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MAY HELP INDIAN CAUSE

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FRAUDULENT LOAN APPS

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY DECEMBER 19, 2023; PAGES 12-13



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BRING FRESH
THINKING IN MI
12 SPORTS

78 MPs suspended from both Houses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
 NEW DELHI

A total of 92 parliamentarians will remain suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session as 78 Opposition members were suspended from Parliament on Monday. They raised a vociferous din in both Houses over the Parliament security breach issues, resulting in the suspension of 33 members from the Lok Sabha and 45 from the Rajya Sabha.

With the suspension of 78 members, the total number of suspended parliamentarians now stands at 92. The Opposition, led by the Congress, termed it "Democracy Suspended". On December 14, a total of 14 MPs (13 in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha) were suspended.

The issue is likely to escalate amid the growing rift between the Opposition and the treasury benches. The Centre is determined to table important pending Bills, and the Opposition, under the INDIA bloc meeting on Tuesday, will see participation by TMC supremo West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, and other top leaders like Sharad Pawar and Lalu Prasad.

Defending the suspensions, the BJP accused the Congress



and its allies of "insulting" the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha chairperson and "embarrassing" the country with their conduct.

Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha, Piyush Goyal, told reporters that Opposition members brought placards and willfully disrupted parliamentary proceedings, despite the earlier decision that placards would not be allowed in the houses.

The Congress slammed the government over the suspension, claiming that an "extreme level of dictatorship" was in place, and "democracy has been suspended."

Soon after the suspension of 33 Opposition Lok Sabha MPs, Congress president

Mallikarjun Kharge said all democratic norms have been thrown into the dustbin by this "autocratic" government, which has shown zero accountability towards Parliament.

Forty-five Opposition members in the Upper House were suspended for unruly behaviour and disregarding the directions of the Chair, as they raised slogans over the Parliament security breach issue and disrupted proceedings. Among those suspended were Congress MPs Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, KC Venugopal, and Randeep Singh Surjewala, as well as Samajwadi Party's Ram Gopal Yadav.

The development occurred soon after 33 Opposition members, including leader of Congress Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, DMK's TR Bалу, and TMC's Sougata Ray, were suspended from the Lok Sabha following similar scenes in the Lower House. While 34 of the Rajya Sabha MPs were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session, 11 have been directed to stay away from the House pending an inquiry report on their conduct by the Committee of Privileges.

The members were suspended after the House adopted a motion moved by Goyal for the suspension of 34 MPs for the remainder of the Session and another one for referring cases of conduct of

11 other Opposition MPs to the privileges committee. The Committee has been asked to submit its report within three months, and the 11 MPs will not be able to attend the proceedings of the House until then. Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar first named the suspended members and then put the motion to vote, which was adopted by a voice vote.

The Opposition members were creating a din in the House while demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah on the security breach in the Lok Sabha and were raising slogans, disrupting proceedings of the House that saw repeated adjournments.

Among the 34 suspended for the remainder of the Session, 12 MPs are from the Congress.

The suspended members are Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, Ameer Yajnik, Naranbhai J Rathwa, Syed Nasir Hussain, Shrimati Phulo Devi Netam, Shaktisinh Gohil, KC Venugopal, Rajani Ashokrao Patil, Ranjeet Ranjan, Imran Pratapgarhi, Randeep Singh Surjewala (all of Congress), while seven members are from TMC Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Mohammed Nadimul Haque, Abir Ranjan Biswas, Santanu Sen, Mausam Noor, Prakash Chik Baraik, and Samirul Islam.

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Delhi Police sends Special Team across six States over Parliament breach

RAJESH KUMAR ■
 NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Counter Intelligence unit has written to Meta, the owner of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, requesting access to the social media accounts of the six accused persons in the Parliament security breach case. They are seeking details of the now-deleted Facebook page "Bhagat Singh Fan Club," where the accused individuals reportedly met. Sources indicate that Meta has also been asked to share WhatsApp chats of the accused, as their mobile phones have been damaged. Simultaneously, Delhi Police informed the court on Monday that the FIR registered for the Parliament security breach is "very sensitive in nature."

Consequently, the accused cannot be provided with a copy of the FIR at present. Oposing Neelam's application for a copy of the FIR, Delhi Police emphasised that the "leak" of "crucial information" at this stage could influence the investigation. Teams



from Delhi Police have been dispatched to six States — Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra — to probe the Parliament security breach that occurred on December 13.

Police sources said that they will also examine the email accounts associated with the WhatsApp numbers of the accused to retrieve chat backups and identify other individuals they were in contact with just before their alleged involvement in the case. Additionally, the police have collected bank account details of all the accused to investigate if they received money for executing the December 13

incident. Various Delhi Police teams approached family members of the accused on Sunday, collecting details of their bank accounts. Bank passbooks of Neelam Devi and Sagar Sharma were seized from their residences in Jind and Lucknow, respectively.

According to sources, Meta has been requested to share WhatsApp chats of the accused due to their damaged mobile phones. "WhatsApp users need to attach an application with an email address... This email account is used to take backup of chats every 24 hours," said a source familiar with the investigation.

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ED summons Kejriwal on December 21 in liquor scam

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has issued a fresh summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for questioning on December 21 in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, officials said on Monday.

He was first called by the federal agency to appear on November 2, but he did not depose alleging that the notice was "vague, motivated and unsustainable in law".

The summonses to Kejriwal, also the national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), pertain to questioning in the alleged Delhi excise policy case and for recording his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the officials said.

He has to appear at the ED headquarters here on December 21, they said. The development comes days after Delhi government officials said Kejriwal will leave for a 10-day Vipassana meditation course at an undisclosed location from December 19.

AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh are among those arrested in this case by the ED and the agency is expected to file a supplementary charge sheet in the case soon. After the first summons, the AAP had alleged that Kejriwal would be arrested as part of the BJP's plan to target top INDIA bloc leaders ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and the ED notice was an attempt to finish the party that is in power in Delhi and Punjab.

The ED has mentioned Kejriwal's name multiple times in its charge sheets filed in the case and said the accused were in touch with him regarding the preparation of the now-scraped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22. In one instance, the agency claimed in its charge sheet that it had recorded the statement of Butchibabu, an accountant allegedly linked to BRS leader K Kavitha, in which he said that "there was a political understanding between K Kavitha and the chief minister (Arvind Kejriwal) and the deputy chief minister (Sisodia).

"In that process, K Kavitha also met Vijay Nair (AAP communications in-charge arrested in the case) on March 19-20, 2021."

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Modi vows nine sankalps to realise New India dream

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
 VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi put forth nine resolutions on Monday, such as saving water, promoting local products, and ensuring farmers' welfare, among others. He urged the countrymen to work towards fulfilling these resolutions.

In his address at the inaugural function of the Swarged Mahamandir on the second and final day of his visit to his parliamentary constituency Varanasi, the Prime Minister said, "My first request is to save every drop of water and raise awareness about water conservation. Second: Go from village to village and educate people about digital transactions, teaching them about online payments. Third: Work to make your village, your locality, your city, number one in cleanliness."

The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stone and dedicated multiple development projects worth over Rs 19,150 crore in Varanasi, including a new Vande Bharat to New Delhi. "UP prospers when Kashi prospers, and the country



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the foundation stone laying and inauguration of various projects in Varanasi on Monday. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya are also seen

prosper when UP prospers," remarked the Prime Minister on the second day of his UP tour. A day earlier, the PM's address at the Kashi Tamil Sangam was translated for the audience using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Tamil language, considered to be the

first in the country. On Monday, Modi went on to propose his fourth resolution: "Promote local products as much as possible, use only Made in India products." The fifth resolution emphasises exploring one's own country before considering travel

abroad. He said, "As much as possible, first explore your own country, travel around in your own country, and if you want to go to another country, then you should not feel like going abroad until you see the whole country."

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Sajjan Jindal rejects rape charge as false, baseless

PTI/AGENCY ■ MUMBAI

Industrialist Sajjan Jindal, the chairman and managing director of the \$23-billion JSW Group, has denied the allegations of rape levelled against him by a 30-year-old Mumbai woman. In an official statement, Jindal said the charge was "false and baseless." The woman, whose social media profile describes her as a doctor-turned-actress, has accused Sajjan Jindal, 64, of raping her after promising to marry her.

"I am committed to providing full cooperation throughout the investigation. As the investigation is ongoing, we will refrain from commenting further at this stage. We kindly request you to respect the privacy of the family," said the statement, issued by the industrialist in his personal capacity.

The complainant claimed that she met Jindal at a cricket match in Dubai a few years ago, which led to a friendship and subsequently to the industrialist getting attracted to her. She said she visited Jindal at his office around 7 pm in January 2022, where he allegedly raped her in the penthouse at Bandra Kurla Complex and promised to marry her.

The woman approached the police on February 16, and the first information report (FIR) was filed at the BKC police station in Mumbai on December 13 under sections 376 (rape), 354 (outraging the modesty of a woman), and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC. She claimed she first met Jindal in October 2021 in Dubai when the two were in the VIP box of a stadium,



watching an IPL match. They later met at the wedding of MP Praful Patel's son. She claimed she later met Jindal inside a star hotel in suburban Bandra and south Mumbai's Jindal Mansion and also went on a drive with him in a car before the alleged sexual assault.

In the FIR, she mentioned that Jindal has been avoiding contact with her since the alleged sexual assault.

The BKC police station in Mumbai said that based on the actress' statements, the accused Sajjan Jindal was booked under sections 376 (rape), 354 (assault or use of criminal force on a woman intending to outrage her modesty), and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC.

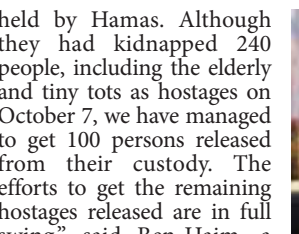
The complainant said when she approached the BKC police on February 16, 2023, the police barely scribbled down a rough statement.

"They didn't even give me a copy of the statement. No FIR was filed. Finally, on December 5, 2023, I filed a writ petition against the police in the Bombay High Court. After the court order, the FIR was filed," she said.

Hamas attack a lesson for entire world: Israeli envoy

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

What happened to Israel on October 7, 2023, is unparalleled and unique in history, and the international community of nations should take note of the unfortunate and shocking attack perpetrated by Hamas, according to Tammy Ben-Haim, Consul General of Israel to south India. The career diplomat cautioned India and other nations against the evil designs of Hamas terrorists. In an exclusive interview with The Pioneer on Monday, Ben-Haim described the act of Hamas as treachery of the highest order. "Right now, our top priority is to bring home safely the 129 hostages



held by Hamas. Although they had kidnapped 240 people, including the elderly and tiny tots as hostages on October 7, we have managed to get 100 persons released from their custody. The efforts to get the remaining hostages released are in full swing," said Ben-Haim, a career diplomat with 25 years of experience in the Israeli civil and diplomatic service. Ben-Haim said the attack by Hamas on Israel is a lesson for the entire world. "This is not an attack based on religion, culture, or economy. It is an act of treachery and materialised only because of the tacit support extended by Iran. The Iranian Government provided Hamas with arms,

being ruled by Palestinians. Not a single Israeli was there in Gaza. But what happened was that the rulers of Gaza diverted the entire money to Hamas to build tunnels under the province. The tunnels had facilities for the safe and speedy passage of jeeps and armoured vehicles. They had converted schools, hospitals, and mosques into storehouses of weapons and military hardware. The entire money meant for the welfare of people, especially children and women, was diverted to the luxurious lifestyle of Hamas commanders and jihadis," said Ben-Haim.

For 18 years, Hamas misappropriated and embezzled whatever

financial aid was contributed by international development agencies. "It was used to destroy Israel. There was no provocation of any kind from Israel's side, which always maintained peace with Gaza and other Arab nations. But Hamas was waiting for a chance to strike at us," she said.

The Israeli diplomat explained how babies were slaughtered, and girls and women in the age group of 18-30 were abused and molested by Hamas jihadis. "Rapes and brutal murders are their modus operandi. Hamas uses the civilian population as human shields. Even after the October 7 incident, Hamas terrorists continued to

shower Israel with rockets. Today, December 18 happens to be the 73rd day of their attacks. They have fired 1,200 rockets during the last 70 days, and the numbers keep on increasing as Israel is facing a difficult situation. We have to get the 129 hostages released from the custody of Hamas, and we have to fortify the nation against further attacks. We are facing attacks from the Lebanon border. Israeli ships in international seas are being attacked. To keep the world in a mode of war, Iran is doing whatever it can do. Terrorists and youngsters are taken to Iran for training in the use of AK-47 rifles and explosive devices. The 1973 Yom Kippur war between

Israel and Arab nations that lasted 19 days was won by Israel. But it was a different story. The present battle has seen many civilians losing their lives. The price on the civilian population we pay is too high," said Ben-Haim.

Continued on Page 2

She said Iran is the root cause of these evil designs. "It is playing the role of the mastermind by bringing together all terrorist organisations. Countries in Europe, the American continent, and Asia should sit together and take note of the situation," she said. Ben-Haim said Israel's focus on Monday was to get the hostages released from Hamas. "The rest of the things we will work out afterwards," she said.

Centre issues advisories as Covid returning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday asked states and union territories to maintain constant vigil amid an uptick in COVID-19 cases and the detection of the first case of the new JN.1 variant in the country. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has urged member states to continue robust surveillance and sequence sharing in the wake of rise in cases of respiratory diseases and new JN.1 COVID sub-variant. The WHO also cautioned that virus is evolving and changing.



governments, we have been able to sustain the (COVID-19) trajectory at sustainable low rates". "However, as the COVID-19 virus continues to circulate and its epidemiology behaviour gets settled with Indian weather conditions and circulation of other usual pathogens, it is important to keep the momentum going to effectively deal with the challenges in public

health," he said. Recently, a few states like Kerala have reported a slight increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, Pant noted. India's first case of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 was detected in Kerala on December 8. Considering the upcoming festive season, he said, states should put in place requisite public health measures and other arrangements to minimise the risk of transmission of the disease. States have been urged to ensure effective compliance of the detailed operational guidelines for revised surveillance strategy for COVID-19 as has been shared by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. They have asked to monitor and report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and

Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in all health facilities on a regular basis for early detection of rising trend of cases. States were also advised to ensure adequate testing in all districts as per COVID-19 testing guidelines and maintain the recommended share of RT-PCR and antigen tests. The WHO advisory issued late Sunday also shared a video of Maria Van Kerkhove, their COVID-19 technical lead on X explaining the reason behind the recent surges and what precautions people can take this time. "Dr @mvankerkhove talks about the current surge in respiratory diseases #COVID19 and JN.1 subvariant. WHO continues to assess the situation. Follow WHO's public health advice to keep your

families and friends safe during this holiday season," WHO posted on X. Maria Van Kerkhove also took to the social media platform and said a number of pathogens have led to the rise in respiratory diseases across the world. "Respiratory diseases are increasing around the world due to a number of pathogens incl #COVID19, #flu, rhinovirus, mycoplasma pneumoniae & others SARS-CoV-2 continues to evolve. JN.1 (sub-variant of BA.2.86) is already a VOI and continues to increase in circulation," she stated. In the video message, Kerkhove said the recent surge in respiratory infections is due to multiple reasons, including increased gatherings during the holiday season and other infections.

Eight ISIS operatives arrested as NIA raids 19 locations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested eight alleged ISIS operatives including a module head as it carried out raids at 19 locations in three states and Delhi on Monday, an official said. The early morning crackdown against the terror group in Ballari and Bengaluru in Karnataka, Amaravati, Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Jamsheerpur and Bokaro in Jharkhand and Delhi, led to the foiling of a plan by the accused to carry out terror acts, especially Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blasts. Besides the module head Minaj who was arrested along with

Syed Sameer from Ballari, the official said Anas Iqbal Shaikh was apprehended from Mumbai, Mohammad Muniruddin, Syid Samiullah alias Sami and Md Muzammil from Bengaluru, Shayan Rahman alias Hussain from Delhi and Md Shabbaz alias Zulfiqar alias Guddu from Jamsheerpur. "The eight ISIS agents arrested during the raids were involved in actively promoting terror and terror-related acts and activities of ISIS, the proscribed organisation. They were operating under the leadership of Minaz alias Md Sulaiman," a spokesperson of the federal agency said. The official said the raids also led to the seizure of explosive raw

materials, such as sulphur, potassium nitrate, charcoal, gunpowder, sugar and ethanol, sharp-edged weapons, unaccounted cash and "incriminating" documents, along with smartphones and other digital devices. According to initial investigations, the accused had planned to use the explosive raw materials for the fabrication of IEDs which were to be used for carrying out terror acts, the spokesperson said. The official said investigations have further revealed that the accused, in pursuance of the path of violent Jihad, Khilafat and ISIS, were continuously in touch with one another via encrypted apps.

TMC condemns suspension of Opposition MPs

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has strongly condemned the suspension of the Opposition MPs and termed it the beginning of the "new era of guarantees of subversion of democracy" --- given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi --- while party supremo and Bengal Chief Minister termed Speaker Om Birla's sacking act a "mockery of democracy". "Why did they suspend so many MPs? Is it that they have become so arrogant after winning two states... the House is supreme... if they (BJP) have the majority why are they so afraid? I don't know what is happening... You can suspend one or two MPs but when you suspend so many of them collectively then the entire House should be suspended," Banerjee said wondering about the reason that led to the suspension of a senior and old parliamentarian like Saugato Roy. "It is very sad," she said adding she was fortunate to "not be a part of this House as in our days things were far better and civilized".

ty system were being suspended. "The BJP has murdered democracy today by suspending those who are asking questions and sparing the person who allowed this breach of security to take place because he is their own MP," Ghosh said asking "why the security agencies investigating the case have not questioned the BJP MP who got the passes issued to the attackers... the way the safety, security and dignity of this House has been compromised is shameful". Thirty three MPs including those from the Congress, Trinamool Congress, and other opposition parties were on Monday suspended by Speaker Om Birla for the remaining part of the Winter Session for their alleged unruly conduct inside the House. TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee two attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "putting on display the kind of guarantees he is going to ensure for the people of India... he is going to guarantee subversion of democracy, he is going to guarantee gagging of the opposition voice," Banerjee said. Raising the cash-for-query case that saw his party colleague and MP Mohua Moitra being suspended from Parliament a few weeks ago, Banerjee said "if Mohua Moitra can be suspended for sharing password of the House why their own MP cannot be suspended for issuing passes to the attackers who threw smoke bombs at the MPs?"

INDIA Bloc meet to firm up 2024 plans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the clock ticking for the Lok Sabha polls next year, opposition bloc INDIA will hold a crucial meeting here to deliberate on seat sharing, a joint campaign blueprint and redrawing the joint strategy to take on the BJP after the setback in the recent assembly polls. A day before the meeting, which will be held at the Ashoka Hotel here, West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee said the INDIA bloc's prime ministerial candidate will be decided after the 2024 general elections and expressed confidence that the alliance will iron out all issues, including over seat-sharing, to defeat the BJP. She also dismissed suggestions that the alliance has lost time in putting things in order, saying "it is better late than never".

Banerjee expressed confidence that a three-way alliance is very much possible in West Bengal between her TMC, the Congress and the Left. "The BJP is not strong, we are weak. We need to work together to overcome it," Banerjee told reporters here in reply to a question on the BJP's rising influence, especially in the Hindi belt. She also said she doesn't discriminate between the Hindi belt and other regions. Banerjee also made light of the BJP's assertion that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will return for a third term, saying 2024 is not a done deal. The TMC chief said she is ready to campaign for alliance partners across the country. She also held a meeting with Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal and discussed the political situation in the country.

Parliament passes Bills to extend Women Reservation in Puducherry, J&K Assemblies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament on Monday passed two Bills to extend provisions of the women's reservation law to the legislative assemblies of Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir with the Rajya Sabha clearing them with a voice vote. The Bills were passed by the Lok Sabha on December 12. The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill were passed amid a din as opposition members demanding that Union Home Minister Amit Shah make a statement in the House on the December 13 Parliament security breach trooped into the well and raised slogans. The Rajya Sabha witnessed two adjournments in the morning session. As the House reassembled at 2 pm, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai tabled the two Bills for consideration and passage. He said the Bills are in favour of women's rights. Soon, opposition members were on their feet raising slogans in support of their demand. Meanwhile, members of the Treasury benches and some other parties spoke in favour of the Bills, asserting that they seek to provide reservation to women in assemblies of Puducherry, and Jammu and Kashmir. V Vijayasai Reddy



(YSRCP), Kavita Patidar (BJP), M Thambidurai (AIADMK), S Phangnon Konyak (BJP), Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar (TDP), Rakesh Sinha (Nominated), Jaggesh (BJP) and Birendra Prasad Baishya (Asom Gana Parishad) were among the members who spoke in support of the Bills. Some members urged the central government to hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir at the earliest. The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill stipulates that nearly one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election to the Legislative Assembly of the union territory of Puducherry (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes) shall be reserved for women in such manner as the Parliament may by law determine. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill stipulates that seats shall be reserved for women in the legislative assembly of the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

RS passes Post Office Bill amid Opposition concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament on Monday passed the Post Office Bill that seeks to simplify the legislative framework to facilitate the evolution of India Post into a citizen-centric service network. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill after a brief discussion amid protests by opposition members demanding a statement from Union Home Minister Amit Shah on the security breach in Parliament on December 13. The Rajya Sabha had passed the bill on December 4. The bill seeks to repeal the 125-year-old Indian Post Office Act and consolidate and amend the law relating to post offices in the country. According to the proposed leg-

islation, "the central government may, by notification, empower any officer to intercept, open or detain any item in the interest of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency or public safety, or upon the occurrence of any contravention of any of the provisions of any law for the time being in force". Replying to a discussion on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Communications Devushin Chauhan stressed that the provision for interception is needed for national security reasons. Chauhan also said the proposed legislation entails provisions towards the expansion of India's postal services network. The Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha during the Monsoon session of Parliament.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh two called it a black day in the history of Indian democracy wondering why instead of catching or suspending the BJP MP who had got the passes issued to the parliament attackers, the opposition MPs who were asking for a better securi-

Bengal youth held for terror links

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Anti-Terrorism Squad of Mumbai Police has arrested one Mukta Mahato from North Bengal district of Raiganj for acting as a terror mole, Bengal Police sources said on Monday. Mahato, a 23-year-old youth was arrested from the Kankra More area of Kligaganj town in North Dinajpur district of Bengal on charges of sharing vital information with his alleged handlers in Pakistan and other countries.

