

OPINION 6
COMPULSORY VOTING FOR VIBRANT DEMOCRACY

WORLD 8
ISRAEL VOWS TO FIGHT ON IN GAZA DESPITE DEADLY AMBUSH

MONEY 10
SENSEX, NIFTY HIT LIFETIME HIGHS AS US FED KEEPS RATE UNCHANGED

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ATTACK ON DEMOCRACY WILL NOT GO UNPUNISHED: PM

Modi warns anti national elements against adventurism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened a meeting on Thursday with top ministers from his council to address the massive security breach in Parliament the day before. Sources reported that the Prime Minister expressed serious concern over the matter and regretted the incident, which he termed an attack on the temple of democracy. Modi instructed his senior Cabinet ministers to treat the security breach in the Lok Sabha "seriously".

"Take this incident seriously. Don't indulge in politicking. We all need to take precautions," the PM is said to have conveyed to his council of ministers at a meeting before the start of Parliament session on Thursday.

Sources mentioned that Modi wanted to be informed about the latest actions taken and the directions of the investigation. He emphasised the need to apprehend the perpetrators swiftly to send a clear message that the current regime is strict.

"There should be zero tolerance for any such anti-national incidents," a source quoted the PM as saying during the review meeting.



The Lok Sabha Secretariat suspended eight personnel for a security lapse incident that triggered a massive scare on the 22nd anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament.

The suspended personnel were from the Delhi Police, on deputation for Parliament security, and were responsible for frisking visitors and media persons.

"Although they are on deputation for Parliament security, their cadre-

controlling authority is the organisation they represent, not the Lok Sabha Secretariat," a functionary said.

In the new security setup for the New Parliament Building, Delhi Police personnel are deployed to frisk those entering the Parliament complex, while the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is responsible for perimeter security. The dedicated Parliament Security Services, who were previously

responsible for overall security, are now limited to issuing entry passes based on recommendations.

The government asserted on Thursday that a high-level inquiry has been initiated into the Lok Sabha security breach incident and urged the opposition not to politicise the issue.

Expressing shock at the breach, several Members of Parliament stated that visitors must clear five levels of security before entering the

complex, and signatures from an MP's office are required for a pass to the visitors' gallery. The breach occurred 22 years after the 2001 attack on Parliament.

In a statement shortly after Parliament assembled at 2 pm, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said, "We all agree that the unfortunate incident on Wednesday was a serious one concerning the safety and security of MPs."

Continued on Page 2

MHA swings into action: NIA intensifies probe into Parliament invasion

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After a series of interrogations with multiple probe agencies, the four culprits arrested over the Parliament security breach on Wednesday have been charged under the anti-terror Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), even as raids are being conducted at several places to apprehend one Lalit Jha, suspected to be the key conspirator.

Initial investigations have revealed that the main conspirator is someone else, and efforts are underway to apprehend him. However, the security agencies have not found connections with any terror group so far.

The Delhi Police has formed several teams and are moving across the country for probes at various locations, seeking cooperation from other agencies, including mobile and internet operators.

A Delhi court sent the four accused — Sagar Sharma (26), Manoranjan D (34), Amol Shinde (25), and



Security personnel check a vehicle near the Parliament House a day after a security breach
Ranjana Dimri | Pioneer

Neelam Devi (37) — to seven days of police custody. They were presented before NIA Special Judge Hardeep Kaur by the city police who sought their custodial interrogation for 15 days.

While seeking a remand for 15 days, the Delhi Police informed the court that it was a well-planned attack on Parliament. The police mentioned that special shoes were made in Lucknow, which need to be investigated. They need to be taken to Mumbai, Mysore, and Lucknow for further

investigation. The Delhi Police further informed the court that they have added Sections 16 and 18 of the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), related to terrorism and conspiracy for terrorism, respectively, against them.

"Their rights were limited to galleries. They jumped from the (visitors) gallery into the Well, which was trespassing. They hid (smoke) canisters in their shoes," the police said.

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Rajasthan CM to take oath today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajasthan Chief Minister-designate Bhajan Lal Sharma, along with his deputies Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa, is set to take the oath of office on Friday outside the Albert Hall museum at Ram Niwas Bagh. The ceremony will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP National President JP Nadda, and other prominent party leaders. Governor Kalraj Mishra will administer the oath, echoing a similar venue used by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in 2018.

Massive security measures and seating arrangements have been implemented at the historic Albert Hall, anticipating a large audience for the ceremony. As of Thursday evening, final preparations were underway to ensure a grand event. The ceremony is scheduled for 11:15 am, with public representatives, party workers, and people from across the state expected to participate.

BJP leaders confirmed that invitations have been extended to central leaders and state chief ministers for the ceremony. Main roads leading to the state capital have been adorned with posters and banners showcasing various welfare schemes of the Centre, along with cutouts of leaders.

In an earlier statement, Raj Bhawan announced that the swearing-in ceremony, proposed by Sharma, would take place on Friday outside Albert Hall in Ram Niwas Bagh. Governor Mishra congratulated Sharma and approved the ceremony's program.

Sharma's oath on December 15 holds significance according to the Hindu calendar, as it precedes the commencement of Karmas on December 16, 2023, considered inauspicious in Hindu mythology until January 15, 2024. Astrologers advise against new endeavors, marriage, engagement ceremonies, house purchases, and starting ventures during this period.

Sharma, a first-time MLA, was announced as the chief minister-designate on Tuesday during a BJP Legislature Party meeting, attended by central observers Rajnath Singh, Saroj Pandey, and Vinod Tawde. Deputy chief ministers Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa, along with Speaker of the Assembly Vasudev Devnani, were also appointed during the meeting. Former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje is expected to attend the ceremony. Party leaders held several meetings at the party's state office to coordinate responsibilities for the event.

According to BJP leaders, key entry points and routes in the state capital, Jaipur, will be adorned with party flags, posters, cutouts, and banners highlighting BJP government schemes.



Suspended TMC MP Derek O'Brien and others outside the Parliament House
PTI

14 MPs suspended for ruckus in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 14 Parliamentarians from the Opposition benches, including one from the Rajya Sabha, were suspended on Thursday for the remaining period of the Winter Session on charges of disrupting proceedings in Parliament. Thirteen Opposition MPs from different parties were suspended from the Lok Sabha, while one TMC MP, Derek O'Brien, faced the action in the upper house.

Amid demands from the opposition for a statement from the Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the security breach in the Lok Sabha, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi moved two resolutions on separate occasions for the suspension of the MPs.

Before their suspension, the MPs moved into the Well of the

House, raising slogans and demanding a statement from the government on Wednesday's security breach.

The Lok Sabha witnessed its first adjournment during the question hour, as it was adjourned until 2 pm amid the opposition's uproar. At 2 pm, Joshi read a statement on behalf of the government, stating that internal security in Parliament falls under the purview of the Speaker. He then moved a resolution amid the chaos to suspend five MPs.

"I move the following, that this House, having noted the misconduct of TN Prathapan, Hibi Eden, Jothimani, Ramya Haridas, and Dean Kuriakose, in utter disregard to the House and the authority of this Chair, and having been named by the Chair, to be suspended from the service of the House for the remainder of the session," the resolution read.

Continued on Page 2

Milestone in Mathura dispute as HC allows mosque survey

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

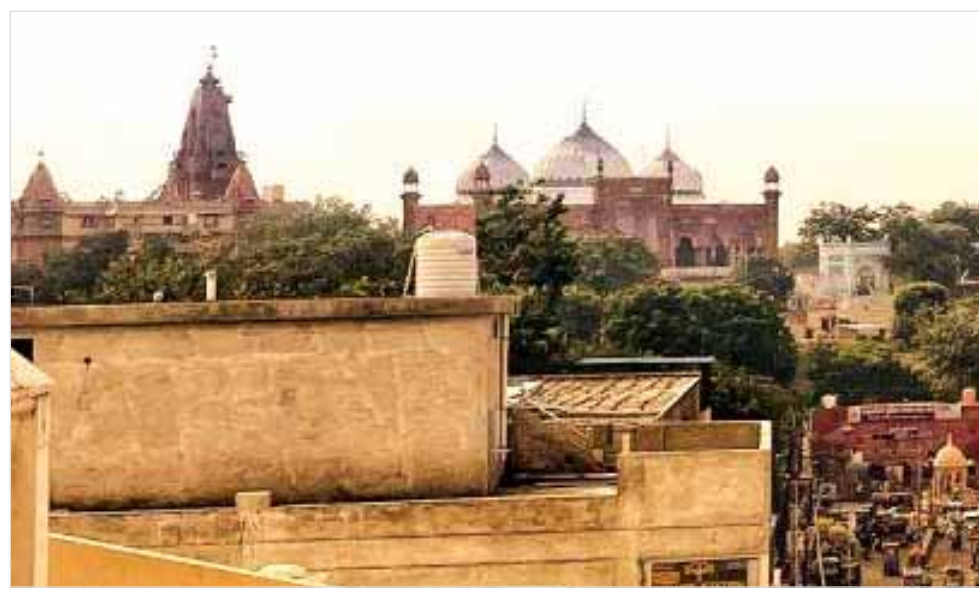
The Allahabad High Court on Thursday allowed a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah premises adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple, an important milestone in the temple-mosque dispute in Mathura. The High Court agreed to the appointment of an advocate commissioner to oversee the survey of the mosque, which the petitioners claim holds signs suggesting that it was a Hindu temple once.

Justice Mayank Kumar Jain said the modalities of the survey will be discussed at the next hearing on December 18.

The order on the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah issue is the second temple-mosque dispute in which the high court has given its nod to a survey over the past months.

The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) recently completed a survey of the Gyanvapi mosque next to Varanasi's Kashi Vishwanath temple, but has sought more time from a local court to submit its report.

According to advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, the application submitted to the Allahabad High Court in the Mathura case said a lotus-shaped pillar characteristic of Hindu temples



exists on the mosque premises, and an image of Hindu deity "Sheshnag" is also present there. It was also submitted that Hindu religious symbols and engravings are visible at the base of the pillar.

In May, the Allahabad High Court transferred to itself all cases related to the Mathura dispute. On November 16, Justice Jain had reserved the order on the Hindu side's

petition seeking a survey of the Shahi Idgah premises. The petition was filed on behalf of the deity Bhagwan Sri Krishna Virajman and seven others through advocates Hari Shankar Jain, Vishnu Shankar Jain, Prabhash Pandey and Devki Nandan. It claimed that Lord Krishna's birthplace lies beneath the mosque.

The applicants had sought the appointment of a commission

with specific directions to submit its report within a stipulated time period after conducting a survey. The petition also sought directions to photograph and record the entire proceedings on video.

According to the petitioners, the factual aspects of the "disputed structure" have to be brought before the court for proper adjudication.

Humans run riot over our regal animals again

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A 70-member team of crack shooters from the Kerala Police, tranquillising experts from the Forest Department, forest guards, and a "Kumki" elephant specially summoned from Mysore are on the trail of a tiger designated as a man-eater in Kerala's Wayanad district. Local residents in Wayanad allege that last week, the tiger killed a person who had entered the reserve forests to collect forest produce, and his half-eaten body was subsequently recovered.

In late November, people discovered the carcass of a leopard on the outskirts of Wayanad forests. Additionally, another leopard was killed in the

Kannur district by officials entrusted with protecting it. According to the government's account, the big cat died when it was tranquillised as part of a mission to rescue it from a well into which it had accidentally fallen.

Within two days, the carcass of a three-and-a-half-year-old leopard was found in the Kozhikode district, reportedly "murdered" by porcupines, according to forest officials. The carcass bore numerous quills, supporting the officials' claims that the leopard fell victim to a territorial dispute between big cats and unruly porcupines. These incidents have earned Kerala the grim nickname "graveyard of wild animals".



Although the Wayanad district forest officer, a woman, issued orders to tranquillise the big cat, the locals remained dissatisfied.

They demonstrated with the victim's lifeless body, demanding that the tiger be euthanised. Adding insult to injury, TV news

channels are reporting the sighting of a tiger in Valparai, a village on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border. Valparai, once abundant with reserve forests and a habitat for tigers, leopards, elephants, boars, as well as smaller animals like rabbits, jackals, foxes, and deer, has undergone significant changes.

"The reserve forests gave way to tea estates, and as the number of plantations increased, the homes of animals shrank. Hence, the sighting of tigers and leopards is treated as 'Breaking News,' as if a major mishap has occurred," said Sudheer Damodaran, an ecologist based in Thrissur who monitors events in Valparai. He noted that massive encroachment into reserve

forests has led to wild animals becoming strangers in their own land.

Pius, a retired assistant conservator of forests, stated that there has been no considerable increase in the number of leopards, tigers, and other wild animals in the forests of Kerala. "Many of them, displaced from their habitats, are forced to enter new settlements, resulting in man-animal clashes. Tigers, cheetahs, and leopards are shy animals and typically keep away from humans. They attack humans only when they become old and infirm," said Pius, drawing on his three decades of experience dealing with wild animals.

Continued on Page 2

Knew Jha but no role in LS attack: Kolkata NGO student

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Nilaksha Aich the college student — to whom Lalit Jha the parliament smoke bomb attack accused allegedly WhatsApped the first video of the attack — on Thursday denied any role in the Wednesday's raid. He had no idea about why Jha, now at large, had sent him the video, he said.



Aich also said that he had met Jha only once in Kolkata. "I had met him in the month of April during an event at Central Avenue ... I was told that like me he too was involved in social works," Aich said. A second-year under-graduate student, Aich said "I have no idea as to why he sent me this video ... I was inside my class room and had no idea of what had taken place inside Parliament ... I only came to know about things after I received the WhatsApped video ... I only watched them." He said that he did not know other persons who had been arrested in the case adding none of these people, not even Jha came to his house at Halisahar in North 24 Parganas some thirty miles north of Kolkata. Neloy Aich, the father of Nilaksha, said that his son was a good student and had no objectionable track record. "He was involved with some NGOs but every activity took place through Facebook or social media ... there was no physical activity involved," the

Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D. -- burst yellow smoke canisters after jumping into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitors' gallery the others videographed the incident. Meanwhile, the Bengal Police after being alerted by the Crime Branch of Delhi Police on Thursday questioned Aich at his residence. Aich reportedly told the police that as he was involved with a number of NGOs he had come in contact with Jha in the month of April this year. Aich also informed the police that Jha lived in Kolkata's Burrabazar area for some time. He allowed himself to be known in the locality as a teacher, sources said. Jha was an introvert kind of person but never aroused any suspicion among his neighbours, the police sources said adding the man used to pay his rent online. Jha had not come to his flat for the past one-and-a-half years and his room was under lock and key, neighbours said.

17 lakh Maharashtra Government employees go on strike, services hit

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Various public services were badly affected on Thursday, as more than 17 lakh Maharashtra Government employees went on a day-long strike to press for Old Pension Scheme (OPS), and 17 other demands. Thursday was the second occasion in the last nine months when lakhs of employees owing allegiance to the Maharashtra State Government Employees Association (MSGEA) struck work across the state, to demand OPS and press for other pending demands. The agitation, which covered all government departments, including schools, colleges, hospitals -- from the block to the state level, affected public services at many places. It may be recalled that chief minister Eknath Shinde had had appointed a committee to study the OPS and the New Pension Scheme. The committee, comprising top former bureaucrats Subodh Kumar, K. P. Bakshi and Sudhir Kumar,



had recently submitted its report to the state government. As part of the day-long strike, the government employees had taken out a massive procession in Nagpur during the past two days, an agitation that coincided with the ongoing winter session of the State Legislature. The agitating government employees also organised demonstrations and protests in different parts of the state

today, including Mumbai, Nagpur, Thane, Raigad, Pune and other places. Earlier this week, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, who holds the Finance portfolio, said that the government would study the committee report and consider the employees' OPS demand positively before the 2024 state Assembly polls. Pawar also assured the agitating employees that the state government would take a decision on OPS ahead of the forthcoming budget session of the state legislature to be held in Mumbai in the first quarter of 2024. On his part, deputy chief Devendra Fadnis has also handed out similar assurance to the agitating state employees. Both the deputy chief minister said that the state government would study the financial implications of the OPS and take a decision in the matter.

Maharashtra cops gun down 2 Maoists on Chhattisgarh border

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Gadchiroli police on Thursday foiled a plan by naxal operatives to ambush security forces and kill the local tribals, by gunning down two Maoists in a fierce encounter and recovering a cache of arms and ammunition in the forests located on the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border. Acting on a tip-off that a large contingent of naxals was camping in the forests located on the Chhattisgarh as part of its plan to ambush security forces and kill innocent tribals, the police teams launched a massive combing operation in the forest area, prompting the Maoists to indulge in indiscriminate firing at them. The police teams retaliated in a big way at the Maoists. The credible intelligence input that the Gadchiroli police had received was that a large number heavily armed Maoists were camping near Bodhintola some 10 km from last outpost Godalwahi in Chhattisgarh, with "an intention to cause sabotage and ambush on the police forces and to kill innocent tribals branding them as police informers". In the fierce encounter that lasted for more than an

hour, at least two Maoists were killed. After the encounter, the police recovered the bodies of two Maoists killed in the firing and also some arms and ammunition, including an AK47 and a SLR weapon, from the encounter site. The police identified one of the two Maoists killed in the encounter as Durgesh Watti, deputy commander of Kasansur Dalam who was one of the main conspirators of the Jambulkhedha blast in which 15 Gadchiroli police personnel were killed in 2019. Efforts are on to identify the second body. The police teams are continuing search operations in the forest areas located on the border of Chhattisgarh. It may be recalled that on May 1, 2019, 15 commandos and a driver were killed in a landmine blast of two security vehicles carried out by Maoists in Kurkheda tehsil of Gadchiroli district in eastern Maharashtra. The shocking attack on the security vehicles had come ten hours after the Maoists set on fire at least 36 private vehicles and two site offices of a road engaged in construction and repair work along the Purada-Malewada-Yerkhade stretch of the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh national highway number 136.

Parliament security breach a grave matter, Kharge writes to Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote a letter to Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar seeking a discussion on Parliament breach issue and termed it as a "grave matter". In the letter, Kharge urged Dhankhar to not take up any other business in the House and keep the proceedings limited to the discussion on the security breach. He called the Wednesday breach of security in Lok Sabha Chamber and in the Parliament precincts "a very grave matter, unparalleled in the recent past." "In view of the gravity of the matter, myself in consultation with floor leaders of INDIA Parties in Parliament have come to a considered view

that the matter is of such a critical importance that it needs to be raised under Rule 267 of the Rules and Procedure of Council of States (Rajya Sabha). "Further, till the Minister of Home Affairs makes a statement on this matter followed by a discussion under Rule 267, there is no occasion for taking up any other business in the House or even for any meeting with a view to 'sort out this matter' in any other manner," he said in his letter. "I trust that your good self will appreciate the situation," the Congress chief said. Opposition parties on Thursday did not allow both houses to function, raising demand for a discussion on the breach. The consequent led to the suspension of 14 Lok Sabha members and one Rajya Sabha member.

AI to predict long term visual impairment in myopic patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers have developed a new artificial intelligence (AI) model that can predict the risk of long-term visual impairment in patients with high myopia, one of the top three causes of irreversible blindness in many regions of the world. The study is published in the journal JAMA Ophthalmology. The team at the Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU) said its machine-learning model works well for predicting—and visualising—the risk of visual impairment over the long term. Machine learning is a type of AI focused on building computer systems that learn from

data, enabling software to improve its performance over time. People with extreme shortsightedness (called high myopia) can clearly see objects that are near to them but cannot focus on objects at a distance. Contacts, glasses, or surgery can be used to correct their vision, but having high myopia can lead to a condition called pathologic myopia, leading causes of blindness. "We know that machine-learning algorithms work well on tasks such as identifying changes and complications in myopia but in this study, we wanted to investigate something different, namely how good these algorithms are at long-term predictions," said Yining Wang, lead author of the study.



The study, recently published in the journal JAMA Ophthalmology, looked at the visual acuity of 967 Japanese patients at TMDU's Advanced Clinical Center for Myopia after 3 and 5 years had passed. The researchers formed a dataset from 34 variables that are commonly collected during ophthalmic examinations, such as age, current visual acuity, and the diameter of the cornea.

Paradigm shift in Kerala's development agenda

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The adage 'if the Mountain will not come to Mohammed, then Mohammed will go to the mountain' has come true in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. Development is coming to the doorstep of the people as the persons who matter failed to deliver the goods. A Non-Government Organization by name CG3 (Connecting Governed, Governing and Governance) which made a paradigm shift in the functioning of the State's Local Self Government Bodies by bringing together all panchayat and district panchayat members face to face with bureaucrats chose Thiruvananthapuram to highlight the pains of the capital city despite hundreds of promises and assurances made by political parties to develop the centuries old metropolis. CG3 is no pushover like other NGOs as it has only persons who matter as the guiding spirits. K G Balakrishnan, former chief justice of India, S M Vijayanand, former chief secretary of the State who is an authority on empowering the local self-government (he was the additional secretary in the ministry of rural development and has presided over the transformation of the local self-governments), Dr K P Klyasanatha Pillay, senior advocate, Supreme Court who is the master brain behind CG3 are the people who is in the forefront of the innovation.

Humans run riot...

From Page 1 Earlier this year, there was commotion in the Idukki district of Kerala regarding the 'attack' by a wild tusker nicknamed Ari Komban, known for stealing rice (Ari) from rations shops. Elephants, too, are compelled to leave their restricted dwelling places due to a lack of water and food. "The encroachment of forest lands by vested interests has resulted in the shrinking of space for animals. We must find a solution to save these animals," said C R Neelakantan, an engineer turned environmentalist. Unfortunately, tigers, leopards, and elephants do not appear on the voters' list, and that could be the reason for their suffering, according to Damodaran.

14 MPs suspended for ruckus in...

From Page 1 The House was then adjourned until 3 pm. When the House reconvened at 3 pm, Joshi moved a second resolution to suspend VK Sreekandan (Cong), Benny Behanan (Cong), Mohammad Jawed (Cong), PR Natarajan (CPI-M), Kanimozhi (DMK), K Subbarayan (CPI), SR Parthiban (DMK), S Venkatesan (CPI-M), and Manickam Tagore (Cong). Later, it was claimed that Prathiban was named among the suspended MPs even though he was not present in Delhi and was in Chennai. The House was adjourned to meet again on Friday. Subsequently, the government withdrew the suspension of DMK MP SR Parthiban from the Lok Sabha as he was not present in the House, and his name was included among those to be suspended by mistake. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi announced that Parthiban's name has been withdrawn from the list of Lok Sabha members suspended earlier in the day due to a mistake on the part of the staff in identifying the member. Joshi stated, 'I have requested the Speaker to drop the name of the member as it was a case of mistaken identity,' and the Speaker has agreed to the suggestion. Meanwhile, some of the suspended members continued to protest in the House even after the adjournment. A few of them came out after some time. The Winter Session of Parliament, which started on December 4, will conclude on December 22. In a statement, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Joshi emphasised, 'We all agree' that the unfortunate incident on Wednesday was a serious matter concerning the safety and security of MPs. Joshi noted that it should be appreciated that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla promptly held a meeting with floor leaders following the incident and listened to suggestions for further strengthening Parliament security.

