

OPINION 6

OLD PENSION SCHEME: SHOULD IT BE RESTORED

WORLD 8

US COURT BANS TRUMP FROM RUNNING FOR PRESIDENCY

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY GO INTO TAILSPIN

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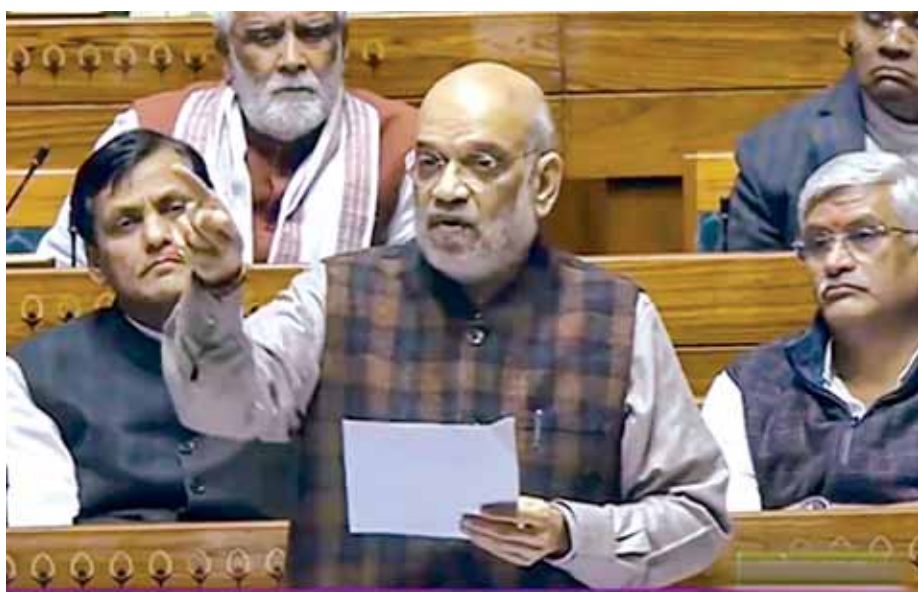
INDIA HOPES FOR REGISTERING SECOND TRIUMPH
12 SPORTS

Death for mob lynching: Shah

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Nagarik Suraksha, Sakshya Bills passed in Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday passed a new Criminal Bill in the Lok Sabha, introducing provisions for the death penalty for those committing the crime of mob lynching. While announcing the punishment for mob lynching, Home Minister Amit Shah questioned the previous Congress governments, asking why they had not included mob lynching in the laws during their 58 years of ruling the country. "You used the term mob lynching to criticise us (BJP), but then you forgot about it once you came into power," the Home Minister said in his response to the members, including the Opposition, during the discussion on The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The Lok Sabha passed three key Bills to overhaul the criminal justice system, with Home Minister Amit Shah asserting that the focus is on delivering speedy justice rather than merely handing down punishment. The Bills were initially introduced during the Monsoon Session of Parliament in August. After the standing committee on home affairs made several recommendations, the



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Wednesday

government decided to withdraw the Bills and introduced their redrafted versions last week. While The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita will replace the Indian Penal Code of 1860, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita will replace the CrPC of 1973, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill will replace the Indian Evidence Act of 1872. Shah criticised the Congress and responded to a question once asked by former Home

Minister and Congress leader P Chidambaram. "Once I was listening to Chidambaram's speech. He had said it is a test for the home minister that if he brings a new law, then what will he do with (the issue) of mob lynching?" Responding to this in the lower House, Shah stated that Chidambaram has neither understood the BJP nor its principles. "Our party has only one ideology, and that is the development of the nation," Shah said.

Continuing his attack on the Opposition, Amit Shah took a dig at "those who said the BJP doesn't understand." "I told them if ones heart is Indian, you will understand the laws. If it is Italian, you won't," the Home Minister quipped. The Union Home Minister's statement came as 143 MPs, including 97 from the lower house, have been suspended from Parliament during the last four days of sitting in both the Rajya Sabha and the

Lok Sabha during the ongoing Winter Session as they insisted on a statement from the Home Minister over the Parliament breach incident last week. Replying to the debate, Shah said the three Bills also have a clear definition of terrorism and scrap sedition as a crime while introducing a new section titled "offences against the State." Members of Congress, DMK, TMC, and other Opposition parties were not present during the debate. While many Opposition parties have been critical of the Bills that seek to replace IPC, CrPC, and Evidence Act, only a handful of non-NDA members, including Hyderabad MP and AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, MPs of the Biju Janata Dal, and Bahujan Samaj, were present in the House. "I am astonished at how some people defend and save the lives of terrorists in the name of 'human rights'. Remember, this is neither the rule of the Britishers nor of Congress. This is Modi's rule. No arguments to save terrorists will be entertained here," Shah said, adding that the Modi Government has explicitly brought 'terrorism' under the purview of the criminal justice system.

Continued on Page 2

Will probe US Khalistani murder plot if evidence provided: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that India's commitment is to the rule of law, and if someone provides information, the government would look into it. These remarks mark his first comments on the US allegations relating to an Indian link over a foiled plot targeting Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannu. Making this assertion in an interview with *The Financial Times*, Prime Minister Modi also mentioned that ties between India and the US are robust, and there is strong bipartisan support for strengthening relations between the two nations. He further said that it is not appropriate to link a few incidents with diplomatic ties. Modi said, "If someone gives us any information, we would definitely look into it." He also emphasised, "If a citizen of ours has done anything good or bad, we are ready to look into it. Our commitment is to the rule of law." These observations from the Prime Minister come in the backdrop of US federal prosecutors charging that one Nikhil Gupta was working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, who holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada.



India has already constituted a probe committee to investigate the allegations. In the interview, Modi expressed India was "deeply concerned about the activities of certain extremist groups based overseas." He emphasised, "These elements, under the guise of freedom of expression, have engaged in intimidation and incited violence." At the same time, Modi stated, "There is strong bipartisan support for the strengthening of this relationship, which is a clear indicator of a mature and stable partnership... Security and counterterrorism cooperation have been key components of our partnership," Modi stated. "I don't think it is appropriate to link a few incidents with diplomatic relations between the two countries," said the Prime Minister. India-US ties have experienced significant progress in various areas, including defence, trade, investment,

critical technology, energy, and climate change. Modi emphasised, "We need to accept the fact that we are living in the era of multilateralism. The world is interconnected and interdependent. This reality compels us to recognise that absolute agreement on all matters cannot be a prerequisite for collaboration." Both sides are currently working on an ambitious roadmap for Indo-US collaboration in seven specific high-technology areas, including semiconductors, next-generation telecommunication, artificial intelligence, and defense under the "Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)". Modi visited Washington in June, bringing new momentum to ties between the two sides. US President Joe Biden visited India in September for the G20 summit, during which he had extensive talks with Modi to further expand bilateral ties.

Murmu, PM slam mimicry; 2 more MPs suspended

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A huge political row unfolded on Wednesday after Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee derisively mimicked Vice President of India Jagdeep Dhankhar during the Opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament on Tuesday against the suspension of MPs. This action drew strong condemnation from President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and members of the ruling BJP. As Dhankhar, who is also the Rajya Sabha Chairperson, declared that he would not tolerate any insult to Parliament or the post of Vice President, the TMC MP at the centre of the storm said that he did not intend to hurt anyone with his actions in the Parliament complex on Tuesday. In contrast, Jat Mahasangh volunteers held a protest march near the Congress headquarters against the "mocking" of Dhankhar. Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha on Wednesday suspended two more Opposition MPs for displaying placards in the House. Thomas Chazhikadan of the Kerala Congress (Mani) and A M Ariff of the CPI(M) were suspended for misconduct after a resolution, moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi, was adopted by the House. This brings the total number of suspended MPs in the Lok Sabha to 97. So far, 143 Opposition MPs have



been suspended from the two Houses of Parliament. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee backed her party MP, while the Congress criticised what it termed the government's "desperate attempt" to divert attention from the unprecedented suspension of over 140 MPs by raising the matter. Attacking Opposition parties over the "mimicry" incident, BJP chief JP Nadra alleged that their elected representatives were acting as "clowns" and took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, suggesting he could apply for a job as a cameraman in the studio of BJP MP Ravi Kishan. Murmu took to social media expressing her dismay at the manner in which the vice president was humiliated in the Parliament complex. "Elected representatives must be free to express themselves, but their expression should be within the norms of dignity and courtesy. That has been the parliamentary tradition we are proud of, and the people of India expect them to uphold it," Murmu said. Responding to the president's

post, the Rajya Sabha chairperson thanked Murmu for her kind words and the timely reminder that basic courtesy must always remain. "I am committed to upholding constitutional principles until my last breath. No insults can prevent me from doing so," Dhankhar responded to Murmu. "I received a telephone call from the Prime Minister. He expressed great concern over the abject theatrics of some Honourable MPs, and that too in the sacred Parliament complex on Tuesday," stated a social media post from the Vice President's secretariat. "He (PM) told me that he (Modi) has been at the receiving end of such insults for twenty years and counting, but the fact that it could happen to a Constitutional office like the Vice President and that too in Parliament was unfortunate," Dhankhar was quoted as saying in the post. He also expressed his anguish in the House. Dhankhar said the act of mimicking him and its videography caused an "insult" to the honour of the post of the vice president, the farmers, and his community. Congress president and Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge took offense at Dhankhar describing the mimicry as a farmer and 'jat' (his caste).

Continued on Page 2

Kejriwal to skip ED questioning today, goes out for Vipassana

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after he attended the Opposition INDIA alliance meeting, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday left for a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat, and is likely to skip the ED summons sent to him. The Enforcement Directorate on Monday issued fresh summons to Kejriwal for questioning on December 21 in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Kejriwal was first called by the ED to appear on November 2, but skipped the summons alleging that the notice was "vague, motivated and unsustainable in law". Kejriwal was scheduled to leave for the Vipassana course on Tuesday but could not do so as he was busy with the INDIA bloc meeting, officials said. He left around 1.30 pm on Wednesday for the pre-scheduled meditation course, they added. The pre-scheduled Vipassana programme will continue until December 30. According to sources, Kejriwal would remain in the camp in Anandgarh village of Punjab's Hoshiarpur district till December 30 and remain completely cut off from his political life.

ED raids Bengal Minister, summons on Lalu, Tejashwi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA/PNS ■ KOLKATA/NEW DELHI

There is more trouble for jailed Bengal Forest Minister Jyoti Priya Mallick after Enforcement Directorate recovered ₹10 crore worth bank fixed deposit certificates, scores of property documents, and at least 600 blank stamp papers, according to agency sources on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the ED summoned Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav and his father and RJD chief Lalu Prasad for questioning in the Railways land-for-jobs money laundering case probe, official sources said on Wednesday. While Tejashwi (34) has been asked to depose before the federal probe agency at its office in Delhi on December 22, Prasad (75) has been asked to appear next week on December 27 to record their statements under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED had previously questioned Tejashwi for about eight hours in this case on April 11, but this is the first time it has summoned Prasad for joining the probe. The summons comes following the questioning of an alleged "close associate" of the Lalu family, Amit Katyal, who was arrested by the ED in November. The alleged scam pertains to the period when Prasad was



the Railway Minister in the UPA-1 Government. Mallick was Bengal Food and Civil Supplies Minister for more than ten years in a row before he was transferred to the Forest Department in 2021 by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The ED officials conducted raids inside Mallick's Forest Ministry office at Aranya Bhavan and found FD certificates and other documents hidden at various places inside his personal enclosure. Though it is not clear whether the recovered documents had any connection with Forest Department officials, they did not rule out the possibility, stating that they were investigating all angles. A close confidant of the Chief Minister, Mallick, a former organisational in-charge of Trinamool Congress' North 24 Parganas district — that elects 5 MPs and about 35 MLAs — was a few months ago arrested for

his alleged role in the multi-crore ration-distribution scam that also saw Bakibur Rehman, a miller, going to jail for his role in the multi-crore scam. The PDS scam saw thousands of tons of subsidised food grains meant for poorer people being channelled to the open market and even allegedly getting smuggled out to neighbouring Bangladesh. According to sources, the ED raids also had a connection with a preliminary probe last month regarding alleged tendering irregularities in the Zoo Directorate of West Bengal. He also started enquiring into the detailed project reports (DPRs) of the Directorate for which tenders were floated. There are allegations that the outsourced agencies, which prepared the DPRs for the Directorate, also participated in the tender process with different identities, which was a clear violation of norms as specified in the process.

