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HEAVY FIGHTING ACROSS GAZA
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‘AIRLINE INDUSTRY TO RECORD
\$25.7 BILLION NET PROFIT IN 2024’

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Amit Shah dares Pakistan on PoK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah thundered categorically in Parliament on Wednesday, declaring, “PoK is ours.” His statement was met with a huge round of applause from the members in the Lok Sabha. While justifying the reservation of seats from the PoK region in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, the Home Minister blamed India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for two major blunders — declaring a ceasefire without winning the entire Kashmir and taking the issue to the United Nations. These, he argued, have resulted in the sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir over seven decades. Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, Shah said if Nehru had taken the right steps, a large chunk of territory would not have been ceded and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir would have been part of India. “I support the word that was used here — Nehruvian blunder. Because of the blunder that was committed during the time of Nehru, Kashmir had to suffer. With responsibility, I want to say the two big blunders that

happened during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru, happened due to his decisions, because of which Kashmir had to suffer for years,” Shah said. “Kashmir had to suffer due to Nehruvian blunders. One was that when our Army was winning and as soon as Punjab area was reached, ceasefire was declared and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was born. If the ceasefire would have been (declared) three days later, PoK would have been part of India,” the Home Minister said. The ceasefire made without winning the entire Kashmir was one “blunder” and the other was taking the issue to the UN. There was an uproar by the Opposition benches over the remarks on Nehru and they staged a walkout but returned later. After their walkout, BJD leader Bhartruhari Mahtab said the Home Minister should also talk about the “Himalayan blunder”, a reference to Nehru’s actions leading up to the war with China in 1962. Shah quipped that his talking about two blunders had upset the Opposition benches and if he had used the phrase “Himalayan blunder”, they would have resigned. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said the remarks made were not an insult to anyone and

Says Kashmir is ours



Parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

PTI

were only made to put things in context. In his remarks, Shah also alleged that the Kashmir matter was taken to the UN in

a hurry. “If at all it had to be taken to the UN, it should have been sent under Article 51 rather than Article 35 of the UN Charter,” he said,

asserting that he of course believes that the issue should not have been taken to the UN in the first place. Shah also quoted Nehru as

saying later that the ceasefire was a “mistake”. Shah said it was not Nehru’s mistake but a blunder. “So much land of this country was lost, it was a

historic blunder,” the home minister added. “Those holidaying in England will not notice any change in Jammu and Kashmir,” he said, in sarcastic way, hitting former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, who was raising questions frequently. Shah said when terrorism started in Kashmir, people were targeted and they had to flee. “I have seen many leaders who shed crocodile tears and consoled well with words. But Modi is the only leader who has worked to wipe out their tears,” he said. He said about 46,631 families and 1,57,967 people were displaced in their own country and were displaced in such a way that they were uprooted from their own homeland and this Bill is going to give them rights and representation. He said after the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be 43 Assembly seats in Jammu region — up from present 37 — and in Kashmir Valley it will be 47 from 46. Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, two members from the Kashmiri migrant community and one representing the displaced persons from the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) will be nominated to the legislative assembly. As many as 24 seats will be

kept for the residents of PoK. Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, Shah said it had nothing to do with going back on promise as it was a temporary article and had to go. “You did not have the courage, PM Narendra Modi showed courage and did away with it,” he said, referring to the Opposition benches. Shah pointed out that the two Bills on Jammu and Kashmir seek to nominate two Kashmiri Migrant community members, including a woman, to the assembly. One seat in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will be set aside for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the Home Minister said. More than 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far, he said. Shah said the Government’s focus is on ending the terror ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir. “I believe the Modi Government will return to power in 2024 and by 2026, I hope there will be no terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir,” he said. The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill were passed by the Lok Sabha after Shah’s reply.

In Koraput Son dies at man’s funeral as tree branches fall

PNS ■ KORAPUT

In a tragic incident, a youth in Koraput district died on Wednesday morning after a tree branch fell on him at his father’s funeral. According to reports, Laxman Mondal, an elderly man, had died on Tuesday night. His family members took his body for cremation at the village burial ground. As it was raining heavily due to the impact of Cyclone ‘Michaung’, the pallbearers, including Mondol’s 22-year-old son Benudhar, took shelter under a tree, waiting for the rain to stop to start the funeral work. All of a sudden, a big branch of a tree fell on Benudhar’s head, causing serious injuries. Benudhar was rushed to the nearest Boriguma hospital, where the doctors pronounced him dead. The hospital authorities handed over the body of Benudhar in the evening and the family was preparing for the funeral of the father-son duo.

Victorious BJP MPs head back home to their States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amidst the parley at the highest level of the party regarding the naming of Chief Ministers for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, Union Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar and Prahlad Singh Patel resigned from the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. The BJP has decided that all 12 of its MPs recently elected to State Assemblies will resign from Parliament to join the new Governments in the Hindi heartland. Three BJP MPs contested in the Telangana Assembly, where the Congress catapulted to power; thus, they continue to hold their Lok Sabha membership. With this the BJP’s tally in the Lok Sabha has come down to 292 and in the Rajya Sabha one down with 93 members. Sources in the Government said all three Union Ministers will also be quitting the Modi Government as a procedural formality. The move has given rise to the view that the party leadership may bring in new faces at the helm in all the three States. With the Lok Sabha elections less than five months away, the party is likely to send a larger message about its social agenda with its chief ministerial choices.



Sources also did not rule out the possibility of having Deputy Chief Ministers in the States to balance social equations and enhance administrative effectiveness. The BJP swept to power in the three Hindi-speaking States, dismissing the challenge from the Congress in all of them as it raced to a two-thirds majority in Madhya Pradesh and comfortable majority the Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan in the polls where Narendra Modi and his guarantees powered its campaign. BJP president JP Nadda

accompanied 10 of them as they tendered their resignations from Parliament. Two others, Union Minister Renuka Singh and Mahant Balaknath, will also be quitting, party leaders said. Other MPs who quit are Rakesh Singh, Uday Pratap Singh and Riti Pathak from Madhya Pradesh; Kirodi Lal Meena, Diya Kumari and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore from Rajasthan and Gomati Sai and Arun Sao from Chhattisgarh. All except Meena are Lok Sabha members. Meena is a Rajya Sabha member. Patel said the 10 MPs took Modi’s blessings before tendering their resignations. The BJP Parliamentary Party will hold its first meeting during Parliament’s Winter Session on Thursday and is likely to felicitate Modi for leading the party to massive wins in three Assembly polls. The BJP Parliamentary Party, which includes all its Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members, generally meets every week during the session. In the meetings, its leaders, including Modi, speak on different issues germane to the agenda in Parliament and also to its organisational and political campaigns.

Rains ravage agriculture in S Odisha

SRC seeks crop damage report

NALINI SAHU ■
BHUBANESWAR

The severe cyclonic storm ‘Michaung’ induced rainfall and caused extensive crop damage in Odisha, especially in southern parts of the State, bringing disappointment to thousands of farmers who hoped for bumper harvests this season. Acres of standing crops such as paddy and millets came under water submergence. The paddy crop was almost ready for harvesting in the next few days, but the heavy rains damaged it entirely. Reports from Gajapati, Kandhamal, Koraput and Rayagada districts said heavy

rains also affected vegetable and horticulture orchards. The Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) sought a report from the district Collectors on crop damage. In a letter to the Collectors, SRC Satyabrata Sahu said Agricultural Input Subsidy (AIS) would be provided to farmers sustaining crop loss of 33% and above as per norms of the State Disaster Response Fund. “You are requested to conduct field-level crop assessment through a joint inquiry by the officials of the revenue and disaster management and agriculture departments through eye estimation to ascertain the crop area damage of 33% and above and submit ULB, block, gram panchayat-wise reports by December 12, 2023,” the SRC’s letter read.



Jaipur burns

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Markets were closed in Jaipur and some other Rajasthan districts and protesters blocked roads and stopped trains on Wednesday after a bandh call by the Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena over the killing of its chief Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi. Governor Kalraj Mishra spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the phone and summoned the State Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, police chief and Jaipur Police Commissioner to review the law and order situation in the State. The police set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe into the killing of the Rajput leader who was shot dead by two men at his house here on Tuesday. They also killed an “accomplice” who had accompanied them to the house. On Facebook, gangster Rohit Godara — said to be linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang — has claimed responsibility and said Gogamedi was killed for “backing” his enemies. The police have identified the two alleged killers as Rohit Rathore from Jaipur and Nitin Fauji from Haryana’s Mahendragarh, and announced a cash reward of ₹ 5 lakh for information leading to their arrest. Markets remained closed in Jaipur, Kota, Bundi, Ajmer, Sawai Madhopur, Chittorgarh, Jhalawar, Baran and some other districts while a mass rally was taken out in Udaipur and a demonstration was held at the collectorate circle amid heavy deployment of police.

Gujarat’s Garba finds a global audience

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Garba, an all encompassing iconic dance of Gujarat performed for nine days during the Navratri festival, has now earned a place on the global cultural map. It has been included in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The inclusion has been made under the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 18th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which began in Kasane, Botswana on Tuesday. In August 2022, India had nominated garba for inclusion in the UN cultural agency’s list. Soon after the announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to the social media X expressing his happiness. “Garba is a celebration of life, unity and our deep-rooted traditions. Its inscription on the Intangible Heritage List showcases to the world the beauty of Indian culture. This honour inspires us to preserve and promote our heritage for future generations.



Congrats for this global acknowledgment,” he posted. Incidentally, the inclusion of the iconic garba of Gujarat in the prestigious list comes a few days after the Prime Minister released a music video titled ‘garbo’, based on a garba song penned by him. “The 190-second song was penned years ago,” Modi wrote on his X timeline

about the video. “Garba of Gujarat is the 15th ICH element from India to join this list. This inscription underscores garba’s pivotal role as a unifying force that fosters social and gender inclusivity. “Garba as a dance form is entrenched deeply in ritualistic and devotional roots, involving people from all walks of life and it

continues to thrive as a vibrant living tradition bringing communities together,” an official release from the Gujarat Government said. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel called it as a ‘proud moment’. Patel wrote on social media X, “Garba’s inclusion in the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage list is truly a proud moment for Gujarat and India. It is an honour given by the world to the ancient culture of India.” Union Minister of Culture G Kishan

Reddy also shared a post on the same, saying the listing is a testimony to the “tireless efforts of this government under the leadership of Modi to showcase our rich culture, traditions and heritage to the world”. Meenakashi Lekhi, Minister of External Affairs, too took to the social media to express her happiness calling it ‘a proud moment for Bharat as Gujarat’s vibrant Garba is now inscribed as the 15th recognised element in @UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.



NCRF Report 2022

Odisha tops in cybercrime cases against women

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha tops in the cases related to cyber offences against women registered in 2022 under the Information Technology Act, said the recently-published National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) report.

The report said Odisha registered 23,648 crime cases against women in 2022 compared to 31,352 in 2021.

However, the State recorded as many as 542 cases under the IT Act for cybercrime offences against women during 2022. Uttar Pradesh followed Odisha with 457 cases while Karnataka registered 235 cases under the

IT Act for offences against women.

Odisha registered 269 cases for publishing or transmitting obscene videos and pictures of women and girls online which is the second highest in the country in 2022.

Besides, as many as 273 cases were registered against cybercriminals in 2022 for morphing pictures of women and creating fake profiles online.

The NCRB report also revealed that Odisha police registered 33 cases in 2022 against different persons for keeping various child pornography videos and pictures.

Odisha was among the top

Odisha tops in detection of DA cases

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Odisha Vigilance topped among all the States in detection and registration of Disproportionate Assets (DA) cases as per the recently-published Crime in India-2022 report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

The Odisha Vigilance reg-

istered 85 DA cases against corrupt public servants in 2022 while Karnataka and Bihar were ranked second and third, respectively, by registering 56 and 48 DA cases during the year, the NCRB report stated.

The same year, Odisha registered 118 trap cases and arrested many tainted officers while accepting bribes. The

total number of cases registered under Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 in the State increased from 265 in 2021 to 287 in 2022, the report said.

Besides, with registration of 84 corruption cases on the allegation of criminal misconduct (misappropriation of government funds), the Odisha Vigilance was third among all

States. In 2022, chargesheets were filed in 321 cases which was also third highest in the country.

Sources in the Odisha Vigilance Directorate said that movable and immovable assets of over Rs 174 crore owned by 91 public servants and 56 private people were unearthed during search operations last year.

to the kidnapping of women.

Odisha with 1,464 cases holds the sixth position among the Sates that reported highest rape cases in 2022.

cases, respectively, for violence against women.

Odisha is also among the top ten States with maximum number of rape cases related

For preparation for Matric exams

Sample Q papers to be provided to students

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government has decided to provide sample question papers to Class-X students for preparation ahead of the Matric examinations 2024.

The Director of Secondary Education has written a letter in this regard to all District Education Officers.

"I am to inform you that one set of sample question paper prepared in tune of the existing examination pattern of Annual High School Certificate Examination 2024 in all subjects, i.e., Odia, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Science, Social Science are being sent. The sample question papers will facilitate students of

Class-X to understand the question pattern and will enable them to prepare the ensuing Annual HSC Examination 2024," the official said in the letter.

"You are, therefore, requested to share the sample question papers with all Headmasters/ Headmistress of Secondary Schools in your dist. You must take follow-up measures so that it reaches all the students," he wrote.

"You are further requested to prepare multiple sets of question papers for the AHSC Examination 2024 utilising the Resource Teachers available at district level and share the same to this Directorate for further dissemination in the form of a digital repository of question bank," he added.

Surging crimes in BBSR

Inter-State criminals come on police radar

Special drives to be launched for New Year

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With New Year and marriage season round the corner, the Commissionerate police have decided to strengthen security measures and launch special drives to prevent the surging crime graph in Bhubaneswar.

Focus would be laid on keeping a close watch on hotels and inter-State criminals. The increased surveil-

lance is crucial as several criminals from Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Bihar have turned the capital city into a hub of their activities.

Patrolling and checking would also be intensified across the city. Apart from this, awareness would be created among people about the modus operandi of criminals to commit crimes and how they should strengthen security in apartments and other residential areas, said city DCP Prateek Singh on Wednesday.

"Recently, the forensics department has added a live fingerprint scanner. It can help officers ascertain whether any person with suspicious movement is caught during checking drive has some criminal antecedents or not. Besides, training is also being given to officers on the new advanced analysis method. A detailed discussion was also held on providing better policing services," said Singh.

"The main objective of the discussion with all police officers was to make

Bhubaneswar a safer place for women and others. The Commissionerate police is regularly conducting awareness drives in some localities or the other including apartments about new crimes and what they can do to upgrade the security mechanisms and take necessary precautions," said Singh.

Of late, a spate of burglaries in the apartments and in other residential areas, chain snatchings and loots in the festival season has rocked the city, triggering panic among the denizens.

Mohapatra, Das get Bigyan Academy award

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Bigyan Academy on Wednesday announced various awards for scientists for the years 2021 and 2022.

Professor Pravat Kumar Mohapatra from Sambalpur and Professor Bidyut Kumar Das from SCB Medical College in Cuttack will receive the Biju Patnaik Award for Scientific Excellence for the years 2021 and 2022, respectively. The award carries cash of Rs 2 lakh along with a medallion, a memento, a citation, etc.

In the category of 'Samanta Chandrasekhar Award', Prof Hrudayanath Thatoi (Life Science), Dr Bikash Kumar Jena



(Physical Science), Dr Ashok Kumar Sahu (Engg. and Technology) and Dr Narayan Prasad Padhy (Engg. and Technology) will be honoured

for the year 2021. For the year 2022, Prof Ramesh Chandra Patra (Life Science), Dr Bhagyadhara Bhoi (Engg. and Technology) and Prof Debi

Prasanna Kanungo (CSIR, Roorkee) will be awarded. They will be given Rs 1 lakh.

Dr Basudeba Kar, Dr Swagatika Dash and Dr Bishnu Prasad Biswal will receive the Odisha Young Scientists Award for the year 2021 while Dr Soumya Ranjan Jena, Dr Uttam Kumar Panigrahi, Dr Soumya Prakash Dash and Dr Rekha Biswal will get this award for the year 2022.

Pranakrushna Parija Popular Science Book Award goes to Arun Kumar Patra, Dr Asit Kumar Swain for the year 2021 and Kartik Swain and Dr Subhendu Patnaik for the year 2022. The young scientists and the authors will receive a cash award of Rs 25,000.

421 officers join Civil Service

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

People are at the centre of our democratic system. So your every thought and every action should be directed towards the betterment and welfare of the people of Odisha," said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik while addressing the 'Nijukti Parba' programme for the newly-recruited Odisha Civil Services officers at the

Lok Seva Bhawan here on Wednesday.

"You are not just civil servants; you are the agents of transformation for a new Odisha, an empowered Odisha. You will be the true architect of our vision of our Odisha for 2047," the CM said.

He informed that as many as 1,269 civil service officers have been recruited in the last five years.

Major IT raid conducted on Boudh Distillery

PNS ■ BOUDH

Separate teams of Income Tax (IT) on Wednesday carried out simultaneous raids at different locations associated with the Boudh Distillery Private Limited (BDPL) and the Ranisati Paddy Processing Private Limited (RSPPL) over alleged tax evasion.

The raids were conducted at places linked to the distillery company in Boudh, Balangir, Rayagada and Sambalpur districts and its registered offices at Kolkata and at Ranchi, a source said.

According to the source, the BDPL is located in Titirikata and the RSPPL in

Purunakatak under Harbhanga block of Boudh district. The searches were started early in the morning. A 12-member team was divided into separate groups, who took part in the simultaneous raids. About four Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) jawans were deployed to assist the raid teams at BDPL.

Similarly, around eight IT sleuths and four CISF jawans took part in the raids on RSPPL.

Allegedly, the two industries have evaded taxes to the tune of crores of rupees by manipulating several documents, the source added.

AC shed, vendor-free Grand Road in Puri

For smooth darshan at Jagannath Temple

PNS ■ PURI

The Puri district administration and the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) will introduce a slew of measures to ensure smooth darshan for devotees at the Jagannath Temple.

These measures would be introduced ahead of the New Year, said Puri Sub-Collector Bhabataran Sahu.

The administration has removed all street vendors from the surroundings of the temple and on the Grand Road in between the shrine and Marichikot Square to ensure free movement of devotees.

It has planned to set up an air-conditioned (AC) shed with sitting facilities for the devotees on the Grand Road.

"The authorities have started a survey for setting up of a 84-

meter-long and 12-meter-wide AC shed. Steps are being taken to complete the project by December 25," added the Sub-Collector.

The AC shed would be built on a portion of the Grand Road between Marichikot Square and SJTA office. It would have steel barricades and sitting facilities, he said.

All the buildings along the Grand Road would be painted in a uniform coat ahead of the inauguration of Jagannath Temple Heritage Corridor on January 17 next year, he said.

Sources said the administration has planned to declare the entire Grand Road from Jagannath Temple to Gundicha Temple as a no-vending zone. In the initial phase, the administration has removed street vendors between Srimandir and Marichikot Square and rehabilitated them at Jagannath Ballav. The street vendors would be provided Rs 15,000 as compensation each per month for a certain period.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Poll predictions are difficult except for Odisha

Most people are confused as to why the latest exit polls got it so wrong. First of all, what pollsters call 'exit poll' is actually not so. That has been long since banned by the Election Commission of India. What the media calls 'exit polls' are only 'post-poll opinions'. The moment people come out of booths after casting votes, they make an honest response. They would tell the truth around that moment because the mind remains focussed on the choices made. But if between two hours have passed, they would have become politically clever to make smartly-twisted responses that lead the analysts to make grossly wrong conclusions. The voters would not tell the truth unless there is a clear 'strong wave situation'. Apart from that, once the exciting moment is long past, ten to fifteen per cent even will shy away from responding at all. They would remain silent or tell a lie. Besides, the selection of booths in a particular village or town also does count critically. If, for a



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

political reason, the environment is dominantly favourable to a particular party, the very feel would be easy to know and one would figure out who is winning. In addition to all this, each booth area has so many community limitations as some are very vocal whereas others are coolly ignorant and would never know what to say.