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It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Daljit Kaur Gill who is purchasing the Flat bearing No. 1F-02, on Third floor, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds., part of KHASRA NO. 50, VILLAGE CHARANIDAS PARGANA & AMP. 331, Situated in the area of Village Khuraji Khas, Ilaqa Shahdara, Delhi, from Mrs. Madhu Jaideka who Mr. Rakesh Jaideka Vide Conveyance deed dated 25.08.2021. Duly Registered as Document No. 5094, in Book No. 1, Volume No. 2171, on Pages 20 to 24, on Dated 31.08.2021, SRO/11 Free Vihar, and same to be financed by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited. That Original General Power of Attorney Executed by Jagat Ram and Co. through Mr. Jagat Ram S/o Mr. Ustam Chandra in favour of Mr. Gopi Chand Lagan S/o Mr. Kannaia Lal in respect of the subject property, Alongwith AT & WILL have been lost/misplaced/ not available. If any Person reads any type of deimnight/line/interest over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, liens etc. Lucern Legal LLP Office No. G-03, at Ground Floor, on Plot No. D-61, Sector-2 Noida, UP-201301, Contact: 99120-4130438

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in

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PUBLIC NOTICE
VISHAL MEHAN, amp. 7-13, KARKARODOMA COURT DELHI-110092

From Page 1
Vishal Sharma, alias Vicky, in whose house the accused stayed in Gurugram before reaching Parliament, is still under detention. According to sources, the role of two more persons has also surfaced during the investigation, adding that all the accused did everything as part of their foolproof plan. The police have registered a case under UAPA sections 16 (punishment for a terrorist act) and 18 (punishment for conspiracy, etc.) and IPC sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 452 (trespass), 153 (wantonly giving provocation, with intent to cause riot), 186 (obstructing a public servant in the discharge of public functions), and 353 (assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from the discharge of his duty) at the Parliament Street police station. Offenses punishable under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act are non-bailable. Sources said the medical examinations of all four arrested individuals—Sagar Sharma (26), Manoranjan D (34), Amol Shinde (25), and Neelam Devi (37)—were conducted at midnight by a

S.NO.	JOB NO.	NAME OF WORK	AMOUNT
1	38/DGM(NTC)/SM(NTC)/2022-23	P/L Thermoplastic paint on road between Sector-39,51 & 40, 50 Noida.	3099471.44

Which can be uploaded by date 21/12/2023 upto 05.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened /downloaded on date 22/12/2023 at 11.00 AM.

S.NO.	JOB NO.	NAME OF WORK	AMOUNT
2	09/DGM(NTC)/SM(NTC)/2023-24	P/L Thermoplastic paint and road Safety items on FNG road between Sector-139, 140, 140A and Sector-139A, 139B, Noida.	6392760.00
3	10/DGM(NTC)/SM(NTC)/2023-24	P/L Thermoplastic paint and road Safety items on internal road of Sector-80, Noida.	7106700.00

Which can be uploaded by date 28/12/2023 upto 05.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened /downloaded on date 29/12/2023 at 11.00 AM.

Dy. General Manager
Noida Traffic Cell
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

From Page 1
Joshi noted that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla promptly held a meeting with floor leaders following the incident and listened to suggestions for further strengthening Parliament security. Some suggestions given by MPs have already been implemented, he said, and noted that the Speaker himself has stated that in the future, additional measures will be taken to strengthen Parliament security. "This matter concerns all of us, and we must speak in one voice," Joshi said. On such a grave national issue, no politics is expected from anyone, the minister asserted. Joshi also listed past incidents when such breaches of security have happened in Parliament, noting that incidents such as slogan shouting, throwing papers, and jumping from the gallery have occurred in the past. The minister informed the House that the Speaker has written a letter to the Home Secretary for a high-level inquiry, and the probe has already begun. Joshi also mentioned that it has become a habit for some members to politicize all issues. "I request them not to politicize this

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PARLIAMENT SECURITY BREACH

TIMELINE

Raids on as key conspirator still on run

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has conducted raids to nab Lalit Jha, the sixth man suspected to be a key part of the group that breached Parliament. A resident of Kolkata, Jha is a teacher by profession and was the main conspirator of the security breach. However, Jha is on the run and is suspected to be either in Rajasthan or Haryana. Multiple teams are on the lookout for Jha, who is also a teacher by profession. Jha, one of the accused in the Parliament security breach, had shot the video of the entire protest by two accused outside Parliament and had shared it with one man, who is associated with an NGO (Samovadi

Subash) in Kolkata, sources said. Initial inquiries suggest the date of the security breach - December 13 - was fixed on instructions from Lalit Jha. The date was significant because it was the 22nd anniversary of an attack on the old Parliament building by Pakistan-based terror groups, in which nine died. Influenced by revolutionary Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Lalit and others were highly motivated to commit an act which could draw the country's attention to them. According to sources, all six joined a Bhagat Singh fan page on Facebook after coming in touch with each other on social media.



Lalit, Sagar Sharma, and Maoranjan D had about a year ago met in Mysore where they made a plan to barge into the parliament. They later added Neelam and Amol into the plan.

liament on a visitor pass issued on the name of an MP. There, he got to know that the frisking of shoes does not happen," the officer privy to the investigations said. On Wednesday, Lalit came with the four others to the Parliament. When they got passes for only two of them, Lalit decided to take the mobile phones of all four - Sagar, Manoranjan, Neelam and Amol - with him. The colour canisters, which were sprayed inside and outside the Parliament complex, had been brought by Amol from Kalyan, Maharashtra. Sagar and Manoranjan went inside, while Neelam and Amol stayed outside at the gate where they too opened the canisters, which

emitted yellow and red smoke, sources said. Lalit later posted the video of the incident on his Instagram account and also shared it with Vishal Sharma alias Vickey -- also part of the group -- soon after Neelam and Amol were detained from outside the parliament, the officer added. Lalit's last location was traced in Neemrana on the Rajasthan-Haryana Border. Police had earlier said that all five had gathered on December 10 and stayed at Vishal Sharma's residence in Gurugram. Neelam, Manoranjan, Amol, and Vishal are in custody and have been questioned by the Delhi Police Special cell and other security agencies.

- In 2022, Lalit Jha, Sagar Sharma, 26, and Maoranjan D, 34, met in Mysuru where they made a plan to barge into the parliament to attract the attention of the country. Later Neelam, 37, and Amol, 25, joined the plan.
- The five joined a Bhagat Singh fan page on Facebook after coming in touch with each other on social media for four years.
- Manoranjan, at the instruction of Lalit Jha, allegedly the main conspirator of the plan, conducted a recce of the Parliament building during the Monsoon Session this year in July and noticed that the shoes of the visitors were not checked.
- The five gathered at Gurugram resident Vishal Sharma's house on Sunday and stayed there till Tuesday.
- All five left for Parliament building on Wednesday morning. Manoranjan had procured visitors passes through Mysore-Kodagu MP Pratap Simha.
- Sagar and Manoranjan entered the new Parliament building and reached visitors gallery. At around 1 pm, Sagar jumped from the visitors gallery into the Lok Sabha chamber. Manoranjan also tried to jump and was seen hanging from railing of the visitors gallery.
- They released yellow coloured gas from canisters they had smuggled inside in their shoes. They were overpowered and thrashed by the MPs in the House and handed over to security personnel.
- Around the same time, Neelam and Amol released gas from similar canisters and raised slogans outside the Parliament building. Lalit who was with them shot a video that was later shared on Instagram.
- Neelam and Amol were caught by the policemen, while Lalit managed to give them a slip.
- All four -- Sagar, Manoranjan, Neelam and Amol -- were taken to Parliament Street Police Station where they were questioned by the investigators. Special Cell of Delhi Police joined the investigation.
- Vishal and his wife were also detained by the police from Gurugram.
- Sagar, Manoranjan, Neelam, and Amol were arrested by Delhi Police after questioning for hours. A case under anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act was registered against all of them.
- Anti-terror unit special cell is probing the security breach and conducting search to nab Lalit who is still absconding. The four are likely to be produced before a city court later in the day.

8 security personnel suspended by LS Secretariat over security breach

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As many as eight security personnel were suspended by the Lok Sabha secretariat over the massive security breach that took place at the Parliament on Wednesday. The suspended police personnel were on deputation for Parliament security and tasked with frisking visitors and mediapersons.

The sources identified them as Rampal, Arvind, Vir Das, Ganesh, Anil, Pradeep, Vimitt and Narendra. "Though they are on deputation for Parliament security, their cadre-controlling authority is the organisation that they represent and not the Lok Sabha Secretariat," a functionary said. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is responsible for perimeter security. A day after Parliament security breach, strin-

gent measures were put in place in and around the building on Thursday with police and Parliament security staff thoroughly vetting credentials of those entering the complex. The MPs were subjected to thorough checks before entering the building, including making them remove their shoes for checks. Only parliamentary staff and those working in nearby offices with valid identity cards were

allowed to access the road between Parliament and the Red Cross building in central Delhi as part of tightened security arrangements. Security personnel deployed outside the Transport Bhavan, metres away from the Parliament complex, did not allow anyone to go beyond the barricades they had put up before checking their identity cards and entry passes.

CPWD floats tender for more security infrastructure day before Parliament security breach

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day before the major security breach in the Lok Sabha, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) floated a tender for additional security infrastructure, including security gadgets and bulletproof enclosure for security personnel, at an estimated cost of Rs 35 crore for the Parliament complex.



tender document states that the financial bid will be invited from pre-qualified bidders at a later date. The CPWD said that in view of the high degree of security concerns at site and the kind of work involved, stringent access-control measures will be exercised for entry and exit of manpower, material and construction equipment. "Reception lounge & other security infrastructure along

with E&M services required to be executed, work also includes security gadgets, Bullet Proof Morchas etc. The contractor shall plan resources accordingly," the document says. The contractor has to execute the work in three shifts with a large manpower of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, experienced supervisors and professional engineers. "The bidder is advised to visit

the site of work, at his own cost, and examine it and its surroundings to himself to collect all information that he considers necessary for proper assessment of the prospective assignment," the document says. According to the CPWD, the agency should have an average annual financial turnover (gross) of Rs. 10.5 crore on civil and/or electrical construction works during the immediate last three consecutive financial years ending on March 31, 2023. A day after the Parliament security breach, stringent measures were put in place in and around the building on Thursday, with police and the Parliament security staff thoroughly checking the credentials of those entering the complex. Security personnel deployed outside the Transport Bhavan, metres away from the Parliament complex, did not allow anyone to go beyond the

barricades they had put up before checking their identity cards and entry passes. Security personnel deployed near the Krishi Bhavan, which houses the agriculture ministry and other government departments, stopped bikers and let them leave only after checking their credentials. The four arrested in connection with the security breach in Parliament have been charged under anti-terror law UAPA besides sections of Indian Penal Code, even as raids are being conducted at several places to nab Lalit Jha suspected to be a key conspirator, police sources said on Thursday. Offences punishable under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act are non-bailable. The security agencies have not found their connections with any terror group so far, an official said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot on Thursday said the Delhi government's 'mohalla' bus service could be rolled out in January next year with the delivery of the first lot of buses after necessary approvals. The 'mohalla' bus service, announced in the 2023-24 Delhi budget, aims to deploy shorter nine-metre electric buses to boost last-mile connectivity in crowded areas and those with narrow roads. These buses have been specially designed to cater to such areas. "The delivery of the nine-metre buses is likely to start from next month and we are waiting for that. Except for one company that had supplied such buses to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, no company has such buses ready.



"Before they are supplied, a prototype is made and the certifying agencies assess its roadworthiness. After the roadworthiness is certified, they (buses) are given to the Transport Department and it carries out an inspection. Then the trial happens," Gahlot said at a press conference. "We held a meeting with the OEM and we are confident of getting the first lot of buses by January. Once we get them, we will flag them off and dedicate

them to the people of Delhi," he added. According to officials, certain areas like outer Delhi, Sangam Vihar, Deoli, Chhatarpur, Vasant Kunj, Dwarka, Rohini and Najafgarh have been identified for deployment of these buses as they do not have proper connectivity to bus stops and metro stations. The Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal-led government plans to procure more than 2,000 feeder buses to operate on routes that cannot be accessed by 12-metre buses. A technical committee was constituted by the transport minister in May to decide routes and operational characteristics of the new bus service. As part of research for the launch of the 'mohalla' bus service, Gahlot will also be meeting MLAs of southeast and outer Delhi constituencies to understand issues of areas lacking last-mile connectivity.

Saxena, Kejriwal flag off 500 electric buses in city



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to provide relief to commuters, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal flagged off 500 electric buses on Thursday, taking the number of such buses in the national capital to 1,300. With this, Delhi has the highest number of electric buses plying on its roads in the country. "We have rolled out 500 (electric) buses today. These are zero emission buses. We will continue to do such things to make Delhi better," Saxena told reporters. Kejriwal in his turn thanked Saxena and promised to keep improving the city transport. "I want to congratulate the people of Delhi on this occasion. I also want to thank the LG for taking out time from his busy schedule to grace this occasion. We now have 1300 electric buses in Delhi. We will continue to strengthen Delhi's transport system," he told reporters. In a post on X, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said,

"Congrats Delhi!!!! We're celebrating another huge milestone today! Flagged off 500 new E-buses along with Hon'ble CM @ArvindKejriwal and Hon'ble @LtGovDelhi. Success is never overnight, it is a guaranteed result of consistency! We are yet again leading the way with a record 1300 e-buses." Later, addressing a press conference, the minister said the addition of the buses is a strong step in the fight against pollution. "In winters, pollution levels go up. One CNG bus emits 800 gram of carbon dioxide per kilometre. One electric bus saves that much amount of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere," he said. Before the Thursday addition, 800 electric buses had been plying on Delhi roads since January 2022. These buses have covered a distance of more than 42 million kilometres and cut more than 34,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide so far, the minister said. By 2025, Delhi will have a total of 10,480 buses with electric ones making up 80 per cent of

the fleet. This will help cut 4.67 lakh tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, according to the minister. The new buses are air-conditioned, comfortable, and equipped with CCTV cameras and panic buttons. "If you do not feel comfortable while travelling, you can press the panic button and immediately the live feed to the command and control centre will start. The feed will also be accessible to Delhi Police that will be able to step in," he said. The Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying with the help of the Central Government, Delhi has got the unique gift of 500 electric buses. "This will make it easier to fight against pollution in Delhi and will give life to Delhi's dying public transport system," said Bidhuri, adding that the AAP government should rationalize the routes properly as there are a number of routes where less number of buses are plying making life hell for the daily commuters.

Amid tussle, Delhi Government releases ₹535 cr for DJB projects

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a tussle over release of funds, the Delhi government's finance department has released Rs 535 crore to the Delhi Jal Board for nearly 70 projects of the agency, officials said on Thursday. Delhi Water Minister Atishi had last month claimed that the national capital was staring at a "man-made water crisis" due to the stoppage of funds to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) by the finance department and demanded Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's immediate intervention. "The file for release of funds came on December 7 and the funds were sanctioned on December 9. These are from the second installment of funds that are supposed to be released to the DJB," said a government official. Amid an ongoing tussle

between the Centre and Aam Aadmi Party, Delhi Finance and Services Minister Atishi in an affidavit submitted before the Delhi High Court said the Finance Secretary Ashish Chandra Verma is delaying the much-needed funds for the DJB. "Despite adherence to the prescribed payment schedule and timely submission of utilisation certificates and requisite details by the DJB on September 12, the Principal Secretary (Finance), Finance and Planning Department has persistently raised new and varied queries, impeding the release of the much-needed funds," Atishi said in an affidavit. The AAP minister also claimed that she had asked the officers to look into the matter but to no avail. "I have repeatedly asked for the officers responsible for the alleged mismanagement to be identified and for recommendations for

disciplinary action, to no avail. Neither have names been forwarded, nor has any action been initiated," she said. Earlier this month, DJB vice-chairman Somnath Bharti had said all maintenance and developmental works have "come to a standstill" due to the delay in disbursement of funds from the finance secretary. "We have to release a total of Rs 2,200 crore to the Delhi Jal Board and out of that Rs 535 crore has been released. The finance department had informed the Delhi High Court about the release of funds on December 11," he added. The government official said that there are about 70 projects for which these funds have been released. "These 70 projects have been gettagged and all their details were furnished to us. These include providing the DJB tankers for water supply and laying of sewer lines.

Delhi Assembly Winter Session begins today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly's Winter Session will commence on Friday with stepped up security arrangements, including thorough frisking and checking of pass holders for the visitors gallery, in view of the security breach witnessed at the Parliament a day before. Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel said that checking of visitors will be stricter than earlier. Goel said that a meeting of the security guards at the Vidhan Sabha is held routinely by the officials before every session. "Glass panels were installed last year to screen off visitors gallery from the Assembly hall where members sit during the session so that nothing can be thrown down," said Goel. "The visitors during the Assembly session have to take passes and they are issued to only those who come on MLA recommendations. The passes

are not issued without the (assembly) speaker's signatures," he added. The assembly speaker further said the security guards see their passes and they are thoroughly checked, adding the checking will be more stringent this time. A senior police officer said that adequate security arrangements will be made in and outside the Delhi Vidhan Sabha during the session. "The security will be tightened in and outside the Vidhan Sabha on Friday in view of the session. The local police will be deployed outside the premises, while the security unit will look after the security inside the Delhi Assembly," the officer said. The session is likely to witness heated debates on alleged witch-hunt of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) dispensation by the Centre and a growing tussle between the bureaucracy and the government, sources said.

Bittu Bajrangji brother set on fire by 7 men

STAFF REPORTER ■ FARIDABAD

A group of men allegedly poured flammable liquid on cow vigilante Bittu Bajrangji's brother and set him on fire here, police said on Thursday. He has sustained 54 per cent burn injuries and is currently being treated at a private hospital, they said. Bajrangji alias Rajkumar, the national president of Goraksha Bajrang Force, was arrested in connection with the Nuh violence but is out on bail. According to police, Bajrangji's younger brother Mahesh Panchal was allegedly attacked on Wednesday night by six to seven men. They allegedly



nised one of the attackers as one Arman, who had a juice shop in Baba Mandi earlier. In his complaint to the police, Panchal said the incident happened in front of a shop when a car came from the direction of Dayal Hospital.

"Six to seven people got out of the car and started beating me up. One of them took out cans of some liquid substance and threw it on me and set me on fire with a matchbox. I immediately jumped into the drain by holding my nose," he said. Panchal said he came out of the drain after the accused turned their car and fled from the spot. "I came out of the drain and went to my home from where my brother Rajkumar alias Bittu Bajrangji took me to BK Hospital for treatment," Panchal said in his complaint. An FIR has been registered against Arman and other accused under sections 147

(riots), 149 (unlawful assembly), 307 (murder attempt), 326A (voluntarily causing grievous hurt by acid etc) of the IPC at Saran police station on Thursday, police said. A senior police officer said that Panchal had received nearly 54 per cent burns and is being treated in a private hospital now. "The incident site has been inspected and CCTV cameras are being checked. Crime branch and police station teams are conducting raids to nab the accused. The accused involved in the incident will be arrested soon," said Sube Singh, spokesperson of Faridabad Police.

Don't fall prey to fake job offers abroad, MEA warns job seekers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday cautioned Indians seeking employment abroad to not fall prey to fake job offers and urged them to use safe and legal services of registered recruiting agents.

In an advisory, the MEA also warned all unregistered agencies promising jobs abroad not to involve in overseas recruitment saying such activities are in violation of Emigration Act 1983 and amount to human trafficking, which is a punishable criminal offence.

It has been noticed that there has been a huge rise in the number of overseas job seekers being cheated by unregistered recruitment agents by fake job offers and also overcharging to the tune of Rs 2 to 5 lakh, it said.

The MEA said these unregistered and illegal agents operate without obtaining a licence from the ministry which is mandatory for any recruitment abroad.

"It is reported that many illegal agents operate through Facebook, WhatsApp, text message and other such medi-



ums. These agencies provide little or no details of their whereabouts and contacts," it said.

"They usually communicate only through WhatsApp, making it difficult to ascertain the location and identity of the caller and genuineness of the job offer," it added in the advisory.

The MEA also cautioned that such agents lure workers to work in difficult and life-threatening conditions and that such cases are being reported for recruitment to work in several East European countries, some of the Gulf countries, Central Asian countries, Israel, Canada, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic. A valid job offer comes along

with an employment contract duly signed by foreign employer, recruitment agent and the emigrant worker, the MEA said.

It said the employment contract must mention terms and conditions of the job being offered and the salary and other emoluments, adding valid job offers must allow the workers to emigrate on strength of employment or work visa or other similar visa except tourist visa. Normally, reputed foreign employers provide for the cost of airfare, boarding and lodging and insurance cover, it mentioned.

The MEA urged people seeking jobs abroad to use the safe and legal services of registered recruiting agents (RA) only.

"All registered RAs are issued a license number which is prominently displayed in their office premises and in their advertisements, including newspapers and social media," it said.

The MEA said prospective emigrants should cross check the genuineness of the RA by visiting the government website www.Emigrate.Gov.In and click the link "List of active RA".

According to the Emigration Act 1983, no recruiting agent shall collect from the prospective emigrant the service charges more than Rs 30,000 plus GST (18%), and the recruiting agent shall issue a receipt to the emigrant for the amount collected by it in this regard.

"Going abroad through any other channel of recruitment involves serious risk of being defrauded of money, not landing in the promised job and difficult living conditions abroad," the MEA said in the advisory. "All unregistered agencies are being warned not to involve in overseas recruitment activities. Such activities are in violation of Emigration Act 1983 and amount to human trafficking, which is a punishable criminal offence," it said.

Stringent measures put in place day after Parliamentary breach

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Parliament security breach, stringent measures were put in place in and around the building on Thursday, with police and the Parliament security staff thoroughly checking the credentials of those entering the complex. The Lok Sabha Secretariat suspended eight security personnel for the security breach in Parliament. Those suspended belong to various security agencies who were on deputation for Parliament security.

Security personnel deployed outside the Transport Bhavan, metres away from the Parliament complex, did not allow anyone to go beyond the barricades they had put up before checking their identity cards and entry passes.