The ED was also trying to find out whether there were any connections between the Forest Department and the complaints of large-scale denudation of the Mangrove Forests along the Sundarbans in North and South 24 Parganas. In recent years, voices were being raised regarding large-scale cutting of Mangrove forests and conversion of forest lands into fisheries presently controlled by local politicians, mostly alleged "henchmen of a particular minister". Incidentally, the Chief Minister had earlier strongly raised her voice against the BJP Government for "playing vendetta politics against TMC", which was manifest from the arrest of senior Trinamool politicians like Mallick. Meanwhile, in a parallel development, the Income Tax Department on Wednesday conducted raids at the business premises of Congress-MLA-turned-TMC-legislator Byron Biswas. The raids were conducted at Biswas' bidi factories, hospitals, and other business facilities in Murshidabad district, sources said, adding that a large number of documents had been recovered from inside the premises. Some cash could also have been recovered, as the latest reports said currency note counting machines were taken inside the raided premises.

Shami gets Arjuna award, Khel Ratna for Satwik, Chirag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry on Wednesday put its stamp on the nominations for the annual sports awards, confirming the prestigious Khel Ratna honour for badminton players Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty and the Arjuna award for 26 sports persons, including pacer Mohammed Shami. The awards will be conferred on the athletes by President Droupadi Murmu at the

Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 9. Chirag and Satwik are Asian Games gold medalists, World Championships bronze winners and Commonwealth Games silver medalists. On the other hand, Shami, 33, had a spectacular run in the ODI World Cup, where India finished second-best, losing to Australia in the final. Shami was the leading wicket-taker in the World Cup, with 24 wickets to his name in seven outings.

The athletes selected for this year's Arjuna award include hockey players Krishan Bahadur Pathak and Sushila Chanu, archers Ojas Pravin Deotale and Aditi Gopichand Swami, boxer Mohammad Hussamuddin, chess player R Vaishali, golfer Diksha Dagar, shooters Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Esha Singh, wrestlers Antim Panghal and Sunil Kumar, paddler Ayhika Mukherjee and para archer Sheetal Devi, among others.



The athletes were nominated for the awards by a government panel on December 13. The ministry also cleared five coaches for Dronacharya award in the regular category and three in life-time category. The Dyan Chand award in the life-time category will be conferred to three persons. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar is the recipient of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2023,

while Lovely Professional University, Punjab and Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra are the first and second runner-ups. National Sports Awards are given every year to recognise and reward excellence in sports. List of National Sports Award winners: Major Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2023: Chirag Shetty and Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy (badminton). Arjuna Awards for 2023: Ojas

Pravin Deotale (archery), Aditi Gopichand Swami (archery), Murali Sreeshankar (athletics), Parul Chaudhary (athletics), Mohammed Hussamuddin (boxing), R Vaishali (chess), Mohammed Shami (cricket), Anush Agarwalla (equestrian), Divyakriti Singh (equestrian dressage), Diksha Dagar (golf), Krishan Bahadur Pathak (hockey), Sushila Chanu (hockey), Pawan Kumar (kabaddi).

Continued on Page 2

Riding drama by meeting PM: BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal BJP on Wednesday said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi had literally produced nothing as "the Chief Minister did not want the meeting to be meaningful ... she only wants to send a political message which she has been able to do."

Even as the Chief Minister told media men in Delhi that she had requested the Prime Minister to get her Government clear the held up central funds — on account MNREGA and PM Housing projects — and said that soon the central and the State officers would meet to find out solution to the problem the BJP leaders in Bengal said there was little hope of funds coming until the State accounted for the previous funds.

"The Chief Minister is a big drama bazz (actor) ... she is doing drama in Delhi by meeting the Prime Minister for central funds and here she is depriving the constituencies where the people have voted for



the BJP?" Adhikari who on Wednesday suddenly barged into the State secretariat Nabanna and stage a short dharna outside the office of Chief Secretary said.

"The State is depriving the people of Bengal from Central schemes like Viswakarma Yojna, Ayushman Bharat and many other such schemes ... first she should get these schemes implemented before asking for Central funds," Adhikari said.

State BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said "Mamata Banerjee wanted to send a message to a section of people by making a publicity of her meeting with the Prime Minister ... if she really wanted a productive outcome then

she should have taken her officers ... instead of this she took some MPs and Ministers with her ... this was done to send a message to her voters ... she knew she was not going to get anything ... she only tried to play to the voters' gallery which she always does before the elections."

The Chief Minister has been alleging that the Centre in pursuance of its vindictive politics had not been clearing more than Rs 1.15 lakh crore of the State. The Centre had withheld Rs 7,000 crore only on account of MNREGA and PMRY funds, the TMC claimed his, whereas the BJP and the Centre holds the State guilty of not accounting for the previous funds.

Lok Sabha suspends two more Opposition MPs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday suspended two more Opposition MPs for showing placards in the House. Thomas Chazhikadan of the Kerala Congress (Mani) and A M Ariff of the CPI(M) were suspended for misconduct after a resolution moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi was adopted by

the House. This takes the number of suspended MPs in the Lok Sabha to 97. So far 143 opposition MPs have been suspended from the two Houses of Parliament. MPs of the opposition INDIA bloc will hold a protest at Jantar Mantar on Thursday against the suspension of more than 140 opposition parliamentarians and stage a "mock Parliament". A meeting was

held at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's chamber in the Parliament complex to finalise the programme. All suspended MPs will join the protest at Jantar Mantar, sources said. They will also hold a "mock Parliament". Rashtriya Janata Dal MP Manoj Jha is likely to be the speaker for the mock proceedings. More than 140 opposition MPs have been suspended from the

Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha since last week for disrupting proceedings. Opposition MPs have been demanding a discussion on the Parliament security breach and a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah on the issue. They have also sought action against the BJP MP who authorised the visitor pass for at least one of the culprits who jumped in the Lok Sabha gallery on

December 13. Slamming the government over the suspension of over 140 MPs, one of the suspended Congress MP in Lok Sabha Shashi Tharoor claimed that a "dubious record" had been created as in no country had so many lawmakers been suspended together and alleged that parliamentary democracy has been "betrayed and reduced to a travesty"

Sarvesh Tiwari new chairman of PRSD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Public Relations Society Delhi (PRSD) elected communications and PR veteran Dr Sarvesh Tiwari, as the Chairman of PRSD. He took over SS Rao, Chief General Manager, Power Finance Corporation (PFC). While Vipin Kharbanda, Vice President of Marketing at REC, appointed as Treasurer. Sanchit Sharma, Director of Critique Communications was been elected as the Joint Secretary in its annual general body meeting held at Press Club of India

on December 17. The Public Relations Society Delhi (PRSD) serves as a unifying platform for professionals across various spectrums, including Media, Corporate Communication, Corporate Affairs, and individuals associated with CPSUs, Government, Public and Private Sectors, Multinationals, Media Educators, and Veterans of the PR Profession. Tiwari is the founder and Managing Director of PR Professionals and was engulfed in controversy recently after Australia's former Minister of Defense and Home Affairs and current Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton has been alleged to use the services of Gurugram based PR

Professionals. Dutton's visit to India, became a contentious issue in the Australian Parliament following accusations by Patrick Gorman, Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister of Australia and Assistant Minister for the Public Service. In his speech in the Australian parliament, Gorman named the Gurugram based firm - PR Professionals - which he accused Dutton for entrusting the task to craft a tailored narrative and manipulate public perception about the shadow Australian prime minister. Tiwari is also handling the public relations activities of Trump Towers, besides several other Central, State government agencies and PSUs.

Modification in tea composition to enhance health benefits planned

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To cash in on the increasing awareness on health and fitness among millennials, the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) and Andrew Yule & Co. Ltd. (AYCL), a sole public-sector enterprise of the Government in the tea industry, has joined hands for modification in composition of various teas to enhance health benefits. "This will help to establish a wellness range of teas in health and wellness centers. The collaboration will help in building the entrepreneurship and boost startup ecosystem," said Prof. (Dr) Tanuja Nesari, Director AIIA at an event here after signing the pact. On the occasion, Union Ayush

Minister Sarbananda Sonowal also released a postal stamp on the 1st anniversary of AIIA Goa in the presence of Dr Munjapara Mahendrabhai, Minister of State Ministry of Ayush and Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Ministry of Ayush. At the event RS Manku, CMD, Andrew Yule, AIIA Goa Dean Prof (Dr) Sujata Kadam among others were present. Calling the pact between the AIIA and Andrew Yule & Co Ltd yet another reflection of growing demand for ayurveda products in domestic and abroad markets, Kotecha said that the aim is to add value to the tea products being produced by the PSU by conducting researches and strengthen its presence in the wellness market.

MDL links pact with MDL for 6 offshore patrol vessels



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Defence on Wednesday signed a contract with Mazagon Dockyard Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), Mumbai for the procurement of six Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG). The contract was made under the Buy (Indian-IDDMM) category at a total cost of Rs1614.89 Crore.

Giving details here, officials said out of the six vessels being procured, four would replace the existing aging OPVs and the other two would augment the ICG fleet. The acquisition of these major ICG platforms is aimed to boost the ICG's capability and reinforces the increased focus of the government towards maritime security. These modern and high-tech Ships will play a critical role in enhancing surveillance, Law enforce-

ment, Search and Rescue, Maritime Pollution Response, and other important capabilities including humanitarian assistance by the ICG. Along with several high-tech advanced features and equipment, these 115m OPVs would be equipped with Multipurpose Drones, AI capability, and Wirelessly Controlled Remote Water Rescue Craft Lifebuoy, etc. enabling greater flexibility and operational edge to the ICG to face new age multidimensional challenges. These Multi-role State-of-the-Art vessels will be indigenously designed, developed, and manufactured by MDL, Mumbai, and will be delivered in a total period of 66 months. The contract achieves the objectives of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' to boost the nation's indigenous shipbuilding capability, bolstering maritime economic activities and fostering the growth of ancillary industries, especially the MSME sector. The project will also generate employment opportunities and expertise development in the country.

RECRUITMENT SCAM CASE

Husband of sitting Calcutta HC judge alleges pressure by CID in WB



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a development which may have consequences, the advocate husband of a sitting Calcutta High Court Judge has complained that the officials of the Criminal Investigation Department were in the pretext of quizzing him in a particular case putting pressure on him to make adverse statements against his wife, the said Judge. The Judge is presently adjudicating a number of sensitive cases including the one related to the school recruitment scam where much to the chagrin of parties concerned she has ordered the Enforcement Directorate to thoroughly investigate the property details of Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee. The Judge recently in an obiter dicta (passing reference) recently said — after evaluating the 6,000-page document submitted by Banerjee's lawyers to the ED for inspection — that there could be a prima facie coincidence between the increase in his assets and the beginning of the recruitment scam. Both of which apparently started from the year 2014. The ruling party has often used intemperate languages against a number of High Court judges including the present Judge leading to a lot of controversy.