The most critical aspect is the sample size. A State like Chhattisgarh has 20 million voters,

out of which 15 million cast votes. But the largest random survey sample includes less than 10,000 voters at the most. Thus, the survey analysts would hardly be able to cover the whole canvas. Further, the so-called 'exit pollsters' don't go to every constituency even once. They invariably select random constituencies which cannot tell the whole truth.

During the Punjab elections in 2019, almost every person was talking about 'giving AAP one chance'. Anti incumbency sentiments were also extremely high. So, it was just easy to conclude that AAP would come with a thumping majority. AAP grabbed easily 92 seats out of 107. That was an unusual wave-like situation and the exit opinions were crystal clear in favour of AAP. This time around, in Telangana, there was a clearly strong anti-incumbency sentiment across the State. People of Telangana were frantic to finish the founder KCR for his dictatorial conduct and monumental arrogance. He never came to the

secretariat but ran his 'durbar' from his palatial residence he got built with public money. He liked to be called supremo and behaved like one, which did not go well with the people seeking democratic decency and humility. In Rajasthan, there was so much talk about the grandly unique welfare schemes by Ashok Gehlot. Yet, he had to bite dust with his overconfident colleagues. So, exit polls or opinions predicted between 80 and 128 seats for BJP which is such a hugely wild range. Similarly, it was between 56 and 106 seats for the main contender Congress.

In the Western democracies like the US and the UK, examples tend to be very accurate as essentially the system is only a bi-party one. There are no countless small parties like in India. Unfortunately, these little entities turn outcomes topsy-turvy. In Rajasthan, a non-descript Bharatiya Adivasi Party contested 30-40 seats, thereby completely spoiling the prospects of big established parties. Similarly in

Madhya Pradesh, there is one 'Jay Adivasi Party and yet another 'Godwana Ganatantra Party' in both MP and Chhattisgarh. A 'Sarab Adivasi Samaj' in Chhattisgarh clearly ate up votes by allying with or opposing bigger parties, thereby throwing poll outcomes haywire. In the immediate previous elections, only 43% votes were cast in favour of the Congress and only 33% went to BJP, amounting to 76% in total, and 24% were eaten or messed up by smaller entities.

All the same, poll predictions can be made nearly accurately only if methodologies are changed. Each Assembly segment must have 500 sample size meaning 45,000 seriously collected responses in Chhattisgarh and 1,15,000 in Madhya Pradesh to get the real picture. And that too the survey needs to be done within one hour of polling, which is an impossible task. Thus, it is clear that only in strong-wave situations, predictions are easy to make. Or else, pollsters are bound to fail. That is what has happened

in the latest elections.

Very interestingly, the political scenario in Odisha has remained dramatically unique for twenty-four years. It has no equal anywhere in India. Ever since Naveen Patnaik's landing, no other political outfit than his BJD has made any headway, let alone win elections and rule the State. Meanwhile, Naveen's chief aide, his long-time private secretary VK Pandian has resigned from IAS and joined the BJD, obviously to fight elections and be part of the ruling team. Incidentally, VK has won absolute confidence of Naveen for his unparalleled delivery skills. An agro expert by formal training, VK, married to an Odia service batchmate, worked hard to cut a niche for himself as an administrator par excellence. Naveen, highly impressed by VK's ability to make things happen, has literally handed over the sceptre of administration, both on the political and bureaucratic fronts, to the latter. And as the word goes around now, VK is

poised to succeed the boss soon. Naveen, though mentally quite fit despite age-related health issues, seems to have made up mind to let VK take over. Strangely in Odisha, neither the colossal BJP nor the classically huge Congress has made any significant dent anywhere in the last decade to attract public attention as alternatives to BJD. Naveen has stolen all the praise by being politically super smart with perfectly-timed advice from a team of intellectually-sound bureaucrats headed by VK. Naveen hasn't blemished his clean image once in 24 years. Even, political giants like Amit Shah get on toes while dealing with Naveen. So, the 2024 elections are yet again going to be a clean sweep for BJD with very marginal losses. The BJP and the Congress will struggle to retain a 'far-behind' second position to secure the opposition leader's post unless miracles happen and the BJD falls due to silly mistakes of pitting old scoundrels or new errand-running street loafers as candidates.

Rs 220-cr drug seizure

Seized contraband produced in court

PNS ■ PARADIP

The cocaine consignment worth Rs 220 crore seized from a foreign cargo ship at the Paradip Port was produced in the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Court (ADJ) at Kujang in Jagatsinghpur district on Wednesday.

Notably, the ADJ Court has been designated as the

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) court to deal with the case.

Besides, documents related to the cocaine seizure were submitted to the court. The contraband was kept in the court amid adequate security. The court collected samples from 22 packets of cocaine and handed them over to the Customs Department, which would send the

samples to the National Forensic Science Laboratory (NFSL) to ascertain the exact nature and chemical composition of the narcotics substance.

Meanwhile, the Customs Department is reportedly trying to intensify its probe into the circumstances in which the cocaine found its way onto the ship, apart from looking into the people

who are involved in it.

However, the communication problem with the crew members has slowed down the probe, sources said.

Reports said that as many as 21 crew members of MV Debi ship including the captain, who are under the scanner of the Customs Department, are being interrogated regarding the cocaine seizure.

B'pur MP joins food adulteration debate in Parl

Calls for stringent action against culprits

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The ongoing Winter Session of Parliament witnessed an impassioned plea from BJD MP Chandra Shekhar Sahu concerning the critical issue of food safety. Sahu voiced his deep concerns regarding the prevalent issue of food adulteration on Monday.

Expressing disappointment over the insufficient measures to combat food adulteration,

Sahu pointed out the lacunae in the current system. Despite existing protocols, he highlighted the ineffective implementation, citing insufficient staffing and systemic exemptions as primary hurdles.

Advocating for robust action akin to successful campaigns such as Clean India and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Sahu urged the Central Government to take concrete and stringent steps to tackle the issue. He underscored the imperative need for effective implementation and stringent measures to curb food adulteration.

Gopalpur: Juvenile held for killing employer

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A 15-year-old boy in Gopalpur in of Ganjam district was arrested and forwarded to court on Tuesday for allegedly bludgeoning his employer to death over nonpayment of dues. The accused is a resident of Baruda village under the Bhnjanagar police station in the district. The boy was working at a fast food joint of one Jagannath Nayak in Gopalpur for a monthly salary of Rs 1,500. For the last few months, the boy and Nayak were at loggerheads over nonpayment of salary.

Even after repeated pleadings, Nayak was not heeding the boy's pleas and did not pay him his monthly dues. Instead, he abused and threatened the boy. Livid with rage over this, the boy attacked Nayak with a stone and an iron rod and beat him to death on November 29. Then, the boy locked the house from outside and fled from the spot.

Later, Nayak's body was recovered from the rented house in Gopalpur in the presence of an Executive Magistrate. After this, the deceased's brother lodged an FIR.

Police are carrying out further investigations to ascertain if there was involvement of any other persons in the incident.

INBRIEF

CM LAUDS I&PR FOR BAGGING GOLD AT IITF

Bhubaneswar: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has appreciated the efforts of Team Odisha in the Information & Public Relations (I&PR) Department for bagging Gold at IITF 2023.



Departmental Minister Pradeep Kumar Amat, Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh and Director Saroj Samal met Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday and showed the Gold award the Odisha Mandap received at the end of the 14-day international trade carnival in New Delhi.

NAIK APPOINTED ADDITIONAL CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Government on Wednesday appointed IAS officer Dr Noonsavath Thirumala Naik as the Additional Chief Electoral Officer of the State. Naik had been serving as Labour Commissioner, Odisha with additional charge of State Mission Director, Odisha Livelihoods Mission. Now, IAS officer Anupam Saha, State Project Director, OSEPA, with additional charge of Member Secretary, Mo School, has been allowed to remain in additional charge of Labour Commissioner.



DA CASE: OMC MANAGER GETS 2-YR RI

Cuttack: The Special Judge, Special Court, Cuttack on Wednesday convicted Rabinarayan Behura, former Manager, Kalarahangi Mines, Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) in Sukinda of Jajpur district, and sentenced him to undergo two years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for possession of disproportionate assets (DA). The court also directed Behura to pay fine of Rs 50,000 and in default to undergo further RI for six months more. The Vigilance would now move the competent authority for stoppage of pension of Behura following his conviction.

MAN GETS 10-YR RI FOR RAPING MINOR IN B'SWAR

Baleswar: Baleswar Special Judge POCSO Ranjan Kumar Sutar on Wednesday convicted an accused in a rape case and awarded him 10 years' rigorous imprisonment. The judge also directed the convict to pay Rs 2,000 fine and in default to undergo another six months' jail term. The convict N Ramarao had sexual assaulted the girl of the Simulia area in Baleswar district in 2018. The court further ordered Rs 4 lakh compensation for the victim to be paid through the District Legal Services Authority, said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Panda.

In Baleswar

Miscreants open fire at woman in her house

A woman sustained bullet injuries after two miscreants opened fire at her inside her house at Raipal village under the Berhampur police limits in Baleswar district on Tuesday night.

The victim was identified as Laxmi Murmu (50), wife of Rasika Murmu, of the village of Nilgiri block.

According to a police source, Laxmi was attacked when she was sleeping along with her husband and their son. The miscreants barged

into their house and shot at the woman and fled from the spot.

Laxmi sustained injuries in her chest, waist and hands. The tribal woman was admitted to a local hospital before being shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack after her condition deteriorated.

"Laxmi is not out of danger and is critical now," a doctor treating her said. The reason behind the firing was not ascertained yet. Police launched a probe into the crime.

People's Forum feted on Disability Day



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik stressed upon empowerment of the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in the State, while speaking at a function organised by the State Government to mark the International Day of PwDs. The event was organised at KIIT campus from December 1 to December 3 where the PwDs, NGOs and other stakeholders participated.

Minister SSEPD Ashok Chandra Panda gave away the best NGO award to the

People's Forum which was received by its founder secretary Gobinda Chandra Pattnaik. Notably, People's Forum has been working for the welfare of the PwDs in different districts of Odisha in collaboration with the Government.

SSEPD Principal Secretary Bishnupada Sethi, Principal Secretary Skill Development and Transport Usha Padhee, Director Niyati Pattnaik, Bhubaneswar North MLA Susant Kumar Rout and BMC Mayor Sulochana Das also graced the prize distribution ceremony among others.

'Creative outlook in lit' talk in LK College

PNS ■ BARIPADA

A national seminar was organised in the Laxmikant Mahavidyalaya, Bangriposi, by the Department of Odia of the college, on theme, "Creative Outlook in Literature" on Saturday. Principal Dr Puspapa Patra presided.

Retired Professor Mohit Sarangi was the chief guest and Engineer Radhasyam Patra was the guest of honour on the occasion. LK College Odia Department Head Nirmal Chandra Sahu and Professor

Manoj Kumar Pradhan conducted the seminar, where Bahadagoda College Odia Department Head Dr Balakrushna Behera and Baripada Srimala College Professor Deepak Kumar Rout offered their views as experts.

A special issue of the literary magazine 'Malini' was released on the occasion. Others who attended the seminar include Khunta Degree College Odia Department Head Hiranmayee Satpathy and Dr Madhusmita Pyne, apart from research scholars.

Regional consultation on migrant children held



SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

With a view to tackling the issues of child migration, trafficking, child marriage and other vulnerabilities of children of western Odisha, the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR),organised a orientation workshop in collaboration with Aide et Action and UNICEF Odisha here on Tuesday.

OSCPCR Chairperson Mandakini Kar stressed the need for protection of migrants and other vulnerable children and sought cooperation of all sections of society to tackle the issue effectively.

Every year, large numbers of people from Balangir, Nuapda, Kalahandi, Bargarh

and other districts of western Odisha migrate to brick kilns of neighbouring States in search of livelihood. The children of migrant labourers also accompany their parents to brick kiln sites where they face torture, exploitation.

The children who are left in their houses in the villages also face deplorable conditions. Moreover, the post-Covid situation has increased the vulnerability of children to various forms of threats, exploitation and hardship.

The government has taken measures like the establishment of seasonal hostels for children affected by migration, support for those orphaned by Covid-19 through initiatives like the Ashirbad Yojana, implementation of action

plans to prevent child marriage, initiatives to combat child trafficking through the IAHTU and efforts to prevent child labour.

Civil society organisations, members of District Child Protection Units, district labour officials from Boudh, Subarnapur, Balangir, Nuapda, Kalahandi and other western Odisha districts shared the challenges they face while tackling the issue of migrant children in their district.

Director Migration & Education, Aide et Action Umi Daniel, Balangir Zilla Parishad Chairman Devaki Sahu, Additional SP Suresh Naik, ADM Lambodar Dharua and others spoke on different issues of migrants children and steps to tackle them.

Question of imposing cap on iron ore mining in Odisha

SC seeks Union Environment Ministry's view

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a significant development, the Supreme Court has asked the Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry to give its views on imposing a ceiling on iron ore mining in Odisha.

According to news agency ANI, a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud and comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was considering an application claiming that Odisha's iron ore reserves are to come to an end within 20 years.

"What is the ministry of environment's view?" the court asked as it considered an affidavit filed by the mines ministry, adding that the reply document did not consider the environment-related aspects.

"It cannot be that only the ministry of mines looks at it. The ministry of environment, forest and climate change has to apply its mind and tell us (on imposing a cap)," the Bench said.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, submitted that a fresh affidavit from the expert ministry would be placed on record.

Opposing the application, senior advocate Rakesh

Dwivedi, appearing on behalf of the Odisha Government, submitted that the availability of resources has grown with increasing consumption and the future generation is not just going to process this raw material.

"This iron ore leads to production of steel which is important for defence, all industries, and expanding railways. Any curtailment is going to mean that the future will suffer much more," he said, adding that intergenerational equity should not be looked at from the point of view of a particular resource only.

Dwivedi also contended that the argument that resources would be exhausted in the next 20-25 years has

no basis.

In a hearing held in August, the top court had asked the Union Government to "decide whether a cap on mining is necessitated in the case of the State of Odisha and, if so, the modalities to be followed for determining such a cap".

It had added that in arriving at its decision, the Union of India shall also examine the basis on which a cap was imposed in the States of Karnataka and Goa. Also, the apex court called for a fresh status report from the Odisha Government on the issue of recovering outstanding dues on account of illegal mining and attaching the assets of the defaulting entities.

Will raise PwDs' issues before Govt: B'pur MLA



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The World Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) Day was celebrated here on behalf of Mukta Aakash Dibyang Sanghatan.

Brahmapur MLA Bikram Kumar Panda inaugurated the function. BeMC Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai and Deputy Mayor E Vivek Reddy, Odisha Cashew Development Corporation Chairman Subash Chandra Moharana, local Corporator Chitrasen Moharana, former Corporator Dandapani

Nayak, BJD leader T Gopi and advisor Pravat Kiran Sadangi were present in the function.

MLA Panda assured that he would raise the different problems as well as the emergent need of the Dibyang People before the Government for its solutions. President of the Dibyang Forum Niranjana Badtya and secretary Kanha Mohapatra conducted the function. PwDs Suresh Yara Laxmi and Santoshi Sahu were felicitated. Convener of the Forum Narayan Sahu proposed vote of thanks.

'Brave land of Odisha taught me how to work for my Karmabhoomi'

In Srinagar, *Bibhuti Pati* spoke exclusively to the first Odia Director General of Police (DGP) of Jammu and Kashmir *Rashmi Ranjan Swain*. Here are the excerpts: *You are away from your native place in Odisha for quite long. What would you say about your command over Odia and Odisha?*

(Laughs) Odisha is my birthplace and Jammu Kashmir (J&K) is my world of action or you can say the terrain of labour (Karmabhoomi). This Karmabhoomi has given all the name and fame to me. I belong to the brave Odia fighter community and I am ready to sacrifice myself for this land of J&K. My motherland Odisha has taught me to do my duties with utmost devotion for my Karmabhoomi and serve my country. About my speaking chaste Odia, it has a history. I was studying in

Bhubaneswar Sainik School, where one studies mother tongue (Odia in my case) till class VIII. For the rest of my school days, I did not have any connection with Odia. When I entered college, I was not interested in studying Odia again. But my elder sister Prof Sabita Pradhan insisted that I should continue to be connected with Odia. Under pressure I studied Odia again during my intermediate class. Every day my sister and I have long conversations in chaste and fluent Odia.

How do the police propose to wage a war against terrorism?

No one can be better than the Jammu and Kashmir Police in fighting terrorism as no one knows the topography and demography like police personnel. Police and security agencies have made a strong resolution to fight against lo-

cal terror recruitment. I have organised a series of meetings with different border districts stressing upon the officers to maintain zero tolerance against terrorism, narcotics smuggling and corruption. We have decided to take stricter action against the supporters of terror. One of the very concrete steps that we have taken is rejuvenating border police posts and strengthening the intelligence. The civilian killings have come down drastically.

About narco-terrorism and drone crime?

Yes, narco-terrorism is a great challenge for us and a threat for the public. These days, narco- terrorism, separatism and local crime have all joined hands against the police and security forces. Countering this is a major issue and an overwhelming task for us. Our neighbouring State is en-



couraging such nefarious activities to create disturbance in India. Our present strategy has successfully controlled it, but much more needs to be done on this front. We have formulated a master plan to tackle

this. Under this plan we will decapitate the mastermind drug peddlers financially by seizing all their movable and immovable properties along with their bank accounts and homes. The drug mafias will

be rendered financially and socially powerless. This will be a signal to other such criminals to not to get involved in these businesses. The moment they find that this business is no longer profitable they will gradually step back from it. This is a long term plan which will see its success over a period of time. Similarly, drone crime is also posing a big threat to the security of the country especially in the border areas. As of now, no technology has been found to counter drone crime. But we have our plans in place such as strengthening intelligence in our border areas and creating awareness amongst the people living in the border villages. We are keeping a 24X7 hour vigil in and around the area; so we can find out who comes to claim any kind of objectionable materials like arms or weapons or drugs etc delivered by the drones.

I have heard about your holding a 'Public Darbar'?

'Public Darbar' is one of the steps to connect with people directly. We would try our best to bring back misguided youth but at the same time would not leave those who motivate them to join terror ranks. Meeting with people would help us to know different issues people are confronted with. We can solve some issues on the spot and some can take time. The Police Department's focus would be to ensure a fast-track grievance redressal system. Those who met me during the Darbar were upbeat as they were given a patient hearing. They expressed deep hope that their issues would now be solved as early as possible.

What is your plan for winter security?

In our maiden interaction, I as the DGP and General Officer Commanding-in-Chief

(GOC-in-C) Northern Command Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi strategised a winter security plan for building cohesion and synergy between the forces with a resolve to bolster safety and security of J&K. The significance of the meeting was in the backdrop of challenges – the winter season brings in its fold – in the form of spurt in infiltration bids before the closure of infiltration routes by the snow-fall.

Your focus?

My primary goal and focus is how the youth of J&K will be completely discouraged to join terrorist organisations and groups. Zero-recruitment for the terror organisation would be my first priority. In comparison to 2022 where around 110 youngsters joined in terror groups, today in 2023 the number has drastically come down to only 12.

‘No proposal to raise OBC quota as per population in local body polls’

Centre informs Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that there was no proposal to increase reservation for Other Backward Castes (OBC) as per population in the local body elections.

Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj Kapil Moreshwar Patil, during the Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, said OBCs are provided one-third reservation under Article 243D of the Constitution.

“However, 21 state governments have increased the reservation up to 50 per cent. The member has sought increasing the reser-

vation for OBCs as per the population in the local body elections. There is no such proposal before us,” he said.

In local bodies, there is a 50 per cent reservation for women. Under this quota, there is a provision to accommodate OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Patil added.

However, the state governments have the right to provide reservations for OBCs. “On this subject, the states should take a call at their level,” the Union minister said while replying to another supplementary question.

