their journey toward better lung health," he said. Dr. Yutaro Setoya, Team Lead, Non-Communicable Diseases, WHO, India, in his special address highlighted how 8.1% of cancer-related deaths are attributed to lung cancer. Annually, 1 lakh people are diagnosed with lung cancer and the disease significantly impacts the working-age population, said Dr Setoya while Dr. Dipjyoti Das, Head Medical Planning and operations, Assam Cancer care Foundation talked about delivering equitable and affordable healthcare in backward regions. Prof Dr D S Rana Chairperson ASSOCHAM National Healthcare Council and Board of Trustees, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital dwelled in detail how smoking is directly linked to lung cancer and how it acts as a barrier affecting lung health. "Smoking is by far the leading risk factor for lung cancer.

Indira, Haksar proved more than a match for Nixon, Kissinger in 1971: Ramesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As former US secretary of State Henry Kissinger passed away, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Thursday recalled that in 1971 then US President Richard Nixon and Kissinger created huge headaches for India but then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her close aide P N Haksar proved "more than a match for them". Kissinger, who dominated foreign policy as the United States extricated itself from Vietnam, died Wednesday. He was 100. In a social media post, Ramesh said, "Henry Kissinger has passed away. He was as immensely consequential as he was hugely controversial." In his long and eventful life he has been both celebrated and condemned, Ramesh noted. "But there can be no doubt about his sheer intellectual brilliance and awesome charis-

ma," he said. For the last three decades, he positioned himself as a great friend and supporter of India and indeed he was, Ramesh said. "But this was not always so and in 1971 especially, President Nixon and he created huge headaches for India and thought they had us cornered. However, Indira Gandhi and P N Haksar proved more than a match for them," the former Union minister said. "I have described the Kissinger-Haksar and Nixon-Indira Gandhi encounters with archival detail in my book 'Intertwined Lives: PN Haksar & Indira Gandhi'," Ramesh said. He also pointed out that Gary Bass in his book 'The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and a Forgotten Genocide' indicts Kissinger severely for his role in the events of 1971 leading up to the creation of Bangladesh.

All rescued tunnel workers fit to return home: AIIMS

PTI ■ RISHIKESH
(UTTARAKHAND)

The AIIMS-Rishikesh on Thursday declared all 41 workers who were evacuated from Silkyara tunnel after a 17-day ordeal fit to return home.

Briefing the media here on their health condition, Dr Ravikant, head of general medicine department, said the workers were thoroughly examined and their blood test, X-ray and ECG reports were normal.

“They are physically normal and clinically stable. We have given them clearance to return home,” he said.

However, Dr Ravikant said one of the workers from Uttarakhand stayed back at the facility for the treatment of a congenital medical condition. A worker from Uttarakhand has been incidentally diagnosed with Atrial Septal Defect, an anomaly that is present at birth, he said.

“His physical condition and vitals are normal. He has been shifted from the Disaster Ward to the Department of Cardiology for further investigations. This disorder is not related to tunnel collapse,” he said.

The workers were rescued from the partially collapsed tunnel in Uttarkashi on Tuesday night after a long-drawn operation. After being kept under medical observation for a night at the community health centre at Chinyalisaur, they were airlifted on Wednesday to AIIMS, Rishikesh for a thorough examination of their health parameters.

As they have come out of a tunnel after 17 days, the workers might need acclimatisation, the doctor said, adding they have been advised to go to the nearest hospital after two weeks for a check-up.

“On the basis of their major organ screening, we can say they are fit to travel. As they were taken good care of during



their confinement in the tunnel with regular feeding, there was no case of starvation. Most

of them are young or of middle age. That also helped them stay fit,” Ravikant said.

Doctors from the AIIMS-Rishikesh will stay connected with the workers through tele-

medicine to monitor their mental health for the next few weeks, he said in reply to a

question. About how they will be taken home, the hospital authorities said respective state governments are working out details of their departure.

The number of workers from Jharkhand is the highest at 15. A nodal officer from Jharkhand who is at AIIMS said on Thursday that they will be airlifted.

The responsibility of commute of the rest of them will be handed over to authorised representatives from their states as and when they approach the hospital administration, the hospital authorities said.

“Our priority is to ensure that all workers are safely transported to their home by officials authorised by their respective state governments,” another doctor said at the media briefing.

Apart from 15 workers from Jharkhand, eight are from Uttar Pradesh, five each from Odisha and Bihar, three from West Bengal, two each from Uttarakhand and Assam, and

one from Himachal Pradesh. Meanwhile, Navayuga Engineering Company Limited (NECL), the firm for which the 41 labourers worked at the Silkyara tunnel, has given a cheque of Rs 2 lakh to each of the rescued workers as ex-gratia and announced a bonus of two months for them when they report back to duty.

The NECL is a private company employed by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) to carry out the construction work of the Silkyara tunnel.

“The company has given a compensation of Rs 2 lakh each, as an ex-gratia, irrespective of cadre or any other position,” NECL’s HR department head Rajeev told PTI.

The management has also decided to give two months’ bonus to all the employees at the site. “We have also advised all our employees to take rest for a few days before coming back to work,” he said.

Israeli woman found dead in Kerala, live-in partner suspect

PTI ■ KOLLAM

A 36-year-old Israeli woman was on Thursday found dead at her residence in this southern Kerala district, police said.

Police suspect that the woman’s 70-year-old live-in partner killed her and have lodged an FIR under section 302 of the IPC against him.

An officer of Kottiyam police station narrated the statement given by the man, who claims to be a yoga acharya, that the couple decided to commit suicide and as part of that, the woman slit her throat.

The man claimed that he also stabbed his own neck and later his stomach, police said. However, the woman had several stab wounds on her body besides the fatal injury to her neck, it said.

The man was also booked under section 309 (suicide attempt) of IPC and is presently hospitalised and under police surveillance, the officer said. The incident, which occurred

on Thursday afternoon, came to light when the accused’s relative found the couple in their room in an injured state. As the relative shouted for help, the man, who was still conscious, got up and shut the door, police said.

The door was broken down after police arrived, but by then the woman was dead, the officer said.

The couple were living in the house of the accused’s relative, police said. The woman had been in Uttarakhand for 15 years and was in Kerala for the last one year, he said.

According to the accused, the woman was depressed and despite yoga lessons from him, she was not feeling better, the officer said. The accused claimed that he was suffering from psoriasis and did not want to continue to live and hence, the couple decided to end their lives, the police said. A suicide note was found in the room, but it has not been analysed yet, the officer said.

Assam CM distributes scooters to 35,770 students

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday distributed scooters to girls and boys, who scored at least 60 per cent and 75 per cent respectively in the Class 12 state board examinations. Instituted in the memory of great litterateur and linguist Dr Banikanta Kakati, the award entered its sixth year with 35,770 students receiving the two-wheelers under the scheme in 2023.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that empowering the youth through education has been one of the commitments of the state government. “I sincerely hope that the scooters presented in recognition of good academic performance by the students will motivate them to do better in the future,” he said.

Out of the total students receiving the scooters, 30,203 are girls, who secured first division, and 5,567 are boys, who got 75 per cent and above in the class 12 examinations conducted by the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC) in 2023.



The estimated financial outlay earmarked for the scheme is Rs 259.54 crore.

Reiterating his commitment to extend more helping hands to the student community, the chief minister said his government would take many more student-friendly steps to help them pursue their studies without any deprivation. Sarma also said his government has accorded the highest priority to human resource devel-

opment. The scheme to give scooters was launched in 2017 to encourage students to higher studies. Sarma said that Assam’s ‘Pragyan Bharati’ scheme has been intended to subsidise household expenditure on higher education, and the ambit of this programme in the coming days will be expanded to bring free scooters, free textbooks and subsidised hostel fees.

BJP MP highlights difficulties faced during Uttarkashi operation

PTI ■ GHAZIABAD (UP)

Local BJP MP V K Singh on Thursday shared insights on the “extraordinary” rescue operation carried out to save 41 labourers from the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi.

Speaking out about the challenging multi-agency effort, Singh highlighted the difficulties faced by the rescuers, while also mentioning the exceptional “bravery and cooperation” displayed by the trapped workers throughout the ordeal.

Addressing reporters here, he recounted the ‘unprecedented scale’ of the rescue operation. “The successful rescue of all the labourers marked a remarkable accomplishment for the teams involved,” he said emphasising that various essentials, including nail cutters, immersion rods, blankets, clothes, and recreational items, were provided to the trapped labourers through a small pipe when they were in the tunnel. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh



Dhami closely monitored the rescue operation, with specialists from India and abroad overseeing the digging work, Singh said.

When the auger machine was stuck, the decision of vertical drilling and drilling by magnesium machine was taken, but it was postponed because the temperature of the magnesium machine is around 8,000 degrees Celsius, which could have melted the pipe, he said.

Singh lauded the expertise and precision of the rat mining specialists, who successfully conducted a 12-meter digging operation, ultimately ensuring the safe rescue of all trapped individuals.

Ready to hold polls in J&K whenever ECI wants: LG

PTI ■ JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday said his administration is ready to hold assembly polls in the Union Territory whenever the Election Commission of India directs it to do so.

Taking a swipe at certain political leaders for spreading misinformation about elections, LG Sinha said he would leave Jammu and Kashmir only after successfully conducting the assembly polls.

“Whatever information has been sought by the ECI from J&K about arrangements, have been submitted to them. I want to tell from this platform that whenever the ECI tells us, the J&K administration is ready to hold elections,” Sinha said while addressing a conference, ‘Samvaad’, organised by Amar Ujala here.

Referring to the democratic processes in J&K, LG Sinha highlighted that the right to conduct assembly polls lies exclusively with the Election Commission of India. He also criticized political leaders for allegedly misleading the public.

“My task was to ensure that writ of the nation is established in Jammu and Kashmir and that has been established. That was (my) work and I have performed it,” he said.

“All top commanders of terrorist organisations have been eliminated. Those who are still alive will soon be eliminated. There is no place for terrorism here,” he said.

He said that there is good coordination between the army, CRPF and police. “Attempts are being made by our neighbour to foment trouble here and some incidents took place. There was martyrdom of some jawans. We will avenge those killings,” he added.

On Kashmiri Pandits, he acknowledged the government’s efforts in providing jobs and homes for 3,000 people but expressed the need for additional measures for their resettlement.



SC VC verdict blot on Kerala Govt

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Leaders of the ruling CPI-M were seen scurrying for cover on Thursday following the Supreme Court verdict declaring as null and void the appointment of party cadre Gopinath Ravendran as vice chancellor of Kannur University. While R Bindu, higher education minister, who reportedly wrote to Governor Arif Mohammed Khan for speeding up the appointment of Gopinath despite the latter crossing the age limit, washed off her hands claiming that the decision to appoint the vice chancellor was made by the Governor, leaders of the Opposition Congress party demanded her resignation from the Government.

The Kerala Government’s move to reappoint Gopinath, who does not waste any opportunity to declare his political leanings, in November 2021 was seen as a fait accompli for appointing Priy Varghese as

assistant professor in the same university despite the fact that she did not meet the minimum professional qualifications prescribed for the post. She is the spouse of K K Raghes, CPI-M leader and an acolyte of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The reappointment of Gopinath as vice chancellor and appointment of Varghese as assistant professor in blatant violation of the University Grant Commission guidelines is seen as the epicentre of all irregularities in the sphere of higher education in Kerala, said P Rajan, veteran editor and chronicler of the State’s politics. Reacting to the apex court verdict, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, said that he was fully aware that the decision to reappoint Gopinath would end up like this. “Chief Minister Vijayan met me personally and pleaded for reappointing Gopinath as the latter hailed from Vijayan’s village. Later he deputed his legal advisor to me with a letter from the

advocate general of the State which declared that the reappointment of Gopinath was in line with the precedence and there was no irregularity in it. That was why I gave the clearance to the same,” said the Governor while speaking to the media on Thursday. The Supreme Court on Wednesday had literally admonished the Governor for delaying the Bills sent to the Raj Bhavan for approval and not toeing the line of the CPI-M led Government.

“What were you doing for the last two years?”, the bench consisting of chief justice DY Chandrachud had asked the Governor. The Bills that were held back by the Governor included an order that removed him from the post of Chancellor of all Universities in the State and also an order appointing the former Chief Justice of Kerala High Court ManiKumar as chairman of State Human Rights Commission. The order

appointing ManiKumar as SHRC chairman is being seen as an act of gratitude for favours received from him during his tenure as chief justice of the State.

It was Save University Campaign Committee, a body of academics and educationists, that alerted the Governor about the irregularities in the reappointment of Gopinath as vice chancellor though he was well past the age of superannuation. The Governor himself had disclosed in a media meet that Gopinath along with Irfan Habib, former chairman of ICHR and Ragesh had instigated hundreds of delegates who had assembled at Kannur to physically assault the former.

“Gopinath is a dangerous goonda like Irfan Habib,” said the Governor.

The duo along with the delegates were seen gesticulating and threatening the Governor who had gone to the university to inaugurate the annual conclave of historians.

Andhra Pradesh opens Nagarjunasagar Dam gate

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh irrigation officials opened one gate of the Nagarjunasagar Dam on Thursday to meet the drinking water needs of the state, an official said, which led to some friction with their Telangana counterparts. Engineer-in-Chief (Irrigation) C Narayana Reddy told PTI that Andhra Pradesh officials had no other option but to open the gate to release 3,000 cusecs of water as Telangana has been allegedly creating hindrances over the past nine years.

“This is a drought year, that’s why we are left with no other option but to take control of our facilities in our own territory,” said Reddy, adding that the dam gate was opened around 10 am. According to the EIC, Telangana officials are allegedly not allowing Andhra Pradesh officials to

even enter the dam to conduct inspections. Moreover, he alleged that they established four checkpoints in Andhra Pradesh territory and termed it unwarranted as one state government cannot go into another state and handle checkpoints. Reddy alleged that Telangana officials have been executing such activities forcibly. “To avoid friction between the states, we were holding ourselves back but the menace has reached a peak.

They were not letting us do even timely release of water for drinking needs,” he said. Reddy observed that Telangana has not only trespassed to handle irrigation installations in Andhra Pradesh territory but is also allegedly controlling all the release points to Andhra Pradesh.

“The problem is that they have presumed that Nagarjunasagar Dam is under their control and they have trespassed into our

territory on the right bank,” he said.

According to the irrigation official, the central line of Krishna river is the boundary between both the states, with the jurisdiction of the left side falling into Telangana and the right side Andhra Pradesh. He said that on the right side the right main canal has a powerhouse and a head regulator for release of water to exclusively cater to the needs of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, the left bank of the river houses Telangana’s installations which fall in its territory and is handled by it, Reddy added. Further, he said 13 gates of the 26-gate spillway fall into Telangana’s jurisdiction and the remaining 13 into Andhra Pradesh’s.

However, he alleged that Telangana authorities did not stop within their facilities and installations but also encroached on Andhra Pradesh side as well.

Nothing pending from Centre to Karnataka, says FM

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said there is “nothing pending” from the Central government to Karnataka and the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for the drought relief to the state, which is due, will be decided once the high-powered committee decides.

Speaking to reporters here, she said because Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been Chief Minister of a state for more than 10 years, he knows what it is for states to get their money in time. “The state government can throw the allegations. He can send me the letter and much before the letter reaches me he can put it in social media, the

minister or the chief minister. And I say not just this in Bengaluru, I’ve even, two days ago, when I was in Kerala, I said that,” Sitharaman said in response to a question on Congress government here alleging delay in release of Central funds to Karnataka.