'Have our tasks cut out both as party and as INDIA group'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday accused the government of "strangling democracy" by suspending MPs over a legitimate demand and said the Congress has its task cut out for next year's general elections both as a party and as INDIA bloc member. Noting that the assembly election results being very disappointing is an understatement, the Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson urged party MPs to channel their disappointment into positivity for next year's general elections. This was the first time that Sonia Gandhi spoke on the recent assembly poll results. Addressing party MPs at a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the Central Hall of Parliament, Gandhi said, "To say that the assembly election results in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have been very disappointing for our party is an understatement." "The Congress president has already had a first round of reviews to understand the reasons for our poor performance and to draw the needed lessons for our organization," she said. "We are facing enormous challenges. Yet, I am confident that our fortitude and resilience will see us through. Our ideology and our values are our guiding light at this difficult time. We must never forget that our leaders fought against insurmountable odds with great courage and fortitude to give us freedom." Sonia told the MPs to "channel the disappointment into a positive drive for the coming general elections". She told the

Congress MPs that the Lok Sabha polls are to be held in the next few months and "we have our tasks cut out both as a party and as INDIA group member." About the suspension of over 140 opposition MPs from Parliament who have been demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on the December 13 Parliament security breach, Gandhi said never before have so many Opposition MPs been suspended and that too for raising a "perfectly reasonable and legitimate" demand. All the opposition MPs asked for was a statement by the home minister in the Lok Sabha on the extraordinary events of December 13, but "there are no words to describe the arrogance with which this request was treated," she said. "What happened on December 13 is inexcusable and cannot be justified. It took four days for the prime minister to address the nation and express his views on the incident and he did so outside Parliament. By this, he clearly indicated his disdain for the dignity of the House and his disregard for the people of our country. I leave it to you to imagine how the BJP would have responded had they been in opposition today," she noted. Later in the day, Congress MPs held a protest against the suspension of opposition members outside Mahatma Gandhi's statue in the Parliament complex. The former Congress chief targeted the BJP government at the Centre over the "soaring" inflation and said the poor are suffering and economic inequalities are rising. "There is a significant gap between the prime minister's boasts on economic growth and ground reality," she said.

Ghaziabad man beheads wife over morning tea delay

PTI ■ GHAZIABAD (UP)



A 52-year-old man allegedly beheaded his wife over delay in morning tea in Fazalgarh village of this district, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place on Tuesday when Dharamvir Jatav, who hailed from Kalanjari village of Meerut district, beheaded his 50-year-old wife Sundri with a sword, they said. An FIR has been registered in this regard following a complaint lodged by the victim's son in Ghaziabad's Bhojpur police station, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Rural, Vivek Chandra Yadav, said that the victim was residing with her family in

Fazalgarh village under the Bhojpur police station area. Her body has been sent for post-mortem, added Yadav. The victim's son named Soldier in his complaint said that his mother was killed by his father for not preparing early tea. He added that his father abused his mother in anger, brought a sword from inside the house and slit her throat. The accused, who is a vegetable vendor, assaulted his wife's body

several times with the sword after killing her, according to the FIR. The victim's son said that his father had arguments with his mother over consumption of liquor. "I and my two sisters tried to save our mother, but my father threatened to kill us. That is why we left the place. My father Dharamvir while fleeing towards the sugarcane crop fields was brandishing the sword so that nobody could catch hold of him," Soldier said. Police have recovered the sword used in the crime and the accused has been sent to jail after being produced before a court.

Bodies of 87 Kuki Zo victims buried in Churachandpur

PTI ■ IMPHAL

The bodies of 87 Kuki Zo victims of ethnic violence were laid to rest in Manipur's Churachandpur district headquarters on Wednesday, officials said. Forty-one of the bodies were airlifted from different mortuaries in Imphal on December 14 while 46 were from Churachandpur district hospital, they said. Thousands of people turned up to pay their final respects to the departed souls amid prohibitory orders. A condolence service was organised at Tuibuong followed by the mass burial amid

restrictions imposed under section 144 CrPc after a violent clash on Monday night over the burial left around 30 injured. Earlier on December 15, nineteen violence victims were laid to rest in Kangpokpi district. Ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts of the state to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis -- constitute little more than 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts.

Shami gets...

From page 1 Ritu Negi (kabaddi), Nasreen (kho-kho), Pinki (lawn bowls), Aishwary Prapat Singh Tomar (shooting), Esha Singh (shooting), Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu (squash), Ayhika Mukherjee (table tennis), Sunil Kumar (wrestling), Antim (wrestling), Naorem Roshibina Devi (wushu), Sheetal Devi (para archery), Illuri Ajay Kumar Reddy (blind cricket), Prachi Yadav (para canoeing). Dronacharya Award (regular category) for outstanding coaches: Lalit Kumar (wrestling), RB Ramesh (chess), Mahaveer Prasad Saini (para athletics), Shivendra Singh (hockey), Ganesh Prabhakar Devrukkhar (mallakhamb). Dronacharya Award (life-time category) for outstanding coaches: Jaskirat Singh Grewal (golf), Bhaskaran E (kabaddi), Jayanta Kumar Pushilal (table tennis). Dhyani Chand Award for lifetime achievement: Manjusha Kanwar (badminton), Vineet Kumar Sharma (hockey), Kavitha Selvaraj (kabaddi), Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2023: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (overall winner university); Lovely Professional University, Punjab (1st runner-up), Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (2nd runner-up).

Murmu, PM slam mimicry; 2 more MPs suspended

From page 1 "I am not allowed to speak in Rajya Sabha often. Should I say it is because I am a Dalit?" he said. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also met Dhankhar to express his concern. "It is shocking

that one MP chose to amplify this ignoble act by video graphing. This is a new low, and no one believing in democracy will ever appreciate it," he said. Expressing his solidarity with his successor, former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu did the offices of the President, Vice President, and Speaker are constitutional offices whose dignity and

decorum must never be lowered. Ruling party members, including ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal, and Nitin Gadkari, expressed their solidarity with Dhankhar by participating in Question Hour proceedings in the Rajya Sabha but remaining standing for about 10 minutes. Congress chief spokesman

Jairam Ramesh criticised the prime minister for the criticism over the mimicry issue and alleged that Narendra Modi, while bidding farewell to Hamid Ansari, was retreating as vice president and chairman of Rajya Sabha after a long 10-year tenure, mocked Ansari, reducing his identity to his religion. Banerjee mimicked Dhankhar during the

opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament against the suspension of the MPs. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was seen making a video of the act. According to Banerjee, it was done "casually" and not to disrespect the vice president. "We respect everyone," Banerjee, who was in the Parliament complex to meet the prime minister, said.

Death for mob lynching: Shah

From page 1 "We have changed the definition of Sedition from 'Rajdroh' (offences against the government) to 'Deshdroh' (offences against the Nation)," he said, noting that IPC Section 124, or the Sedition Law, has been repealed. "The purpose of the new law is not to save the government but to save the country. In a healthy

democracy, everyone has the right to criticise the government, but we will not allow anyone to say anything demeaning about India," Shah said. "The sedition law, made by the British, under which Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel... Many of our freedom fighters remained in jail for years, and that law continues till date. When they were in opposition, they used to protest, but when they came to power, they misused it. For the first time, the Modi

government completely abolished the sedition law," he said. Shah said the first duty of the state is justice. "Judiciary, Executive, and Legislature are the three pillars of democracy. The makers of our Constitution divided the work among these three to give strong administration to the country. Today, for the first time, these three together will give the country a justice-centric criminal system and not a punishment-centric one," he said.

"For the first time, laws are going to be made according to the spirit of our Constitution under the leadership of Modi. The new laws are framed by keeping in mind the core values of our Constitution - individual freedom, human rights, and equal treatment for all," Shah said. Replying to the debate, which started on Tuesday and continued on Wednesday, Shah said three major amendments have been brought in the bills, including giving relief to medical professionals who

sometimes face intimidation from the kin of patients. Participating in the debate, Owaisi alleged that the new criminal bills are a threat to the civil liberties and rights of the people as they give sweeping powers to the police to act as "judge, jury, and executor." He said several provisions incorporated in the BNS were "very dangerous." Speaking in the same vein, former NDA ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal said such important bills should not

be passed in such a way. On the criminal justice system, the home minister said the timeline has been the biggest barrier to securing justice in the country. "Justice is not delivered timely.... Tarikh pe tarikh milti hain (prolonged trial) ... Everyone keeps shifting the blame on each other," he said. Shah added that now an FIR will have to be filed within three days of receiving the complaint, and the preliminary inquiry will have to be finished within 14 days.

Public Notice
This is to inform the general public that Mr. Suresh Kumar Tripathi is the sole owner of Third floor (with roof rights) left side portion built-up property no. B-197, area measuring 950 sq. ft., i.e. 53.61 sq. mtrs., out of Kharsa no. 479, situated at Duggal colony Khamrup, New Delhi-110062. This property was legally acquired through a Sale Deed dated 16.09.2017 vide doc. No. 5509, executed by Mrs. Vinita Tripathi.

Mr. Suresh Kumar Tripathi is now the process of mortgaging the aforementioned floor with SBI India Home Finance Co. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client.

If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 7-day period by contacting Law Vertices: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301. Landline (011)-910120-2101663 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform General Public Notice that Sh. Om Prakash S/o. Late Sh. Kishori Lal R/o. 238, RPS MIG Flats, Sheikh Sarai Phase-1, New Delhi-110017, had purchased the said flat bearing no. 238, RPS MIG Flats, Sheikh Sarai Phase-1, New Delhi-110017 vide Sale Deed Dated 24.02.2005, bearing Registration No. 2798 in Adal Book No. 1, Vol. No. 4752. Now, our client Mr. Om Prakash is proceeding to create a mortgage in respect of the said property in favour of IDFC FIRST Bank Limited.

Further, if any person, body, individual, institution having any claim, title interest and/or objection in respect of or against or relating to or touching upon said property or part of the property by way of sale, exchange, lease, lien, mortgage, charge, encumbrance, gift, trust, easement, maintenance, inheritance, testamentary disposition or otherwise or having in their custody any title documents pertaining to the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at the address mentioned in this notice with 5 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claims, of such person shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Any objections raised after the completion of the 5 days shall not be binding upon the said property or my Client & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 3 days of this publication to Mr. Amandeep Singh (Advocate), having office at 236 RPS Colony, Sheikh Sarai Phase-1, New Delhi-110017, Mobile No. 9711570956, email: aman@vortexir.com

Sd/- Amandeep Singh Advocate

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

"I, Narottam Kumar S/o Shri Trilok Chand R/o 61C, DDA Flats, Mata Sundari Road New Delhi 110002 declare that in school record wrongly mentioned name as Mayank Kaim Gautam but the correct name is Mayank Gautam for all future purposes."

PD(226)A

Metro to give ₹15 lakh to kin of dead woman

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) will provide a compensation of Rs 15 lakh to the next of kin of a woman passenger who died after an accident at a metro station recently. In addition, the DMRC shall also take care of the education of her two children, Delhi Metro said in a statement. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has earlier directed Delhi Metro to work out modalities to ensure guidance, care and education to children who had lost their mother in the accident. Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday posted on X to offer his condolences to the victim's family members. The incident took place on December 14 at the Inderlok Metro Station here. The 35-year-

old woman, Reena, succumbed to injuries at Safdarjung Hospital on Saturday. The Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS) is holding an inquiry into this incident. She was dragged along the platform as her sari got stuck in the door of a train. The woman is survived by a 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son. According to the provisions in the Metro Railway (Procedure of Claims) Rules, 2017, a compensation of Rs 5 lakh shall be paid to the deceased's next of kin, the statement said. "In addition, as humanitarian assistance to the children of the deceased, an additional amount of Rs 10 lakh shall also be provided. Since the children are both minors, DMRC is currently engaged in sorting out the legal modalities of handing over the amount to the legal heir," it said.



In addition, the Delhi Metro shall also take care of the education of the two children, the urban transporter said. "Deeply pained to hear about the sad demise of Smt Reena Ji in a tragic incident at Inderlok Metro Station. While @OfficialDMRC is providing financial compensations, I have also directed senior officials of

DMRC to work out modalities to ensure guidance, care & education of the children Riya & Hiten who had unfortunately lost their father earlier. "I offer my heartfelt condolences to them. May God bless them & give them all the strength to bear their irreparable loss. @PMOIndia @MoHUA_India @PIB_India," he wrote. The two children had earlier demanded financial compensation in the form of a fixed deposit. According to reports, the relatives of the children have expressed their inability to look after them due to financial constraints. The woman's son, who studies in class 6, said he was with her

mother at the time of the incident. The DMRC in its statement on Wednesday also said that a team of senior officials has been deputed to look into the matter to facilitate all requirements quickly. Puri has also directed that caretaking and education of the children be ensured by the Delhi Metro management, it said. The Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS) is holding an inquiry into this incident. The woman's daughter, a student of class 8, had earlier said, "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 Delhi government has written to the DMRC seeking a detailed report on the death of the woman, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said on Monday.