Security personnel deployed near the Krishna Bhavan, which houses the agriculture ministry and other government departments, stopped bikers and let them leave only after checking their credentials.

Inside the Parliament campus, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma was not allowed to enter the new build-

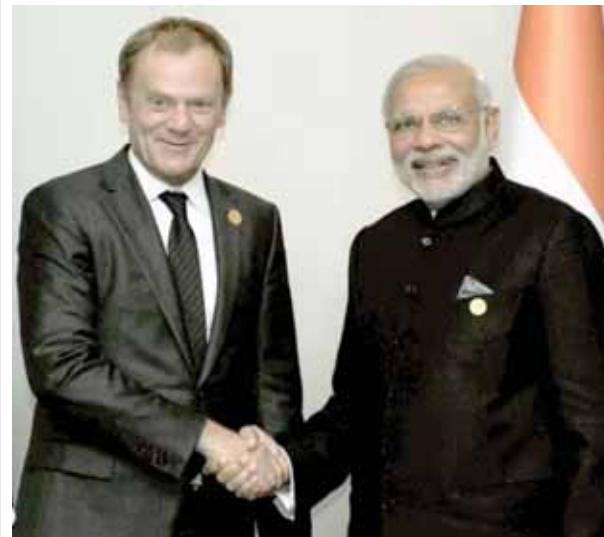
ing from the Makar Dwar, which is meant for the entry of parliamentarians. Sangma had to get off his car and walk to the Shardul Dwar to enter the building.

"Ministry officials, including the ministers' private secretaries and other staff, were stopped from entering Parliament through the Makar Dwar as it is only meant for the entry of the MPs.

"They were asked to enter the building through the Shardul Dwar," said a Parliament official. The Makar Dwar of the new Parliament House has been kept out of bounds for everyone, including journalists. Mediapersons with cameras were shifted to the lawn near the old Parliament building's gate number 12 and asked not to take sound bites of the MPs, take pictures or shoot videos near the Makar Dwar.

Security personnel deployed outside the Parliament complex allowed only those visitors to reach the entry gates who had a valid entry pass. The drivers of the members of Parliament (MPs) who were not carrying passes were not allowed to enter the complex.

Modi congratulates Tusk on appointment as PM of Poland



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday congratulated Donald Tusk for his appointment as the Prime Minister of Poland and said he looks forward to working together to further deepen the friendly relations between the two countries.

New Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk was sworn in by that country's president on

Wednesday morning. The swearing-in ceremony of the pro-European Union government took place in the presidential palace in Warsaw. In a post on X, Modi said, "Congratulations, Excellency @donaltdusk on your appointment as Prime Minister of Poland." "I look forward to working together to further deepen the longstanding and friendly relations between India and Poland," Modi said.

Continue MDS beyond 2024 to address mental health issues: Panel

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Citing poor primary infrastructure for mental health and low psychiatrist-patient ratio in the country grappling with mental health issues, a Parliamentary panel has asked the Government to not to go ahead with its plans to terminate the Manpower Development Scheme (MDS) in 2024 and instead continue it beyond to help address the mental health needs of the population.

The panel on 'mental health care and its management in contemporary times', led by Rajya Sabha MP Bhubaneswar Kalita, highlighted the existing shortage of mental health professionals while emphasizing the inadequacy of the current ratio of 0.75 mental health professionals for every 100,000 people.

In its report tabled in Rajya Sabha, the panel pointed out

that this shortage of mental health professionals has real-world consequences, as millions of individuals grappling with various mental health issues continue to suffer. The panel identified not only the stigma and ignorance surrounding mental health but also the insufficiently trained mental health workforce as significant barriers to addressing the mental health needs of the population.

By recommending the continuation of the MDS, the Parliamentary Panel urged the government to take proactive measures to address the shortage of mental health professionals. The scheme plays a crucial role in training and developing a workforce equipped to meet the growing mental health challenges faced by the country, said the report.

The MDS was incorporated in the central flagship National Mental Health Programme



(NMHP) with an aim to boost infrastructure and human resources in the sector. As per the programme, the four kinds of PG seats are there - Psychiatry, Clinical Psychologists, MSc in Psychiatric Nursing and MSc Social Worker. Under Scheme-A, about 1,007 seats have been added in recent years -- 55 in Psychiatry, 306 in Clinical Psychology, 251 in Psychiatric Social Worker and 385 in Psychiatric Nursing.

The MDS also envisages strengthening/establishment of PG departments in mental health specialties as well as financial support towards capital works and faculty support to the existing Central and State Mental Health Institutions for strengthening/establishment of Post Graduate Departments in mental health specialties viz: Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology, Psychiatric Social Work and Psychiatric Nurse.

A total of 47 PG Departments in 19 institutes have been established/ approved to date. These schemes are set to be completed by 2024, as per the Government.

However, the RS panel opined that the MDS should not be phased out and instead be continued given urgency in the sector. The Committee also recommended the National Medical Commission (NMC) through the Union Health Ministry to actively explore the feasibility of augmenting the MD Psychiatry seats in the medical colleges.

"The Committee also suggests the Ministry to examine the possibility of a 3 year DNB degree in Psychiatry and other mental health specialisation in private hospitals, railway hospitals, PSU hospitals etc, through the National Board of Examinations." The panel further recom-

mended the Ministry to expedite the solution of the problem which has emanated due to the discontinuation of the M.Phil courses as per the New Education Policy.

"The Committee believes that Clinical Psychologists are an essential mental health resource and thus suggests that the Ministry may explore re-naming the course or any other alternative and thus relieve the candidates who have already joined the course."

There is a shortage of mental health infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, and a lack of trained professionals. Additionally, stigma and discrimination persist, hindering effective intervention and support.

However, these challenges provide an opportunity for India to forge a path forward, adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to mental health management.

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited Shal Tower Plot No-23, New Rohtak Road Karol Bagh New Delhi-110007

PUBLIC NOTICE:
Builder Cancellation

This is to bring to your notice that **Vikesh Pal/ Rajesh Pal** (borrower/s) has availed Home loan facility vide facility agreement number **LBND00004967934 & LBND00005112925** located at **Flat No. C1502, 14th Floor Savy Ville De, Rajnagar Extension, Ghaziabad, UP.** The borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement.

The Bank has informed the same to the borrower through letter dated **September 14, 2023** informing that **Ascent Buildtech Pvt. Ltd.** has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication.

Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder.

Dated: December 15, 2023
Place: Delhi/NCR

For ICICI Bank Limited
Sd-

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Mr. Deepak Garg and Mrs. Sandhya Gurjar are in process to purchase the Built Up Flat No. 706-A on 7th Floor, having its covered area measuring 1048.30 sq. fts., in project name "Supertech Avant Garde", built on Plot No. 01, Situated at Sector-05, Residential Colony, Vaishali, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, J.P. (availing loan from RBL Bank) from Shilpa Deepak Chaturvedi, whereas she acquired the same vide gift deed dated 13.12.23 executed by Shikha Anil Saklani, Shekhar Srivastava and Shalini Srivastava (Doc.No.13271)

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (legitimate/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, assignment or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb., J.P., Mch. 9810063351

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited Shal Tower Plot No-23, New Rohtak Road Karol Bagh New Delhi-110007

PUBLIC NOTICE:
Builder Cancellation

This is to bring to your notice that **PRADEEP KUMAR / KALPANA KUMARI** (borrower/s) has availed Home loan facility vide facility agreement number **LBDEL00005192363** located at **FLAT NO. 4155, CRC SUBLIMIS-TOWER 4, 15TH FLOOR, PLOT NO GH 11A, SECTOR 1, GREATER NOIDA- 201307** The borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement.

The Bank has informed the same to the borrower through letter dated **August 25, 2023**, informing that **ENTICEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED**, has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication.

Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder.

Dated: December 15, 2023
Place: Delhi/NCR

For ICICI Bank Limited
Sd-

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Mr. Vaidhyan Jani & Mrs. Parul Jani is in process to purchase the Property Bearing No. A-83, Block A, Area Measuring 248.90 Sq. Mtrs., Situated in Residential Colony Gaurav Puram Ghaziabad-201013 Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad (availing loan from RBL Bank) from Satya Prakash Sharma, Shiv Prakash Sharma, Ravi Prakash Sharma, Vipul Sharma & Arvind Sharma, inherited after the death of their mother Nirmala Sharma, whereas she acquired the same vide Sale Deed dated 11.11.1998 executed by Satya Prakash Sharma on behalf of Sohan Lal Grover (doc. No. 2853)

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, assignment or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb., J.P., Mch. 9810063351

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) R/w Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, (on underlying pool assigned to ICICI Bank by Dewan Housing Finance Ltd.) in relation to the enforcement of security in respect of a housing loan facility granted pursuant to a loan agreement entered into between DHFL and the borrower, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Number (Loan Account Number) (DHFL Old LAN & ICICI New LAN)	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Subhash Chand/ Sunita Devi/ (01400003099 & QZDEL00004999218)	506, 5th Floor, Tower- C4 , Avalon Homes, Alwar By Pass, Bhiwadi, Rajasthan/ December 11, 2023	March 28, 2023 Rs. 6,95,703/-	Delhi/ NCR & Bhiwadi

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : December 15, 2023
Place : Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

Over 35 crore Suvidha sanitary pads sold across India in 3 years: Mandaviya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over 35 crore Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Pads have been sold through the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana centres across the country in the last three years with the rural uptake increasing from 11-12 per cent to 45 per cent, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday.

Overall, the uptake of sanitary pads has climbed to 55 per cent, Mandaviya said during the media briefing on achievements of the government on the front of development of women and children in the last nine years.

Listing the initiatives taken for the welfare of women, he said it was the Modi government which launched the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" campaign that aimed to improve the education among girls as well as the efficiency of welfare service intended for them.

For the security of women, the one nation one helpline was launched and a one-stop centre initiative was also started. While 733 one stop centres have been approved, 703 are operational in the country presently.

These provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence and in distress, both in private and public spaces, through a range of services including police facilitation, medical aid, legal aid and counselling, psychological support and temporary shelter in an integrated manner under one roof.

Speaking about the law against triple talaq, Mandaviya said it was an important step for



Muslim women to get freedom from the age-old tradition.

"This freedom means they will no longer have to face this type of divorce and will be able to make full use of their rights. It is a social and legal reform that promotes women empowerment and provides them support in the society. With this type of change, women will feel more independent and will get the freedom to make their own decisions," he said.

Under the leadership of the prime minister, the government implemented various skill development schemes especially for women.

"We launched the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, which provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers, thereby improving the health and nutrition of the mother and child as well as compensation for wage loss," he said.

Keeping in view the health of the women in terms of hygiene, Mandaviya said under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), the government has launched Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkins at Rs 1 per pad for women to ensure easy availability of the menstrual health services at affordable prices.

'Jai Anusandhan' important for making India self-reliant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan" - research and innovation will create a robust health research ecosystem and will be twin engines to drive our global competitiveness.

Mandaviya, who inaugurated five new facilities at the Indian Council of Medical Research - National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR-NIMR) here, said "Jai Anusandhan" is a very important principle in the endeavour towards making India self-reliant.

The facilities include a test research laboratory, an innovation complex, a conference hall complex and a 300-seat Auditorium.

Mandaviya said this inauguration is "indicative of the focus of the government on research and innovation in every field of health."

"The government is working to develop India's health sector completely and make it self-reliant." Highlighting the importance of "Jai Anusandhan", the Health

Practising yoga nidra may improve sleep, cognitive functioning: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Practising yoga nidra—a kind of mindfulness training—might improve sleep, cognition, learning, and memory, even in novices, according to a pilot study conducted by Dr Karuna Datta of the Armed Forces Medical College in India, and colleagues.

After a two-week intervention with a cohort of novice practitioners, the researchers found that the percentage of delta-waves in deep sleep increased and that all tested cognitive abilities improved.

Unlike more active forms of yoga, which focus on physical postures, breathing, and muscle control, yoga nidra guides people into a state of conscious relaxation while they are lying down. While it has reported to improve sleep and cognitive ability, those reports were based more on subjective measures than on objective data.

The new study used objective polysomnographic measures of sleep and a battery of cognitive tests. Measurements were taken before and after two weeks of yoga nidra practice, which was carried out during the daytime using a 20 minute audio recording. The study is published in the open-access journal PLOS ONE.

Among other things, polysomnography measures brain activity to determine how long each sleep stage lasts and how frequently each stage occurs. After two weeks of yoga nidra, the researchers observed that participants exhibited a significantly increased sleep efficiency and percentage of delta-waves in deep sleep.

The Minister focused on the integration of technologies like digital health and artificial intelligence in healthcare and emphasized the importance of innovative use of drones for vaccine and drug delivery and the exploration of organ transfer via drones, which would signify a major leap in healthcare accessibility and efficiency.

Stalin to launch 'CM with people' plan

'New scheme for hassle free Government services to be launched by Chief Minister on December 18'

18 at Coimbatore, the government said on Thursday. Under the initiative, representations from the public will be scrutinised within 30 days by officials and appropriate services, based on qualifying norms, shall be provided to people. State-wide special camps will be held, which will bring officials of all the departments under one roof to register grievances and representations, an official release said.

Such camps are scheduled to be held under the direct supervision of the CM to receive from people, representations related to government departments and services. The Chief minister will launch the scheme in Coimbatore and at the same time, state ministers will be following suit in their



respective districts. In the first phase, from December 18 to January 6, as many as 1,745 camps are scheduled to be held in districts other than the four northern districts of Chennai, Kancheepuram, Chengelpet and Tiruvallur affected by cyclone Michaung. In these four districts, special camps under the scheme will be

held from January first week till the end of that month. Ahead of the 2021 Assembly polls, Stalin had received petitions from the public and after he assumed the office of the chief minister, he set up a separate department to look into such grievances. The grievances were redressed within 100 days, the government said. The separate department has, in the past about two and a half years, received and addressed issues flagged in the about 49 lakh petitions. The CM also launched in February this year, a district-wise, on the spot assessment, inspection and review plan (Kala Aayvil Mudalamaichar) to ensure timely delivery of government services and welfare schemes to the people.

Panel to be formed on issue of converted tribals who get dual benefits: Maharashtra

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Maharashtra Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha on Thursday said the state government will form a committee to study the demand of the delisting of the tribals who get dual benefit after converting to another religion. The tribals who convert get benefits as members of a minority community and also as members of a Scheduled Tribe (ST), he said, speaking in the Legislative Council. Many tribals are being converted through coercion and inducement, the BJP leader claimed, adding that conversions hollow out the tribal culture. A committee headed by a retired vice chancellor will be formed to study the issue of delisting of the persons who get



such dual benefit, Lodha, the minister for skill development and employment, stated, adding that it will have members from all political parties. He was responding to a calling attention motion moved by BJP legislators Niranjan Davkhare and Pravin Darekar demanding removal from the ST list of the tribals who convert to Islam and

Christianity, and the withdrawal of reservation benefit for them. The issue saw a heated argument between the BJP MLAs and Congress legislator Kapil Patil. Patil said the members of a Scheduled Tribe have the right to decide whom they should worship, and alleged that the proposed delisting will amount to religious discrimination. If the tribals embrace Hinduism, it becomes acceptable (to those who are seeking the delisting upon conversion), but if they embrace Islam, Christianity or Buddhism it is considered unacceptable, he said. Finally, Lodha said he will discuss the issue with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar and inform the House.

BJP demands resignation of Naveen after IT seizes huge cash from liquor traders in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The opposition BJP in Odisha on Thursday asked Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to resign from his post on moral grounds following the seizure of over Rs 350 crore from liquor traders in the state by the Income Tax Department. The demand was made by BJP Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal. "How can a liquor trader store such a huge amount of money? The state's BJD government has patronage liquor trade and kept its funds for use during the upcoming elections," Samal alleged seeking clarification from the ruling Biju Janata Dal on the huge black money. He said the ruling party must make it clear as to who owned such a huge amount of cash. Samal said it is impossible to hoard such a huge amount of cash without the support and assistance of the state government.



"Had the state Vigilance or Economic Offences Wing (EOW) acted and caught these liquor traders, Income Tax raids would not have been required", he said. The BJD strongly rejected Samal's statement and accused him of making wild allegations against the chief minister under pressure from an Odia Central

minister. BJD vice president Prasanna Acharya said that nobody has the guts to bring corruption charges against Naveen Patnaik and he is known across the country for honesty and integrity. In a separate press conference, BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said: "It seems that

the Odisha state BJP president has more facts compared to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Central Ministers on the matter of Income Tax raid". Mohanty said the prime minister on December 8th and 12th had posted messages on X twice. "From PM's posts, it was clear that seized cash belonged to a Congress Rajya Sabha MP and Congress was responsible for it. We request Manmohan Babu that if he has more facts than their central leadership, then let him place it before them," Mohanty said. The BJD spokesperson also said that from a raid in UP Rs 500 crore cash and gold were found with a businessman. "Income Tax Department is also repeatedly conducting raids in Maharashtra and seizing hundreds of crores of cash and gold. What is Manmohan Babu trying to say, that the recovered cash and gold found in BJP-ruled states are property of BJP leaders," Mohanty asked.

Kerala moved SC against unconstitutional, illegal financial measures of Centre: Vijayan

PTI ■ KOTTAYAM (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said his government has moved the Supreme Court against the Centre's allegedly "unconstitutional and illegal" measures that have pushed the southern state into dire straits financially. Vijayan contended that even though the state government repeatedly communicated to the Centre to stop its "discriminatory" actions, the Central government intensified its "vindictive moves" to make it difficult for Kerala to survive. "In this backdrop, the state government has approached the Supreme Court against the discriminatory measures of the Centre which is throwing Kerala into dire straits by sacrificing the federal principles of the Constitution of India," he said at a press conference held here as part of the Nava Kerala Sadas, an outreach programme of the Left administration. The CM said the aim behind initiating the legal battle was to seek an order from the apex court under Article 131 of the Constitution which deals with settling Centre-state disputes. Vijayan said the petition seeks to restore the constitutional rights of the state governments by urging the apex court to prevent unconstitutional interference by the Centre in the states' financial affairs, repeal unconstitutional cuts to state borrowing limits, revoke the Centre's order including the states' public account liabilities in the borrowing limit, etc. The plea also seeks to prohibit the central measures that encroach upon the states' constitutional prerogatives by the exercise of powers not contained in the Constitution, the CM said. He said that the Centre's failure to provide GST compensation and the reduction in revenue deficit grant by it have squeezed the southern state financially.



"We have tried to overcome this by increasing tax and non-tax revenue and prioritising expenditure, but the economic impact is more than we can bear," the CM said. Vijayan said instead of seeking an explanation from the Centre for such measures, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan was asking for a report from the state government on a petition for imposing financial emergency in the southern state. "The Governor should seek an explanation from the Centre, which is consistently trying to derail development and welfare activities in the State by encroaching on financial autonomy through cuts to borrowing limits," he said. Vijayan said that Khan's move seeking a report from the state will not be able to hide the central government measures which have allegedly affected the economy of Kerala. At the same time, the CM said since the Governor has sought a report, the government will be responding to the same. "We are examining how to respond to the Governor's letter. But, what I said was that he (Khan) should examine the veracity of the petitions he receives, instead of simply forwarding it to us and seeking an explanation," Vijayan added. The CM said that presently, the state urgently needs Rs 26,226 crore to ease the crisis caused by the central measures. "It will not be enough to overcome the crisis. It is estimated

that the loss due to central measures will be between 2 and 3 lakh crore rupees in the next five years. "This would be 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the state's GDP over a five-year period. If this danger is not prevented, it will lead the state to a crisis from which it may not be able to recover even after decades due to the limited resources of Kerala," Vijayan said. He called upon the opposition and Kerala society to stand with the state government as it embarks on a decisive legal and historic battle to preserve Indian federalism. Khan on Wednesday had termed as unfortunate that the Left government was not able to pay pensions to those who worked over 35 years for the state. "But, those who worked for two years as ministers' personal staff are continuing to get their pensions," he said. He also reiterated what he said on Tuesday that the Chief Secretary of the state had submitted an affidavit in the Kerala High Court stating that the government was not in a position to honour the financial guarantees given by it. "It means the government is unable to fulfil its Constitutional duties. On the other hand, we are seeing festivities on a large scale. Extravaganza. Just for renovation of a swimming pool, Rs 10 lakh is being spent. So, I do not know how to react to this situation," Khan had said.

Excise policy scam: SC rejects Sisodia's pleas seeking review of bail denial order

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another setback to senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia, the Supreme Court has dismissed his pleas seeking review of its October 30 verdict dismissing his bail petitions in the corruption and money laundering cases related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. A bench of Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice SVN Bhatti dismissed the review petitions on Wednesday during in-chamber proceedings where such pleas are considered and decided. "We have carefully perused the review petitions as also the grounds in support thereof. In our opinion, no case for review of the judgment dated October 30, 2023, is made out. The review petitions are, accordingly, dismissed," the bench said in its order which was passed on Wednesday but uploaded on the apex court's website on Thursday. It also rejected Sisodia's request for an oral hearing on the review petitions. In a setback to Sisodia, the apex court had on October 30 denied him bail in the corruption and money-laundering cases related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, saying the allegations by the probe agencies that "windfall gains" of Rs 338 crore was made by a few wholesale distributors was "tentatively supported" by evidence. The top court, which termed several charges levelled by the Enforcement Directorate against Sisodia as debatable, said about the alleged windfall gains that "However, there is one clear ground or charge in the complaint filed under the PML Act, which is free from perceptible legal challenge and the facts as alleged are tentatively supported by material and evidence."