He said local body elections could not be held in Maharashtra due to the OBC



quota issue. The Supreme Court has said that the reservation cannot be increased beyond 50 per cent without empirical data. About women's reservation in local bodies, Patil said the Centre has made several efforts to empower elected women panchayat leaders, including providing them six months of training. There has been a rise in the participation of women in the governance process, he said.

The minister was responding to queries raised by YSRCP MP Ryaga Krishnaiyya, the DMK's

P Wilson and NCP leader Vandana Chavan.

Responding to another question, Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) with a budget outlay of Rs 24,000 crore was being implemented from this year to undertake tribal welfare initiatives.

“It is one of the largest Central schemes targeting the tribal community's development and aims to uplift the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG),” he said.

In the previous five-year plans, PVTG groups with less than 500 members were not covered which led to backwardness of many tribal communities. However the PM-JANMAN scheme targets to empower PVTG groups with 100 members, he said.

Modi to launch global investors summit in Dehradun

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the 'Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit 2023' in Dehradun on December 8 as the hill state looks to boost investment in the coming years, his office said in a statement on Wednesday.

Modi will also address the gathering on the occasion, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in its statement.

The 'Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit 2023' is a step towards establishing Uttarakhand as a new investment destination and the theme of the two-day event is 'Peace to Prosperity'.

The summit will be attended by thousands of investors and



delegates from across the world.

It will witness participation of Union ministers and ambassadors of various countries along with leading industrialists, among others, the statement said.

Karnataka facing draught, has sought ₹18,000 crore relief from Centre: Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka is reeling under the impact of severe drought and the state government has sought Rs 18,171 crores as relief from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said on Wednesday.

Raising the matter in the Upper House during the Zero Hour, the Congress president said Karnataka is grappling with the most severe drought in 123 years and the damage to crops is estimated at over Rs 35,162 crore.

According to him, the damage to crops ranges from 40-90 per cent.

Kharge said the state govern-

ment has sought Rs 18,171 crore from the NDRF to help the affected people.

“This financial support is crucial for providing input subsidies, gratuitous relief and implementing other immediate growth measures due to low rainfall (in Karnataka),” the senior Congress leader said.

He further highlighted that water levels in various reservoirs have reached an alarmingly low mark and there may also be a shortage of drinking water in the coming days.

Kharge also spoke about the flood situations in certain parts of Tamil Nadu, including Chennai. He also accused the BJP of not paying heed to the problems being faced by people as they have “won elections”.

Has Stalin also asked DMK leaders to apologise for insulting Sanatan Dharma: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday asked if DMK chief M K Stalin has asked party leaders, who had spoken against Sanatan Dharma, to also apologise after MP DNV Senthilkumar expressed regret in Lok Sabha for referring to Hindi heartland states in a derogatory manner in the House.

Addressing a press conference at BJP headquarters, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar also slammed the “silence” of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on the “repeated objectionable remarks about Sanatan”.

“I heard Mr TR Baalu say today that Chief Minister Stalin has told MP Senthilkumar to not make such statements. But there is

a question that has to be asked to Mr Baalu and (M K) Stalin.

“What about Udayanidhi Stalin's statement? Has he (M K Stalin) advised Udhayanidhi Stalin to apologise? What about A Raja? Has he (DMK chief) advised A Raja to apologise?” the BJP leader said.

“Why can't Stalin apologise?” he said.

He alleged that the opposition



INDIA bloc parties have started a “new chapter of divisive politics” with north-south divide remarks as their efforts to drive a wedge on religious lines for votes did not work in the just-concluded assembly polls.

The BJP will “firmly oppose” such politics played by the Congress and other members of the “INDI Alliance”, Chandrasekhar said.

“People of the country will

also totally oppose such politics and expose them,” he said at a press conference at the BJP headquarters.

Senthilkumar had on Tuesday used a pejorative to describe Hindi heartland states while attacking the ruling BJP. The comments led to a ruckus and adjournment in the House and were expunged by Speaker Om Birla.

BJP leaders had decried his remarks as “hate speech” and

said the voters will “wipe out” the INDIA bloc from southern India as well in the next elections. Facing flak, the DMK MP had later apologised.

“Commenting on the results of the five recent state assembly elections, I have used a word in an inappropriate way. Not using that term with any intent, I apologise for sending the wrong meaning across,” Senthilkumar said in a post on X.

‘Companies using vaping products to trap kids into life threatening menace’



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Citing various studies indicating that the aerosol from electronic devices such as e-cigarettes and e-hookahs can cause fatal health conditions such as lung inflammation, DNA damage and lung cancer, Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of concerned mothers combatting the escalating vaping crisis among youth, has expressed concerns that companies are using such products to trap kids into life-threatening menace.

The group called out international tobacco and vaping firms for deliberately targeting children to establish a consumer base for their addictive and harmful products including all kinds of new-age gateway devices such as e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn electronic devices.

Stressing on the critical need for increased awareness, the body has repeatedly highlighted on the urgency of educating the public about such intentions of these companies.

“Despite the ban on vaping devices and e-cigarettes in India, their availability is cultivating a generation addicted to these habits, potentially leading them towards tobacco use.

“It's crucial to debunk misconceptions that paint e-cigarettes as harmless vapor inhalation. Recent research underscores the substantial harm caused by inhaling these substances, posing risks to lung health and impacting various facets of children's development, including cognitive abilities and brain development,” said Varuna Pathak, former Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at the Gandhi Medical College.

Experts have highlighted that e-cigarettes and many new age gateway products are reported to contain approximately 900 to 2,000 distinct chemical entities with a substantial number still being unknown.

“In addition to being considered a gateway to lifelong tobacco habits, these new-age gateway devices are fostering a new generation of individuals becoming habituated to these products. This rising trend is not only prevalent globally but also noticeable in India. Similar to the concerns raised by Scottish parliamentarians, our own parliamentarians should engage in discussions with experts to ensure that vaping and e-cigarettes do not take root within our country, said Bhavna Barmi, internationally-acclaimed clinical psychologist, public speaker and head psychologist at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute.

“Recent trends indicate a shift where more young individuals are initiating nicotine use through vaping rather than traditional cigarettes. This presents a significant challenge - a new generation becoming addicted solely through the use of e-cigarettes, which in turn will give rise to various psychological challenges among users,” Barmi added.

This predatory targeting of children has also been highlighted by experts globally, and most recently it was raised in discussions in the Scottish Parliament.

Epidemiologist Professor Emily Banks underscored to the Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSPs the concerning and immoral intentions of vaping and tobacco giants to create ‘lifelong customers’ in children and teenagers. Her remarks aligned with growing expert support for a complete ban on disposable e-cigarettes in Scotland.

More than 45 nations which include Australia, Singapore, Thailand, Argentina, Japan, Brazil have implemented e-cigarette bans. In 2019, India commendably banned vaping and e-cigarettes under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act.

‘More tremors due to activation of Almora fault in Western Nepal’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Earthquake activity has increased in 2023 owing to the activation of the Almora fault in Western Nepal, the Government told the Parliament on Wednesday informing that there have been 97 earthquakes between magnitude 3.0 to 3.9 in 2023 compared to 41 in 2022.

“The activation of the Almora fault in western Nepal was the reason for earthquakes in parts of north India and Nepal,” Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a written reply in Lok Sabha.

He said the activation of the Almora fault triggered significant mainshock earthquakes on January 24 (5.8 magnitude), October 3 (6.2), and November 3 (6.4).

These mainshocks, accompanied by subsequent aftershocks, led to an increased frequency of earthquakes in 2023, Rijiju said, adding that the background seismicity remained unchanged during this period.

“It is common for northern India and Nepal to occasionally experience moderate earthquakes, and fluctuations in seismic activity.

Nepal and the neighbouring northern part of India, situated near the active faults of the Himalayan region, are highly seismically active areas prone to frequent earthquakes due to collision tectonics, where the Indian plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate,” he said.

Almora fault is a high angle west-northwest-east-southeast trending tectonic plane that separates the Garhwal group of inner lesser Himalaya in the north from Jaunsar and Dudatoli Groups of outer lesser Himalayas in the south. Rijiju said the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published the Seismic Zoning Map of India, ranging from Zone II to V and offers guidelines for implementing the essential engineering codes and practices to construct earthquake-resistant buildings.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has been the agency responsible for various precautionary measures such as earthquake drills, awareness programs, earthquake management to enhance preparedness and response to earthquake related incidents.

On January 24, an earthquake of magnitude 5.8 hit Nepal. It was strongly felt in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Girls who start menstruating as they turn 13 years at risk of developing type 2 diabetes in midlife: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A US research published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Nutrition Prevention & Health has found that girls turning 13 years old who start to menstruate risk developing type 2 diabetes in mid-life.

The researchers from Tulane University and Brigham and Women's Hospital in the US also found that having periods early in life, especially before 10 years of age, is also associated with an increased risk of getting a stroke before the age of 65 in those having diabetes, researchers found after analysing data of more than 17,000 women aged between 20 and 65.

However, they said that being an observational study, they couldn't establish the causes behind these associations.

“Earlier age at [first menstr-



al cycle] may be one of early life indicators of the cardiometabolic disease trajectory in women,” they suggested in their study.

The women included in the study came from the nationally representative cross-sectional National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2018. The women had specified the age at which they had their first menstrual cycle.

Of the women studied, about

10 per cent, or 1773, reported a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. Further, 11.5 per cent of these, or 203, reported some type of cardiovascular disease, the researchers found.

They quantified the increased risk of type 2 diabetes due to beginning to menstruate early in life as 32 per cent (periods at age 10 or before) through 14 per cent (age 11) to 29 per cent (age 12).

They also found that menstru-

ating before turning 10 was linked with a more than doubling in stroke risk among women below the age of 65 with diabetes. Specifically, they calculated the risk to be 81 per cent among those having their first period at the age of 11, 32 per cent at 12, and 15 per cent at 14.

“One potential pathway explanation may be that [such] women are exposed to oestrogen for longer periods of time, and early [menstruation] has been associated with higher oestrogen levels,” the researchers explained.

They also said weight could be another important factor influencing the results, as when they adjusted the data for weight, the observed associations between age at first menstrual cycle and stroke complications weakened slightly, albeit remaining significant.

The researchers said that these

findings supported the possibility that age of getting the first period may be incorporated into early-life strategies for preventing diabetes and progression of diabetes complications.

“These findings add another dimension to the potentially less well understood determinants of cardiometabolic risk, particularly in women who have been relatively underrepresented in this area of research,” said Sumantra Ray, Executive Director of the NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition & Health, which co-owns BMJ Nutrition Prevention & Health.

“And they provide a clear steer on the need to design interventional studies looking at the prevention of cardiometabolic disease in ethnically diverse groups of women who start menstruating at a young age,” he said.

Saudia taking measures for more fulfilling journey for Hajj

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saudi Arabia has rolled out a series of “transformative” measures like improving visa processing, accessibility and logistical support to ensure a more enriching experience for Indian pilgrims undertaking the journey to Mecca, Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfig bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah said on Wednesday.

In an interview to PTI, Al-Rabiah said the initiatives are specifically designed to provide Indian pilgrims with enhanced flexibility throughout their journey, particularly benefiting women embarking on independent Umrah trips.

The new steps like extension of the Umrah visa to 90 days and introduction of a four-day transit visa are tailored to accommodate the growing influx of Indian pilgrims.

“By promoting gender equality and cultivating a safer, more embracing environment, these changes collectively aim to ensure a more fulfilling and secure pilgrimage experience for all travellers,” he said.

Al-Rabiah, currently on a visit to India, held talks with Union Ministry Affairs Minister Smriti Irani and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday.

The influential minister said the aim of the new initiatives was to ensure “warmth and convenience” to the overall experience of the pilgrims.

1st nationwide CPR awareness event held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time in the country, a nationwide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) awareness programme was launched in the country with over 20 lakh participants including students, professionals and paramedical staff being given training in a single sitting online.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya after launching the much-needed programme stressed the need for raising awareness among people and about the importance of training to provide immediate help in case of cardiac arrest and save lives. The move follows shocking reports from across the country of healthy young people succumbing to cardiac arrests during routine daily activities when they had almost no prior health issues, much less cardiac problems..

The programme was prepared by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences on CPR training along with Ministers of State for Health Bharati Pravin

Pawar and SP Singh Baghel.

“It should be our effort to keep our heart healthy by taking a balanced diet and doing exercise regularly. However, in the proximity of someone suffering from cardiac arrest, if one is trained in CPR technique, it will enable them to save lives,” Mandaviya said.

“It is imperative that a patient is administered treatment immediately upon suffering a cardiac arrest. Hence awareness and adequate training in CPR is paramount,” he added while lauding the initiative of the NBEMC.

Mandaviya said, “It (CPR) is of critical importance as the victim of cardiac arrest needs help administered urgently. In light of this, it is crucial that there is heightened awareness amongst the public with adequate knowledge and training so that we can save someone's life.”

Praising people's participation in the training, Mandaviya said, “Anyone can suffer from cardiac arrest at any given point in time and enhanced knowledge and training will aid in administering the right procedures and save a life.”

2 days 16th MCSG meeting held: Ministry



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The 16th edition of the India-Germany Military Cooperation Sub Group (MCSG) meeting was conducted for two days starting Tuesday here, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

The meeting was co-chaired from the Indian side by Brigadier Vivek Narang, Deputy Assistant Chief of Integrated Staff IDC (A), HQ IDS, and Col (GS) Christian Schmidt, Director, Department International Cooperation Armed Forces Office from the German side.

The meeting was conducted in a friendly, warm, and cordial atmosphere. Discussions focused on new initiatives under the ambit of existing bilateral defence cooperation mechanisms and further strengthening ongoing defence engagements.

India-Germany Military Cooperation Sub Group (MCSG) is a forum established to boost defence cooperation between both nations through regular talks at the strategic and operational levels between the Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff, and the Department of International Cooperation Armed Forces.

CDS Chauhan presides over 1st session of combined leadership conclave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan presided over the first session of Combined Leadership Conclave and interacted with the senior leadership of the Armed Forces here on Wednesday. The CDS provided an insight into modern warfare and national security.

The three-day conclave is focussing on geo-strategic issues, national security and defence, contemporary and emerging security challenges and integration and jointness for capability enhancement as well as ‘Aatmanirbharta’ in defence.

Eminent personalities with renowned experience in respective fields will also interact with participants enlightening them about issues of national importance, defence ministry said.

The conclave aims to serve as a development programme for senior officers of the three services, focused on regional and national security issues with a view to enhance synergy, both at operational and strategic levels within the Armed Forces.

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) Lt Gen JP Mathew and other senior officers of HQ, Integrated Defence Staff were also present during the event.

Parts of Chennai suffer from inundation

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Residents grappled with stagnant water and power disruption in parts of the city and its suburbs on Wednesday, two days after Cyclone Michaung wreaked havoc in the metropolis and neighbouring districts, even as civic agency personnel stepped up relief and rehabilitation efforts.

The government said power was kept suspended in some areas as a “preventive measure” since the power cables were under water, while asserting all efforts were being taken to restore normalcy.

Another day’s holiday was declared for schools and colleges in Chennai on December 7.

The cyclone-triggered heavy rainfall had led to inundation in localities including Velachery and Tambaram. On Wednesday too, people were seen leaving their homes in the areas surrounded with water to safer zones, carrying their children and wading through the stag-

nant water. They called for help, including pressing more boats to ferry people to higher ground.

Chief Minister M K Stalin visited some of the affected areas and distributed food and essential commodities to people put up at a relief centre in the city. He inspected activities undertaken by the city civic body to drain water.

He also wrote to the Centre seeking an interim flood relief of Rs 5,060 crore to tide over the situation.

Many users on social media site ‘X’ shared videos of residential localities still being surrounded by stagnant water, claiming many residents were stuck inside. The hashtag #Velachery was trending on the microblogging site.

A user lamented that her relatives were stuck in their home for the last three days without power, drinking water and milk. There were complaints of delay in supply of milk in many affected parts including Velachery and Tambaram and residents alleged it was being sold for extra price.

CYCLONE MICHAUNG



A drone visual shows an area that is flooded after the landfall of Cyclone Michaung, in Chennai, on Wednesday

PTI

Power supply had not resumed in parts of the city including Kilpauk and Kattupakkam. The state government said relief activities were on in full swing

and that people in many of the affected areas were being rescued through inflatable boats even during midnight. Senior officials of the Greater

Chennai Corporation were overseeing the rescue and relief activities, the civic agency said. The Greater Chennai Police also announced helpline num-

bers for citizens to contact them for rescue and relief activities.

An update from the city police on Wednesday said six rain-related deaths were reported while many persons in need were rescued by the cops in different parts of the city. Among the rescued were aged persons and a number of pregnant women, and a woman and her newborn, an official release said.

Further, 11 subways in the metro remained closed for vehicular movement due to water-logging. There were no disruptions in operations at the airport while the Southern Railway announced cancelling a number of services and diversion of many others.

However, it announced resumption of the suburban services on the Chennai Egmore-Chengalpatt and Chennai Beach-Arakkonam routes with frequency of 30 and 45 minutes, respectively. Services on the Tiruvottiyur-Sullurpeta line will be operated in a hourly frequency, it said in an update.

Cyclone damages infrastructure in Andhra

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

The severe cyclonic storm Michaung, which crossed the Andhra Pradesh coast close to Bapatla on Tuesday and subsequently weakened into a cyclonic storm, left a trail of destruction in its wake. Michaung is expected to subside into a deep depression over the next six hours, said an official.

The storm damaged 770-kilometre roads, uprooted 35 trees and killed three livestock, among others.

According to data shared by the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO), nearly 40 lakh people from 194 villages and two towns were affected by Michaung’s impact, including the inundation of 25 villages. Though there was no loss of

human life on Tuesday, Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority Director BR Ambedkar told PTI that a four-year-old boy died after a hut wall collapsed on him in Tirupati district on Monday. While another person died in Bapatla district, Superintendent of Police Vakul Jindal told PTI that the cause of death was not related to the cyclone.

“The lone deceased person was found in a drunken state on a road by his motorcycle, which was not submerged under water, in the Inkollu village,” Jindal said. Across the state, 204 relief camps are accommodating 15,173 evacuees. As part of relief efforts, 18,073 food packets and more than 1 lakh water packets were distributed. Eighty health camps were also organised.



INDIA Bloc must act swiftly to finalise future strategies, says Nitish

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday sought to downplay BJP’s victory in three states in the Hindi heartland, stating that there is “no need to discuss much” on such wins of the saffron party, and said the opposition INDIA alliance must act swiftly to finalise its future strategies.

Kumar said he is now focusing on the next meeting of the INDIA coalition, which is scheduled in the third week of December.

“The Congress has performed well in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. These things happen in electoral politics. Earlier, there were Congress governments in these states...Now BJP has won. There is no need to discuss much on such issues. The Congress has won Telangana this time,” the JD(U) leader told reporters here while responding to queries about the BJP’s win in three states.

The meeting of the INDIA coalition, which was scheduled to be held on December 6, has been deferred as some senior leaders were unable to attend the same due to their preoccupations, Kumar said.

“I want the INDIA coalition to act swiftly to finalise its future strategies, including the seat-sharing issue, in the next meeting, which is scheduled to be held in the third week of December,” he said.

RJD president Lalu Prasad had on Tuesday claimed that top leaders of the INDIA bloc would meet on December 17 in Delhi to chalk out the strategy for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

“I am also not in a position to attend today’s meeting as I am not well. But, I will attend the next meeting of the INDIA coalition,” said Kumar, who played an instrumental role in bringing together different parties opposed to the BJP.

He said the opposition leaders will discuss issues related to seat sharing and also finalise several other strategies.

“My only wish is to unite the maximum number of parties before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Everything should be finalised at the earliest. I have no desire for myself,” Kumar said.

The 26-party opposition alliance, which has been formed to jointly take on the ruling BJP at the Centre in next year’s elections, have already held meetings in Patna, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Asked about Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s proposed visit to Bihar, Kumar said, “Yes, he is coming to chair the Eastern Zonal Council (EZC) meeting in Patna on December 10. We all will be there.”