Delhi BJP demands apology from INDIA bloc for mocking Dhankar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leaders have demanded that the Opposition INDIA bloc apologise to the vice president as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was recording "like a monkey" TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee's act of mimicking Rajya Sabha chairman Jagdeep Dhankar. Bidhuri said Rahul and leaders of INDIA Alliance have insulted Jat community and they should apologise from Dhankar. Bidhuri also demanded to sack Kalyan Banerjee from the TMC. Rahul was seen making a video of the performance by Banerjee who appeared to mimic the way Dhankar walked by leaning forward and made reference to having a spine. In a related development, an advocate has filed a complaint against Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee for his mimicry of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar on the premises of the Parliament complex. "INDIA alliance is showing the level of its wisdom. It is not able to digest its defeat (in the recent assembly polls). They also know that in 2024, the BJP will return to power at the Centre and Narendra Modi will be the prime minister. They are not able to digest all these things," the BJP's West Delhi MP said at Parliament Complex when asked for comment. "So they displayed their frustration yesterday," Verma said.

With Dhankar's mimicry, the members of the opposition INDIA bloc showed that they can even make fun of a person who is sitting on such a high constitutional post, the BJP leader said. "And their leader Rahul Gandhi was doing videography like a monkey. It was quite strange. We felt very sad," Verma said, adding, "I want the entire INDIA alliance to apologise to the vice president." According to police, a complaint was given by advocate Abhishek Gautam at Defence Colony Police station on Tuesday evening. We have forwarded it to the New Delhi district police.



LG asks Chief Secretary to reconstitute General Council of IIT-D

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concerns over the inordinate delay of over three years in constituting the General Council of premiere Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi (IIIT-D) by the ruling AAP government, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena through his Secretariat, has asked the Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to ensure reconstitution of the General Council in a time bound manner for smooth functioning of the university. The file for reconstitution of the General Council of IIIT-D, whose three-year term expired in March 2019, had been lying with Delhi's Education Minister - first Manish Sisodia and thereafter, Atishi - for unexplained reasons since May 2020. According to Raj Niwas official, upon complaints received from several quarters about this deliberate inaction on part of the Education Minister, the LG Secretariat withdrew the file from the government invoking Rule 19(5) of the Transaction of Business Rules (ToBR). "Records on file show that the General Council of IIITD was last constituted vide notification dated 15.03.2016 with three years term, which expired in March 2019. IIIT-D had requested the Department of Training and Technical Education (DTTE) for re-constitution of the General Council in July, 2019 itself. However, the proposal of the Department for approval of the General Council of IIITD was lying pending in the office of

Minister Education since 20.05.2020 i.e. more than three years, without any action," he said. "While disposing of the file, the LG Secretariat issued instructions for directing the administrative department (Department of Training & Technical Education), to process the proposal for constitution of the General Council of IIITD in a time bound manner, in terms of the statutory provisions and the extant law in force, for smooth governance and functioning of the University," official said. "The LG Secretariat has brought on file that the General Council of IIITD, being a Statutory Authority, is mandated to perform key functions related to the functioning of the Institute viz. developing, planning, monitoring and formulating policies to execute the strategic plan for the Institute, reviewing the broad policies and programmes of the Institute, suggesting measures for the improvement and development of the Institute, considering the annual accounts of the Institute. "Any delay in constitution of such an authority leads to severely affect the governance of a premier Technology Institute like IIITD. The callous attitude of the Government towards the formulation of a statutory body is very unfortunate," he said. Notably, the LG had also raised concerns over extraordinary delay in reconstitution of General Council of IIIT-D in its 15th General Council meeting held on November 02, 2023.

India at cusp of becoming great economic power: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

India is presently in a challenging phase of its socio-economic transition and at the cusp of becoming a great economic power, in the middle of global challenges that are complex as well as unpredictable, Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena said here on Wednesday. Making these assertions on the occasion of 12th convocation of Dr B R Ambedkar University (AUD), he said Indian expertise and talent has much demand worldwide. The prospects in a liberal economic environment are immense. Yet, to take advantage of the unfolding opportunities in a globalized market, we have to galvanize our demographic strength. Saxena said our demographic

dividend of youth - 600 million people in the age group of 25 years and below, has to be converted into an asset that propels our surge for development. For this to happen, we have to undertake skilling and capacity building amongst our youth in a mission mode. Institutions and Universities, undoubtedly, have to take the lead in shaping this demographic dividend. This stupendous task can only be accomplished when public institutions, undergo a paradigm shift and enter into collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders, that includes industry, civil society and varied state and central agencies, he said. Over the past 15 years, AUD has registered a remarkable trajectory of growth, both in terms of quality and the quantity. It has

established multiple robust institutional pillars and mechanisms, that work cohesively to achieve the dual objectives of delivering, high-quality education, while upholding principles of equity and social justice, the LG said. Despite having, much older, established and reputed institutions of higher education, as its peers in Delhi, AUD has set its own benchmark of excellence in the fields of social sciences and humanities. In fact, the University is now known for its academic excellence, creative pedagogy and innovative teaching. It has a learning ecosystem that promotes knowledge creation, not just for the benefit of the individual seekers but also keeping in focus, its social relevance, Saxena said. For graduates to compete in a

global economy, they will have to be empowered with quality education by our institutions. For this, our institutions should work relentlessly to achieve excellence, he said adding models of imparting education have to be in sync with the latest trends, technology and also the evolving profile of the students. Delhi Higher Education Minister Atishi was also present on the occasion, honored the graduating students by awarding them degrees. Addressing the students, she expressed gratitude that, unlike many others, they had the opportunity to study in a good institution. She stated that Ambedkar University is renowned not only in Delhi but throughout India as a liberal arts university. She mentioned that liberal arts are often viewed with a critical perspective in our society. This year the university awarded a total of 1095 degrees. These include 33 PhD degrees, 13 MPhil degrees, 602 postgraduate degrees, 442 graduate degrees, and 5 diplomas.

DU ink MoU with SRI for research collaboration

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Shirram Institute for Industrial Research for collaboration in research and development. The MoU was signed by Vikas Gupta, the registrar, on behalf of the Delhi University (DU) as the first party and the director of the Shirram Institute for Industrial Research (SRI) as the second party as authorised representatives.

The MoU will initially be in force for a period of five years and may be renewed subsequently with mutual consent of both the parties in writing, the statement said. "The DU and the SRI have under this MoU

agreed to collaborate for joint activities, including research projects, trainings, workshops/conferences in areas of shared facilities and expertise. Under the collaboration, the experts and scientific staff from the SRI may visit the DU, and reciprocally, the teachers, students and researchers from the DU may visit the SRI, fostering collaboration to share facilities and expertise between both institutions, it said. The SRI and the DU may undertake collaborative research projects in the areas of mutual interest and may apply for other collaborative projects or assignments jointly to national and international agencies, the statement said. The research scholars/ scientists from the SRI can register for Ph.D. With the DU, with one faculty member of the concerned department of the DU and another faculty member from the SRI as supervisors as per the mutually agreed terms. At the same time, a scientist with the SRI may become a guide for the Ph.D. Students of the DU.



DJB hikes damages for sewer death to ₹30 lakh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has, following an order of the Supreme Court increased the compensation for sewer deaths from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 30 lakh, officials said on Wednesday. The Apex Court had earlier in October said the government authorities will have to pay Rs 30 lakh as compensation to the

family of those who die while cleaning the sewers. "To ensure that the compensation for sewer death is increased (given that the previous amount fixed, that is, Rs 10 lakh - made applicable from 1993). The current equivalent of that amount is Rs 30 lakh. This shall be the amount to be paid by the concerned agencies," said an order from the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

"In the event, the dependents of any victim have not been paid such amount, the above amount shall be payable to them. Furthermore, this shall be the amount to be hereafter paid as compensation," the DJB added. The DJB further said the compensation will be disbursed in the case of sewer victims suffering disabilities, depending upon the severity of disabilities.

'Hackathons aim to break barriers, adopt technologies of future'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

National Critical Information, Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), Government of India, Director General Dr. Navin Kumar Singh on Tuesday said hackathons are a way to ensure that educational system of the country are aligned to solving the actual problems of the country. Inaugurating the Grand Finale of the 36-hour non-stop Software Product Development Competition, Smart India Hackathon-2023, an initiative of Ministry of Education, at Amity University, Noida, Singh as Chief Guest on the occasion, complemented Amity University for providing the best of facilities and infrastructure to the participants of the Hackathon. "The aim of these Hackathons is to move towards Aatm Nirbhar Bharat, breaking barriers and adopt technologies of the future, in sync with the vision of Prime Minister of India. We need to have more IT product Companies rather than just be IT services provider and with the Start Up Indian campaigns, we will be able to achieve this goal as well," said Dr Singh.

Car seized as evidence in terror case scrapped for being 15 years old

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A car seized as evidence in a terror case and parked outside a police station here was picked up by the Delhi government's Transport Department as part of a drive and later scrapped, officials said. The 2006 model Maruti Alto car was parked outside the Special Cell Police Station in Lodhi Colony. Being over 15 years old, the vehicle was picked up during a drive to seize overaged vehicles in May, they said. As no one came forward to stake claim within the stipulated three months of it being seized, the car — an evidence in Delhi Police's ongoing probe in a 2021 terror case — was scrapped oblivious to the Delhi Police. Shahzad Alam, Special Commissioner, Transport Department, said the Special Cell of the Delhi Police has so far not pointed out any lapse. "There is no error from our end. The vehicle was parked on a public road and it was seized and sent to a scrapyard. We issued a show cause notice to the scrapper after the matter came to light. The scrapper replied and they also met the SHO of the Special Cell," he said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jacqueline moves court for restraining Suresh from issuing statement

Bollywood actor Jacqueline Fernandez on Wednesday moved a Delhi court seeking directions for immediately restraining alleged conman Suresh Chandrasekar from issuing any communication pertaining to her, directly or indirectly, to media. In her plea, the actor sought directions to the superintendent of Mandoli prison and Delhi Police's economic offences wing (EOW) to not allow Chandrasekar to issue any further letters, statements or mes-

sages about her. She also sought filing of a detailed report by the jail superintendent regarding the action taken against Chandrasekar. Citing Chandrasekar's letter dated October 15, the plea said it was "laced with unsolicited and disturbing content," and that it was widely reported by media. "This relentless pursuit by Chandrasekar, aimed at estab-

lishing contact with the applicant (Jacqueline), is nothing short of a blatant attempt at witness tampering, with the clear intention of mentally intimidating her to the extent that she is compelled to withhold the truth in the criminal trial," the actor's petition said. It said the "barrage of letters and messages" posed a "substantial threat to her safety and well-

being" as a single woman residing in India, away from her family, besides inflicting "immense distress and fear" upon her. "These letters, intentionally circulated and published widely in the print media, have caused significant financial losses to the applicant. This campaign is not only harassment and intimidation but is a direct violation of her rights as a prosecution wit-

ness," the plea said. It said a detailed investigation is needed to understand as to how he got to write such intimidating letters to electronic and print media. In its reply, the EOW said it was a matter of "grave concern" that an important witness in the case was harassed and threatened by the accused. This could affect the trial, it said.