JKLF chief Yasin Malik cases: 3 witnesses fail to appear before TADA court in Jammu



PTI ■ JAMMU

Three witnesses, including former Kashmir Bar Association president Mian Abdul Qayoom, failed to appear in a special court here on Thursday in connection with the 1989 abduction of Rubaiya Sayeed, while separatist leader Yasin Malik and his associate Rafiq Pahlou appeared before it via video-conferencing. Pahlou was given a final opportunity by the special TADA court to file objections to an application for the cancellation of his bail in a 1990 case in which four Indian Air Force (IAF) officers were killed case and the abduction case of Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the then Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. "Four eyewitnesses were summoned to appear before the special court. Among them, Mian Qayoom did not appear and

submitted a medical certificate that he is admitted in a hospital. It was said that another eyewitness (number 23) is dead. Both were witnesses in the Rubaiya Sayeed abduction case," Senior Public Prosecutor S K Bhat told PTI. In the case of the killing of the IAF personnel in a terror attack in Srinagar in 1990, the court had summoned two witnesses for identification, but they could not appear citing medical reasons, Bhat said, adding that both of them had to come from outside. Bhat said Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Malik and Pahlou appeared before the court via video-conferencing. The court would again hear the case of the killing of the IAF personnel on January 18 and the Rubaiya Sayeed case the next day. Bhat said Pahlou was given a last opportunity by the court for filing objections to

an application for the cancellation of his bail. The court has agreed to summon eyewitnesses. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) moved an application in August for the cancellation of Pahlou's bail in the two cases, informing the court that he had violated the bail conditions by allegedly indulging in separatist activities. Two witnesses — numbers 24 and 25 — were examined in November. They supported the prosecution's case and identified accused Ali Mohammad Mir, Bhat said. Mir, who is the prime accused in the abduction case after Malik, had taken Rubaiya Sayeed in his vehicle to Sopore from Srinagar and kept her in a guesthouse. Malik, who is lodged in Delhi's Tihar Jail where he is serving a term in connection with a terror-financing case, was not produced in the court physically due to an order issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs restricting his movement. Pahlou is lodged in the Central Jail in Srinagar following his arrest for reviving the terrorist apparatus in the Kashmir valley, Bhat said. Pahlou alias "Nanaji" was among the 10 terrorists arrested in July from a hotel in a case related to a conspiracy to revive the banned JKLF and separatist amalgam Hurriyat Conference in the valley. The special Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act court has already framed charges separately against Malik and several others in both cases. The charges against Malik, Pahlou and eight others in the 1989 abduction case of Rubaiya Sayeed were framed by the court on January 11, 2021.

Army rescues over 1,200 stranded tourists in Sikkim

PTI ■ GANGTOK

The Indian Army has rescued 1,217 tourists stranded in high-altitude areas in eastern Sikkim due to snowfall and inclement weather, officials said on Thursday. The rescue mission was conducted by the Trishakti Corps of the army, and the tourists were moved to safer areas and provided



with shelter, warm clothing, medical aid and hot meals, they said. "The rescue and relief operation by the army, which commenced on December 13 continued till early morning hours of December 14. A total of 1,217 tourists were evacuated from the forward areas of East Sikkim to an army transit facility," an official said.

"The army in concert with civil administration ensured that all tourists were evacuated back to Gangtok despite the sleet on the roads, which presented a challenge to the entire rescue effort," he said. Soldiers had even vacated their barracks to enable the accommodation of the stranded tourists, the officials added.

Karnataka BJP to seek explanation from 3 legislators who attended Congress dinner

PTI ■ BELAGAVI (K'TAKA)

Karnataka BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Thursday termed as a "serious matter" three of his party legislators attending a dinner hosted by the Congress after its Legislature Party meeting here and said he would seek explanation from them. State Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said the legislators did not participate in any meeting, but only attended the dinner on Wednesday night, on his invitation. The three are: MLAs — S T Somashekar and Shivaram Hebbar — and MLC H Vishwanath. The three legislators, who are former Ministers, attending the

dinner raised eyebrows and added to speculations that they might be contemplating joining the ruling Congress ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha polls. They had made no secret of their disenchantment with the BJP and its internal affairs, ever since the party lost the May Assembly polls. The three were among the 17 Congress-JD(S) legislators who defected to BJP in 2019, which had led to the collapse of the H D Kumaraswamy-led government and paved the way for BJP to come to power. Somashekar and Hebbar were Ministers in the previous BJP government. Somashekar and Hebbar had jumped ship to BJP from Congress. Vishwanath, originally a Congressman, was in JD(S)

as its state chief, when he defected to BJP in 2019. "Morning I got information about it. I will talk to them today itself. I will discuss what their intention is....It is a serious matter, I will discuss with them today itself," Vijayendra told reporters here. Shivakumar said: "I had separately hosted a dinner, for which certain other party leaders were also invited, so they (Somashekar, Hebbar), also Vishwanath, and others, about ten people had come." Speaking to reporters here, he said: "Why will they come to the Congress legislature party meeting? They are not our party legislators. They did not come to the legislature party meeting, they had only come



for dinner." Somashekar said he had gone to the dinner meet as the invite was extended by the Deputy

Chief Minister; he had also attended the one hosted by Vijayendra. "Till 8 PM I was in the

Assembly, after that I went to the hotel where our President Vijayendra had invited (me) for dinner and was there till 10 PM.

I also met B S Yediyurappa (BJP veteran) and others at the dinner meet and had dinner there. After 10:30 PM the Deputy Chief Minister had invited me, not for a Congress legislature party meeting, but for dinner, I had gone for dinner. As I had already completed my dinner at Vijayendra's meet, I wished DCM and came back," he said. Stating that he will not do anything which will embarrass the BJP, while being in the party, Somashekar said he had gone there as it was an invite from the Deputy Chief Minister. "In BJP some are targeting (me) saying that I will quit the party, in Congress some are asking as to when I will join them — I have no such thing — I'm in BJP, I have not embarrassed

BJP and will never do it," he said, as he also ruled out any possibility of him contesting Lok Sabha polls. BJP legislature party leader and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka said he will talk to Somashekar, as there have been certain developments in the last two-three months vis-a-vis the MLA. "Somashekar told me that he was invited for dinner and had gone there, so I don't think he has violated anything. I will talk to him. He had participated in protests organised by the party against the government yesterday. During the session as there will be various such invites, he might have gone for dinner. But, I will call him and talk to him," he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Paradigm shift

The BJP's choice of new CMs is a shift towards strategic allegiance and social signalling

No less surprising than the recent Assembly poll results are the new BJP Chief Minister choices in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Their names have sparked discussions about the party's strategy, with veterans being sidelined for newer faces, mostly with a low profile. This shift in approach to State leaders' selection sheds light on the BJP's evolving formula of governance, where loyalty, organisational experience and social signalling play pivotal roles. The decision to replace seasoned leaders, including Shivraj Singh Chouhan who ruled Madhya Pradesh for 18 years, with fresh faces in the three States marks a departure from convention. The stalwarts, who had been at the party's forefront in these States, suddenly find themselves on the sidelines. This shift implies a calculated move by the BJP high command to inject the leadership with new energy and perspective. One of the central themes emerging from these appointments is the preference for candidates seen as more amenable to the directives

of the Prime Minister and Home Minister. This idea of having 'yes-men' in key positions reflects a strategy aimed at ensuring a seamless alignment between the Centre's agenda and a State's leadership, especially with general elections just round the corner. This top-down decision-making model has both advantages and drawbacks, as it may streamline governance but could stifle counter-views and creative policymaking.

The BJP's choices in the three States also reflect a keen awareness of social signalling. In Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai is a tribal while Dr Mohan Yadav, Madhya Pradesh's new CM, is an OBC leader. The biggest surprise is in Rajasthan where CM-elect



Bhajan Lal Sharma, a first-time MLA, was the last person on the radar of political pundits. He is the RSS favourite, though the decision did not sit well with top contender Vasundhara Raje. The new Chief Ministers, often representing different social or demographic groups, are strategically positioned to send out a message of inclusivity and representation. This approach aligns with the broader political trend of diversifying leadership to appeal to a wider voter base. However, the challenge lies in balancing symbolic representation with actual policy outcomes that address the concerns of diverse communities. The new Chief Ministers, while relatively fresh faces, have a history of dedicated service within the party. This emphasis on loyalty is not only political strategy but also a means to ensure that they remain aligned with the party's ideology and goals. However, an overemphasis on loyalty may compromise a State's interests as only a strong leader there can deal with the Union Government effectively. The BJP's selection of new Chief Ministers underscores a strategic shift in its leadership dynamics. The sidelining of the old guard and the emphasis on organisational experience, loyalty and social signalling also highlight the hold that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have over the party.

PICTALK



Devotees take part in a procession to mark the 2nd anniversary of the Kashi Vishwanath Dham, in Varanasi

PTI

The highway of growth: A catalyst for real estate

Highways are the fast lanes of prosperity and this is once again proved by the surge in real estate along Dwaraka Expressway

Gurgaon's retail is set for a momentous shift. Around 4.7 million sq ft of retail space is set to enter the market over the next 5 years, as per the research by 360 Realtors. The city, which is also called the mall capital of India, has close to 90 operational malls, almost doubling over the past 12 years. However, the millennial city has an insatiable appetite for new malls, high streets, shopping centres, etc. The expanding population, higher concentration of corporate houses, cosmopolitan lifestyle, and higher portion of migrant workforce, make Gurgaon a fertile ground for retail businesses and malls to thrive.

There is a visible spotlight on emerging micro-markets on the Dwaraka Expressway, which many industry pundits believe is the future of Gurgaon. The region, which stretches from sec-73 to 95, connects Kherki Dhaura in Gurgaon to Dwarka in Delhi. Across the expressway numerous new neighbourhoods and commercial catchments are unfolding, thereby giving a facelift to the region. **Factors that drive organic demand**



The 16-lane expressway is fraught with factors that drive organic demand for the property market. It is conveniently linked with the IGI airport (45 mins). Major employment hubs in Gurgaon such as Cyber Hub (25 mins) and Golf Course Road (30 mins) are at an approachable distance. Likewise, it is also coherently linked to the under-construction INR 25,000 crore international convention centre in Dwarka, the second diplomatic enclave, and new business clusters and hotels in the sub-city. Through a grid of road network, it is seamlessly connected to other major parts of the millennial city such as Huda city centre, Hero Honda Chowk, Old Gurgaon, etc. This makes the stretch a viable commercial and office zone with new spaces in the pipeline. The leasing rates are also lower in contrast to other popular

commercial destinations in Gurgaon such as Cyber Hub, GCR, GCER, MG Road, etc. As commercial significance is growing, housing demand is getting a natural thrust. **Surge in Liveability**

The livability around the Dwaraka expressway has remarkably improved over the past decade. As the region is coherently linked with Delhi and Gurgaon, a greater number of households are shifting to the region. Gradually Dwarka Expressway is becoming a self-sustainable business district in itself, piquing the interest of established organizations as well as startups. There are close to ~ 30 top-quality schools in the region. Work will soon be begun on a 750-bed multispecialty hospital. Likewise, there are plenty of banks, ATMs, gyms, retail outlets, etc, thereby giving a big push to overall livability. Its proximity to the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and Delhi Mumbai expressway is further bringing the spotlight on the region with growth in new industries, warehouses, and business houses in the vicinity. This in turn is driving

holistic growth.

The rise of Concept & Experience-based retail

The focus would not just be on creating spaces that can facilitate transactions but also on nurturing meaningful interactions with the visitors. New-age consumers do not just want transactions and discounts, rather they are looking to make long-lasting experiences. This is giving way to the concept of real estate in the Dwaraka expressway region. There is a growing emphasis on mixed real estate including SCOs. The benefits of SCOs are that they incorporate a wide range of concepts under one roof. One can find hypermarkets, food courts, office spaces, startup zones, and gaming zones alongside banks, healthcare centres, fitness centres, flea markets, etc under a single space. New projects such as Gallexie-91 and Metro Street-83 are doing a remarkable job, as they are believed to redefine the future of retail in the region. Others are also in the pipeline.

(The writer is National Head of 360 Realtor's Franchise vertical; views are personal)



AMIT SHARMA

Highways are the fast lanes of prosperity and this is once again proved by the surge in real estate along Dwaraka Expressway

with many a village not easy to drive into. North India had been drenched with blood between 1946 and 1948. Partition, in any case, had a disrupting effect not only on people but also on the administration. Until the second Battle of Tarain in 1192, Indigenous Australians were introduced in 1949, but enrolment and having one's name marked on the voting register was not compulsory for Indigenous Australians until 1984. Venezuela and the Netherlands are countries that have moved from compulsory voting to voluntary participation. The last compulsory Dutch and Venezuela elections were in 1967 and 1993, respectively. Compulsory voting is increasingly resented by citizens in some countries such as Brazil, the largest country where compulsory voting is enforced: at the last presidential election in 2014, some 30 million voters, about 21% of registered voters, did not vote, even though Brazil has some of the most severe penalties enforced against non-voters. It was a phenomenal initiative for India to launch its democracy with a universal adult franchise on the morrow of independence. It has to be borne in mind that in 1947, up to 80 per cent of our people were illiterate. Our country was predominantly rural,

Compulsory voting for vibrant democracy

There is a strong case for compulsory voting as it means an end to tactical voting, votebank politics and can lead to stronger democracy



PRAFULL GORADIA

Compulsory voting is an effect of laws requiring eligible citizens to register and vote in elections and impose penalties on those who fail to do so. Presently, 22 countries provide for compulsory voting, and 11 democracies—about 5% of all United Nations members—enforce it.

Athenian democracy held that it was every citizen's duty to participate in decision-making, but attendance at the assembly was voluntary. Sometimes there was some form of social opprobrium to those not participating. Belgium has the oldest existing compulsory voting system. Compulsory voting was introduced in 1893 for men and in 1948 for women, following universal female suffrage. Belgians aged 18 and over and registered non-Belgian voters are obliged to present themselves at their polling stations. If they fail to vote in at least four elections, they can lose the right to vote for 10 years. Non-voters also might face difficulties getting a job in the public sector. Australia introduced compulsory enrolment for voting at federal elections in 1912. Voting for Indigenous Australians was introduced in 1949, but enrolment and having one's name marked on the voting register was not compulsory for Indigenous Australians until 1984. Venezuela and the Netherlands are countries that have moved from compulsory voting to voluntary participation. The last compulsory Dutch and Venezuela elections were in 1967 and 1993, respectively.

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Hyderabad were committed to accede to India by Independence Day. Patel could not do anything about Jammu & Kashmir since Jawaharlal Nehru had taken charge of the state, he being originally a Kashmiri; Sheikh Abdullah was his close friend. Several other countries practice compulsory voting. Argentina since 1912; Australia since 1924; Brazil, Ecuador (since 1936); Peru (since 1933), Uruguay (since 1970) and Singapore are among the prominent ones. If Sardar Patel did not have time enough to implement such a policy, hopefully, his pragmatic successors would have done so. It is only that party that favours a vote, that would disapprove of compulsory voting because that would make tactical voting meaningless. This is of particular significance for India. We have been plagued by the phenomenon of what we refer to as the vote bank, particularly the 'minority vote bank'. Put simply, this refers to the religious minority communities voting in large numbers whereas the majority Hindu community is usually either disinterested in voting and does not take much interest in political issues, but feels aggrieved when policies



POLITICS THAT IS SERVILE TO THE VOTE BANK, ESPECIALLY OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE, IS ALSO A SERIOUS LONG-TERM SECURITY THREAT TO THE NATION, SOMETHING INDIA HAS SORDIDLY EXPERIENCED IN PREVIOUS DECADES

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are not its liking. The situation has seen a significant change after the 2014 elections, but by no means can we assert that political consciousness as voters has settled on the majority of the country's voters. Politics that is servile to the vote bank, especially of a religious nature, is also a serious long-term security threat to the nation, something India has sordidly experienced in previous decades. Cross-border terror attacks instigated by our neighbouring country with impunity were allowed to remain unpunished because of the fear that retaliatory action might aggrieve voters belonging to a particular religion and thereby hurt the ruling party's prospects in future elections. This led to India justifiably being known as a soft state and therefore brought us little or no global sympathy in the face of unrelenting terror. Only after the 2014 elections have we seen a sea change in both voting behaviour and the government's policies emanating thereof. That makes the case for compulsory voting even stronger.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author, and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REWARDING UPPER-CASTE VOTERS

Sir—This pertains to the news: BJP selects Rajasthan Chief Minister. After thirty-three years, a Brahmin has become the Chief Minister of Rajasthan. This choice has been duly praised, as it rewards an individual for their dedication to the party and Sangh Pariwar.

The central observers, namely Rajnath Singh, Vinod Tawde, and Saroj Pandey, presented the sealed envelope containing the name of Bhajan Lal Sharma. Vasundhara Raje, upon reading Sharma's name on the slip, was unexpectedly surprised. The appointments and elections of Rajender Shukla as Deputy CM in MP, Vijay Kumar Sharma as Deputy CM in Chhattisgarh, and Bhajan Lal Sharma as Chief Minister in Rajasthan should be viewed in the right perspective. Upper-caste voters played a crucial role in securing BJP's victory in the recent assembly polls, and as a result, their representatives are appropriately rewarded.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

FARMER SUICIDE

Sir—According to a recent report presented by Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Anil Bhaidas Patil in the Maharashtra state assembly on Thursday, a distressing number of 2,400 farmers have tragically taken their own lives between January and October this year. This alarming statistic, especially prominent in the Amravati revenue division with 951 reported cases, underscores the severity of the situation. In response to a question from Congress legislator Kunal Patil, the minister disclosed additional figures, revealing 877 suicides in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar division, 257 in Nagpur division, 254 in Nashik division, and 27 in Pune division. Notably, the state government provides Rs 1 lakh to the families of farmers who succumb to suicide. This bleak reality is further exemplified by a recent spike, with five farmer suicides reported in Yavatmal district within just three days. Consequently, Maharashtra now bears the unfortunate distinction of being one of the leading

Parliament security breached



The attempt at causing a disturbance by the youth is condemnable and abhorrent. Harming the integrity of the 'temple of democracy' is detrimental and unforeseen on the people's side. The massive security breach that took place in Parliament on the 22nd anniversary of the attack on Parliament marked December 13 as a Black Day in history. Intruders jumped into the Lok Sabha from the five-tier security arrangements visitors' gallery while proceedings were underway for the Winter Session. The intruders tried to create chaos and shouted slogans. According to the "Practice and Procedure of Parliament" guidelines

mentioned for visitor's entry, "a member can apply for the issue of visitors' cards only for those who are very well known to them personally." The Parliament security staff inside the public gallery will maintain a very close vigil on the visitors and ensure that they maintain silence and do not indulge in any kind of mischief or disturbance, such as shouting slogans, attempting to throw leaflets or any other objectionable item, or attempting to jump into the Chamber. Despite strict vigilance and security, the grotesque act happened. On the morning of December 13, 2001, five terrorists entered Parliament House Complex in an Ambassador car fitted with a red light and a forged Home Ministry sticker on the car's windshield. A firefight ensued, lasting over 30 minutes. All five terrorists were killed, along with eight security personnel and a gardener. At least 15 people were injured. It's not the time for the blame game; rather, all the Parliamentarians should unite to build consensus over the security arrangements that protect the Parliament.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

states in the country with a concerning prevalence of farmer suicides, raising urgent concerns about the well-being of agricultural communities. The gravity of this situation necessitates comprehensive interventions and support systems to address the root causes and mitigate the distressing trend. Let us hope that people in power take it on priority and do something about it.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

MOVING AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS

Sir—The COP28 has once again demonstrated the strong influence that profit-chasing capital holds over nations that present themselves as welfare-oriented and benevolent governments. Despite convening for the 28th time, the COP could not reach a decision to phase out fossil fuels but committed to transitioning away from them. India has allocated most of its mines to foreign direct investment (FDI)

players for accelerated exploitation. There is potential to equip every building with solar or wind power generators designed for domestic use, with significant subsidies and arrangements to purchase excess power from the grid. This is feasible because the country can allocate significant funds (in lakhs of crores) for forging substantial loans taken by corporations and the wealthy. Currently, we are falling short of our target to transition to 450 GW by 2030, having only reached 130 GW. It is imperative for governments to assert genuine control over those who wield influence over them. A major event concludes in the usual fashion, marked by rhetoric and rituals, lacking serious concern for the well-being of future generations.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TESTING TIME FOR INDIA-MALDIVES TIES

Maldives is drifting away from India and tilting towards China and Türkiye



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India's close ally in the Indian Ocean region, a country with which it shares maritime boundaries seems favourably tilting towards China under its newly elected president Dr Mohammed Muizzu. Maldives and India have had a warm relationship so far, bolstered by Mr Muizzu's predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who was widely seen to be favourably inclined to India. Two incidents have triggered fresh concerns about this ally of India in the Indian Ocean region. First, in one of his foreign visits after being president, Mr Muizzu chose to visit Türkiye and establish an embassy in Ankara. The press release from the president's office reasoned it out as "the Maldives importing many essential commodities used in daily life and other important items from Türkiye and as part of additional efforts to encourage Turkish investment in the Maldives and export Maldivian goods. Furthermore, the number of Maldivian students studying in Türkiye for higher education and the Maldivian tourists travelling to Türkiye are increasing rapidly." Second, Maldives sent its vice president Hussain Mohamed Latheef to China sponsored China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation (IORFDC), while ignoring any concurrent gesture in a similar forum the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), earlier. The Vice president during his address to the IORFDC made a special mention regarding developing closer relations with China. The press release stated "China has been crucial to the Maldives' recent development and highlighted the two countries' solid shared commitment to a people-centric strategy, aiming to promote social development, peace, and prosperity." He added that the recently inaugurated President of the Maldives, HE Dr Mohamed Muizzu, and his administration are dedicated to fortifying the long-standing relations between China and the Maldives, built upon the foundation of mutual respect and shared goals.



Now both of these events, when looked at from an India angle, raise concerns, as both Turkey and China have not been favourable towards India's unique security interests, on land and the ocean. To be sure, there has been an anti-India rhetoric brewing in Maldives for the last few years, accentuated more so during Mr Muizzu's noisy political campaign. The anti-India campaign shot to prominence in 2020, primarily due to a minor Indian military presence in Maldives. However, it was enough for the opposition parties to raise it as a cause of concern against the sovereignty of this strategic island country. Almost two decades back a similar sentiment was echoed across Male and other neighbouring islands dotting the Indian Ocean, under the then leader Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, who along with his colleagues had indulged in Anti India sloganeering, to curry favours from China. Maldives is strategically located in the busy Indian Ocean maritime trade route and its geography makes it a strategic location for any country, wanting to have a reasonable say on maritime geopolitics. The presence of a few Indian military personnel to man some aerial stations from a security perspective for the island country, has created a rift in the India-Maldives bilateral. Mr Muizzu and Indian PM Narendra Modi met up in Dubai, on the sidelines of the high-level climate summit. On his return from Dubai he said "Even in my first meeting after taking the oath of office, I communicated very clearly that we do not want foreign military troops in Maldives... In all our communications, India has agreed to accommodate this". The Indian press release post the meeting of the leaders did not mention any of the prickly issues even though in an earlier social media post Mr Modi had indicated respecting the democratic decision of the citizens of Maldives, meaning, India may be willing to work with Muizzu government and let not the bilateral relationship sail away. India has so far maintained its neighbourhood-first approach and looks like it is willing to continue its down-south approach.