“There is nothing pending from our side for Karnataka, I’m a MP from the state, I have a responsibility also. There’s nothing pending. Well if the state doesn’t send me the required paper, I will keep waiting for the paper to send it. I can’t send money, without authorisation of the Accountant General. So that’s the truth behind any allegation, the allegation without facts in them,” the Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka added.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had last month alleged that the BJP-led Union government has burdened our state by not releasing funds for 61 Centrally sponsored schemes across 23 departments, and slashing Karnataka’s tax share, resulting in a Rs 45,000 crore loss since 2020.

To add to that, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who supposedly represents Karnataka in the Rajya Sabha, decided not to approve the Rs 5,495 crore special grant that was promised, he had posted on ‘X’, adding that “alarmingly, Karnataka receives just 15 paise for every rupee it contributes in tax.”

Responding to a question on the release of NDRF funds for drought relief to Karnataka,



Sitharaman said, “For NDRF, there is a committee. The Home Minister looks into it. I had Minister (Revenue Minister of Karnataka) Krishna Byre Gowda come and meet me.

Even there I explained to him saying the money whichever is being decided will be -- and the SDRF money is in the hands of the state government to spend.” Stating that it’s not as if NDRF

money will not come, she said, “the assessment team, the technical team, they all came and made a team assessment, they’ve submitted to the high powered committee. The moment the committee recommends the money is going to come. It is due to the state. Nobody’s going to stop it.” The Karnataka government has declared 223 out of the total 236 taluks in the state as drought hit, and the state government has been repeatedly attacking the Centre for delay in release of drought relief funds, as per NDRF norms.

The FM further said, for the north Karnataka farmers, she has asked the ITC group to come and procure stock that is there with them, so that imme-

diately some money can go into the hands of the farmers. “Even that team has come.”

Sitharaman today visited a ‘Jan Aushadi Kendra’ on Subedar Chatram Road here. Noting that the Prime Minister dedicated to the nation the landmark 10,000th Jan Aushadi Kendra at AIIMS, Deoghar in Jharkhand, the FM said, all over the country Jan Aushadi Kendras are steadily becoming popular among families. Particularly the middle class and also the poorer sections are getting better informed that the same medicine equally effective is available as a generic medicine drug. Because of Jan Aushadi Kendras, people are able to

save, as in some cases medicines are 70 per cent lesser price or 66 per cent lesser, she said. “It leaves a lot of money in the common people’s hands. Middle class, lower middle class, poor people will have some more money left and their hand which they can use for their children, for the elders and for the family.”

Further stating that now more than 2,000 drugs are available through these stores, she appealed to the people of Bengaluru to support this very noble cause of medicines being available at affordable prices. “It’s a great relief for the middle class, lower middle class and the poorer sections of our society.”

The CAA scare

Amit Shah rakes up citizenship Act amid State elections, much to the consternation of minorities

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement regarding the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has reignited a vigorous debate and speculation. The CAA, a bone of contention since being introduced in December 2019, aims to provide citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighbouring Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. At the time, it faced widespread protests and criticism over its potential impact on India's secular principles and the rights of religious minorities. This time again, Shah's reiteration about the CAA's implementation has triggered doubts and discussions. Due to its association with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the fear of potential discrimination and exclusion – especially against the Muslim community – fueled protests across the nation. The Government's response to these protests involved reassurances that the CAA was not meant to harm any particular community and



that it aimed to provide a haven for persecuted minorities from the neighbouring countries. However, the controversy surrounding the Act persisted, leading to an unspecified delay in its implementation. But due to nation-wide protests Government chose to put it on the backburner. Meanwhile other issues took over and CAA was almost forgotten. But with Amit Shah's statement it is back on the centre stage. Proponents argue that the CAA is a humanitarian gesture, offering refuge to neighbours facing religious persecution. They contend that it aligns with India's tradition of sheltering persecuted communities and upholds the principle of religious freedom. On the

other hand, critics express concerns about the Act's potential impact on India's secular fabric. They argue that by selectively providing citizenship based on religion, the CAA undermines the principle of equal treatment for all regardless of religious affiliation. Critics fear it may set a precedent that challenges the secular foundation of the Constitution. Furthermore, the CAA has been closely associated with the NRC, a process aimed at identifying and expelling undocumented immigrants. The combination of CAA and NRC has raised apprehensions about possible discrimination and exclusion, particularly affecting vulnerable communities who may struggle to produce the necessary documentation. Shah's statement on the CAA's implementation, especially during Assembly polls, raises questions about the timing and political motivations. Elections often bring specific policy issues to the fore as leaders seek to rally support. The CAA, with its polarising nature, can be strategically used to appeal to certain voter bases. The nation does need a comprehensive refugee policy but that must not be discriminatory, to say the least. Besides, dislocating people living in India for generations would be inhumane as it violates India's commitment to uphold human rights.

PICTALK



School students form 'red ribbon', Universal symbol of awareness about HIV, in Moradabad

PTI

Are foreign universities best bet for better education?

Foreign university campuses in India may be good for many reasons but improvement of higher education is not one of them

With the latest UGC notification regarding the regulations for foreign universities to be set up in India, getting a degree from a reputed foreign university may not be difficult for the privileged class. In recent times, there has been an exodus of Indian students to foreign countries for higher studies and jobs. In states like Kerala and Punjab, this trend is increasing daily. The trend is so alarming that even after schooling, students leave the mother country, and many foresee a generation of old-age couples living in posh houses. Why are people moving to alien countries? Is it due to the lack of quality education in our country? Is it a lack of poor infrastructure in our educational institutions? Or Is it the colonial mindset that made us look at foreign countries as better than our homeland? If we analyze the issues behind this exodus, we find that there are multiple issues, and it is challenging to pinpoint one problem. One main issue in our higher education is the unnecessary administrative procedures followed in our public



sector universities and colleges. It's more challenging to tackle the administrative people of these institutions than to learn complicated subjects. Half of the productive time of students doing doctoral degrees in these institutions is wasted on tackling the people in the administration. Students must get no-objection certificates from different sections, even sections unrelated to their course. Even after awarding the PhD degree, if the student wants a NET exemption certificate, they have to repeat the complete cycle of paperwork. What is the need for these complicated administrative procedures? Is it to protect the job of jobless staff members? Few new-generation public sector universities like the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) have streamlined these com-

plicated procedures, reducing the paperwork and completing the work within the stipulated timeline on their website. However, the majority still follow the old culture. Many students move to foreign countries to complete their degree within the specified time without hassles. The second reason for the mass exodus is their lucrative salary in foreign countries. Gone are the days when students worked jobs as service. Nowadays, for even minor assistance, a student expects remuneration. When we were students, we used to help our teachers to maintain departmental libraries and gardens. Only people from the affluent class could get admission to these universities because of the higher tuition fees. More than that, even if a student receives a degree from a foreign university having a campus in India, it won't have the same weightage as studying in their main campus in the respective countries. The culture of a university is directly related to the culture followed in society. So, even if a foreign university tries to follow an alien culture, the native societal culture is

bound to reflect on their campuses. Even though starting foreign university campuses is a welcome step, it won't bring long-term benefits. Instead, we must improve the quality of education and research in our public sector universities and attract international students to India. The presence of international students on our campuses will enhance our academic quality and bring money to the public exchequer. Since the Indus Valley civilization, education and learning have been deeply ingrained in the Indian subcontinent. Our ancient universities, like Takshashila and Nalanda, have attracted students from around the globe. We have to envision the day when students from foreign countries visit our public sector universities, and we start our university campuses in other countries. As a driving force, this will also help propagate Indian values and philosophy across the globe.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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India rising but China still ahead

India is becomeing proactive in international arena and getting good response but the China's dominance in the Global South remains undisputed

In the ever-shifting landscape of global power dynamics, India finds itself at the forefront of a compelling narrative—the quest to be the "voice" of the Global South. As it assumes the G-20 Presidency, India's ambitions to represent the diverse nations of Africa, Latin America, and Asia echo loudly, challenging its formidable neighbour, China, in a musical chairs game of influence. The ongoing great power struggle between these two nations raises crucial questions about the future trajectory of the Global South and who will emerge as its torchbearer.

In this intricate dance of geopolitics, the article ultimately raises the question of what it truly means to be the "voice" of the Global South. As the world watches the interplay between the Dragon and the Elephant, whether India's soft power and ideals of brotherhood can attract nations, contrasting with China's more robust physical and economic might. In the late 1980s, Deng Xiaoping prophetically declared the advent of the "Asian Century" during a meeting with India's then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. This prediction has materialized, but the pivotal question remains: which nation will lead this Asian century? Statistical data, unequivocally, places China ahead of India in military prowess, economic size, and technological advancements. Yet, this article explores the unique strengths and potential contributions India can offer as it endeavours to become the "voice" of the Global South. Coined in 1952 during the Cold War, the term "Third World" has evolved into the more neutral "Global South." This term transcends through the diverse group of nations from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, evolving into a symbol of shared historical experiences of colonization, economic challenges, and a collective desire for a more equitable global order. India, currently hosting the G-20 Presidency, has taken proactive steps, hosting a virtual "Voice of the Global South" summit and championing the issues of developing nations. As India positions itself as a



leader, it offers distinct advantages over China. India's vibrant democracy, commitment to pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law resonate with nations worldwide. With a young and tech-savvy population, India's scientific community has already made significant global contributions. India's diplomatic finesse comes to the forefront as it navigates challenges posed by China's economic investments in neighbouring regions. Unlike China's perceived debt-trap diplomacy, India's trade relations and diplomatic acumen position it as a bridge between the Global North and South. The question lies in whether India's commitment to collaboration and building trust can outshine China's more assertive tactics. A recent report published by Pew Research Surveys has unveiled a noteworthy trend: India has greater favourability than China in the developed world. However, when it comes to developing countries (the Global South), China has an edge over India as the more favourably favoured nation. This trend can be seen because, within the Global South, many countries grapple with shared historical experiences, socio-economic challenges, and aspirations for equitable global representation. China's ascendancy as the preferred nation is predictable



INDIA'S ADVANTAGES LIE IN NOT BEING PERCEIVED AS AN AGGRESSOR OR ENCROACHER, IN CONTRAST TO CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE VIEWED AS A POTENTIAL DEBT TRAP

due to its economic prowess and infrastructure investments, which will help developing countries achieve their developmental goals. Amidst a backdrop of geopolitical shifts and economic realignments, India's democratic values, commitment to human rights, and rule of law sets it apart. Its young, tech-savvy population and thriving scientific community position it as a catalyst for innovation. India, with its evolving intellectual property regime, excels in process technology and manufacturing. US-based multinationals heavily invest in both China and India. The allure of less expensive skilled labour, market access, collaboration opportunities, and government incentives draws these corporations to India. In sectors such as information technology, telecommunications, transport equipment, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and energy, India faces both opportunities and challenges. The lack of a sophisticated customer base hampers significant innovation in IT, but this gap may close in the coming decades. The growing sophistication of engineering and design services in aircraft and automotive industries positions India as a significant player in global markets. India is moving beyond replicating designs to contributing to cutting-edge innovation.

India's ascent in the Global South leadership struggle against China is not only influenced by geopolitical dynamics but also by its innovation landscape. Chinese and Indian firms are increasingly involved in early-stage research and clinical trials, showcasing a shift towards innovative product development. India's advantages lie in not being perceived as an aggressor or encroacher, in contrast to China's Belt and Road Initiative viewed as a potential debt trap. India's trade significance and good relations globally position it as a bridge between the Global North and South. While China may have firepower, India's diplomatic prowess and cordial relations give it a better ability to lead the world. India's journey from shadows to spotlight in the global innovation arena is nothing short of a triumph. As the dragon of China breathes its economic fire, the elephant of India is trumpeting its unique strengths on the global stage. So, as the dragon and elephant dance in this innovation duet, India's ascent is not just a rise; it's a melody, echoing across the realms of progress.

(The writer is Associate Professor, centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences Pondicherry Central University, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ALLOW DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Sir — Very often, this age-old issue about dual citizenship despite various utterances by different politicians over the years comes to the fore. It is an issue that has been of concern to many people. It would be in everyone's best interests to resolve this issue once and for all. The government and the courts need to find a solution that may resolve the issue faced by many who have obtained Portuguese and other nationalities find themselves in, many through birth and for historical reasons. It would be prudent for the central government to allow people dual nationality or citizenship as they can have a foreign nationality and still maintain close links with the motherland. According to the World Population Review, 49% of all countries worldwide allow dual citizenship which means that a person can be a citizen of more than one country. We are living in an age where the world is a global village just like no man is an island.

Ramanath Krishnan | Kozhikode

TELANGANA ELECTIONS

Sir — Telangana sees a triangular contest between the BJP, Congress, and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). BRS has fielded candidates in all 119 seats. As per the seat-sharing agreement, the BJP and actor Pawan Kalyan-headed Jana Sena are contesting in 111 and 8 seats, respectively, while Congress has given one seat to its ally CPI and is fighting from 118 others. Meanwhile, Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM has put up candidates in nine segments in the city. The key candidates include Chief Minister KCR, his minister-son K T Rama Rao, state Congress president A Revanth Reddy, and BJP Lok Sabha members Bandi Sanjay Kumar and D Arvind. Ahead of the polls, the state saw top national leaders, including PM Modi, Rahul Gandhi, and ruling BRS supremo K Chandrasekar Rao, wooing voters.

Silkayara rescue operation



Prayers from the entire nation towards rescuing the 41 workers trapped inside the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakashi bore fruit after a 17-day ordeal. The mission that has been accomplished is a triumph of human labour over

machinery, as the rat-hole mining experts managed to manually break through the final 12 metres of rubble using only hand drills and pulleys. This extensive and challenging rescue work, spanning over 400 hours, showcases the resoluteness and determination of the rescuers and the indomitable spirit of the trapped workers. It also highlights the might of our nation and the combined spirit of its people to stand united in the face of any adversity, and we can go to great lengths when it comes to the well-being of our people. But as we watched on television the hardship and struggle over the operations, questions emerged as to whether the mountainous area in Uttarakhand can withstand the level of this kind of heavy tunnelling work.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

The saffron party's campaign stressed the necessity of electing a "double engine government" and pointed to the "family rule" of KCR and alleged corruption. The BRS's campaign centred around the previous Congress regime's failures and ongoing welfare measures for farmers, women, and other sections of society, as well as his struggle to achieve Telangana statehood. Congress's campaign focused mainly on the alleged corruption of the BRS government while highlighting its six poll guarantees. The results of Telangana will be out on December 3 along with the other four states that went to polls. It would be interesting to see which way the wind is blowing. The general elections are not very far and these results would definitely give an indication of public mood.