Delhi IGI Airport to get India's first inter State multi-modal transport hub

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport will get India's first inter-state multi-modal transport hub near Aerocity. A proposal has been floated to construct a hub near the GMR Aerocity at the Delhi airport, which will be developed in a phased manner in consultation with the Transport Department of the Delhi Government, would handle around 50 buses. As per the proposal, this transit hub will provide seamless connectivity to the airport through metro, bus and trains to passengers

coming from the neighbouring states. Currently, there is no proper facility for parking these interstate buses at Delhi Airport. Therefore, this proposed facility will immensely help all the passengers coming from adjoining interstate cities to catch international flights. With IGI's capacity going to cross 11 crore passengers per annum next February and cross 13.5 crore latest by 2032, the sheer volume of footfalls requires this kind of connectivity between the airport and other modes of transport. Delhi Airport, being the national cap-

ital's airport and connected to a maximum number of international destinations and airlines, has large catchment areas from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Passengers from these states



travel to IGI airport by interstate buses to catch international flights. According to GMR Airport Infrastructure Limited-operated Delhi Airport, the ISBT, to be developed in consultation with the Delhi Transport Department, will help in bringing long-distance passengers to the airport from the adjoining hinterland. Its location offers the best intermodal connectivity, efficient circulation, and well-laid subway connections for pedestrian movement. The proposed airport ISBT will have state-of-the-art passenger

amenities, matching the airport standards. It will have the best possible user facilities like retail, F&B outlets, EV charging, transit facilities, comfortable waiting areas, ambience, waiting hall, business centre, internet/Wi-Fi services, souvenir shops, etc. so that passengers, meeters and greeters can avail of these facilities. Talking about the development, Videsh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO, DIAL - a GMR Airport Infrastructure Limited-led consortium said, "India's first multi-modal transport hub, which will integrate bus, metro, and air

services, is a transformative project that redefines passenger convenience, offering enhanced facilities for bus travellers. It will offer an unparalleled passenger experience that begins before you even reach the airport. By prioritizing bus travellers and their needs, DIAL is creating a truly inclusive transportation ecosystem. More than just a transportation hub, this project represents our commitment to sustainable development and reduced traffic congestion. By encouraging public transport usage, DIAL is paving the way for a cleaner, greener future."

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Vacant Central posts being filled in mission mode, says MoS Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

All vacant posts in Central Government organisations are being filled in a mission mode, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday. "Rozgar Mela" is one of the steps towards fulfilling the government's commitment of according the highest priority to employment generation, Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said in a written reply to a question. He said Rozgar Melas are being



held across the country and the new appointees are inducted into various Central ministries, departments, Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) and autonomous bodies, including health and education



institutes and public sector banks among others. "Filling up vacant posts in various ministries and departments is a continuous process. All vacant posts are being filled

in a mission mode," Singh said, adding that employment generation in the country coupled with improving the employability of youth is the priority of the Central government. Accordingly, the Government of India announced the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package to provide stimulus to business opportunities and enhance employment opportunities, the minister said. "Under this package, the government is providing fiscal stimulus comprising various long-term schemes/ programmes/

policies for making the country self-reliant and to create large-scale employment opportunities. In addition to this package, several schemes have been launched to generate employment and self-employment in the country in different sectors of the economy," he said. These schemes include Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana, Production Linked Incentive schemes, PM GatiShakti, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi etc, Singh added.

Besides these initiatives, various flagship programmes of the government such as Make in India, Start-up India, Stand-up India, Digital India, Smart City Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, and Housing for All are also oriented towards generating employment opportunities for the youths nationwide, he said. The details relating to conducting state-level Rozgar Melas and related specific initiatives of state governments are being maintained by the states, the minister added.

States should be on alert on Covid rise: Mandaviya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the country reported the highest number of 614 new Covid cases since May 21 and three deaths in Kerala, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has asked the States to be prepared and remain alert against new and emerging strains of Covid-19, especially ahead of the upcoming festivities.



The Minister also underlined the challenge posed by the rise in JN.1 cases in some countries such as China, Brazil, Germany and the United States and the recent one back home in Kerala. As many as 20 cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been found across the country with 18 traced in Goa and one each in Kerala and Maharashtra, INSACOG data showed.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation said that it has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly increasing spread but said that it poses a "low" global public health risk. A rise in daily Covid positivity rate has been observed in a few states like Kerala, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Karnataka, however the Minister said that there was no cause for panic. On the new JN.1 variant of SARS-CoV-2, the Minister said that the variant was under intense scientific scrutiny, but not a cause of immediate concern. No clustering of cases has been observed in India due to JN.1.

Chairing the high-level review meeting with states, Mandaviya, however, reiterated that Covid was not over yet and requested the states to monitor emerging infections, symptoms and case severity to plan appropriate public health responses. He assured the states of all support from the Centre and stressed the need for collective efforts between the Centre and the states to deal with the emerging situation in the spirit of the "whole-of-government" approach.

"We need to be on the alert but there is no need to panic," Mandaviya said and directed officials to strengthen the surveillance system for whole genome sequencing of positive case samples to track the variants through the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network and ensure timely detection of newer variants.

At the meeting, states and UTs were requested to ramp up testing and refer a large number of Covid positive samples and that of pneumonia-like illnesses to INSACOG Genome Sequencing Laboratories (IGSLs) daily to track new variants, if any. He told officials to undertake mock drills every three months at both the central and state levels to assess the functionality of PSA plants, oxygen concentrators, cylinders and ventilators, and encourage the sharing of best practices. Mandaviya asked states to raise awareness among people on respiratory hygiene and ensure the dissemination of factually correct information and counter fake news to mitigate any panic.

The meeting was informed that while active Covid cases in India were significantly low compared to the global scenario, there has been a steep rise in active cases. It was also noted that 92.8 per cent of the cases were in home isolation. There has been no increase in the hospitalisation rates due to Covid-19. The cases that are hospitalized are due to other medical conditions and COVID-19 is an incidental finding, the meeting was informed. Dr VK Paul, member (Health) of NITI Aayog reiterated the need for a "whole-of-government" approach to tackle the challenges posed by the surge in Covid cases and the emergence of a new variant.

Baramulla Railway project most difficult post 1947, says Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday said the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project is perhaps the most difficult new railway line project undertaken in the country post-Independence. "The USBRL project is perhaps the most difficult new railway line project undertaken in the country post-Independence. The terrain passes through young Himalayas, which are full of geological surprises and numerous problems," Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.



of the project, 161 km has already been commissioned," Vaishnaw said. "The work on the Katra-Banihal (111 km) section has been taken up. Anticipated cost of the project is Rs 37,012 crore, against which, expenditure of ₹34,261/- crore has been incurred up to March, 2023 on the project. An outlay of ₹5,310 crore has been allocated for the year 2023-24."

Talking about the challenges in the project, the railway minister said the Katra-Banihal section predominantly involves tunnelling. According to him, 97.42 km out of 111 km, which is 87 per cent of the total length of Katra-Banihal section, is in tunnels and the maximum length of tunnel T-49 is 12.77

km, which will be the longest transportation railway tunnel in the country. "Railway has made the world's highest Railway Bridge over Chenab river in Reasi District of Jammu and Kashmir. The iconic Chenab Bridge is 1,315 metres long having arch span of 467 metre and height of 359 metre above river bed," Vaishnaw said.

He added, "Indian Railways' first cable-stayed bridge has been constructed over Anjikhad. Its bridge deck is 331 metres above the river bed level and height of its main pylon is 193 metres." Besides the USBRL, Vaishnaw said that final location survey of the following lines have been sanctioned: doubling of Baramulla-Banihal section (135.5km); new line of Baramulla-Uri (50km); new line of Sopore-Kupwara (33.7km); new line of Awantipora-Shopian (27.6km); and new line of Anantnag-Bijbehara-Pahalgam (77.5km).

Highlighting the socio-economic contributions of the USBRL project, the minister said that employment generation is a significant aspect of its impact.

Mamata meets Modi, demands release of funds by Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and demanded the release of pending Central funds to the State. The TMC supremo said the prime minister proposed that officials from the State and the Centre can sit together and clear the issues.

Speaking to the media after the meeting in the Parliament complex along with nine party MPs, Banerjee said 155 central teams have already visited West Bengal and the state government has given clarification on issues raised by the Centre. The Centre and the West Bengal government have been involved in a tug-of-war over the release of funds to the state, with the TMC even holding a protest led by its general secretary Abhishek Banerjee in the national capital in October. The BJP has accused the TMC government of siphoning off central funds meant for Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojna and MGNREGA.



Talking about the pending MGNREGA funds for the state, Banerjee said it is mandatory under the Constitution to pay the workers. "We didn't even get a penny for 100 days of work (under MGNREGA) in the budget for 2022-23. "Funds for Aawas Yojna have been stopped, rural development schemes have been shut, and the health mission programme has also been shut. We are also not getting funds under the Finance Commission," Banerjee alleged.

"Our officials have given all the clarification they asked for. PM has said a joint meeting will be held by the Centre and state officials. I said we have given clarification 155 times. We can do that once again, in a federal structure, the central government has a share and the state also has a share," she said. "It is not right to stop the money for poor people," Banerjee said, adding that the Centre owed nearly Rs. 1.16 lakh crore to the state under various centrally sponsored schemes and pending claims for natural disasters over the past years. The pending dues include MGNREGA payment to the tune of nearly Rs 6911 crore - Rs 3732 crore against wage liability and Rs 3179 crore against non-wage liabilities; central share for 11,01,731 houses sanctioned under PM Aawas Yojana which has not been released; and fund under National Health Mission by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

On Wednesday, the central government has a share and the state also has a share," she said. "It is not right to stop the money for poor people," Banerjee said, adding that the Centre owed nearly Rs. 1.16 lakh crore to the state under various centrally sponsored schemes and pending claims for natural disasters over the past years. The pending dues include MGNREGA payment to the tune of nearly Rs 6911 crore - Rs 3732 crore against wage liability and Rs 3179 crore against non-wage liabilities; central share for 11,01,731 houses sanctioned under PM Aawas Yojana which has not been released; and fund under National Health Mission by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

CORRIGENDUM

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

DEMAND NOTICE PUBLICATION UNDER SARFAESI ACT FOR LOAN ACCOUNT NO. 002105023126, 002155000039 & 002155000045 NAME OF THE BORROWER TECHNOCRATS TOOLING PRIVATE LIMITED, UMESH KUMAR SINGH-DIRECTOR, PRAVEEN RAO-DIRECTOR, SPS TECHNOLOGY, UMESH KUMAR SINGH, REENA SINGH WERE PUBLISHED IN DEMAND NOTICE DATED December 1, 2022 AND PUBLISHED DATED 24 February, 2023 AT THE PIONEER (HINDI), & THE PIONEER (ENGLISH) RESPECTIVELY AND SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE DATED MAY 04, 2023 IT'S PUBLISHED DATED MAY 09, 2023 AT PIONEER (ENGLISH) and PIONEER (HINDI), MAY 10, 2023 published at INDIAN EXPRESS (ENGLISH) and PRATAHKAL (HINDI), & MAY 10, 2023 published at ODISHA TODAY (ENGLISH) and UTKAL MAIL (ODI), and physical possession notice, pre-sale notice, inventory, inventory list & Panchnama dated NOVEMBER 30, 2023 & Post possession to borrower & Police and Vacation notice borrower dated DECEMBER 01, 2023, published dated DECEMBER 06, 2023 at PIONEER (ENGLISH) and PIONEER (HINDI), DECEMBER 06, 2023 published at INDIAN EXPRESS (ENGLISH) and PRATAHKAL (HINDI), & DECEMBER 06, 2023 published at ODISHA TODAY (ENGLISH) and UTKAL MAIL (ODI) under the securitisation, reconstruction of financial asset and enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of the power conferred under section 13(2) the property address mention in the entire sarfaesi proceedings is **FLAT NO NGH 051, 5TH FLOOR TOWER H NEW TOWN HEIGHTS SECTOR 90 GURGAON** & the NPA date is mention in demand notice publication is **AUGUST 15, 2401**, respectively. **WE WISH TO MENTION THAT INADVERTENTLY AND UNINTENTIONALLY A TYPOGRAPHICAL ERROR HAS OCCURRED IN THE SAID THE BORROWERS ADDRESS IN 13.2 & SYMBOLIC NOTICE AND ITS PUBLICATION FLAT NO NGH 051, 5TH FLOOR TOWER H NEW TOWN HEIGHTS SECTOR 90 GURGAON & the NPA date is mention in demand notice publication is AUGUST 15, 2401 INSTEAD OF FLAT NO. NGH-051 ALONG WITH PARKING SPACE NO, POH-025, 5TH FLOOR, TOWER-H, NEW TOWN HEIGHTS, SECTOR-90 ATREVENUE ESTATE OF VILLAGE HAYATPUR, TEHSIL AND DISTT- GURGAON & the NPA date is SEPTEMBER 16, 2022. THEREFORE, REQUEST YOU TO PLEASE READ THE SAME ASFLAT NO. NGH-051 ALONG WITH PARKING SPACE NO, POH-025, 5TH FLOOR, TOWER-H, NEW TOWN HEIGHTS, SECTOR-90 ATREVENUE ESTATE OF VILLAGE HAYATPUR, TEHSIL AND DISTT- GURGAON & the NPA date is SEPTEMBER 16, 2022.**