The meeting is expected to be joined by the CMs of other member states Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.

He claimed that the grand alliance government in Bihar is working for the overall development of the state.

“This is the reason that we raised the quota for deprived castes in state government jobs and educational institutions, based on our caste survey report. We want that the Centre should also conduct caste-based census in the country and accord special status to Bihar for its growth,” Kumar added.

Female foeticide ring busted in Karnataka

PTI ■ MANDYA (K’TAKA)

Health officials on Wednesday launched a crackdown on medical scanning centres after a large-scale female foeticide ring was exposed carrying out medical termination of female foetuses at a makeshift surgical facility set up at a jaggery factory in a remote village of Mandya district.

The raids were carried out by the Mandya District Family Welfare Officer Venkataswamy and Pandavapura Sub-division Assistant Commissioner Nandish. They sealed scanning centres that did not comply with government guidelines and keep their records up to date.

The police recently arrested 10 people including doctors, nurses and agents, who had allegedly carried out over 900 female foeticides.

The gang used to contact pregnant women and persuade them to get a sex determination test done, for which they charged between Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000, according to police. They used to conduct the tests in the jaggery factory where all the required equipment was



kept, police said “If the tests showed a female child, they would ask those women whether they wanted to abort it.

Once the women agreed, the team would charge about Rs 50,000 to do the work. At least 900 female foeticides were carried out by the gang,” a senior police official said. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah noted that a CID probe has been ordered into the female foeticide case. Based on the report, stringent action will be taken against the culprits, he told reporters in the district headquarters town of Belagavi.

CHHATTISGARH 72 newly elected MLAs crorepatis

PTI ■ RAIPUR

As many as 72 out of 90 MLAs in the newly-elected Chhattisgarh legislative assembly are crorepatis, four more compared to the previous Vidhan Sabha. The BJP, which won a landslide victory in the recently-held elections, tops this list with 43 crorepati MLAs, followed by Congress. Out of 90 seats, the BJP has won 54 and Congress 35.

A total of 72 newly-elected MLAs (80 per cent of the House strength) are crorepatis. The BJP tops the list with 43 (80 %) of 54 MLAs each having declared assets valued at more than Rs 1 crore.

At 29, 83% of 35 MLAs of Congress are crorepatis, as per the analysis done by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and the Chhattisgarh Election Watch.

The average of assets per winning candidate in the state assembly elections held this time is Rs 5.25 crore compared to Rs 11.63 crore in the 2018 assembly polls.

With assets worth Rs 33.86 crore, BJP’s first-time MLA Bhawan Bohra (Pandariya seat) tops the crorepati club, followed by the outgoing chief minister and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel (Patan constituency) with assets worth Rs 33.38 crore. BJP’s Amar Agrawal (Bilaspur seat) stands at a third position with assets valued over Rs 27 crore. Congress MLA from Chandrapur, Ramkumar Yadav, and his BJP counterparts Ramkumar Toppo and Gomati Sai, the



incumbent MP who contested the assembly elections, are at the bottom of the list of MLAs with the lowest assets.

Yadav has declared assets worth Rs 10 lakh, the lowest among all MLAs, Toppo Rs 13.12 lakh, and Sai Rs 15.47 lakh, as per the analysis.

The report also states that 33 out of 90 MLAs (37 per cent) have declared their educational qualification as having passed class 5 to class 12. At 54, a maximum of 60 per cent of the total MLAs hold graduate

degrees or higher qualifications. Two others hold diplomas while an MLA has declared himself as just “literate”.

A total of 44 winning candidates (49 per cent) have declared their age between 25 and 50 years while 46 others (51 per cent) are between 51 and 80 years.

BJP’s Domanlal Korsewada (75), elected from the Ahiwara (SC) seat is the oldest MLA in the newly-elected assembly while Congress’ Bilaigarh (SC) legislator Kavita Pran Lahrey (30) is the youngest of all.

Will meet Shah, Jaishankar over refugees issue: Lalduhoma

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Lalduhoma, chief minister-designate of Mizoram, on Wednesday said he will soon meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to discuss the issue of refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and internally displaced people from Manipur.

Around 44,000 people from the two neighbouring countries and state have taken shelter in Mizoram due to several problems including ethnic strife.

Lalduhoma, the Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) leader, called on Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati at Raj Bhavan and staked claim to form the new government following his party’s victory in the assembly polls. His government is likely to take oath on Friday.

“I have telephonic conversations with the Home Minister

and External Affairs Minister on Tuesday. I will soon meet them in Delhi to discuss how the Centre and the state government can work together to look after the refugees and displaced people,” Lalduhoma told reporters after meeting the governor.

The 73-year ZPM leader said his government will continue to provide shelter to the refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh and displaced people from Manipur on humanitarian grounds.

He said that his government will also see if it can provide better relief to them compared to that by the outgoing MNF government.

The ZPM dethroned Zoramthanga-led Mizo National Front (MNF) on Monday, bagging 27 of the total 40 assembly seats.

Lalduhoma, an ex-IPS officer who had served as the security in charge of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, said



that he would discuss the country’s policy towards refugees from Myanmar with Jaishankar, who is his civil service batchmate. He expressed hope that the Centre will extend help to the state government to look after the Myanmar refugees as it is a humanitarian issue.

More than 31,300 Myanmar nationals and over 1,100 Bangladeshi nationals are currently in Mizoram, according to the state home department. These Myanmar nationals

belonging to the Chin community, who share ethnic ties with Mizos, have taken shelter since February 2021 following a military coup in the neighbouring country. The Bawm or Mizo community from Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts, who fled gunfights between the Bangladesh army and an ethnic insurgent group, fled to the northeastern state from November last year.

Besides, nearly 12,000 internally displaced people from Manipur have taken refuge in different parts of Mizoram since May this year due to ethnic clashes.

The outgoing MNF government had in May urged the Centre to provide financial assistance to the tune of Rs 10 crore for the internally displaced people from Manipur. In September, the Centre told the state government that it would assist it in kind.



Pakistan woman arrives in India to marry Kolkata man

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Pakistan woman arrives in India to marry Kolkata resident Karachi resident Javeria Khanum crossed over into the Indian side from Attari in Amritsar district where she was welcomed by her fiancé Sameer Khan and some members of his family to the beats of dhol.

Khanum has been granted a 45-day visa after two previous visa rejections and the Covid pandemic stalled their plans for around five years.

The couple, in a brief interaction with reporters at Attari, said the marriage will be solemnised in January next year.

“I have been granted a 45-day visa. I am very happy to be here. Just on arrival, I am already getting so much love here. In the first week of January the marriage will be solemnised,” she said.

She had tried to get a visa on two occasions, but got lucky the third time. “It is a happy ending and a happy beginning,” she said, expressing her happiness at being able to travel to India

to get married.

“Everyone back home was very happy. I can’t believe I have got the visa after five years,” she added.

Sharing how the couple got in touch, Khan said he expressed interest in marrying Khanum after seeing her photo on his mother’s phone.

“This started in May 2018. I had come home from Germany where I was studying. I saw her photo on my mother’s phone and expressed my interest. I told my mother that I want to get married to Javeria,” he said.

Earlier, the visa was rejected twice and in between there was the Covid pandemic, Khan said, adding that he was thankful to the Indian Government for the visa.

“My mother is very happy now that we will be getting married in January next year,” he said. Khan said his friends from his time in Germany – from Africa, Spain, the United States and other countries – are likely to attend his wedding.

The couple then left to catch a flight from Amritsar to Kolkata.

‘Illegal Bangladeshi immigrants changing demography in Jharkhand, Bihar, WB’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey Wednesday claimed the demography in many parts of Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal was changing because of a rise in infiltrations by illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and demanded the Centre implement National Register of Citizens (NRC) in these states. During the Zero Hour in Lok Sabha, the MP from Jharkhand’s Godda said, “I am raising this issue for the 100th time in 15 years as MP.”

“We talk about Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes. My state Jharkhand was separated from



Bihar as a tribal majority state. In 1951, the population of tribals was 36 per cent in Jharkhand. Today it is only 24 per cent.

He claimed that in Jharkhand the tribal population has gone down.

“The result is such that there is delimitation in the whole country but Jharkhand is a state where delimitation could not be done in 2008 because it will reduce one tribal seat in Lok Sabha and three tribal seats in the assembly,” Dubey said.

“Today the situation is that Bangladeshi infiltrators come and marry tribals. The Muslim population, especially in districts like Godda, Pakur, Sahibganj, Deoghar, and Jamtara, is increasing. This is not a Hindu-Muslim issue,” he said.

The BJP MP claimed that a sim-

ilar situation was being witnessed in neighbouring Bihar and West Bengal.

“When Mamata Banerjee was MP she had said the demography of Bengal was changing because of Bangladeshis. Since she became chief minister, Malda, Murshidabad and Kaliachak, is full of Bangladeshi infiltrators. Same is the situation in Katihar, Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, and Bhagalpur (of Bihar). Demography is changing because of Bangladeshis,” he said.

“The Government of India should bring the NRC and send away all Bangladesh infiltrators,” the MP said.

Vasundhara Raje heads to Delhi amid Rajasthan CM suspense

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Amid a suspense over the BJP’s chief ministerial pick for Rajasthan, senior party leader and former CM Vasundhara Raje was headed to New Delhi Wednesday night.

She was scheduled to take a flight to Delhi. Sources in the Raje camp said she would be meeting the party high command on Thursday. The development came after nearly 60 of the newly elected BJP MLAs met her at her Civil Lines residence on Monday and Tuesday.

The party sources said the name of the chief minister will be decided by the party’s parliamentary board and before that,

a BJP legislature party meeting will be called.

However, the party has not yet made any announcement regarding the legislature party meeting.

Raje, a two-time chief minister, is among the frontrunners for the post of chief minister.

In the assembly election results declared on Sunday, the BJP got 115 seats while the Congress secured 69 seats. Elections on 199 out of 200 seats in the state were held on November 25.

Polling in Karanpur, where the election was adjourned due to the demise of the Congress candidate, will be held on January 5 and results will be declared on January 8.

FIRST COLUMN

DISCIPLINE YOUR SENSES

Our senses would always seek their objects but we must keep them on a leash



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We have six senses, which are actively looking for gratification by contact with their objects. For example, our tongues look for tasty foods except when we are full. There is nothing wrong with it if these pleasures are within ‘dharma’/ ‘maryada’ (within allowable limits). God has allowed it, as stated by Lord Krishna in verse # 7.11 of the Bhagavad-Geeta, in which He stated, “I am passion in beings, according to religious principles.” He emphasised this point further in verse # 6.17, when He counselled, “One whose eating and recreation are appropriate; of one who strives appropriately in activities; of one who sleeps and stays awake, as required; his sufferings are less. Because sufferings there will be in this material world, described by the Lord as a place of miseries.” (8.15) But despite such warnings, we are forever ready to transgress allowable limits hoping to escape punishment. What happens will be clear as we go through the activities of these six active senses. Beginning with our tongue, all of us are guilty of indiscretions sometimes or other. Picture yourself invited to a very rich buffet dinner. You survey what is on offer, which will be a lot unless you are on a restricted diet. What should I eat? People load their plates as if they are starving. This explains our control over our senses. Shouldn’t we consider what is best for us to eat? Is it on offer? Then, why think so much? Just eat enough because more food will be available in a few hours for breakfast.



Let us go to our eyes next. It used to be okay till multiple channels came and now smartphones. There is so much to see, especially now one can watch with no one watching. Unfortunately, we are being watched all the time because ‘karmaphalas’ are being made by our acts. Wise people restrict themselves to what is useful and at worst, what is harmless like a sports programme. The pleasure of speaking occupies a very high place in modern man’s desires. Everyone is an expert on everything with Google playing its role. Doctors get frustrated when patients begin telling them what they should know. One doesn’t want to consider that if one was so wise why should he or she be in so much trouble? The fourth sense, which is also very active is our ears. What do we want to hear most? Our appreciation, which is how good we are compared to everyone around us. Again, like question begs an answer: why aren’t we satisfied with our lives then? Our skin occupies an important position in how we think. We place comfort in all considerations. Air conditioners, heaters, etc are all fine, but how about a little sweating it out with walks, yoga exercises, etc? What does a modern person value the most? Muscles of course to show off. People spend hours in gyms to build what is not needed which gives them trouble as they age. I have saved the next sense for the last, which gives us the maximum trouble. Yes, you have guessed it right. The sex pleasure is considered the topmost pleasure of all by almost everyone. Our thinking is normally defined by it. Lord Krishna has warned us about it in verse # 18.39, when He cautioned about ‘pramad’. The conclusion is obvious. We have senses and they would always seek contact with their objects. This is normal, but what is not normal is not restricting oneself to what is allowable. God would not have made such a system if it was not workable. It is very much so; only we have to be highly disciplined in thinking and acting, and we can live a satisfactory life.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Is India losing sheen for investors?



AS MITTAL

The slowdown in foreign direct investment in India is a cause for concern, as multinational corporations are finding other competitors more attractive

India's GDP grew by 7.6% in the second quarter (July-September) of the year, a positive sign of economic growth. However, the steepest declines in foreign direct investment (FDI) are a matter of concern, especially considering India's recent emergence as a promising investment destination and a viable alternative to China. This decline is particularly worrying as it is happening despite positive projections of India's growth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank. According to the latest report by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), FDI inflows have slowed down drastically. The decline in FDI inflows has been steep, and the situation has only worsened, with a further decline of -24% in April-September 2023. The current FDI inflows stand at \$20.48 billion, down from \$26.91 billion over the same period last year. Even the overall FDI inflows in 2022-23 witnessed a 16% decline, standing at \$71.3 billion from \$84.8 billion in 2021-22. The steepest declines in FDI have been in crucial sectors such as computer software and hardware, automobile, infrastructure construction activities, and metallurgical industries. For instance, inflows in computer software and hardware fell from \$14.4 billion in 2021-22 to \$9.3 billion in 2022-23, in the automobile industry from \$6.9 billion to \$1.9 billion, in infrastructure construction activities from \$3.2 billion to \$1.7 billion, and in metallurgical industries from \$2.2 billion to \$219 million. The slowdown in foreign direct investment (FDI) in India is a cause for concern, as multinational corporations (MNCs) are finding Vietnam, Indonesia, and other competitors more attractive. This is a clear indication that the "China plus one" strategy of MNCs is not working for India. During January-September of this year, FDI in Vietnam increased by approximately 8% compared to the same period last year, reaching about \$18 billion. In the case of Indonesia, FDI flows stood at around \$10 billion during January-September of this year, similar to the levels seen last year. The factors that influence capital flows into countries include the global and domestic macroeconomic environment, the domestic policy and regulatory environment, and political stability. Since India is expected to benefit greatly from the "China plus one" strategy, policymakers must pay closer attention to these FDI trends. It is well known that FDI flows are more likely to gravitate towards countries with broader and deeper trade agreements. Lower tariffs and other benefits negotiated through free trade agreements (FTAs) incentivise foreign investment. Therefore, the decline in FDI flows to India may reflect this. A deeper assessment of the country's prospects is needed to address this issue. India is genuinely the alternative to China for companies looking to diversify if it is the "one" in China plus one strategy if the Government's PLI scheme is a powerful enough incentive to draw in investments, and if the solid foundations of India's growth forecasts are taken into account, then MNC investor should be long on India. Any concerns regarding an uncertain business environment, an uneven playing field, or the fear of arbitrary



“THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CAPITAL FLOWS INTO COUNTRIES INCLUDE THE GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT, THE DOMESTIC POLICY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

changes to the rules of the game must not deter investors from investing in India. More states should be in the ambit of FDI: The scope of FDI must be expanded to more Indian states. FDI has been concentrated in only a few states due to their location and favourable business environment. Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat have together attracted a staggering 69% of the FDI inflows into the country, with Maharashtra being the top recipient. However, it is disappointing to note that Punjab ranks a lowly 12th in attracting FDI, with a cumulative investment of a meagre Rs. 7693 crore in the past four years, which is a paltry 0.49% of the total inflows of Rs. 15.08 lakh crore from October 2019 to September 2023. In contrast, the neighbouring state of Haryana has been more successful, ranking sixth with FDI equity inflows of Rs. 67,502 crore, accounting for a substantial 4.17% of the total inflows during the same period. Punjab's successive governments have been striving to attract investments, particularly from foreign investors, but they have been facing major hurdles such as location disadvantage, poor connectivity, and frequent protests. The existing industry in Punjab has also been complaining about disruptions in their operations and movements due to the aforementioned issues. Haryana is way ahead in this regard with a signif-

icant advantage due to its proximity to Delhi NCR and superior connectivity. It is high time that Punjab takes firm steps to improve its position in attracting FDI, as its highest ranking was only ninth in 2020-21, when it attracted FDI equity investment of Rs. 4,719.45 crore, primarily in food processing, auto components, engineering goods, and textiles. The declining trend in FDI inflows to Punjab since then is a cause for concern. Therefore, the state must create a more conducive environment for businesses and investors, and promote its potential in various sectors, to attract more FDI and boost its economy. Disadvantage: Despite signing and negotiating bilateral free trade agreements, India has failed to secure a trade agreement with the European Union or become part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) countries including China, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea for free trade agreements. The trade agreement between the 10 member states of ASEAN and their free trade agreement partners - Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea - has deepened economic integration between these countries, which are at the heart of manufacturing supply chains. As a result, India's exclusion from such agreements and the supply chains that run through these regions puts it at a significant dis-

advantage in this manufacturing ecosystem. The Way Forward: Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) have a far greater potential to facilitate the growth of the Indian economy than Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI). However, India needs to take swift and assertive action to speed up structural reforms, root out corruption, and reduce red tape in bureaucracy to strengthen its position as the most attractive investment destination for FDI. India has adopted a negative list approach in its FDI policy, which outlines only those sectors and activities where foreign investment is regulated. Sectors not mentioned in the document are open to obtaining 100% FDI under the automatic method. The liberal and attractive policy regime for investors, combined with a favourable business climate and reduced regulatory framework, have resulted in higher FDI inflows. But this alone is not enough. India needs to complement this with a sound trade policy that boosts exports, encourages inclusive development, and incentivises R&D to make our manufacturing ecosystem globally competitive, thereby fetching FDI at a large scale.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are strictly personal)

Artificial Intelligence is transforming the steel industry

A step-by-step approach is the best to implement artificial intelligence. Scores of AI models are available for use in the steel units which can be tried without much hassle

Technology is ever-evolving. While it becomes difficult to keep pace with rapid technological advancements in all expanses of life, it is equally difficult to discount them because these are highly value-accretive. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one such technology. The manufacturing sector, in general, and the steel sector, in particular, are integrating AI into their daily operations to improve productivity, health and safety, reduce operational costs and reap countless other operational and functional benefits. Survival will be at stake for those who will not. In a developing nation or the Global South, cheaper availability of steel is a prequel to ensure sustainable development. Since raw materials for



ALOK SAHAY

making steel are unlikely to be economical in the foreseeable future, adaptation of modern disruptive technologies and processes is the only way out. Estimates suggest that the proper adaptation of AI in the entire value chain of steelmaking can save between \$60 and \$100 per tonne. Apart from this, a key takeaway from the recently concluded ISA Steel InfraBuild Summit in Lucknow was that the use of AI in architecture will enable engineers and architects to design, plan, and build steel structures more efficiently, resulting in proper economics and savings in infrastructure and real estate. In the steel sector, AI can be adopted in R&D and innovation to procurement, manufacturing and back-office

process digitalisation to supply-chain inventory, marketing, and whatnot. All these can lead to a 60% growth in EBDITA in three years. Greenhouse gas emissions can also be reduced by 5-10%. Maintenance is, as always, a difficult task. Each manufacturing unit has its maintenance plan tailored to its particularities. Proper implementation and use of AI can help predict the exact timing of maintenance, thereby reducing shutdown time, cutting maintenance costs, and enhancing the lifespan of the machinery. The Indian steel industry has been the early adopter of AI. Adaptation of AI has the highest impact on steel manufacturing in the entire value chain. In the coke oven plant, sinter plant, blast furnaces,

continuous caster and rolling, among others, the implementation of AI has multiple benefits ranging from 1-2% yield improvement to a 50-80% reduction in quality losses. Energy consumption also improved by roughly 10%. Autonomous or semi-autonomous data or content examination also makes predictions and recommendations easier. Integration of sales and production data improves revenue management and customer satisfaction. With precise data, AI's ability to predict market data and price fluctuations helps manufacturers adjust production, manage inventories, and respond swiftly to changing market conditions. Enhancing safety is also another essential

aspect. No wonder steel manufacturers worldwide are embracing AI to ensure faster delivery of business requirements. This is the age of intelligent manufacturing. Far from having a steel-producing smart factory, intelligent manufacturing encompasses all of it - sourcing raw materials to production to marketing products through an integrated intelligent supply chain. Steel consumption mirrors the health of an economy. Aspiring to be in the league of a developed nation, India has miles to go to catch up with the global steel consumption average. The building, construction and infrastructure sector consumes nearly 70% of all steel in India. The growth of the steel sector will largely depend on the demand emanating

from the infrastructure sector. While AI adaptation will benefit the steel sector, implementing AI in the infrastructure sector will help assess the sector's specific needs - such as identifying cost-effective high-strength steel structure-based designs and offering tailor-made products. Adaptation, both in the steel and the infrastructure sector, is a challenging task. A mindset of experimentation and a determination to bring about positive changes are required. With AI, the ultimate goal is to implement an automated and unsupervised process linked with software and processes to improve performance over time. However, there is no substitute for human capital, and once integrated with AI, it will do wonders if used for the benefit of mankind and planet Earth. The apprehension that AI will displace jobs is unfounded. However, the dynamics of the job will change, requiring manpower with digital skills. It also warrants upskilling existing employees. A step-by-step approach is the best to implement AI. Building on the following line from the learnings of the first will yield the best results. Scores of AI models are in use in different steel manufacturing units in the country. The use of transformative technology will only go up in the days ahead. We need to be ready to adapt to the changes and implement it.