Ashraf Hussain | Howrah

ALL INDIA JUDICIAL SERVICE

Sir — Since lower courts are the lifelines of the common man, picking their presiding officers with care and caution cannot be overemphasised. At present, the jurisdictional high courts or state

governments are vested with the power to select subordinate court judges either through examination, interview, or both. At the same time, however, the process of selecting lower court judges has not consistently met the nod of approval from the know-how. The need to have a uniform mechanism for picking judges at the entry level on an all-India basis is widely felt. President Drupadi Murmu recently pitched for an All India Judicial Service, and there are a plethora of legal experts who believe the time is ripe for such a system on the lines of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). The generally tough IAS exams attract the best talents in India. In the same vein, an All India Judicial Service could captivate meritorious young minds that are at present not keen on the judiciary as a career. The Centre does not seem averse to the idea, but it may not easily pass muster with the judiciary because the latter's authority stands threatened.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A METAPHOR FOR INDO-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS

Australian, Arnold Dix, personifies healthy Indo-Australian relationship



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

A miracle occurred this week, when a joint effort of nearly 1000 people working like a single organism and the prayers of millions, managed to move a mountain to rescue 41 trapped workers in eighteen days. While much would be written and hours of content would be created, chronicling the death-defying, Human vs/with Nature feat, there was one of the heroes who stood out like a lone lighthouse, signalling the way to large ships in the tricky geo-political waters. Arnold Dix, an international tunnel expert from Australia had been roped in earlier in the 17-day operation to assist the evacuation process. This expert besides, providing the necessary professional help, was perhaps the most visible face of the rescue mission, offering prayers at the temple of the local deity, beaming with confidence in his interviews with the media about the success of the mission and bringing hope to millions who prayed for the trapped miners. A week earlier, most Indians or at least cricket fans would not have batted an eyelid to lambast the Australians, as they defeated India in its dream run towards a cherished world cup. A week later Arnold Dix is a celebrated figure in India due to his ingenuity in handling the crisis. Taking a cue, leaders at the top from both nations were also busy finalising their geo-political strategy in 2+2 dialogue for greater cooperation bilaterally and at multilateral platforms. The joint statement released after the dialogue mentioned that the Comprehensive strategic dialogue between the two nations was to ensure “both countries sharing major Indian Ocean coastlines, and sharing a positive agenda of cooperation with countries across Asia and the Pacific Ocean region, their cooperation served to reinforce an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.



As the India-Australia CSP continues to deepen bilateral cooperation with a shared commitment to democracy and pluralism, rule of law, and a multifaceted bilateral agenda, the Ministers reaffirmed that gender equality is of fundamental importance and investment in the empowerment of all women and girls is critical to full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Ministers reaffirmed their support for sovereignty and territorial integrity in the Indo-Pacific, democratic values, the rule of law, freedom of navigation and flight and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The Ministers underlined the importance of being able to exercise rights and freedoms in all seas and oceans consistent with international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including freedom of navigation and overflight, in addressing challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including those in the East and South China Seas. They underscored the importance of disputes being resolved peacefully by international law without threat or use of force or any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo, and that countries should exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability. They expressed serious concern about the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore exploitation activities. All was happening in the backdrop of India’s close ally Sri Lanka allowing nearly \$4.5 billion Chinese investment in the strategic Hambantota port town. Hambantota is literally in India’s backyard and offers strategic access to China on Indian critical infrastructure. Chinese shipping company already owns the port of Hambantota. The mention of a strong commitment by India and Australia in the joint statement was a show of recommitment to jointly address regional issues, with Chinese sharks lurking in their oceans. Perhaps Arnold was a greater symbol of what is yet to come out of the Indo-Australian relationship.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Employability of skilled trainees is a must

Aligning Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana PMKVY with the industry to match local economic needs is crucial to making skilled trainees employable



DINESH SOOD

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), launched in 2015, has trained 13.7 million candidates over seven years. However, only 18% or 2.4 million of these candidates have been successful in securing a job. This low placement rate is one of several concerning issues highlighted by a Lok Sabha standing committee. The committee also identified underutilized funds, infrastructure deficiencies, dropouts, a disconnect with industry, and insufficient state engagement as significant problems. To increase the effectiveness of the program, PMKVY must be aligned with the local economy’s needs. Currently, only 2.4% of India’s 530-million-strong workforce has received formal vocational education or training. This means that a vast majority of the workforce remains unskilled, making them less productive. Additionally, a quarter of India’s workforce has less than primary education, further emphasizing the importance of skill development programs in reducing unemployment rates. Despite this, the latest data from the quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports an unemployment rate of 6.8%, with a youth unemployment rate (for ages 15 to 29) of 17.3%. The PMKVY has undergone three versions, with PMKVY 2.0 having the highest number of trained and placed candidates, with a placement rate of 19.5%. However, this rate has since fallen to 5.8% for PMKVY 3.0, the lowest yet. Overall, approximately 11 million trained candidates have completed certification. The government must take immediate action to address these concerns, align PMKVY with the local economy, and improve the program’s effectiveness.

It is imperative to note that Uttar Pradesh is the state with the highest number of candidates trained, with a staggering 1.59 million individuals, however, the placement rate in the state is only a meagre 20%. On the other hand, Telangana takes the lead with the highest placement rate of 35.1%, followed closely by Puducherry at 34.6%. Haryana and Punjab are not far behind with placement rates of 31.7% and 29.6% respectively. Maharashtra and Kerala, however, need to work on their placement rates, as they stand at a disappointing 9.3% and 10.4% respectively. It should be noted that NSDC primarily partnered with private vocational training providers due to the lack of private Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) at the time. However, the shorter training duration of NSDC courses (3-4 months) compared to the 1-2 year programmes offered by ITIs is a major challenge that needs to be addressed. Poor utilisation of funds: According to government data, the programme’s fund utilization was poor in 2016-17, with only 56% of the allocated funds being used. Although the number improved to 98% in 2020-21, it fell back to 72% in 2021-22. The Lok Sabha standing committee reported that the suspension of training and placement operations due to COVID-19 restrictions led to a significant drop in enrollment and certification, resulting in low disbursement and utilization of funds. However, it is expected that the ongoing training under PMKVY 4.0 since January 2023 will lead to an increase in expenditure upon its completion. Connect to industry is missing: NSDC, established in 2008, collaborates with partner trainers to conduct skill development



MOREOVER, THE ONLINE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR THE STATE-MANAGED COMPONENT WAS OPERATIONAL IN ONLY 15 STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES, AND THIS HAS AFFECTED COORDINATION WITH THE UNION GOVERNMENT

programmes. However, the lack of industry participation and a disconnect between NSDC and the industry is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed. The current skill development programmes do not align with the actual regional demand for skills, creating a mismatch between training and local economic needs. This leads to a gap between the skills imparted and the market requirements, which is unacceptable. The quality of training and the choice of the particular skill being imparted must meet the market standards. Unfortunately, the skill centres are not adequately equipped for practical training, resulting in theoretical training with little practical exposure. This is unacceptable, and immediate action needs to be taken to bridge this gap. The Lok Sabha’s standing committee has also highlighted this disconnect and suggested surveying industry representatives to better understand their needs. It is time to take the necessary steps to ensure that the skill development programmes align with the industry needs and bridge the gap between the skills imparted and the market requirements. Candidate dropout, infra deficiencies: A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Administration between 2016 and 2021 revealed that 20% of candidates who enrolled under PMKVY dropped out. The reasons for this were medical issues, family obligations, social challenges, lengthy commutes to training centres, marital status changes, increased livelihood demands, limited job opportunities, and perceived skill stagnation. Female candidates also dropped out due to pregnancy, marriage, and course duration.

The standing committee noted that the Ministry needs to take immediate action to address the factors that lead to candidate dropouts, such as distance to training centres and accessibility to jobs. For the female dropouts, the committee suggested that the Ministry should collaborate with ASHA and anganwadi centres to create awareness about the benefits of skilling and encourage them to resume training as soon as possible after delivery. It is unacceptable that out of 818 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) or training centres allocated in all districts of India, only 722 have been established so far. Of the remaining, 58 PMKKs were surrendered to the government by private vendors due to operational difficulties. This is a significant issue and requires immediate attention from the government. The lack of eligible trainers is another issue that is preventing many centres from becoming operational. As a solution, the government must create a pool of National Assessors and Trainers under PMKVY 4.0. The government must take necessary actions to ensure that the PMKVY program is successful in creating a skilled workforce and reducing unemployment in India. Limited state participation: State disparities driven by varying economic and employment histories result in limited state participation. This is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency. For instance, while some states have a significant agricultural workforce that relies on programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, others like Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu have more employment opportunities. Therefore, it is imper-

ative to adopt localised, demand-driven approaches that extend employment schemes from metropolitan areas to tier-2 and tier-3 cities, thus addressing specific regional challenges. In 2016-20, PMKVY 2.0 introduced state participation to enhance support and monitoring and enable targeted training that aligns with local needs and aspirations. However, the state-managed model encountered several issues, including delays in the release of funds from the state treasury to respective departments, a shortage of trainers with the necessary eligibility criteria, a lack of available placement partners, and delayed payments to training partners. These issues need to be addressed immediately to ensure that the programme is efficient in achieving its objectives. Moreover, the online management system for the state-managed component was operational in only 15 states and union territories, and this has affected coordination with the Union government. It is imperative to expand this system to all states and union territories to ensure that the programme runs smoothly. In conclusion, enhancing the programme’s effectiveness and aligning PMKVY with the industry to match local economic needs is crucial to making skill training programmes employable. It is time to take bold steps to address the challenges facing the programme and ensure that it achieves its objectives.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres; Views expressed are strictly personal)

Leveraging the power of advanced AI in the Edtech space

As AI continues to grow, its ethical considerations must be evaluated to ensure that it provides an equitable, inclusive, and successful learning environment

As the world of education continues to evolve, technology is playing an increasingly important role in the transformation of traditional teaching methods. A particularly significant development in this field is the incorporation of Artificial Intelligence in Educational Technology. This integration can fundamentally alter how we learn, instruct and interact with educational material. AI has made a huge impact on a lot of different industries, and it’s no different in the education industry. AI is becoming more and more popular and it can be used in a variety of ways to get better and more diverse results. It can be used in schools, for professional learning and assessment, for lifelong learning or enterprise work-



DINESH KUMAR POOBALAN

force learning and assessment. Let’s discuss the various ways in which advanced AI is reshaping the EdTech space and its implications for the future of education; Personalised Learning: AI can tailor educational content to meet individual student needs, adapting to different learning styles, speeds and preferences. The increasing acceptance of personalized learning by students is revolutionizing the way learning and assessment are conducted, as it is based on the student’s capacity and career objectives, which enable them to achieve their professional and personal goals. AI-driven software can analyse student performance and the content available to them and suggest tailored study plans that are based on their

strengths and weaknesses, as well as integrate data on market skill demand to provide clearer options and advice for students when they finish their studies. Predictive Analytics for Early Intervention: By analysing large volumes of information, AI can detect trends and anticipate potential difficulties that students may encounter. Through predictive analytics, educators can be alerted early on and provide additional support to those students who are at risk of lagging. By taking a proactive approach, educators can provide more personalised and targeted intervention, resulting in improved student performance and a decrease in dropout rates. Automated Grading: Another important aspect to discuss

here is Automated Grading. Educators may find the process of grading and assessing to be laborious and time-consuming. Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms facilitate the automation of these activities, enabling rapid and precise assessment of assignments, tests and assessments. Not only does this save educators time, but it also provides students with prompt feedback, encouraging a continuous learning process. Adaptive Learning Platforms: One of the most significant applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the field of Education Technology (EdTech) is the creation of adaptive Learning Platforms (ALPs). AI-powered adaptive learning platforms leverage the power of machine learning

to analyse student performance data and create educational content that is tailored to the individual needs and preferences of the learner. Adaptive learning platforms are distinct from traditional adaptive learning approaches in that they offer an individualised learning experience, allowing each student to progress at their speed. Refined Workflows: As the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the sector increases, tools will facilitate the automation of day-to-day operations and the reduction of mistakes. Schools will benefit from the elimination of redundant study materials and the assignment of appropriate learning models. Barriers and challenges associated: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into

Educational Technology (EdTech) offers a range of advantages; however, it is important to consider ethical considerations and difficulties. Privacy, algorithmic biases and digital divide are some of the issues that need to be addressed. It is essential to strike a balance between the utilization of advanced AI to improve educational outcomes and providing equitable access to all students to develop EdTech solutions responsibly. Another key aspect is Enhanced Engagement, which explains that Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) applications that are powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), can provide students with an immersive learning experience. For example, medical students

may be able to perform virtual surgeries; history students may have the opportunity to explore ancient civilizations. AI can also assist in developing and updating educational content based on current trends and student performance data. Advanced technological features like ‘Chatbot’ generate a complete lesson plan and curriculum for teachers by just asking for it. AI is revolutionizing the way students learn, providing them with personalized experiences, immersive simulations and predictive analytics. The potential of AI in EdTech is boundless, and its potential to transform education is undeniable.

(The writer is the CEO & CTO, of Greatify, views are personal)

Kissinger, secy of state under Presidents Nixon and Ford, dies at 100

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the diplomat with the thick glasses and gravelly voice who dominated foreign policy as the United States extricated itself from Vietnam and broke down barriers with China, died Wednesday, his consulting firm said. He was 100. With his gruff yet commanding presence and behind-the-scenes manipulation of power, Kissinger exerted uncommon influence on global affairs under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, earning both vilification and the Nobel Peace Prize. Decades later, his name still provoked impassioned debate over foreign policy landmarks long past.

Kissinger's power grew during the turmoil of Watergate, when the politically attuned diplomat assumed a role akin to co-president to the weakened Nixon.

"No doubt my vanity was piqued," Kissinger later wrote of



his expanding influence. "But the dominant emotion was a premonition of catastrophe."

A Jew who fled Nazi Germany with his family in his teens, Kissinger in his later years cultivated the reputation of respected statesman, giving speeches, offering advice to Republicans and Democrats alike and managing a global consulting business. He turned up in President Donald Trump's White House on multiple occasions. But

For eight restless years — first as national security adviser, later as secretary of state, and for a time in the middle holding both titles — Kissinger ranged across the breadth of major foreign policy issues. He conducted the first "shuttle diplomacy" in the quest for Middle East peace. He used secret channels to pursue ties between the United States and China, ending decades of isolation and mutual hostility.

He initiated the Paris negotiations that ultimately provided a face-saving means — a "decent interval," he called it — to get the United States out of a costly war in Vietnam. Two years later, Saigon fell to the communists.

And he pursued a policy of detente with the Soviet Union that led to arms control agreements and raised the possibility that the tensions of the Cold War and its nuclear threat did not have to last forever.

At age 99, he was still out on tour for his book on leadership. Asked in July 2022 interview with

ABC whether he wished he could take back any of his decisions, Kissinger demurred, saying: "I've been thinking about these problems all my life. It's my hobby as well as my occupation. And so the recommendations I made were the best of which I was then capable."

Even then, he had mixed thoughts on Nixon's record, saying "his foreign policy has held up and he was quite effective in domestic policy" while allowing that the disgraced president had "permitted himself to be involved in a number of steps that were inappropriate for a president."

As Kissinger turned 100 in May 2023, his son David wrote in The Washington Post that his father's centenary "might have an air of inevitability for anyone familiar with his force of character and love of historical symbolism. Not only has he outlived most of his peers, eminent detractors and students, but he has also remained indefatigably active throughout his 90s."

China grieves death of 'dear old friend'

Beijing (PTT): China, a major beneficiary of former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger's ping-pong diplomacy that broke the ice between the two countries in 1971, on Thursday called him a "dear old friend" of Chinese people and mourned his death, saying he was "pioneer and builder" of ties between Beijing and Washington.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who held close consultations with Kissinger to find ways to halt the steep slide of US-China ties, sent a message of condolences to his US counterpart Joe Biden over the death of Kissinger.

Kissinger, who enjoyed a red-carpet welcome, has visited China more than 100 times, the most recent one being in late July this year to pave the way for a summit between Xi and Biden in Seattle earlier this month.

Considered the architect of the US-China relationship since the early 70s, Kissinger died at his home in Connecticut on Wednesday at the age of 100. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, and in his own name, Xi extended profound condolences and expressed sincere sympathy to Kissinger's family, official media here reported.