He is said to have sent reports on movement of Indian Navy ships, sources said adding was in contact through social media platforms with people in Palestine, Pakistan etc. A person in Bengal reportedly paid him for sharing the location, pictures and names of Indian ships. The information was subsequently relayed to the Pakistani agencies. Another person was earlier arrested from Maharashtra on similar charges. Mahato has been arrested under a number of non-bailable charges.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all that I, CHAUHAI D/O H. ZAKUNGA R/O - H. NO. 71, REPUBLIC HMARV ENG, TOWN VILLAGE AIZAWL, DISTT. AIZAWL-796001 I am the mutatee/legal owner of 1/6 FLAT NO. 25, FF-BLK-C4, PKT-2, SEC-62, NARELA, DELHI-40, FILE NO. L/339(245)12015/DDA 14/NA which is allotted by the DDA. I have lost the Original Allotment Letter, Possession Letter, NOC for Electric & Water Connection, Fitting Fixture Inventory, Site Possession Slip of the above Plot. FIR/CR to this effect has lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi wide LR No. 1248338/2023, Dated: 18-12-2023. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9873731323 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Any person claiming any right, interest, or having any objections with respect to this property can also personally inform/contact me.

PUBLIC NOTICE
My Clients Arun Kumar Mahajan S/o Prithvi Raj Mahajan & his wife Aruna Mahajan W/o Arun Kumar Mahajan R/O-3C, GH-10, Sunder Apartment, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-87 have debarred & disowned their Son Rajat Mahajan from their movable & immovable properties. My Clients have also severed all their relation with him. If anybody deals with him in any manner they do so at their own risk & responsibility. Ramesh Chander (Adv) Ch. 68, Western Wing, Tis Hazari

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Bijender Singh, S/o Pralap Singh, R/o 87, Joshi Chauhan, Sonipat, Haryana, (Aadhaar no. 5025 0330 1494), hereby state that my daughter Apama @ Simmi, Age 22 years, of her own free will and against our wishes, has had a love marriage with Aadesh, S/o Rakesh, R/o Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. I don't want to have any relationship with my daughter. I evict my daughter from all my movable and immovable properties. After today she will have no relation with me or any member of my family. In future, if she does any transaction with anyone or takes any wrong step, then she herself will be responsible for it and I or my family will not be responsible for that. Bijender Singh

Delhi Police sends Special... From Page 1

The court of Special Judge received a submission from Delhi Police on Monday, asserting that the FIR registered over

the Parliament security breach is "very sensitive in nature". Therefore, the accused cannot be provided with its copy at present. The court, presided over by Special Judge Hardeep Kaur, has reserved the order on Neelam Azad's application for December 19. During the arguments, Azad's

lawyer claimed that she was being harassed. Police informed the court that the copy of the FIR, lodged under stringent sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), including terrorism, is in a "sealed cover" due to its sensitive nature. "Further investigation is in

progress, and the accused is in police remand. Some other persons who might be involved are still at large. Therefore, providing the copy of the FIR to the accused at this stage can influence the investigation," Public Prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh told the court. Sources reveal that more than

50 teams are investigating the digital and bank details and background of the accused. The main mastermind, Lalit Jha, has been handed over to the special cell team in Janakpuri, South Western Range. Other accused individuals are being handled by specialized teams in different regions.

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL NARMADAPURAM (MP)
cmohoshangabab@mpurban.gov.in
NIT No/5929/E-Tendering/NPN/2023 Narmadapuram Date 12.12.2023
// Notice Inviting Tenders //
(3rd Call)

Online bids are invited from registered contractors/firms of repute for work of water supply scheme of Municipal Council Narmadapuram Under AMRUT 2.0 (III Call), E-Tender ID- 2023_UAD 319573_1 NIT- 5929 Date 12.12.2023 Probable amount Rs. 1688.12 Lacs, EMD Rs. 8.44 Lacs, Cost of Bid document 50,000/-. Last date and time of submission of Bid 29.12.2023 & time 17.30 Hrs. All other details are published on website <https://mpntenders.gov.in>. Further information or clarification (if any) shall be published on website only, and not in Newspaper.

Chief Municipal Officer
Municipal Council Narmadapuram

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

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

A) Fresh-Tender Work:

Sr. No.	Jobs No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (in Lacs)
1	38/DGM (E&M)/S.M./ E/M-III/23-24	Providing Lighting arrangement in Master Plan Green Park Near B-Block, sector - 99, Noida	Rs. 55.87
2	39/DGM (E&M)/S.M./ E/M-III/23-24	Providing Low Height Street light pole in Main Road and green Belt in sector - 15A, Noida	Rs. 87.48
3	40/DGM (E&M)/S.M./ E/M-III/23-24	Providing Lighting arrangement on service road of sector - 41, Noida	Rs. 80.80
4	42/DGM (E&M)/S.M./ E/M-III/23-24	D/O Village (Annual Electrical maintenance of Barat Ghar, Panchayat Ghar in Village- Sadarpur, Challeria, Morma, Ghjore, Sarfabad & Parthala Khanjarpur), Noida	Rs. 37.46
5	43/DGM (E&M)/S.M./ E/M-III/23-24	Strengthening of Street Lighting on road between F & G block Sector-44 and Sector-45 road, Noida	Rs. 90.62

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 01.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 02.01.2024 at 11.00 AM.
Office Sector - 39
Dy. General Manager NOIDA
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

78 MPs...

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Others suspended for the winter session are M Shanmugam, N. R. Elango, Kanimozhi NVN Somu, R. Girirajan, Manoj Kumar Jha, Firayaz Ahmad V. Sivasadan, Ram Nath Thakur, Aneel Prasad Hegde, Vandana Chavan, Ram Gopal Yadav, Javed Ali Khan, Mahua Maji, Jose K. Mani, and Ajit Kumar Bhuyan. The 11 opposition members whose names have been referred to the privilege committee are - Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dangri, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G. C. Chandrashekhar, Binoy Viswam, Sandosh Kumar P, Mohamed Abdulla, John Brittas, and A A Rahim. The Lok Sabha suspended 33 opposition members, including Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, T R Baalu, and Sougata Ray, from the House for displaying placards and raising slogans over the Parliament's security breach issue. While 30 members, including 10 from the DMK, nine from the Trinamool Congress, eight from the Congress, and one each from IUML, JD(U), and RSP were suspended for the remainder of the Winter session, three other Congress members were suspended pending a report of the Privileges Committee.

Last week, 13 opposition members were suspended from the Lok Sabha, and one was suspended from the Rajya Sabha for disrupting the proceedings. The total number of suspended opposition members now stands at 47. The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day soon after the suspension of 33 members was announced. Among those suspended on Monday were Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Gaurav Gogoi, K Suresh, Amar Singh, Rajamohan Unnithan, Su. Thurunavukkarasar, K Muraleedharan, Anto Antony (all from Congress), Kalyan Banerjee, Aparupa Poddar, Prasun Banerjee, Sougata Ray, Satabdi Ray, Protima Mondal, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Asit Kumar Mal, Sunil Kumar Mondal (all from TMC), T R Baalu, A Raja, Dayanidhi Maran, T Sumathy, K Navas Kani, Kalanidhi Veerasamy, C N Annadurai, S S Palanimanickam, G Selvam, S Ramalingam (all from DMK), ET Mohammed Basheer (IUML), N K Premachandran (RSP), and Kaushalendra Kumar (JD-U). Three Congress members -- K Jayakumar, Vijay Vasanth, and Abdul Khaleque -- who had climbed on the speaker's podium and raised slogans were suspended from the Lok Sabha pending a report of the Privileges.

Modi vows nine sankalps to realise... ED summons Kejriwal...

From Page 1
"I propose the sixth resolution: keep making farmers more and more aware of natural farming. I made this request to you last time, and I am repeating it now. This is a crucial campaign to save Mother Earth. My seventh request is to include Millets as Shri-Ann in your daily eating life, promote it widely; it is a superfood," Modi said. "My eighth request is: whether it's fitness, yoga, or sports, make it an integral part of your life. The ninth request is: be a supporter of, at least one poor family; help them. This is necessary to eradicate poverty in India," the Prime Minister said. Other projects dedicated by the PM include the inauguration of the New Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Nagar-New Bhaupur Dedicated Freight Corridor Project, built at a cost of around Rs 10,900 crore, among other railway projects. The PM also flagged off the Dohrihat-Mau MEMU train and a pair of Long Haul goods trains at the newly inaugurated Dedicated Freight Corridor. He also flagged off the 10,000th locomotive made by Banaras Locomotive Works and launched the Unified Tourist

Pass System under the Smart City Mission. On the occasion, the Prime Minister emphasized the development of Nari Shakti, Yuva Shakti, farmers, and the poor as prerequisites for Viksit Bharat. "These are the only four castes for me, and strengthening them will strengthen the nation," Modi emphasized. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and ministers from the Centre and state government were present on the occasion. Inaugurating the world's largest meditation centre, Swarved Mahamandir, Modi said the country has declared freedom from the slave mentality and is feeling proud of its heritage. "In the era of slavery, the oppressors who made an effort to weaken India first targeted our symbols. After independence, rebuilding these cultural symbols was essential," he said. Modi mentioned that after India gained independence, "there was opposition to the rebuilding of the Somnath temple, and this thought process remained dominant for decades." The result of this was that the country slipped into the pit of an inferiority complex and forgot to feel proud of its heritage, he said.

From Page 1
Similarly, the ED charge sheet said, YSRCP MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy also held meetings with Kejriwal where-in Arvind Kejriwal welcomed his entry into the Delhi liquor business. It had said that Buchibabu and another accused Arun Pillai have revealed that they and Vijay Nair were working with the "support and sanction" of Arvind Kejriwal and AAP leader and the then Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia for all excise policy-related activities- including formulation as well as implementation. It had also alleged that Vijay Nair "arranged a video call through facetime (a video calling facility on iPhone) on his phone for another arrested accused Sameer (Mahandru) and Kejriwal, where Arvind said to Sameer that, Vijay is his boy and that Sameer should trust him and carry on with him." Kejriwal had then rubbished the contents of the ED complaint saying it has "filed 5,000 charge sheets under the tenure of the current government." "How many people have been sentenced? All the cases filed by ED are fake and they are used to topple governments or form them. ED does not file cases to eradicate corruption.

Principal Secretary non-appearance: Delhi Assembly refers matter to privileges panel

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Monday referred the matter of the non-appearance of the finance department's principal secretary before the House despite a summons to the Privileges Committee.

Before lunch, the Assembly passed a resolution summoning A C Verma, principal secretary, finance, to appear before the House at 2 pm for allegedly obstructing government funds earmarked for the House. As Verma did not turn up, the Speaker directed him to be present in the House at 5 pm or else the matter of his absence would be referred to the Privileges Committee. Verma, however, failed to appear yet again. "This is a huge insult to the House. I refer this matter to the Privileges Committee," Goel said.

AAP legislator Mohinder Goyal threatened to launch a stir over the alleged obstruction of funds. "I will start a protest after 20 days. I am giving them time but I promise to keep troubling these people. At 10 am on the 21st day, I will hold protests outside the Lt Governor's residence as well as



the houses and offices of these officers who are obstructing the work of the government," he said.

"They have not listened to any committee till now. I will take the people of Delhi with me and those of you who want to join me can come," he added.

Earlier in the day, the Assembly Speaker said because funds were not being released by Verma, the annual programmes of the Assembly on Diwali and Chhath could not be held this year. The function on Christmas will also not be held, he said during the ongoing Winter Session of the Delhi Assembly. Chief Whip of the Aam Aadmi Party, Dilip Pandey, then moved a resolution for summoning Verma to the Assembly.

When the Assembly session resumed after lunch, Finance Minister Atishi raised the issue. "It seems a conspiracy is underway. The finance department refers files related to Delhi Vidhan Sabha to the law department. However, the law department has written on more than 40 files that no file related to the Assembly should come to them," she said.

"Since 1993, the files of Delhi Vidhan Sabha were being sent to the finance department but now it is saying the files should not be sent to them," she added. Atishi also claimed that despite being the finance minister, her directions were not being followed by the finance department. "After the GNCTD (Amendment) Act, officers

refuse to listen to the ministers. Delhi's bureaucracy has been weaponised against the elected government," she alleged.

According to Goel, the principal secretary, finance, had said that he was on leave and sent Niharika Rai, secretary, finance, to attend the proceedings.

However, the BJP MLAs opposed this, saying a principal secretary is the head of a department unlike a secretary while the AAP MLAs termed the absence as "contempt of the House" and questioned how could the senior official be on leave when the Assembly was in session.

Subsequently, Goel directed Verma to be present in the House or else the matter would be referred to the Privileges Committee. Meanwhile, Pandey's resolution that files related to the Assembly's financial matters be sent directly to the finance department was passed by the House.

The Delhi Assembly on Monday passed a resolution seeking the presence of all concerned officers when issues related to people are raised in the House under Rule 280. The resolution was moved by Aam Aadmi Party MLA Mohinder

Goyal. Rule 280 is an effective device for the Members to invite the government's attention to the issues relating to their Constituency, according to the Delhi Assembly website.

"During the Assembly session on Friday, I had said that when we raise issues related to people in the House, then officers should be present in the gallery of the House. But, today the position here is still the same," he said, before moving the resolution. Goyal said during discussions on starred and unstarred questions, some officers are present, but not in full strength.

"Today's, I urge you, Mr Speaker, to please ensure that their due presence will be there, only then I will raise my queries," Goyal said.

He then moved a verbal resolution to the Speaker who then put it forth before the House and was approved by it.

"I urge the secretary to send this resolution passed in the House to the CS (chief secretary) that all officers be present here under Rule 280," the Speaker said.

The resolution was passed during the ongoing Winter Session of the Assembly.

BJP MLAs marshalled out amid row over discussion on Kejriwal residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Delhi BJP MLAs on Monday said they were marshalled out of the Delhi Assembly when they demanded to discuss the renovation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence. The BJP MLAs led by Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said they had given a calling attention motion to discuss the issue. However, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel rejected their demand following which the BJP MLAs started protesting.

The Speaker then allowed AAP MLAs to discuss the issue of 'hindrances' created by the finance department in the functioning of the Public Works Department, the Delhi Jal Board and the health department.

As the protests by the BJP legislators continued, Goel ordered that Bidhuri, along with Abhay Verma, Ajay Mahawar, Mohan Singh Bisht, Anil Kumar Bajpai, Vijender Gupta, Om Prakash Sharma, and Jitender Mahajan be marshalled out.

Later they held their protest in the assembly premises and shouted slogans. Bidhuri said that BJP MLA

Ajay Mahawar had given a notice to raise this issue through calling attention motion, which the Speaker had accepted. "However, he demanded a discussion on this matter on Monday, the Speaker outrightly refused," he said.

Bidhuri stated that despite the notices given by BJP MLAs for discussion being accepted, no discussions were allowed. The same situation persisted on the first day of the session on Friday as well.

"In the notice, Mahawar had stated that for the luxurious residence of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, which has been built without approval, without permission to cut trees, and without a tender, crores of rupees of work have been allocated. Additionally, 21 flats and two surrounding bungalows have been accommodated in this Rajmahal without any approval. The person who claimed to live in a two-room flat had arranged for himself a bungalow equivalent to 75 bedrooms. This is a blatant violation of rules, along with corruption," Bidhuri said.

The BJP has been attacking Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party, claiming Rs 45 crore was spent on the renovation of the chief minister's residence 6, Flagstaff Road during 2020-22.

The AAP has hit back, saying the BJP was trying to divert attention from real issues by raising this matter.

BJP using officers to stop funds, to halt Government works: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Finance Minister Atishi on Monday accused the BJP of using officers to stop funds and hampering the city government's works, asserting that the saffron party won't be able to come to power in the national Capital despite deploying these tactics.

During a discussion in the Delhi Assembly on the alleged hindrance created by the Finance Department in the functioning of the Public Works and Health departments and the Delhi Jal Board, Atishi said the government has a surplus budget and there is no shortage of funds.

"Due to the honest government of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the budget has grown two-and-a-half times in the past eight years. There is no lack of funds and there is surplus budget. The only problem is that the Finance Department is not ready to release the funds," she alleged.



Talking about the issue of non-release of funds to the Delhi Jal Board, Atishi said it had raised a demand for the second instalment of funds in August but a simple routine file was not processed by the Finance Department.

"The Finance Department has a bad intention. They alleged financial mismanagement in the Delhi Jal Board and, despite me writing to the Finance Department to name any corrupt official, they have not replied and stopped the funds," Atishi alleged. "There are over

Rs 1,200 crore worth of previous bills lying pending with the Delhi Jal Board. Whatever is happening in Delhi is orchestrated by the BJP," she claimed. The BJP knows they cannot defeat Kejriwal in Delhi and they are using officers to stop the Delhi government's work, she said. "The officers themselves are scared because they are threatened to hamper the work (of the government). Despite this, the AAP will again return to power and the BJP will lose even the eight seats it has (at present) in the

assembly polls of 2025," she said.

Earlier in the day, while speaking on the issue of obstruction of Delhi Assembly funds by the Finance Department, Atishi said it is a serious matter that the department is not processing the House's bills. The bureaucracy of Delhi has been "weaponised" against the elected government since the GNCTD (Amendment) Act was brought in by the Centre, she said.

"They are returning files saying the Law Department is the administrative department to process the bills. However, the Law Department has clearly written in more than 40 files that the files should not be sent to them," said Atishi.

"The Finance Department and the finance secretary have refused to comply with my orders. The Finance Department has also stopped funds of the Public Works Department and the Delhi Jal Board," she alleged.

AAP Government asks privileges panel to probe BJP allegations of 203 homeless people deaths

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling AAP government on Monday asked the Privileges' Committee of the Delhi Assembly to probe the BJP's allegations that 203 homeless people have died in the city this winter. This comes after AAP MLA from Burari, Sanjeev Jha, referring to Bidhuri's statement in the House of the Delhi Assembly's ongoing winter session, said he checked the Delhi Police website and found month-wise data on the number of deaths of homeless people in Delhi from June to December 15.

"When I saw the cause of death... And these are unidentified people whose data is kept, it was mentioned as accidents or injuries, among other factors," Jha said. Jha said the matter raised by the Bharatiya Janata Party amounts to a subject of "privileges" and accused the saffron party of trying to mislead the House



and people of Delhi. The AAP leader termed the matter as "sensitive" and urged Speaker Ram Niwas Goel to send the matter to the Privileges Committee.

Goel then put Jha's proposal before the House which referred the matter to the Privileges Committee for a probe.

Citing a Delhi Police report, Leader of Opposition in the

Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri shared the figure on Friday during the ongoing Winter Session. Bidhuri gave a notice for a calling-attention motion on Friday on the alleged death of 203 homeless people in Delhi during the ongoing winter season.

"We demand that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal provide answers on the issue in the House," Bidhuri said.

The Speaker, however, rejected the motion, saying he would look into the Delhi Police report and then take a decision. The issue had resonated inside and outside the Delhi Assembly on Friday.

Hitting back at the BJP, Delhi Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj had said the photos (of the deceased) are from November when winter was yet to set in in Delhi.

Arvind Kejriwal meets Mamata, Uddhav day before INDIA bloc meet

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



A day before the Opposition INDIA Bloc meeting, AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal met his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee here on Monday. After meeting with Mamata, the AAP convener met former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, Aadiya Thackeray and Sanjay Raut in the evening at his residence.

Kejriwal did not comment on the discussions at the around 45-minute meeting at the South Avenue residence of TMC MP and Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee. AAP leader Raghav Chadha was also present during the meeting.

Minutes before the meeting with Thackeray, the AAP stated, "Uddhav Thackeray will meet Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in some time. Both the leaders will meet at the residence of Sanjay Raut will also attend the meeting. Along with India alliance, ED notice can also be discussed as Kejriwal has received ED notice some time ago." Earlier on the day, Banerjee said the prime ministerial candidate of the alliance

will be decided after the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, emphasising that all the issues including seat sharing will be ironed out by the alliance partners to defeat the BJP.

Kejriwal is scheduled to go to an undisclosed place to attend a 10-day Vipassana meditation course from Tuesday.

The INDIA bloc meeting is scheduled in New Delhi on December 19. The alliance's proposed meeting on December 6 was postponed after several top leaders including Mamata Banerjee, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav expressed inability to attend. This will be the fourth meeting of the opposition alliance and the first meeting since the results for five Assembly elections - Telangana, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, were announced. According to sources, the Trinamool Congress head has also got an appointment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, December 20, at 11 am in Parliament. She is going to discuss the issue of pending funds from the Centre to West Bengal.

Government writes to DMRC, seeks report on incident of death of woman



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has written to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) seeking a detailed report on the death of a woman after she was dragged along the platform as her sari got stuck in the door of a train, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said on Monday.

The incident took place on Thursday at the Inderlok Metro Station here. The 35-year-old woman, Reena, succumbed to injuries on Saturday.

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has announced that the commissioner of Metro Railway Safety will hold an inquiry into the incident. Talking to reporters outside the Delhi Assembly, Gahlot said, "We have written to the MD, DMRC asking about the report and have asked them to share it with us. We have also asked for details about their compensation policy. The DMRC should take steps to rehabilitate its (victim's) family". Reena's husband died around seven years ago. She is survived by a son and a daughter.

In a post on X, Gahlot shared a copy of the letter sent to the DMRC. "An incident of death of a 35 years old woman, who

suffered severe brain and chest injuries on 14.12.2023 when a train dragged her for several metres at Inderlok Station after her clothes got stuck in the door has been reported. This incident has raised concern regarding the efficiency of safety mechanisms deployed by DMRC," he said in the letter. The minister directed that the period within which the Commission shall be submitting its inquiry report be indicated. "A copy of the inquiry report of the Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety, be shared with me," he said.

Gahlot said the deceased was a poor widow and is survived by her 10-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter.

"It has been reported in the media that all the relatives are hesitant to adopt the orphan kids as they are themselves financially constrained. It is, therefore, essential that adequate financial help is extended to the orphan kids so that their education and other requirements are met. Please indicate the policy of Delhi Metro in this regard and the proposal of financial help to the orphan kids," he said.

The children have sought from the government financial compensation in the form of a fixed deposit.

Deceased woman children seek financial aid

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The two children of a 35-year-old woman who died in an accident at a metro station here have demanded financial compensation in the form of a fixed deposit. Victim Reena's 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son told reporters that their father had passed away around eight years ago. According to reports, the relatives of the children have expressed their inability to look after them due to financial constraints.

"My father died around eight years ago and now my mother has died too. We are totally helpless and seek financial help from the government in the form of a fixed deposit," the girl, a student of class 8, said. According to the victim's son, who studies in class 6, he was with her at the time of the incident.

My mother was holding my hand and entered the train but I could not. As she was coming out, her saree got stuck in the door and she was dragged along the platform. She was screaming for help, he said.