(The writer is the Secretary General of, the Indian Steel Association (ISA), views are personal)

Heavy fighting across Gaza halts aid delivery

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces battled Hamas militants across Gaza on Wednesday after expanding their ground offensive to its second-largest city, further shrinking the area where Palestinians can seek safety and halting the distribution of vital aid across most of the territory. The assault on the south threatens further mass displacement within the besieged coastal enclave, where the U.N. says some 1.87 million people — over 80 per cent of the population — have already fled their homes. North, including large parts of Gaza City, has been completely destroyed, and Palestinians fear the rest of Gaza could suffer a similar fate as Israel tries to dismantle Hamas, which has deep roots in the territory it has ruled for 16 years.

Israel says it can no longer accept a Hamas military presence in Gaza after the October 7 attack that triggered the war, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control over the territory, something opposed by the United States and much of the international community. The Israeli military said Tuesday that its troops were “in the heart” of the southern city of Khan Younis after what it described as “the most intense day” of fighting since the start of the ground operation five weeks ago, with heavy battles in the north as well.

PUSHED TO THE EDGE

For the past three days, aid distribution — mainly just supplies of flour and water — has been possible only in and around Rafah, on the southern border with Egypt, because of fighting and road closures by Israeli forces, the U.N.’s humanitarian aid office said.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said fuel and medical supplies have reached “critically low levels” at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, north of Khan Younis. Up to 200 wounded people have been brought in every day since December 1, when a weeklong truce expired, it said. “Without electricity, ventilators would



Relatives of Israeli hostages Eli and Yossi Sharabi, Tsachi Idan and Idan Shitvi attend a ceremony and a prayer for their liberation at the synagogue in Lisbon, Tuesday. The families are in Lisbon to ask for the help of the Portuguese government in securing the hostages release.

AP/PTI

cease to function, blood donations would have to stop, the sterilization of surgical instruments would be impossible,” said Marie-Aure Perreaut Reval, the aid group’s emergency coordinator in Gaza. She said they are also running low on surgical supplies and external fixators for broken bones.

Gaza has been without electricity since the first week of the war, and Israel has severely limited fuel imports, forcing several hospitals to shut down because they cannot operate emergency generators. Thousands of people have fled to the Rafah since Israel resumed its offensive after the cease-fire, including many from the north who have been displaced multiple times.

Hamza Abu Mustafa, a teacher who lives near a school-turned-shelter and is hosting three families himself, said “the situation is extremely dire.”

“You find displaced people in the streets, in schools, in mosques, in hospitals ... everywhere.”

A Palestinian woman who identified herself as Umm Ahmed said the harsh conditions and limited access to toilets are especially difficult for women who are pregnant or menstruating. “For women and girls, the suffering is double,”

she said. “It’s more humiliation.” Palestinian women have recently taken to social media to request menstrual pads, which are increasingly hard to find. “I apologize for raising such a matter,” one user wrote on X, adding that there were 15 girls staying in her house. “What are we supposed to do?”

HUNDREDS KILLED SINCE CEASE-FIRE

The war has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza — 70 per cent of them women and children — and wounded more than 42,000, according to the territory’s Health Ministry, which released new figures late Tuesday. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but its overall tally tracks with a figure released by the Israeli military this week.

The ministry says hundreds more have been killed since the cease-fire ended Friday, and many still are trapped under rubble.

The military accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields when the militants operate in residential areas. But Israel has not given detailed accounts of individual strikes, some of which have leveled entire city blocks. Military Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi

said militants keep weapons in homes and other buildings so fighters in civilian clothes can use them to fire on troops.

“Striking them requires significant use of fire, both to target the enemy but also to, of course, protect our forces,” he said Tuesday. Israel says it must remove Hamas from power to prevent a repeat of the October 7 attack, when Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took captive some 240 men, women and children after bursting through Israel’s vaunted defenses. More than 100 hostages were released during last week’s cease-fire, along with 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But an estimated 138 hostages remain in Gaza, mostly soldiers and civilian men, and accounts of widespread rape and other atrocities committed during the rampage have deepened Israel’s outrage and further galvanized support for the war.

Experts have been piecing together evidence in recent weeks in a case that is complicated because there are no known victims to testify and limited forensic evidence. Biden’s comments come as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has sought to put greater focus on the sexual violence it says Hamas committed during the October 7 attack that killed some 1,200 people on Israeli soil and led to another 240 being taken hostage. Some recently released hostages have shared testimonies of sexual violence and abuse during their time in

NO END IN SIGHT

Hamas’ continuing ability to fight in the north, where Israel entered with overwhelming force weeks ago, signals that eradicating the group without causing further mass casualties and displacement — as Israel’s top ally, the US has requested — could prove elusive.

Hamas raping Israeli hostages appalling: Biden

AP ■ BOSTON

President Joe Biden has forcefully denounced the reported rape and sexual violence against Israeli girls and women by Hamas militants following the October 7 attack on Israel, calling on the world to condemn such conduct “without equivocation” and “without exception.”

Speaking at a campaign fundraiser in Boston on Tuesday, Biden noted that in recent weeks, female survivors and witnesses to the attacks have shared “horrific accounts of unimaginable cruelty.”

“Reports of women raped — repeatedly raped — and their bodies being mutilated while still alive — of women corpses being desecrated, Hamas terrorists inflicting as much pain and suffering on women and girls as possible and then murdering them,” Biden said. “It is appalling.”

Israel has said it is investigating several cases of sexual assault and rape from the Hamas attack on Israel. Witnesses and medical experts have said that Hamas militants committed a series of rapes and other attacks before killing the victims in the October 7 attack, though the extent of the sexual violence remains unknown.

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Gaza.

Hamas has denied that militants committed sexual assaults. Netanyahu railed against the lack of international response during a press conference on Tuesday evening.

“I say to the women’s rights organizations, to the human rights organisations, you’ve heard of the rape of Israeli women, horrible atrocities, sexual mutilation — where the hell are you,” asked Netanyahu.

Israel hosted a special event at the United Nations on Monday where former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, and former Meta chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg were among those who criticised what they called a global failure to support women who were raped, sexually assaulted and in some cases killed.

The comments from Biden came one day after White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the militants’ alleged assaults on women “reprehensible.”

Jean-Pierre, who underscored that she was speaking on behalf of the president, was responding to a question about comments made by Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a California Democrat, during a CNN interview in which she responded to a question about rape by Palestinian militants by saying, “I think we have to be balanced about bringing in the outrages against Palestinians, 15,000 Palestinians have been killed.”

Jayapal later issued a statement clarifying that she “unequivocally” condemns “Hamas’ use of rape and sexual violence as an act of war.” As a senator, Biden was the author of the Violence Against Women Act, which was signed into law in 1994. He referenced his work on the issue as a lawmaker as he spoke out against the allegations of sexual violence by Hamas.

US President: If Trump wasn’t running I’m not sure I’d be running

AP ■ BOSTON

President Joe Biden told campaign donors Tuesday that he wasn’t sure he’d be running for reelection if Donald Trump wasn’t also in the race, warning that democracy is “more at risk in 2024” and that the former president and his allies are out to “destroy” democratic institutions. The president was using a trio of fundraisers to caution against what might happen should his predecessor again claim control of the White House, noting that Trump has described himself as his supporters’ “retribution” and has vowed to root out “vermin” in the country.

“We’ve got to get it done, not because of me. ... If Trump wasn’t running I’m not sure I’d be running. We cannot let him win,” Biden said, hitting the last words slowly for emphasis.

Biden’s forceful rhetoric came as Trump, the current GOP front-runner, who tried to overturn the 2020 election he lost and is facing criminal charges connected to those efforts, attempted over the weekend to turn the tables by calling Biden the “destroyer of American democracy.”

Trump on Tuesday was asked by Fox News Channel’s Sean Hannity to promise he “would never abuse power as retribution against anybody.” “Except for day one,” Trump responded. “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.”

“After that I’m not a dictator,” Trump added.

Biden, who said he is not alone in sounding the alarm over Trump, noted that Trump is the “only losing candidate” in US history to not accept the results.

Biden also said that on Jan. 6, 2021, as Trump supporters violently stormed the US Capitol in a failed attempt to stop the certification of the election results, Trump sat in his dining room just off the Oval Office, “watching them threaten his own vice president.”

Trump declines to rule out abusing power to seek retribution if he returns to WH

New York (AP): Former President Donald Trump declined to rule out abusing power if he returns to the White House after Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity asked him Tuesday to respond to growing Democratic criticism of his rhetoric.

The GOP presidential front-runner has talked about targeting his rivals — referring to them as “vermin” — and vowed to seek retribution if he wins a second term for what he argues are politically motivated prosecutions against him. As Trump has dominated the Republican primary, President Joe Biden has stepped up his own warnings, contending Trump is “determined to destroy American democracy.”

“Under no circumstances, you are promising America tonight, you would never abuse power as retribution against anybody?” Hannity asked Trump in the interview taped in Davenport, Iowa.

“Except for day one,” Trump responded. “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.” Trump then repeated his assertion. “I love this guy,” he said of the Fox News host. “He says, You’re not going to be a dictator, are you?” I said: ‘No, no, no, other than day one. We’re closing the border and we’re drilling, drilling, drilling. After that, I’m not a dictator.’” Earlier in the interview, Hannity had asked Trump if he “in any way” had “any plans whatsoever, if reelected president, to abuse power, to break the law to use the government to go after people.”

Ex-UK PM Johnson says ‘sorry’ for COVID pain & loss



PTI ■ LONDON

Britain’s former prime minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday said he is “deeply sorry” for the pain and the loss caused by COVID-19 as he gave his evidence to the ongoing official public inquiry into the government’s handling of the pandemic which hit the country in early 2020.

Johnson, who was in charge as the prime minister of the day, admitted he should have “twigged” the widespread health impact of coronavirus but insisted he had to take “very, very difficult decisions” as the crisis was fast unfolding. Inquiry chair Baroness Heather Hallett, who has been hearing evidence in London since June, had to get a protester removed from the room as they held up a poster reading: “The dead can’t hear your apologies.”

“I am deeply sorry for the pain and the loss and the suffering of those victims and their families,” said Johnson, after swearing on the ‘Bible’ for his evidence. “I do hope that this inquiry will help to get the answers to the very difficult questions that those victims and those families are rightly asking so that we can protect ourselves better, help each other to protect ourselves better and prevent further suffering,” he said.

The former PM was reminded by barrister Hugo Keith of the more than 230,000

COVID-linked deaths in the country as a “shocking figure and a terrible loss of life”. Johnson acknowledged that was the “core of the tragedy” and that “inevitably...we may have made mistakes.”

“The tragedy is that we were operating on a fallacious, inductive logic about previous reasonable worst case scenarios, and this one and this was the one where I am afraid the worst predictions turned out to be correct,” he told the inquiry.

“I think we were doing the best we could at the time, given what we knew, given the information we had at the time, I think we were doing our level best. Were there things that we should have done differently? Unquestionably,” he said.

He revealed that the government “underestimated the scale and pace of the challenge”, thinking the peak of the virus would come in May or June 2020. Johnson also said he took responsibility for the speed of the government’s response to the pandemic, the lockdown decisions and their timelines.

His evidence is expected to last for two days and follows the evidence of his Cabinet colleagues from the time, former health secretary Matt Hancock and levelling up secretary Michael Gove. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who was chancellor of the exchequer at the time, is expected to give his evidence in the coming weeks.

Top US , Chinese diplomats agree to build on recent progress in ties

Beijing (AP): The top US and Chinese diplomats agreed on Wednesday to keep building on recent progress in bilateral ties and work together to keep the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza from spreading. Both Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken referred in a telephone call to last month’s closely watched meeting between the two countries’ leaders in San Francisco following years of frigid ties.

“The important task for both sides at present is to continue the positive impact of the San Francisco meeting, implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state, and consolidate the momentum of stabilising Sino-US relations,” Wang said, according to China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Blinken also emphasised that the two sides should build on progress at the summit, according to the US State Department. President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping agreed at their meeting to keep channels of communication open and resume military-to-military talks. Yet, major political differences between the countries remain far from resolved.

Wang and Blinken also discussed the Israel-Hamas war, where China has been trying to play a role in negotiations, and agreed to maintain communications on the situation. Last Wednesday, China presented a four-point peace plan to the United Nations on ending the conflict, although the plan lacked detail. Blinken also raised recent attacks on shipping vessels in the Red Sea by Yemen’s Houthi rebels, an escalation in a series of maritime attacks in the Mideast linked to the Gaza war, and said it was important to keep the conflict from spreading.

Wang said any solution to the crisis in Gaza requires a two-state arrangement that reflects the will of the Palestinian people.

COP28 secures USD 83 bn in climate pledges

PTI ■ DUBAI

The first week of the COP28 global climate talks concluded with a significant milestone with the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, pledges of over USD 83 billion and the draft text for Global Stocktake mentioning phasing out of all fossil fuels for the first time in years.

However, even as over USD 83 billion was mobilised in pledges questions persist about the voluntary nature of these commitments and the actual fulfilment by the participating nations.

Amidst the discussions, the issue of fossil fuels emerged as a focal point, with a new draft text of the Global Stocktake proposing options for the phase-out of unabated coal and an orderly and just transition away from fossil fuels which might be a contentious point for India. India has repeatedly stressed that



phasing out or phasing down coal language is something that it can’t support.

India even skipped signing the pledge to commit to tripling the global renewable energy capacity by 2030 over this.

Over the reduction of greenhouse gases, India also refrained from signing the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health.

The Global Stocktake, released on Tuesday, represented the first periodic review

of global efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. India, representing the BASIC bloc, played a prominent role in advocating for accountability.

The nation emphasised the necessity for the Global Stocktake to consider the failures of developed nations.

Delegates from the BASIC grouping, comprising Brazil, South Africa, India, and China, voiced concerns about the fragmented multilateralism of

developed nations during preliminary negotiations, sources said.

Despite initial challenges in substantive negotiations, the first week of COP28 witnessed a flurry of pledges.

An analysis by independent science-based assessment Climate Tracker revealed historic declarations on food systems transformation, health, renewable energy, and efficiency, along with initiatives to decarbonise heavy-emitting industries.

Key pledges and declarations included a groundbreaking agreement to operationalise and capitalise funding for Loss and Damage, with an impressive USD 726 million already pledged.

Additionally, efforts were made to replenish the Green Climate Fund (GCF) with USD 3.5 billion, bringing the total to USD 12.8 billion.

Contributions of USD 133.6 million to the Adaptation

Fund, USD 129.3 million to the Least Developed Countries Fund, and USD 31 million to the Special Climate Change Fund were also announced.

The UAE further committed USD 200 million to help vulnerable countries through Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and USD 150 million to fund water security solutions.

International financial institutions joined the effort, with the World Bank announcing an annual increase of USD 9 billion for 2024 and 2025 to finance climate-related projects. Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) collectively pledged over USD 22.6 billion toward climate action.

As COP28 transitions into its second week, anticipation builds for increased progress in substantive negotiations, with the hope that the momentum generated by substantial financial pledges will translate into meaningful actions to address the global climate crisis.

Bodies of 6 crew lost in Osprey crash recovered

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Air Force Special Operations Command said on Tuesday it has recovered the remains of six of the eight service members who were lost when their Osprey crashed off the coast of Japan last week, adding it is now focused on recovering the two bodies still missing and the aircraft debris. The CV-22B Osprey crashed on November 29 during a training mission. Ospreys have had a number of crashes, including in Japan, where they are used at US and Japanese military bases, and the latest has rekindled safety concerns.

Three bodies were recovered from the sunken wreckage, and a total of six of the eight crew members’ remains that had been located have now been recovered, the Air Force said. The search continues for the remains of the two crew members still unaccounted for, it added. “The depth of sorrow is immeasurable,” Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, who heads Air Force Special Operations Command, said in a statement announcing the names of the crew. “The honorable service of these eight airmen to this great nation will

never be forgotten, as they are now among the giants who shape our history.”

President Joe Biden said he and first lady Jill Biden were heartbroken by the loss. “We owe them everything,” Biden said in a statement. “Jill and I are praying for the families and friends who lost a loved one in this terrible accident.”

LOST CREW MEMBERS WERE:

US Air Force Maj. Jeffrey T. Hoernemann, 32, of Andover, Minnesota, was a CV-22 instructor pilot and officer in charge of training, assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan. US Air Force Maj. Eric V. Spendlove, 36, of St. George, Utah, was a residency trained flight surgeon and medical operations flight commander assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Maj. Luke A. Unrath, 34, of Riverside, California, was a CV-22 pilot and flight commander assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations

Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Capt. Terrell K. Brayman, 32, of Pittsford, New York, was a CV-22 pilot and flight commander assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Tech. Sgt. Zachary E. Lavoy, 33, of Oviedo, Florida, was a medical operations flight chief assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake M. Turnage, 25, of Kennesaw, Georgia, was a flight engineer assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Senior Airman Brian K. Johnson, 32, of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, was a flight engineer assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan. US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob “Jake” M. Galliher, 24, was a native of Pittsfield, Mass. His remains were the first to be found. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent a message

to Biden, offering his heartfelt condolences to the families of those who were lost and to the American people and his thanks for their dedication away from home for the peace and stability of Japan and the region.

The US-made Osprey is a hybrid aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter but can rotate its propellers forward and cruise much faster, like an airplane, during flight. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Japan has suspended all flights of its own fleet of 14 Ospreys. Japanese officials say they have asked the US military to resume Osprey flights only after ensuring their safety. The Pentagon said no such formal request has been made and that the US military is continuing to fly 24 MV-22s, the Marine version of Ospreys, deployed on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa.

In Tokyo, Defence Ministry Press Secretary Akira Mogi said Tuesday that deployment of Ospreys is key to a defence buildup in southwestern Japan due to current regional security concerns but acknowledged the need to address the residents’ safety worries rekindled by the crash.