In his message, Xi said Kissinger was a world-renowned strategist and an old friend and good friend of the Chinese people. Half a century ago, with an outstanding strategic vision, Kissinger made historic contributions to the normalisation of China-US relations, which has not only benefited the two countries but also changed the world, Xi said. Kissinger had made it his lifelong pursuit to promote the development of China-US rela-

tions and enhance the friendship between the two peoples, and his name will always be associated with China-US relations, Xi said. Noting that Kissinger will always be remembered and missed by the Chinese people, Xi said that China is ready to work with the United States to carry forward the cause of friendship between the two peoples and promote the sound and steady development of China-US relations, so as to benefit the two peoples and make due contribution to world peace and development. Speaking at a daily press briefing on Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called Kissinger a "dear old friend" of the Chinese people and a pioneer and builder of China-US relations, who has made historic contributions to the normalization of ties between the two countries.

Truce in Gaza extended by another day

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel and Hamas agreed at the last minute Thursday to extend their cease-fire in Gaza by another day. But any further renewal of the deal that has seen dozens of hostages and prisoners released could prove more daunting since Hamas is expected to set a higher price for many of the remaining captives. International pressure has mounted for the truce to continue as long as possible after nearly eight weeks of Israeli bombardment and a ground campaign in Gaza that have killed thousands of Palestinians, uprooted more than three-quarters of the population of 2.3 million and led to a humanitarian crisis.

Israel has vowed to resume its offensive once the cease-fire expires.

And the talks appear to be growing tougher, with Hamas having already freed most of the women and children kidnapped during the deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war. The militants are expected to make greater demands in return for freeing scores of civilian men and sol-

diers.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top officials on his third visit to the region since the start of the war, said he hoped the cease-fire could be extended and more hostages could be released.

"This process is producing results. It's important, and we hope that it can continue," he said.

Qatar, which along with Egypt has played a key role in mediating, announced the latest extension of the truce, under which Hamas has released at least 10 Israeli hostages per day in exchange for Israel's release of at least 30 Palestinian prisoners. The two Arab countries are now seeking to prolong the deal by another two days, according to Diaa Rashwan, the head of Egypt's State Information Service.

As word of Thursday's extension came, gunmen opened fire on people waiting for buses along a main highway entering Jerusalem, killing at least three people and wound-

ing several others, according to police.

The two attackers, brothers from a Palestinian neighborhood in annexed east Jerusalem, were killed. Hamas' armed wing claimed the attack, casting it as retaliation for the killing of women and children in Gaza and other Israeli "crimes." The attack did not appear to threaten the truce in Gaza.

Netanyahu is under intense pressure from families of the hostages to bring them home. But his far-right governing partners are also pushing him to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed, and could bolt his coalition if he is seen as making too many concessions.

Israel says it will maintain the truce until Hamas stops releasing captives, at which point it will resume military operations aimed at eliminating the group, even as the Biden administration has urged it to operate with far greater precision if it resumes its offensive.

"As soon as Hamas stops releasing mothers, we're coming for the fathers. As soon as

it stops releasing daughters, we're coming for the sons," Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy said. "We are going to continue putting unrelenting military pressure on Hamas to release everyone."

The initial truce — which began Friday and has now been extended twice — called for the release of women and children. Israeli officials say Gaza militants still hold around 30 women and children, who would all be released within a few days if the swaps continue at the current rate.

It's not clear how many of the women might be soldiers. For soldiers and the civilian men still in captivity, Hamas is expected to demand the release of high-profile Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks, something Israel has strongly resisted in the past.

Israel says around 125 men are still held hostage, including several dozen soldiers.

An Israeli official involved in hostage negotiations said talks on a further extension for the release of civilian men and soldiers were still preliminary, and that a deal would not be considered until all the women

and children are out. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because talks were ongoing.

So far, most Palestinians released have been teenagers accused of throwing stones and firebombs during confrontations with Israeli forces. Several were women convicted by Israeli military courts of attempting to attack soldiers.

With Wednesday's releases, a total of 73 Israelis, including dual nationals, have been freed during the six-day truce, most of whom appear physically well but shaken. Another 24 hostages — 23 Thais and one Filipino — have also been released, including several men.

Before the cease-fire, Hamas released four hostages, and the Israeli army rescued one. Two others were found dead in Gaza. On Thursday, the military confirmed the death of Ofir Tzarfat, who was believed to be among the hostages, without providing any further details. The 27-year-old attended a music festival where at least 360 people were killed and several others were kidnapped on Oct. 7. Hamas and other Palestinian militants killed over

1,200 people — mostly civilians — in their wide-ranging attack across southern Israel that day and captured around 240. Authorities have only ever provided approximate figures.

Israel's bombardment and ground invasion in Gaza have killed more than 13,300 Palestinians, roughly two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The toll is likely much higher, as officials have only sporadically updated the count since Nov. 11. The ministry says thousands more people are feared dead under the rubble.

Israel says 77 of its soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive. It claims to have killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

During the pause in fighting, Palestinians in Gaza have been consumed by the search for aid and horror at the extent of destruction.

Residents described entire residential blocks as leveled in Gaza City and surrounding areas in the north.

Top Ramaswamy aide leaves to join Trump campaign: Report

Washington (PTI): A top aide to Republican presidential aspirant Vivek Ramaswamy has resigned and joined former president Donald Trump's campaign, according to a media report which called the departure the latest indicator of Indian-American's stagnating election campaign.

Brian Swensen formally resigned from his role as national political director for the Ramaswamy campaign over the weekend, CNN reported. Swensen has joined the Trump campaign, the news network quoted a source familiar with his departure, as saying. Swensen is expected to be working on the campaign's political operation in the early-voting states, specifically in Nevada, two Trump campaign sources told CNN. Swensen's departure is the latest indicator of 38-year-old Ramaswamy's stagnating campaign, which has struggled to gain momen-

tum even as the candidate closely aligns himself with Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican nomination, the report said. Ramaswamy has repeatedly praised Trump, the Republican front-runner, whom he trails by double digits, often calling him the "best president of the 21st century." Earlier this month, Brandon Goodyear, the Ramaswamy team's videographer, stepped away from the campaign, a source familiar with the departure told CNN. Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for the Ramaswamy campaign, thanked Swensen for his work with the campaign and wished him well in the future. "We absolutely love Brian and completely wish him the best," McLaughlin said. Swensen's responsibilities handling Ramaswamy's political operations in New Hampshire will be overseen by senior adviser Mike Biundo, McLaughlin said.

3 killed in Jerusalem shooting

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

At least three Israelis were killed and six others injured when Palestinian gunmen opened fire at a bus stop here, breaking an uneasy peace in the city since the outbreak of the current round of violence in the region.

"At around 7:40 am (local time) two Palestinian gunmen got out of a vehicle on Weizman Street at the main entrance to the capital and opened fire at people at a bus stop", the police here said.

Three persons were killed and six wounded, two of them seriously, in a terror shooting attack at the entrance to the city, police and medics said.

Two off-duty soldiers and an armed civilian in the area are said to have returned fire, killing the two terrorists.

Videos circulating on social media platforms show a handful of people waiting at the bus stop starting to run away in dif-



ferent directions as the two gunmen start firing indiscriminately.

Israel's internal security agency, Shin Bet, named the two attackers as brothers Murad Namr, 38, and Ibrahim Namr, 30, from East Jerusalem.

"The pair were Hamas members and previously jailed for terror activity", the agency said.

Murad was jailed between 2010 and 2020 for planning terror attacks under directions of terror elements in the Gaza Strip and Ibrahim was jailed in

2014 for undisclosed terror activity, it said.

Footage showed that the two were armed with an M-16 assault rifle and a handgun.

A police search of the vehicle found large amounts of ammunition. Police were searching the area to rule out any additional attackers.

Medics with Magen David Adom ambulance service that reached the site of the attack declared a 24-year-old woman dead at the scene, while an elderly man and a woman among the eight others injured were declared dead at the hospital.

Two of the wounded were listed in serious condition.

The bus stop was the scene of a deadly bomb attack almost exactly a year ago.

Thursday's attack came shortly after Israel and Hamas agreed to extend the ceasefire for a seventh day.

"The War Cabinet unanimously decided last night that

if a list, as was agreed upon in the outline, were not delivered by 07:00 this morning (Thursday, 30 November 2023), fighting would resume at once," an announcement from the Israeli PMO said in the morning as people anxiously waited to hear on the fate of the fragile ceasefire for exchange of Israeli hostages against Palestinian prisoners.

"A list of women and children — in accordance with the terms of the outline — was delivered to Israel a short time ago; therefore, the pause will continue", it added.

In a press release, the PMO said, "Pursuant to receiving the list of hostages slated to be released today (November 30), the families have been notified".

Jerusalem has been relatively quiet since the outbreak of the recent round of violence and no major skirmishes have been reported despite several calls by Hamas to Palestinians in Jerusalem to support them.



President Joe Biden takes a photo with people on the tarmac before he boards Air Force One at Denver International Airport in Denver, Wednesday, to travel to Pueblo Memorial Airport in Pueblo, Colo.

Kim's sister rejects US offer of dialogue with North Korea

Seoul (AP): The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Thursday dismissed US calls for a return to diplomacy and lambasted condemnations of the North's recent spy satellite launch, vowing more launches in violation of UN bans.

During a UN Security Council meeting earlier this week, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called the North's satellite launch a "reckless, unlawful" action that threatens its neighbours. But she reiterated the US offer for dialogue without any preconditions, saying North Korea "can choose the timing and topic".

Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, rejected the US overture and threatened more satellite and other weapons launches.

"The sovereignty of an independent state can never be an agenda item for negotiations, and therefore, (North Korea) will never sit face to face with the US for that purpose," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media.

"(North Korea) will continue to make efforts to develop everything belonging to its sovereign rights and continue to exercise the sovereign rights, enjoyed by all the member states of the UN, in a dignified manner without being restricted in the future, too," she said.

Multiple UN Security Council resolutions ban North Korea from performing any launches using ballistic technology, such as satellite liftoffs and missile tests.

But the North has argued it has sovereign rights to launch spy satellites and test-flight ballistic missiles to cope with what it calls US-led military threats. It views major US-South Korean military drills as invasion rehearsal and often reacts with its own weapons tests.

S Korean farmers protest against proposed anti-dog meat legislation

AP ■ SEOUL

Dozens of South Korean dog farmers scuffled with police during a rally near the presidential office on Thursday to protest a push by authorities to outlaw dog meat consumption. Earlier this month, government and ruling party officials agreed to introduce legislation by the year's end that would ban the centuries-old practice. Individual lawmakers have submitted similar anti-dog meat bills in the past, but this would be the first time for the government to back such legislation.

About 200 farmers, restaurant owners and others involved in the dog meat industry gathered in Thursday's rally. They chanted slogans, sang, raised their fists and took turns making speeches criticizing the government's move. One

protester said he would kill himself if the government and governing party move ahead with the legislation.

"We'll fight. We'll fight," the protesters shouted.

Some farmers brought dogs in cages on their trucks but were prevented from taking them to the protest site. A shoving match between some protesters and police occurred, with some farmers rushing to a street when a truck, apparently carrying dogs, approached.

Police detained three protesters, farmers said. Police said they couldn't immediately confirm the detentions.

Dog meat consumption is neither explicitly banned nor legalized in South Korea. But there have been calls to prohibit it over worries about South Korea's international image and a growing public awareness of animal rights. World

celebrities including American actress Kim Basinger and French actress Brigitte Bardot have called for a ban.

The bill pushed by the government and governing party would phase out the dog meat industry by 2027. It would provide financial support to farmers for dismantling their facilities and opening new businesses and offer vocational training and other benefits.

"To have a government-backed bill with the political will behind it to see it passed swiftly is a highly significant milestone, a point we have never reached before in this campaign to phase out this abusive industry," the anti-animal cruelty group Humane Society International's Korea office said in written responses to questions from The Associated Press.

'2023 hottest year on record'

AP ■ DUBAI

The UN weather agency said Thursday that 2023 is all but certain to be the hottest year on record, and a warning of worrying trends that suggest increasing floods, forest fires, glacier melt, and heat waves in the future.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) also warned that the average temperature for the year is up some 1.4 degrees Celsius (2.5 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial times — a mere one-tenth of a degree under a target limit for the end of the century as laid out by the Paris climate accord in 2015.

The WMO secretary-general said the onset earlier this year of El Nino, the weather phenomenon marked by heating in the Pacific Ocean, could tip the average temperature next year over the 1.5-

degree (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) target cap set in Paris.

"It's practically sure that during the coming four years we will hit this 1.5, at least on temporary basis," Petteri Taalas said in an interview. "And in the next decade we are more or less going to be there on a permanent basis."

WMO issued the findings for Thursday's start of the U.N.'s annual climate conference, this year being held in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates city of Dubai.

The UN agency said the benchmark of key Paris accord goal will be whether the 1.5-degree increase is sustained over a 30-year span — not just a single year — but others say the world needs more clarity on that.

"Clarity on breaching the Paris agreement guard rails will be crucial," said Richard Betts of Britain's Met

Office, the lead author of a new paper on the issue with University of Exeter published in the journal Nature.

"Without an agreement on what actually will count as exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius, we risk distraction and confusion at precisely the time when action to avoid the worst effects of climate change becomes even more urgent," he added.

WMO's Taalas said that whatever the case, the world appears on course to blow well past that figure anyway.

"We are heading towards 2.5 to 3 degrees warming and that would mean that we would see massively more negative impacts of climate change," Taalas said, pointing to glacier loss and sea level rise over "the coming thousands of years." The nine years 2015 to 2023 were the warmest on record, WMO said. Its findings for this year

run through October, but it says the last two months are not likely to be enough to keep 2023 from being a record-hot year.

Still, there are "some signs of hope" — including a turn toward renewable energies and more electric cars, which help reduce the amount of carbon that is spewed into the atmosphere, trapping heat inside," Taalas said.

His message for attendee at the UN climate conference, known as COP28? "We have to reduce our consumption of coal, oil and natural gas dramatically to be able to limit the warming to the Paris limits," he said. "Luckily, things are happening. But still, we in the Western countries, in the rich countries, we are still consuming oil, a little bit less coal than in the past, and still natural gas." "Reduction of fossil fuel consumption — that's the key to success.

Pak EC urged to defer general elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Two separate petitions seeking the postponement of general elections in Pakistan on February 8 landed before the election commission, citing growing terror threats and inclement weather. The petitions, filed by individuals hailing from the restive Balochistan province, cited security issues and snowfall in several districts as reasons to seek the postponement of elections, the Dawn newspaper reported.

One of the petitions filed by Meena Majeed, a general councillor from Mand teshil of Kech district through Advocate Fatima Nazar, stated Balochistan was grappling with heightened security concerns. "Specifically, the Mek-ran division has witnessed a surge in terrorist activities, ranging from target killings of innocent daily wage earners to alarming incidents such as IED blasts and women suicide bombing," it stated. The impact was most pronounced in districts such as Kech and Gwadar, where 61 acts of terrorism during the last three months alone claimed 32 lives, it read.

According to the plea, the challenging geographical terrain of Balochistan, characterised by scattered populations residing in far-flung villages

amidst mountains adds to the complexity. "This topography coupled with inadequate road infrastructure and poor connectivity presents a formidable obstacle to implementing effective security measures and ensuring the feasibility of free and fair elections", it added.