Sources said family members of the woman held a protest outside of the Nangloi Metro Station on Saturday and demanded financial help for the children.

Man hit by speeding minibus, dragged on bonnet in Lajpat Nagar



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A man was allegedly hit by a minibus and dragged on its bonnet for some distance in south Delhi's Lajpat Nagar area on Sunday. According to the police, the man was walking on the road when he was hit by the minibus and the driver intentionally dragged him. However, the man didn't suffer any severe injuries, they added.

The incident was caught on camera and the video of the incident is doing rounds on social media. It can be seen in the video that a man is standing on the front bonnet of the speeding minibus on the highway. The video is said to have been shot in South Delhi's Lajpat Nagar area. The driver of the bus is seen driving the bus at high speed and the man is hanging on the trunk of the minibus. A major accident could have occurred if the man would have fallen from the moving bus. The driver does not slow down the bus even after noticing the man hanging from the front bonnet of the bus.

A PCR call was received around 11:30 pm on Sunday.



The caller alleged that while going from the DND flyover towards Noida, the driver of a minibus hit him in Lajpat Nagar and dragged him on the bonnet of his vehicle for some distance. The caller was following the minibus and no one was injured in the incident, a senior police officer said.

When the caller, Vicky Kumar, was contacted later, he said he was in Uttar Pradesh. Once he will file a complaint, legal action will be taken accordingly, the officer said. Later, Kumar, a transporter, visited Kotla Mubarakpur police station. Speaking to reporters on Monday, Kumar said he sustained a minor sprain in his leg in the incident. He said he was coming from Bamnoli village in Dwarka Sector 28 and headed to Raj Nagar in his car with his driver and conductor. When they reached the South Extension flyover, Kumar asked his driver to give way to a minibus behind their car. While overtaking the car, the minibus' rear portion allegedly hit Kumar's vehicle. "We stopped it (minibus) near the Moolchand traffic signal. The bus passengers alighted from the vehicle.

56 years old man killed after assault by 2 in road rage case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 56-year-old man was killed after two people assaulted him in an alleged case of road rage near west Delhi's Tagore Garden metro station, police said on Monday.

The two accused -- Jatin Samariya (21) and his cousin Pawan Samariya (21) -- have been arrested in the matter. The cousins run a scrap business, they said.

"An incident of road rage took place near Tagore Garden metro station under the jurisdiction of Rajouri Garden police around 5:30 pm on Sunday," said the police.

Ravinder Singh, a taxi driver, was driving home with his son and a relative from Moti Nagar when a car brushed past his cab while overtaking it, said a senior police officer. "Singh stopped his car, rolled down his window and shouted at the driver of the vehicle. They stopped their car a few metres ahead, blocked Singh's cab and asked him to get out. The two men then assaulted him and fled," said the officer.

The police received a PCR call and the victim narrated the incident to the investigators. Later, after he complained of chest pain and uneasiness, he was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead. The police registered an FIR under sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) 341 (wrongful restraint), and 34 (common intentions) of the Indian Penal Code and launched a probe.

Gen Naravane sheds light on how Agnipath scheme evolved

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a meeting with the Prime Minister weeks after becoming the Army Chief, Gen MM Naravane sounded out in early 2020 about the "Tour of Duty" scheme for inducting soldiers for short-term tenure but months later the PMO came out with a formulation with a much wider scope to include all the three services.

This is what Gen Naravane says in his memoir 'Four Stars of Destiny' while elaborating on the birth of the 'Agnipath' recruitment scheme — considered India's most radical military recruitment policy. Naravane, who served as the 28th Army Chief from December 31, 2019, to April 30, 2022, notes that various models of the scheme were deliberated upon and the Army's initial view was that 75 per cent of the personnel to be recruited could be retained while 25 per cent should be released. In June 2022, the government rolled out the Agnipath recruit-

ment scheme for short-term induction of personnel with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. It provides for recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years.

In the book, published by Penguin Random House India, Naravane also recalled that the first year's starting salary for the inductees was kept at just Rs 20,000 per month (all-inclusive) and that was "not acceptable".

"This was just not acceptable. Here, we were talking about a trained soldier, who was expected to lay down his life for the country. Surely a soldier could not be compared with a daily wage labourer? Based on our very strong recommendations, this was later raised to Rs 30,000 per month," he says.

After the new formulation of the scheme, Gen Naravane says, the Army was "taken by surprise by this turn of events,

but for the Navy and Air Force, it came like a bolt from the blue."

"When I had first sounded out the PM about the Tour of Duty scheme, it was more on the lines of a short-service option at the soldier level, similar to the Short Service Commission scheme for officers that was already in vogue." "Just as a limited number of SSC officers are taken each year, likewise a limited number of jawans would be similarly enrolled and released after the completion of their 'tour' with the option of re-enlisting for another tour, if found to be fit," he writes.

Naravane writes that nothing much happened in the next couple of months as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic grabbed all the attention, followed by the clashes in Galwan in eastern Ladakh.

"However, the prime minister's office (PMO) was considering this proposal but with a much wider scope and applicability. In the PMO formulation, not



only should the complete intake of the year be short-service based, but it would also apply to all three services," he writes.

"Having become a tri-service matter, it now fell on the CDS, Gen Bipin Rawat, to take the proposal forward, albeit with the Army remaining the lead service."

"We in the Army were taken by surprise by this turn of events, but for the Navy and Air Force, it came like a bolt from the blue," he says.

Naravane says it took him some time to explain to the other Chiefs that his proposal

had only been Army-centric and that he was equally surprised by these developments. "And it took them some time to reconcile with the fact that they were very much part of the new proposal, dubbed the 'Agnipath' (Walk of Fire) scheme by the PMO, with the soldiers, sailors and airmen recruited under this scheme to be known as 'Agniveers' (Fire Warriors)," he notes.

For several years, the Army was contemplating inducting civilians on a three-year short service or 'Tour of Duty'. On the preliminary discussions on 'Agnipath', Naravane

says the first issue to be addressed was that of retention of inductees and the Army felt that it should be 75 per cent retention and 25 per cent released, while the Department of Military Affairs opined that it should be 50-50 per cent, with the term being five years. Naravane says this was the model that was presented by the CDS to a full panel comprising "the prime minister, ministers of home, defence and finance, the NSA, service chiefs, PS to the PM and the secretaries of the relevant departments in November 2020."

"In fact, it was during this meeting that the terms 'Agnipath' and 'Agniveer' were used for the first time. Assuming an intake of 50,000 soldiers each year, then after each 'tour', 25,000 soldiers would revert to civil society," he says.

"It was felt that this was too little to bring about any significant change in the population since one of the aims of the

scheme was to give back to society disciplined manpower, who would be in a position to contribute much more in the workplace due to the values and ethos they would have imbibed while in service."

Naravane says the percentages were got reversed, with only 25 per cent to be retained and 75 per cent released. He says it was back to the drawing board as the discussion progressed and the next issue that came up was the modalities for retention.

"It was taken for granted that this would be like the SSC scheme, with the retention or release after the contracted period of five years. "On this account, the PMO view was that there should be a two-step retention process; 50 per cent after three years and another 25 per cent after five years, effectively making it only 25 per cent retention," he says.

"This was just not practical. Six to eight months would go into basic training and deployment,

Government to take possession of communication network in case of public emergency or safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government can take temporary possession of any telecommunication network in the interest of public safety or in the event of a public emergency, the proposed law for telecommunications states, as per the Telecommunications Bill 2023. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday by Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw amid the Opposition's protest demanding Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on the breach in Parliament security last week.

The draft law states, "On the occurrence of any public emergency, including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety, the Central Government or a State



Government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the Central Government or a State Government, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, by notification- (a) take temporary possession of any telecommunication service or telecommunication network

Central Government or a State Government shall not be intercepted or detained, unless their transmission has been prohibited under clause (a) of sub-section (2), the draft Bill states. The draft law also states that the government may, in the interest of public safety, direct the interception of any message between individuals. It also empowers the government to suspend telecommunication networks.

The bill states that in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence and security of the State, the Centre can "direct that any message or class of messages, to or from any person or class of persons, to or from any telecommunication equipment or class of telecommunication equipment, or relating to any particular subject, brought for transmission by, or transmitted or received

Rijiju flags off India's first winter science expedition to Arctic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday flagged off India's first-ever winter science expedition to the Arctic region, in a bid to maintain year-long presence at the Himadri research station in Svalbard in Norway.

A team of four scientists will embark on the journey on Tuesday to India's research station in the NyAlesud town on the Brogger peninsula where research institutes from 10 countries have laboratories. Ny-Alesund is the world's northernmost settlement, situated at 79 degrees north latitude in the north-western region of Spitsbergen, Svalbard.

"In this maiden winter expedition, our scientists are poised to unravel further mysteries and push the boundaries of scientific knowledge about our



Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran, National Centre for Polar Ocean Research Director Thamban Meloth and India Meteorological Department Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, among others, were present at the flagging-off ceremony here.

"As we venture into uncharted territory, India assumes a global role in Arctic exploration, contributing to the scientific community at large," Rijiju said.

He termed the expedition "historic" and said it held immense significance as India navigated the Arctic's critical influence on global climate, sea levels and biodiversity for the first time. "This is the first winter expedition to the Arctic. The team of scientists will stay at the research station at NyAlesund for 30 to 45 days and then will be replaced by another team," a senior official said.

PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, AJC Bose Road, Kolkata- 700020 CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, 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 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/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Physical Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Excel Auto (Borrower)/ Vineet Kumar Jha, Ajay Kumar Singh, Satyendra Kumar Sinha (Co-Borrowers) Vineet Kumar Jha, Ajay Kumar Singh, Satyendra Kumar Sinha, Roli Sinha, Lalita Sinha, Suryadeo Singh, Nirmala Singh (Guarantors)/ Suryadeo Singh, Nirmala Singh, Roli Sinha, Lalita Sinha, Satyendra Kumar Sinha (Mortgagors) Flat No. 204, 2nd Floor Chandan Villa Apartment Jagdeopath Near Arrah Garden Patna- 800014/ 194351000001, 194355000003 & 625905051907	Tauzi No. 181, Khata No. 82, Plot No. 787 Mouza-Sheikhpura, P.S. Phulwarisharif, Sub And Sadar Registry Office and District Patna P.S. No. 111, Patna (Admeasuring an area of 7 Kathas)/ Date of Physical Possession 13/12/2023	November 26, 2021 Rs. 6,81,55,076.99/-	Patna

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(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 19, 2023
Place : Gurgaon

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

Central Coalfields Limited

"A Miniratna Company" (A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)

NOTICE

"All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd. www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company (CCL. www.centralcoalfields.in/) CIL e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in> in addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of my Client Mr. Ravinder Singh S/o Sh. Harvinder Singh Presently R/o 1682 Ravenswood Drive, Peterborough, Ontario, K9K 2P7, Canada, is the lawful owner of Plot No-30/31/32-33 adjacent to each other total area 418.98 meters. Khasra No-34/1 and 34, Ajjpur, Tahsil Khatkoti, Muzaffargarh, U.P. as per revenue records. The legal and lawful owner Sh. Ravinder Singh has never delivered any original Power of Attorney to Mr. Vinay Choudhry S/o Yashpal R/o D-45, Sector-3, Ansal Sushant City, Meerut, U.P. If he uses the unauthorized photocopy of the power of attorney for the aforementioned property. He will be personally liable for any legal consequences. Anyone engaging based on this photocopy will also be held responsible for their actions.

G.P. Singh (Advocate)
Off: B-8/25, First Floor, Sector-15, Rohini, Delhi-89. # 9811297979

India will always remember Emir's contributions: Jaishankar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday accused the Congress and its allies of "insulting" the Lok Sabha speaker and the Rajya Sabha chairperson and "embarrassing" the country with their conduct, with 92 opposition members suspended from both the Houses in the past five days.

Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha Piyush Goyal told reporters that opposition members brought placards and willfully disrupted parliamentary proceedings despite the decision taken earlier that placards would not be allowed in the Houses. "They refused to heed repeated requests of the speaker and the chairperson and insulted them, he said and accused INDIA bloc parties of disrespecting Parliament.

"It was clearly their preplanned strategy to not allow Parliament to run smoothly," he said, noting that a bill to provide reservation to women in Jammu and Kashmir and Puducherry was taken up for consideration and passage in the Rajya Sabha but protesting opposition members did not allow a discussion. "The Congress and its allies are intrinsically against the interests of women and backward classes. Whenever the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes any step to empower backward classes and women, they are pained because the Congress and the Left are always against their empowerment," Goyal said.

Thirty-three opposition members, including Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, T R Baalu and Sougata Ray, were suspended from the Lok Sabha for displaying placards and raising slogans over the Parliament security breach issue. While 30 members — 10 from DMK, nine from TMC, eight from Congress and one each from IJML, JD(U) and RSP — were suspended for the remainder of the Winter session, three other Congress members were suspended pending a report of the Privileges Committee.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, 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/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Vijay Kumar/ Kiran/ LBDEL00004858772	DDA MIG Flat No. 276, Third Floor, Prasad Nagar (With Terrace Roof Rights) Delhi-110005/ Dec 13, 2023	July 29, 2023 Rs. 75,31,683/-	Delhi & NCR
2.	Manjul Mahour/ Priyanka Kawal/ LBNOD00005155474/ LBNOD00005159726	Flat No 3G/907, Tower 3G, 9th Floor (Without Roof Rights), Nilaya Greens, Situated at Khasra No. 1015, 1023/1, 1023/2, & 1023 Min Village Morta, Raj Nagar Extension Ghaziabad/ Dec 13, 2023	July 14, 2023 Rs. 32,87,177/-	Delhi & NCR
3.	Pankur Tyagi/ Abhishek Tyagi/ Suman Lata Tyagi/ LBGH200005337379 & LBGH200004960883	House No-54 A, Ground Floor, Block-A, Ews, Sector-A, Nandni Kunj, Ghaziabad/ Dec 13, 2023	August 29, 2022 Rs. 34,75,918.74/-	Delhi & NCR
4.	Persis Solomon Ismael/ Asha D Singh/ LBGUR0002415972	Unit No G-57, Ground Floor, Block C, Tower-C, "Spaze Business Park", Sec 66, Gurgaon/ Dec 13, 2023	July 31, 2023 Rs. 11,20,213/-	DELHI & NCR
5.	Narender Singh Negi/ Gouri N/ LBGUR00003766171	Flat No-303, 3rd Floor, Tower-B, Supertech Araville, Village Naurangpur, Sector-79, Gurgaon, Haryana/ Dec 13, 2023	June 23, 2021 Rs. 1,29,20,628/-	Delhi & NCR
6.	Shikha Singla/ Tarun Kumar Kuril/ LBDEL00003466165	Flat No. 1606, 16th Floor Araville Tower E, Vill Naurangpur Sector 79, Gurgaon, Haryana/ Dec 13, 2023	June 23, 2021 Rs. 78,55,950/-	Delhi & NCR
7.	Dharamvir Singh/ Harish Chaudhary/ Aspek Media Pvt Ltd/ Chaudhary Ventures Pvt Ltd./ LBGUR00003339948	Property Bearing No. 803, Part of Khasra No. 315/8 Arjun Nagar Kotla Mubarak Pur Delhi/ Dec 13, 2023	September 15, 2023 Rs. 4,90,76,990/-	Delhi & NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(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 19, 2023
Place: Delhi/Ncr

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank LTD Office Number 201-B, 2ND Floor, Road No. 1 Plot No. B3, WIFI IT PARK, Wagle Industrial Estate, Thane (West)- 400604

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, 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/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Alok Kumar Sinha & Sarita Sinha- LBBHP00006071552 & LBSAT00005448356	Flat No. J-601, 6th Floor, Tower No. J, Maxblis White House, Plot No. 17, Eco City, QSector-75, Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, Noida- 201301/ December 14, 2023	August 07, 2023 Rs. 80,00,727.00/-	Bhopal

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(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 19, 2023
Place: Noida

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Mohd. Kashif, S/o. Deen Mohd, R/o. 337/C, Gali No.4, Batla House, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025 have declared that my name has been wrongly mentioned in my Passport as Muhammad Kashif instead of Mohd Kashif.

PD(222)A

THANKSGIVING

Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

PD(223)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

Plot No.18, Rishabh Vihar, Delhi-92

That our client Nisha Jain, proposes to purchase the above said property from Poonam Kansal d/o late Bimal Prasad Jain, who has assured our client that she is absolute owner in possession of the above said property vide Surviving Member Certificate as the only class legal heirs of late Bimal Prasad Jain who died intestate on 14.03.13 and was owner of said property vide conveyance deed No.3467 dated 08.08.95.

Under the circumstances, notice is hereby given to the General Public, Bank/Financial institutions or other persons, organizations, company/ies, government authority/ies, having any claim, rights, title, or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the said property, is hereby called upon to make the same known, in writing with documentary evidence by registered AD Post to the undersigned at the address mentioned hereinbelow within 07 days of the publication of this notice and in the event no response having been received to the notice, the title of Poonam Kansal to the said property shall be deemed to be clear of any claim, charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our client in any manner whatsoever.

Kumar Amit
9811377525
Advocate
Legal Access
132A, Anarkali Complex, Jhandewalan Ext. New Delhi

Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE

Locker hired by **MR. MUJAHID MASHIR and MRS. SHAHNAZ PRAVEEN** having address at **123 G-F GL-1 KH-50 GAFFAR MZL JAMIA NAGAR New Delhi-110025**, with **NEW FRIENDS COLONY**, branch of **Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd.** situated at **D-960, NEW FRIENDS COLONY, NEW DELHI-110025**, has rent overdue since last 5 years.

All the 3 letters sent to **MR. MUJAHID MASHIR** joint holder **MRS. SHAHNAZ PRAVEEN** calling upon them for the same has returned unopened and they are not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice if the rent for the said locker is not paid by **MR. MUJAHID MASHIR and MRS. SHAHNAZ PRAVEEN** within **90 days** from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **March 20, 2024 at around 12 p.m.**

Kerala refutes charges of inaction amid rising Covid-19 cases

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/MALAPPURAM

Hours after the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, V D Satheesan, expressed concern over the rising cases of COVID-19 in Kerala, state Health Minister Veena George on Monday alleged that some people were trying to create unnecessary panic among the public on the matter.

"This is absolutely wrong," she said in response to Satheesan's allegation that the state government was not taking any steps to contain the spread of the virus in the southern state.

George said that after noticing a slight increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in November, the Health Department had issued proper precautionary measures and

carried out preparatory work. She said that the ministerial meeting had decided to send the samples for whole genome sequencing at that time.

"Samples have been sent for whole genomic testing since November. JN.1 was detected in only one sample, from a 79-year-old person from Karakulam, Thiruvananthapuram. That patient was cured after treatment at home," she said in a statement in Thiruvananthapuram.

She added that Singapore had detected JN.1 in 15 people who travelled from India to the country in the past months.

"It means that this COVID-19 variant is also present in other states of India," she said.

The minister highlighted the peculiarity of the COVID-19 case in Kerala, noting that it was found through testing conducted in the state.

"It was discovered due to the excellence of the systems in Kerala and due to vigilance," she claimed.

George said that the health department had undertaken proper preparatory work to deal with the situation.

"From the beginning, we have been looking at whether the use of ICU beds and ventilators is on the rise. It is still being monitored," she said.

Describing the steps taken by the Health Department to deal with the COVID-19 cases, the minister said that measures have been taken to ensure the availability of isolation wards, rooms, oxygen beds, ICU beds, and ventilators in hospitals.

From December 13 to 16, an online mock drill was conducted involving 1,192 government and private hospitals to ensure their preparedness, she said.



Visitors wear masks at the Emakulam Government Hospital after rise in number of COVID cases, in Kochi

The minister disclosed that 1,957 oxygen beds, 2,454 ICU beds, and 937 ventilator ICU beds have been arranged.

George clarified that the deceased individuals also had other serious illnesses.

"No one has died from COVID, and those who succumbed were admitted to the hospitals with other serious illnesses," she claimed.

She said that the spread of the disease in Kerala should not be misinterpreted as affecting people's lives.

Elderly and seriously ill people should take precautions to avoid getting COVID-19, she said.

Earlier in the day, Satheesan told reporters in Malappuram that even though 89 per cent of the COVID cases in the country are in the state, the Kerala government has not provided clear information about the action

taken.

"The spread of COVID-19 is intensifying in the state. However, the government has not yet issued any clear statements on this," the Congress leader alleged.

He further said that at the national level, the Ministry of Health reports that out of more than 1,800 cases in the country, over 1,600 cases have been reported in Kerala.

"There were four deaths...111 new cases were reported yesterday (Sunday) alone," he said, quoting national level reports.

Satheesan alleged that the state government is inactive, possibly waiting for the conclusion of the state government's outreach programme, Nava Kerala Sadas.

"The government should take immediate action before people start panicking about the spread of the virus," he said.



Wearing of face masks must for people above 60 in Karnataka

PTI ■ MADIKERI (K'TAKA)

The Karnataka government on Monday asked those above 60 years of age, with comorbidities, and symptoms of cough, phlegm and fever to mandatorily wear face masks, in the wake of detection of a case of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 in neighbouring Kerala. Increased tests among those with such symptoms and suspected cases, and heightened surveillance in border districts are among the measures that the officials have been instructed to take up, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao told reporters here.

The situation is being continuously monitored, and there is no need for any restriction on movement and gathering of people as of now, he said, adding, the Government would come out with an advisory.

"There is no need for anyone to worry. We had held a meeting day-before-yesterday and our technical advisory committee headed by Dr (K) Ravi had met yesterday and there was discussion between our officials and experts regarding the measures to be taken," Rao said.

"Those above 60-years of age and those with comorbidities like issues related to heart, kidney among others, and those with cough, phlegm and fever should mandatorily wear masks. We are communicating this to the public. Also we have asked our hospitals and health centres to be prepared. There should be more surveillance in border districts like — Kodagu, Dakshina Kannada, Chamarajanagara — which share border with Kerala," he added.

The government would, based on the situation, decide what

further measures need to be taken, he said. Along with stepping up surveillance at the border, instructions have been issued to increase testing and those with symptoms and suspicious cases are being asked to compulsorily undergo testing.

"In a couple of days we will get to know if the infections are increasing or not. As we increase COVID tests, if more positive cases are recorded, we will decide on further measures that need to be taken. There is no need for imposing any curbs or restrictions now itself," Rao said.

On whether there will be any restriction on Ayyappa pilgrims returning from Kerala, Rao said, as of now there are no curbs on restriction on movement of people and gathering.

"We will not stop any such thing now, because such a situation — where people should not move or gather — is not there," he said.