Putin visits Saudi & UAE as Ukraine war grinds on

AP ■ DUBAI

Russian President Vladimir Putin began a trip on Wednesday to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, hoping to shore up support in the Mideast from two major oil producers allied to the US as his war on Ukraine grinds on. Putin landed in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms now hosting the United Nations' COP28 climate talks. It marked his first trip to the region from before the coronavirus pandemic and the war — and as he faces an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court over the war in Ukraine.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE has signed the ICC founding treaty, meaning they don't face any obligation to detain Putin over the warrant accusing him of being personally responsible for the abductions of children from Ukraine during his war on the country. Putin skipped a summit in South Africa over concerns he could be arrested on arrival there.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's foreign minister, met a smiling Putin after he bounded down the stairs of his presidential plane. As he arrived at Abu Dhabi's Qasr al-Watan palace to meet Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the country's ruler, the UAE's military acrobatics team flew in formation with red, white and blue smoke trailing them in the colours of the Russian flag.

Soldiers on horseback and with camels lined his arrival route, Russian and Emirati flags also hanging from light-poles.

The pageantry in the Emirates, which relies on America as its major security partner, highlights the UAE's expansive business ties to Russia that have exploded in the time since grinding Western sanctions have targeted Moscow.

Ukrainians on hand for the event expressed outrage over Putin being in the country at



United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, right, greets Russian President Vladimir Putin upon his arrival at an international airport in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Wednesday. AP/PTI

the same time they described him as committing environmental crimes in their country.

"It is extremely upsetting to see how the world treats war criminals, because that's what he is, in my opinion," said Marharyta Bohdanova, a worker at the Ukrainian pavilion at the United Nations COP28 climate summit in Dubai, wiping away tears. "Seeing how people let people like him in the big events, ... treating him like a dear guest, is just so hypocritical in my opinion."

Officials at Russia's pavilion at the talks declined to speak to The Associated Press.

Putin last visited the UAE in 2019, receiving a warm welcome from Sheikh Mohammed, then the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. In the time since, however, the world has greatly changed.

The Russian president isolated himself during the coronavirus pandemic. He launched an invasion targeting Ukraine in February 2022, a grinding war that continues on today and has been a topic for Ukrainian diplomats at the COP28 talks.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas war remains a major

concern for the Mideast, particularly the UAE, which reached a diplomatic recognition with Israel in 2020. Recent attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels also threatens commercial shipping in the Red Sea as Iran's nuclear program continues its rapid advances since the collapse of the 2016 nuclear deal.

Putin is scheduled to meet with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Thursday for what Ushakov has described as "a rather lengthy conversation." The two countries have been discussing ways to get around the Western sanctions targeting them.

Putin will travel onto Saudi Arabia and meet with powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the one-day trip, Ushakov said. Those discussions likely will focus on Moscow's other major concern in the Middle East — oil.

Russia is part of OPEC+, which is a group of cartel members and other nations that have managed production to try and boost crude oil prices. Last week, the group expanded some output cuts into next year and brought up and-coming oil supplier Brazil

into the fold. Benchmark Brent crude traded Wednesday around USD 77 a barrel, down from nearly USD 100 in September, over concerns about a weakening economy worldwide.

The visit comes after COP28 saw a parade of Western leaders including US Vice President Kamala Harris, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and others backing Ukraine speak at the summit. So did Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, long a Putin ally.

A readout on Putin's trip from the state-run Tass news agency published early Wednesday offered no suggestion Putin might come to the COP28 site, instead quoting Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov saying he'd land and have a "meeting at the palace" and one-on-one talks with Sheikh Mohammed. Still, some reports suggest Putin could make an appearance at the climate talks.

The UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change's spokesperson Alexander Saier said at a press conference that he is "not aware that Mr. Putin will come to the conference, but I would also need to check the host country with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." He declined to immediately answer whether UN police would be obligated to make an arrest.

The Emirati organisation committee for COP28 referred questions to the UAE's Foreign Ministry, which did not immediately respond. The UAE repeatedly feted the now-deposed Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir in the past despite an ICC warrant seeking his arrest over charges of genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

I'm talking about his crimes and this person is literally right now here, somewhere near me," said Alina Abramenko, another worker at the Ukrainian pavilion that highlights the environmental damage wrought by the war. "You know, it's really strange."

Court rejects Imran's plea to withdraw appeal against disqualification

TOSHAKHANA CORRUPTION CASE

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani high court on Wednesday rejected former premier Imran Khan's plea to withdraw his appeal against his disqualification in the Toshakhana corruption case, on a day when the election watchdog announced to conduct an in-prison hearing of a contempt case against him.

Khan, 71, has been in jail since August 5, when he was arrested after a conviction in the Toshakhana case. He was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on October 21 in the case for failing to disclose the proceeds from the sale of gifts he got from the Toshakhana (state repository).

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader approached the Islamabad High Court Chief (IHC)

against the electoral body's decision, contending that he had purchased the assets legally; hence, there was no reason for him not to mention the gifts in his assets statement.

However, on January 18, the PTI filed a fresh plea in the IHC to withdraw the petition, saying the cricketer-turned-politician wanted the Lahore High Court (LHC) to hear the matter. A separate petition had been filed in the LHC against Khan's disqualification. A division bench of the IHC comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri announced the verdict, which was reserved on September 13, rejecting Khan's request to withdraw his petition against disqualification in the case.

In a written order, the IHC said the top election body had partially addressed arguments in the case and sought

more time.

"In the interest of justice, an opportunity is allowed to the respondent to address arguments. On the next date of hearing, if the arguments are not addressed by the respondent, the matter shall be decided on the basis of available record," it stated and adjourned the hearing till December 11.

Separately, the top election body decided to conduct the contempt case proceedings against the former premier on December 13 at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, where he is currently incarcerated.

The decision was made after the Interior Ministry refused to produce Khan before the commission during the last hearing due to security concerns. Khan survived an assassination attempt in November 2022. The ministry also urged for an in-prison trial, and the ECP, after hearing arguments, reserved its decision on the issue on November 30.

ECP to hold contempt case proceedings against ex-Pak PM

Islamabad: Pakistan's election commission on Wednesday decided that contempt case proceedings against former prime minister Imran Khan and his party colleague Fawad Chaudhry will take place on December 13 at the high-security Adiala jail.

Khan, the 71-year-old founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, and Chaudhry are both currently incarcerated in multiple cases at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

Khan has been in jail since August 5 when he was arrested after a conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had also disqualified him in the same case for failing to disclose the proceeds from the sale of gifts he got from the state repository.

The decision to hold the trial inside the jail from December 13 comes a day after the ECP reserved its verdict on a petition that was filed to remove Khan as the head of his PTI party due to his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case.

On Wednesday, the Dawn newspaper said, "The ECP issued its verdict in light of the Interior Ministry's denial to produce the former premier before the Commission during the last hearing, citing security concerns." Subsequently, on November 30, the ECP reserved a verdict and suggested the possibility of holding Khan's trial in the Adiala jail. Last year, the ECP had initiated contempt proceedings against the PTI chief, former party leader Asad Umar, and Chaudhry, the former information minister, for allegedly using "intemperate" language against the chief election commissioner, the Dawn said. **PTI**

Malala calls for making 'gender apartheid' crime against humanity

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Likening the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women in Afghanistan to the treatment of Black people under apartheid in South Africa, Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai has urged the international community to make "gender apartheid" a crime against humanity.

Yousafzai, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 when she was 17 for her fight for girls' education in Pakistan, was the speaker at the 21st edition of the annual Nelson Mandela Lecture here on Tuesday. At the event, international thought leaders share their views each year on the death anniversary of the global icon who became South Africa's first democratically-elected president after serving 27 years as a political prisoner under the white minority apartheid government.

"The theme for this year is 'Leading for a just future'," said the chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation Board, Prof Njabulo Ndebele.

In her address, Yousafzai, now 26, said that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was enforcing "gender apartheid" by denying girls and women the right to education and work. In the same way that whites in South Africa believed that it was in the natural order of things to separate Blacks, in Afghanistan, the Taliban say that oppressing girls and women is a matter of religion, she said. "So let me say this as plainly as possible — that is only an excuse but it is also not true," Yousafzai, who miraculously survived an assassination attempt by the Pakistani Taliban in October 2012, said.

Many Muslim scholars, including those from Afghanistan, have made clear that Islam does not condone denying girls and women the right to education and to work, she said.

"If we as the world accept the Taliban's (80+) edicts on girls and women, we are sending a message everywhere that they are less human. That their rights are up for debate. That we are willing to look away," she said. Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel laureate, said apartheid was more than just a description.

"It is a legal concept. South Africans fought for racial apartheid to be recognised and criminalised at the international level. In the process, they drew more of the world's attention to the horrors of apartheid. By defining systemic oppression in legal terms, they named it and made it easier to enlist allies against it," she said.

But gender apartheid has not been explicitly codified yet, so Yousafzai called on every government in every country to make gender apartheid a crime against humanity.

"We have an opportunity to do that right now. The UN is currently drafting and debating a new Crimes Against Humanity treaty. This is the moment for world leaders to stand with Afghan girls and women. Adding and adapting language on gender apartheid to the treaty will codify it under international law," Yousafzai said, adding that South Africa could play an important role in the process.

"This legal approach might seem disconnected from everyday life and human suffering, but the international law is not an obstruction — it is a practical tool," she said. She said this would hold the Taliban to account and render anyone who helps them legally complicit. "As we saw with South Africa, it can spur and strengthen collective action. Codification will stop gender apartheid from happening elsewhere. Human rights activists have a big role to play in building public pressure (to achieve this)," Yousafzai said.

Amrita Sher-Gil's Lahore residence to turn into museum

Lahore (PTI): Hungary plans to turn Hungarian-Indian painter Amrita Sher-Gil's Ganga Ram Mansions on The Mall here into a museum, a top diplomat of the country said as several art lovers and intellectuals gathered for the unveiling of a commemorative plaque and an exhibition to pay homage to the celebrated artist.

In connection with her 82nd death anniversary on Tuesday, the Hungarian embassy in collaboration with the Punjab University College of Art and Design held a ceremony to install a commemorative plaque at her residence here in the capital of Pakistan's Punjab province and an exhibition to pay homage to her.

The recreated works by 13 university artists were on display at the exhibition. They recreated the artworks of Amrita Sher-Gil with the amalgamation of their ideas to pay homage to the distinguished artist.

Iran sends capsule capable of carrying animals into orbit

Tehran (AP): Iran said on Wednesday it sent a capsule into orbit capable of carrying animals as it prepares for human missions in coming years. A report by the official IRNA news agency quoted Telecommunications Minister Isa Zarepour as saying the capsule was launched 130 kilometres into orbit. Zarepour said the launch of the 500-kilogram (1,000-pound) capsule is aimed at sending Iranian astronauts to space in coming years. He did not say if any animals were in the capsule.

He told state TV that Iran plans to send astronauts into space by 2029 after further tests involving animals. State TV showed footage of a rocket named Salman carrying the capsule. Iran occasionally announces successful launch-

es of satellites and other space crafts. In September, Iran said it sent a data-collecting satellite into space. In 2013, Iran said it sent a monkey into space and returned it successfully.

Reports said the country's Defense Ministry built and launched the Salman rocket while the capsule was built by the Iranian civil space agency. Media reports did not say where the launch took place. Iran usually makes launches from Imam Khomeini Space Centre in northern Semnan province. It says its satellite program is for scientific research and other civilian applications. The US and other Western countries have long been suspicious of the program because the same technology can be used to develop long-range missiles.



This photo released by the Iranian Defense Ministry on Wednesday claims to show a rocket with a capsule carrying animals is launched from an undisclosed location into orbit, Iran. Iran said Wednesday it sent a capsule into orbit carrying animals as it prepares for human missions in coming years. AP/PTI

Taliban's abusive education policies harm boys as well as girls in Af

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Taliban's "abusive" educational policies are harming boys as well as girls in Afghanistan, according to a Human Rights Watch report published Wednesday. The Taliban have been globally condemned for banning girls and women from secondary school and university, but the rights group says there has been less attention to the deep harm inflicted on boys' education.

The departure of qualified teachers including women, regressive curriculum changes and the increase in corporal punishment have led to greater fear of going to school and falling attendance.

Because the Taliban have dismissed all female teachers from boys' schools, many boys are taught by unqualified people or sit in classrooms with no teachers at all.

Boys and parents told the rights group about a spike in the use of corporal punishment, including officials beating boys before the whole school for haircut or clothing infractions or for having a mobile phone. The group interviewed 22 boys along with five parents in Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Bamiyan and other communities in eight provinces. The Taliban have eliminated subjects like art, sports, English and civic education.

"The Taliban are causing irreversible damage to the Afghan education system for boys as well as girls," said Sahar Fetrat, who wrote the report. "By harming the whole school system in the country, they risk creating a lost generation deprived of a quality education."

Students told Human Rights Watch that there are

hours during the school day when there are no lessons because there is a lack of replacement teachers. So they said they do nothing.

Taliban government spokesmen were not available for comment on the report. The Taliban are prioritizing Islamic knowledge over basic literacy and numeracy with their shift toward madrassas, or religious schools.

The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and work and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021. According to the UN children's agency, more than 1 million girls are affected by the ban, though it estimates 5 million were out of school before the Taliban takeover due to a lack of facilities and other reasons.

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Markets scale fresh lifetime highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied for the seventh straight session to hit fresh lifetime highs on Wednesday, driven by gains in index majors Reliance Industries, ITC and L&T amid persistent foreign fund inflows. Besides, receding crude oil prices in international markets also boosted sentiment, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 357.59 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at a new record of 69,653.73. The barometer rose to 69,744.62 during intra-day. The broader index Nifty also climbed 82.60 points, or 0.40 per cent, to hit its fresh peak of 20,937.70. "Post-state elections, market optimism thrives, confirming policy continuity and meeting investor expectations. A robust FII reversal is fuelled by receding inflation and dropping yields in US and Indian

markets. The allure of Indian market gains post-China credit rating downgrade and decline in oil prices was followed by ease in geopolitical tensions," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. As many as 20 shares of the BSE benchmark index closed the session with gains, while 30 stocks in the Nifty ended in positive territory. Among major Sensex movers, Wipro closed with the maximum gain of 3.85 per cent, followed by ITC -- 2.51 per cent higher. L&T and TCS gained 2.31 per cent and 2.13 per cent, respectively. Tata Motors, Nestle India, Infosys and Bajaj Finance were other gainers. On the other hand, NTPC, Axis Bank, UltraTech Cement and ICICI Bank ended the session with a loss of up to 1.58 per cent. In the broader market, the BSE large-cap index rose 0.61 per cent, the mid-cap gauge gained 0.19 per cent, and smallcap advanced by 0.18 per cent.



"A strong rebound in IT, driven by reduced US recession risks and in anticipation of robust summer demand, fuels the momentum in the power sector," Nair said. However, he cautioned that short-term profit booking may occur due to domestic premium valuation concerns.

"Further, lingering El Nino risks, a drop in reservoir levels, and reduced sowing may hold RBI to profound upgrade H2 FY24 growth and reduce future inflation estimates." Among sectoral indices, utilities surged 3 per cent, followed by power (2.41 per cent). While oil & gas jumped 1.96 per cent, the IT index

went up 1.48 per cent, capital goods advanced by 1.25 per cent, and tech rose by 1.18 per cent. In contrast, healthcare declined by 0.64 per cent, telecommunications slipped 0.58 per cent and bankex fell 0.50 per cent. Analysts said the sustained equity buying by foreign institutional

investors was attributed to declining US bond yields, while the domestic players were betting big on favourable macroeconomic data and expectations of longer political stability in the country. Besides, investors are also expecting the Reserve Bank to maintain the status quo on the interest rate in its bi-monthly monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday, they added. Foreign institutional investors purchased shares worth Rs 5,223.51 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, in Asian markets, Hang Seng and Nikkei 225 finished with gains of 0.90 per cent and 2.04 per cent, respectively, while China's Shanghai Composite lost 0.11 per cent. European markets were broadly higher, led by France's CAC 40, rising 1.08 per cent. London's FTSE 100 gained 0.29 per cent, and Germany's

DAX was 0.7 per cent higher. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 registering a marginal loss of 0.06 per cent. On Wednesday, global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.31 per cent lower to USD 76.96 a barrel. "The bearish formation around the crucial resistance of 21,000 (Nifty) amplifies the bearish sentiment. The support lies at 20,850, below which the market may witness a healthy correction in the short term. On the other hand, a move above 21,000 might trigger a resumption of the bullish trend," Rupak De, Senior Technical analyst at LKP Securities, said. On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 431.02 points, or 0.63 per cent, to close at a record high of 69,296.14. Nifty also climbed 168.50 points, or 0.81 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 20,855.30.

RBI MPC meet begins amid expectations of status quo on interest rate

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI's high-powered rate setting panel on Wednesday began its 3-day brainstorming on the next set of bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectation of continued pause on the short-term key lending rate as GDP growth is gaining momentum, and inflation manageable. RBI left the benchmark policy rate (repo) unchanged in its past four bi-monthly monetary policies. It had last increased the repo rate in February to 6.5 per cent, thus ending the interest rate hike cycle which began in May 2022 in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disruptions in the global supply chain resulting in high inflation in the country. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das would unveil the decision of the six-member MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) on December 8.

On expectations from the MPC, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA said with the GDP data for the second quarter of 2023-24 appreciably higher than the MPC's last forecast, and continuing concerns on various aspects of food inflation, "we expect the MPC to pause in its December 2023 review, amidst a fairly hawkish tone of the policy document". According to Deutsche Bank Research, RBI will likely increase 2023-24 GDP forecast to 6.8 per cent year-on-year, from 6.5 per cent earlier, while holding the CPI forecast unchanged at 5.4 per cent. "RBI will likely keep repo rate and stance unchanged, persist with tight liquidity and ensure that short-term rates remain around 6.85-6.90 per cent, resulting in an 'effective rate hike'," it said. India retained the tag of the world's fastest-growing major



economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in the September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing. Director of Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) Sanjay Bhutani, said the central bank's recent MPC meetings have kept the policy rate unchanged, aligning with mar-

ket expectations. "We anticipate a similar outcome for this upcoming meeting. However, with inflation on a downward trend, an easing of interest rates could be on the cards, potentially occurring as early as February-March 2024," he said, and added this would be a positive development for all sectors, particularly capital and research-intensive industries like

the medical technology sector. The government has mandated the central government to ensure that the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stays at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. Retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, mainly due to cooling prices of food items. The Reserve Bank's MPC, in its October meeting, projected CPI inflation at 5.4 per cent for 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. H S Bhatia, Managing Director of Kelwon Electronics and Appliances, manufacturing partner for Daewoo India, said RBI's monetary policy decisions will have a significant impact on the consumer durable industry. "The industry is hoping that RBI will keep interest rates stable or even reduce them slightly in the upcoming review so that con-

sumers get enough purchasing power," he said. Parijat Agrawal, Head - Fixed Income, Union Asset Management Company said the US 10-year bond has corrected meaningfully from the peak in line with the incoming data and the central bank narrative, and concerns around oil prices too have reduced. "Although MPC will emphasise on bringing inflation to the 4 per cent target, we expect MPC to remain on pause on rates and stance," Agrawal said. The MPC comprises three external members and three officials of RBI. The external members on the panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma. Besides Governor Das, the other RBI officials in MPC are Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor).