The petitioner urged the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to accept the instant petition, postpone polling in Kech and announce a fresh suitable and appropriate schedule for election within district Kech, enabling the people to exercise their constitutional right to cast a vote, in the interest of justice.

The other petition, filed by Toor Gul Khan Jogezeai from district Kila Saifullah Khan through Advocate Azizullah Kakakhel, pointed out that many districts and divisions in the country face heavy snowfall in winter which affects the daily routine of residents.

As a result, elections could not be held in such areas, since the inhabitants of these areas were either displaced or limited, until the month of May or the restoration of normal life.

It stated if elections were held in such areas, it was feared that the provincial or national assembly candidates would either lose their vote bank or voters would lose their votes in

favour of their candidates as the case may be.

Hence, it is need of time that the election be postponed to any other suitable time through which the citizens of such an area could participate in a free and fair election and elect representatives according to their choice of constituency, the petition read.

Interestingly, the ECP has already rejected the reports of delay in general elections, and non-preparation of electoral rolls and decided to take legal action against those spreading "misleading" news.

ECP spokesperson Haroon Shinwari said the news of delay in elections in media circles was "absolutely baseless and misleading", and that the news of non-preparation of electoral rolls was false. "The Election Commission has decided to approach Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) against those spreading such false news so that legal action can be taken against those spreading such misleading news," he maintained.

According to an ECP spokesman, the printing of updated electoral rolls for the upcoming general polls is already underway at Nadra offices, while the transportation of the lists to different districts has been started.

Pak Cabinet nod to Imran jail trial in cipher case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday approved the jail trial of former prime minister Imran Khan in the cipher case after the special court's decision to conduct in-prison proceedings due to security reasons.

Following the court order, the report for the jail trial was moved by the Ministry of Law and Justice and it was approved by the Cabinet, Geo News quoted officials as saying.

Khan, 71, has been incarcerated in the Adiala jail Rawalpindi since September 26, where his in-prison trial had been going until last week when the Islamabad High Court ruled against the jail trial on procedural grounds while declaring the proceedings held so far as vitiated.

After the Islamabad High Court ruling, Special Court judge Abul Hasnat Zulqernain heard the cipher case on Tuesday at the Federal Judicial Complex in Islamabad. Khan was not presented by authorities due to security reasons

despite the fact that the judge last week had asked to present Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who is also accused in the cipher case.

"It has been informed that the PTI chairman faces security risks of a serious scale," according to a report presented in the court by authorities.

After hearing the case, the special court announced its order, approving the jail trial in an open court format at the next hearing. Later the hearing was adjourned till December 1 (Friday). The cipher case was launched on August 15 and Khan and Qureshi were indicted on October 23.

Khan was arrested after a case was filed against him for allegedly violating the Official Secrets Act by disclosing a secret diplomatic cable – called the cipher – sent by the country's embassy in Washington in March last year. Earlier, the Cabinet on Tuesday also approved conducting the jail trial of Khan in the Al-Qadir Trust corruption cases.

Former PM writes to Pak CJ on harassment of party workers

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's jailed ex-premier Imran Khan on Thursday urged Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to take cognizance of the alleged political victimisation of his party workers, including their abductions and disappearances and sought the formation of a commission to probe all issues faced his party ahead of elections.

In a seven-page letter to Chief Justice Isa, Khan, chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party pleaded with him to assert Article 184 (3) of the Pakistani Constitution that safeguards the 'right to liberty, to associate, assemble, and speak' on account of their political affiliation. The 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician also asked for the formation of a commission to probe the disappearances of journalists and political workers as the country goes to polls on February 8.

These disappearances or abductions, quite apart from

the arbitrary arrests, have spread fear through society and are a grotesque affront to the claim that Pakistan is a country ruled by a constitution and a set of laws. It is requested to take cognizance of such issues against PTI, the letter reads.

He said that the government's "power to prosecute and arrest is being used in a blatant attempt to engineer and skew the political landscape of the country". Khan also stated in his letter that all political parties, along with the PTI, should be allowed "coverage without any restriction or discrimination".

The country's electronic media watchdog, the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority, has banned Khan's speeches and live broadcasts.

The incarcerated former Prime Minister also highlighted that a large number of women members of his party arrested after the May 9 violence have been imprisoned even after being granted bail

in the case against them. He noted that the treatment meted out to women was a "tragic indictment of law enforcement" as he highlighted the administration in Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad for mistreating the women held in jails.

Talking about the crackdown on the party, he said that the PTI workers were "being targeted through the registration of multiple and successive criminal cases to ensure continued imprisonment".

Khan urged Chief Justice Isa to ensure a fair trial of every arrested worker and stop further arrests, which he said was important to hold the upcoming election in a fair and free manner. "Without the intervention of the apex court in halting the widespread arrests and abductions that are presently underway, there is no possibility of a fair general election being conducted on February 8, 2024," Khan said.

Nawaz Sharif's statement in Toshakhana case recorded

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan accountability court was informed on Thursday that former prime minister and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif has recorded his statement in the Toshakhana corruption case.

The case filed in 2019 against Sharif, former president Asif Ali Zardari and former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani centers on allegations that they received luxury vehicles from the Toshakhana (gifts repository) at discounted prices.

The prosecutor informed Judge Muhammad Bashir, who was hearing the case, that Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Sharif has recorded his statement in the case.

The defence counsel informed the court that there was no record of the vehicle mentioned to have been given to Sharif or any documentation showing Sharif's request seeking any vehicle. The prosecutor responded that a thorough examination of the statement was required before any subsequent steps in the proceeding.

The court adjourned the hearing of the Toshakhana case, scheduling the next session for December 20.

According to the case filed by NAB, then-prime minister Gilani, in order to extend illegal benefits to Sharif and

Zardari, allegedly allowed the retention of vehicles gifted to them by different foreign states and dignitaries by relaxing the Toshakhana rules.

The accused, "through dishonest and illegal means for their personal benefit and interest", retained the vehicles in question "against a nominal payment of 15 percent of the total value", the reference stated.

In June 2020, the court issued a non-bailable arrest warrant of Sharif who was living in London in self-exile. But the same were withdrawn after he volunteered to surrender before the court last month after ending about four years of exile.

Missiles tear through buildings in eastern Ukraine; 1 dead

AP ■ KYIV

Russian missiles tore through apartment buildings in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region, local officials said Thursday, killing at least one person and burying families under rubble as the Kremlin's forces continued to pound the fiercely contested area with long-range weapons.

Russian military units simultaneously launched six S-300 missiles during the night, according to Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko. The missiles struck three Donetsk cities — Pokrovsk, Novohrodivka and Myrnohrad, he said. The cities lie 25-40 kilometers (15-25 miles) from the front line.

Emergency workers pulled the body of a 62-year-old man from the wreckage of a destroyed multi-story building in Novohrodivka. Four more people may be under the rubble, including a child, authorities said.

In Pokrovsk, the strikes destroyed a multi-story building, nine houses, a police office and cars. Emergency crews helped rescue a man with a 6-month-old baby, covered in blood, in his hands, officials said. The head of the city administration, Serhii Dobriak, said it was fourth time Pokrovsk came under attack in the past month.

"They are striking the city center, the houses," he said. "They are just destroying the civilian population."

He urged people to evacuate because "the intensity of strikes is increasing."

All three of the targeted cities are close to Avdiivka, a city where a fierce battle has taken place in recent months. Avdiivka is a gateway to parts of the Donetsk region still under Ukrainian control.

Pak province aims to deport 10,000 Afghans a day

AP ■ QUETTA

A Pakistani province is setting targets for police to arrest and deport hundreds of thousands of Afghans who are in the country illegally, officials said Thursday. The measure is part of a nationwide crackdown following a sharp decline in the expulsion of Afghans living in Pakistan without legal permission. Near the Chaman border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan, local residents were protesting against new travel visa requirements aimed at cutting down on illegal immigration that have disrupted traffic in the area.

Some of those targeted for deportation had apparently gone to remote areas in Pakistan to avoid arrest, authorities said.

"Instructions have gone to police to arrest Afghans living in Pakistan illegally," said Jan Achakzai, spokesperson for the government in southwestern Pakistan's Baluchistan province. He said authorities have been asked to deport 10,000 Afghans a day. Achakzai made his comment days after authorities at the two key northwestern Torkham and southwestern Chaman border crossings acknowledged that there has been a sudden decrease in the number of Afghans who were sent back to Afghanistan after being arrested on the charges of living in Pakistan illegally.

An estimated 1.7 million Afghans were living in Pakistan in October when authorities announced the crackdown, saying that anyone without proper documents had to go back to their countries by October 31 or be arrested.

Since then, more than 4,00,000 Afghans returned to their home country. Pakistani officials say they are deporting

only those foreigners, including Afghans, who are in the country illegally, and an estimated 1.4 million Afghans who are registered as refugees should not worry as they are not the target of the anti-migrant drive. Police in Pakistan have been going door to door to check migrants' documentation.

Pakistan has been hosting Afghans since the 1980s, when millions of Afghans fled south and east to the neighbouring Islamic nation during the Soviet occupation of their country. The numbers spiked after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

As part of its crackdown, Pakistan stopped recognizing special permits under which hundreds of thousands of residents in the Baluchistan province border town of Chaman could cross between the two countries. The new visa requirement angered residents who have been rallying near the border, disrupting normal traffic toward the border crossing.

The protesters want Pakistan to allow them to continue using the special permits for business purposes and to meet with relatives who live in the Afghan border city of Spin Boldak. In Afghanistan, the Taliban-led administration says it is providing shelter and food to returnees. According to Tolo News, a private Afghan outlet, Afghan refugees have complained of mistreatment by Pakistani soldiers after returning home.

The alleged mistreatment of migrants by Pakistani authorities drew widespread condemnation from human organizations. On Tuesday, the New York-based Human Rights Watch said Pakistani authorities have committed widespread abuses against Afghans living in the country to compel their return home.

'US arms sales to Taiwan turning island into powder keg'

Beijing (AP): China's defence ministry said Thursday that the US should stop interfering in both Taiwan and the South China Sea, saying US arms sales to Taiwan are making the situation more dangerous.

Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party is "turning Taiwan into a weapons depot and a powder keg," said Senior Col. Wu Qian, the defense ministry's top spokesperson.

He spoke less than two months ahead of a presidential election in which Taiwan voters will choose between the ruling party, which favors a stronger defense and close ties to the US, and opposition parties that advocate improving ties with China as the best way to reduce tensions. "Taiwan's security depends on the peaceful development of cross-strait relations instead of a few pieces of U.S.-made weapons," Wu said at a monthly news conference. The 160-kilometer (100-mile)-wide Taiwan Strait runs between Taiwan and China's east coast.

China claims the self-governing island as its territory and says it must come under its control. The US government does not support formal independence for Taiwan but is bound by its own laws to provide the island with the means to defend itself. "We request that the US side acts in accordance with its words and takes concrete steps to honor its commitment not to support Taiwan independence, stops arming Taiwan and stops undermining China's core interest," Wu said. Some American lawmakers are calling for stepped-up support in response to threatening military drills by China.

China factory activity contracts in November

Hong Kong (AP): An official survey of Chinese manufacturers shows that factory activity contracted for a second straight month in November, an indicator of weak demand despite various stimulus measures aimed at supporting the economy. The official manufacturing purchas-

ing managers' index fell to 49.4 in November, down slightly from October's 49.5, according to data released Thursday by the National Bureau of Statistics.

A figure below 50 indicates a contraction in manufacturing activity while a number above 50 reflects an expansion, on a scale

up to 100. The index has fallen in seven of the past eight months, with an increase only in September. Despite prolonged weakness after the pandemic, the economy is expected to grow at about a 5% annual pace this year.

The new orders sub-index contracted for a second consec-

utive month, while two other sub-indices for raw material inventory and employment also were lower. China's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has faltered after an initial burst of growth earlier in the year faded more quickly than expected.

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that I, Akshay Kumar Garg S/o Sh. Krishan Chand R/o SD-437,Tower Apartment, Pitampura, Delhi-110034, am the owner of DDA SFS Flat No.417 on Ground Floor,Pocket/Block-S(Daxini)situated at Pitampura,Delhi-110034.Vide file no F37 (74) 81/SFS/Pl.I lost/misplaced Original Possession Letter/NOC for Water & Electricity and Mutati on Letter pertaining to the said flat. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, vide LR No:1183451/2023 dated 30/11/2023 Any person claiming any right,interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9911952727 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to Dy. Director (SFS)H or Asstt. Director(SFS)H,D-Block,Third Floor,Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my client RANVEER SINGH is in process to avails the LAP against his Plot No. 02, area measuring 393.12 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Block/SectorSU-145, in the New Okhla Industrial Development Area, District Gautam Budh, Nagar, U.P. (availing loan from Pritam Capital & Housing Finance Ltd.) having acquired by way of Mutation Letter dated 08.01.2018, issued by NDDIA after the death of his father Mr. Liley Ram (who was the owner by way of Lease Deed dated 16.05.2017, doc. No. 2079). All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR NOTICE
Applications forms for allotment of Photostat Shop at Regional Campus, Jalandhar for session 2023-24 upto **30-06-2024** are invited till **10-12-2023**. The details, terms & conditions and forms can be downloaded from the university website link:- **https://online.gndu.ac.in/tenders-notice.aspx**
Dean Students' Welfare
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
NA/12/20501/2023/30195
Dated CHD :- 11/30/2023

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all that I, KISHORE KUMAR & BISHHAM KUMAR both S/O LATE ASHOK KUMAR HARIANI both R/O-FLAT NO.406,EL APPTT., PLOT NO.13, PKT-6, PH-1, NEAR NASIR PUR, SEC-1A, PALAM VILLAGE, DWARKA,DELHI-45I am the mutatee/legal owner of PLOT NO.207,PKT-2,BLK-A,AREA-325QM, SEC-30,ROHINI, DELHI,FILE NO.F-47 (617)2005/LAB/RO which is allotted by the DDA, have lost the Original Allotment Cum-Demand Letter/Possession Letter & Site Possession Slip of the above Plot. FIR/NCR to this effect has lodged in P.S.Crime Branch,Delhi vide LR No.1192908/2023, Dated-30-11-2023. 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. 9810921408 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.Any person claiming any right, interest or having any objections with respect to this property can also personally inform/contact me.

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR
Short Term e-Tender Notice for Providing Un-Skilled, Semi-Skilled, Skilled and Highly-Skilled Manpower through Outsourcing
E-tender No.GNDU/REG/2023/03 **Date: 30-11-2023**
Online bids are invited for providing Un-Skilled, Semi-Skilled, Skilled and Highly-Skilled workers at Guru Nanak Dev University Main Campus, its Regional Campuses and Associated/Constituent Colleges on monthly wages on contract basis for a period of two years. Tender Documents can be purchased through online mode only from website www.eproc.punjab.gov.in. Last date for closing the online tender is 11.12.2023 upto 5:00 P.M. For more details visit the above mentioned portal.
Amritsar
30-11-2023
NA/12/20502/2023/30196 Dated CHD :- 11/30/2023

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SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX No. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop
e /Sealed tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy a) Hiring of Car(Swift Dzire or its equivalent) b) Allotment of Milk Bars at Civil Hospital.	01 year, extendable for another one year/ 01No. 02 years, extendable for another one year / 01No.
2.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy a) Rice Husk b) Milkbar at- • Gurdwara Shri Mastuana Sahib, Sangrur - Barnala Main Road (reserved). • Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering & Technology (SLIET), longowal (Unreserved).	Jan 2024- 700 MT Feb 2024- 700 MT Mar 2024- 600 MT For 03 year on Rent / 01No. For 03 year on Rent / 01No.
3.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy a) Supply of Liquid Nitrogen Gas. b) Sealed Tenders for Outsourcing of:- • Activity for Housekeeping (Sanitation & Cleaning) and Horticulture work. • Cycle, Scooter, Motor Cycle Stand Activities.	Annual
4.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy a) Purchase of Conduction lid film. b) Hiring of :- • Insulated single portion road milk tankers fitted with single phase milk pump for the loading of milk from BMC to tanker and Transportation of milk from BMC/MCC to Amritsar Dairy. • Powder plant for conversion of skimmed milk to SMP. c) Empanelment of road milk tankers for transportation of milk from milk union Amritsar to other unions/powder plants.	Annual Annual /05 No's Half yearly 05 No's (15 MT, 20 MT)
5.	For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy Hiring of One vehicle for supply of LN2 Gas, Semen and other allied works related to procurement etc.	01 No.