"We will monitor the situation daily, in case we get any adverse information, we will say what needs to be done. For those above 60 years of age, those with comorbidities and respiratory issues, wearing masks is good. We will make it mandatory. Advisory will be issued by the government today."

Noting that a mock drill has been conducted at all hospitals by district health officials to check their preparedness, the Minister said, checks have been conducted on the number of beds, ventilators, oxygen supply, masks, testing and PPE kits among other things that are required in case of emergency.

"Instructions have been given to make necessary preparations at all health centres and taluk and district hospitals," Rao added.

BJP, Opposition trade barbs over Dawood relative link claim

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday rejected NCP MLC Eknath Khadse's allegations that a BJP minister had attended a wedding in 2017-18 hosted by a family related to fugitive underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

Demanding Khadse's apology to the legislative council for making a baseless claim, Fadnavis said perhaps the allegation was raised because Uddhav Thackeray is present in the House.

Khadse, who belongs to the Sharad Pawar camp of NCP, showed photos of the cabinet minister attending a wedding and alleged that the family is related to Dawood Ibrahim, the prime accused in the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blasts case.

Council chairperson Neelam Gorhe

directed that the name of the minister be removed from the proceeding. She also rejected the opposition's demand for a discussion.

Fadnavis, also the Home Minister, said, "The concerned minister and many other political leaders and government officers had attended the wedding of a nephew of a renowned Muslim priest in Nashik city, known as Shaheer-Khatib.

"An allegation was made that one of the daughters in the family of the in-laws of the bride's father has been married to one of the brothers of Dawood Ibrahim. There is no case against any one of them. In 2017-18, the investigation team has clearly stated that Shaheer-e-Khatib has nothing to do with Dawood," he said.

Targeting Shiv Sena-UBT, he said, "Why such rigorous attempts were not made when Saleem (Kutta) was with



(Sudhakar) Badgujar? I reject these allegations. There is no such connection (Dawood link). He (Khadse) should apologise to the House.

faction legislators raised slogans against Shiv Sena UBT, saying Salim Kutta is the new leader of UBT.

"Everybody knows who is the godfather of Sudhakar Badgujar in Mumbai. Badgujar finances Salim Kutta which is akin to promoting anti-nationals," state minister Dada Bhuse told reporters on the premises of the Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA Kailas Gorantyal expressed doubts about the identity of the person purportedly seen in the video with Badgujar.

"Saleem Kutta or Saleem Kuria was murdered a long time ago in Mumbai in 1998. His three wives had approached a TADA court for the release of the property seized by the police earlier. The court had upheld their appeal. We don't know who this person is (dancing in the video)," he told reporters.

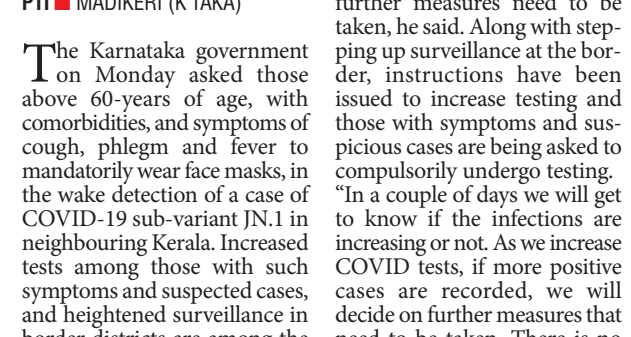
A case on charges of cheating and corruption has been registered against Badgujar in Nashik by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).

Fadnavis on Friday announced a probe by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the dance party where Salim Kutta and Badgujar were allegedly present together.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau filed a police complaint against Badgujar accusing him of submitting fake documents of retirement from a company, in which he was a director, in 2006.

"Don't take unjust action. If the documents (about his retirement from the company) provided by me are proven fake, I will commit suicide, will hang myself in the ACB commissioner's office," the Sena (UBT) leader said.

He said the ACB issued a notice to him suddenly at 7 pm on Sunday and his houses were raided.



Coast Guard augments assets to support TN Government in relief initiatives

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Coast Guard's six disaster relief teams have been deployed for rescue and relief operations, authorities said here on Monday.

Consequent to the closure of Thoothukudi airport, the Coast Guard is augmenting its assets in the area by positioning a fixed wing Dornier aircraft and an ALH helicopter at Madurai to support rescue and relief efforts in flood affected areas, including transportation of key NDRF personnel from Chennai, a Defence release said.

Presently, mobile communication network facilities are not available at Thoothukudi.

A rescue diver team with paddle boats and kayaks and one disaster relief team from the Coast Guard Station Mandapam have all been sent to Thoothukudi to assist rescue

efforts. Six disaster relief teams (DRTs) from the Coast Guard have been deployed for rescue and relief operations in coordination with district authorities. Further, an Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) of the Coast Guard with an integral helicopter onboard has been deployed to monitor the situation in coastal areas of Thoothukudi and to respond to any eventuality at sea and shore locations.

Coast Guard district headquarters at Thoothukudi is maintaining close coordination with the administration of both Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts.

The Tamil Nadu government has sought the assistance of the Coast Guard for the rescue of stranded citizens and supply of relief materials such as food and medicine to the local population in the flood affected areas.



Maharashtra Assembly passes Lokayukta Bill

CM, Ministers to be within ambit of ombudsman

PTI ■ NAGPUR

The Maharashtra Assembly on Monday passed the Lokayukta Bill 2022, which brings the chief minister and his council of ministers under the ambit of the anti-corruption ombudsman.

It was tabled in the House by industries minister Uday Samant. The Bill was passed by

the Legislative Council on Friday. Maharashtra is the first state in the country to pass such a bill that covers the chief minister and his cabinet.

As per the Bill, the Lokayukta will have to seek the approval of the Vidhan Sabha before initiating any inquiry against the chief minister, which would require bringing a motion in the House. Such a motion will have to be



passed by not less than two-thirds of the total members of the Vidhan Sabha, as per the Bill. It also stipulates that the Lokayukta will not investigate cases involving allegations of corruption against the chief minister on matters related to internal security or public order.

"Any such inquiry shall be kept secret and if the Lokayukta comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry shall not be published or made available to anyone," reads the Bill.

It also lays down that the trial against the chief minister, ministers or elected representatives must be completed within a year of the date of complaint.

The Lokayukta will have a chairperson, who shall be a present or former Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court or the Bombay High Court.

The Lokayukta shall have a maximum of four members, two of whom shall be from the judiciary.

The Lokayukta Bill was passed by the Assembly in the Winter session last year but some legislators raised objections when it was tabled in the Council at the time.

The Bill was then referred to a joint committee.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Monday blamed drug mafia and illegal immigrants for the ethnic strife that has rocked the northeastern state for months.

Singh also attributed the current crisis to the "failure" of the previous government in guarding the state's borders.

Nearly 200 people have died and over 60,000 were rendered homeless due to the ethnic conflict between the Kuki and Meitei communities since May.

"The present conflict is engineered by drug mafia groups and illegal immigrants who have suppressed the voice of the original tribes. The war is not between Meiteis and Kukis, but between the government and the illegal immigrants," Singh told a gathering at Lilong in Thoubal district.

"Everyday, I keep contact and communicate with my old Kuki friends through phone. They are helpless and unable to speak the truth as they are being intimidated by guns," the CM said. Singh said "more than 6,000 immigrants have entered Kamjong district from Myanmar" due to fighting between the neighbouring country's military and anti-junta groups.

Police teams have been sent to monitor the situation, collect biometric details and make arrangements to provide them temporary shelters, he said.

"We are not against Chin Kuki, but only against those illegal immigrants. We simply want to identify those illegal sections by taking their biometric details and later have them leave when the situation in Myanmar improves," Singh said.

"Where is the mistake if I stressed on stopping illegal immigration? Will we agree to continuous influx and eventual suppression of the indigenous populace... Original communities of the state becoming smaller and becoming a minority?" said the chief minister.

Commenting on the previous government, Singh said "The current crisis is due to their failure to properly enforce laws in the state. If they had fenced the almost 400-km international borders, cancelled the Free Movement Regime, this situation would not have come up."

Singh also asked the security forces to take strict action against illegal possession of weapons and those taking the law into their own hands.

"If this is not checked immediately, it has the potential to create misunderstanding among communities and unwanted incidents," he added.

Murmu: Use of technology should be for promoting social justice, equality

PTI ■ KHARAGPUR (WB)

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday emphasised the use of technology for promoting social justice and equality rather than increasing differences in society.

During her address at the 69th convocation of IIT Kharagpur on Monday, Murmu said everyone should possess the right to access technology and it should be used to promote social justice and equality rather than exacerbating differences.

"We believe that everyone should have the right to access technology. The use of technology must be for promoting social justice and equality, rather than increasing disparities in society," the President said.

She cited the example of digital payment systems, highlighting how technology has

simplified life, even benefiting small traders.

Murmu said the IITs have a global reputation.

"IITs are considered incubation centres of talent and technology. IIT Kharagpur has the distinction of being the first such institute of the country. This institution has nurtured great talents in its journey of almost 73 years and its contribution to the development of the country is unmatched," she said.

The President was happy to note that in line with the government of India's policy of internationalisation and globalisation of IITs, IIT Kharagpur is working on alliances and collaborations with other global institutions.

She said the move will not only help in establishing IIT Kharagpur at the international level, but will also be a big step towards giving global recognition to the Indian education system.

In this context, the President observed that not even a single educational institution of such a vast country with the world's oldest knowledge tradition is among the top 50 educational institutions of the world.

"The race for ranking is not more important than good education. But good ranking



develop technology and implement it," she added.

The President said today India is scaling new heights, setting new standards and emerging as a major world power.

"We look forward to finding solutions to the challenges facing the world in the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. In this Amrit Kaal of India, the golden age will come only by churning through technology," she added.

Computerization, solar energy, genomics and large language models are some of the experiments that have the potential to bring revolutionary changes in social life. Diseases that seemed incurable 150 years ago are now treated almost free of cost. People's standard of living is getting better. The role of technology is important in making this world better and inclusive," Murmu said.

not only attracts students and good faculty from all over the world but also enhances the reputation of the country," She said IIT Kharagpur should make efforts in this direction.

"Institutions like IIT Kharagpur will have to play an important role through innovation and technology. They will have to make revolutionary efforts to

Political parties demand Statehood, extension of Article 371 to J&K

PTI ■ JAMMU

The leaders of various political parties held a meeting here on Monday and later staged a demonstration, demanding immediate restoration of statehood and extension of Article 371 to Jammu and Kashmir.

The political parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT), National Panthers Party (NPP) and Dogra Swabhiman Sangathan Party (DSSP), also highlighted their demand for deportation of illegally settled immigrants, early return and settlement of the Kashmiri migrant pandits and regularisation of the daily wagers.

This was the first such meeting in Jammu after the Supreme Court on December 11 upheld the abrogation of Article 370 in the Centre in August 2019.

"We have taken part in the 'all-party meet' organised by the

Shiv Sena and Sainik Samaj Party and highlighted our demand for immediate restoration of statehood and democratically elected government in Jammu and Kashmir," NPP chairman and former minister Harsh Dev Singh told PTI after the meeting.

The NPP chairman accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of ruling Jammu and Kashmir by a remote control over the past many years.

"Almost all the bureaucrats posted in J&K are from outside and do not know anything about the region as a result of which the alienation among the local populace is increasing with each passing day," he said.

"The democratically elected government is also an antidote against militancy, extremism and violence," Singh said, adding his party will always remain in the forefront to safeguard the interests of the people of Jammu region.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

The last mile

The outcome of today's INDIA bloc meeting may redefine strategies and influence the 2024 elections

In the dynamic realm of Indian politics, the Opposition alliance meeting today is significant as it involves the critical issue of sharing seats for the 2024 elections. It comes shortly after the Opposition conceded the crucial States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to the BJP in Assembly elections. The seat-sharing formula could not be formalised before these Assembly elections, resulting in the BJP's sweep, so today's meeting of the INDIA bloc with the tagline "Mae nahin, hum" ("We, not me") could be a turning point in the Opposition's plan for 2024. As a follow-up, the Congress Working Committee would meet on December 21 to finalise its campaign for the Lok Sabha elections. There is speculation that the meeting, summoned by party president Mallikarjun Kharge, would also chalk out a plan for Rahul Gandhi's next edition of Bharat Jodo Yatra and ratify any seat-sharing formula agreed upon in the INDIA bloc meeting. It is expected to shape the course of political alliances and spell out strategies. This is perhaps the last chance for the bloc to show solidarity for its common cause since seat sharing is a delicate and intricate process for maximising the constituents' chances of electoral success. The outcome will impact not only the alliance but also play a pivotal role in determining the collective strength of the Opposition. If the Opposition manages to finalise a mutually agreeable seat-sharing formula, it could strengthen the bonds within the coalition.

Interestingly, the Congress' defeat in the recent Assembly elections comes as a blessing in disguise for INDIA as the party is likely to be more accommodative of the others now. Having said that, the seat-sharing exercise is not going to be easy, given the number of parties involved and their complex cross-cutting interests. Besides, a seat sharing agreement per se does not guarantee an electoral win as votes may or may not get transferred in favour of the common candidate. However, a united front is the minimum necessity for challenging the BJP, and a harmonious distribution of seats may foster trust and cooperation among the Opposition partners. On the other hand, the failure to reach a consensus might lead to fragmentation within the Opposition ranks; infighting and lack of unity could undermine its electoral prospects, providing the ruling party with a distinct advantage. The Opposition meeting could also witness the emergence of new, smaller alliances or realignments as parties explore alternative partnerships. In a scenario where the main alliance break down, some parties may opt to form new alliances based on shared ideologies or regional considerations, reshaping the political equations in unforeseen ways. What exactly holds for INDIA bloc only time will tell but one thing is for sure, this is the last shot they have got to forge a united front; if INDIA leaders fail to set aside their personal interests, they will not be true to their opposition *dharma*.

PICTALK



Tourists at an ice-skating rink at Lakkar Bazar, in Shimla

Maldives: Undercurrents may help Indian cause

President Muizzu is bound by campaign promises and stances. He may thaw his stand with practicalities that strengthen his political appeal



BHOPIINDER SINGH

Words are crawling out of the political woodwork in the archipelagic state of Maldives, as intrigues that go beyond simplistic assumptions, emerge. For months the Maldivian national elections were getting billed as one between the 'pro-India' Maldivian Democratic Party and the 'pro-China' People's National Congress. Factually, the Maldivian Democratic Party under previous President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's government (2018-2023) had restorative (after the previous term of a decidedly anti-Indian dispensation of Abdulla Yameen) and warm relations with Delhi.

Indeed, the People's National Congress this time had campaigned on a virtual 'India Out' campaign. Finally, the People's National Congress under Mohamed Muizzu won.

True to his poll promise, Mohamed Muizzu did ask the Indian Government to withdraw its personnel, albeit, whilst promising to be only 'pro-Maldives', and not 'anti-India' or 'pro-China', as labelled. The fact that Mohamed Muizzu ran for Presidency only because Abdulla Yameen was legally debarred from the electoral fray due to corruption and money laundering charges and therefore ostensibly on Abdulla's behalf, made the expectations of reversing Male's warmth towards Delhi, in favour of Beijing, even more credible.

So far, the script played out as expected (as feared?) and Delhi decided to play a wait-and-watch game to decipher the extent of Muizzu's supposed antipathy towards India. Would President Mohamed Muizzu be different from the image of the politically charged, accusatory and inflammatory leader of the opposition party during the electoral campaign or would he toe his supposed mentor Yameen's tilt? Would Muizzu moderate his political rhetoric in favour of practicalities and necessities, and thereby lower the din against Delhi? It is still early days to assert conclusively, but as always in politics, there are more intrigues and undercurrents than meets the eye.



Muizzu does not need to pander or remain beholden to Abdulla Yameen, beyond a point.

Completely unrelated news gripped the Maldivian discourse post the settlement of electoral dust - firstly the second-guessing of Muizzu and his politics, and secondly of soaring onion prices, an integral part of Maldivian cuisine. As India has banned exports of onions to curb its own inflationary pressures, Male is feeling the pinch with prices soaring from Maldivian Rupee 200-300 per sack to 900-1000 - alternative supplies from Pakistan and China are just not the same quality or price. It is an inadvertent example of Maldivian dependence on India for its socio-economic 'normalcy', and even an exemption from exports has been sought to bring about the necessary relief from inflation, the point of maintaining good relations with India is underscored. But more grippingly, there is a murmured discomfort brewing between Mohamed Muizzu and his one-time benefactor, Abdulla Yameen, that can alter many linear assumptions, including those of Muizzu's future equation with Delhi. The rift dates to the time when at one time Yameen wanted his party to boycott the elections, but the wider coalition started drifting in favour

BUT MORE GRIPPINGLY, THERE IS A MURMURED DISCOMFORT BREWING BETWEEN MOHAMED MUIZZU AND HIS ONE-TIME BENEFACTOR, ABDULLA YAMEEN, THAT CAN ALTER MANY LINEAR ASSUMPTIONS, INCLUDING THOSE OF MUIZZU'S FUTURE EQUATION WITH DELHI

of Muizzu as a favoured candidate to partake in elections. Yameen ultimately acquiesced and Muizzu won the elections, but somewhere Yameen felt slighted by his purported nominee's success.

The fact that Muizzu's victory speech had no mention of gratitude to Yameen or to his role in winning the ballot race, was telling. While Muizzu did release Yameen from incarceration as promised during the campaign earlier, however, he didn't bother to postpone celebratory events to accommodate Abdulla Yameen's presence and participation in the same.

It is also being murmured that President Mohamed Muizzu is increasingly cold towards unsolicited advice and engagement coming from Abdulla Yameen as he would like to assert his own style, policies, and preferences, as befitting a duly elected President, and not as a prop for someone else. Even the run-up to Abdulla Yameen's promised release was filled with testy vibes as Mohamed Muizzu asked Abdulla Yameen's supporters to stay away from street protests and instead allow Mohamed Muizzu to handle Yameen's release in his own way - clearly, Abdulla Yameen was not pleased with Muizzu's put-down of Yameen's supporters and with

his pace to release him. The pot of discontent was brewing, for long. Further allocation of ministerial berths in the Muizzu cabinet without the active consultation or accommodation of Yameen's preferences, further frustrated former President Yameen.

The technicality of provisions under the Prisons and Parole Act under which Yameen was released debar Yameen from formally participating in political confabulations, further ties up Yameen's abilities to assert his own agenda. Muizzu's apparent defiance and becoming his own political man is at the heart of Maldivian intrigues that beset its newly formed government. How this newfound assertion by Muizzu manifests as regards, as his relationship with Delhi is concerned, is yet to be seen, however for him to be openly 'pro-China' as Abdulla Yameen was, may not be on the cards. Muizzu like all politicians may thaw his stand with practicalities that strengthen his political appeal as opposed to kowtowing Yameen's agenda - one beneficiary of this situation may just be India, despite labels attached to Muizzu.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andobar & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COMPULSORY VOTING

Sir - Compulsory voting for vibrant democracy (Dec, 15). Compulsory voting is a good idea. But how far it works in practice is to be seen. The democratic responsibility of a citizen ends with his voting in the elections. Ours is not a participatory democracy. After elections, the politicians have a field day. They indulge in defections for gain, form unholy alliances and above all corruption.

Only the rich, criminals and corrupt enter politics is the order of the day. Voters are bribed by offering freebies. Then what else to overcome? Politics is the last resort of the scoundrels. That is why people are fed up with today's politicians and the voting percentage in the elections has come down to 60% to 75%. We have a long way to go. Service-minded politicians are not seen today. Politicians are for self-aggrandisement and come to make money. Criminals and corrupt people should be shown the door in the elections to make the nation more vibrant.

NR Ramachandran | Chennai

PARLIAMENT ATTACK, RAHUL'S TAKE

Sir - Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said unemployment and rising prices were behind the December 13 Parliament security breach. Speaking to reporters after an election strategy meeting with leaders of the party's Gujarat unit here, Gandhi said it's the youngsters who are not getting jobs due to Central government policies who breached Parliament security. He said the breach was the eruption of an anger long-simmering among the youth. Two persons jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber on 13 December and opened yellow smoke canisters inside the house, leading to a scare.

The breach was a serious issue yet the Union Home Minister is not ready to state it in Parliament. This is not good for democracy. But there is no meaning of this to those people who do not believe in democracy. In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack on Wednesday, two men jumped

Women cricketers make history



Indian women cricketers created 'world record' biggest 'test win' Vs England (by 347 runs margin). Earlier record was 309 runs margin victory by Sri Lanka versus Pakistan. It was the first home - soil test - win for India versus England. Indian exuberance and excellence were elucidative in its speedy and mighty 410 runs on the first day of the test itself. They got bundled out for 428 runs. In the 2nd innings, they

scored 186 for 6 declared. England were too stunned to be lassoed by the Indian spin bowling. They scored a meager 136 and 131. Surprisingly just 267 total in both innings together. From the Indian side in the first innings 5 half-centuries were scored (one each by:- Shubha, Rodrigues, Kaur (49), Bhatia, Sharma). None in the second innings by any of the teams. Nat Sciver - Brunt's was the only half-century for England that too in the first innings. That elucidates the all-around excellent display of cricket - skills, well - knit teamwork by the Indian side. D. Sharma took 9 wickets in the match (5 + 4), while 4 other bowlers claimed the remaining 11 wickets (Singh, Rana, Vastrakar, Gayakwad) in both innings together. From England's side, all the (5) bowlers claimed at least 1 wicket each except L. Filer. Indian women's cricket is on the pinnacle of peaks is the apt description.

PV Srinivas Sreelekha | Secunderabad

into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans, before they were overpowered by MPs.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

JOTO MOT TOTO POTH

Sir - No true Hindu can associate himself/herself with the Brand Hindutva propagated by the "nationalist" saffron brigade since the early 1990s. While Ramakrishna Paramhansa had advocated "Joto Mot Toto Poth" (As many opinions so many ways!) advocating equality of all religions, Swami Vivekananda was liberal enough to initiate Kumari Puja through the worship of a Muslim girl in Kheer Bhavani. Rather his impeccable secularism arrived as his "nemesis", falling prey to the bullets of the communal Hindutva brigade! However, it is strange that some secular personalities also are found to describe the erstwhile Babri Masjid as a "symbol of religious and military conquest"! Does there exist any proof that it was indeed constructed after the demolition of any Hindu shrine? The

name "Babri" might suggest that the mosque was built by anybody associated with Babar, but does such nomenclature suggest that the destruction of any temple by any orthodox Islamic conqueror? How can an event of the dark medieval era of "Might is Right" - when expansion of empire by hook or by crook and humiliation of the people religion and culture of the "conquered land" had been the prevalent norm - be invoked in the same breath with the destruction of the mosque in the "modern" 20th century when the society was being governed by full-fledged law and Constitutional process. So by equating the fact of Babri Masjid demolition with the unproved allegation of the mosque built upon a Hindu shrine centuries ago, aren't those otherwise secular personalities also inadvertently providing a moral boost to the saffron brigade who had engaged in that unpardonable act and vitiated the erstwhile secular environment forever!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Insufficient funds will not mitigate climate change

With current pledges totalling only around \$700 million, vulnerable countries affected by costly climate disasters are calling for additional funds



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

Climate finance has taken centre stage in discussions surrounding global climate action, particularly at COP28 in Dubai. The finance day at COP28 witnessed a significant breakthrough in international financial architecture, with influential countries and financial institutions committing to innovative mechanisms that support low-income and vulnerable nations in their fight against climate change.