Date : December 21, 2023
Place : Gurgaon
Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that Mr Prakash Shukla and Mrs Pratima Shukla had booked a residential flat in the project being developed by Prateek Group (hereinafter referred to as "Company") with the name of "Prateek Grand City" at Siddharth Vihar, NH-24, Ghaziabad. That Prakash Shukla has unfortunately expired on 28-Apr-2021 and Mrs. Pratima Shukla w/o Mr. Prakash Shukla R/o Flat No. 1208, Tower C-6, Prateek Grand City, at Siddharth Vihar, NH-24, Ghaziabad has approached & applied to the company being the legal heir of Late Mr. Prakash Shukla. In case there is any other legal heir of Mr. Prakash Shukla, the said person is required to approach the company along with relevant documents within 15 days from the publication of this notice. In case no name/s is/are received by the company Mrs. Pratima Shukla w/o Mr. Prakash Shukla R/o Flat No. 1208, Tower C-6, Prateek Grand City, at Siddharth Vihar, NH-24, Ghaziabad will be registered as legal heir of Mr. Prakash Shukla and no objection would be accepted thereafter.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Ranjan Biswas is in process to purchase the Entire Upper Ground Floor without roof rights floor back side (Southern side) Portion of Property Bearing No. H-3/67 measuring 100 Sq. Yds. Out of Kharsa No. 79/18 Situated in Village Palam in the abadi of Mahavi Enclave Palam, New Delhi. Having loan from Praram Capital & Housing Finance Ltd from Magna Chauhan, who purchased the same from Sanjay Kumar Goyal vide Sale Deed dated 19.2.2017 (Doc. No. 1006) whereas he has lost an original Sale deed dated 16.07.2019 executed by Mr. Bejani in favour of Mr. Sanjay Kumar Goyal. As per the said property, an FIR has already been lodged for that on dated 10/10/2022. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. **Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)** Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vaishali, G.B., U.P. Mob. 9610063351

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.	Sumit Kumar Mishra/ Vibha Devi Mishra/ LBDEL00002094431	Flat No.430, 4th Floor, Block-B, Manhar Garden, Near Harish Nagar, Sikandara, Bodla Road, Agra/ December 18, 2023	July 31, 2023 Rs. 24,16,442/-	Delhi/ NCR & Agra
2.	Dhananjay Kumar/ Chandra Shekhar Prasad/ LBDEL00002043180	Flat No.301, 3rd Floor (Flat No.01, 3rd Floor, Block A, Manhar Garden) Block A, Manhar Garden, Harish Nagar Sikandara Bodla Road, Sikandara Agra/ December 18, 2023	July 19, 2023 Rs. 18,83,244/-	Delhi/ NCR & Agra
3.	Deepak Kumar Mishra/ Rekha Mehta/ LBGHZ00005174102	Apartment No. C- 207, 2nd Floor Tower C, Mulberry County, Situated in Village Mujeri, Sector- 70, Tehsil Ballabgarh, Haryana Faridabad/ December 19, 2023	June 15, 2023 Rs. 18,08,469/-	Delhi/ NCR
4.	Pradeep/ Geeta/ LBFDB0000510709	Flat No. 803 T-7/ Tower A, "Lake View Apartment", Sector- 48, Faridabad/ December 19, 2023	July 14, 2023 Rs.39,41,029/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Dharmvir/ Pinki/ LBDEL00004897559	DDA LIG, Flat No. 1274, 3rd Floor, Sanskriti Apartments, Pocket- GH-1, Sector- 28, Rohini, Delhi/ December 19, 2023	October 26, 2022 Rs.16,90,081/-	Delhi/ NCR & Hisar

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 21, 2023
Place: Delhi/NCR
Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER , CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM
GHINGARIKHAL, RANIKHET, DISTT.-ALMORA 263645

Letter No.: 01/Camp Dehradun / Date : 18-12-2023

E-Tender Notice

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Tender Value with GST (Rs. In Lakh)	Period of Completion
1.	Construction of Remaining Civil Works of Trout Hatchery at Bageshwar, District Bageshwar.	Rs. 73.92	06 Months
2.	Repairing of Existing Administrative Block of Rajiv Gandhi Navodaya Vidhyalaya, Chaulaniya District-Almora.	Rs. 69.23	06 Months

3.Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal: 20-12-2023 (17.00 hrs)

4.Online Bid submission: End date :- 03-01-2024 (17.00 hrs)

5.Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 05-01-2024 (11.00 hrs)

6.Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: - Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Ranikhet.

7.Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 22-12-2023 (11.00 hrs) Project Manager Construction Unit Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Ranikhet.

8.For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in

PROJECT MANAGER

PUBLIC NOTICE-TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Notice for sale of immovable assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Vibhore Kumar (Borrower), Anuradha Jasuja (Co-Borrower) Lan No. LBGUR00004983636	Unit No. G-68, Ground Floor, Spaze Palazo Sector 69, Village Fazilpur Jharsa, Haryana Gurgaon- 122001 Admeasuring an area of 394 Sq. Fts.	Rs. 97,22,393/- as on December 08, 2023	Rs. 72,00,000/- From 12:00 Noon to 02:00 PM onwards	December 26, 2023	January 17, 2024, From 12:00 Noon onwards

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency **M/s NexGen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link-<https://disposalhub.com>)** The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till **January 16, 2024 before 05:00 PM** failing which, this/these secured asset/s will be sold as per schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005** on or before **January 16, 2024 before 05:00 PM** and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before **January 16, 2024 before 05:00 PM** along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005** on or before **January 16, 2024 before 05:00 PM** Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi.

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact **ICICI Bank Limited On 8126013708/ 8584874809**

Please note that Marketing agencies 1. **M/s NexGen Solutions Private Limited** 2. **Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd** 3. **Hecta Proptech Pvt Ltd** have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property.

The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s

Date: December 21, 2023
Place: Gurgaon
Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

ITDC continues to perform with tourist friendly steps post Covid

ARCHNA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Post-Covid tourism revival along with a string of tourists-friendly steps at its iconic hotel The Ashok and duty free shops across 14 seaports has helped the public sector unit, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) to continue its stellar performance.



Union Tourism Minister G Krishna Reddy recently informed the Lok Sabha that for the half year ended 30th September, 2023, ITDC has reported turnover of Rs 255.04 crore up by 31 per cent over the corresponding period of last year of Rs 195.37 crore. It has achieved net profit of Rs 37.4 crore in the first half of fiscal 2023-24, i.e. an increase of 60 per cent over the corresponding period of last year, said the Minister.

The total turnover for the fiscal year 2022-23 stood at Rs 458.08 crore for ITDC, representing an increase of over 58% compared to the previous year. Reddy was replying to a written query posed by Lok Sabha MP Suredhnanand Saraswati about steps being undertaken by the Government to streamline ITDC Hotels and role of the PSU in promoting tourism and hospitality sectors in the country.

During pandemic times, the PSU's earnings had taken a beating, witnessing a negative bottomline due to low tourists turnout. Reddy spelled out various steps being initiated to boost the revenue of its verticals like Ashok Group of Hotels under which the Ashok Hotel and Hotel Samrat at New Delhi, Hotel Kalinga Ashok (Bhubaneswar,

Orissa) are being operated under the ITDC/JV. "The joint venture company hotel is The Ashok Beach Resort, Puducherry with PIPDICL," said the Minister. Some of the hotel properties of the ITDC are in the process of divestment. Renovation of 48 guest rooms, improvement of main lobby, addition of new swimming Pool for guests and a new licensed F&B outlet in Samrat Hotel, New Delhi and tie ups with most of the online travel agent's for online room bookings are some of the measures taken by the PSU. "Ashok events division has been utilized by many central ministries, government departments, autonomous bodies etc. for executing their events in India and internationally," said the Minister. Also, ITDC's Duty Free division has been profitable and even as on date when due to the pandemic, most of the travel and tourism related business have taken big hits, ITDC's Duty Free shops at 14 Seaports/locations for international tourists continues to earn profits for ITDC and the government, he said. The ITDC is also eyeing cruise tourism around India's coastal towns to tap growing tourists inflow in the country

Caste census call after public view: Shinde

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday said an appropriate decision on caste-based census will be taken after eliciting the opinion of all sections of society and keeping sentiments of the people in mind. Shinde visited the memorials of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founder K B Hedgewar and second 'sarsangchalak' MS Golwalkar in Reshimbhagh area here and paid tributes to them. On Tuesday, RSS functionary Shridhar Gadge said there should no caste-based census and sought to know what will be achieved by it. Such an exercise may benefit some people politically as it will provide data about the popu-

lation of a certain caste, but it is not good socially and in terms of national unity, said Gadge, the Vidarbha Sah-Sangchalak. Notably, the Congress is in favour of a countrywide caste census. To a query on the RSS functionary's comments, Shinde on Wednesday said Maharashtra is a progressive state and its culture and traditions are different from other States. "Here all the communities and castes live together, work together and celebrate together. Hence, after taking the opinion of all sections of society an appropriate decision will be taken keeping feelings of the people in mind," the CM told reporters. Ministers and MLAs belonging to the BJP visit the memorial of



Hedgewar and Golwalkar every year during the winter session of the state legislature in Nagpur. Shinde, who forged an alliance with the BJP last year to form government in the state, said, "We visit Dr Hedgewar Smruti Mandir every year during the

winter session. I feel at peace and get energy and inspiration after coming here. That is why we come here." To a query on politics over Hindutva, Shinde said, "There is no politics behind us coming over here." The CM said his Government has been formed on the ideology of Hindutva and the ideology of (Shiv Sena's late founder) Balasaheb Thackeray. "This Hindutva of development, as also said by our prime minister, is for sabka saath, sabka vikas," he said. Shinde further said his government represents the common people. He said anybody can meet the Chief Minister and this accessibility is the feature of his Government. "I also work as a common man, that is why people like us and our Government," the CM added.

NDPP, BJP alliance returns to power

Nagaland sees women legislators for first time in 2023

PTI ■ KOHIMA

The ruling NDPP-BJP Alliance returned to power in Nagaland in this year's assembly polls, which also saw the election of two women candidates to the House for the first time in the northeastern State's history. The state also saw the assembly bill seeking to reserve 33 per cent of seats in urban local bodies (ULB) for women, paving the way for civic polls in the state after two decades.



The People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) of the NDPP and the BJP won the Nagaland Assembly elections held on February 27 by winning 37 seats in the 60-member House, with Neiphiu Rio becoming the chief minister of the tribal-dominated state for the fifth consecutive term, making him the longest-serving CM of the state.

The alliance bettered its performance from the previous election, when the regional party had won 18 seats while the saffron party had bagged 12 constituencies. In this year's assembly polls, two women candidates -- Hekhani Jakhalu and Salthoutuonuo Kruse of the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) -- were greenhorns but they defeated sitting MLAs in Western Angami and Dimapur-III seats respectively. The Republican Party of India (Athawale) and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) opened their accounts in the Christian-dominated state by winning two constituencies and one seat respectively in the assembly elections.