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

Incharge (Purchase)

Key infra industries growth rises by 12.1% in October

5 sectors log double digit expansion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The output of eight key infrastructure sectors jumped by 12.1 per cent in October 2023 against 0.7 per cent expansion in the year-ago period on account of a sharp uptick in production of coal, steel, cement and electricity, according to the official data released on Thursday.

These numbers assume significance as the eight core sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity — contribute 40.27 per cent to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

Growth was primarily driven by a low base effect and double-digit growth in five sectors — coal, steel, cement and electricity.

Infrastructure sectors grew by 9.2 per cent in September.

The output growth of eight sectors was at 8.6 per cent in



April-October 2023-24 against 8.4 per cent in the year-ago period.

Coal output rose by 18.4 per cent while steel production jumped 11 per cent during the month under review as against 3.8 per cent and 5.8 per cent in October 2022 respectively.

Cement production grew by 17.1 per cent against a 4.2 per cent contraction in the year-ago period.

Electricity generation rose by 20.3 per cent in October 2023 against 1.2 per cent in the

same month last year.

Output of crude oil and natural gas increased by 1.3 per cent and 9.9 per cent in October this year respectively as against a negative growth of 2.2 per cent and 4.2 per cent in October 2022 respectively.

Refinery products production stood at 4.2 per cent in October this year as against (-) 3.1 per cent in October 2022. Fertiliser production growth stood at 5.3 per cent in October this year as against 5.4 per cent in October 2022.

Stock markets edge up in volatile trade on derivatives expiry, rise for 3rd day

Market valuation of BSE-listed firms remain above \$4 trillion mark

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty eked out gains on Thursday to extend the winning run for a third straight day in a highly volatile trade amid the scheduled monthly derivatives expiry and muted trend in the US markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed 86.53 points or 0.13 per cent higher at 66,988.44, registering its third day of gains.

Stock markets witnessed heavy volatility due to the monthly expiry of derivatives contracts and oscillated between gains and losses during the day. Sensex hit a high of 67,069.89 and a low of 66,610.35 in day trade.

Despite heavy volatility, the combined market valuation of all listed companies on the leading stock exchange BSE continued to remain above the USD 4-trillion mark for the second day in a row. The market valuation of all listed



companies on the BSE reached the USD 4-trillion milestone for the first time ever on Wednesday.

The broader Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange edged up 36.55 points or 0.18 per cent to close at 20,133.15.

Analysts said that investors were awaiting GDP and other macro numbers scheduled for release after market hours.

"Asian stocks mostly rose on Thursday to clock their strongest performance in 10 months, as investor sentiment warmed on a relatively benign global interest rates outlook and signs of economic recovery. European

stocks rose mildly," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.96 per cent and midcap index jumped 0.83 per cent.

Among the indices, healthcare rallied 1.66 per cent, consumer durables rallied 1.61 per cent, realty jumped 1.52 per cent, industrials (1.48 per cent), capital goods (1.39 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.77 per cent). Utilities and bank were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains.

Indian economy grows 7.6% in Sept quarter: Govt data



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economy grew 7.6 per cent in the September quarter as against 6.2 per cent in the year-ago period, according to official data released on Thursday.

India remains the fastest-growing major economy, as China's GDP growth in the July-September quarter this year was 4.9 per cent.

As per the National Statistical Office (NSO) data, the GVA (Gross Value Added) of the agriculture sector recorded a 1.2 per cent growth, down

from 2.5 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2022-23. The GVA growth of the manufacturing sector accelerated to 13.9 per cent in the second quarter of the current fiscal against a decline of 3.8 per cent a year ago.

The growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) during the April-September period in 2023-24 stood at 7.7 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent in the first half of the last financial year. The GDP growth in the first quarter of the current fiscal remained unchanged at 7.8 per cent.

India should not take new commitments at COP28 climate talks in Dubai: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India should not take new commitments at the ongoing United Nations COP28 climate talks in Dubai and continue its green transition without additional assurances, think tank GTRI suggested on Thursday.

The climate conference is being held at the Dubai Expo City from November 30 to December 12.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that India has already made significant commitments at COP27 (Conference of Parties) and the Paris Agreement, aligning with its Long-term Low Emissions and Development Strategy.

India's commitment to generating half of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 is noteworthy.



"At COP28 India need not take new commitments at COP28. Instead, it may continue its green transition without additional commitments," GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

However, he added that the country's high methane emissions, especially from the agriculture sector, pose a chal-

lenge.

"Any improvement will require changing crop pattern which may take decades of efforts. Balancing emission reduction with the livelihood impact on the agriculture sector is crucial," Srivastava said.

The think-tank also suggested that as 70 per cent of

electricity is generated from coal power here and many large industries rely on captive and not grid power, India needs to improve on these.

"However, India should not agree to an immediate shutdown of coal-fired power plants to ensure energy security. India must highlight that developed countries are responsible for 89 per cent of historical emissions. They subsidized the fossil fuel industry with USD 1.8 trillion in 2020," it said.

It added that India should advocate for broadening the scope of climate discussions to address these interconnected challenges, fostering a more effective approach to climate action.

Further it said that despite fifty years of international efforts, annual GHG (greenhouse gas emissions) emissions have increased by 270 per cent, reaching 53.8 billion

metric tons of CO2 equivalent in 2022.. "The rising GHG emissions underscore the insufficiency of current efforts to meet the agreement's goals. Highlighting this will be the focus of COP28," it said adding India's role at COP28 is crucial, given its status as a developing nation and the third largest emitters of carbon dioxide gases after China and the US.

But India must emphasise the fact that its per capita CO2 emissions at 1.9 tons are "very" low, far lower than the USA (14.5) and China (8.9) those of all developed countries and China, it said.

"Large population converts even low per capita emissions into big total, India cannot be punished for being a large population. COP28 obligations must be tied up with per capita emissions and not a country's total emissions," Srivastava said.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The country's largest multiplex operator PVR Inox will open 150 screens in the next fiscal with an investment of about Rs 500 crore, a top company official has said.

The company, which opened a six-screen luxury cinema at Maison Inox here on Thursday, already runs 118 screens across 23 properties in the megapolis.

Overall, including its property in Colombo, it operates 1,711 screens at 359 properties across 114 cities.

We are planning to add 150 more screens at an investment of around Rs 500 crore next fiscal, Sanjeev Kumar Bijli, an Executive Director at PVR Inox, told PTI here.

On the Maison Inox, he said normally a screen required an investment of Rs 5 crore but given that it's a luxury collection and comes with the first



attached bar (Gastby Bar), the per screen cost is about Rs 7 crore.

On the company's overseas expansion plans, he said they will have more screens in Sri Lanka only and not anywhere else.

Despite the civil war and the deep financial difficulties, "Sri

Lanka has been an extremely good market for us so far", Bijli said.

"Given the response to our first screen in the capital of the island nation, we are planning to have more properties there. But we have no other overseas market in mind for expansion," Bijli said.

Petrol, diesel price revision only when oil price stabilises below USD 80

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned fuel marketing companies are likely to revert to daily revision in prices of petrol and diesel only when international oil prices stabilise below USD 80 per barrel on a sustained basis, industry officials said.

Three state-owned fuel retailers — Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) — which control roughly 90 per cent of the market, have kept petrol and diesel prices on freeze for a record 20th month in a row.

This is despite the raw material (crude oil) cost surging last year, leading to heavy losses in the first half of 2022-23 fiscal year before easing rates propelled them to profitability.

"There is considerable volatility in the international oil market and prices fluctuate wildly," an official said. "Oil companies can cut prices by Re 1 per litre and everyone will applaud. But when international oil prices go up, will they be allowed to raise rates remains in doubt."

India is the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation. It imports more than 85 per cent of its oil needs and hence domestic pricing is linked to international rates.

The basket of crude oil that India buys has averaged USD 83.42 per barrel in November, down from USD 90.08 of October and USD 93.54 of September.

While at current prices, oil companies are making some money on petrol, diesel — the most consumed fuel accounting for almost 40 per cent of all petroleum products consumed in the country -- but it has been in a "touch-and-go" scenario in recent weeks,



another official said. "On some days there is profit on diesel but on other days there is loss. There is no consistent trend."

Three retailers had been recouping losses they incurred for holding rates when crude oil prices shot through the roof last year. In May, international oil prices and retail pump rates had come at par, but the subsequent surge widened the gulf between cost and price realised.

"For oil companies to revert to daily market based price revision, oil prices will have to come below USD 80 on a sustained basis," an official said.

Petrol and diesel prices have been on a freeze since April 6 last year. Petrol costs Rs 96.72 a litre in the national capital and diesel comes for Rs 89.62 per litre. The three firms made bumper profits in April-September -- first half of the current fiscal -- but considering the low earnings of last year, they are yet to recoup all losses, officials said.

Consider this, IOCL posted a net profit of Rs 26,717.76 crore this year as compared with a full year profit of Rs 8,241.82 crore in 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023).

In 2021-22 (considered a normal year), the company had posted a profit of Rs 21,762 crore for the full year.

Considering that to be a normalised earnings, for two years (2022-23 and 2023-24), it should make about Rs 42,000 crore.

In one-and-half years (April 2022 to March 2023 full fiscal and April 2023 to September 2023), the company earned about Rs 35,000 crore.

Similar is the situation with BPCL and HPCL.

"Not all of the losses have been recouped," an official explained. "When prices were high in the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there were huge losses. These losses were trimmed in the second half of 2022-23. In the current year, the losses are being recouped by making profits when oil prices are low."

International oil prices have firmed up since August, leading to margins of three retailers turning negative again.

The OMCs' marketing margins -- the difference between their net realised prices and international prices -- have already weakened significantly from the high levels seen in the quarter ended June 30, 2023 (Q1 fiscal 2024). Marketing margins on diesel turned negative since August while margins on petrol have narrowed considerably over the same period as international prices increased.

India, Africa to be major contributors to 112 million barrel/day of peak global crude oil demand in 2030: S&P

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The global demand for crude oil is expected to see its peak in 2030 at 112 million barrels a day mark with India and Africa to be major contributors, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

The current global demand of crude oil is at 103 million barrels per day, Pulkit Agarwal, head of India Content at S&P Global Commodity Insights, said on Thursday.

The global demand for crude oil will peak to stay in the range of 112 million barrels a day in 2030 from the present level of 103 million barrels a day, he told PTI at S&P Global Commodity Insights: Media Roundtable Outlook 2024.

India and Africa will be the major contributors to the 8.73 per cent increase in demand by 2030 as industrial activities will pick up in the region,



Agarwal said.

There will be increased use of clean cooking, automobiles and setting up of refineries by various economies, he said.

However, the demand for crude oil in India will see its peak in 2040 to reach 7.2 million barrels a day from 5.2 million barrels a day at present, he said.

On the price outlook he said, "In our base case, oil prices will likely hover above USD 80/bar-

rel and can inch closer to USD 90/barrel by Q3 2024."

Gauri Jauhar, Executive Director, Energy Transitions & CleanTech Consulting, S&P Global Commodity Insights, said as India grows, it will also transition at a sustainable pace based on an underlying economic transition of mobility, urbanization and a desire for reliability.

An energy transition will inevitably be a technology tran-

Hiring of apprentices jump in IT, ITES segment: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The headcount of apprentices in the IT and ITES segment witnessed a steep rise this year and more such people are expected to be hired by companies in the coming months as well, according to a report released on Thursday.

Business solutions provider Quesst Corp's Apprentice Skill Trends Report' said there has been an over 250 per cent annual increase in apprentice headcount in the IT/ITES space in 2023 compared to last year as companies look at lowering the cost of their workforce. About 79 per cent of employers in IT/ITES industries expect a rise in apprentice intake in the com-

ing months as well, it said.

As per the report, the spike in hiring in the IT/ITES industry has been steadily growing month-on-month as the industry prioritises apprenticeship engagement for the potential to lower the cost of its workforce.

"The IT space in India has seen a drop in headcount and fresher intake due to global tensions. However, apprentice hiring has picked up substantially in the past year across the IT segment, with newer roles emerging that did not perhaps exist a year ago.

"This is a trend observed across both metro and tier II cities, which is encouraging to see," Quesst Corp Vice President Girija S said. She

also said that apprentice hiring in Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) segment is also flourishing with the expansion of Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). "However, the scope for apprentice skilling and job creation in IT/BFSI sectors is unprecedented, and we expect the creation of approximately 5 million jobs by 2025," she added. The report is based on Quesst Corp's operations data, which maps demand and supply in the talent ecosystem for apprentice hiring.

It noted that BFSI and IT/ITES were the top industries employing apprentices in the past year, considering the high return on investment amid ongoing uncertainties and global turmoil.

INBRIEF

ECOZEN GIVES FARMERS COMPLETE CONTROL OVER PUMPS

Haryana: A key player in cleantech, Ecozenspecialises in developing climate-smart technology solutions that help farmers improve in farm yield, reduce waste and increase farm earnings. As a leading brand in the solar pump sets in India, Ecozen has positively impacted over 1,60,000 Indian farmers through their advanced Ecotron smart solar pump controllers. Farmers in Haryana now get India's first 4G-enabled smart solar-powered pump controller, known as the Ecotron, available through Ecozen Solutions under PM KUSUM Yojana with a 75% subsidy. To ensure that the pumps are installed quickly under the PM Kusum Yojana, Ecozen has partnered with Mahindra Solarize. This partnership helps the farmers of Haryana get Ecozen's advanced technology backed by the wide and efficient installation network of the Mahindra team.

LIC LAUNCHES JEEVAN UTSAV PLAN

New Delhi: In tune with our market talk, Corporation of India launched LIC's Jeevan Utsav is Individual, Savings, Whole Life Insurance plan. It is a Limited Premium plan with Guaranteed Additions throughout Premium Paying Term Identification Number (UIN) for LIC'

NATIONAL BOXING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Panghal, Thapa sail into semifinals

PTI ■ SHILLONG

World Championships runner-up Amit Panghal (51kg) and 2021 Asian Champion Sanjeet (92kg) continued their impressive run as 12 SSCB boxers secured semifinal spots at the Men's National Boxing Championships here on Thursday.

Six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa, representing Assam, also progressed to the last-four stage.

Panghal dominated the proceedings throughout and ultimately won the bout comfortably in a unanimous decision against Mohammad Aarif of Jammu and Kashmir.



He will next face Ankit of RSPB in the semifinals.

Up against 2018 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Naman Tanwar of RSPB, Sanjeet was at the top of his game as he controlled the bout and played from a distance, landing hard punches throughout to register a win with a unanimous decision in the 92kg quarter-final.