Key announcements include the expansion of Climate-Resilient Debt Clauses (CRDCs) by prominent entities such as the UK, France, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and African Development Bank (AFDB). This move has garnered support from 73 countries, urging donors to extend the use of CRDCs by 2025 and provide fiscal space for climate action.

During his address at COP28, Prime Minister Modi underscored the importance of providing climate finance and



technology to the Global South countries to help them fulfil their commitments. He called for progress in a new collective quantified goal on climate finance, replenishment of the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund, affordable finance from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) for climate action, and developed countries eliminating their carbon footprint before 2050. Climate finance refers to local, national, or transnational financing from public, private, and alternative sources to support mitigation and adaptation actions addressing climate change. The majority of the funds are allocated for disaster adaptation and mitigation.

While there is no common ground on the definition and elements of climate financing, it remains highly debated and considered a vital tool to address the climate crisis.

Developing countries advocate for climate finance to be new and additional, while developed nations debate whether it should consist of grants only or include loans and other forms of finance. This ongoing debate aims to delineate climate finance from existing financial sources.

With current pledges totalling only around \$700 million, vulnerable countries already affected by costly climate disasters are calling for additional funds through a newly formed disaster fund. According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released on November 16, developed countries provided and mobilized \$89.6 billion in climate finance for developing countries in 2021. However, the estimated amount needed for the energy transition, climate adaptation, and disaster relief is staggering, reaching \$2.4 trillion annually for emerging markets and developing countries.

While opinions vary among stakeholders, experts believe that funds should be directed toward the most vulnera-

ble populations. Partha Hefaz Shaikh from WaterAid Bangladesh suggests that climate finance should be allocated to water, hygiene, and sanitation, emphasizing the importance of supporting services to provide climate-resilient Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services to those most affected by climate change. He highlights the need to prioritize households facing the greatest impact of the climate crisis.

It is crucial to note that Bangladesh, ranked as the 7th most vulnerable to climate change according to Energy Tracker Asia's Special Report, faces a potential 2-9% GDP loss by 2050, as warned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Similarly, Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director of partnerships at UNICEF, expresses concern that only 1% of all climate finance goes to education. She insists that this percentage must increase at COP28 to align with the rising temperatures and the urgent need for comprehensive climate action.

(The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

PERMISSIVE PARENTING TO RESPECTFUL PARENTING

Give children respect and appreciate their compliance to end fear-based discipline



SAKSHI SETHI

Many of us are aware of the traditional authoritarian style of parenting where we were asked to perform tasks as told by our parents and even got punished with strict discipline methods if stepped out of line. Yet we were loved by them and no doubt they did the best that they could in their capacity. Yet, many of the parents of today's scenario are creating a completely new way of parenting which is the opposite of authoritarian parenting i.e. permissive parenting. Kids nowadays are found to be demanding and responsive as parents do not set limits or are very inconsistent in enforcing boundaries. Many parents even prioritize their child's temporary happiness above everything else giving rise to a newly added term in town Permissive Parenting.

It means that the parent's lack of boundaries puts their child at risk which is quite different from listening to and respecting the child's perspective. Gentle parenting is not a researched or studied parenting style. Children need boundaries, rules and effective discipline to grow. Any parenting method that lacks these elements is permissive parenting. Any parent who refrains from discipline to be liked does no good to their kid in the long run but trains them in poor habits that can hinder them into their adulthood.



Since ages, children have been proven to thrive best with clear boundaries that are reasonable and are held with kindness and love while on the contrary, permissive parenting can feel good as one is giving their child everything in unlimited amounts without any questions attached. As a parent, the best thing one can do is to work on healing trauma, so that one can set boundaries and at the same time the love and affection develop them into a responsible and respectful adult. Numerous studies have found that uninvolved parenting affects a child's self-confidence. Over time such type of parenting can create more ruptures in the parent-child relationship and leave a feeling of frustration. If one focuses only on keeping the child content at the moment, they may not learn the important boundaries and responsibilities that are essential for their development.

Also, children raised in such an atmosphere may struggle with self-discipline and may also face difficulty following rules in schools or other settings of life. They may also face problems with authority figures and struggle to understand the importance of boundaries. Lack of guidance and discipline can also hinder their development of important life skills, such as problem-solving and decision-making.

Remember, when we can be mindful to make sure that the children know they are safe and loved no matter what, then one can begin imparting the wisdom of obedience. One needs to normalise treating children like humans, giving them respect, seeking collaboration over compliance ending fear-based discipline and most importantly be clear that respectful parenting is not permissive parenting. One should not be afraid to be the strict one when the other parent chooses to be permissive and enabling. The children need at least one parent to prepare them for adulthood.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Universality of human rights is a myth



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Human rights emerge from the ashes of exploitation by a privileged few, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defiantly standing at its 75th year



In the renowned Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a grand proclamation resonates: all are equal before the law and entitled, without distinction, to equal protection under the law. Each 10th of December is designated as International Human Rights Day, not as a mere ritual of repetitive rhetoric, but as a solemn call for genuine solidarity and authentic commitment to the profound principles it represents. However, echoing the cautionary words of George Orwell in Animal Farm, where 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,' the stark reality unfolds before us. The notion of equality becomes not a force for justice but a potent instrument of mass control—an alluring mirage that conceals hidden motives.

Gustave Le Bon, in The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind, posited that the truth is often shunned, as people, thirsty for validation, turn a blind eye to inconvenient evidence. The UDHR, in its 75 years, has become more than a document; it transforms into a collection of words manipulated in the most abhorrent manner. Crafted to subdue hostile factions, the UDHR, touted as universal, becomes a tool wielded by a select group of powers. To borrow Slavoj Žižek's words, it acts as a perfect rhetoric, lulling us into a 'dogmatic slumber' of false freedom, from which we urgently need awakening.

The concept of human rights, born in the 20th century, reached a crucial point on December 10, 1948, with the adoption of the UDHR by the United Nations General Assembly. This marked a new chapter in the idea of universal human rights, in responding to the aftermath of World War II. While the UDHR outlined a comprehensive list of rights similar to those in the US Constitution, it carried a political reality—a deceptive facade masking the true nature of its universality. From the start, the weaknesses of human rights law were ingrained in the UDHR, lacking the binding force of a formal treaty and relying on General Assembly endorsement without the power to shape international law as outlined in the UN Charter. The very rights it proclaimed were couched in vague, aspirational terms, leaving room for diverse interpretations.



A COMPLEX NARRATIVE UNFOLDS AS THE UNITED STATES AND NATO CYNICALLY WEAPONISE THE CONCEPT TO UNDERMINE ACHIEVEMENTS IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, VEILING HEGEMONIC INTERESTS IN THE CLOAK OF FREEDOM ADVOCACY

Even liberal democracies hesitated to embrace binding legal commitments, casting a shadow over the lofty aspirations of this declaration. Despite the initial attention it garnered, this Universal Declaration failed to spark a paradigm shift in international relations, eluding voters, politicians, and influencers. "Human rights" now serves power-hungry politicians, who wield it as a concept to be exploited alongside pseudo-patriotism.

It is also manipulated by self-proclaimed civil society activists, who capitalize on the plight of humans for profit. Human rights have transformed into a tool for expressing idealistic goals while concealing strategic agendas. Once a utopian dream, universal human rights continue to be abused. Understanding their power requires exploring their utopian dimension, promising a reformation marked by dignity and respect. Amidst the various modern schemes of liberty and equality, human rights stand as one among others, not the sole driving force behind global ambitions. They are survivors in the realm of thought and social activism, perceived as a moral alternative to failed political utopias.

In the urgent pursuit of global justice, the imperative to address human rights violations is undeniable. However, a complex narrative unfolds as the United States and NATO cynically weaponise the concept to undermine achievements in socialist countries, veiling hegemonic interests in the cloak of freedom advocacy. Termed human rights imperialism, this alarming phenomenon inflicts its most brutal consequences on Third World states, often through military force. Imperial powers persist in dominating nations, justifying their actions by referencing documents they imposed. Today's crimes against humanity exceed historical atrocities, facilitated by the insidious employment of "soft power" as a tool

for global dominion and enslavement.

Grasping the universality of human rights demands a perspective that perceives it as a collaborative process, urging states to join forces in ratifying existing treaties, drafting new ones, and fulfilling obligations outlined in the UN Charter. It transcends abstraction, embodying a commitment to concrete standards that, unfortunately, are corroding in practice.

The realisation of a genuine demand for humanity hinges on prioritizing the defence of justice as fairness, as mentioned by John Rawls, over attempts to merely mend it. This necessitates a radical departure from the current paradigm where international law, including human rights, serves as a manipulative tool for great power policies.

Instead, the call is for international law to transform into the gauge and restraint on state power. The persistent notion that only Western states can be trusted with humanitarian actions, despite a track record of failed interventions and questionable motives, must be shattered. Internationally, this signifies a struggle for peaceful and egalitarian relations among all states, regardless of size or strength. The way forward emphasizes peace, disarmament, independent economic development for the Third World, humane living conditions, and the preservation of the natural environment.

The unequivocal assertion of individual equality before the law demands the simultaneous establishment of comprehensive human rights across various spectrums. It imposes a strict prohibition on promoting hatred or inciting racial, national, or religious contempt. Allowing such expressions under the guise of freedom of speech risks dangerous consequences, as seen in the proximity between vicious rhetoric and incitement to war. The sanctity of press freedom cannot jus-

tify the dissemination of perspectives poisoning public opinion. Instances like a Nobel Prize for human rights advocates in Iran and Syria, contrasted with life imprisonment for Julian Assange, reveal a glaring lack of universality.

The drafted universal declaration, despite a meticulous process, omits crucial protections against genocide and atrocities, demanding correction. It fails to address the plight of individuals suffering not only under dictatorships or tyrannical regimes but also those subject to hegemonic ambitions. This renders it a mere statement without the force of law—a wasted effort perpetuating the myth of universality, leading us into the abyss of delusion.

In this redefined era, human rights emerge from the ashes of exploitation by a privileged few, with the UDHR defiantly standing at its 75th year. Rather than teetering on the brink of irrelevance, the UDHR serves as a scathing indictment of humanity's failure to embrace inclusivity and equality.

Beyond the superficiality of talk shows, the document perseveres, its struggle meticulously chronicled, even as institutions betray its core principles. Cultural biases, cynically used to deepen economic disparities, pose a formidable challenge. Nations once victims of egregious human rights violations now demand an urgent reevaluation of the UDHR, emphasising the need for universal applicability and lasting relevance. The time for rhetoric has passed; a resounding call to action is underway—a demand to breathe new life into the foundational principles safeguarding human dignity and rights, transcending selective interpretations and illuminating a world that cannot afford indifference's shadows.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka. Views are personal)

When Bollywood seriously tickles your funny bone

The evolution of comedy in Hindi cinema did not occur in isolation. It was a reflection of societal changes. As the entertainment landscape shifted, so did the Bollywood humour

The world of Hindi cinema has been graced by many legendary comedians whose impeccable timing and unique styles have brought joy to audiences for decades. Junior Mehmood, originally Naeem Sayyed, was one of them who emerged as a comedic luminary in Hindi cinema, filling the laughter void left by his senior, Mehmood Ali. Renowned for his impeccable timing and distinctive style, he etched a memorable presence in Bollywood's comedic landscape. On December 8, 2023, the cinematic world mourned his passing. With over 200 films in multiple languages, he delighted audiences with classics like 'Hare Rama Hare Krishna', 'Kati Patang', 'Mera Naam Joker',



RAJDEEP PATHAK

and 'Bachpan.' Junior Mehmood's ability to inject humour into diverse characters, showcased in hits such as 'Do aur Do Panch', 'Geet Gaata Chal' and 'Suhagraat' secured his lasting impact. His tribute to Mehmood's legacy by recreating the iconic 'Hum Kaale Hain To Kya Hua' in 'Brahmachari', starring Shammi Kapoor remains unique.

The golden era of Hindi cinema, often characterized by timeless classics and unforgettable performances, witnessed the rise of iconic comedians who became synonymous with laughter. In the annals of Hindi cinema, Jagdeep emerged – and is still remembered – for creating a niche in the comedic landscape. His roles in iconic



films like "Sholay" and "Andaz Apna Apna" showcased his knack for inducing laughter with minimal effort. Jagdeep's unique style and memorable portrayals added a layer of charm to the comedy genre, making him a

beloved – often notorious – figure in the hearts of movie enthusiasts. While, Mehmood and Johnny Walker – an actor whose integrity towards his profession was unquestionable and was known for "Clean

Comedy" – were renowned comedians in their league, however, another actor, Rajendra Nath Malhotra, (Rajendra Nath), distinguished himself with his unique comic timing. His endearing, innocent persona and mischievous antics set him apart as a lovable and sweet individual. His memorable roles (from the films 1960s and 1970s.) have immortalized delightful moments on screen, becoming a timeless treasure for future generations.

His humour was uncomplicated, combining whimsical facial expressions, a spirited walk, quirky attire, clever English wordplay, frequently exaggerated eyebrow raises, and his unique comedic timing. Brimming with

delight, those in the audience could immediately sense the enjoyment. A mere look at his visage was enough to send people into fits of laughter!

While male comedians have been prominently featured, it's crucial to acknowledge the contribution of female comedians who played pivotal roles in shaping the laughter quotient of Hindi films. Uma Devi Khatri alias Tun Tun, with her impeccable timing and memorable performances, paved the way for women in comedy.

Her roles in films like "Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi" and "Half Ticket" demonstrated that humour (laughter) knows no gender boundaries, and women could command the spotlight with their comedic

pross. Other actresses like Guddi Maruti, and lead role heroes like Sridevi, Madhuri Dixit and others did justice to their acts. So was the case with lead male actors like Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra or even Shakti Kapoor, including singer-actor Kishore Kumar. The evolution of comedy in Hindi cinema did not occur in isolation. It was a reflection of societal changes. As the entertainment landscape shifted, so did the medium through which humour was delivered.

(The writer is a programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, views are personal) This is first part of two part series on social impact on Bollywood. To be continued

Austin expected to press for more targeted approach in Gaza

Car plows into parked vehicle in Joe Biden's motorcade

AP ■ TEL AVIV

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin was expected to press Israel to wind down major combat operations in Gaza on a visit on Monday, in the latest test of whether the US can leverage its unwavering support for the offensive to blunt its devastating impact on Palestinian civilians.

France, the UK and Germany — some of Israel's closest allies — joined global calls for a cease-fire over the weekend, and Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with Hamas on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops while waving a white flag.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will keep fighting until it removes Hamas from power, crushes its still-formidable military capabilities and returns the dozens of hostages still held by the group after its Oct. 7 attack, which ignited the war.



Palestinian firefighters extinguish cars after an Israeli military raid on the Far'at refugee camp in the West Bank on Monday.

The US has vetoed calls for a cease-fire at the UN and rushed munitions to Israel while pressing it to take greater steps to avoid harming civilians. More than 100 people were killed in strikes on resi-

dential buildings in northern Gaza on Sunday, a Health Ministry official in the Hamas-run territory said.

The 10-week-old war has killed over 18,700 Palestinians and transformed much of the

north into a moonscape. Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, with most packing into UN-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the besieged territory.

US PRESSURE ON ISRAEL

Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown, who arrived in Tel Aviv on Monday, are expected to press Israeli leaders to transition to a new phase of the war after weeks of heavy bombardment and a ground offensive. American officials have called for targeted operations aimed at killing Hamas leaders, destroying tunnels and rescuing hostages. Those calls came after US President Joe Biden warned that Israel is losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

But Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said last week that his country would continue major combat operations against Hamas for sev-

eral more months.

So far, under US pressure, Israel provided more precise evacuation instructions as troops moved into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month, though Palestinians say nowhere in Gaza is safe as Israel continues to carry out strikes in all parts of the territory.

Israel has reopened its main cargo crossing with Gaza to allow more aid in — also after a request from the US. But the amount is still less than half of prewar imports, even as needs have soared and fighting hinders delivery in many areas.

New York-based Human Rights Watch on Monday accused Israel of deliberately starving Gaza's population — which would be a war crime — pointing to statements by senior Israeli officials expressing the intent to deprive civilians of food, water and fuel or linking the entry of aid to the release of hostages.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, a military spokesman, denied Israel was restricting the

amount of aid and blamed the suffering of civilians on Hamas, accusing the militants of stealing it.

UNPRECEDENTED DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

The war began with an unprecedented surprise attack by Hamas that overwhelmed Israel's border defences. Thousands of militants rampaged across southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 240 men, women and children.

Hamas and other militants are still holding an estimated 129 captives after most of the rest were freed in return for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners during a truce last month. Hamas has said no more hostages will be released until the war ends.

More than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Health Ministry, which has said most are women and minors, and that thousands more are buried under the rubble. The ministry

does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Israel's military says 127 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza ground offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes.

At least 110 people were killed in Israel's bombardment of residential buildings in the urban Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza on Sunday, Munir al-Boursh, a senior Health Ministry official, told Al Jazeera television.

The area has seen heavy fighting in recent days. "No one can retrieve the martyrs or take the wounded to hospitals," said Amal Radwan, who is staying at a UN shelter in Jabalya. The military meanwhile released pictures of what it said was around \$1.3 million in Israeli currency found in the home of a senior Hamas operative in the camp.

Wilmington (US)(AP): A car plowed into a parked SUV that was guarding President Joe Biden's motorcade Sunday night while the president was leaving a visit to his campaign headquarters. The president and first lady Jill Biden were unharmed.

While Biden was walking from the campaign office to his waiting armored SUV, a sedan hit a US Secret Service vehicle that was being used to close off intersections near the headquarters for the president's departure. The sedan then tried to continue into a closed-off intersection, before Secret Service personnel surrounded the vehicle with weapons drawn and instructed the driver to put his hands up.

Serbia's populists claim sweeping victory in polls

AP ■ BELGRADE

Serbia's governing populists claimed a sweeping victory on Sunday in the country's parliamentary election, which was marred by reports of major irregularities both during a tense campaign and on voting day. Acting Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said that with half the ballots counted, the governing Serbian Progressive Party's projections showed it won 47 per cent of the vote and expected to hold around 130 seats in the 250-member assembly.

The main opposition Serbia Against Violence group won around 23 per cent, Brnabic said.

The main contest in the parliamentary and local elections was between President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressives and the centrist coalition that sought to undermine the populists who have ruled the troubled Balkan state since 2012.

The Serbia Against Violence opposition coalition



was expected to mount its biggest challenge for the city council in Belgrade, with analysts saying an opposition victory in the capital would seriously dent Vucic's hardline rule in the country.

Vucic, however, said his party was also leading in the vote in the capital, though he added that post-election coali-

tion negotiations would determine who governs in Belgrade.

"This is an absolute victory which makes me extremely happy," a jubilant Vucic said at his party's headquarters in Belgrade. "We know what we have achieved in the previous period and how tough a period lies ahead." The main opposition group disputed the elec-

tion projections from the governing party, claiming there was vote-rigging and saying it would dispute the vote count "by all democratic means."

"People who do not live in Belgrade were brought in buses, vans and cars to vote as if they were citizens of Belgrade," opposition leader Miroslav Aleksic said, also charging that 40,000 identity documents were issued for people who do not live in the capital.

"We will use all available democratic means against the vote rigging in Belgrade and Serbia," he said. "What happened today cannot be something we can accept as the result of a democratic and fair election." Turnout one hour before the polls closed was around 55 per cent, about the same as during the last election in 2022 when Vucic scored a landslide victory. First official results are expected on Monday.

Irregularities were reported by election monitors and

independent media. One report alleged ethnic Serbs from neighbouring Bosnia gathered to vote at a sports hall in Belgrade that wasn't an official polling station.

Another report said a monitoring team was attacked and their car was bashed with baseball bats in a town in northern Serbia.

Observers from the independent Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability expressed "the highest concern" over cases of the organised transfer of illegal voters from other countries to Belgrade, the group said in a statement.

"The concentration of buses, minivans and cars was observed on several spots in Belgrade, transferring voters to polling stations across the city to vote," the group said.

CRTA also reported cases of voters being given money to vote for the governing party and the presence of unauthorised people at polling stations. Authorities disputed that

there was any wrongdoing. Brnabic, the premier, called the accusations "lies that are intended to spread panic."

Several right-wing groups, including pro-Russia parties and Socialists allied with Vucic, ran candidates for parliament and local councils in around 60 cities and towns as well as regional authorities in the northern Vojvodina province.

The election didn't include the presidency, but governing authorities backed by dominant pro-government media ran the campaign as a referendum on Vucic.

Although he wasn't formally on the ballot, the Serbian president campaigned relentlessly for the SNS, which appeared on the ballot under the name "Aleksandar Vucic — Serbia must not stop!"

Serbia Against Violence, a pro-European Union bloc, includes parties that were behind months of street protests this year triggered by two back-to-back mass shootings in May.

Israelis stunned after Hamas kills three hostages

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israelis were left stunned and speechless when three hostages held by Hamas were killed by Israeli forces in the middle of an active war zone after they waved a white flag and screamed out in Hebrew to show they did not pose a threat.

For some, the incident was a shocking example of the ugliness of war, where a complex and dangerous battlefield is safe for no one. But for critics, the incident underscores what they say is the excessively violent conduct of Israel's security apparatus against Palestinians. Except in this case, it cut short the lives of three Israelis trying desperately to save themselves.

"It's heartbreaking but it's not surprising," said Roy Yellin, director of public outreach with the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. "We have documented over the years countless incidents of people who clearly surrendered and who were still shot."

Yellin said the killings violated basic military ethics and international law that prohibit shooting at people trying to surrender, whether combatants or not. But he said it was part of a long trend of largely unpunished excessive force that in recent weeks has ensnared Israelis themselves.