All the political parties in the state, including seven NCP legislators and four Independent MLAs, extended unconditional support to the NDPP-BJP dispensation, making it an all-party government for the third time in the state. The solution to the decades-old Naga political issue, which every political party pronounces as its top priority before every election, went backstage as the state government was yet to form any political affairs committee (PAC) to facilitate negotiating parties to conclude the peace talks. The Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the Working Committee of Naga

National Political Group (NNPG), comprising at least seven groups, since 2017 to conclude the peace talks. Eight years have passed since the signing of the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015 with the NSCN-IM and another six years have gone by following the signing of Agreed Position on November 17, 2017 with WC NNPGs. With no significant development in the political negotiations between the Centre and the Naga groups, another year is coming to an end with no solution to the Naga political issue. The Nagaland Assembly on November 9 unanimously passed a bill seeking to reserve 33 per cent of seats in urban local bodies (ULB) for women, resolving a contentious issue and paving the way for municipal elections in the state after two decades.

The CM has said that the apex tribal bodies, which had earlier opposed such a reservation, accepted it and the State Election Commission (SEC) will soon announce the dates for municipal polls. ULB elections in the northeastern state have been long overdue, with the last civic polls having been held in 2004. Since then, elections were not conducted first due to the unresolved Naga peace talks and then on the issue of 33 per cent reservation for women which the tribal bodies had opposed, asserting it infringes upon the special rights of Nagaland guaranteed under Article 371(A) of the Constitution.

The 10-day Hornbill Festival, the annual tourism promotional event of the state, saw an overall footfall of 1,54,057 visitors, an increase of 13,758 from the previous year. The tally included 1,14,860 locals, 37,089 domestic tourists and 2,108 foreigners who witnessed the coming together of the 18 tribes of Nagaland at the festival.

PDP favours pre-poll alliance with National Conference in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Despite receiving repeated snubs from the top leadership of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference over forging a pre-poll alliance to defeat the Bharatiya Janta Party in the poll arena, the Peoples Democratic Party, one of the key constituents of the GUPKAR alliance, Wednesday extended an olive branch while favouring a pre-poll alliance with the National Conference for the maiden Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir. The party's sentiment was shared by the PDP Parliamentary Board chairman Mohammad Sartaj Madni who earlier chaired the first meeting of the newly constituted board to chalk out the party's poll strategy. Interacting with the reporters Mohammad Sartaj Madni Wednesday said the party wants the constituents of the Peoples' Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) to meet together. "The PAGD was formed after Mehbooba's struggle. She brought us all together. Mehbooba is the anchor of the PAGD. So, we do not want any rifts in it. There will be nothing from our side to suggest that we do not want the alliance. We want all the people of J-K to get united for a larger goal to achieve that goal," Madni told reporters after the meeting. Both the Kashmir-based regional parties, once considered arch-rivals, had come together under the banner of GUPKAR alliance after the

Abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had never minced any words while claiming that his party was ready to contest all the 90 Assembly seats on its own, without forging any alliance with any other political party. On the other hand, PDP and JKNC leadership also traded barbs on various occasions holding each other responsible for conceding space to the BJP. Responding to a question if the party had finalised the candidates for the Lok Sabha polls next year, the PDP leader said the parliamentary board would decide that in another meeting. Interestingly, none of the senior leaders of the JKNC reacted to the offer made by the PDP. In the absence of JKNC Vice President Omar Abdullah, none of the senior leaders reacted in the valley. Party President and Member of Parliament from Srinagar Dr Farooq Abdullah, however, attended the meeting of the INDIA bloc in New Delhi alongside PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti. During the alliance's last meeting, Omar Abdullah had proposed that the seats already held by the INDIA alliance members shouldn't come up for discussion and only those seats held by BJP and non-INDIA alliance parties should be considered for seat-sharing. Omar's suggestion made it clear that NC wouldn't enter into a pre-poll pact with PDP in Kashmir.

Prohibitory orders imposed in Arunachal town after lockdown call in colleges

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC were imposed at Pasighat, the headquarters of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, on Wednesday following an "indefinite lock-down" call given by an organisation against two colleges in the district.

The organisation, Adi Baane Kebang Youth Wing (ABKYW), gave call from Wednesday to press for its demand that most of the appointments in the College of Horticulture and Forestry (CHF) and the College of Agriculture (CoA) be made from the state's scheduled tribe community. Apprehending law and order

issues and public disturbance in the college campuses, District Magistrate Yaji Taggu on Wednesday passed the orders prohibiting gathering of five or more people and carrying arms in the entire Pasighat town. The ABKYW has been demanding, among others, 80 per cent job reservation for Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled

Tribe in group A and B posts and 100 per cent reservation in group C and D posts. On December 13, the ABKYW gave an ultimatum of seven days to the authorities to resolve the issue. The "lock-down" was announced after the expiry of one week. The ABKYW staged an 8-hour dharna at CHF and CoA campuses on December 4.

International tourist arrivals pick up in Goa but far from prepandemic times

PTI ■ PANAJI

The number of foreign tourist arrivals in Goa is picking up after a major drop due to COVID, but is yet to touch the pre-pandemic levels, according to official figures. For the first seven months of this calendar year, 2.81 lakh foreign tourists arrived in the coastal state, which is more compared to the figures for 2021 and 2022, when the sector was hit by the coronavirus outbreak and its aftermath. According to numbers provided in the Lok Sabha by the Union tourism ministry, in response to a question by Goa MP Francisco Sardinha, the year 2021 saw 22,000 foreign travellers arriving in the state and the number rose to 1.75 lakh in 2022. A senior official from the state tourism department said that



this year's footfall - 2.81 lakh foreign visitors - is much less compared to the pre-pandemic times. "But this is not the case only with Goa. Overall, there has been a drop in international travels," he said. The figures provided by the Union tourism ministry to Sardinha also said that 9.34 lakh foreign tourists arrived in Goa in 2018, which increased to 9.37 lakh in 2019 but then

nosedived due to COVID-19. Amid a drop in the foreign tourist arrivals compared to the pre-pandemic times in Goa, the tourism industry is banking on the new sectors to make up for the losses in the number of international arrivals, said Nilesch Shah, President of Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG). Shah told PTI that the conflicts in Ukraine-Russia and Israel-

Palestine are the main reason for the lower number of foreign tourists visiting Goa. He said that there are also other reasons, including the opening of e-visa facilities by other competitive markets. "It will take time for Goa to reach the pre-pandemic figures of international travellers," Shah said. Shah said that there are a lot of tourists who now plan their holidays in destinations like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam. Another state tourism department official said that chartered flights from new destinations like Uzbekistan have started arriving in the state. "Last week, a weekly flight from Uzbekistan to Manohar International Airport in Goa started," he said. The flight Centrum Air Q6 5545 is operated by Elaine Avia in Uzbekistan, he said.

J&K Police raids 5 locations in Srinagar in investment fraud

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir Police has carried out raids at five locations in Srinagar as part of a probe into a multi-crore investment fraud, officials said on Wednesday. Electronic gadgets and documents were seized during the raids by the cyber wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police on Tuesday night, they said. Inspired by the Hindi film 'Phir Hera Pheri', the fraudsters set up a company named 'Curative Survey' in the Karan Nagar area and duped several people of at least Rs 59 crore under the pretext of doubling their investment within two weeks, officials said. The officials, however, said the amount might increase as the investigation is still in progress. Initially, the company made good on its promise which brought in more investors and the scheme was promoted by at least two local YouTubers adding to its popularity. Soon after, the owners of the company disappeared, officials said, adding that they found the Karan Nagar office locked. One of the YouTubers, Idris Mir, said he could not be held responsible for the fraud as he had featured the company on his channel as a paid promotion.

Indian researchers team to visit Egypt

To study Red Sea coast and Nile River basin

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

An interdisciplinary team of eight researchers from the Kerala-based PAMA Institute for Advancement of Archaeological Sciences is embarking on a visit along Egypt's Red Sea coast and the Nile River with the aim of exploring the ancient maritime link between India and Egypt. The institute is located in Pattanam in Ernakulam district. In a statement, the institute said the primary objective is to explore the ancient maritime connections between India and Egypt during the Sangam Age (300 BCE - 300 CE) and prepare a ground for

future Indo-Egyptian studies. Historical records distinctly reveal early interactions between the Indian subcontinent and Egypt, notably dating back to the pharaonic era, which is prior to third century BCE, Nehal Singh, PAMA Research Officer, said in the statement. Evidence such as the utilisation of black pepper in Ramses II's mummification during the 12th century BCE illuminates this ancient connection, he noted. Around the first century BCE, the early coastal port network of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean witnessed a significant transformation. Ships originating from peninsular India managed to reach Red Sea ports like Berenike and Myos Hormos in just 40 days, the expert explained in the statement. Research carried out in Pattanam highlights the peak phase of Indo-Roman contact through Egypt, spanning from 100 BCE to 300 CE, it said.

Bengaluru resident dies from Covid-19

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A 64-year-old man died in the city due to COVID-19 infection five days ago, Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said on Wednesday. Asked if the cause of death is the new subvariant JN.1 of the SARS CoV-2 virus, he said it is not known so far. The person, who had comorbidities, is a resident of Chamarajpet and died on December 15, the Minister told reporters. "It is still not known whether the patient had JN.1 sub variant infection. He had heart failure, also TB infection. He also had hypertension, lung disease, bronchial asthma, along with COVID-19 and pneumonia," Rao added. Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Services, Randeep D, told PTI: "It's the first (COVID death) after recent surge in cases". Rao, meanwhile, said the state



government would increase testing to gauge the rate of COVID-19 infections. In the next three days, it intends to increase the number to 5,000 tests per day. RT-PCR tests have been made mandatory for all severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) cases, and at least 1 in 20 influenza-like illness (ILI) cases, he said. A meeting will be held with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on Thursday to discuss further measures to be taken and preparations made, Rao said. The Minister earlier attended a

virtual meeting by union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya with Health Ministers of all states, officials from the central and state governments, and representatives from Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and NITI Aayog, among others. He said there is need to do more tests and genome sequencing to know about the spread of infection, adding, instructions have been issued to do more tests, especially in border districts -- Dakshina Kannada, Kodagu, Chamarajanagara and Mysuru. Karnataka government on Tuesday issued an advisory asking people above 60 years, those with comorbidities, pregnant women and lactating mothers, to wear face masks when outdoors, and to strictly avoid visiting closed, poorly ventilated spaces and crowded areas, in the wake of current Covid-19 situation in the country and detection of JN.1 sub variant in neighbouring Kerala.

Telangana total debt pegged at ₹6.71 lakh crore by end of FY 24

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana will have an outstanding debt of Rs 6,71,757 crore, including non-guaranteed loans of corporations or institutions by the end of FY 24 against Rs 72,658 crore in 2014, the state government said. Telangana State Finances-White Paper was tabled by the government in the Legislative Assembly. The debt servicing burden of monies which are borrowed on the budget and off-budget has increased enormously and is consuming 34 per cent of the state's revenue receipts while the salaries and pensions of employees consume another 35 per cent of the state revenue receipts, a State Government document said on Wednesday. "The total debt on the books of the State, guaranteed and

serviced by the State, guaranteed but not serviced by the State, and not guaranteed and serviced by the institutions is Rs 6,71,757 crores," it said. Further, as per budget estimates for FY 2023-24, the debt under FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003) is estimated to increase to Rs 3,89,673 crore. In Telangana, there is a gap of almost 20 per cent between the budgeted and the actual expenditure. This figure is not only high when compared to other states, but also in comparison to the expenditure achieved in the united Andhra Pradesh, the document said. The new government is determined to implement all the six guarantees which are promised by the party based on which the people of Telangana had given the mandate for change, it said.