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

Vocational exposure is key to employability



DINESH SOOD

Industry stakeholders must bring cognitive skills, a growth mindset, cultural intelligence, and digital literacy to create innovators and entrepreneurs in the country



India's GDP growth has brought optimism against the backdrop of an unbalanced world economy. In this scenario, the focus is once again on skilling initiatives. Skill India Mission and the skill development of the new generation are crucial for building 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the need for every youth to be empowered with skills starting from school time, to become important stakeholders in a development revolution. Today, education is not limited to what is taught in schools, colleges, and universities. The scope of learning has widened due to the evolving market and digital advancements. Acquiring market-driven skills will provide great placement opportunities to the youth and strengthen the foundation of 'Viksit Bharat'. India has a demographic advantage that needs to be harnessed by building the capacity and infrastructure for skilling, reskilling, and upskilling both existing and new entrants to the workforce. The goal was to increase the proportion of formally skilled workforce from the current 5.4% to at least 15% by 2022-2023. However, the India Skills Report 2022 by Wheebox shows that the overall youth employability in India is only 48.7%. While several government-led skilling initiatives are covering some ground, they are not enough to meet the targeted supply of 109 million workers. According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, 86% of those aged between 15 and 59 years have not received any vocational training, while the remaining 14% received training through diverse formal and informal channels. The conversion of this pool into human capital requires a dedicated focus on skilling and education. There is ample evidence to prove that upskilling the youth could



WITH OVER 15 LAKH SCHOOLS TEACHING 25.38 CRORE STUDENTS, INDIA HAS ONE OF THE LARGEST EDUCATION NETWORKS IN THE WORLD AND WE ARE DETERMINED TO MAKE IT EVEN BETTER

lead to increased incomes, higher profitability, and greater productivity in the economy. The NEP has set a clear goal to increase the gross enrolment ratio in higher education, including vocational education, to 50% by 2035. We are determined to achieve this goal by adding 3.5 crore new seats to higher education institutions (HEIs) focusing on a flexible curriculum with creative combinations of subjects, integrating vocational education with mainstream education, and allowing multiple entries and exits with appropriate certification. We will establish Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) at par with IITs and IIMs to provide the best possible education to our students. We are committed to providing vocational exposure to at least 50% of learners through school and higher education by 2050. We firmly believe that every child should learn at least one vocation and be exposed to several more. With over 15 lakh schools teaching 25.38 crore students, India has one of the largest education networks in the world, and we are determined to make it even better. However, we acknowledge that achieving this ambitious goal requires sustained, concerted efforts, willpower, and steadfastness in implementing critical reforms. We need to invest in setting up skill centres in every high school across the country and recruit vocational teachers. Adding technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions

to our schools is also essential. We are confident that, as India aspires to be the world's third-largest economy by 2030, investing in our education system is not a big task. We will do what it takes to make India a world leader in skill. It is vital to impart skill training to our young children so that they can develop an interest in entrepreneurship. This will expose them to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, drones, the Internet of Things (IoT), Real Time Analytics, and so on. Automation and data exchange are at the core of the fourth Industrial Revolution - Industry 4.0, and therefore, we need to train our young brains accordingly. While a few of them may join the government and services sector, most of them will find their way into the manufacturing and service sector, which is filled with opportunities in our country. Although some skilling schemes have been restructured, the problem has not been fully addressed. For instance, when the government introduced the Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana (GKRY) in 2020 to address skilling and unemployment issues caused by reverse migration, it did not work out as expected. Many reports suggest that GKRY's market demand-driven skilling initiatives were not successful and did not reach the intended beneficiaries. This indicates a systemic problem that affects the talent ecosystem in India. Therefore, instead of merely making youths 'Labharathi' (Beneficiary), we should equip them with the necessary skills

to make them 'Kamarathi' (Workman). The informal sector employs around 93 per cent of India's working population, which puts them at a high risk of exclusion. To mitigate this risk, marginalized groups need to be engaged through both online and offline channels. Common Service Centers (CSCs) can help with last-mile reach, while user-friendly and vernacular interfaces can benefit job and skill seekers across different segments. The Talent NODE is not a silver bullet, but with an innovative and inclusive approach, it can help between 50-80 million people find better job opportunities that match their skills and aspirations. An interconnected ecosystem can create a million different opportunities, enabling India's youth to become job-ready and contribute significantly to the country's development. It is crucial for industry stakeholders, including the government, private, and public sectors, to bring cognitive skills, a growth mindset, cultural intelligence, and digital literacy to create innovators and entrepreneurs in the country. This will help the youth to be job-ready and contribute significantly to India's development as a developed nation. (The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres, views are personal)

Adopt spiritual lifestyle to be youthful in twilight years

It is possible to retard the aging process and live a healthy life. Oldness can be converted into newness if we live from the level of consciousness

Living from the level of consciousness adds life to years and not years to life. This is possible through mind-body intervention and optimum lifestyle intervention including regular meditation, yoga, exercise, 'pranayama,' consuming a 'sattvic' diet, perfect sleep, becoming the embodiment of positive emotions, managing stress in a very subtle manner, not consuming junk food and poisons such as tobacco or alcohol or addiction-forming drugs etc.

How do we classify ageing? Newness can be classified as 1.) Chronological Age 2.) Biological Age 3.) Psychological Age, 4) Emotional Age 5) Environmental Age 6) Vascular Age 7) Spiritual Age.



HK CHOPRA

Chronological Age: Chronological Age is calendar Age. Our chronological age is a measure of several rotations the earth has performed on its axis and around the Sun since we left our mother's womb. **Biological Age:** Biological Age refers to "how good you look". It is calculated concerning an average population of the same Chronological Age. The markers of biological age are known as biomarkers and these markers are: **Biological Markers of Age** Hair - Premature graying represents oldness and blackness of hair represents Age. Hearing - Premature diminution of hearing represents oldness and preservation of hearing threshold represents Age. Vision - Premature formation of cataracts represents oldness

and maintaining the integrity of the lens represents healthy ageing **Teeth** - Premature fall of teeth represents oldness and preservation of teeth represents Healthy Ageing **Wrinkles on the face:** Premature wrinkling of the skin on the face and elsewhere represents oldness and the absence of wrinkling of skin represents healthy ageing. **Muscle Mass:** Reduced Muscle Mass and weakening of muscle strength prematurely represents oldness while its preservation represents healthy ageing. **Bone and joints:** Osteoporosis and Osteoarthritis - Prematurely represents oldness and preserving the bone, spine, and joint health represents healthy ageing.

Menopausal changes: if occur prematurely represent oldness and maintaining its relation with nature represents healthy ageing. **Prostate:** Enlargement of the prostate prematurely also represents oldness while maintaining the integrity of the prostate is healthy ageing. **Blood Pressure:** A rise in Blood Pressure prematurely represents oldness and maintaining normal blood pressure represents healthy ageing. **Cholesterol:** A rise in Blood Bad Cholesterol Levels prematurely also represents oldness. **Sugar:** A rise in Blood Sugar prematurely also represents oldness while maintaining normal levels represents healthy ageing. **Immune Function:** preserving immunity is an expression of

healthy ageing **Antioxidant:** Increased Antioxidants are healthy ageing. **Breathing Capacity:** preservation represents Healthy ageing. **Metabolic Activity:** preservation represents Healthy ageing. **Sleep:** Sleep patterns, especially sleeplessness and restlessness represent unhealthy ageing. **Psychological Age:** Is How Good we feel subjectively, we can feel 40 at the age of 60, which is a healthy psychological age. Reduction in Cognitive functions, forgetfulness, unnecessary anxiety, unnecessary aggression, unnecessary hostility, and negative imagination represent oldness. We can reverse our biological and psychological ageing by achieving Newness potential through a disciplined

lifestyle **Emotional Age:** Enhancing positive emotions such as emotion of love, compassion, humility, harmony, and calmness are expressions of healthy ageing. **Environmental Age:** Environment is our extended body and it influences ageing. A healthy Environment is responsible for healthy ageing and unhealthy environments such as toxic emotions, toxic behaviour, toxic relationships, toxic air & water and toxic eatables are responsible for unhealthy ageing. **Vascular Age:** Vascular ageing is associated with changes in the mechanical and structural properties of the blood vascular wall such as loss of arterial elasticity, endothelial dysfunction,

reduced arterial compliance and premature hardness of blood vessels or plaque formation in the blood vessels is unhealthy ageing. **Spiritual Age:** Healthy Biological, psychological, emotional, environmental and vascular ageing are expressions of optimised spiritual ageing from the level of consciousness. We can change our Newness potential biology through our perceptions, our thoughts and our own choices. Thus, spiritual age is an expression of soul, spirit or consciousness which is a field of newness. (The writer is the chief cardiologist at Medanta Moolchand Hospital; views are personal) This is the second part of the series on ageing. **Concluded.**

Israel vows to fight on in Gaza despite deadly ambush

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israel has vowed to keep fighting in Gaza until it crushes Hamas after one of the deadliest single battles of the war for its soldiers, even as it faces mounting international calls for a cease-fire and unease on the part of its closest ally, the United States. The ambush a fresh reminder that Hamas is still able to fight after six weeks of devastating warfare aimed at crushing its military capabilities. Israel has imposed a total siege and flattened much of northern Gaza with a massive air and ground campaign, driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes.

Hamas' resilience has called into question whether Israel can defeat Hamas without wiping out Gaza. Support for Hamas has surged among Palestinians, in part because of the militant group's stiff resistance to a far more powerful foe, while Israel's most important ally, the US, has expressed growing discomf over civilian deaths in what is already

one of the 21st century's most devastating military campaigns.

"We are continuing until the end, there is no question," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said late Wednesday. "I say this even given the great pain and the international pressure. Nothing will stop us."

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan was set to visit Israel on Thursday. The US has pressed Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians, and President Joe Biden said earlier this week that Israel was losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

The ambush took place Tuesday in the dense Gaza City neighborhood of Shijaiyah, which was also the scene of a major battle during the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas. The dead included two high-ranking officers. A total of 116 soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive, which began Oct. 27. Heavy fighting has raged for days in Shijaiyah and other areas in



An Israeli mobile artillery unit fires a shell from southern Israel towards the Gaza Strip, in a position near the Israel-Gaza border on Thursday.

and around eastern Gaza City that were encircled earlier in the war.

Tens of thousands of people remain in the north despite repeated evacuation orders, saying they don't feel safe anywhere in Gaza or fear they may never return to their homes if they leave them.

A HEAVY CIVILIAN TOLL

Israel's air and ground assault, launched in response to Hamas' unprecedented attack into southern Israel on Oct. 7, has killed more than 18,600 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The ministry does not differentiate between civil-

ian and combatant deaths. Its latest count did not specify how many were women and minors, but they have consistently made up around two-thirds of the dead in previous tallies. Thousands more are missing and feared dead beneath the rubble. Nearly 1.9 million Palestinians have been driven from their homes, with most seeking refuge in the south, even as Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of the territory, often killing women and children. Residents reported Israeli airstrikes overnight in Rafah, the southernmost town along the Egyptian border. An Associated Press reporter saw 27 bodies brought into a local hospital early Thursday.

New evacuation orders issued as troops pushed into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month have pushed U.N.-run shelters to the breaking point and forced people to set up tent camps in even less hospitable areas.

Heavy rain and cold in recent days has compounded

their misery, swamping tent camps and forcing families to crowd around fires to keep warm. Israel has sealed Gaza off to all but a trickle of humanitarian aid, and U.N. agencies have struggled to distribute it since the offensive expanded to the south because of fighting and road closures. Almost no aid has reached the north since the start of the war.

RIISING SUPPORT FOR HAMAS

Israel might have hoped that the war and its hardships would turn Palestinians against Hamas, hastening its demise, but as with previous rounds of violence, it seems to be having the opposite effect.

A poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found 44% of respondents in the occupied West Bank said they supported Hamas, up from just 12% in September. In Gaza, the militants enjoyed 42% support, up from 38% three months ago.

That's still a minority in

both territories. But even many Palestinians who do not share Hamas' commitment to destroying Israel and oppose its attacks on civilians see it as resisting Israel's decades-old occupation of lands they want for a future state.

The poll meanwhile showed overwhelming rejection of Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, with nearly 90% saying he must resign. The 88-year-old leader's administration is widely seen by Palestinians as a corrupt and autocratic accomplice to the occupation because it works with Israel to suppress Hamas and other militant groups.

The US wants Abbas' internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to also govern Gaza. Hamas seized Gaza from the PA in 2007.

The U.S. also wants to revive the long-defunct peace process to negotiate the creation of a Palestinian state. Netanyahu's government

is firmly opposed to Palestinian statehood and has said it will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza.

Late Wednesday, Hamas' supreme leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said any plans for Gaza that do not involve Hamas are an "illusion and mirage," though he said the group is open to halting the fighting. Haniyeh lives in exile in Qatar, but it was not clear where he was when he made those comments.

Israelis remain strongly supportive of the war and see it as necessary to prevent a repeat of Oct. 7, when Hamas burst through the country's vaunted defenses. Palestinian militants attacked communities across southern Israel that day, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking some 240 hostages.

Around half the hostages, mostly women and children, were released last month during a weeklong cease-fire in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

House approves impeachment inquiry into Biden

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The House on Wednesday authorised the impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, with every Republican rallying behind the politically charged process despite lingering concerns among some in the party that the investigation has yet to produce evidence of misconduct by the president.

The 221-212 party-line vote put the entire House Republican conference on record in support of an impeachment process that can lead to the ultimate penalty for a president: punishment for what the Constitution describes as "high crimes and misdemeanours," which can lead to removal from office if convicted in a Senate trial.

Biden, in a rare statement about the impeachment effort, questioned the priorities of House Republicans in pursuing an inquiry against him and his family. "Instead of doing anything to help make Americans' lives better, they are focused on attacking me with lies," the president said following the vote. "Instead of doing their job on the urgent work that needs to be done, they are choosing to waste time on this baseless political stunt that even Republicans in Congress admit is not supported by facts."

Authorizing the months-long inquiry ensures that the impeachment investigation extends well into 2024, when Biden will be running for reelection and seems likely to be squaring off against former



President Donald Trump — who was twice impeached during his time in the White House. Trump has pushed his GOP allies in Congress to move swiftly on impeaching Biden, part of his broader calls for vengeance and retribution against his political enemies.

The decision to hold a vote came as Speaker Mike Johnson and his team faced growing pressure to show progress in what has become a nearly year-long probe centered around the business dealings of Biden's family members. While their investigation has raised ethical questions, no evidence has emerged that Biden acted corruptly or accepted bribes in his current role or previous office as vice president. "We do not take this responsibility lightly and will not prejudice the investigation's outcome," Speaker Mike Johnson and his leadership team said in a joint statement after the vote. "But the evidentiary record is impossible to ignore." House Democrats stood in united opposition to the inquiry resolution Wednesday, calling it a farce perpetrated by those across the aisle to avenge the two impeachments against Trump.

"This whole thing is an extreme political stunt. It has no credibility, no legitimacy, and no integrity. It is a sideshow," Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said during a floor debate. Some House Republicans, particularly those hailing from politically divided districts, had been hesitant in recent weeks to take any vote on Biden's impeachment, fearing a significant political cost. But GOP leaders have made the case in recent weeks that the resolution is only a step in the process, not a decision to impeach Biden.

That message seems to have won over skeptics. "As we have said numerous times before, voting in favor of an impeachment inquiry does not equal impeachment," Rep. Tom Emmer, a member of the GOP leadership team, said at a news conference Tuesday.

Ramaswamy evokes Old Testament's Cyrus

Washington (PTI): Republican US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy has said he aligns some core principles of his Hindu faith with the "Judeo-Christian values" but acknowledged that he would not be the best president to spread Christianity.

The 38-year-old Indian-origin multimillionaire biotech entrepreneur on Wednesday night appeared on a CNN town hall in Iowa, during which he responded to questions on his religion, immigration, border security, and economic inequality. A significant constituency of the Republican voters are Evangelical Christians in Iowa.

An audience member sought his response about his perception of those people who believe he "cannot be our president" because his religion "is not what our founding fathers based our country on." Ramaswamy said he "respectfully disagrees."

Ramaswamy said that he aligns some core principles of his Hindu faith with the "Judeo-Christian values" shared by many Iowa voters. At the same time, he acknowledged that he would not be the best president to spread Christianity.

But he also asserted his commitment to uphold the First Amendment protection for freedom of religion would be a focus of his presidency.

"I think it's my responsibility to make faith and patriotism and family and hard work cool again in this country. I think that's my job as your next president," Ramaswamy said.

Ramaswamy appeared at the town hall just weeks before the January 15 Iowa caucuses kick off the Republican Party's 2024 presidential nominating process. If nominated by the Republican Party and elected in the presidential election in November 2024, he would be the youngest-ever American president.

"We don't choose who God works through."

3 suspected of planning terror attacks held in Denmark

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

Three people were arrested in coordinated actions across Denmark and one person in the Netherlands on suspicion of plotting to carry out "an act of terror," Danish police said on Thursday. Flemming Drejer, operative head of Denmark's Security and Intelligence Service, known by its acronym PET, said that Denmark was not changing the terror threat level, which has been at "serious," the second-highest level, since 2010.

He added that the case had "threads abroad" and "was related to criminal gangs," singling out the banned gang Loyal to Familia.

In January 2020, a Danish court upheld a nationwide police ban on the gang, saying that the LTF should be dissolved as illegal under Denmark's constitution.

The gang had been behind

gang feuds, violence, robberies, extortion and drug sales in the Danish capital and "had used violence and illegal means to achieve its goal," the Copenhagen District Court said then. In September 2018, police in Denmark issued a temporary ban against the LTF and said anyone seen wearing its logo could face prosecution.

"Persons abroad have been charged," he said. "It is a serious situation," Drejer told a press conference, adding the arrests were "carried out in close collaboration with our foreign partners," and said those arrested were part of "a network." Drejer added that the suspects would face a custody hearing within 24 hours, likely behind "double closed doors," meaning that he could not give details about the case, any target or motive.

"This is extremely serious," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said at a European Union summit in Brussels. "It

shows the situation we are in in Denmark. Unfortunately."

"It is absolutely true when both (Denmark's intelligence agencies) say that there is a high risk in Denmark," Frederiksen said. "It is of course completely unacceptable in relation to Israel and Gaza, that there is someone who takes a conflict somewhere else in the world into Danish society."

Earlier this month, the European Union's home affairs commissioner, Ylva Johansson, warned that Europe faces a "huge risk of terrorist attacks" over the Christmas holiday period due to the fallout from the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. In July 2022, a gunman at a shopping mall in Copenhagen killed three people and injured seven. The man, who believed the victims were zombies, was sentenced in July to detention in a secure medical facility.

Taiwan's Nationalist Party leader visits China

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

A leader of Taiwan's main opposition Nationalist Party is visiting rival China less than one month before the self-governing island republic holds elections for president and the legislature under intense pressure from Beijing. In a news release Thursday, the party — also known as the Kuomintang or KMT — said vice chair Andrew Hsia and his delegation departed for China on Wednesday at the invitation of Taiwanese businesspeople. It called the trip a mission to maintain contacts and contribute to "peace, stability and prosperity between the two sides."

Though the party said the invitation was accepted in October, the visit comes at a sensitive time as the Nationalists seek to regain the presidency and legislature from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which has been shunned by China for its

insistence that Taiwan is an independent country.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory, to be brought under its control by military force if necessary. The Nationalists ruled Taiwan under martial law for almost four decades after fleeing to the island amid the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949 and formally agree with Beijing that both sides are part of a single Chinese nation.

Most surveys show the party's ticket of former national police chief Hou You-yi and his running mate, ex-legislator Jaw Shaw-kong, are well behind the DPP's William Lai, currently vice president, and vice presidential candidate Bih-kim Hsiao, Taiwan's former representative to the United States. That appears to reflect the prevailing sentiment among Taiwanese of maintaining their current status of de-facto independence, even while maintaining close economic ties with China.

On Wednesday, China's Taiwan Affairs Office denounced Lai as a "troublemaker" and "war-maker." Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said Taiwanese should reject independence "for the sake of their peace, stability and well-being."

In its statement, the Nationalist Party said it is committed to Taiwan's security and democracy, and to peace and stability between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. It accused the DPP of generating "fake news" concerning contacts between Nationalist officials and the ruling Chinese Communist Party, saying that was an attempt to smear a "normal and appropriate agenda to conduct exchanges on the mainland to serve Taiwan compatriots and Taiwan businesspeople."

The statement said Taiwanese on the mainland needed particular care "at a time of heightened tensions between the US and Beijing

authorities," and leaders must maintain channels of communication.

That appeared to cast Hsia in the role of go-between, although there was no indication he had been entrusted with carrying any specific messages to the Chinese authorities. The statement did not say whether Hsia would be meeting any high-ranking Chinese officials.

Contacts between Taiwan politicians and China have come under particular scrutiny in the run-up to the election amid concerns Beijing will seek to influence the vote by offering favors and spreading disinformation.

Prosecutors have been looking into trips to China by grassroots ward chiefs during which their expenses were covered by the Chinese government, saying that is part of a long-term "united front" strategy of steering votes toward pro-unification politicians.

Japan's Kishida replaces 4 mins linked to slush funds scandal

Tokyo (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida replaced four of his Cabinet ministers on Thursday in an effort to contain the damage from a widening slush fund scandal that has shaken his governing party and his grip on power within it.

The shakeup is Kishida's third of his Cabinet, whose support ratings have continued to drop to new lows. The scandal involves the Liberal Democratic Party's largest and most influential faction. It used to be led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated in 2022. Kishida replaced four ministers from the Abe faction: Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsumo; Economy and Industry Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura; Agriculture Minister Ichiro Miyashita; and Internal Affairs Minister Junji Suzuki. All have emerged as the alleged recipients of suspected kickbacks of unreported fundraising proceeds.

A purge of members from that wing of the party is key to Kishida's balancing act within the party but could trigger a power struggle. Kishida doesn't have to call a parliamentary election until 2025, but the Liberal Democratic Party has a leadership vote in September.

Matsumo said in his final news conference on Thursday that he had submitted his resignation to Kishida in response the fundraising allegations, which he said "have shaken the public trust in politics." He said he also submitted resignations of behalf of three other ministers and a Kishida aide.

Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, who belongs to Kishida's party faction, was named to replace Matsumo's role as the prime minister's right-hand person in the Cabinet. Former Justice Minister Ken Saito was given the role of economy minister.

Pope calls for treaty to regulate AI

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis on Thursday called for an international treaty to ensure artificial intelligence is developed and used ethically, arguing that the risks of technology lacking human values of compassion, mercy, morality and forgiveness are too great. Francis added his voice to increasing calls for binding, global regulation of AI in his annual message for the World Day of Peace, which the Catholic Church celebrates each Jan. 1. The Vatican released the text of the message on Thursday.



jacket went viral, showing just how quickly realistic deepfake imagery can spread online. The pope's message was released just days after European Union negotiators secured provisional approval on the world's first comprehensive AI rules that are expected to serve as a gold standard for governments considering their own regulation.