1,14,902 entities as startups recognised

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on October 31, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. These eligible firms are allowed to seek fiscal incentives under the Startup India Action Plan, which was launched in January 2016, and that includes income tax exemption for three years. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said the action plan includes 19 items spanning across areas such as simplification and handholding, funding support and incentives and industry-academia partnership and incubation. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) "has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on 31st October 2023," he said. Replying to a separate question, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said subdued demand in major export destinations such as the US, Hong Kong, the Middle East and China and availability of raw materials at competitive rates were some of the challenges faced by the gems and jewellery export industry. Export of gem and jewellery during 2022-23 was at USD 38.11 billion, a decline of 2.95 per cent compared to the previous year's export of USD 39.27 billion, she informed. The sector constituted 8.45 per cent in the total merchandise exports during 2022-23 and the industry employs around 5 mil-

lion skilled and semi-skilled workforce. In another reply, she said that to ensure goods imported are not of substandard quality, the customs authority follows a risk-based framework to intelligently prevent entry of non-compliant goods at the borders. "A task force has also been constituted in CBIC (Central Board Of Indirect Taxes and Customs) for enforcing national standards," Patel said. She added that as far as imported goods such as TVs and tyre, are concerned, the trade data indicates that there are several categories of import of such products where there has been considerable reduction in imports. Citing certain examples, she provided data that showed imports of different size of TV sets, liquid crystal display television set, and different kinds of tyres declined during April-October this fiscal. Imports of television sets of screen size exceeding 54 cm but not exceeding 68 cm dipped to USD 0.02 million during April-October this fiscal from USD 0.25 million in 2021-22. Similarly, imports of radial tyres used in buses/lorries declined to USD 1.01 million during the seven-month period of this fiscal as against USD 16.92 million in 2021-22. "The Department of Commerce has been regularly monitoring and sensitizing line ministries and other stakeholders from time to time and at various levels on the issue of imports," she said.



About 33,000 notices sent by CBIC officers for discrepancies in GST returns filed in FY18, FY19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Central tax officers have sent around 33,000 GST notices to businesses for discrepancies in returns filed and short payment of taxes in 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years, a CBIC official said on Wednesday. The National Co-ordination Committee of the State and Central GST officers, chaired by the Revenue Secretary, is likely to be held by the end of this month or early January, which among other things would also sensitise tax officers regarding issuance of notices, the official said. Speaking at the Assocham National Conference on GST, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Member-GST Shashank Priya said the notices sent for 2017-18 and 2018-19 were a "small percentage" of the total returns filed for the two fiscal years. He said the bunching up of demand notices was also on account of extension in the deadline given to taxpayers for filing annual returns for the two years. Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out on July 1, 2017. The last date for filing annual returns for 2017-18 fiscal was extended till February 7, 2020, while for 2018-19 it was till December 2020. Under the GST law, every registered person is liable to file annual return for every financial year on or before December 31 of the next financial year. Accordingly, the last date of filing annual return for 2022-23 fiscal is December 31, 2023. "At the request of the taxpayers the time for return filing was postponed. So returns also were filed at a late juncture and officers have come under a lot of pressure (to scrutinise the returns). So this has led to this unfortunate situation. One hopes that as we progress for-

ward this situation gets addressed and we will not have all the proposed notices pending at the same time. For 2017-18, it has happened like that and we will see how best to deal with it," Priya said. The Central GST officers have sent around 30,000-33,000 notices to GST registered businesses for short-payment of taxes, he said. "In our interaction with the field formations, we will try to sensitise them that they should put their officers on alert, they should do a critical scrutiny of details, documents, facts given by the registrants before coming to a conclusion and passing an order. I'm sure, we will take up this issue in the National Co-ordination Committee meeting so that all tax administrations are sensitised," Priya said. These disputes, he said, if are resolved out at the level of adjudicating authority, instead of approaching the GST appellate tribunal, would be a relief both for the tax administration as well as taxpayers. "We are working on automated scrutiny module that would give certainty on how scrutiny is to be done and what kind of issues will be looked into return scrutiny," Priya said. Further, the officer said the GST appellate tribunal would be put in place in the next 4-5 months and efforts are also being made to identify infrastructure, following which selection process of members will start. With regard to curbing fake registration under GST, Priya said in many tax administration, about 25-28 per cent of the businesses registered were found to be fake. "We are looking at how we further tighten the registration. We are also looking at how we make it less and less open for changing the GSTR-3B (monthly GST payment form)," he said.

'Airline industry to record \$25.7 billion net profit in 2024'

PTI ■ GENEVA

The airline industry is projected to register a net profit of USD 25.7 billion in 2024 as more normal growth is expected in both passenger and cargo segments, global grouping IATA said on Wednesday. For 2023, the net profit is estimated at USD 23.3 billion, significantly higher than the USD 9.8 billion projected by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in June this year. IATA has more than 300 airlines as members. The airline industry's operating profit is expected to touch USD 49.3 billion in 2024 from USD 40.7 billion this year. In 2024, the total revenue is estimated to grow 7.6 per cent to USD 964 billion compared to 2023. "Some 4.7 billion people are expected to travel in 2024, a his-



toric high that exceeds the pre-pandemic level of 4.5 billion recorded in 2019," IATA said. Industry passenger load factor is nearing its 2019 level, which is supporting the financial recovery of the airlines, IATA Director Policy and Economics Andrew Matters said. "The airline industry net profit is expected to reach USD 25.7 billion in 2024 (2.7 per cent net profit margin). That will be a slight improvement over 2023, which is expected to show a

USD 23.3 billion net profit (2.6 per cent net profit margin)," IATA said, while releasing its review of 2023 and outlook for 2024 here. The cargo volume is expected to be higher at 61 million tonnes next year compared to 58 million tonnes in 2023. "From 2024, the outlook indicates that we can expect more normal growth patterns for both passenger and cargo... While the recovery is impressive, a net profit margin of 2.7 per cent is

far below what investors in almost any other industry would accept," IATA Director General Willie Walsh said. According to him, the airlines will always compete ferociously for their customers but they remain far too burdened by onerous regulation, fragmentation, high infrastructure costs and a supply chain populated with oligopolies. About the Asia Pacific market, IATA said while some of the region's main domestic markets -- China, Australia and India -- recovered quickly from the pandemic, international travel to/from the region was subdued as China only eliminated the last of its international travel restrictions in mid-2023. The Asia Pacific region is expected to report a net loss of USD 0.1 billion in 2023 and have a net profit of USD 1.1 billion in 2024.

Rupee rises 5 paise to close at 83.32 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 5 paise to close at 83.32 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, helped by a bullish trend in domestic equities and sustained foreign fund inflows. Forex traders said elevated American currency in the overseas markets and dollar buying by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) capped sharp gains for the local unit. The rupee consolidated in a narrow range as investors remained on the sidelines ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision later this week. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.35 against the greenback. The rupee oscillated between an intra-day low of 83.37 and a high of 83.29 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.32 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 5 paise from its previous close, even as domestic benchmark indices touched new lifetime peaks. On Tuesday, the rupee settled at 83.37 against the dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on positive tone in the US Dollar and fresh foreign inflows. A weak tone in crude oil prices and positive domestic markets may also support the rupee. "However, the RBI intervention



may cap the sharp upside. Traders may take cues from US ADP Trade balance and non-farm employment change data. Investors may remain cautious ahead of RBI's monetary policy decision on Friday," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain the status quo on the short-term interest rate in its monetary policy review. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled to begin its three-day deliberations on December 6. Das will unveil the decision of the six-member MPC on December 8. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent lower at 103.97.

Adani Group to invest \$75 billion to scale up AGEL RE portfolio to 45 GW: Gautam Adani

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Group has plans to invest USD 75 billion on energy transition initiatives by 2030, its chairman Gautam Adani said on Wednesday. The investments will boost the group's vision to have 45 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity by 2030, Adani said in a statement. "We are committed to largescale renewables, developing an

indigenous fully integrated manufacturing ecosystem and green hydrogen solutions. At the Adani portfolio level, a total investment of USD 75 billion by 2030 on our energy transition initiatives will further our vision to have 45 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030 and strengthen the pivotal role played by AGEL in India's glide path to decarbonization," the group chairman said. The investments will be execut-

ed through Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL). AGEL has emerged as the second-largest global solar PV developer in the US-based Mercom Capital Group's latest annual global report. "The company's outstanding performance and contribution to the renewable energy landscape have earned it the prestigious second rank among the world's foremost solar PV developers," the statement said.



India coal import drops 5 per cent in Apr-Sep period to 125.21 MT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Country's coal import has registered a drop of five per cent at 125.21 million tonnes (MT) in the April-September period of the ongoing financial year, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, coal and power minister Pralhad Joshi said that, had the production through auction, commercial coal auction not started, then as per compound annual growth rate (CAGR) there would have been a need to import 150 million tonnes (MT) of coal, but the country has actually imported only 125.21 MT of coal during the April-September period of 2023-24. "In the current year 2023-24, coal import up to the month of September 2023, was 125.21 MT, which is a decline of 5 per cent over the corresponding period last year," the minister said.

PNB Housing Finance achieves ₹1,000 crore loan book under Roshni segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

PNB Housing Finance on Wednesday said its affordable housing segment Roshni has achieved a Rs 1,000 crore loan book in less than a year of its launch. This achievement represents the company's steadfast focus on financial inclusion by offering low ticket-size loans of Rs 5-35 lakh for home buying, plot purchases, construction and renovation, it added. Roshni Home Loans offers loans to individuals, focusing

on the salaried class and self-employed, along with new-to-credit applicants. It provides a customer-centric approach, characterised by tailored financial products, innovative technology and seamless experiences, to meet the unique needs of individuals seeking affordable housing finance solutions. "There is a strong demand for affordable housing in the country, owing to the rapid rate of urbanisation, growing younger population, increasing per capita income and higher demand

of housing units beyond the metro cities. We are aligned with the government's mission of housing for all and are committed to fulfilling the homeownership dreams of individuals from all walks of life," said Girish Kousgi, MD and CEO, PNB Housing Finance. PNB Housing Finance recently inaugurated its 100th Roshni branch, also its first-ever all-women branch, cementing its position as a leader in the affordable housing category, the lender said in a release.

Junior Hockey World Cup

India needs to guard against complacency against Spain

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Their campaign has started off positively, but India must guard against complacency when they face Spain in their second Pool C match of the FIH junior men's hockey World Cup here on Thursday.

Vice-captain Arajjeet Singh Hundal came out to be India's saviour, scoring a hat-trick as India overcame some anxious moments to beat Korea 4-2 in their opener on Tuesday.

But India's coach C R Kumar was not too satisfied with the

performance and said his side needs to be more clinical and avoid conceding unnecessary penalty corners.

India conceded six penalty corners, while earned just two against Korea.

"We are very happy that we got the three points and that's the positive side. But we have to more clinical in both circles. We conceded two goals in penalty corners which we need to pay attention to," Kumar said after the Korea match.

"We gave away too many penalty corners, six in the whole game where we had just



two. We need to be more cautious."

India are striving to secure their fourth podium finish in the event after having won the tournament twice in 2001 (Hobart) and Lucknow (2016). The country had clinched a silver medal way back in 1997 in Milton Keynes, England.

Skipper Uttam Singh and his deputy Hundal are the only two players who have experience of the big event, having featured in the last edition of the tournament, where India finished fourth in Bhubaneswar, losing to France in the bronze medal

play-off match.

The Spaniards, who have a bronze medal in their kitty at the 2005 edition in Rotterdam, are India's toughest opponent in the pool, comprising Canada as the other side.

But going by form, India will start as favourites against Spain on Thursday.

India's last pool match is against Canada on Saturday.

Pool A consists of defending champions Argentina, Australia, Chile, and Malaysia, while Pool B has Egypt, France, Germany and South Africa. Pool D is the toughest of the lot

as Belgium, Netherlands, New Zealand and Pakistan will be vying for a quarterfinal berth. The top two teams from each pool will qualify for the quarterfinals.

The Indians played an attacking game from the onset on Tuesday and would look to continue in the same vein but their defence will have to be cautious against counterattacks which the Koreans used to great effect to earn penalty corners.

Spain too would be looking to exploit that weakness against the Indians.

2024 Australian Open

Former champion Wozniacki awarded one of first wild cards

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Former No. 1-ranked Caroline Wozniacki has been awarded one of the first wild cards for the 2024 Australian Open and is planning on bringing her two young children to the scene of her biggest Grand Slam triumph.

Wozniacki, the 2018 Australian Open women's champion, and six Australian players were granted the first batch of wild cards.

The 33-year-old Wozniacki returned to top-flight tennis in August after more than three years off the tour. She played in Montreal and Cincinnati before making a run to the fourth round of the US Open, where she lost to eventual champion Coco Gauff.

"I have so many wonderful memories of Melbourne, and of course winning the Australian Open is an all-time

Arsenal slew of late winners highlights resilience

AP ■ LONDON

They say little should be read into the Community Shield, the traditional curtain-raiser to the English soccer season.

Maybe this year is an exception. Back in early August, Arsenal scored an equalizer through Leandro Trossard in the 101st minute in regulation time and went on to beat Manchester City in a penalty shootout at Wembley Stadium.

Aside from winning a piece of silverware, it was hailed by Arsenal's players as a statement victory - despite the uncompetitive nature of the fixture.

"The mental block is gone," goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale said that day, a reference to his team stumbling late in last season's Premier League title race and finishing behind City.

Well, maybe they are right. And that's not just because Arsenal woke up Wednesday to a five-point lead in the Premier League. It's because of how the team has got there.

Scoring late goals - a trait demonstrating resilience and character - has become the

norm for Arsenal. Dare it be said, it's a sign of a champion team.

Just in the first 15 league games of this season, Arsenal has scored in the 96th and 101st minutes to beat Manchester United 3-1; in the 86th minute to beat Man City 1-0; in the 84th minute to draw 2-2 at Chelsea; in the 89th minute to beat Brentford 1-0; and, on Tuesday, in the seventh minute of stoppage time to win 4-3 at Luton.

That's nine points gained with goals scored from the 84th minute or later. Maybe that late rally in the Community Shield was a portent for how this season will go.

"We don't want a draw, we want to win," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "That drive, that energy, that risk and emotion that we put in the pitch, you can sense it."

The seeds of these comeback wins were sewn last season when Arteta's teams produced a number of late recoveries in games to snatch crucial points in the title race.

The most memorable was Reiss Nelson's winning goal against



Bournemouth that sent Arsenal fans wild at Emirates Stadium. That was in the 97th minute and gave Arsenal a five-point lead in the league, just like Declan Rice did with his winner against Luton.

Arsenal again looks to be the team most likely to stop City winning the Premier League. Last season, its title bid imploded in the final two months, weighed down by injuries to

key players - William Saliba, in particular - and a naivety in dealing with holding off a fast-finishing juggernaut like City. Could this season be different? Arsenal has a few things going in its favor.

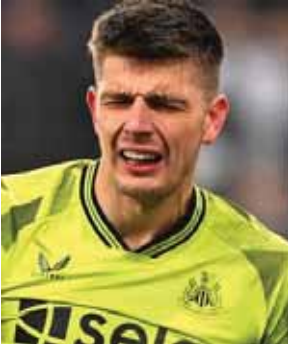
Rice, a club-record signing for \$138 million in July, is an upgrade in central midfield and has already contributed crucial goals against United and Luton.

There's better strength in depth across the squad, in terms of numbers and experience. Arteta's approach also appears to be different this season, going for more control than chaos - before the Luton game, anyway - to help the team better last the distance in a grueling campaign that also includes playing in the Champions League. In this respect, Arteta seems to be using the playbook of City manager Pep Guardiola from last season.

"Playing every three days and you have to win every game and every game, the demands are there," Arteta said. "It's the way they go about it, how much they want it."

After the pain of the end of last season, Arsenal's players might want it even more.

There are questions marks about the wisdom of Arteta's decision to bring in goalkeeper David Raya and promote him above Ramsdale, last year's first-choice keeper. Raya was at fault for two goals against Luton and has looked shaky in other games, notably in the draw at Chelsea.



Goalkeeper Nick will be out for four months

AP ■ NEWCASTLE (ENGLAND)

Newcastle United goalkeeper Nick Pope will be out for "around four months" after dislocating his left shoulder, manager Eddie Howe said Wednesday, in the latest injury to hit the Premier League team.

It leaves Pope in a race against time to make England's squad for the European Championship, which starts in June.

The 31-year-old Pope sustained the injury as he dived to his left in an attempt to save a shot by Manchester United defender Sergio Reguilon that was blocked in front of the Newcastle keeper. Howe said Pope will require surgery.

"The operation hasn't happened yet," Howe said, "but we're thinking roughly around four months. So, it's a big blow to us but one that we expected after the game."

"He's naturally down because at this stage of the season where we have so many games, huge games coming up - he's got, obviously, the Euros ahead of him as well, which he was determined to try to be involved in, and there's still chance of that for him."

Slovakia international Martin Dubravka will replace Pope, with Howe also having former Liverpool goalkeeper Loris Karius in the squad.

Newcastle have been linked with a move for former Manchester United keeper David de Gea, who is currently without a club, but Howe said no approaches have been made.

"We have not made any inquiries or any decisions about our recruitment leading into January," Howe said.

"This is a chance for the goalkeepers we have at the football club to consolidate their positions, and that will be the same for every other position at the club."

Defenders Sven Botman and Dan Burn and midfielders Sean Longstaff, Jacob Murphy and Harvey Barnes are among those currently missing because of injuries for Newcastle.

Sinclair ends her 23 years career

AP ■ VANCOUVER

Christine Sinclair, the world's top international goal scorer among both women and men, played her final match with the Canadian national team.

Sinclair, 40, ended her 23-year national team career with a 1-0 victory against Australia on Tuesday at Vancouver's BC Place - renamed Christine Sinclair Place for the occasion.

Sinclair has scored 190 goals since she made her national team debut in 2000. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the game's top scorer among men, has 128 international goals.

It was Sinclair's 331st appearance for Canada, second only in international soccer to retired US star Kristine Lilly, who played in 354 games.

"To see the growth of the game, see where it's at now, and the opportunities that are available, whether it's in the national team or playing pro. Honestly I never thought in my career that this was going to happen. And I just feel fortunate to be a part of that growth and it's incredible to experience the change," she said before the match.

More than 45,000 fans were on hand for the game. In addition to Sinclair, the team also honored midfielder Sophie Schmidt, who played in her final game after a 19-year national team career, and former goalkeeper Erin McLeod, who retired in January.

"Tonight, the world's greatest goalscorer - Christine Sinclair - is stepping onto the pitch with Team Canada for the last time. @Sincy12, thank you for inspiring all of us. Your impact on the game, and on sports in Canada, is something we'll be celebrating for quite some time," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau posted on social media.

When Sinclair was subbed out in the second half, Schmidt took her place on the field after an emotional embrace.

With Sinclair, Canada won the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. She won bronze medals at both the 2012 and 2016 Games.

Botafogo squanders 13-point lead to lose national league title

AP ■ SAO PAULO

There's an old saying in Brazilian soccer: some things only happen to Botafogo. The reference to the club's historic lack of luck has never rung more true than this year.

The club of World Cup winning greats like Mané Garrincha, Jairzinho and Mário Zagallo squandered a 13-point lead in the Brazilian league and now Palmeiras is very likely to defend its title on Wednesday. It's the first time a team has lost such a big advantage in the South American nation's top flight.

The last round will take place without any hopes for Botafogo fans at Internacional but to finish in fourth position, which would be enough to secure a direct spot at the next Copa Libertadores.

The Rio de Janeiro club is currently fifth. Botafogo was on the top of the standings for 31 of 38 rounds, giving long-suffering supporters confidence their club would lift its first national title since 1995.

But now Palmeiras is in a position where it doesn't necessarily have to win its last game to secure another title. Even with a loss at Cruzeiro, Palmerias can clinch the league as long as Atletico Mineiro doesn't erase a differential of eight goals.

Flamengo has a slim title chance, but that depends on an even more unlikely combination of results involving other



teams.

Botafogo's title hopes vanished for the season after a 0-0 draw with Cruzeiro on Sunday, a match that ended with some supporters hurling insults at players and burning team shirts at the Nilton Santos Stadium.

Only a few seasons ago the fans would have been excited just to finish near the top. But after American businessman John Textor bought the club's soccer division last year, expectations rose dramatically.

"We needed to be a little bit more humble. We needed to read every match, read the moment of the club," veteran striker Diego Costa, who

arrived in the middle of the season, told journalists on Sunday. "We needed to leave our ego outside so we could achieve better results. I hope this is a good teaching for all those who are here. Soccer makes you pay."

It was against Wednesday rival, Internacional, that Botafogo achieved its 13-point advantage on August 12. By then, some fans had tattooed the Brasileirao trophy on their bodies, laughed at rivals losing points to relegation contenders and started debating what round the team would be crowned.