Sanjeet will take on All India Police's (AIP) Vicky in the semifinals.

The other 10 SSCB boxers who qualified for the semifinals include Barun Singh (48kg), Pawan (54kg), Sachin (57kg), Akash (60kg), Vanshaj (63.5kg), Rajat (67kg), Akash (71kg), Deepak (75kg),

Lakshya (80kg), Jugnoo (86kg).

In other significant bouts, Thapa showcased his skill set and power packed punches to secure a commanding 5-0 victory over Shashank Pradhan of Delhi to set up a clash against Harivansh Tawari of Maharashtra.

Commonwealth Games silver medallist Sagar (92+kg), who represents RSPB, was up against Navjot Singh of Chandigarh. He started the bout with an aggressive approach and landed a flurry of hard hitting punches in the first round itself that led to the referee stopping the contest.

He will fight it out against Vishal Kumar of Delhi.



SYED MODI INTERNATIONAL

Priyanshu lone Indian in men singles quarters

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Priyanshu Rajawat was the lone Indian shuttler to qualify for the quarterfinals in men's singles, while Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand made the cut in women's doubles at the Syed Modi International badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Priyanshu, who won the Orleans Masters this year, emerged victorious after compatriot Sathish Kumar Karunakaran retired while lagging 18-21 6-11 in the second round match.

The world no. 31 Indian will now clash against Indonesian qualifier Alwi Farhan.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa and Gayatri, seeded fourth, defeated compatriots Dhanyaa Nandakumar and Ridhi Kaur Toor 21-9 21-5 and are set to face another Indian pair next.

As many as 10 Indians had participated in the men's singles draw which has world no. 12 Japanese Kenta Nishimoto and world no. 14 Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei as the top two world-ranked players.

While HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen had withdrawn at the last-minute, the rest of the shuttlers, apart from Priyanshu, cut a sorry figure after failing to cross

the second round of the Super 300 tournament.

World no. 40 Kiran George, who won the Denmark Masters this year, fought hard before losing 16-21 21-18 20-22 to world no. 36 Chia Hao Lee of Taiwan.

Things were more gloomy in women's singles as none of the Indian players could cross the second round, though as many as 11 of them participated in the tournament. The draw has Japan's world no. 17 Aya Ohori as the top ranked player.

While the left-handed Ashmita Chaliha, who had won Maldives International this season, was outclassed by third seed Ohori 21-7 21-13, 16-year-old Unnati Hooda, the 2022 Odisha Open and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters winner, was humbled 9-21 13-21 by former world champion Nozomi Okuhara of Japan and qualifier Janani Ananthakumar lost 15-21 12-21 to Malaysia's Wong Ling Ching.

Anupama Upadhyaya, the former junior world no. 1 and current senior national champion, lost 16-21 17-21 to Taiwan's Sung Shuo Yun, seeded eighth, while Ruthvika Shivani Gadde, who was part of the 2018 gold-medal winning Commonwealth Games mixed team, was no match for Thailand's Lalrinat Chaiwan, losing 8-21 12-21.

India need more people to take up sport for bigger Olympic success: Bindra

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Abhinav Bindra reckons that investing in just elite athletes will not make India a sporting superpower and if the country aspires to take its medals tally to double digits in the Olympics, more people need to enter the playing arenas and sport should not be looked at from the narrow prism of high performance.

India's top athletes have been receiving tremendous financial support from the government and corporate houses, of late, and the results have only got better as elite athletes get to train abroad and they now work with best support staff.

Bindra said the investment in just top level athletes will not suffice.

"If you want to get to 50 (Olympic medals), it is not just going to be pumping money into the elite (athletes). It is only going to be a very small percentage of your population that is going to get involved in sports, so you need more people to play," Bindra said during the RCB Innovation Lab Leaders Meet here.

Bindra, the 2008 Beijing Olympics gold medallist in 10m air rifle, added that India was at a juncture where sport must become a mass movement now.

"The by-product of that hopefully will be that more people will be involved in sport. So I believe that the shift in perspective needs to happen and it needs to happen now."

The former world champion also said that for India to become a sporting nation, a "sustainable" and "thriving ecosystem" should be created where sport is not judged from the narrow lens of high performance.

"What I would really like to see India as a country is to start looking at sport more holistically and not singularly from the prism of high performance.

"It is a very narrow view and if you only look at it from a



high-performance perspective, it will be very challenging to make that next leap from seven Olympic medals in Tokyo," he said.

India had its best-ever tally at the 2022 Tokyo Olympics, where it returned home with seven medals, including a gold in javelin throw from Neeraj Chopra.

Bindra, 41, added that more than just celebrating India's success in major events, if the country could celebrate sports, it could bring about the "real change" in the ecosystem.

"Giving more opportunities to young people to simply enjoy sport is that to me an important element that has to be developed for the whole Olympic project. The number two point is developing an economy for the future. The whole country needs to be involved in not just celebrating Indian success but also celebrating sports.

"If you have that larger goal in mind and you have this more holistic thought process in mind, I think you come up with an interesting project that will not just be limited to the two weeks of sports, but to how the Olympic Games can truly be the driver for real change," he said referring to India's endeavour towards hosting 2036 Olympic Games.

On RCB Innovation Lab creating a platform for a dialogue on sports, Bindra said, "Event like these bring experts from all over the world to ideate, which in turn make one aware of the "newest global trends, and opportunities that exist".

India start with 12-0 thrashing of Canada in FIH Women's Junior World Cup

PTI ■ SANTIAGO (CHILE)

The Indian team made a resounding start to its FIH Women's Junior Hockey World Cup campaign by securing a commanding 12-0 victory over Canada here.

Annu (4th, 6th, 39th minute), Dipi Monika Toppo (21st), Mumtaz Khan (26th, 41st, 54th, 60th), Deepika Soreng (34th, 50th, 54th), and Neelam (45th) were the goal scorers for India on Wednesday.

India began the match with an attacking approach, and swiftly secured an early advantage as Annu scored two early goals through penalty corners.

Despite taking a two-goal lead, India persisted with their aggressive style, maintaining pressure on Canada. However, they were unable to find more goals in the opening quarter as it ended 2-0 in their favour.



The momentum from the first quarter was carried into the second by India, who continued their dominance. They maintained possession, consistently penetrating the circle,

resulting in Dipi Monika Toppo and Mumtaz Khan netting a field goal each, further extending India's lead.

In the meantime, Canada won a penalty corner but they were

unable to make the most of it.

As the second quarter concluded, the Indian team enjoyed a commanding 4-0 lead.

Despite having a healthy lead, the Indian team showed no signs of slowing down in the third quarter and continued to dominate the proceedings with Deepika Soreng converting a penalty corner, following which Annu completed her hat-trick, while Mumtaz Khan scored her second goal of the match.

Also, Neelam smashed home her shot from a penalty corner to make it 8-0 for India by the end of the penultimate quarter.

The Indian team's hunger for goals continued in the fourth quarter, resulting in strikes from Deepika Soreng and Mumtaz Khan as they completed their hat-tricks.

India will next lock horns with Germany on Friday.

French soccer league struggling with violence

AP ■ PARIS

There's been discriminatory chanting in the stands, a team bus pelted with stones, a game called off because of crowd trouble, and precious few goals on the field.

The French soccer league is making headlines for all the wrong reasons this season. And now even the French government is calling for something to be done about it.

After 13 rounds of games this season, the number of incidents is worrying officials who have been dealing with an upsurge of violence in stadiums over the past two campaigns.

According to Interior minister Gerald Darmanin, more than 100 police officers were injured in soccer-related incidents last season, and 870 people were detained. And there is no sign of abatement.

"There's no other sport with this level of violence," Darmanin said recently.

In October in Montpellier, a match was stopped in added

time after fans threw a firework from the stands that landed next to Clermont goalkeeper Mory Diaw. The Senegal player had to be taken off on a stretcher, but was not seriously injured.

A new nadir was reached a few weeks later in Marseille when the bus carrying Lyon players was stoned by fans outside the Velodrome stadium. The windows were smashed and Lyon coach Fabio Grosso was left with his face bloodied, an injury that required stitching.

Supporters were also targeted, five police officers were injured, and nine people placed in custody, according to Darmanin.

Another episode of violence broke out in Montpellier last weekend when a bus transporting Brest fans back home was attacked as they left the southern city following a 3-1 win for the away team. Their bus was hit by stones reportedly thrown from a motorway bridge.

"What happened was very serious. When you look at the impacts on the vehicle, you



quickly understand the violence," said Pascal Robert, the club's managing director. "If the paving stone that was thrown at the front of the bus had fallen two meters lower, the driver would have been hit... I can't imagine the tragedy that would have ensued with our sixty supporters on board."

Meanwhile, the league isn't offering up a whole lot in terms of entertainment or suspense.

Paris Saint-Germain once again

tops the standings ahead of Sunday's match at Le Havre, having won nine of the last 11 league titles. With its star-studded team lead by Kylian Mbappe - the league's top scorer with 14 goals - PSG has no rival on the domestic stage.

Nice, however, has mounted a credible challenge this campaign and lags just one point behind the leader ahead of Saturday's match at Nantes.

But the other 16 teams are not giving their fans much to cheer

about. According to the league's statistics, the average number of goals per game after 12 rounds was lower than in the last three seasons - at under 2.5 - with the number of scoreless draws on the rise.

Some supporter groups are finding other ways to stay entertained.

Before the match between Marseille and Lyon was ultimately called off, fans from both teams remained in the stadium and exchanged insults as they waited for play to resume.

Taunting their Marseille rivals, some Lyon fans were filmed making Nazi gestures and mimicking monkeys.

Vicent Labrune, the French league president, believes the violence reached a new high after stadiums welcomed supporters back again following the COVID-19 pandemic during which games were played with no fans.

With the reopening of venues, violent individuals who had served stadium bans during the interruption were allowed back,

he said. "The guys had served their time. We ended up with a completely above-average number of crazy people," Labrune said during a hearing with French lawmakers this month.

Labrune estimated that about 50 violent fans at each French league club are causing trouble.

"If we manage to get them out of stadiums, the situation should improve," he said.

Labrune added that the "zero tolerance" policy implemented by the league - with point deductions and the closure of stadium sections - is needed to improve the situation. But he seemed under no illusion that the violence can be eradicated without a bigger change in mentalities.

"Football is a reflection of society, we're not going to stop it all on our own," Labrune said.

Faced with an increasing number of homophobic chants in stadiums, Labrune also called for matches to be systematically stopped as soon as the first offensive chant can be heard.

Dortmund gaining confidence

AP ■ BERLIN

Borussia Dortmund's success in the Champions League is giving it confidence it can recover its faltering Bundesliga campaign.

Dortmund defeated AC Milan 3-1 away on Tuesday to reach the knockout stage of Europe's premier competition despite a poor start to what many regarded as the toughest group with big-spending Paris Saint Germain and Newcastle.

The German team lost 2-0 at PSG in its first game, followed up with a scoreless draw with Milan at home, but recovered with back-to-back wins over Newcastle before Tuesday's win in Italy.

"It's a real statement to qualify from the group already in the fifth match-day," Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl said.

"Not many believed we could do it."

Part of the reason for that is Dortmund's patchy form in the Bundesliga so far this season. The team ended a run of three games without a win in the league last weekend with a 4-2 victory over Borussia Mönchengladbach, but had looked set for more disappointment after finding itself 2-



0 down after 28 minutes.

Instead, hopes are high again after two consecutive wins including Tuesday's success in Milan.

But Dortmund next faces a trip to unbeaten Bundesliga leader Bayer Leverkusen on Sunday - a team that has averaged more than three goals a game so far and is already 10 points clear of Dortmund after just 12 rounds.

Leverkusen leads 11-time defending champion Bayern Munich by two points. Bayern can move provisionally top on Saturday with a win at home over struggling Union Berlin - a team that hasn't won any of its last 15 games across all competitions.

Leverkusen faced Swedish team Håcken away in the Europa

League on Thursday.

Before that game, Leverkusen had won every match across all competitions this season with one exception - a 2-2 draw at Bayern in the fourth round of the league.

Since Xabi Alonso took charge of the team in October last year, Leverkusen has only failed to score in its own stadium once - against Dortmund last season in a 2-0 loss in January. That defeat ended Leverkusen's five-game winning run.

But Alonso's team seems to have more resilience this season - Leverkusen has the second-best defense in the league with 10 goals conceded compared to Bayern's nine. Both teams are the only unbeaten sides after 12 rounds.

Golfer Lee tied for lead in Australian Open women's field

AP ■ SYDNEY

Teenage amateur Rachel Lee was almost late to the first tee but finished the first round of the Australian Open in a tie for the lead with American Jenny Shin.

The 16-year-old Lee had to hurry to start her round Thursday after getting the times confused, and she carried momentum to a 6-under 67 at The Lakes Golf Club in a tournament that has men's and women's fields and a two-venue format.

"I was putting and my coach says, Rachel, you're on the tee," Lee, who attends a Sydney high school, explained. "So I just ran out there. I've learned my lesson."

Jenny Shin was also 6 under after a 66 at The Australian Golf Club. The pair had a one shot lead over two-time major winner Jiyai Shin of South Korea.

Ashleigh Buhai of South Africa and local Stephanie Kyriacou were in fourth place at 4 under. Cameron Davis led the men's field by a stroke at 9 under after

an opening 63 at The Lakes.

The 2017 champion had an eagle at the par-5 14th and seven birdies to finish one ahead of American Patrick Rodgers.

Scotland's Connor Syme was equal third at 7 under after an opening 64 at The Australian. All but two of the leading 10 players in the men's field had their first rounds at The Lakes, including Min Woo Lee, who was 5-under just four days after winning the Australian PGA Championship title in Brisbane last Sunday.

His older sister, two-time major winner Minjee Lee, was in a three-way tie for sixth in the women's field at 3 under.

Cameron Smith, who missed the cut in his attempted title defense at the Australian PGA last week, was in a group of 20 players at 1 under after opening with a 71 at The Lakes.

"There's definitely something to build on there," he said.

Adam Scott had two birdies and two bogeys in an opening, even-par 71 at The Australian and was among a big group of players nine shots off the pace.

Bellingham keeps scoring

AP ■ BARCELONA (SPAIN)

Real Madrid wasn't supposed to still be this good after losing its top scorer this summer and being decimated by injuries.

But, in came Jude Bellingham and the England midfielder has kept Madrid on course to compete for titles this season.

Madrid is leading La Liga and is the only team other than Manchester City to have won all five of its games in the Champions League.

The key to the ongoing success of the 14-time European Cup winners can be boiled down to the depth and overall talent of its squad, and the incredible impact that Bellingham has made since arriving from Borussia Dortmund.

Bellingham led Madrid to another commanding victory on Wednesday when he scored his team-high 15th goal of the season to help beat Napoli 4-2 and remain perfect in the Champions League group stage.

Madrid is also leading the title fight in Spain, where it is in first place, level on points with Girona before hosting the relegation-threatened Granada on Saturday.

"He's been a wonderful sign-



ing," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said about Bellingham on Wednesday, before he dug deep to find a supposed flaw in his new star.

"He needs to improve his Spanish because, like I have said, nobody's perfect."

Madrid lost the pillars of its attack and defence when Karim Benzema, its top scorer for the five previous seasons, was lured with other European players to Saudi Arabia in June and goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois tore a knee ligament just before the season kicked off in August.

Then came more season-threatening injuries. Eder Militão, the team's best central defender, ruptured his ACL in the season opener, and Eduardo Camavinga, Madrid's

most versatile midfielder, tore a knee ligament while training with France this month.