Artificial intelligence has captured world attention over the past year thanks to breathtaking advances by cutting-edge systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT that have dazzled users with the ability to produce human-like text, photos and songs.

But the technology has also raised fears about the risks the rapidly developing technology poses to jobs, privacy and copy-right protection and even human life

itself. Francis acknowledged the promise AI offers and praised technological advances as a manifestation of the creativity of human intelligence, echoing the message the Vatican delivered at this year's UN General Assembly where a host of world leaders raised the promise and perils of the technology.

But his new peace message went further and emphasized the grave, existential concerns that have been raised by ethicists and human rights advocates about the technology that promises to transform everyday life in ways that can disrupt everything from democratic elections to art.

He insisted that the technological development and deployment of AI must keep foremost concerns about guaranteeing fundamental human rights, promoting peace and guarding against disinformation, discrimination and distortion. His greatest alarm was

devoted to the use of AI in the armaments sector, which has been a frequent focus of the Jesuit pope who has called even traditional weapons makers "merchants of death."

He noted that remote weapons systems had already led to a "distancing from the immense tragedy of war and a lessened perception of the devastation caused by those weapons systems and the burden of responsibility for their use."

"The unique capacity for moral judgment and ethical decision-making is more than a complex collection of algorithms, and that capacity cannot be reduced to programming a machine," he wrote. He called for "adequate, meaningful and consistent" human oversight of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (or LAWS), arguing that the world has no need for new technologies that merely "end up promoting the folly of war."

Nitin Sawhney on Booker Prize judging panel

PTI ■ LONDON

Award-winning British Indian musician Nitin Sawhney, known for musical scores including for a screen adaptation of Salman Rushdie's 1981 Booker Prize-winning 'Midnight's Children', was on Thursday announced as a member of the 2024 Booker Prize judging panel.

Sawhney, in his late 50s, will join a five-member panel chaired by artist and author Edmund de Waal and including novelist Sara Collins, fiction editor of 'The Guardian' newspaper Justine Jordan and Chinese American writer and professor Yiyun Li. Sawhney took to social media to say he was "honoured" to be on the panel, which will begin its search for next year's winner of



one of the world's most prestigious literary prizes worth GBP 50,000.

Born in Kent, south-eastern England, Sawhney is recognised as a world-class producer, songwriter, touring artist, club DJ, multi-instrumentalist and composer for theatre, dance, videogames and orchestras. Besides Rushdie's novel, he

has also composed for the screen adaptation of Booker-shortlisted novelist Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake' and most recently for Shekhar Kapur directed film 'What's Love Got To Do With It'.

He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) by the late Queen Elizabeth II in the 2019 New Year Honours list for services to music.

"The recipient of the Ivor Novello 2017 Lifetime Achievement award, he has collaborated with other world-class artists of all kinds... He holds eight honorary doctorates from UK universities and sits on the boards of multiple charities, including Complicité," notes the Booker Prize brief on the musician, whose latest album 'Identity' was released in October.

No peace in Ukraine until goals achieved: Putin

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed on Thursday that there would be no peace in Ukraine until his goals are achieved and said those objectives remain unchanged at a year-end news conference that offers the leader an opportunity to reinforce his grip on power.

Giving rare detail on what Moscow calls its special military operation, Putin dismissed the need for a second wave of mobilization of reservists to fight in Ukraine — a move that proved deeply unpopular in the past. He said there are some 617,000 Russian soldiers currently there, including around 244,000 troops who were called up to fight alongside professional Russian military forces.

The Russian president, who has held power for nearly 24 years and announced recently he is running for reelection, was greeted with applause as he arrived in the hall in central Moscow. Putin did not hold his traditional press conference last year after his military failed to take Kyiv and as the Ukrainian army retook swaths of territory in the east and south of the country.

But with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy now forced to plead for more US aid, a stalling counteroffensive and reports of fracturing Western support for Ukraine, the Russian president has decided to face the media once more — though the broadcast remains heavily choreographed and more about spectacle than scrutiny.

This year, ordinary citizens have the chance to phone in questions along with those asked by journalists, and Russians have been submitting queries for Putin for two weeks. It is the first time the Russian leader, who has heavily limited his interaction with foreign media, will potentially face multiple questions from Western journalists since the beginning of the Ukraine war.

The press conference opened with questions about the conflict in Ukraine and highlighted concerns some Russians have about fears of another wave of mobilization. In September 2022 Putin



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia, on Thursday. AP/PTI

ordered a partial military call-up as he tried to boost his forces in Ukraine, sparking protests.

“There is no need,” for mobilization now, Putin said, because 1,500 men are being recruited into the Russian army every day across the country. He said, as of Wednesday evening, a total of 486,000 soldiers have signed a contract with the Russian military.

Putin reiterated that Moscow’s goals in Ukraine — “de-Nazification, demilitarization and a neutral status” of Ukraine — remain unchanged. He spelled out those loosely defined objectives the day he sent troops to the country in February 2022.

“De-Nazification” refers from Russia’s allegations that the Ukrainian government is heavily influenced by radical nationalist and neo-Nazi groups — claims derided by Kyiv and the West. Putin has also demanded that Ukraine remain neutral — and not join the NATO alliance.

“There will be peace when we will achieve our goals,” Putin said, repeating a frequent Kremlin line. Putin’s last news conference was in 2021 amid US warnings that Russia was on the brink of sending troops into Ukraine. He delayed his annual state-of-the-nation address was until February of this year.

Putin’s appearance is primarily aimed at a domestic audience and is a chance for him to personally resolve the problems of ordinary Russian citizens ahead of the March 17 election. Putin fielded questions Thursday from a group of children in Russian-annexed Crimea concerned about the leaking roof and mold in their sports hall and a woman who addressed “my favorite president” to complain about the spiking price of eggs.

“I regret and apologize about that. A glitch in the work of the government” Putin told her, explaining that egg production has not matched demand and blaming the government for not increasing imports quickly enough.

State media said that as of Wednesday, about 2 million questions for Putin had been submitted ahead of the broadcast. Journalists lined up for hours in freezing temperatures to get into the venue and some donned traditional dresses, including elaborate hats in order to catch Putin’s attention.

Many journalists also hold placards, prompting the Kremlin to limit the size of signs they can carry during the news conference, which often lasts about four hours.

Attendees must test for COVID-19 and flu before entering the news conference site. Putin enforced strict quarantine for visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Orban tests EU promises to help Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders struggled at the start of a two-day summit on Thursday to keep intact their two most basic promises to Ukraine at war — to give it the money and wherewithal to stave off the Russian invasion and maintain its hope that one day it will be able to join the wealthy bloc.

And stunningly, the threat to that commitment does not come from outside, but from within, from the EU’s increasingly recalcitrant member Hungary. The vision of its prime minister, Viktor Orban, heartily shaking hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin two months ago still hung heavy over the gathering.

Orban came into the summit vowing to both block the plans by his 26 fellow leaders to officially declare that membership negotiations with Ukraine can start, and more pressingly, deny Kyiv 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) in financial aid that the country desperately needs to stay afloat. “The European Union is about to make a terrible mistake and they must be stopped — even if 26 of them want to do it, and we are the only ones against it,” he said in comments released by his office Thursday. “This is a mistake, we are destroying the European Union.”

The challenge comes at an especially dire time for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, straight off a trip to Washington where his pleas for more aid from the US Congress fell on deaf ears.

“Ukraine will not stand without supports and ongoing support from both the European Union and the US,” said Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar. Barring that, he added “well then, Putin will win.” Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said the decision on the financial aid had to be taken at the summit, “because Ukraine is not fighting tomorrow. Ukraine is fighting right now.” The urgency to find a solution is matched only by the potential blow to the EU’s credibility, Zelenskyy said

in a video address to the leaders. “Nobody wants Europe to be seen as untrustworthy. Or as unable to take decisions it prepared itself,” he said.

Referring to Putin, he added, “Don’t give him this first — and only — victory of the year. Europe must win, agreements must be honoured.”

“Whatever it takes” had been the relentless mantra of the EU in pledging its support, leaders dressed up in the yellow and sky-blue colours of Ukraine, and countless speechifying ending with the rallying cry “Slava Ukraini!” — “Glory to Ukraine!”

The EU, a group of 27 nations which still cherish their independence on strategic and foreign affairs issues, works by unanimity on most issues relating to Ukraine. Orban is seen by many as Putin’s foot in the summit door, Putin’s wrecking ball to demolish EU support for Zelenskyy. Even ahead of the summit, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had already taken Orban aside in an attempt to make him change his mind.

“It is important that a clear signal of support be sent here — a signal directed to the courageous citizens of Ukraine, who are defending their country, but a signal also directed to the Russian president,” said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Orban said such negotiating tactics would not work with him. “We will not shift on this, no matter the offer. Hungarians are genetically insensitive to pressure,” he said. He said at least three conditions had not yet been fulfilled by Ukraine. “So there is no need to negotiate membership of Ukraine now.” The next EU summit is slated in March. Orban has complained of corruption in Ukraine and has demanded a “strategic discussion” on the country’s future in Europe as the war with Russia bogs down and concerns mount about what kind of administration might emerge in Washington after the US elections in a year.

Special court allows in-camera trial of Imran Khan, Qureshi

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A special court in Pakistan on Thursday accepted the country’s top investigative agency’s plea seeking an in-camera trial of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood in the cipher case involving the alleged leaking of state secrets and violation of laws. The special court on Wednesday once again indicted Khan, 71, and Qureshi, 67, in the cipher case, which is based on the allegation that a secret diplomatic document sent by the Pakistan embassy in March last year was mishandled by them and they violated the laws of the country.

On Thursday, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) urged Special Court Judge Abul Hasan Zulqar-nain to allow the trial to be held in-camera, which he accepted, despite ruling last month that the proceedings would continue at the Adiala Jail but in an open court.

After hearing arguments, the judge said the next hearing would be heard in-camera, which he adjourned until Friday. He further ruled that family members of the suspects would be allowed to attend the hearing. The FIA registered the cipher case on August 15 on the charges of violating the secret laws of the country. The FIA on September 30 filed the charge sheet against Khan and Qureshi who signed its copies. The FIA invoked in the charge sheet sections 5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act which may lead to a death sentence, or two to 14 years’ imprisonment if convicted. Khan and Qureshi were initially indicted in the case on October 23. Both had pleaded not guilty.

The special court judge while hearing the case on December 4 had declared that fresh indictment was mandatory in the light of the Islamabad High Court judgment which declared all proceedings illegal after ruling against the jail trial on procedural grounds.

As a result of the judgment, the special court started fresh proceedings. On Monday, the former premier challenged the process of his indictment in the cipher case in the Islamabad High Court, urging it to halt the proceedings till deciding on the petition. Speaking to the media after Thursday’s hearing, Qureshi’s daughter Mehrbano Qureshi asserted that an open trial was the “requirement of justice”.

However, the National Accountability Bureau prosecutor Rizwan Abbasi said the FIA has filed a petition seeking an in-camera hearing of the case under section 14 (exclusion of public from proceedings) of the Secrets Act. “If this matter was not secret, then there would not have been an FIR. How can a secret matter be made public?” Abbasi asked.

Meanwhile, the IHC dismissed Khan’s petition seeking an immediate stay order on the cipher trial, seeking reports from the respondents by December 20.

Imran’s lawyer held outside HC

PTI ■ LAHORE

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan’s lawyer and a leader from his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party was arrested on Thursday outside the Lahore High Court where he was attending the lawyers’ strike against the Supreme Court’s decision to allow military courts to try civilians allegedly involved in the May 9 violence.

Lawyer Sher Afzal Marwat, who is also the senior vice president of Khan’s PTI, was arrested under a public order ordinance, Punjab police said. A heavy contingent of police, accompanied by plainclothes men, pounced on Marwat, dragged him from the road and bundled him into a nearby police van.

“Marwat is also wanted in a case in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and he may be handed over to its police,” they said. Pakistan’s Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed the trial of civilians by the military courts, condi-

tionally suspending its October 23 ruling in which it had ordered authorities to conduct the hearing of the cases of more than 100 supporters of Khan arrested for their alleged role in May 9 violence in ordinary courts.

Earlier on October 23, a five-member Supreme Court bench had declared that trying civilians in military courts for their alleged role in attacks on army installations after the arrest of Khan on May 9 was ultra vires of the Constitution. Khan, 71, has been in jail since August this year charged with multiple cases and convicted in many of them. The PTI termed Marwat’s arrest as “abduction” and “absolutely shameful.” Indirectly chiding the military establishment, the PTI said: “The arrest of Marwat shows the respect for courts in the eyes of those in power. The law is openly flouted by those who are at the helm showing a complete regard to the judicial system of Pakistan. It’s time that the

judiciary should take notice of this.”

Last week, the KPK police tried to arrest Marwa after he managed to hold a party convention in Bajaur. Marwat had said the police made a failed effort to abduct him as he was entering Gulabad with approximately 300 officers allegedly involved in the incident. Marwat came close to Khan after representing him in most of the cases against him after the May 9 incidents of PTI workers’ attack on military installations.

Meanwhile, agencies picked former PTI lawmaker Shujaat Nawaz Anjala from Gujrat district for posting a pro-Imran Khan video clip on his social media account. A few days ago, Anjala released a video message on his Facebook account claiming loyalty to PTI supremo Imran Khan.

Currently over 10,000 PTI workers and leaders are languishing in jails in different parts of the country after May 9 events.

Taliban sending women to jail to protect them from violence, says UN report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Islamabad (AP): Taliban officials are sending Afghan women to prison to protect them from gender-based violence, according to a UN report published on Thursday. Before the Taliban seized power in 2021, there were 23 state-sponsored women protection centers in Afghanistan where survivors of gender-based violence could seek refuge. Now there are none, the UN report said. Officials from the Taliban-led administration told the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan that there was no need for such shelters or that they were a Western concept.

The Taliban sends women to prison if they have no male relatives to stay with or if the male relatives are considered unsafe, the report said. Authorities have also asked male relatives for commitments or sworn statements that they will not harm a female relative, inviting local elders to witness the guarantee, it added. Women are sent to prison for their protection “akin to how prisons have been used to accommodate drug addicts and homeless people in Kabul,” the report said.

The Associated Press contacted Taliban-led ministries about where survivors of gender-based violence can seek help, what protection measures are in place, and the conviction rates for offenders, but nobody was available for comment. Women and girls have been increasingly confined to their homes since the Taliban takeover in 2021. They are barred from education beyond sixth grade, including university, public spaces like parks, and most jobs. They are required to take a male chaperone with them on journeys of more than 72 km (45 miles) and follow a dress code.

Pak extends deadline for Afghan refugees in transit to Western countries

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Amidst mounting international pressure, Pakistan has extended the deadline for the repatriation of Afghan nationals without proper documents and waiting to relocate to Western countries till February 29. The development comes a week after US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West visited Pakistan and met with Pakistan’s caretaker Foreign Minister Jilal Abbas Jilani. “The decision to extend the deadline from December 31 to February 29, 2024, was taken to encourage Afghan nationals to obtain legal documents or finalise evacuation arrangements in a third country as soon as possible,” the Dawn newspaper quoted the caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi as saying. Solangi was speaking to the media after the caretaker federal cabinet on

Wednesday extended the deadline for the repatriation of Afghan nationals who have been residing in the country without proper documentation, but waiting to relocate to Western countries under their respective resettlement plan. During the visit of West, the two sides discussed a range of issues, including the ongoing drive against undocumented Afghans, the report said. The forced expulsion of Afghans without documentation has drawn widespread criticism from human rights activists, UN officials, and others, who have asked Pakistan to reconsider the controversial policy. On Wednesday, the cabinet also decided that Afghan nationals who have to leave for a third country and do not have any legal documents or processing fees would be fined USD 400 for overstaying in Pakistan instead of the earlier fixed amount of USD 800.

Pak court suspends EC decision to appoint bureaucrats as ROs

PTI ■ LAHORE

A top Pakistani court has suspended the election commission’s decision to appoint bureaucrats as Returning Officers (ROs) for the February 8 general elections, prompting a war of words between political parties, with two of them terming it as a “conspiracy” to postpone the polls.

Lahore High Court on Wednesday announced a reserved verdict on the plea challenging the Election Commission Pakistan’s (ECP) decision to appoint bureaucrats as Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Officers (DROs) from the executive while hearing a plea by former prime minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Justice Ali Baqar Najafi of the Lahore High Court said that on factual grounds, “the apparent absence of a level playing field” for the political party of the petitioner (PTI) is visible to all and has also been seriously noted by many inde-

pendent groups. “With top political leadership locked inside the jail or gone underground, electioneering by his political party will be a big question mark,” the judge said referring to Khan and other PTI leaders, who have been in jail on different charges.

The judge further noted that the apprehension of the petitioner that the ECP may not hold free and fair polls appears to be well founded as ROs, DROs and Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) are appointed from the presently posted members of the administration throughout the country “with whom the petitioner’s political party (PTI) does not inspire any confidence.”

“Undoubtedly, the holding of general elections costs this poor nation billions, which may be wasted if the election results are not accepted by major political parties,” Justice Najafi observed and referred the petition to the chief justice LHC to constitute a larger

bench to decide the matter. Following the High Court’s order, the ECP on Thursday stopped the training of the ROs, DROs, and AROs.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) criticised the decision even as the PTI reiterated that the powerful Pakistan Army is working according to what it termed as the ‘London Plan’.

“This is a conspiracy of Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to postpone the elections,” PML-N president and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said in a statement on Thursday.

He said the PTI went to the court with the intention to delay polls, as, in the 2018 elections it had made no objections to bureaucracy for performing the duties of ROs and DROs. “Now, if the elections are postponed, the PTI and its supreme Imran Khan will be solely responsible,” Shehbaz asserted.

PPP’s information secretary Faisal Karim Kundi said

efforts are afoot to delay polls. “Conspiracies are being hatched to postpone polls,” he added. The PTI has alleged that the military establishment wants sham elections to install its “puppet” Nawaz Sharif as prime minister under the ‘London Plan’.

In response to other parties’ allegations that PTI wants delay in polls, its secretary general Omar Ayub said on Thursday on X: “PTI’s stance is very clear. We demand the immediate announcement of the election schedule so that the general elections are held on 8th February 2024.”

“PTI demands that the ROs are from the judiciary because we do not trust the public servants to conduct free and fair elections given the recent track record of the biased illegal Caretaker Governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the equally biased Caretaker Federal, Baluchistan, and Sindh Governments,” Ayub said. He also said the ECP should not

use the decision of the LHC to delay the announcement of the schedule.

“ECP has continuously proven that it is an appendage of the federal government and used every opportunity to harm PTI and ex-PM Imran Khan. “As far as the statements of the other political parties are concerned and especially PMLN Shehbaz Sharif and JUI-F Maulana Fazala-ur-Rahman, they have consistently used a range of excuses ranging from global warming to snowfall and terrorism to delay the elections because they fear the wrath of the people of Pakistan due to the dismal performance of the PDM government,” he said.

Pakistan is headed to the general elections scheduled to be held on February 8. After ending his self-imposed four-year exile in London, Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan on October 21 and has been getting clean chits in case after case that was pending for many years.

HK places arrest bounties on activists abroad for breaching security law

Hong Kong (AP): Hong Kong police accused five activists based overseas on Thursday of breaching a harsh national security law imposed by Beijing and offered rewards of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (\$128,000) for information leading to each of their arrests.

The latest arrest warrants further intensified the Hong Kong government’s crackdown on dissidents after anti-government protests in 2019.

Many leading pro-democracy activists were arrested, silenced, or forced into self-exile after the introduction of the security law in 2020, in a sign that freedoms promised to the former British colony when it returned to China in 1997 had been eroded drastically. But both Beijing and Hong Kong

governments have hailed the security law for bringing back stability to the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

The arrest warrants were issued for Johnny Fok and Tony Choi, who host a YouTube channel focusing on current affairs, and pro-democracy activists Simon Cheng, Hui Wing-ting and Joey Siu. Police refused to tell their whereabouts, but their social media profiles and earlier media reports indicated they had moved to the United States and Britain. In July, Hong Kong warned eight other activists who now live abroad that they would be pursued for life under bounties put on them. It was the first such use under the security law, and the authorities’ announcement drew criticism

from Western governments.

Steven Li, chief superintendent of the police national security department, said the authorities received some 500 pieces of information since the last round of bounties were announced. While some of the information was valuable to the police, no arrest of the eight had yet been made.

Li said the five activists newly added to their wanted list committed various offenses including colluding with foreign forces and incitement to secession. “They all betrayed their own country and betrayed Hong Kong,” he said in the news conference. “After they fled overseas, they continued to engage in activities endangering national security.”

Li said authorities will try

their best to cut the financial support to the wanted activists. Police arrested four other people Wednesday on suspicion of funding former pro-democracy lawmakers Nathan Law and Ted Hui — two of the eight activists targeted by the police in July — through an “online subscription and crowdfunding platform.”

The four were alleged to have provided financial support to others committing secession. The amount involved ranged from 10,000 to 120,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$12,800 to \$15,400). Cheng wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that he embraced the charges. “Being hunted by China (Hong Kong’s secret police, under a one-million-dollar bounty, is a lifelong honour,” he wrote.

PPP announces Bilawal Bhutto as PM candidate, Zardari presidential nominee

Islamabad (PTI): The Pakistan Peoples Party on Thursday announced that its chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari would be its prime ministerial candidate and his father Asif Ali Zardari the presidential nominee in the general election scheduled to be held on February 8.

The announcement comes as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party had already announced that its chief and former three-time premier Nawaz Sharif would be the nominee for the post of prime minister.

Though Pakistan is a multi-party parliamentary democracy and the election of prime minister and president is indirect based on the number of seats won by a party, the nomination of prime minister



or president helps the voters to decide with the knowledge who would be on the top of decision making hierarchy after elections. Addressing the media here, PPP information secretary Faisal Karim Kundi said that Bilawal will be the candidate for the prime minister and “our wish will be that we replay 2008 and make Asif Zardari the president”.

Zardari, 68, who had become the President of Pakistan after elections held in 2013, served in the post till 2018. Bilawal, 35, served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from April 2022 to August 2023. Kundi also said that the elections “should not be delayed” beyond February 8 and that the PPP is “fully ready” for the elections.