"Follow the leader!" Botafogo fans chanted after every win by

their team of little known players such as goalkeeper Lucas Perri, defender Adryelson, midfielder Eduardo and striker Segovinha.

But then ... It was some-things-only-happen-to-Botafogo time. Botafogo failed to win its 10 latest matches in the competition. Last week, the team scored an apparent winner from the spot against relegated Coritiba in the 90th minute, only to see their opponents equalize 49 seconds later.

"Making fun of a Botafogo fan today is like finding a dead body on the sidewalk, kick it and run away laughing," said social media mogul Felipe Neto, one of the club's most popular supporters.

"The dead body can no longer feel anything."

Botafogo's downfall accelerated at the end of June after Portuguese coach Luis Castro left for Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal following a call from Cristiano Ronaldo. Castro's replacements, Bruno Lage, Lucio Flavio and Tiago Nunes weren't able to keep up the team's fighting spirit and attacking mentality.

Some of Botafogo's losses came in such shocking fashion that rival fans pitied the club's fate. One glaring example was a home match against Palmeiras on November 1, when Botafogo was already in a dwindling form but still could have extended its lead in the league to six points. The team led 3-0 after 37 minutes.

FIA opens conflict probe into Mercedes head Toto, wife Susie

AP ■ LONDON

The governing body of Formula One racing is investigating Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff and his wife Susie, who heads the F1 Academy, following allegations of a conflict of interest and whether they have shared confidential information with the commercial rights arm of the global series.

In a short statement issued on Tuesday, the FIA said it is "aware of media speculation" whether confidential information was exchanged, and that its compliance department is "looking into the matter."

The probe comes after a report in BusinessF1 magazine that rival team executives raised concerns about whether Toto and Susie Wolff passed on information discussed in private meetings.

Susie Wolff is managing director of the all-female series F1 Academy, and reports to F1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali.

The BusinessF1 report said team officials were alarmed when Toto Wolff made comments in a recent meeting that included details they felt could only have come from F1. The report did not detail what was discussed.

The Mercedes team and Formula One Management, which runs the commercial



side of F1, denied any allegations of improper sharing of information or conflict of interest.

"We wholly reject the allegation in the statement and associated media coverage, which wrongly impinges on the integrity and compliance of our team principal," Mercedes said.

Formula One said it has rules and procedures in place to prevent improper information sharing, and it believes the allegations are wrong.

"We are confident that no member of our team has made any unauthorised disclosure to a team principal and would caution anyone against making imprudent and serious allegations without substance," Formula One said.

In a statement posted on social media, Susie Wolff denied any wrongdoing and said she is "deeply insulted."

Viknesh appeal challenging two years ban rejected

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kerala footballer M Viknesh's appeal challenging a two-year ban, imposed on him by disciplinary committee of the NADA for failing a dope test, has been rejected by the appeal panel in a rare doping case relating to the 'beautiful game' in the country.

Viknesh was handed a two-year ban by the NADA Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel starting from November 12, 2022 after his dope sample collected during the National Games in Gujarat in September-October 2022 was found to contain banned

"Terbutaline", a common substance found in cough syrup. In an order passed on December 2, the appeal panel of the NADA upheld the disciplinary committee's decision but changed the date of its operation.

The appeal panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) held that Viknesh's two-year ban will start from April 5, 2023, the date of decision of the disciplinary committee as the Kerala footballer was not provisionally suspended after he failed the dope test. Very few footballers have been handed bans by the NADA panels for failing dope tests in



the history of the sport in the country. East Bengal defender Arun Malhotra was found positive

for a banned substance in a test conducted before the national team's departure for the 2022 Busan Asian Games. The All

India Football Federation (AIFF) slapped Malhotra a ban of 60 days. NADA was non-existent then as it was established in 2009.

Mumbai FC player Nishant Mehra had failed a dope test conducted after an I-League match in 2011 and was handed a two-year ban by the NADA. He was the first Indian footballer to be banned by the NADA for doping.

Another Mumbai FC player Dane Pereira was banned for one year in 2025 after testing positive for an anabolic steroid. In 2017, former India goalkeeper Subrata Paul was let off with a warning after he tested

positive for banned Terbutaline. He was able to prove before the disciplinary panel of the NADA that he had taken a banned drug unintentionally.

Viknesh had submitted that on account of fever and cough he consulted a doctor who prescribed Ascoril syrup which "contained the prohibited substance". He submitted that he was completely unaware that the said syrup contained prohibited substance and that was why he did not mention any medical prescription in the doping control form.

Viknesh also relied upon the case of Subrata Paul but the

NADA appeal panel said "the appellant has neither filed any copy of the decision nor media report or provided any citation/date of the decision ..."

"We are of the considered opinion that the Appellant has committed an ADRV (Anti-Doping Rule Violation) ... Therefore, the Order dated 05.04.2023 ... Passed by Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel is upheld and the Appellant shall undergo ineligibility period of two (2) years from the decision of Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel which is 05.04.2023," the appeal panel of the NADA headed by Abhinav Mukerji ruled.

ICC RANKINGS

Ravi becomes world number 1 T20I bowler



PTI ■ DUBAI

Young Indian leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi on Wednesday rose to the top spot in the ICC T20I bowling chart on the back of his recent performance against Australia.

The 23-year-old was India's go-to bowler in the just-concluded series against Australia, taking nine wickets from five games. Bishnoi, who is on 699 rating points, has jumped five places to displace Afghanistan spinner

Rashid Khan (692) from the top slot. Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and England's Adil Rashid, who both have 679 points, are in joint third. Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana (677) completes the top

five. Bishnoi is the only Indian bowler in the top 10 in the shortest format even as Axar Patel climbed nine spots to be 18th. Meanwhile, the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav, who captained India during their 4-1 T20I series win against Australia,

held on to the top spot among batters, while opener Ruturaj Gaikwad dropped a place to be seventh. Hardik Pandya retained the third spot in the all-rounders' list, despite missing the series against Australia due to injury.



Mushfiquur becomes first Bangladesh batter to be out for obstructing field

PTI ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Former captain Mushfiquur Rahman on Wednesday became the first Bangladesh batter to be given out for 'obstructing the field' in a bizarre dismissal on the opening day of the second Test against New Zealand here. The 36-year-old Rahman defended a rising delivery from New Zealand quick Kyle Jamieson in the fourth ball of the 41st over and then extended his right hand to apparently keep the ball away after it bounced up wide outside off stump. The Black Caps were quick to appeal and the on-field umpires referred the matter to the TV umpire Ahsan Raza who gave Rahman out. According to Law 37.1.2, "The striker is out obstructing the field if, except in the circumstances of 37.2, in the act of

receiving a ball delivered by the bowler, he/she wilfully strikes the ball with a hand not holding the bat. This will apply whether it is the first strike or a second or subsequent strike. The act of receiving the ball shall extend both to playing at the ball and to striking the ball more than once in defence of his/her wicket." Earlier such dismissals were classified as "handled the ball" but a change in the laws in 2017 brought them under "obstructing the field" category. Former England captain Michael Vaughan was the last batter to be given out 'handling the ball' against India in 2001. Rahman was Bangladesh's top-scorer with his 35 off 83 balls as the hosts were bundled out for 172 inside 67 overs. Bangladesh won the first Test in Sylhet by 150 runs.

Will play IPL until I cannot walk anymore: Maxwell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Star Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has vowed to play in the world's biggest cricket league, the IPL "until he can't walk anymore". The 35-year-old, who played a massive role in Australia's ODI World Cup-winning campaign in India recently, will once again don the colours of Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL next year. "The IPL will probably be the last tournament I ever play, as I will play the IPL until I can't walk anymore," Maxwell was quoted as saying by Australian Associated Press (AAP) at the Melbourne Airport on Wednesday. "I was talking about how good the IPL has been to me throughout my career, the people I've met, the coaches I have played under, the international players that you get to rub shoulders with, how beneficial to my whole career that tournament has been. "You're rubbing shoulders with AB (de Villiers) and Virat (Kohli) for two months, talking to them while watching other games. It's just the greatest learning experience that any player could ask for," he said. Maxwell feels Australian cricketers should play in the IPL for experience ahead of the T20 World Cup in the United States



and the West Indies in June. "Hopefully, a lot of our Australian players can get over to the IPL and get to work in slightly similar conditions to the West Indies, where it is a little bit drier, it will spin," Maxwell will return to action as captain of Melbourne Stars in the Big Bash League opener against Brisbane

Heat in the opener at the Gabba on Thursday. After winning the ODI World Cup by beating favourites India at home, Australia are now looking to reclaim the T20 world title which they won in 2021. "As soon as we won this World Cup, we all talked about the refocus towards the next one," Maxwell said. "I'm hoping it's going to be a really exciting summer for the BBL, with what is just around the corner. "Hopefully a little bit more importance on putting your name up in the headlines for the right reasons and trying to push for those spots," he added.



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Requires qualified professionals in following position(s)/ discipline(s):


VC No.	Post	No of vacancies
397/23	Team Leader (Interview at Jaipur, Rajasthan)	01
398/23	Senior Manager (Civil) (Interview at Guwahati, Assam)	01
399/23	Senior Manager (Civil) (Interview at Guwahati, Assam)	01
400/23	Assistant Manager (Civil) (Interview at Guwahati, Assam)	01

For details regarding the Position, pay scale, qualification, age, date & venue, selection process etc., candidates may see the detailed advertisement posted on RITES website www.rites.com under Career Section.

India opens campaign against Afghanistan

DUBAI: India will face Afghanistan in the opening match of the ACC Men's U-19 Asia Cup cricket tournament here on Friday. Pakistan will play Nepal in the other match of the opening day. Arch-rivals India and Pakistan will face each other on Sunday. Eight teams will compete for the top prize in the 50-over event which is being hosted by the Emirates Cricket Board.

The teams have been divided into two groups of four each. India, Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan are placed in Group A. Bangladesh, Japan, Sri Lanka and hosts UAE feature in Pool B. The top two teams from each of the two groups will progress to the semi-finals which will be played on December 15. The tournament final will be played at the Dubai International Stadium on December 17. PTI



OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, JODA

C-2017 Phone No:- 06767-272214 Fax No:- 06767-272214 E-Mail:- ejodamunicipality@rediffmail.com

No. 4593 / Dt. 04.12.2023 /

'e'-procurement Notice

Bid identification No. JM-08/ 2023-24

Bid documents consisting of specification, the schedule of quantities and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in the Govt. website i.e www.tendersodisha.gov.in

1. Nature of Work :- Civil Works.

2. No. of Works :- 2 Nos.

3. Estimated Cost :- Rs.49,56,242/- to Rs.70,33,462/-

4. Bid identification No. :- 2023_ORULB_97828_1 to 2023_ORULB_97828_2

5. Date & time of availability of the Documents in the Portal :- From dt. 05.12.2023 at 11.00 A.M. Up to Dt.19.12.2023 at 5.00 P.M.

6. Last date/time for receipt of Bids in the Portal :- On dt.19.12.2023 up to 5.00 P.M.


7. Technical Bids received on line shall be opened :-On Dt.20.12.2023 at 11.00 AM.

8. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid. :- Executive Officer, Joda Municipality

Further, the details can be seen from the e-Procurement Portal:- www.tendersodisha.gov.in.

Executive Officer, Joda Municipality.

OIPR-13124/11/0016/2324



WORKS DEPARTMENT

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BHADRAK (R&B) DIVISION

e-mail:- bhadrakmbdivision@gmail.com

Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice

Bid Identification No. SE (R&B) BDK25/2023-24

No 72831 / dt. 05.12.2023

1. Nature of work: - - Electrical Work

2. Number of works: -(Four) No's

3. Amount put to Tender: - Rs.35,92,400/-,7,32,280/-,4,19,200,4,19,200 /-

4. Class of Contractor: "Authorized Dealer of OEM"

5. Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal: - 14.12.2023at 11.00 AM

6. Last Date / Time of receipt of bid in the portal: - 21.12.2023 up to 05.00 PM

7. Date of opening of bid: - Dt.22.12.2023at 11.30 AM

8. Name & address of the Office inviting bid: - Superintending Engineer, Bhadrak (R&B) Division.


9. The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only.

10. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal "http://tendersodisha.gov.in."

11. All future corrigendum will be available on ONLINE mode only.

Superintending Engineer Bhadrak (R&B) Division

OIPR-34079/11/0023/2324



OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, BALIMELA

Odisha, Pin -764051, e-Mail:- eonacbalimela@gmail.com

Lt. No. 2381 / Dev / 2023 Dated:- 04/12/2023

e- NOTICE

BID IDENTIFICATION No.EOBLM06/2023-24

The Executive Officer, NAC, Balimela, on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites for bidders of eligible class registered with the State Govt. and bidders of equivalent grade/ class registered with central Govt./ MES/Railways according to norm of e-procurement system in online mode for the work as per DTCN.

1. Name of the Work :- Civil Works

2. Number of Work :- 1 No.

3. Estimated cost :- As per DTCN

4. Period of Completion :- As per DTCN

5. Date and Time of availability of Bid Document in the Portal :- From 10.00AM of Dt. 05/12/2023 to 5.00PM of Dt. 14/12/2023

6. Last date and time for receipt of Bid in the Portal :- 5.00PM of Dt. 14/12/2023

7. The bid received online shall be opened on 11.00 AM of dt. 15/12/2023

8. If necessary, Lottery will be drawn on Dt.16.12.2023 at 11 A.M.

9. Name and Address of the Officer inviting Bid: Executive Officer, NAC, Balimela.

Further details can be seen from the Procurement Portal: www.tendersorissa.gov.in

Executive Officer, Balimela NAC

OIPR-13140/11/0014/2324

Bangladesh takes control of 2nd test


After New Zealand reduced to 55-5 on eventful 1st day

AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Bangladesh took full control of the final test against New Zealand after 15 wickets fell on an eventful day one Wednesday as the hosts pursue a first ever test series win against the Kiwis. The home side was all out for 172 but hit back strongly to reduce New Zealand to 55-5 in 12.4 overs before bad light forced stumps. Both teams' batters struggled on a wicket where most of the balls kept low and the bounce was uneven. The New Zealand bowling attack maintained a tight line and length to create pressure by conceding just eight runs in the first seven overs after Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto opted to bat first. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner (3-31) and offspinner Glenn Phillips (3-65) shared six wickets to wreak havoc on the Bangladesh batting lineup. Ajaz Patel, another left-arm spinner, claimed 2-54 while skipper Tim Southee took one wicket without conceding a single run in 5.2 overs. Mushfiquur Rahman made a team-high 35 before becoming the first Bangladeshi batter to be dismissed for handling the ball. While defending a delivery from fast bowler Kyle

Jamieson, the team's most experienced batter used his right hand to push the ball away even though it wasn't close to the off-stump. After New Zealand appealed for the out, the third umpire checked and then gave him out for obstructing the field. Bangladesh's first boundary came in the eighth over when Zakir Hasan drove Patel through cover for four. The pressure eventually got the better of Zakir (8) when he played a rash shot against Santner and chipped it straight to mid-on. In the next over, Patel dismissed Mahmudul Hasan (14) after he was beaten by the drift to give a catch at short-leg. Momtazul Haque (5) was the next to go when he was caught behind off Patel's bowling. But the biggest blow for Bangladesh followed in the next over when captain Najmul Hossain Shanto (9), who hit a century in the previous test, attempted a reverse sweep against Santner. The on-field Umpires turned down the appeal but New Zealand reviewed it successfully to leave Bangladesh 47-4. Mushfiquur and Shahadat Hossain, playing his only second test, shared a 57-run partnership which eventually kept Bangladesh ahead on a tricky wicket.

The dismissal of Mushfiquur triggered another collapse, which began with Shahadat (31) being caught down the leg-side off the bowling of Phillips. The onus was on Mehidy Hasan to lead a fight-back with the lower order but Santer came back to dismiss him as New Zealand bowled Bangladesh out shortly after tea. However, Mehidy led Bangladesh's bowling attack with 3-17 and left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who took 10 wickets in the first test, took 2-29. Tom Latham and Devon Conway started cautiously but Mehidy broke through with a delivery that Conway thought would turn. Instead it went straight to crash the stump as Conway was out for 11. Taijul then dealt a double blow by dismissing Latham and Henry Nicholls. New Zealand fell into deep trouble when Kane Williamson, the centurion of the previous test, ended up getting an inside edge towards short while defending a quicker delivery of Mehidy. Just a ball later, Mehidy fired another quicker one that kept extremely low to trap Tom Blundell leg-before for a duck. Daryl Mitchell (12) and Glenn Phillips (5) were batting when play came to an end because of bad light.



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Office of the Superintending Engineer

U.K.Head Works Division,Kolabnagar(K).PIN.764011

e-Procurement notice- SE-UKHWD- 11/2023-24 Dated.04.12.2023 (ONLINE)

1. No of Work :: 07 (Seven) nos.

2. Type of Work :: Civil Works

3. Approximate Value of Work :: From Rs. 6.85 Lakh to 33.50 Lakh

4. Class of Contractor :: Registered & licensed Contractors of 'C' & 'D' Class

5. Period of completion :: 02 (Two) to 03(Three) Calendar Months

6. Date & time of availability Of bid documents on line :: 08.12.2023 at 11.00 Hours to 18.12.2023 up to 14.00 Hours


7. Date & Place of opening of Bid on line :: 18.12.2023 (14.30 Hours) at office of the Superintending Engineer, UKHWD,Kolab Nagar

8. Name of the officer inviting Bids. :: Superintending Engineer, UKHWD , Kolab Nagar

Further details can be seen in the Govt. of Odisha e-Procurement Web-Site <http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>

Superintending Engineer Upper Kolab Head Works Division, Kolabnagar

OIPR-32015/11/0012/2324



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER

RURAL WORKS DIVISION RAIIRANGPUR (MAYURBHANJ)

E-mail ID: - eerwairangpur@yahoo.com

Letter No. 5619 // Date- 04.12.2023

"e" Procurement Notice for Road Works

Bid Identification No – RWDRRP – 16 / 2023-24

1. Name of the work : Special repair to roads for the year 2023-24

2. Estimated Cost : From Rs. 5.08 to 16.81 lakhs (approximately),

3. Class of Contractor : "D" & "C" Class or relevant Class of works license.

4. Period of Completion : 02 (Two) calendar months.

5. Tender Paper Cost : as per annexure /-


The details are as follows.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification.	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in OIO S.E.R.W. Division, Raipurpur. Technical Bid & Financial Bid
		From	To		
1	2	3	4	5	6
S.E.R.W Division, Raipurpur.	RWDRRP- 16 / 2023-24	11.12.2023 at 11.00 A.M.	20.12.2023 up to 5.00 P.M.	19.12.2023 up to 5.00 P.M.	21.12.2023 at 11.30 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in

-Sd- Er.D.Behera Superintending Engineer R.W.Division,Raipurpur

OIPR-25107/11/0019/2324



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER

CUTTACK (R&B) DIVISION NO.I: CUTTACK

E-Mail ID:- esewdcuttack@gmail.com

Tel/ Fax No.(0671)-2304128

B-1393

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

('e' PROCUREMENT NOTICE)

Bid Identification No. S.E. CTC(R&B)-45 of 2023-24

TENDER CALL NOTICE

1. The Superintending Engineer, Cuttack (R&B) Division No.I, Cuttack on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites on Percentage rate basis bid in Single cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractor for Road works as mentioned below.

2. No. of Work :- 12 Nos.

3. Nature of work :- Road works

4. Class of Contractor :- "D" & "C", "C" & "B" and "B" Class

5. Tender Paper Cost :- Rs.4000/- & Rs.6000/- (Online)

6. Available of bid documents in the website :- From 08/12/2023 to 5PM of 18/12/2023

7. Date of Opening of Bid :- 11AM of 19/12/2023

8. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum/ corrigendum/ cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

(Er. P.K.Majhi) Superintending Engineer, Cuttack (R&B) Division No.I

OIPR-34091/11/0043/2324