Vinicius Júnior also went down during the most recent international break when he tore a leg muscle with Brazil, an injury that will keep him out of action for the remainder of the year.

Toss in minor injuries to Kepa Arrizabalaga, who came in to replace Courtois, veteran leader Luka Modric, and starting holding midfielder Aurelien Tchouaméni, and it seems Madrid should have struggled against Serie A champion Napoli. Instead, it rolled over the Italian club just like most of its rivals this campaign. Its only loss this season came at Atletico Madrid in the domestic league in September.

INDIA NEED YOUNG BOWLERS TO DELIVER

PTI ■ RAIPUR

India's young bowling unit, which has been under the pump, will look to better its death overs performance while utilising Glenn Maxwell's absence to its advantage in the fourth T20 International against Australia here on Friday.

India's second-string attack did not paint a good picture of itself by not defending 40-plus runs in the final two overs in the third match which the Australians won while chasing a daunting 223-run target.

"There is a possibility of a minor tweak in the Indian line-up after Prasidh Krishna gave away 68 runs in four overs, including 21 in the final over.

"Deepak Chahar is back in the T20 mix and his ability to move the new ball should be considered for his inclusion in the playing XI along with death overs specialist Mukesh Kumar, who is back after one-match break.

"Both Prasidh and Avesh Khan lack variety and innovation as they keep pitching the ball at the same length. Both bowl in late 130s or early 140s but consistently pitch it back of the length and the nature of Indian tracks make it a cannon fodder for batters.

"Also not being able to use variations like conventional or wide yorkers has been the undoing of these bowlers who also didn't execute slower deliveries properly.



In the batting line up, Shreyas Iyer's comeback means only Tilak Varma looks a candidate who could be benched as five others -- Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Ishan Kishan, skipper Suryakumar Yadav and finisher Rinku Singh select

themselves.

India will also look to exploit the absence of a marauding Maxwell who pulled off a heist of sorts to singlehandedly bring Australia back into the five-match series with a win in a last-ball finish in Guwahati.

"But the hosts will fancy their chances with Maxwell, and other influential players such as Steve Smith and Adam Zampa not figuring in the playing XI here, having left for home after a long stay in the country where they won their sixth

World Cup title recently.

"Cricket Australia (CA) released many of its top players including Maxwell midway into the series keeping in mind their workload and fitness ahead of the T20 World Cup.

"The Suryakumar Yadav-led second-string India are smarting from a classic Maxwell innings, and the home team bowlers will be relieved that he will not walk out to bat at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium.

"Instead, they will probably be bowling to players such as Tim David, Josh Philippe and big-hitter Ben McDermott, a far better proposition at the moment than challenging Maxwell, who has enhanced his reputation as one of Australia's greatest white-ball batters in the past five-six weeks.

"The runs, and the manner and situation in which he has accumulated them, has catapulted Maxwell into a level not meant for others.

"India's bowlers, though, will still have to contend with Travis Head, on a high after his scintillating match-winning hundred in the World Cup final against India, and the seasoned Matthew Wade, who is leading the side in the ongoing series.

"Like in Guwahati, dew could again have a say on a December evening in this part of the world, and the captain winning the toss would opt to bat second without an iota of doubt, leaving the team batting first to deal with the wet ball in the second innings.

"The reinforcements have already joined the Australian squad and are available for the penultimate match of the series that started barely three days after their triumphant World

Cup campaign, the tight scheduling leaving many former players surprised.

"India's batting has been served well by the likes of young Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ishan Kishan, Rinku Singh, Tilak Varma and the skipper himself when required.

"These players are expected to fire again but one man whose confidence will be sky high is Ruturaj Gaikwad, who is coming off a blazing 123 off 57 balls.

"The likes of Jason Behrendorff, Kane Richardson and Tanveer Sangha could find the going tough one more time.

"So far, the unfriendly conditions meant the series has been a nightmare for the bowlers with five 200-plus totals in six innings, and the trend is expected to continue in the remainder of the rubber.

"Teams (from):

"India: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Ruturaj Gaikwad (vice-captain), Ishan Kishan, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Shivam Dubey, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Deepak Chahar.

"Australia: Matthew Wade (capt), Jason Behrendorff, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Chris Green, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Ben McDermott, Josh Philippe, Tanveer Sangha, Matt Short, Kane Richardson.



Rohit will handle it with grace: Ashwin

'If Mumbai Indians make Hardik captain'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Spin stalwart Ravichandran Ashwin feels that if all-rounder Hardik Pandya is made the Mumbai Indians skipper, Rohit Sharma will "handle it with grace" as the Team India captain "does not have much ego".

"Pandya returned to Mumbai Indians recently after an all-cash deal trade-off with Gujarat Titans, the IPL side he led for two years.

"Pandya, who had started his IPL journey with Mumbai Indians in 2015 and won four titles, moved to Gujarat Titans in 2022 and led the side to title triumph the same season, besides helping it finish runners-up in IPL 2023.

"The trade-off to bring Pandya back to the MI fold raised several eyebrows, especially in terms of the franchise's captaincy, which is currently with Rohit.

"Rohit Sharma does not have much ego. He is a great human being and a sound leader. He will handle it with grace (if Pandya is made MI leader)," Ashwin said during his YouTube interaction with former cricketer S. Badrinath.

"In the history of IPL, apart from the top four to five teams, all have released players. Mumbai and CSK have never done it. I know Hardik to an

extent. I see this move as a milestone achievement," he added.

"The day I lose this motivation, I know it's over."

"Asked about his retirement plan, Ashwin, 37, said the day he loses motivation, he would call it quits.

"I am not being diplomatic, but for four to five years (since 2019), I found myself in a very dark space in life, and took help for mental health as well. In the dark space, I realised I have to be ready for any eventuality," he said.

"I have been preparing for life after cricket for five years. But I continue to work hard on my cricket; to contribute with the bat, I went to the USA and practised baseball.

"The day I lose this motivation, I feel irritated about waking up in the morning to bowl or bat, I know it is over. I will then quit immediately, say thanks to all and go on to the next chapter in life."

"Ashwin, however, clarified that he has not yet decided on his post-retirement career.

"I am searching for something to do beyond cricket. I am interested in marketing and a lot of other things. But even if nothing else, I can't stop watching cricket. I am a cricket-tragic. I will do something in cricket and something other than that," he concluded.

Shanto's century helps Bangladesh

AP ■ SYLHET (BANGLADESH)

Najmul Hossain Shanto became the first Bangladeshi cricket to hit a century on his debut as captain as the hosts tightened its grip on the first Test against New Zealand here on Thursday.

"Shanto's 104 helped Bangladesh extend its lead to 205 runs by reaching 212-3 at stumps on Day 3. Mushfiquur Rahim was batting on 43, after adding 96 runs with Shanto for the fourth wicket.

"The captain helped his team regain the upper hand on a spin-friendly track after Bangladesh lost two openers in quick succession to leave them on 26-2.

"Left-arm spinner Ajaz Patel got the better of Zakir Hasan (17) for the second time in the match, with a delivery that spun sharply to rap him in front of leg-stump.

"Mahmudul Hasan, who top-scored for Bangladesh with 86 in the first innings, was run out in unluckiest manner as a drive from Shanto touched bowler Tim Southee's palm on the followthrough to hit his stump.



"The two wickets in two overs brought the Black Caps back into the game but Shanto and Mominul Haque added 90 runs for the third wicket to give Bangladesh the edge.

"Mominul survived a leg-

before shout as New Zealand reviewed in vain but appeared to be confident against his favorite opponent, against which he has averaged a whopping 55.61. He was run out on 40 after hitting four

boundaries from 68 balls.

"Unlike his aggressive first-innings 37, Shanto stayed clam throughout the day to frustrate the New Zealand bowlers. He raised his fifth test hundred off 192 balls and his third in the

last four innings, pushing a fuller delivery of Patel past extra cover from a single.

"He then hit a boundary in the last ball of that over, his 10th in 193 balls as bad light forced stumps for the third consecutive day.

"New Zealand had resumed the day on 268-8 and was bowled out for 317, in reply Bangladesh's 310 in the first innings.

"Captain Tim Southee Southee played the key role, scoring 35 off 62 with three fours while Kyle Jamieson added 23 off 70.

"With the main bowlers failing to make any breakthrough, Shanto introduced occasional bowler Mominul who wrapped up New Zealand's innings, dealing a double blow.

"He trapped Jamieson leg-before to end a 52-run ninth-wicket partnership and, four balls later, also got the better of Southee to finish on his career-best 3-4.

"Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam took four wickets on Wednesday, including top scorer Kane Williamson for 104, but didn't add to his haul on Day 3 and returned figures of 4-109 from 39 overs.

Delhi didn't keep promise to retain me: ABD recalls 2010 snub

PTI ■ DURBAN



One of the greatest batters of modern era, AB de Villiers has revealed that he was snubbed by erstwhile Delhi Daredevils after spending three seasons at the IPL franchise.

"Before making it big at the Royal Challengers Bangalore, the South African batting legend had three lukewarm season with the Delhi franchise, now known as Delhi Capitals.

"But in a team meeting, also attended by explosive Australian opener David Warner, de Villiers was told that he was going to be "retained" but it happened otherwise as the franchise released him before the 2011 auction.

"Recalling the incident in his

YouTube channel, 'AB de Villiers 360', the former South African skipper said: "When I played in the 2010 season, I got called into the office and was told 'you are going to get retained, young AB de Villiers.' "I sat alongside David Warner in that meeting. It came as a huge surprise to me a week or

two later when I realised I had been released.

"So the communication wasn't great back in the day, that must be different these days but it's not a nice feeling," De Villiers added.

"The 39-year-old said it was a huge blow and he was very nervous before the auction.

"You're unsure of your career, at that time in 2010 I think I only played five games in that IPL season so a lot of doubts crept up in my mind.

"But I did have a very good international season. I kept playing good cricket and luckily for me the auction happened and I got picked up by RCB, and it changed my life forever, so great memories with regards to that.

"I was so nervous. Then I got

the news from Twitter that I was picked by RCB and the next moment Virat (Kohli) called."

"De Villiers went on to mes-

merise the Indian fans with his stroke-making and formed a dream combination with star batter Kohli at the top of the order for 11 seasons.

'Rohit, Virat were crying in dressing room after heartbreaking loss'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Skipper Rohit Sharma and Star batter Virat Kohli were in tears in the dressing room following India's heartbreaking loss to Australia in the recent ODI World Cup final in Ahmedabad, veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said.

"Australia beat India by six wickets on November 19 in the final to win a record sixth ODI World Cup title. After the loss, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Indian dressing room and tried to cheer up Rohit and Kohli. But Ashwin said the dressing room witnessed some heartbreaking scenes. "Yes, we were feeling the pain. Rohit and Virat were in tears, (and) seeing it felt bad. Anyway, (it was) not

meant to be. This team was an experienced side, (and) everyone knew what to do," he told former cricketer Subramaniam Badrinath on his YouTube channel.

"Although India failed to emerge successful in the World Cup, Kohli and Rohit lit up the event up with their explosive batting. Ashwin heaped praise on Rohit, both as a batter and leader.

"If you take a look at Indian cricket, everybody will be telling you that MS Dhoni is the best captain. (But), Rohit Sharma is an outstanding person, (and) he understands every single player in the team," he said.

"He knows the likes and dislikes of each of us and has a great understanding. He puts in the effort to know each player personally," he reckoned.



CUTTACK MUNICIPALITY CORPORATION
C-1968

"e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Tender Call Notice No. ୧୮୫୮ (PW) Date 30.11.2023
Tender ID : 2023_ORULB_96203 (Two Bid)
Civil work-9 Nos.

Bid Value : Rs.55.17 Lakhs to Rs. 100.68 Lakhs

Tender ID : 2023_ORULB_96204
Civil work-36 No

Bid Value : Rs.3.18 Lakhs to Rs.46.46 Lakhs


Date and Time schedule :

Start	End	Opening
11.00 AM on dt. 04.12.2023	5.00 PM on dt.14.12.2023	11:00 A.M. on dt.18.12.2023

Tender Details : can be seen from the procurement portal : www.tendersorissa.gov.in

OIPR-13031/11/0096/2324

Executive Engineer
City Division-II,CMC



EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. 38-SBP-TRD-OT-2023-24, Dt. 23.11.2023

Name of the Work: ELECTRICAL TRD WORKS FOR PROVISION OF 12 METER WIDE FOOT OVER BRIDGE, EXTENSION/ RAISING OF PLATFORM, IMPROVEMENT TO PLATFORMS AND ADDITIONAL PLATFORM SHELTER AT MUNIGUDA STATION UNDER AMRIT BHARAT SCHEME.

Approx cost of the work: ₹36,82,657.49, EMD: ₹73,700/-, Completion Period of the work: 08 Months.

Date & time of Tender Closing: 15.12.2023 at 1530 hrs.


No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders, even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-Tenders is available in website www.reps.gov.in

The tenders/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS portal. Only registered tenders/bidders can participate on e-tendering. All relevant papers must have to be uploaded at the time of participating on e-tendering as per instruction.

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website fifteen days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigendum issued for this tender.

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD)/ Sambalpur PR-825/O/23-24



OFFICE OF THE PANCHYAT SMITI, REMUNA, BALASORE
Te.:06782-224369, email:ori-remuna@nic.in
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Tendering
Identification No. 04/2023-24, 29.11.2023


The Block Development Officer, Remuna, Balasore on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites bids from bidders of eligible class registered with the Odisha State Government and bidders of equivalent Grade / Class registered with Central Government / MES / Railways for the works detailed in the table below to be eventually drawn up in P1 contract with design and execution of the following work.

1. Nos. of Work :	1 No
2. Estimated cost :	Rs. 16.95 lakhs
3. Period of completion :	90 days
4. Availability of bid document in Portal :	Dt. 5.12.2023 at 11.00 hours to 19.12.2023 up to 17.00 hours through online.
5. Seeking of Clarification :	Dt. 05.12.2023 at 11.00 hours to Dt. 19.12.2023 up to 13.00 hours
6. Date of opening of Bid :	Dt. 20.12.2023 at 11.00 hours in the O/O BDO, Remuna, Balasore.
7. Name and address of the Officer inviting Tender :	BDO, Remuna, Balasore

Bid Cost and EMD will be receipt through electronic payment by NEFT / RTGS. Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement Portal: <http://tendersodisha.gov.in>

OIPR-19164/11/0011/2324

Block Development Officer, Remuna



OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, BARBIL
C-1960

"e"-Procurement Notice
BID REFERENCE MUNICIPALITY (BBLM-7/2023-24)
TENDER CALL NOTICE NO.4625 DATE.22.11.2023

- Name of the work:- Civil construction works as mentioned in website.
- No. of work:- 83 (Eighty three)
- Bid value:- Rs.2,56,000/- to 25,66,000/-
- Period of completion:- 45 days to 90 days
- Period of availability of tenders online:- From 10.00 A.M. of 28.11.2023 to 5.00 P.M. of 08.12.2023
- Last Date & time of bidding online:- 5.00 P.M. of 08.12.2023
- Date & time of opening of Technical Bid:- 11.00 A.M. of dt.11.12.2023
- Name and address of the officer inviting bid:- EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BARBIL MUNICIPALITY

Further details can be seen from the procurement portal:- www.tendersorissa.gov.in

Sd/-
Executive Officer,
Barbil Municipality.

OIPR-13108/11/0018/2324