Sensex, Nifty hit lifetime highs as US Fed keeps rate unchanged

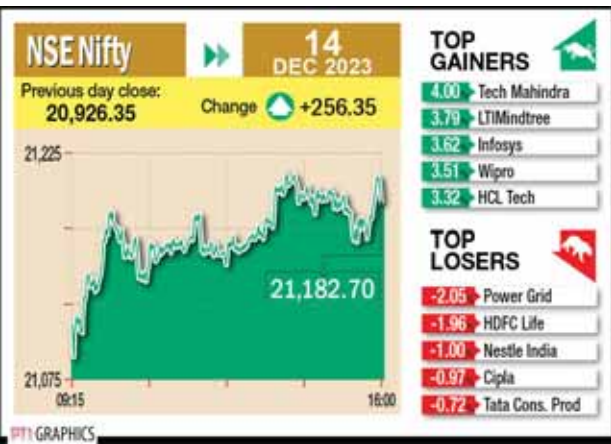
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied over 1 per cent to hit all-time highs on Thursday, propelled by intense buying in IT, tech and realty stocks after the US Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged and signalled rate cuts next year. Persistent buying by foreign investors and sliding crude oil prices in the international markets also supported domestic equities, traders said. Rising for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 929.60 points or 1.34 per cent to settle at 70,514.20, its all-time closing high. During the day, it surged 1,018.29 points or 1.46 per cent to hit its all-time intra-day peak of 70,602.89. A total of 2,064 stocks advanced

while 1,702 declined and 126 remained unchanged. The Nifty rallied 256.35 points or 1.23 per cent to settle at a record closing high of 21,182.70. During the session, it jumped 284.55 points or 1.35 per cent to 21,210.90, its record intra-day peak. "The market continued its exuberance and hit a fresh high amid the dovish commentary from the Federal Reserve, signalling at least three rate cuts in 2024. Further, the sharp fall in US bond yields improved investors' confidence. "An upgrade in India's GDP forecast, ease in global oil prices, and the RBI decision to clamp down inflation to the target level led to a broad-based rally with outperformance from Realty and IT," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.



Among the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Wipro, HCL Technologies, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major gainers. On the other hand, Power Grid, Nestle, JSW Steel, Maruti, Titan and Tata Motors were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE midcap jumped 1.06 per cent and smallcap climbed 0.62 per cent.



Among the indices, Realty rallied 3.80 per cent, IT jumped 3.21 per cent, Realty (3.80 per cent), teck (2.72 per cent), telecommunication (2.14 per cent), financial services (1.38 per cent), oil & gas (1.36 per

cent) and energy (1.28 per cent). Consumer Durables emerged as the only laggard. In Asian markets, Seoul and Hong Kong settled in positive territory, while Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading in the green. The US markets ended with significant gains on Wednesday. The Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged on Wednesday for a third straight time, a sign that it is likely done raising rates after having imposed the fastest string of increases in four decades to fight painfully high inflation. The Fed's policymakers also signalled that they expect to make three quarter-point cuts to their benchmark interest rate next year. "The US Fed's decision to leave rates unchanged lifted the world equity market mood, including India, which saw benchmark indices reach yet another record high on the back of a frenzied buying support. Besides, falling crude oil prices and foreign

investors pumping in money into domestic equities have bolstered investors' sentiment. "With India continuing to post strong growth numbers and hopes of rate cut expected in the middle of next year, optimism in equity markets could continue in the medium term," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) continued to remain buyers as they bought equities worth Rs 4,710.86 crore on Wednesday, according to their exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.74 per cent to USD 75.55 a barrel. The BSE benchmark advanced 33.57 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 69,584.60 on Wednesday. The Nifty gained 19.95 points or 0.10 per cent to 20,926.35.

Don't apply SC ruling in NOS case mechanically in all employee secondment cases: CBIC to officials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC has asked its field offices not to mechanically apply the Supreme Court judgment in the Northern Operating System (NOS) case in relation to the secondment of employees. In an instruction to field formations, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said secondment as a practice is not restricted to service tax and the issue of taxability on secondment shall arise in GST also. Secondment of employees refers to an agreement between an employer and employee, that requires the employee to work in another location or department for a specified period. GST officials have recently issued notices to various multinational companies over secondment of employees following the Supreme Court judgement which held that the secondment of employees by overseas group company to NOS was a taxable service of 'manpower supply' and service tax was applicable on the same. It is noted that secondment as a practice is not restricted to service tax and the issue of taxability on secondment shall arise in GST also, the CBIC said. A careful reading of the NOS judgment indicates that the



Supreme Court's emphasis is on a nuanced examination based on the unique characteristics of each specific arrangement, rather than relying on any singular test, the CBIC said. The CBIC said there may be multiple types of arrangements in relation to secondment of employees of overseas group company in the Indian entity. In each arrangement, the tax implications may be different, depending on the specific nature of the contract and other terms and conditions attached to it. "Therefore, the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the NOS judgment should not be applied mechanically in all the cases. Investigation in each case requires a careful consideration of its distinct factual matrix,

including the terms of contract between overseas company and Indian entity, to determine taxability or its extent under GST and applicability of the principles laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgment in NOS case," the CBIC said. EY Tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal said this circular could bring much-needed relief to taxpayers, as it potentially allows full input tax credit on paid tax when Section 74 proceedings are not initiated. "Nevertheless, the department recognizes the existence of various types of secondment arrangements, highlighting the potential for different tax implications depending on the specific case. This suggests a nuanced approach from the department,

where the Supreme Court's judgment won't be universally applied," Agarwal said. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said while this clarification by CBIC is a commendable stride forward, encouraging tax officers to approach secondment arrangements with care and in adherence to legal principles, it is noteworthy that the board has refrained from providing specific illustrative cases where tax imposition would not apply. Deloitte India Partner Saloni Roy said after the SC ruling, GST officials issued notices to various multinationals for seeking the details on secondment arrangements and demanded GST, along with interest and penalty. These notices were challenged in some cases before various high courts, which granted stay on the proceedings as an interim measure. "The instruction issued by the Finance Ministry acknowledges the issues faced by industry and has directed the field formations to evaluate each arrangement basis the parameters set by the Supreme Court before any demand is raised. Also, since this is an interpretational issue, the levy of 100 per cent penalty will be applied only when a willful evasion of tax is found," Roy said.

Wholesale inflation back in positive zone after 7 months, at 0.26 per cent in Nov

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale price-based inflation rose at the fastest pace in eight months at 0.26 per cent in November mainly due to a sharp rise in food prices. The WPI inflation was in the negative zone for the past seven months and was at (-) 0.52 per cent in October. "Positive rate of inflation in November, 2023 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, minerals, machinery & equipment, computer, electronics & optical products, motor vehicles, other transport equipment and other manufacturing etc.," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement. Food inflation rose to 8.18 per cent in November, from 2.53 per cent in October. Official data released earlier this week showed retail or consumer price based inflation rising at its fastest pace in three months at 5.55 per cent in November, driven by spike in food prices. The Reserve Bank in its bi-monthly monetary policy last week, held interest rates steady and flagged risks of rising food inflation in November and December.

Average power purchase cost rises 71 paise/unit in FY22-23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Average power purchase cost increased by 71 paise per unit during FY22-23 due to a rise in various overheads like transmission and distribution rates, Parliament was informed on Thursday. On the rise in power cost due to increased use of imported coal, Union Power Minister RK Singh, in a written reply to the Lok Sabha, said, "Average power purchase cost increased by 71 paise only between FY22 and FY23. This is because of increase in various costs - including an increase in transmission and distribution costs". The minister explained that with the rise in electricity demand from July 2021 onwards, the consumption of coal in thermal power plants increased. The supply of domestic coal on a daily basis was less than consumption, which resulted in the depletion of coal stock and stocks at plants came down from 28.7 million tonnes (MT) as of June 30, 2021, to about 8.1 million tonnes (MT) as of September 30, 2021, he added. Therefore, in December 2021, the Ministry of Power advised state Gencos and IPPs (independent power producers) to import (coal) at the rate of four per cent of the total requirement and central Gencos at the rate of 10 per cent during 2022-23. During April-September 2022 (H1 of FY 2022-23), the receipt of domestic coal was about 355 MT against the consumption of 385 MT (domestic - 359 MT + imported: 1.4X18.9 MT) - a shortage of 30 million tonnes. The gap between the supply of domestic coal and consumption of coal was about 1.6 lakh tonnes/day during this period, he informed the House. To improve the situation, the Ministry of Power advised Gencos on August 1, 2022, to make the decision regarding blending at their level, taking into account the domestic coal supply and stock position (need-based blending) with continuous monitoring of stock levels.



The gap between daily coal consumption and daily arrival of domestic coal ranged between 2.65 lakh tonnes to 0.5 lakh tonnes between September 2022 and January 2023, he stated. If the imports for blending had not been made, the coal stocks in thermal power plants would have reduced to zero in September 2022 and would have continued so, leading to widespread power cuts and blackouts, he noted. Therefore, Singh stated that the Ministry of Power advised central, state Gencos and independent power producers (IPPs) on January 9, 2023, to import coal at the rate of 6 per cent by weight to have sufficient coal stocks at their power plants for smooth operations till September 2023. The gap between daily coal consumption and daily arrival of domestic coal increased from 1.30 lakh tonnes per day to 2.80 lakh tonnes per day between June 2023 and September 2023, he pointed out. Therefore, the Ministry of Power advised central and state Gencos and IPPs on September 1, 2023, and October 25, 2023, to import coal through a transparent competitive procurement process for blending, he added. In another reply to the House, he explained that the cost of generation of electricity is dependent on the share of imported coal used and the price of imported coal. The pricing of imported coal is linked with international

indices, sources of origin, and other factors like ocean freight, insurance etc, which is purely dynamic and varies with international conditions, he noted. Also, imported coal has a high calorific value compared to domestic coal, he pointed out. The cost of fuel, including that of imported coal, is passed into generation tariff in accordance with regulations laid down by the appropriate Electricity Regulatory Commission, Singh said. The generation cost becomes an input for the determination of retail consumer tariff, which is again approved by the respective regulatory commission before it is passed on to the consumers, he stated. The regulator lays down norms for various input costs and does not allow costs in excess of the norms to be passed through, he stated. In another reply to the House, the minister said the power demand of the country is increasing rapidly because we have added 2.86 crore new consumers and because our economy is growing rapidly. "The peak demand during the FY2013-14 was 1,35,000 MW. The peak demand during the current financial year (till November 2023) has increased to 2,43,000 MW," he informed the House. The projected peak demand as per the 20th Electric Power Survey (EPS) will be 2,77,200 MW in FY2026-27 and 3,66,400 MW in FY 2031-32, he also stated.



Ashneer Grover moves NCLT, alleges mismanagement, oppression against BharatPe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BharatPe co-founder and former managing director Ashneer Grover has moved the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), alleging oppressive conduct and mismanagement by the board of the fintech firm. In his petition, Grover has prayed for reinstating him as managing director of the company and declare as "illegal" changes in the management of the company by altering the board of Resilient Innovations Pvt Ltd, which is doing business as BharatPe. He has also requested NCLT to order inspection and audit of the company by Ministry of Corporate Affairs and to revert any shares/ESOPs issued since his resignation on March 1, 2022. Grover has also sought revocation of termination of his wife Madhuri Jain by the board, terming it "illegal". He has also asked for removal of any new member inducted on the board after his exit. Moreover, he has requested NCLT to direct winding up of the company in the "interest of justice" in the petition filed under Sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act 2013, which deals with oppression and mismanagement. Grover's plea came for a hearing last week on December 6, where his counsel sought time to address the issue of maintainability further. A two-member bench comprising members Mahendra Khandelwal and

Rahul Bhatnagar was directed to list the matter on January 11, 2024, for the next hearing. Grover has submitted he has a "prima facie" case on merits and the balance of convenience lies in his favour. In case relief is not granted, then grave irreparable harm, loss and injury would be caused to him, as per the petition. In his petition, Grover has mentioned 12 respondents, including the company, its founder Shasvat Nakrani, Chairman Rajnish Kumar, former CEO and director Sushil Sameer and other directors and officials of Resilient Innovations. Grover has alleged that he has a "coerced termination from the employment" of the company in an arbitrary manner and clawback of his restrictive shares "illegally, arbitrarily" without due compliance of the law. The voice of a director and the largest individual shareholder of BharatPe has been muffled in order to mismanage the affairs of the company, he alleged. "The entire conduct of the board of directors of Respondent No 1 (BharatPe) from sending the petitioner (Grover) on a temporary leave over a fabricated issue that has nothing to do with the affairs of the company to sending the petitioner of compulsory leave by passing a board resolution in excessive exercise and abuse of its power forcing to resign from Respondent No 1 company is nothing but conducting its affairs in a manner contrary to and prejudicial to ..," he submitted.

Gold jumps ₹1,130; silver rallies ₹2,350

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price jumped Rs 1,130 to Rs 62,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had ended at Rs 61,820 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver also rallied Rs 2,350 to Rs 77,400 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 75,050 per kg in the previous trade. HDFC Securities' senior analyst of commodities Saumil Gandhi said gold prices surged on Thursday in the Delhi



markets trading at Rs 62,950/10 grams, up by Rs 1,130, following a bullish trend in the overseas markets. In the futures trade, the February contract of gold climbed Rs 1,381 to Rs 62,580 per 10 grams on the MCX, while the March contract of silver bounced Rs 3,393 to Rs 74,925 per kilogram. In the overseas markets, gold

and silver were trading higher at USD 2,032 per ounce and USD 24 per ounce, respectively. Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,032 per ounce, up by USD 51 from the previous close in the international markets. Comex gold jumped as much as 2.5 per cent after the US Federal Reserve signalled for the first time that its aggressive monetary policy interest rate-raising campaign is over, expecting a series of cuts next year, Gandhi said. Furthermore, a drop in the US Treasury yields and the dollar index also bolstered the gold prices, he added.

Bihar Business summit: MoUs inked with 300 firms for investment of ₹50,530 cr

PTI ■ PATNA

Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) totalling Rs 50,530 crore were sealed with around 300 companies for proposed investments in various sectors in Bihar during the two-day global investors' summit which concluded here on Thursday, officials said. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who attended the event during the day released the Bihar Logistics Policy 2023 aiming at providing international-standard infrastructure facilities for industrial and social growth. He, however, did not address the 'Bihar Business Connect-2023'. The Adani Group said it would make an additional investment of Rs 8,700 crore in the state in various sectors, including cement manufacturing, logistics and the agro-industry. The group has already invested Rs 850 crore in the state, said Pranav Adani, Director of Adani Enterprises, while speaking at the summit. MoUs were signed with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (Rs 7,386.15 crore), Patel Agri Industries Private

Limited (Rs 5,230 crore), Holtech International Inc (Rs 2,200 crore), Indo European Heart Hospitals and Research Institute Private Limited (Rs 2,000 crore) and other companies, the officials said. Addressing the concluding session of the summit, Industries Minister Sameer Kumar Mahaseth said the state needs three things for faster development. "Rain in Nepal causes much destruction in Bihar. If an agreement on water management with Nepal is reached, Bihar can be saved from floods. If Bihar gets the special state status, its industrial development will accelerate further. The third point is that if Bihar is included in the Special Economic Zone, its economic development will increase." The state has made rapid progress in electricity, water, and roads, making it an ideal destination for investment, Mahaseth said. Addressing the gathering, Pranav Adani, Director of Adani Enterprises, said, "Our group has decided to invest Rs 8,700 crore in additional sectors in Bihar. This will create direct or indirect employment for approximately 10,000 people in the state."

Procurement from GeM portal may reach ₹3.5L crore this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The procurement of goods and services from the government portal GeM is expected to touch Rs 3.5 lakh crore by the end of this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said. The government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all the central government ministries and departments. "As of today, the procurement has reached Rs 2.4 lakh crore and going by the trend, the procurement this fiscal will reach close to Rs 3.50 lakh crore, hopefully," GeM CEO P K Singh told reporters here. In 2021-22, the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore. It crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last year. Singh said that the share of central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) in the total buying of goods and services is increasing at a healthy rate. More than 245 CPSEs, including Coal India, SAIL, NTPC and SBI, are participating in the process. The top five undertakings that are procuring maximum in value terms this fiscal (till



December 10) include Coal India, National Thermal Power Corporation, Steel Authority of India, Bharat Dynamics and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. "In just 6.5 months of 2023-24, procurement by CPSEs has surpassed Rs 1 lakh crore mark. Buying carried out by these units on GeM contributed about 63 per cent to total procurement," Singh said. GeM has over 63,000 government buyer organisations and over 62 lakh sellers and service providers offering a wide range of products and services. Currently, government departments, ministries, public sector units, state governments, and central armed police forces are allowed to carry out transactions through this portal. The portal provides a wide range of products from office stationery to vehicles. Automobiles, computers and

office furniture are some of the major product categories. Services, including transportation, logistics, waste management, webcasting and analytical, are listed on the portal. South Korea's KONEPS is the largest such platform in the world. Currently, GeM stands at the third position after Singapore's Gebiz. States/union territories like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant amounts of procurement orders in the current financial year. "GeM's expansion into the services sector has played a pivotal role in driving its accelerated adoption," he said, adding that services sector contribution in the total procurement has increased from 23 per cent in 2021-22 to about 50 per cent this fiscal.

Rupee recovers 7 paise to close at 83.33 against dollar as rate hike fear eases

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered from all-time lows to close at 83.33 against the US dollar on Thursday, gaining 7 paise as the greenback weakened in the overseas markets following signals that rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve were over. A stellar rally in domestic equities fuelled by foreign fund inflows also boosted the rupee sentiment. However, dollar buying by state-run banks and a rise in oil prices capped the rupee gains, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened strong at 83.30 against the last close of 83.40, the lowest closing level against the US dollar. The rupee moved in a tight range of 83.35 and 83.27 in the day trade. It finally closed at 83.33, up by 7 paise over the previous close. The US dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, eased by 0.32 per cent to 102.54. The US Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged on Wednesday for a third time in a row.

India lose to Germany in semifinal of FIH junior World Cup

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR
Penalty corner woes continued to haunt India as they failed to convert even once from 12 shots to lose 1-4 to a clinical Germany in the semifinal of junior men's hockey World Cup here on Thursday. Six-time champions Germany, on the other hand, earned just two penalty corners in the whole match but scored on both the occasions. The Indian team will need a lot of soul-searching as it was inexplicable not to score even once from a dozen penalty corners in such a crucial stage of the showpiece. The Indians had produced a spectacular display of grit and character to prevail over the Netherlands, ranked fourth in

the world, in the quarterfinal on Tuesday in their 4-3 win, but penalty corner conversion let them down on Thursday. Ben Hasbach struck a brace with goals in the eighth (field goal) and 30th minute (penalty corner) to give Germany a 2-1 lead at half-time. Sudeep Chirmako (11th) scored the solitary goal for India with a field effort. The mighty Germans then consolidated their lead with a clinical penalty corner conversion by Glander Paul (41st), while Florian Sperling's 58th minute field strike completed the formalities. Last edition runners-up Germany will face the winner of the other semifinal between France and Spain in the summit clash. India will play for the bronze



medal on Saturday. The first quarter was an evenly contested one with Chirmako cancelling out Hasbach's goal. After a midfield lapse, Hasbach

took control of the ball to score from the rebound and give Germany the lead. Chirmako equalised for India with a splendid shot as the German goalkeeper came forward

to narrow the angle but the Indian kept him at bay to slot it home from the edge of the circle. That goal was, however, the only bright spot for the Indian team.

India could have got the upper hand had they converted at least one of the four PCs they earned. But it was not to be. The second quarter was even worse as the Uttam Singh-led side wasted all the six PCs they earned in quick succession. India paid the price as Germany scored from a PC taken by Hasbach. Paul scored from another penalty corner in the third quarter to give Germany 3-1 lead. Sperling then settled the issue two minutes from final hooter when he struck from a rebound. The Indian junior men's team has now lost to Germany five out of five times this year. India had also lost to the same opponents (2-4) in the semifinals of the 2021 edition in Bhubaneswar.



KHELO INDIA PARA GAMES Narwal clinches air pistol gold

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top Indian para shooter Manish Narwal added to his string of fine performances over the past few months by winning the men's 10m air pistol (SH1 category) gold in the KheLo India Para Games here on Thursday.

The 21-year-old champion marksman, who had won gold in P4 mixed 50m pistol SH1 category in Tokyo Paralympics, and a bronze in 10m air pistol SH1 at the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou recently, scored 240.2 to stand on the top of the podium at the Karni Singh shooting ranges.

Haryana's Manish, who suffers from a disability in his right hand, surpassed his gold-winning score of 239.7 in the same category achieved at this year's Lima World Shooting Para Sport Championships.

Rudransh Khandelwal, who had clinched silver ahead of Manish in 10m air pistol SH1 at Hangzhou, claimed the second spot here.

Tamil Nadu's powerlifter Kasthuri Rajamani bagged the gold medal in 67kg category with a massive effort of 100kg in her third attempt. Kasthuri, who competed at the Asian Para Games recently, was a runaway winner ahead of silver medalist Parul Gohil

of Gujarat (64kg) and Punjab's Sumandeep, who won bronze with a lift of 57kg.

In the elite 73kg category, Reshma Mogil from Gujarat was a clear winner with a lift of 72kg. The silver was won by Sahista of Delhi, who lifted 58kg while the bronze went to Maya from Rajasthan (57kg). In the men's 80kg category, Punjab's Gursewak Singh was in stunning form. He began with a lift of 162kg, increased it to 166kg and finally finished it with 171kg to win gold.

Abdul Salam of Kerala won silver (155kg), while Delhi's Honey Dabas settled for bronze (152kg).

Karnataka's Sandesha BG won gold with an effort of 171kg in the elite 88kg section. Delhi's Jagmohan was second (145kg), while the bronze went to Divyesh Ladani of Gujarat (140kg).

In para table tennis, Gujarat's Bhavina Patel, who won silver in the 2020 Paralympics and bronze in Hangzhou, was a comfortable 3-0 winner against Gujarat's Shamim Chawda in her opening match in the women's Class-4 category. The bronze medalist at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, Sonal Patel from Gujarat, defeated Tamil Nadu's Fatima Beevi 3-0 in her opening match in the women's Class 1-3 category.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ENGLAND FLOPS, SPAIN SURGES

AP ■ LONDON

So much for the English taking over European soccer. The final Champions League group stage in its current format ended with representation from the supposedly all-powerful Premier League cut in half as Manchester United and Newcastle United failed to advance to the knockout stage - and were even knocked out of European competition altogether.

Instead, there was a Spanish resurgence, a decent showing from the German contingent, and a couple of nice surprises making their way into the round of 16 in the form of Copenhagen and PSV Eindhoven.

This was the last year of the 32-team, eight-pool group stage, with the Union of European Football Associations pivoting next season to a single 36-team league that will see clubs play eight games - up from the current six.

The top eight teams will advance automatically to the round of 16 knockout bracket and Nos. 9 to 24 in the standings go into a playoff round to decide the other eight qualifiers.