According to a military official, the three hostages, all men in their 20s, emerged from a building close to Israeli soldiers' positions in the Gaza City neighbourhood of Shijaiyah, where troops have been battling Hamas militants in intense combat. They waved a white flag and were shirtless, possibly trying to signal they posed no threat. Two were killed immediately, and the third ran back into the building screaming for help in Hebrew. The commander issued an order to cease fire, but another burst of gunfire killed the third man, the official said. The army's chief, Lt. Col. Herzi Halevi, said the hostages "did everything pos-

sible" to make it clear they did not pose a threat. "The shooting at the hostages was against the rules of engagement. It is forbidden to shoot at someone who raises a white flag and seeks to surrender," he said. "However, this shooting was carried out during combat and under pressure."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that the killings "broke my heart, broke the entire nation's heart," but he indicated no change in Israel's intensive military campaign. With popular opinion firmly behind the military effort, the hostages' deaths weren't likely to prompt a change in the public mood.

Israel says a number of hostages have died in Hamas captivity. But the deaths of the three hostages struck a nerve because they were killed by the forces trying to rescue them.

Roughly 129 hostages remain in the Gaza Strip, according to the Israeli military, and their plight has gripped the nation, which sees their captivity as the embodiment of the security failure surrounding Hamas' October 7 attack that sparked the war. The hostages' deaths prompted hundreds of demonstrators to take to the streets in anger. It also came days after another incident raised questions about Israel's open-fire rules. After Hamas militants shot at a busy Jerusalem bus stop, an Israeli man who had rushed to confront the attackers was gunned down by an Israeli soldier, even though he had raised his hands, knelt on the ground and flung open his shirt to indicate he wasn't a threat. The military has launched an investigation.

Critics see a direct link between a long list of shooting deaths of Palestinians — from the killing of 32-year-old autistic man Eyad Hallaq, to the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, and many more over the years — to the incidents that led to the deaths of Israelis.

BP to pause Red Sea shipments over fears of Houthi attacks

London (AP): Oil and natural gas giant BP has joined the growing list of companies that have halted their shipments through the Red Sea because of the risk of attack from Yemen's Houthi rebels, threatening a major trade route in what is expected to have global effects.

London-based BP said Monday that it has "decided to temporarily pause all transits through the Red Sea," including shipments of oil, liquid natural gas and other energy supplies.

Describing it as a "precautionary pause," the company said the decision was under ongoing review but that it was prioritizing crew safety.

Oil prices rose Monday partly over market nerves about attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthis, which have targeted container ships and oil tankers passing through a nar-

row waterway that separates Yemen from East Africa and leads north to the Red Sea and Suez Canal, where an estimated 10% of the world's trade passes through.

The Houthis have targeted Israeli-linked vessels during Israel's war with Hamas but escalated their attacks last week, hitting or just missing ships without clear ties. In the past few days, four of the five world's largest container shipping companies have paused or rerouted movements through the Red Sea. Maersk, MSC, CMA CGM Group and Hapag-Lloyd are leaders in alliances that move basically all consumer goods between Asia and Europe, so "virtually all services will have to make this rerouting," said Simon Heaney, senior manager of container research for Drewry, a maritime research consultancy.

El-Sissi wins Egypt's presidential election

AP ■ CAIRO

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, who has ruled with an unquestioned grip for the past nine years, won reelection to a third, six-year term in office, election authorities announced Monday. He ran against three virtually unknown opponents.

El-Sissi recorded a landslide victory, securing 89.6% of the vote, the National Election Authority said. Turnout was 66.8% of more than 67 million registered voters. "The voting percentage is the highest in the history of Egypt," declared Hazem Badawy, the election commission chief, who announced the official results in a televised news conference. The vote was overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on Egypt's eastern border, which has threatened to expand into wider regional turmoil.

The North African country is also in the midst of an economic crisis, with monthly inflation surging above 30%. Over the past 22 months, the



Egypt pound has lost 50% of value against the dollar with one third of the country's 105 million people already living in poverty, according to official figures.

A key Western ally in the region, el-Sissi has faced international criticism over Egypt's human rights record and harsh crackdown on dissent. A career army officer, el-Sissi, as defense minister, led the 2013 military overthrow of an elected but divisive Islamist president amid widespread street protests against his one-year rule. El-Sissi was first elected as president in mid-2014, then reelect-

ed in 2018. A year later, constitutional amendments, passed in a general referendum, added two years to el-Sissi's second term, and allowed him to run for a third, six-year term.

His victory in the latest election was widely deemed a foregone conclusion. His three opponents were marginal political figures who were rarely seen during the election campaign. Hazem Omar, head of the Republican People's Party, came second with 4.5% of the vote, followed by Farid Zahran, head of the opposition Social Democratic Party with 4%. Abdel-Samad Yamama, chairman of the Wafd Party, received less than 2% of the vote.

An ambitious young presidential hopeful, Ahmed Altantawy, dropped out of the race after he failed to secure the required signatures from residents to secure his candidacy. He was considered el-Sissi's most credible opposition figure and said that harassment from security agencies against his campaign staff and supporters prevented him from reaching the vote threshold for candida-

cy.

In the months prior to the election, el-Sissi vowed to address the country's ailing economy without offering specifics.

Experts and economists widely agree that the current crisis stems from years of mismanagement and lopsided economy where private firms are squeezed out by state-owned companies. The Egyptian economy has also been hurt by the wider repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, which rattled the global market.

El-Sissi's government initiated an ambitious IMF-backed reform program in 2016, but the austerity measures sent prices soaring, exacting a heavy toll on ordinary Egyptians.

Last December, the government secured a second IMF deal on the promise of implementing economic reforms, including a floating exchange rate. The coast of basic goods have since jumped, particularly imports.

Pope approves blessings for same-sex couples if they don't resemble marriage

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis has formally approved allowing priests to bless same-sex couples, with a new document explaining a radical change in Vatican policy by insisting that people seeking God's love and mercy shouldn't be subject to "an exhaustive moral analysis" to receive it. The document from the Vatican's doctrine office, released Monday, elaborates on a letter Francis sent to two conservative cardinals that was published in October. In that preliminary response, Francis suggested such blessings could be offered under some circumstances if they didn't confuse the ritual with the sacrament of marriage.

The new document repeats that condition and elaborates on it, reaffirming that marriage

is a lifelong sacrament between a man and a woman.

And it stresses that blessings in question must be non-liturgical in nature and should not be conferred at the same time as a civil union, using set rituals or even with the clothing and gestures that belong in a wedding. But it says requests for such blessings for same-sex couples should not be denied full stop. It offers an extensive and broad definition of the term "blessing" in Scripture to insist that people seeking a transcendent relationship with God and looking for his love and mercy should not be subject to "an exhaustive moral analysis" as a precondition for receiving it.

"Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God," the document said. "The request for a

blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live."

He added: "It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered."

The Vatican holds that marriage is an indissoluble union between man and woman.

As a result, it has long opposed same-sex marriage.

And in 2021, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said flat-out that the church couldn't bless the unions of two men or two women because "God cannot bless sin." That document created an outcry, one it appeared even Francis was blindsided by even though he had technically approved its publication.

Indian-origin undercover reporter finds exploitation of care workers in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

A UK-based reporter from Kerala who went undercover as a care assistant in a care home for the elderly in north-east England discovered worrying levels of exploitation of staff, many of them recruited from overseas countries such as India.

Balakrishnan Balagopal's report for the 'BBC Panorama' investigation, which will be telecast here on Monday evening, found carers being charged thousands of pounds by an Indian recruitment agency and nurses locked into lengthy contracts with a care home with financial penalties if they tried to leave jobs.

According to official statis-

tics for the past year, 140,000 visas were issued to overseas workers to come to the UK to meet staff shortages in the health and care industry and 39,000 of these went to people from India.

"As I delved deeper into the lives of overseas caregivers, I heard a narrative of exploitation, debt, separation from family, and the constant fear of making mistakes," Balagopal said in a statement.

"The pursuit of a permanent visa became a tightrope walk, impacting the quality of care provided. The very individuals tasked with ensuring the happiness and well-being of residents found themselves entangled in a web of instability," he said.

Explosion rocks Guinea's capital

AP ■ CONAKRY (GUINEA)

An explosion and inferno at Guinea's main fuel depot in the capital of Conakry left several people dead or injured, authorities and local media reported Monday, as emergency services battled to put out the fire. The fire broke out at the Guinean Petroleum Company depot shortly after a massive explosion past midnight Sunday, Guinea's presidency said in a statement. The area in the heart of the Kaloum administrative district is home to most government offices.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire at the depot that supplies most of the fuel in Guinea, raising fears of a major supply disruption.

Officials have not confirmed any casualty figures though local media reported dozens of people were hurt, most of them hospitalised with



In this image made from video, residents watch a plume of smoke from a burning oil depot, in Conakry, Guinea, Monday.

serious injuries. At least four dead were confirmed at the Ignace Deen hospital, Conakry-based Le Courrier de Conakry news platform reported. Communications Minister Aminata Kaba said that damage was significant. The fire razed several offices and buildings within the area that was covered with thick

smoke. Many residents fled their homes. "I was sleeping when I heard a whistle, then a deafening explosion," said Mounatou Baldé, who lives in Kaloum. Authorities shut down schools and public places in the capital as emergency services raced to put out the fire, which caused a major blockade in the area.

North Korea conducts long-range missile test

North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, likely launching a developmental, more agile weapon, as it vows strong responses against US and South Korean moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans.

The South Korean government described the missile tested as a solid-fueled weapon, a likely reference to the North's road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM whose built-in solid propellants make its launch more difficult for adversaries to detect than liquid-fueled weapons. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un previously called the Hwasong-18 the most powerful weapon of his nuclear forces.

South Korea's military said the North Korean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said the missile was launched on an elevated angle, an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries. Japanese lawmaker Masahisa Sato, citing Japan's Defense Ministry, said the missile rose as high as 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles).

The reported flight details matched those of North Korea's second test of the Hwasong-18 missile in July. The North first test-fired the missile in April.

Since 2017, North Korea has carried out a slew of ICBM tests in a bid to acquire the ability to launch nuclear strikes on the US mainland. But all of its previous ICBM tests before April's Hwasong-18 launch involved liquid-propellant ICBMs, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time.

In a trilateral call, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his South Korean and Japanese counterparts condemned the North Korean launch, which the White House said was "a flagrant" violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by the North. It said the three advisers also underscored the importance of sharing data and coordinating responses



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news programme at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday AP/PTI

amid growing cooperation between North Korea and Russia. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol ordered officials to maintain a solid South Korean-US joint defense posture and respond "swiftly and overwhelmingly" to any North Korean provocations against South Korean territory. In a televised statement, senior South Korean military officer Lee Seung O separately warned that North Korea will be solely responsible for all the consequences that could occur due to its provocations.

The North's ICBM test was its second weapons firing in less than a day. On Sunday night, the North launched a short-range ballistic missile, also into the water off its east coast, according to the South Korean, Japanese and U.S. governments.

South Korea's military said the short-range missile flew about 570 kilometers (354 miles), a range that observers say is far enough to reach all key sites in South Korea, including US military installations, if weapons are launched near the border with the South. The US military said the launch highlighted "the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program."

Observers said the North's back-to-back launches were likely a protest against moves by South Korea and the United States to bolster their joint nuclear deterrence capabilities in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear threats.

Putin registered as candidate for presidential poll

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday presented documents to Russia's Central Election Commission to register as a candidate in the 2024 presidential election.

"He submitted them," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state media. Supporters of Putin on Saturday formally nominated him to run in the 2024 presidential election as an independent candidate.

The nomination by a group of at least 500 supporters, under Russian election law, is mandatory for those running not on a party ticket. Independent candidates also need to gather at least 300,000 signatures of support from 40 regions or more. The group that nominated Putin included top officials from the ruling United Russia party, prominent Russian actors and singers, athletes and other public figures.

Putin has used different tactics over the years. He ran as an independent in 2018 and his campaign gathered signatures. In 2012, he ran as a nominee of the Kremlin's United Russia party, so there was no need for signatures.

Earlier this month, lawmakers in Russia set the country's 2024 presidential election for March 17, moving Putin a step closer to a fifth term in office. Under constitutional reforms that he orchestrated, Putin is eligible to seek two more six-year terms after his current term expires next year, potentially allowing him to remain in power until 2036.

The tight control over Russia's political system that he has established during 24 years in power makes his reelection in March all but assured. Prominent critics who could challenge him on the ballot are either in jail or living abroad, and most independent media have been banned.

Ukraine's military chief says one of his offices was bugged

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's military chief said Monday that a covert listening device was found in one of the offices where he works, and hinted without elaborating that bugs were detected in other locations. Army Cmdr Valeriy Zaluzhnyi commented to local media about Sunday's revelation by Ukraine's Security Service that during a routine sweep a bug was found in a room he used. The device wasn't working, the agency said.

Suspicion immediately fell on Russia amid the almost 22-month war between the two countries that is set to grind on into another year.

"I have several offices where I work. This happened in one of them," Zaluzhnyi said. "We checked (the room) and found (the device)," he said. He added that listening devices were not only found in the office where he worked, but he didn't provide further details and left it unclear whether more than one device was found in the Ukraine General Staff premises.



The murky developments left lots of questions unanswered. Officials did not comment further. The intelligence services of both Russia and Ukraine have been active during the war.

Ukraine's military intelligence chief has survived 10 assassination attempts carried out by the Russian state security service, or FSB, according to Ukrainian authorities. Last month, his wife underwent hospital treatment after being diagnosed with heavy metals poisoning. Ukraine's spy agency, meanwhile, reportedly has been active in sabotage

operations far behind the front line. Artillery bombardments continue to claim civilians lives as the front-line fighting becomes bogged down by wintry mud and snow.

Two Ukrainian civilians were killed and at least two were injured over the previous 24 hours, the president's office reported Monday. In the north, the Russian army shelled the village of Krasnopillia in the Sumy region, killing a civilian in his home and damaging residential buildings, it said. In the south, an 81-year-old man died on the street during an attack on the centre of Kherson city.

Pak court rules against raising objections to delimitations

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday ruled against raising any objections to the delimitation of electoral boundaries after the issuance of the election schedule, removing further impediments in the path of the February 8 polls. The schedule for Pakistan's general elections was issued on Friday night by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after the intervention of the apex court.

A three-member bench of the top court, headed by interim Chief Justice Sardar Tariq, took up an appeal filed by the ECP against the Balochistan High Court's (BHC) decision to change the delimitations carried out by the polls organising body. The decision was announced on the ECP's appeal against the delimitation of two constituencies in Zhob and Shirani in Balochistan province. The SC also nullified



the BHC's decision on delimitation. The changes were made in two constituencies in Balochistan by the BHC and the ECP moved to the apex court to scrap the changes. The bench after hearing arguments set aside the BHC's order on Monday and accepted the ECP's appeal.

The electoral process could not be affected to provide relief to an individual, the court declared the high court decision null and void.

The move by the Supreme Court comes two days after it shot down an effort by the Lahore High Court to disrupt the election process by suspending appointments of returning officers and district returning officers from bureaucracy. Elections are set to be held on February 8 next year and the ECP on Friday issued a detailed schedule. Earlier the delimitation process was completed on November 30. After fresh delimitation, the National Assembly (NA) would consist of 336 seats, including 266 general seats, 60 seats reserved for women, and 10 for non-Muslims. The delimitation shows that the strength of the Assembly has decreased by six seats from the previously 342 seats.

Pak EC reserves verdict in organisational polls in PTI

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's top election body on Monday reserved its judgment in a case challenging the controversial organisational elections in the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party founded by the now-incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan. A five-member panel of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) concluded the hearing of multiple petitions filed by members of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) against the election held on December 2 in Peshawar.

Several petitioners led by PTI's estranged former leader Akbar S Ahmad challenged the election in the ECP by blaming the party for carrying out a selection process in the name of party election, aiming at throwing out party workers to give the reins to a few lawyers ahead of general elections on February 8.

The ECP panel, led by the Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, reserved the verdict after hearing arguments by the rival parties.

Earlier, following an order by the ECP to hold the polls within the party to retain the cricket bat as a party symbol, the PTI organised its party polls, electing Barrister Gohar Khan, a nominee of Imran Khan, as the new chairman.

Both Akbar S Ahmad and Gohar Khan attended the hearing. Khan, who is in jail, had decided to stay away from party elections as it would have invited a legal challenge by his opponents since he was disqualified by the ECP in the Toshakhana corruption case.

Geo News reported that PTI's counsel Barrister Ali Zafar presented his arguments, "The chairman is elected for five years while the panel is for three years. Voting is not required where there is an uncontested election."

Zafar also told the top poll body that the ECP is not a regulator in the intra-party polls and uncontested elections are not illegal, Geo News reported.

Suspected cyberattack paralyzes majority of gas stations across Iran

Tehran (AP): Nearly 70% of Iran's gas stations went out of service on Monday following possible sabotage — a reference to cyberattacks, Iranian state TV reported. The report said a "software problem" caused the irregularity in the gas stations. It urged people not to rush to the stations that were still operational.

Israeli media, including the Times of Israel, blamed the problem on an attack by a hacker group dubbed "Gonjeshke Darande" or predatory sparrow. State TV quoted a statement by the Oil Ministry as saying more than 30% of gas stations remain in service. The country has some 33,000 gas stations. In recent years, Iran has seen a series of cyberattacks on its filling stations, railway system and industries. Surveillance cameras in government buildings, including prisons, have

also been hacked in the past. In 2022, the Gonjeshke Darande group hacked a major steel company in the southwest of the country. A cyberattack on Iran's fuel distribution system in 2021 paralyzed gas stations across the country, leading to long lines of angry motorists. The hacking group claimed responsibility for the attack on fuel pumps. The country disconnected much of its government infrastructure from the internet after the Stuxnet computer virus — widely believed to be a joint US-Israeli creation — disrupted thousands of Iranian centrifuges in the country's nuclear sites in the late 2000s.

Iran, long sanctioned by the West, faces difficulties in getting up-to-date hardware and software, often relying on Chinese-manufactured electronics or older systems no longer being patched by manufacturers.

Hundreds protest growing arrival of Rohingya refugees by sea

AP ■ SABANG (INDONESIA)

More than 200 people protested Monday against the continued arrival of Rohingya refugees by boat on an island in Indonesia. Over 1,500 Rohingya, who fled violent attacks in Myanmar and now are leaving camps in neighboring Bangladesh in search of better lives, have arrived in Aceh off the tip of Sumatra since November. They have faced some hostility from fellow Muslims in Aceh.

The protesters, many of them residents and students, called on authorities and the UN refugee agency to remove all Rohingya refugees from Sabang island. They also want humanitarian organizations helping the refugees to leave. The latest arriving boat carried 139 Rohingya, including women and children.

"Our demand is to reject

them all. They must leave. Because Sabang people are also having a hard time, they cannot accommodate any more people," said one protester, Samsul Bahri.

Last week, Indonesia appealed to the international community for help. Indonesia once tolerated such landings of refugees, while Thailand and Malaysia push them away. But the growing hostility of some Indonesians toward the Rohingya has put pressure on President Joko Widodo's government to take action.

The president earlier this month said the government suspected a surge in human trafficking for the increase in Rohingya arrivals. Police in Aceh have detained at least four people suspected of human trafficking in the past two weeks. On Monday, police in Banda Aceh detained the captain of one boat, himself a

refugee, and charged him with smuggling people from Bangladesh.

"We examined 11 witnesses and some admitted to handling over 100,000 taka (\$904) money to him, and others handed over the money through their parents and relatives," police chief Fahmi Irwan Ramli said.

About 740,000 Rohingya were resettled in Bangladesh after fleeing their homes in Myanmar to escape a brutal counterinsurgency campaign carried out in 2017 by security forces. Accusations of mass rape, murder and the burning of entire villages are well documented, and international courts are considering whether Myanmar authorities committed genocide and other grave human rights abuses. Efforts to repatriate the Rohingya have failed because of doubts their safety can be assured.

Taiwan reports two Chinese balloons near its territory

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

Two Chinese balloons flew north of Taiwan, the island's Defense Ministry said Monday, as China increases pressure on the self-ruled territory it claims as its own ahead of a presidential election in January. The balloons crossed the sensitive Taiwan Strait separating the island from China and were detected about 110 nautical miles (204 kilometres) northwest of the northern port city of Keelung on Sunday, the ministry said.

It was the second time this month Taiwan reported a Chinese balloon near its territory, after one crossed southwest of Keelung on December 7. China's potential for using weather balloons to spy on other governments came into focus earlier this year, when the United States

shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic Ocean, drawing China's ire.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry did not say whether it suspected the balloon could have been used for spying. China's Foreign Ministry did not immediately comment. Beijing has increased pressure on Taiwan by sending military aircraft and warships

near the island almost daily. Taipei is preparing for a presidential election on January 13. The front-runner, current Vice President William Lai of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party, has been criticised by Beijing as a "separatist." Lai has said he wants to maintain peace and the status quo in relations with China.

Myanmar SC rejects Suu Kyi's spl appeal in bribery conviction

AP ■ BANGKOK

Myanmar's Supreme Court rejected on Monday a special appeal by the country's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi against her conviction in a case in which she was charged with corruption for allegedly receiving gold and thousands of dollars as a bribe from a former political colleague, a legal official said.

Suu Kyi, 78, was arrested on February 1, 2021, when the military seized power from her elected government. She is serving prison sentences totaling 27 years after being convicted of a string of criminal charges that her supporters and independent analysts say were concocted to discredit her and legitimise the military's seizure of power. Monday's trial was closed to

the media diplomats and spectators. Suu Kyi's lawyers were barred by a gag order from talking about it. A legal official relayed the court's decision to The Associated Press while insisting on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities. Suu Kyi was convicted, in the special appeal case, of receiving USD 6,000,000 and seven gold bars in 2017-18 from Phyoo Min Thein, the former chief minister of Yangon, the country's biggest city. He is also a former senior member of her political party. She was sentenced to five years in prison in April last year after being found guilty of bribery. Her lawyers, before they were served with gag orders in late 2021, said she rejected all the corruption allegations against her as "absurd."

Special appeals are usually

the final stage of the appeals process in Myanmar. However, they can be re-examined by the Special Appeals Tribunal or the Plenary Tribunal if the chief justice sees an aspect of public interest. Initial appeals filed by her lawyers in most of her cases have already been rejected at least once by the lower court. Appeals of her convictions on election fraud, breaching the country's official secrets act and five other corruption charges are still being processed, the legal official said. Suu Kyi's legal team has faced several hurdles, including being unable to meet with her to receive her instructions. They have applied at least six times for permission to meet with her since they last saw her in person in December 2022, but have not received any response, the legal official said.