So, what have we learned ahead of the round of 16 draw on Monday?
ENGLAND'S STRUGGLES

There will be wry smiles around Europe as English teams received a bloody nose, just when the Premier League seemed to have unstoppable momentum on the back of wealth generated from huge broadcast deals. Only defending champion Manchester City and Arsenal got through, marking England's weakest round-of-16 challenge in 11 years. It's quite the slump for a country that has provided six of the last 10 finalists and three of the last five winners. Not helping England's cause was this being Newcastle's first participation in 20 years, with the Saudi-owned north-east team plunged into the toughest group - containing Borussia Dortmund, Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan - and running into an injury crisis that hit a relatively shallow squad.



Oh, and there was a huge refereeing error that ultimately cost Newcastle dear. As for United, it was a chaotic campaign for a club in something of a maelstrom amid ownership wrangles and concerns over the quality of its manager.

SPAIN'S SURGE
Of the eight group winners - Bayern Munich, Arsenal, Real Madrid, Real Sociedad, Atletico Madrid, Dortmund, Man City and Barcelona - four are from Spain. While it was expected from Madrid, and potentially Barca and Atletico, too, given they were placed in weak groups, Sociedad's rise with a mostly homegrown team and coach is a welcome sight for romantics keen to see new names thrive.

In its first Champions League season in a decade, Sociedad was unbeaten and conceded just two goals. Barca is back in the big time, too, after failure to get out of the group stage in its first two post-Lionel Messi seasons. Real, fueled by Jude Bellingham, was one of two teams - with Man City - to claim a maximum of 18 points while Atletico was unbeaten, too. Germany arguably performed the best of the rest, with Bayern and Dortmund winning groups and Leipzig second behind City.

SURPRISE PACKAGES
PSV, the European champion in 1988 and runaway leader in the Eredivisie is in the knockout stage for the first time since 2016. Its only loss in 26 games this season was a 4-0 beating by Arsenal in their Champions League opener. Copenhagen's only previous appearance in the round of 16 was in 2011.

Neeraj needs to stay calm to defend title in Olympics: Colin Jackson

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Defending an Olympic title is a great achievement and India's champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra needs to "stay calm" to achieve the feat in Paris next year, feels former 110m hurdles world record holder Welshman Colin Jackson. Chopra has been the face of Indian athletics since the historic gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. Since then, he has continued to add silverware, winning World Championships, Diamond League, while challenging the 90-metre barrier. His personal best stands at 89.94m.

"He (Neeraj) is really focused and committed. He has clear perspective and pure quality which excites me a lot about him," Jackson, a two-time world champion, said.



"To be able to defend your title at the Olympics will be a great achievement for him. I think he needs to stay calm and do what he has been doing till date." Here in Kolkata for the eighth edition of Tata Steel Kolkata 25K, Colin said Indian athletes

must focus on preparations for the Paris Olympics. "India has performed well at the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and also at the Olympics recently," the 1988 Seoul Olympics silver medalist said. "I would advise the youngsters

that this sport is for you, don't shy away from it, grab it and go for the win. It is about staying focused and giving your best on the particular day," Jackson said.

"The most important thing for the Indian athletes is not to get intimidated by the environment at the Olympics. For me participating in a World Championship would be the same as the Olympics, that's what gave me longevity."

"It is important to take it as any other event, not to think it is the Olympics and put more burden on oneself."

Jackson is here as the brand ambassador of Tata Steel Kolkata 25K on Sunday.

"I hope on Sunday it will be a great race. I am looking forward to the race day and I wish the runners the very best," he signed off.

Putin questions Olympic rules for neutral Russian athletes



AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin questioned the International Olympic Committee rules mandating Russian athletes compete at the Paris Olympics as neutrals. Putin also indicated on Thursday that Russia has yet to take a final decision on whether its competitors will take part next year. The IOC rejected a blanket ban last week when it confirmed Russians will be allowed to compete under the name of Individual Neutral

Athletes. The IOC wants no national symbols such as the flag or anthem, no team sports, and to exclude athletes who are contracted to the Russian military or security services, or who have publicly supported Russia's military campaign in Ukraine. Similar measures apply for Russia's ally Belarus, which Moscow used as a staging ground for troops and equipment before sending its army into Ukraine. "I've always said that athletes train for years and that they

need to be given the opportunity to compete at the largest competitions, including the Olympic Games," Putin said. "Everyone knows, whether it's our flag or not, everyone knows it's our athlete. It's an obvious thing. And therefore in principle I supported our athletes going to such competitions, but now it needs to be carefully analysed, what kind of conditions the IOC is setting out." He expressed concern that "politically motivated artificial conditions" could be used to exclude top Russian competitors.

"If the aim of this is to cut out our leaders and show that Russian sport is not developing or on the contrary is withering away, then it is necessary for the Sports Ministry and the National Olympic Committee of Russia to analyse and to take a balanced decision," Putin said. Russian athletes previously competed without national symbols at the Winter Olympics in 2018 and 2022, and at the last Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 2021. On those occasions, the measures were part of the fallout from years of disputes over doping.

Soccer clubs in England, Saudi fuel record \$888 mn spend on agents fees in transfers

AP ■ ZURICH

Soccer clubs in England and Saudi Arabia fueled spending on player agents in international transfer deals to a record USD 888 million this year, the International Federation of Association Football said on Thursday. FIFA noted "isolated cases of service fees even surpassing USD 10 million," though the soccer body lost a key court ruling in London last month which threatens its global regulations that seek to limit how much agents can be paid from deals.

Agents across Europe have brought legal cases against FIFA and national soccer federations to block the rules which were intended to take effect worldwide in October. The project is stalled in England, which FIFA's latest research showed still dominates the multi-billion dollar soccer player transfer market. FIFA said English clubs were "the number one spenders by a long shot" in 2023 with combined spending of more than



USD 280 million on agent commissions in transfers between two clubs in different countries. Money from player transfers between two clubs in the same country does not count in the FIFA numbers. The total spend on agents was up 42% in 2022 and more than one-third from the previous peak of USD 654 million in the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

Italian clubs spending USD 115.7 million was the only other collective national total in nine figures. Saudi Arabian clubs spent USD 86 million on agents in a state-backed recruitment

program to boost its domestic league with hires such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema. FIFA did not specify details of individual transfers, though said in 224 cases the agent service fee was at least USD 1 million, and those deals accounted for nearly 69% of the total spend.

In most deals, agents were paid fees of USD 10,000 to USD 100,000, FIFA said. Clubs in North and Central America collectively spent USD 5.4 million across 20 transfers, and African clubs spent less than USD 200,000, FIFA said.

Dortmund defender Süle flags up a lack of intensity in Bundesliga

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)

Borussia Dortmund has thrived on the Champions League stage against Paris Saint-Germain, AC Milan and Newcastle. Now comes the tricky part - Augsburg away on a Saturday afternoon. After Wednesday's 1-1 draw with PSG ensured Dortmund finished on top of what was arguably the Champions League's most difficult group, defender Niklas Süle admitted the team has lacked the same intensity in some Bundesliga games.

"We've had the problem fairly often this season, that we've showed a different dynamic in the Champions League, a different kind of will. It's not always

possible to explain," Süle told broadcaster DAZN.

"Here (at Dortmund's 81,000-capacity stadium), 9 p.m., the floodlights, against the best in Europe, I don't think there's anyone in the team who isn't motivated all the way." The Dortmund players "have ourselves to blame" if that same drive hasn't been apparent in domestic games, he added. Dortmund topped its Champions League group but in the Bundesliga Edin Terzic's team is fifth and 11 points off leader Bayer Leverkusen.

Süle was a standout performer against PSG, sliding at full stretch to keep out a Kylian Mbappe shot headed for goal. In the Bundesliga, though, the Dortmund defense has not gone



a full game without conceding a goal since Oct. 20.

In nearly two months since then, Dortmund has earned five points from six Bundesliga games, conceded 15 goals in total, and was knocked out of the German Cup by Stuttgart, too. So is Dortmund raising its game for the Champions League, underperforming in Germany, or both?

There have certainly been no easy games in recent weeks as Dortmund lost to Bayern Munich and Leipzig and drew with leader Bayer Leverkusen. Stuttgart is flying high in third place and far exceeding expectations, but Dortmund has still lost twice to a team it would normally be expected to beat. Dortmund heads to ninth-

placed Augsburg on Saturday and then to relegation-threatened Mainz on Tuesday for its last two league games before the winter break.

Sporting director Sebastian Kehl was dismissive of Süle's suggestion that the Champions League occasion made much difference.

"That shouldn't play any role for a Bundesliga player, for a player for Borussia Dortmund. This competition (the Champions League) is obviously special but we know that we now need to deliver in the Bundesliga, too," Kehl told DAZN.

"The expectation is that we win both of those games (against Augsburg and Mainz), that we take the same brave approach and the same

intensity on that day as we had today, and hopefully we'll improve our situation in the Bundesliga table."

After Bayern was stunned 5-1 by Eintracht Frankfurt last week, Leverkusen is the last remaining unbeaten team in any of Europe's main five national leagues. Its lead over Bayern stands at four points, though Bayern has one game extra to play.

It's Leverkusen's turn to take on Frankfurt on Sunday, seeking a win after back-to-back draws with Dortmund and Stuttgart. After beating Manchester United 1-0 on Tuesday, Bayern takes on Stuttgart in a game that will test whether Stuttgart truly belongs in the battle for the Champions League places.

SHUBHA WANTS TO FOCUS ON PLAYING GOOD CRICKET

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Shubha Sathesh, who made her India women's team debut in the one-off Test against England on Thursday, said she believes in focusing on playing good cricket and does not have to prove anything, having spent seven years on the domestic circuit.

Karnataka's Shubha, having played across age groups and gradually moving up the ladder, scored a fine half-century at the DY Patil Stadium, guiding India to an imposing 410 for 7 on the opening day.

"About proving, I did not really think of that because I just had to play good cricket - that is all I know and I believe in," Shubha told the media after the first day's play.

"It is journey - it is a process is what I feel. It is an amazing feeling; I am out of (lost for) words because it is happening altogether right now."

Shubha revealed she was told about her Test debut and No. 3 slot only on the morning of the match.

The 24-year-old Shubha struck 13 fours in her 69-run knock from 76 balls on Thursday to join the list of those who have made fifties on Test debut for India.

"Today morning, I got to know about everything," Shubha said. "It has been quite a journey for



me, I have been in domestic cricket for 6-7 years now. Getting an India call-up was living in a dream sort of thing," she added.

Shubha's national call-up and subsequent debut comes close on the heels of her getting picked by Royal Challengers Bangalore during the Women's

Premier League mini-auction recently. "I started playing cricket when I was 12. I used to play other sports as well. I was fortunate, I

did not have any thought of becoming a cricketer. At the age of 12, I just wanted to play," Shubha added.

The left-handed batter said the message from the team management was simple, to 'express yourself', and she enjoyed batting with Jemimah Rodrigues. "The message was simple. I just had to express myself, I just had to have fun and I did that," she said.

"Jemimah and I have played a lot of junior-level cricket. We know each other from quite long, so we keep talking all the time."

"It is a beautiful wicket to bat on. Jemimah and I were talking that we just have to bat, (play) proper cricketing shots to keep going," said Shubha, whose 115-run stand with Jemimah is now the second-highest for India for the third wicket.

"It is always a learning process, I will definitely learn from this and move on and get a bigger score next time," said the No. 3 India batter.

England bowler Lauren Bell praised Shubha and Jemimah for their attacking game, which set the tone for the home side's massive total on the opening day.

"It is very impressive - how it is their first match and they can play Test match cricket like that. They both batted really well and we had to work really hard for our wickets," Bell told the media.



Warner's 164 in farewell series leads Australia to 346-5 on opening day

AP ■ PERTH (AUSTRALIA)

David Warner hit a scintillating century in his farewell Test series as Australia reached 346 for five against Pakistan's inexperienced bowlers on the opening day Thursday of the three-match series.

Warner's commanding 164 off 211 balls - his first test century in a year - vindicated captain Pat Cummins' decision to bat first on a hard bouncy pitch.

The 37-year-old Warner, who will be retiring after the last test in his Sydney hometown, made Pakistan toil in the first couple of sessions before he holed out at deep square leg in the last hour. He hit 16 fours and four sixes.

Mitchell Marsh was unbeaten on 15 on his home ground and Alex Carey was 14 not out after reaching the end of a great first day for Australia. Pakistan went into the test match without a specialist spinner and handed debuts to fast bowlers Aamer Jamal (2 for 63) and Khuram Shahzad (1 for 62).

More importantly, they twice missed opportunities to dismiss Warner. Shahzad missed an overhead catch at mid-on after Warner completed his 26th test hundred, and Sarfaraz Ahmed fumbled a difficult stumping

chance just before Warner reached 150.

Pakistan had its most productive period in the last session when it claimed three wickets. Shahzad had Steven Smith caught behind for 31 off a delivery that shaped away, and Travis Head on 40 and Warner went while going for aggressive shots against Jamal.

Warner, enduring a lean patch in Test cricket since his double hundred against South Africa at Melbourne last year, was criticized for being given a chance in the Perth test, but the left-hander responded in style.

He and Usman Khawaja, with 41, were ruthless during their century stand in the first session when they romped to 117 for no loss.

Warner completed his half-century off just 41 balls but slowed down after lunch. He reached his sixth Test hundred against Pakistan off 125 balls with an upper cut four off Jamal and celebrated his century with his trademark leap.

Khawaja took a backseat to Warner's aggression before Pakistan spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi broke through after bowling 13 of Pakistan's first 32 overs. Afridi got a faint edge of Khawaja's outside edge after lunch. Marnus Labuschagne, on 16,

went for an unsuccessful lbw referral against seamer Faheem Ashraf. Video suggested the ball would have crashed onto his leg stump.

Earlier, Warner carried a limited-overs mindset into the test arena. He and Khawaja, wearing a black armband, set the tone by scoring 14 in the first over from Afridi.

They passed 50 in the 10th over and Warner raised his half-century in the 15th, from 41 balls, with a slashing boundary against Faheem Ashraf.

A couple of overs later, Warner went even further into one-day mode when he crouched and flipped a delivery from outside off stump way over the fine-leg boundary for his first six of the innings, following 11 boundaries.

Khawaja wasn't allowed to wear shoes branded with an "All lives are equal" humanitarian message, so he wore a black armband instead. The International Cricket Council intervened on Wednesday after Khawaja indicated his shoes plan to highlight the loss of innocent lives in the Israel-Hamas war.

The Australians are the world Test champions. Pakistan hasn't won a test match in Australia since 1995, and playing its second test series this year.



Shami races against time to be fit for SA Tests

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Senior pacer Mohammed Shami, who is recovering from an ankle injury, is racing against time to be fit for the Test series against South Africa, starting at Centurion on December 26.

Though Shami was included in the Test squad that was announced on November 30, the 33-year-old's availability was subjected to his recovery after the treatment.

In that context, PTI understands that Shami might not board the flight to South Africa along with other members of the Test squad such as captain Rohit Sharma, senior batter Virat Kohli, fellow pacer Jasprit Bumrah and others.

They are scheduled to fly out to Johannesburg on Friday. Shami is likely to continue his recuperation at home, and the pacer could make a return dur-

ing the Test series at home against England starting from January 25 at Hyderabad.

If a replacement is indeed required for Shami, then the selectors under Ajit Agarkar have the option of drafting in a bowler from the India 'A' squad which is currently playing in South Africa.

Before the first match against South Africa, the Test side members will play a three-day intrasquad match from December 20.

The second Test against the Proteas will start at Cape Town from January 3, 2024.

Meanwhile, Shami has something to cheer for as he was nominated for the prestigious Arjuna Award on Wednesday. As per the information received from the Sports Ministry, a special request was made by the BCCI to the ministry to include Shami's name as he originally didn't figure in the list.

SLC appoints Sanath as consultant

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka Cricket on Thursday appointed former opener Sanath Jayasuriya as the full-time Cricket Consultant for one year to ensure all-round development of the sport in the country.

The appointment of Jayasuriya follows the reconstitution of the national selection panel on Wednesday under new lead selector and former opener Upul Tharanga.

"Under this role, Jayasuriya will be responsible for ensuring that SLC national programmes achieve an optimum level of pro-



fessionalism and that all players and coaching staff are monitored in order to deliver excellence," the SLC said in a media release. "Accordingly, he will oversee the training, coaching requirements of all teams aligned with the high-performance center.

"He will also establish national specialist skills programmes with key staff aligned to lead roles within each skill discipline, among several other tasks," the release added.

Jayasuriya will immediately assume duties in his new role and he will operate from the High-Performance Center at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo.

Sri Lanka are trying to turn around their cricketing fortunes after a shoddy effort in the recent ODI World Cup where they finished ninth in the 10-team table with just two wins from nine matches.

FEMA violation: HC upholds reduction in penalty on Rajasthan Royals

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court has upheld an order passed by a tribunal reducing the penalty imposed on the owners of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket franchise Rajasthan Royals from Rs 98 crore to Rs 15 crore for alleged financial irregularities.

A division bench of Justices K R Shriram and Neela Gokhale in its judgement on Wednesday dismissed an appeal filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) challenging the July 11, 2019 order passed by the tribunal.

The high court in its order noted the tribunal arrived at its conclusion based on evidence and analysis of the same. "The findings are far from being perverse. Thus, no question of law arises in the case. We find that in fact no justification has been recorded by the special director (ED) to impose maximum penalty as opposed to the tribunal having considered relevant material has interfered and reduced the penalty," the court



said in its order. "We find that the special director has completely failed to apply the doctrine of proportionality, while choosing to impose maximum penalty on the respondents (owners)," the HC said.

The bench said it was in agreement with the tribunal's finding and does not find anything perverse in its reasoning and conclusion. In 2013, the ED imposed a penalty of Rs 98.35 crores on

the owners of the franchise team after its preliminary probe revealed alleged irregularities under provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

The Rajasthan Royals team owners filed an appeal against this before the appellate tribunal which held the ED's order as unreasonable and reduced the amount to Rs 15 crore.

The high court in its order noted the tribunal held that no loss was caused to the public exchequer and the remittances have come into India and remained in the country.

"This is not a case where any foreign exchange has gone out of India. Also, the remittances were utilised for the purposes for which they were intended and there is not even an allegation of utilisation of the money for extraneous purposes," it said.

The HC further said the tribunal has also found no justification in the order passed by the ED's special director for imposing maximum penalty on the owners.

India defeat Nepal to clinch Women's Bilateral Series for Blind

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sushma Patel scored a breezy 37-ball 45 as India defeated Nepal by seven wickets to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match T20 Women's Bilateral Cricket Series for the Blind here on Thursday.

Put in to bat, Nepal scored 165 for six in 20 overs with skipper Binta Pun scoring 69 and sharing a 101-run stand with Mankeshi Chaudhary at the Police Gymkhana Cricket Ground.

However, following her departure, India bounced back with a flurry of wickets as Nepal lost four batters in the last four overs.

Sushma, who was adjudged 'Player of the Match', Ravanni, Basanti Hansda and Simu Das all scored as India chased down the target in the 19th over for the loss of three wickets. The last match of the series will be played on Friday. India had won the first two T20s before Nepal came back in the third game on Wednesday.

Valli, Du Plessis make fifties as S Africa 'A' manage draw against India 'A'

PTI ■ POTCHEFSTROOM (SOUTH AFRICA)

Unbeaten fifties from opener Yaseen Valli and Jean du Plessis helped South Africa 'A' earn a draw against India 'A' on the fourth and final day of the first 'Unofficial Test' here on Thursday.

South Africa 'A' made 152 for 2 in 42 overs in their second innings before both the sides agreed to shake hands. Earlier, India 'A' finished their first innings at 417 all out.

The home side were in a bit of bother when they were reduced to 48 for 2 in the 12th over as opener Cameron Dean Shekleton and one down batter Rubin Herman returned to the hut without contributing much. However, SA found their fight



through Valli (72 not out, 137 balls, 8x4) and Du Plessis (50 not out, 82 balls, 5x4) as they negated the rest of the 30 overs without much fuss.

They played comfortably against Indian pacers, especially Prasidh Krishna who had taken a fiver in the first innings, including a hat-trick. Earlier in the day, India resumed their first innings from 377 for six with Shardul Thakur batting on 70.

But, he could add only six more runs to his overnight score, before giving a catch to Valli off pacer Evan Jones.

Saurabh Kumar made 22 to take India past the 400-run mark as the visitors ended their first innings at 417 all out for an innings lead of 98 runs. For South Africa, Jones took four wickets while fellow pacer Siya Plaatjie grabbed three. The second unofficial Test will begin at Benoni on December 26.

BRIEF SCORES:
South Africa 'A': 319 all out in 98.1 overs and 152 for 2 in 42 overs (Yaseen Valli 72 not out, Jean Du Plessis 50 not out) drew with India 'A': 417 all out in 86.5 overs (Pradosh Ranjan Paul 163, Shardul Thakur 76, Sarfaraz Khan 68; Evan Jones 4/100, Siya Plaatjie 3/65).

Shoaib mistakenly ignored McCullum's England selection call for India tour

PTI ■ LONDON

A few days ago, when young England off-spinner Shoaib Bashir saw a missed call from a New Zealand dialling code number, he ignored it thinking it could be from "anyone random".

All of six first class matches old, Bashir couldn't even imagine in his wildest dream that the number belonged to former New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum and the England red-ball coach was calling him to give him some exciting news. "I was like 'Who is this? It could be anyone random'," Bashir told 'The Telegraph'.

Bashir's inclusion in the 16-member Test squad for the tour

of India on Monday came as a surprise to everyone including the off-spinner himself.

It wasn't until McCullum reached out to him on WhatsApp that Bashir responded.

"I didn't think it was someone winding me up, and I didn't think much of it until it hit me. Then I was like, 'Wow, it's Baz'. 'Honestly, I can't put it into words now, and it's been two or three days. It's just so special. I'm delighted to have an opportunity - it is crazy, crazy news,'" he said.

England will play five Tests in India as part of their ICC World Test Championships cycle starting in Hyderabad on January 25. Looking forward to a gruelling



sojourn to the subcontinent, Bashir is ready with his bag full of tricks. Apart from that, England will bank on his six foot

four inch-tall frame and vast hands to help him generate bounce and bowl with control. "I've got the off-spinner, the

undercutter, a side-spinner and an arm ball. And I am working on a Carrom ball, too. So, I've got a few, and I think they would work quite nicely in India." The 20-year-old has snared 10 wickets in his fledgling first-class career since making his professional debut in June for Somerset.

He was part of England Lions' trip to the UAE, where he got to spend time with coaches and former players Graeme Swann and Andrew Flintoff.

"Legends. Such good lads. You look at them and you're reminiscing on these old thoughts of them taking poles, whacking the ball. It's just unbelievable. To be working with them now is incredible," Bashir said.