B'desh court denies opp leader's bail request ahead of election

AP ■ DHAKA

A court in Bangladesh's capital on Monday denied a bail request from a top opposition leader who was jailed, pending investigation, following an October anti-government protest that turned violent and is therefore unable to guide his party ahead of a general election next month.

Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury made the ruling during a Chief Metropolitan Court hearing where Bangladesh Nationalist Party Secretary-General, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir appeared. The same court also denied a bail petition from another senior party leader, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, a former commerce minister. The Bangladesh

Nationalist Party, led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, is boycotting the Jan. 7 election after its demands for a caretaker government to organize the voting were not met. The party accused Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of rigging the 2018 vote and says it does not have any faith the next election will be conducted fairly.

Supporters argue the election will not reflect the will of voters without the main opposition party's participation.

Alamgir is the party's key leader since the ailing Zia is hospitalized and faces 17 years of imprisonment following her conviction in two corruption cases that her party says were politically motivated.

The boycott of the election by Zia's party means voters in the South Asian nation of 166

million have little choice but to reelect Hasina as she seeks a fourth consecutive term. Hasina, Zia's archrival, has pledged a free and fair election.

The party's decision to boycott the polls comes amid a months-long crackdown on opposition politicians and other government critics. It says more than 20,000 party people have been arrested across the country since Oct. 28, the day of a massive rally where a police official was killed, allegedly by Zia's supporters. Alamgir was arrested on sabotage charges the day after the event. The magistrate on Monday denied a request for Alamgir and Khasru to be transferred to police custody for 10 days so they could be interrogated, saying police could question them in jail, if necessary.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
SSA-12018/5/2023-MIS-SEC/1372585/2023 Date :18.12.2023
Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites following bids through GeM portal :

- GEM/2023/B/4323972 Dated: 11-12-2023 for supply of Secondary level Science kit and Secondary level Mathematics Kit.
- GEM/2023/B/4354896 Dated: 16-12-2023 for Supply of Television for Digital Library in schools.

Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit their bid in GeM portal accordingly. The bid is also available in SSA website : <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

Janasanyog/CF/4275/23/19-December 2023

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THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX No. 0172-5041872,66

Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop

tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh a) e Tender for the purchase of packing material for Seed processing Plant, Bassi Palanaa for Kharif 2023 & Rabi 2023-24. b) Short term e-tender for Purchase of:- • Maize Hybrid Seed • Bajra Hybrid (Multicut) Seed	Annual 623 Qtls. 399.50 Qtls.
2.	For Verka Farikot Dairy Hiring the outsource Agency (Service Provider) for providing of Unskilled, Semi-Skilled, Skilled, Highly Skilled, B- category, A-category and for the different vacant sanctioned posts of Milk Union Farikot as per requirement.	

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

Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

Google has removed 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store, says FM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government on Monday informed Parliament that Google has suspended or removed over 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store between April 2021 and July 2022. The government is constantly engaged with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other regulators and stakeholders concerned to control fraudulent loan apps, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. The matter is also regularly discussed and monitored in the meetings of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), an inter-regulatory forum under the chairmanship of the Finance Minister. The objective is to remain proactive, maintain cyber security preparedness with constant vigilance, and take appropriate and timely action

to mitigate any such vulnerabilities in the Indian financial system, she said. As part of steps taken to control fraudulent loan apps, she said, the RBI has shared a 'whitelist' of legal apps with the government of India, and this list was shared by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) with Google, whose app store is the primary source of distribution of digital lending apps. Google has updated its policy regarding enforcement of loan lending apps on the Play Store and has also deployed additional policy requirements with strict enforcement actions for lending apps in India, she added. As per their revised policy, only those apps are allowed on the Play Store which are published by Regulated Entities (REs) or those working in partnership with REs. "Between April 2021 and July 2022, Google also reviewed approximately 3,500 to 4,000



loan lending apps and suspended or removed over 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store," she said. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), has been regularly

analysing the digital lending apps proactively. Arctic Based on its analysis and complaints reported on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the I4C team analyses apps on various parameters and reports to Meity apps found suspicious for blocking, she said. To spread awareness against cybercrimes and to safeguard interests of citizens, several steps have been taken by the government, the RBI, and banks, she said. The RBI has formulated conducting of electronic-Banking Awareness And Training (e-BAAT) which has largely focused on awareness about fraud and risk mitigation, while a Nation-wide Intensive Awareness Programme (NIAP) was carried out in collaboration with the REs. In a separate response, Sitharaman said more than 44.46 crore loans amounting to Rs 26.12 lakh crore (as of

November 24, 2023) have been sanctioned to the borrowers under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) since its inception. Under PMMY, collateral-free institutional credit up to Rs 10 lakh is provided by Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), i.e., Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs), Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs). Any individual who is otherwise eligible to take a loan and has a business plan for a small business enterprise can avail of a loan under the scheme. Loans can be availed for income-generating activities in the manufacturing, trading, and services sectors, and also for activities allied to agriculture, under three categories, - Shishu (loans up to Rs 50,000), Kishor (loans above Rs 50,000 and up to Rs 5 lakh) and Tarun (loans above Rs 5 lakh and up to Rs 10 lakh).

India, UK to hold next round of talks for free trade agreement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India and the UK officials in January next year will hold the next round of talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) to resolve remaining issues, the commerce ministry said on Monday. The 13th round of negotiations for the proposed pact was held between September 18 and December 15. "The UK and India will continue to negotiate towards a comprehensive and ambitious Free Trade Agreement. The fourteenth round of negotiations will take place in January 2024," the ministry said in a statement. These negotiations focused on complex issues including goods, services, and investment. An Indian team was in London recently. Issues which need to be resolved include duty cuts on electric vehicles and whiskey and the movement of professionals. Talks are also progressing on the proposed bilateral investment treaty (BIT). India and the UK launched the

talks for a free-trade agreement (FTA) in January 2022, to conclude talks by Diwali (October 24, 2022), but the deadline was missed due to political developments in the UK. There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which include goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights. The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties. On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, automobiles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items. Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance). The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23 from USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22.

Stock markets snap record breaking run on profit taking; Sensex drops 168 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Monday due to profit-taking by investors after a record-breaking rally in the last week and a largely weak trend in Asian markets. Snapping its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 168.66 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 71,315.09. During the day, it fell 341.46 points or 0.47 per cent to 71,142.29. The Nifty fell by 38 points or 0.18 per cent to 21,418.65. Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid, ITC, JSW Steel, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, IndusInd Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major laggards. Sun Pharma, Reliance Industries, HCL



Tech, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance and Maruti were among the gainers. Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "The market started on a subdued note as concerns over oil supply disruptions through the Red Sea and elevated valuations dented investor sentiment." In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower while Seoul ended in the green. European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended mostly with gains on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude

declined 0.29 per cent to USD 76.33 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continued their buying momentum as they bought equities worth Rs 9,239.42 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Rising for the third day running, the BSE benchmark jumped 969.55 points or 1.37 per cent to settle at its record closing high of 71,483.75 on Friday. During the day, it surged 1,091.56 points or 1.54 per cent to 71,605.76, its all-time intra-day high level. The Nifty climbed 273.95 points or 1.29 per cent to settle at its new closing high of 21,456.65. During the day, it zoomed 309.6 points or 1.46 per cent to hit its record intra-day peak of 21,492.30.

India oilmeal exports fall 22 per cent in November, says industry data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Oilmeal exports fell 22 per cent annually to 3.17 lakh tonnes in November, mainly due to fall in shipment of rapeseed meals, according to industry data. In a statement on Monday, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) Executive Director B V Mehta said the export of oilmeals stood at 3,17,870 tonnes in November compared to 4,07,193 tonnes in the same month last year. Rapeseed meals exports declined to 93,124 tonnes last month from 1,34,952 tonnes in the year-ago period while outward shipments of soyabean meals rose to 1,83,429 tonnes from 1,64,075 tonnes. As per the SEA data, the overall export of oilmeals during April to November period stood at 28,83,921 tonnes, up 21 per cent from 23,82,690 tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year. SEA said that there has been a surge in export of soyabean meal. "International demand for Indian soyabean meals has benefited from improved price competitiveness and the shortage of Argentine export supplies in recent months," the association said. The total export of soyameals during April-November was at 8.57 lakh tonnes compared to 3.25 lakh tonnes during the



Government to launch 9th round of commercial coal mine auction tomorrow

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Centre will launch the ninth round of commercial coal mines auction on Wednesday, offering as many as 26 blocks to bidders. In pursuit of ensuring energy security and driving economic development, the Ministry of Coal is set to embark on another significant stride with the launch of the 9th round of Commercial Coal Mine Auctions here on 20th December 2023, the Coal Ministry said in a statement. "Of the 26 coal mines to be auctioned, seven are fully explored, while 19 are partially explored blocks," the ministry said. These mines are in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana. Coal and Mines Minister Pralhad Joshi will be the chief guest and Minister of State for Railways, Coal and Mines Ramesh Chandra Patil Danve will be the guest of honour on the occasion. Unlike previous commercial coal mine auctions, there are no restrictions on the sale or utilisation of coal. "Notably, eligibility criteria have been eliminated, removing any technical or financial barriers for participation," the coal ministry said.

RBI board discusses prevailing economic, financial scenario

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The Reserve Bank of India's board on Monday reviewed the prevailing economic and financial scenario, including the challenges posed by geopolitical developments. The 605th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of Reserve Bank of India was held today in Ekta Nagar (Kevadia) under the Chairmanship of Governor Shaktikanta Das. "The board reviewed the economic and financial scenario, both domestic and global, including the challenges posed by global geopolitical developments," the central bank said in a statement. It also discussed the activities of select central office departments and the draft report on trend and progress of banking in India, 2022-23. Directors on the central board Satish K Marathe, Ravathy Iyer, Anand Gopal Mahindra and Ravindra H Dholakia attended the meeting. RBI Deputy Governors Michael Debarbra Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar, and Swaminathan J as well as Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth also participated in the meeting, the statement said.

India needs 1,000 scrapping centres, 400 fitness test points: Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday said the country needs 1,000 vehicle scrapping centres and 400 automated fitness test centres. Launching 'DigiELV', Gadkari said the road ministry has so far approved 85 vehicle scrapping facilities across the country. "We need 1,000 vehicle scrapping centres in the country and at least 400 automated fitness test centres," he said. DigiELV is a trading platform for End of Life Vehicle Certificate of Deposit. Anyone who currently owns a Certificate of Deposit (CD) can sell the CD through the platform. A CD is issued when a user submits a vehicle for scrapping at an RVSE. Noting that the National Vehicle Scrapage

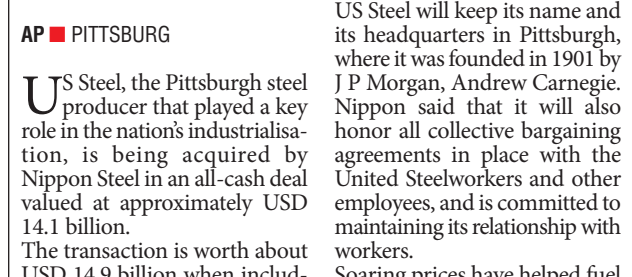


Policy is a win-win for all stakeholders, the minister said that India can be a scrapping hub in South Asia.

"Circular economy is very important and it is going to create jobs in the country," Gadkari said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the National Vehicle Scrapage Policy in August 2021 and said it would help phase out unfit and polluting vehicles and also promote a circular economy. Under the new policy, the Centre had said the states and Union Territories (UTs) will provide up to 25 per cent tax rebate on road tax for vehicles that are purchased after scrapping old vehicles. The vehicle scrapping policy has come into effect from April 1, 2022. Announced in the Union Budget 2021-22, the policy provides for fitness tests after 20 years for personal vehicles, while commercial vehicles will require it after the completion of 15 years.

Storied US Steel to be acquired for more than \$14 billion by Nippon Steel

AP ■ PITTSBURGH
US Steel, the Pittsburgh steel producer that played a key role in the nation's industrialisation, is being acquired by Nippon Steel in an all-cash deal valued at approximately USD 14.1 billion. The transaction is worth about USD 14.9 billion when including the assumption of debt. The price tag for US Steel is nearly double what was offered just four months ago by rival Cleveland Cliffs. US Steel, which rejected that offer, confirmed the offering price from Nippon early Monday.



US Steel will keep its name and its headquarters in Pittsburgh, where it was founded in 1901 by J P Morgan, Andrew Carnegie. Nippon said that it will also honor all collective bargaining agreements in place with the United Steelworkers and other employees, and is committed to maintaining its relationship with workers. Soaring prices have helped fuel consolidation in the steel industry this decade. Steel prices more than quadrupled near the start of the pandemic to near USD 2,000 per metric ton by the summer of 2021 as supply chains experienced gridlock, a symptom of surging demand for



goods and the lack of anticipation of that demand. Nippon, which will pay USD 55 per share for US Steel, said Monday that the deal will bolster its manufacturing and technology capabilities. It will also expand Nippon's production in the US and add to its positions in Japan, India and the ASEAN region. Nippon said the acquisition is anticipated to bring its total annual crude steel capacity to 86 million tonnes and help it capitalise on growing demand for high-grade steel, automotive

and electrical steel. "The transaction builds on our presence in the United States and we are committed to honouring all of US Steel's existing union contracts," Nippon President Eiji Hashimoto said in a prepared statement. US Steel CEO David Burritt said that the sale is beneficial to the United States, "ensuring a competitive, domestic steel industry, while strengthening our presence globally." The acquisition has been approved by the boards of both companies and is targeted to close in the second or third quarter of 2024. It still needs approval from US Steel shareholders.



Gold rises ₹100; silver jumps ₹350

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 62,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid strong cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had ended at Rs 62,650 per 10 grams. Silver also jumped Rs 350 to Rs 77,950 per kilogram. "Gold prices edged higher on Monday, in the Delhi markets trading at Rs 62,750/10 gram, up by Rs 100 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the futures trade, February contract of gold declined Rs 162 to Rs 62,030 per 10 grams on

the MCX. However, March contact of silver climbed Rs 153 to Rs 74,678 per kg on the bourse. In the global markets, gold and silver were trading higher at USD 2,024 per ounce and USD 24 per ounce, respectively. Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,024 per ounce, up USD 5 from its previous close in the international markets. Navneet Damani, Senior VP of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Gold price continue to trade higher, extending a push above key levels on the back of US Fed's stance they were done with raising interest rates, and will consider rate cuts in 2024, which sparked steep losses in the dollar and Treasury yields."

AERA directs certain airport operators to withdraw additional charges levied on chartered flight operators

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Regulator AERA has directed certain airport operators to withdraw additional charges being levied on chartered flight operators and the operators concerned are refunding the additional charges, according to the government. The Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) regulates and approves the tariff cap for ground handling services at major airports in the country. On Monday, Minister of State for Civil Aviation V K Singh told the Rajya Sabha that recent-

ly, AERA received complaints from some of the chartered aircraft operators that certain airport operators have increased operational charges relating to handling of chartered flights. "Accordingly, AERA took up the issue with the concerned airport operators for immediate withdrawal of additional charges/making of non-aeronautical services (elite meet



and greet services) as a pre-requisite for charter aircraft operations for landing at these airports." "Subsequent to AERA's intervention, concerned airport operator had withdrawn the additional operational charges related to chartered aircraft operators. The airport operator is refunding these additional charges," he said in a written reply. Separately, the minister said specific airports are not granted point of call status in the bilateral Air Services Agreement (ASA) between India and the respective country. He said the civil aviation ministry has received requests from the Kannur International Airport for granting it as a point

Real Madrid has depleted defense

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has some tinkering to do with his defense after yet another serious injury blow.

Central defender David Alaba became the third Madrid player to sustain an anterior cruciate ligament injury on Sunday, having to be substituted before halftime in the team's 4-1 win against Villarreal in the Spanish league.

The Austria international is expected to undergo surgery on his left knee in the coming days and is not likely to play again this season.

"We are really sad about it because he is another player that we will lose," Ancelotti said. "I've never had three of my players get cruciate injuries in four months, it's incredible."

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Éder Militão also underwent surgeries to repair their knee ligaments this year, while midfielder Eduardo Camavinga and forward Arda Güler sustained other knee problems that sidelined them for significant periods. Also out for Madrid are forward Vinicius Júnior and right back Dani Carvajal.

The injury setbacks have left Ancelotti in a tough spot, having to find ways to rebuild the squad entering the decisive second half of the season.

Madrid visits Alaves on

AFTER ALABA BECOMES 3RD PLAYER WITH SERIOUS KNEE LIGAMENT INJURY



Thursday for its final match of the year. It leads the Spanish league by a point over Girona, which has a game in hand against Alaves later on Monday. Early next year Madrid begins its Copa del Rey campaign and plays in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. In the Champions League, Madrid will face Leipzig in the round of 16. "What the team has to do is

exactly what it's been doing so far," Ancelotti said. "We've done more than what anyone believed we were capable of. Despite the problems, this team fights, digs in, plays some great football and shows extraordinary commitment. That's the only way to fill in for all the guys who are out injured." The defense is likely to make Ancelotti lose some extra sleep. In addition to the many other

absentees, left back Ferland Mendy had to be replaced at halftime on Sunday because of a muscle ailment. Ancelotti downplayed the problem, but it wasn't clear when Mendy would return to action. Nacho Fernández replaced Alaba on Sunday, but the only other central defender currently available for Ancelotti was Antonio Rüdiger. Ancelotti said he may need to

use midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni in the middle of the defense. The France international is just returning from a foot injury, though, having made his first appearance since October as a late substitute against Villarreal on Sunday. "Tchouaméni is our first option," Ancelotti said. "Of course, it isn't his natural position, but this is an emergency and I think he can fill in."

Ancelotti will likely complete the squad with some reserve-team players, and the club may also sign someone during the winter transfer window. Ancelotti said Militão and Courtois could potentially make it back to the squad before the end of the season, but did not offer any other detail on a timetable. "We'll come back stronger," Militão said after Sunday's match while sending his support for teammate Alaba on social media.

OTHER MATCHES

Barcelona, trailing Madrid by seven points, will try to end a three-match winless streak on Wednesday when it hosts last-place Almeria, which is the only team yet to win in the Spanish league after 17 rounds. Barcelona is coming off a 1-1 draw at Valencia on Saturday, a 3-2 loss to Antwerp in the Champions League on Tuesday, and a 4-2 home defeat against Girona in the league last week. Girona, the season's biggest surprise so far, visits seventh-place Real Betis on Thursday, while fourth-place Atletico Madrid hosts Getafe on Tuesday with a chance to win a club-record 21st straight win at home in all competitions. Struggling Sevilla, expected to announce Quique Flores as its new coach on Monday, faces Granada on Tuesday as it tries to stay outside the relegation zone.



Xabi, Leverkusen aim to take unbeaten run into 2024

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)

Xabi Alonso and his Bayer Leverkusen team have already secured top spot in the Bundesliga for the winter break. Now they need one more good result to take their record unbeaten run into the new year, too.

Even Harry Kane - on the best scoring run ever for a new Bundesliga arrival - hasn't been able to get Bayern Munich into its usual top spot going into the three-week break.

Leverkusen's 3-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt on Sunday was composed and clinical. In fact, the performance had everything that was missing from Bayern's 5-1 loss to the same opponent the week before. Nigerian striker Victor Boniface was again the star for Leverkusen. He finished with a goal and an assist, and the other goal was scored by Jeremie Frimpong on the rebound from Boniface's shot.

"It's been good, a big credit to the coach, the staff, all the players," Boniface said of Leverkusen's season so far. "Everyone is giving 100% to achieve something like this and we are really proud of ourselves."

Leverkusen's record in all competitions for the 2023-24 season is 21 wins, three draws, no losses. That makes it the only unbeaten team in any of Europe's five biggest leagues, all the more impressive given that Leverkusen was in the relegation zone when Alonso took charge 14 months ago.

The last test of 2023 before the winter break is at home Wednesday against Bochum, while second-place Bayern visits Wolfsburg. Now that Leverkusen looks like a true title contender, racking up points before the winter break takes on extra importance because Leverkusen could miss up to five players in January and February during the African Cup of Nations.

That includes Boniface, whose strong form for Leverkusen has put him firmly in contention to start for Nigeria. He made his debut for his country in September and has played all five games since.

In Boniface's absence, Leverkusen will need to lean on Patrik Schick, who has struggled with injuries since his breakout European Championship campaign for the Czech Republic two years ago, but has scored three times in eight games since his return in October. Filling in for the impressive Edmond Tapsoba and Odilon Kossounou in defense will be especially tricky too.

Kane scored twice in Bayern's 3-0 win over Stuttgart to become the fastest player ever to 20 Bundesliga goals, needing just 14 games to achieve the feat.

Bayern is four points off Leverkusen but has one more game to play because of a game against Union Berlin that was rescheduled for Jan. 24 because of heavy snow.

It's a measure of Leverkusen's achievement that Bayern already has 35 points and still isn't top. At the same stage of the season last year, Bayern had 31 from its opening 14 games and led by four. Only a dramatic slide in the second half of the season allowed Borussia Dortmund to get close to challenging Bayern for the title.

Bayern's squad won't face the same impact from international tournaments in the new year, though right-back Noussair Mazraoui is expected to play for Morocco at the African Cup of Nations and central defender Kim Min-jae will be in action for South Korea at the Asian Cup. The return of Matthijs de Ligt to the squad against Stuttgart after a knee injury, even if he was only an unused substitute, is an encouraging sign that Bayern will have cover for Kim.

After the three-week winter break, the Bundesliga resumes Jan.



Urs fires 4 under 68 to occupy tied fifth place in LET final stage

PTI ■ MARRAKECH (MOROCCO)

India's Pranavi Urs maintained the momentum as she carded a sprightly 4-under 68 in the second round for a tied fifth position at the Ladies European Tour's Final Qualifier on Monday. Urs had also scored a 68 in the first round at Maaden course and the Mysuru girl is now standing at 9-under after her effort at the Royal Golf De Marrakech course.

Singapore's Shannon Tan also fired a round of 68 to share the fifth place with Urs. She is three shots behind Mexican Fernanda Lira who produced a round of 71 and leads the field at 12-under-par. Lira had shot a women's course record of 62 on day one.

The players are playing two rounds each at the Par-72 course at Royal Golf Marrakech and Par-73 at Al Maaden course. As Urs shot a bogey free 68 with two birdies on either side of the RGM layout, some of the other Indians also showed some improvement. Neha Tripathi, who had a 3-over 75 at RGM improved to 6-under 67 at Al

Maaden. She is now 3-under at Tied-25. Vani Kapoor (73-70) is now tied 37, Tvesa Malik (74-70) is tied 51, Amandeep Drall (75-70) is tied 63, Ridhima Dilawari (74-72) is tied 77, Avani Prashanth (76-71) is tied 85, Jasmine Shekar (75-74) is tied 105, Seher Atwal (77-74) is tied 119, Sneha Singh (83-72) is tied 141, Ananya Datar (80-79) is tied 148 and Durga Nittur (80-81) is tied 150. After four rounds, the top 65 and ties will play the final round. The top 20 and ties get a full card for 2024 and those finishing from 21st to 50th ties will get fewer starts. Starting from the tenth, Urs birdied the 14th and the 16th and then added birdies on the first and second to be 4-under through 11 holes. But she was not able to convert any more of the chances and parred the rest for a 68. Neha opened with a birdie on the first, but gave it back on the second. After a par, she birdied the fourth and then had five birdies in a row from sixth to tenth. She again birdied in the 12th at which point she was 7-under through 12 holes.

'AIFF to approach 24 PIO players for India selection'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) is exploring the possibility of selecting Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) for the national duty and will approach 24 such players soon, president Kalyan Chaubey said. The inclusion of PIO and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) players in the national team has been a topic of debate for a long time.

National team head coach Igor Stimac has already advocated the need to select PIO players for the Indian team. But it is easier said than done as the Indian law does not allow dual citizenship. If a PIO players want to play for India, they have to take up Indian citizenship. A person must also stay in India for 12 months before applying for citizenship.

"We are looking to approach 24 PIO players who are playing across the world. But you know there is the issue of dual citizenship (not being permitted to play for India)."

"So, we have to see how this can be done within the framework of Central Government's rules," Chaubey told PTI in an interview, without revealing the names of the players.

"We are having internal discussions on the matter and will come out with more details once more clarity is established."

According to the draft minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of November 9, a sub-committee of the AIFF under Punjab Football Association president Samir Thapar "will collate data and information on the subject" to enable the national federation to arrive at a decision.

Mansi, Murugesan win gold

Bhagat secures 2 silvers at Fazza Dubai Para Badminton International



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mansi Joshi and Thulasi-mathi Murugesan emerged champions in women's doubles SL3-SU5 category, while Tokyo Paralympic champion Pramod Bhagat signed off with two silver medals at the 5th Fazza Dubai Para Badminton International 2023 here. The event was held in UAE from December 11 to December 17. Mansi and Murugesan, ranked second in World Para-Badminton, outwitted the Indonesian

pair of Leani Ratri Oktilla and Khalimatus Sadiyah 15-21 21-14 21-6 to secure the gold in women's doubles SL3-SU5 category. Bhagat, also a Para Asian gold medalist, went down 17-21 18-21 to England's Daniel Bethell in the SL3 final to finish second best. In mixed doubles SL3-SU5 category, Bhagat and Manisha Ramdass went down to Indonesia's Hikmat Ramdani and Leani Ratri Oktilla 14-21 11-21 in the final. Team India also secured bronze

medal in mixed doubles SL3 and SU5 with Kumar Nitesh and Thulasimathi Murugesan. In the men's SL 4 category, Tokyo silver medalist Suhas Yathiraj secured silver, while Sukant Kadam and Tarun won bronze medals. In the women's singles (SL4) Palak Kohli bagged a bronze. In men's doubles SL 3- SL4 category, Manoj Sarkar and his Korean partner Cho Nadan secured silver, while Kumar Nitesh and Tarun secured bronze.

AP ■ BOLOGNA

Jose Mourinho stated publicly for the first time that he wants to extend his contract at Roma - casting aside speculation that the veteran coach could be headed to a lucrative deal in cash-rich Saudi Arabia. But the 60-year-old coach's pledge came with a caveat. "I want to continue at Roma. And if I stay at Roma we've got to really think hard about the financial fair play limitations we have, because maybe it's better to work with younger players and give them some chances," Mourinho told Serie A rights holder DAZN after Roma was beaten 2-0 at Bologna on Sunday. "That could present an opportunity for development, compared to players who have nothing left to develop. I want to continue and I'm open to a new approach," Mourinho added. "When everyone is available we have sufficient quality to fight it out. We didn't finish fourth last season because we reached

Mourinho wants to stay at Roma



a European final and we had a lot of physical issues," Mourinho said after a game in which Roma was missing Romelu Lukaku and Paulo Dybala.

"Without fundamental players, obviously it's tough for us." Roma finished sixth in Serie A last season. Mourinho's three-year deal at Roma

expires after this season and Roma's American owners have given no indication on their plans for the coach.

While Mourinho guided Roma to European finals in both of his first two seasons at the club - winning the inaugural Conference League in 2022 and finishing runner-up to Seville in the Europa League last season - he's also had a series of suspensions for his verbal and at times vicious verbal attacks on referees.

"We haven't talked about it. You are the first person I have said this to," Mourinho told a DAZN reporter when asked if he's told the club yet of his desire to stay. Mourinho added that Roma's fans, who travel to away games en masse throughout Italy and Europe, are "special."

"It would always be tough for me to separate from them," he said. "If the separation has to happen, it would never be because of my own choice."

Mbappé scores but PSG concedes late equaliser

AP ■ PARIS

French league leader Paris Saint-Germain missed the chance to move seven points clear after conceding a sloppy stoppage-time equalizer in a 1-1 draw at Lille on Sunday. Star striker Kylian Mbappé's penalty gave PSG the lead in the 66th minute before Canada striker Jonathan David levelled four minutes into injury time. Still, with Monaco and Nice losing their games, PSG is five points ahead with one round of matches left on Wednesday before the mid-season winter break.

PSG substitute Marco Asensio's poor pass was intercepted by Remy Cabella, whose deflected shot was well saved by goalkeeper Arnau Tenas. But the alert David got ahead of central defender Marquinhos to head in

the goal that ensured Lille stays in fourth place after 16 matches. Mbappé was kept quiet until a penalty was awarded when defender Bafodé Diakité impeded defender Lucas Hernandez. Goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier guessed the right way but was beaten by Mbappé's power and precision.

It took Mbappé's league-leading goal tally this season to 16 and it was also the 17th goal he has been involved in against Lille during his career - 11 goals and six assists. But as so often in recent seasons, Mbappé's goals paper over cracks in the PSG team, notably when it comes to defending a lead and coping under pressure.

Brest is proving the surprise team in the league this season and is in fifth place on goal difference behind Lille after win-

ning 2-0 at Nantes in an earlier game.

Brest's fourth win in the past five games had left Lille needing at least a draw to reclaim fourth. PSG midfielder Vitorinha's angled shot was saved by Chevalier in the 36th minute of an even first half, where Edon Zhegrova was dangerous down the right for Lille.

In the lunchtime kick off, Brest scored in quick succession early in the second half through midfielder Hugo Magnetti and Benin striker Steve Mounié following a corner.

Before the game, Nantes fans held a minute's silence for a supporter from the Brigade Loire ultras group who died after being stabbed before a home game against Nice on Dec. 2. His face was projected on the stadium's big screen at Stade de la Beaujoire and Nantes players



warmed up with his name - Maxime - written on their training tops.

Before the game, his name was also carried on a giant banner held by Brigade Loire ultras and other home fans as they walked to the stadium from the location in Nantes where he was fatally stabbed during an altercation. Also Sunday, Marseille continued its improvement under coach Gennaro Gattuso by beating last-place Clermont 2-1 at home for a fourth straight league win. Defender Michael Murillo fired Marseille ahead in the 26th after being set up by in-form striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Amine Harit doubled the lead in the 42nd when he followed up after Iliman Ndiaye's shot had been saved following a pass from Aubameyang, who went close moments later.

Striker Jim Allevenah scored for Clermont in the 58th.

OTHER MATCHES: Central defender Maxime Estève headed in early on from silky playmaker Téji Savanier's cross as Montpellier won 1-0 at Metz. Savanier is among the best passers in the league. Despite a yearly salary of around 1.4 million euros (\$1.5 million), he still lives where he grew up on the outskirts of Montpellier among a Gypsy commune, sharing a modest-size flat with his wife and children in a low-income housing estate. Savanier remains strongly attached to the local community and often hosts barbecues.

Also, veteran striker Kevin Gameiro was on target as coach Patrick Vieira's Strasbourg side won 2-1 at Lorient to move up to ninth, and Toulouse drew 0-0 at home to Rennes.

PATIDAR OR RINKU SET FOR DEBUT

PTI ■ GÖEBERHA (SOUTH AFRICA)

Immensely gifted Rajat Patidar will be pitted against the flamboyant Rinku Singh for the lone available batting slot when a determined Indian team gears up for the final kill against a lacklustre South Africa in the second ODI here on Tuesday. After young pacers Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan produced a near flawless performance in the opening game that India won by eight wickets, KL Rahul wouldn't like to take his foot off the pedal and aim to heal the scars of 0-3 defeat here under his leadership back in 2022. India will handover a debut ODI cap to one of its reserve batters as Shreyas Iyer has linked up with the Test squad after Sunday's game with an eye on the two-match series, starting on 'Boxing Day'. The world wants to watch more of Rinku, the left-hander, who is earning new fans by thousands with every passing match. The diminutive left-hander has shown that he has the technique and temperament to succeed on South African tracks that offer way more bounce compared to the sub-continent pitches.

However, the Indore-based right-hander Patidar had made it to Indian ODI team back in 2022 itself but in the past one year had to struggle and underwent a heel surgery earlier this year. The Indian team management has very specific roles for players and while Rinku is being looked upon as a finisher at No. 6, the 30-year-old Patidar is more of a specialist No. 4 when he bats for his state team Madhya Pradesh. Hence, with Iyer, a right-hander vacating a slot in the playing XI, his like-for-like replacement is Patidar. In case of Rinku, the No.6 slot currently has been given to Sanju Samson, who is playing as a specialist batter behind skipper KL Rahul, who is donning the big gloves. As has been the template of national team managements, they would like to give Samson, who is senior to Rinku, a fair go at that slot before turning to the southpaw. However Rinku's brilliant List A record (near 50 average) will force the team management to give him a go. In fact, both Rinku and Patidar could get a go but in that case, Tilak Varma, who got to face just

2ND ODI: INDIA LOOK TO SEAL SERIES



a couple of deliveries in the opening game, will have to be dropped from the playing eleven. That doesn't seem very logical at the moment. The opening game witnessed the debut of young left-handed opener B Sai Sudharsan, whose silken half-century held a lot of promise going into the future. For the hosts, this series is a massive white ball test for its batters in the post Quinton de Kock era. De Kock's exhilarating stroke-play at the top, allowed the Rassie van der Dussens, Heinrich Klaasens and David Millers to accelerate. But in slightly helpful bowling conditions, India's fringe pacers exposed their shortcomings and they will have to put up a way better show in the second game, which will be a day/night affair.

NOT MUCH CHANGE IN BOWLING COMBINATION
The bowling department will not need much tinkering after a near-perfect performance from Arshdeep and Avesh. Mukesh Kumar, whose 0/46 in 7 overs did stick out like a sore thumb, would want to present an improved version of his bowling as he either went too full or at times bowled too short during the opening game.

In case the team management wants to experiment, it can replace Mukesh with his Bengal teammate Akash Deep but that looks unlikely in the second game when the team is gunning for series glory. In the spin department, both Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav, who have not been picked for Tests, wouldn't like to miss out on international matches and it is unlikely that they would volunteer to rest which would allow Rahul to give Yuzvendra Chahal a chance to play the only format he has been selected.

SQUADS:
India: KL Rahul (captain and wk), Rituraj Gaikwad, B Sai Sudharsan, Tilak Varma, Rajat Patidar, Sanju Samson, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mukesh Kumar, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Rinku Singh, Akash Deep, Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar.
South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Ottneil Bartman, Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi, Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasens, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Mithali Pongwana, Wiaan Mulder, Andile Phehlukwayo, Rassie van der Dussen, Tabraiz Shamsi, Lizaad Williams, Kyle Verreynne.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legendary India cricketer Sunil Gavaskar reckons that Hardik Pandya, as the new leader, will bring in "fresh thinking" in the Mumbai Indians camp as Rohit Sharma appeared fatigued and has not contributed enough with the bat in the last few years. The India T20 skipper was traded to Mumbai Indians ahead of the 2024 IPL auction, scheduled to take place in Dubai on Tuesday. Rohit and Chennai Super Kings skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni are the most successful captains in the IPL, guiding their teams to five titles each in the lucrative league. However, Mumbai Indians have gone without a title since 2021, finishing last in the 2022 edition. Gavaskar said that it could be because Rohit is "fatigued" since he has been playing continuously not only as IPL team skipper but also as the India captain. "See, we don't have to look at it (decision appoint Hardik as MI captain) as right or wrong. The decision they (MI) have taken

Hardik will bring fresh thinking in MI Rohit's contribution with bat has gone down: Gavaskar

has been for the benefit of the team. We can say that the contribution of Rohit, even with the bat, has become slightly lesser," Gavaskar told Star Sports. "Earlier, there used to be a lot of contribution (with bat) from Rohit, but in the last few years, they have finished at number 9 or 10. And last year they qualified for the playoffs, but the 'joshi' (enthusiasm) of Mumbai Indians was not there to be seen as we have seen in the past. "Maybe because he has played cricket continuously he must have been fatigued, constantly captaining the Indian side and then Mumbai Indians," added Gavaskar. Hardik, after leading Gujarat Titans to title triumph in the team's inaugural year in 2022 also led his side to runners-up finish this year. The cricketer-turned-commentator felt Hardik has proved himself for the Gujarat franchise and his return to Mumbai Indians will infuse fresh ideas into the side.



"So, the decision that they have taken, he is a young player, young in terms of captaining a side, who has proven himself, taking Gujarat Titans to the

finals twice and winning it once. "So with the same thought process, they have made him captain. Because sometimes you need that fresh thinking, and he can bring that fresh thinking and I think the decision that has been taken, Mumbai Indians can benefit from it and won't damage them," he added. Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan said the biggest challenge for Hardik at Mumbai Indians would be to manage senior players like Rohit, Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah, all of whom are leaders themselves. "Now that this decision about Hardik Pandya has been taken, I think Suryakumar Yadav was involved in this discussion, Bumrah was in it as well, so for Hardik Pandya, the biggest challenge will be with all these people — Rohit Sharma, Surya-

kumar Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, who are leaders themselves, they have been captains of the Indian team in the past. "Hardik will have to learn to manage these guys and it will be his biggest challenge. And this won't be easy for him," said Pathan. He compared Rohit's stature with that of Dhoni, saying the stalwart had built the Mumbai franchise with his hard work and commitment. "The stature that Rohit Sharma has in Mumbai Indians, I think it can be compared to the stature that Dhoni has in CSK. He has made this team with his own hard work and dedication through his captaincy. "He's a great captain who has carried this team for years and last year, with the team they had, many people thought they could qualify for the playoffs. They qualified, even though they didn't have (pacer) Jofra Archer and their bowling was light. "Even their form wasn't good. They didn't have the facilities of Bumrah (who was recovering from injury)," said Pathan.

IPL PLAYER RELEASE Story of whims and minimal communication



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Siddarth Kaul has been a consistent performer in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament over the years, but the pacer has played just one IPL match across the 2022 and 2023 seasons for the Royal Challengers Bangalore. Take a look at these stats to get a deeper understanding of that anomaly. In the 2021 SMAT, Kaul took 10 wickets from five matches, 19 from 10 games in 2022 to be the highest wicket-taker that season, and 16 from 10 fixtures in the 2023-24 season when Punjab lifted their maiden trophy in the tournament. So, Kaul playing just one IPL match despite those impressive numbers on often unresponsive Indian pitches getting released ahead of this year's auction defies logic. Welcome then to the quixotic world of player retention and release in the IPL, often marked by whims and minimal communication between a player and franchise. But these little quirks can leave a player wondering what has been done wrong not to merit a better run in the cash-rich league. Here Kaul, who has appeared in three ODIs and as many T20s for India, has been robbed of a chance to display his skills in front of a larger audience for two seasons. "I wouldn't say I am not hurt. I am also a human being. But then you cannot do much about it either, can you?" Kaul tells PTI. "But I cannot stand at that point and I cannot think of leaving the game. I played for India after 11 years of making my First-Class debut. I had that belief and I still have. I will keep banging on the doors." Perhaps, a longer rope in the IPL during the last two seasons could have helped the 33-year-old rekindle his India ambitions, so to say. But Kaul has taken it up on the chin and hopes that he will get a contract in the auction on Tuesday. "I believe in karma. My job is to perform and my numbers in the domestic matches are there for everyone to see. "I won't blame anyone (for not

getting retained) because the team (RCB) has a new coaching set up this year and their thinking might have been different in terms of the combination they want for this IPL. "I need to give my 200 percent every time I enter the field and keep improving my skills and that's my mission," he says. That brings the question of the manner in which the team management conveys the decision of not retaining a player ahead of the auction, and it is a delicate matter as it often involves a lot of disappointment. India leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal had elaborated how RCB management released him without a proper conversation. "What I felt really bad about (him getting released) was there was no phone call or communication. At least have a talk," Chahal had said on YouTube Ranveer Allahbadiya's podcast. A former India teammate of Chahal concurred. "I just received a 10-second call. 'You will not be retained.' That was all. There was no talk, no explanation as to why they released (me) after a few seasons. "After all I have played a few seasons for them, so let's part, say, on good terms. It is a bit tough because suddenly you are out there alone, hoping that a contract is on the way for auction," he says. But an official who has been associated with multiple IPL franchises in the past saw another side of it. "It is quite natural for a player to feel disappointed after not getting retained. Sometimes, a player might be competing for a slot in the team with two other players. If they do well, then the third player in all likelihood will get only minimum chances. "Then the teams generally release him to explore his chances elsewhere. But generally, the team explains to a player well in advance about their decision - retention of release," he elaborates. "Some of those big players might be part of such detailed discussions, but the second or third rung players often do not get the luxury of that. It is fortunate that I at least got a phone call," the player tells.

Getting more bowling options to support Siraj real priority: RCB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Acquiring more bowling options to support pace spearhead Mohammad Siraj will be Royal Challengers Bangalore's top priority at the upcoming IPL auctions, team's Director of Cricket Mo Bobat said on Monday. RCB have retained 18 players, including star batter Virat Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell and Siraj, and released 11 players. Those who have been released include the trio of medium pacer Harshal Patel, Sri Lanka leg spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and Australian quick Josh Hazlewood, depleting the team's bowling resources. "Mohammad Siraj is a core part of what we do so supporting Siraj with some more bowling options including overseas bowling options is going to be a real priority for us moving forward," Bobat was quoted as saying in a media release.



"Then we have got a core of local spinners, which I think is quite strong. Some of them got some opportunities over the last year or two and they might play more leading roles moving forward," he added. A top heavy side, RCB traded Australia all-rounder Cameron Green for Rs 17.5 crore from Mumbai Indians, to strengthen their middle order. "We have got a strong core of retaining players, and we have got a very powerful top order. Part of the decision-making that we had around our player release decisions was to try and strengthen the middle order

and bringing Cameron Green was a fantastic move." RCB have a purse of Rs 40.75 crore with a total of seven slots available to sign players. Bobat also underscored the significance of fostering the right performance environment and culture for players to showcase their capabilities. "I am committed to a long-term project here. We have a fantastic captain in Faf, and an excellent group of senior players with the experience of Virat, Maxi (Maxwell), and DK (Dinesh Karthik). So the ingredients are really strong. "The next objective is to make sure we create the right performance, and culture where the players can really go and showcase what they are capable of, and go out and entertain the public. "If we commit to our processes, play a brand of cricket that is aggressive, and have those moments where we're prepared to be brave it will get the fans going."

Naveen-ul-Haq banned for 20 months from ILT20 due to breach of contract



PTI ■ DUBAI

Afghanistan pacer Naveen-ul-Haq was on Monday handed a 20-month ban from participating in the International League T20 for breaching his Player Agreement with Sharjah Warriors. Naveen had signed up for the Warriors for the opening season of the tournament. He was offered another year's

extension but refused to sign the retention notice for Season 2. Sharjah Warriors approached the ILT20 to intervene in this dispute. The ILT20 first initiated a mediation process through an independent third-party mediator. However, the mediation failed. The ILT20's three-member Disciplinary Committee, which includes the league's Chief

Executive Officer David White, Head of Security and Anti-Corruption Col. Azam and Member Emirates Cricket Board Zayed Abbas, separately heard both the parties and on examining the evidence before them conveyed its final verdict of a 20-month ban on Naveen. "We do not take pride in making this announcement but all parties are expected to comply with their contractual commitments and recognise that non-compliance can cause damage to the other party," CEO DP World ILT20 David White said in a release. "Unfortunately, Naveen-ul-Haq failed to honour his contractual obligations with the Sharjah Warriors and as such the league had no option but to impose this 20-month ban on him. "The disciplinary proceedings against Naveen were conducted in a transparent manner and both parties involved were given opportunities to prepare and present their submissions."

PTI ■ SYDNEY

David Warner can continue playing Test cricket for another year if he can extend the imperious form he displayed against Pakistan in the series-opener in Perth, former Australia wicketkeeper Ian Healy said on Monday. The 37-year-old, who scored a match-winning 164 off 211 ball in the first innings in the opening Test, which Australia won by 360 runs, is playing his swan-song series. He is likely to bid adieu to the longest format of the game after the third Test in Sydney in his home ground. "What I love about him is his durability. We all know how fit he must be because he's maintained his pace between wickets.

Outstanding Warner can play Test cricket for another year: Healy

I just love the way that he kept going and his feet moved," Healy said on SEN Radio. "This is the bit I agree about Mitchell Johnson and what he said about, 'Why have a swan-song, your last three years hasn't been very good and now you're picking the way you can retire.' "But if he bats like that, he can go another year for mine (me) until he doesn't want to play anymore. That's what he's been missing in Test cricket, that footwork,



balance and real bat speed when he needed it," he added. Given his recent poor run in Test cricket, Warner faced a lot of criticism for publicly announcing he hopes to finish his Test career after this series in Sydney by former teammate Mitchell Johnson. Johnson felt that the series against Pakistan should have been used to pick Warner's successor. However, Healy feels the southpaw's century in difficult conditions won Australia the match in

Perth. "That 160 he made in the first innings won us a Test in Perth. It wasn't easy. I looked at it from afar on Thursday afternoon and I said, 'Oh, jeez, I wouldn't like to be Pakistan,' they are going to feel about a foot shorter than they actually are tomorrow afternoon not knowing how difficult the conditions were. "Maybe Pakistan missed the trick in the first session (on Day 1), bowling too short, but I don't know of anyone else that can make 160 that quick in tough conditions. "I like the way Michael Slater made tough second innings batting conditions look. Mark Waugh could also make a mockery out of tough conditions, but David Warner was outstanding."

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