Kashmir valley braces for harshest winter period

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The minimum temperature in Kashmir stayed several degrees below the freezing point as the valley braces for 'Chilla-i-Kalan' -- the 40-day harshest winter period, officials said on Wednesday. Srinagar city -- the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir -- recorded a low of minus 4.4 degrees Celsius on

Tuesday night, down from the previous night's minus 3.7 degree Celsius, the officials said. Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, which serves as one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6.3 degrees Celsius, they said. The famous ski resort of Gulmarg in Baramulla district recorded a low of

minus 4.4 degrees Celsius, the officials said. Qazigund recorded a low of minus 4 degree Celsius, Kokernag town saw the minimum settle at minus 3.3 degrees Celsius and Kupwara recorded a low of minus 3.5 degrees Celsius. The weather office has forecast generally dry weather over the next few days in Kashmir as the minimum temperature is expected to dip further.

The drop in temperature has resulted in freezing of many slow moving water bodies. It has also resulted in freezing of water supply pipes in some areas. With electricity supply erratic in many areas of Kashmir, people have resorted to use of 'kangri', an earthen firepot, to beat the chill. The drop in temperature has resulted in an increase in respiratory

problems among the children and elderly. The 'Chilla-i-Kalan' is the 40-day harshest winter period when a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies, including the famous Dal Lake here as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley. The chances of snowfall are the most

frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially the higher reaches, receive heavy snowfall. While 'Chillai-Kalan' begins on December 21, it will end on January 31. The cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir with a 20-day-long 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day-long 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold).



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The lure of lucre

IPL is no more about just cricket; mega bucks have turned it into a purely commercial venture

In our country where cricket is treated nothing less than religion, the Indian Premier League (IPL) auctions have always been a spectacle. This annual event, nowadays even televised live, draws awe, amazement and immense attention from cricket enthusiasts, team owners and players alike. In the latest edition of these auctions, the demand was for pace bowlers, with Australian sensation Mitchell Starc emerging as the most expensive buy at a staggering Rs24.75 crore. While such high pay packets are apt to make headlines, they also raise important questions about the balance between the commercial aspects and the essence of the sport. The mouth-watering price tag attached to players like Starc is indicative of the IPL's transformation into a lucrative business venture. The 'gentleman's game' is fast turning into an orgy of the moneyed elite where players are just pawns in the game. It is not very far from South Korean web series 'Squid Games' where a few rich people place bets on poor players for enjoyment. Team owners are willing to shell out astronomical sums to secure marquee players, creating a bidding war that often borders on the extravagant. While this certainly adds an element of excitement to the auction, it also underscores how commercialisation has taken centre stage. Since inception, the IPL has been a money spinner, attracting sponsorships, broadcast deals and a massive fan following.



The league's format, blending cricketing entertainment with glitz and glamour, has turned it into a cash cow. While financial success is crucial for sustaining any sports league, there is growing concern that

the balance between sporting integrity and commercial interests is tilting in favour of the latter at IPL. As zeroes are added to cheques, there's a risk of cricket itself being relegated to the background. The primary purpose of IPL was to showcase top cricketing talent in a format that was both thrilling and entertaining. However, the shift of focus to the commercial spectacle rather than the game itself raises questions about the impact on the purity of the sport. The team game has turned into a showcase of individual overkill. The exorbitant amounts spent on stars hurt team dynamics. Teams may find themselves overly reliant on a few key players, diminishing the competitive balance that makes cricket such a riveting sport. The increasing influence of commercial interests is evident not only in player auctions but also in the league's overall structure. The tournament's scheduling, marketing strategies and even venue choices often prioritise financial gains over cricketing considerations. The IPL has become a brand, but that should not overshadow the essence of the sport it represents. Striking a balance between financial success and the sport's spirit is crucial for IPL's long-term sustainability and credibility. It is imperative to ensure that love for the game remains at the forefront of the IPL experience.

PICTALK



A man dressed as Santa Claus with school children during pre-Christmas celebrations, in Malda

Old Pension Scheme: Should it be restored



K S TOMAR

Prime Minister Modi took a political risk in Assembly elections and did not promise the restoration of old pension scheme

It was a farsighted, extrapolative and prophetic vision of late prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee who made a daring decision to replace the old pension scheme (OPS) with a market-driven and financially viable, national pension scheme (NPS) in 2003, which was not primarily dictated by short term benefits to present generation at the cost of future generations thereby protecting the states from an imminent fiscal distress and economic structural collapse.

Centre and RBI are opposed to OPS

According to an article published in a Sept. bulletin of the Reserve Bank of India, it was made crystal clear that states reverting to OPS may face unsustainable fiscal stress. The cumulative effect of OPDS could be 4.5 times higher than NPS with an additional burden of 0.9% of GDP annually by 2060. The authors have highlighted that while OPS may be more attractive to employees, it puts a significant financial burden on the government, unlike NPS, which aims to ensure good pensions while reducing the budgetary burden. As per research conducted 23 years back, India's implied pension debt of centres and states coupled with the funding gap of the pension scheme was bound to reach unmanageable and unsustainable levels which may spell doom for the growing economy of the country in future.

OPS may lead to economic distress in future.

As per projection, states opting for OPS may land in serious economic distress and the burden will keep on multiplying every year especially when the burden will be exceeding lakhs of crore after ten years. BJP leadership could resist the pressure of its state leaders to counter the Cong party's poll promise of OPS through the risk of losing the elections due to employees' annoyance loomed large before polls.

Prominent economists are vehemently opposed to OPS as it will have a cascading effect on the health of the economy in future. Montek Ahluwalia, former deputy chairman of the now-scrapped planning commission



described the move by some state governments to implement OPS as absurd as it will prove a recipe for bankruptcy. BJP spokesman, Sudhanshu Trivedi had agreed with Montek's views and asked Congress to ponder over their stand about OPS which could spell financial disaster. He asked Congress to refrain from spewing venom against Prime Minister Narendra Modi over this issue.

Congress may include OPS in INDIA's Agenda in 2024

Contrary to it, in a desperate bid to improve performance in 2024, Congress may stick to its stand about OPS and emphasise making a poll promise to states and central employees. Some of the top leaders in AICC give statistics to prove the impact of OPS on central and state employees who are bound to oppose the BJP on this issue. Congress is optimistic that a majority of more than 4 crore 60 lakh employees and their families will vote for the INDIA alliance if it includes OPS in its 2024 manifesto. Punjab and Himachal govern-



IN A DESPERATE BID TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE IN 2024, CONGRESS MAY STICK TO ITS STAND ON OPS AND MAY MAKE A POLL PROMISE TO STATES AND CENTRAL EMPLOYEES

ments have implemented OPS though they are having debt liabilities of Rs 2.63 crore and Rs 90,000 crore respectively. OPS will put an additional burden of thousands of crores on state exchequer. As per data, pension liabilities of the states account for 2.1% of the total expenditures and it rose by 8.9% which is expected to grow unhindered in future. It is likely to go up to 7.98% by 2040 because it has already witnessed an increase of 15.90% from 2014 to 2019. The old pension scheme (OPS) acted as a 'saviour' to ensure the victory of the Cong in Himachal Pradesh in 2022 and contributed substantially to Karnataka assembly polls but it miserably failed to save the Grand Old Party from a humiliating defeat in state elections including Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan which had already implemented the scheme. Economists opine that the insignificant impact of support of employees to help beleaguered Congress in three states may act as a blessing in disguise for the economy in the

states as well as the country because OPS has got potential to destroy the economic structure in states thereby affecting the the the country's ambition to emerge as a big economic power in the world. Employees prefer OPS as it guarantees a lifelong pension which is fifty per cent of the last drawn salary. On the other hand, NPS generates market-linked returns without any guarantee. The returns are taxable whereas OPS is free from any type of tax. Having 531.71 lakh subscribers, NPS assets were 7.36 trillion as of March 31, 2022, as against 5.78 trillion in 2021. Congress failed to retain power in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh which had implemented OPS one year before polls and made a promise to revert to the old scheme in MP also. Given the disastrous fallout of OPS, BJP may opt for via media thereby making some improvement in NPS and the process may be accelerated in the coming days.

(The writer is a political analyst and senior journalist. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TELECOMMUNICATION BILL

Sir — The Telecommunications Bill, 2023, introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday, proposes the first comprehensive rewrite of telecommunications law in 138 years, consolidating spectrum rules, right of way, dispute resolution between service providers and the Department of Telecommunications or local governments, and other aspects of telecom regulation into one fresh statute. The Bill will replace the Telegraph Act, of 1885. Previous changes have been enabled by other laws and incremental amendments to the Act.

This Bill has opened the door for administrative allocation of spectrum for satellite broadband services, which is the global norm for assigning spectrum to entities. Overall, these changes signal a significant step towards creating a dynamic, secure, and forward-looking telecom environment in India, positioning it to effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities of a digital future.

Jahangir Ali | Mumbai

INDIA-OMAN RELATIONS

Sir — India and Oman have a strategic allies together since the Cold War era. Oman has always been an Island of Peace, following the shared diplomacy of mediation and moderation like India's neutral stand in dealing with regional and international conflicts and issues. The first time, a close and warm India-Oman strategic partnership was observed in 2008 during then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Oman and the first Gulf country with which we have conducted joint exercises in all three defence precincts. Apart from Defence and Security arrangements, Bilateral trade, Maritime trade, and India's West Asia policy is another important keystone. India holds the second largest market for crude oil export after China for Oman and in the milieu, the Rupay debit card was also launched in 2022. The visit of the Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham Bin

Suspension of 141 MPs



It's the height of absurdity to see 141 members of Parliament get suspended in a single session from the temple of democracy. The Parliament supposedly busy discussing the issues of national importance has become a place for show-offs between rival parties. The number of sittings has been getting reduced

gradually. The hours of debates and the referrals to standing committees are on the decline. Many important bills including financial bills that merit deliberations in depth could not get proper examination before being passed. Now the number of suspensions in one session has surpassed the total number of suspensions in one decade.

There seems to be no proper effort for floor management or negotiations from the treasury benches or Chair. The suspensions in the House could have been the last resort, but unfortunately, they become a routine and regular phenomenon. The contentious issue, the security breach in Parliament House, is a serious one that deserves a political deliberations. The Government could have come up with a statement reassuring the nation. The leader of the House could have convinced the opposition with his sincere appeal. The developments in this winter session of Parliament have been sending shivers down the spine to the lovers of democracy.

DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

Tarik is significantly important as both countries are an acolyte of Peace and tranquillity and Oman serves as the gateway link for India to West Asia. The closest neighbours are members of all groups vis-a-vis GCC, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Invitee to G-20 as Special guests by India.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

WORD OF THE YEAR 2023

Sir — American dictionary organisation Merriam-Webster has recently announced that its word of the year for 2023 is "authentic." The word is in gestulation of the rise of Artificial Intelligence and the spread of misinformation on social media platforms. Every year the dictionary company publishes its word of the year, highlighting the top-searched terms, and this year's word "authentic" was a decision that it said was

driven by "stories of conversations about AI, celebrity culture, identity, and social media." Although the importance of authenticity transcends all kinds of industries and all walks of life, it is a term that resonates with those of us working within the cyber-security industry in particular. Interestingly, Merriam-Webster's word of the year for 2022 was "gaslighting", which is a commonly misused therapy buzzword, and in a way, this word is opposite to "authentic." Social media, while offering unprecedented opportunities for global interaction, has unfortunately contributed to a culture that values quantity over quality. It is time to strike a balance between the virtual and the real, fostering relationships that stand the test of authenticity.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Influencer marketing is effective and innovative

There are no rules set in stone for influencer marketing. The best approach is to try something different using influencer's USP



SAHIL CHOPRA

Authenticity, values, and goals are the cornerstones of establishing any mutually beneficial partnership. Successful long-term collaborations between brands and influencers are anchored in carefully thought-out strategies and insights.

Defining goals Before partnering with influencers, brands and advertisers must identify their campaign objectives, from determining KPIs to building a streamlined workflow for the various stages of the campaign.

Choosing the right influencer

Selecting influencers for the campaign is one of the most crucial steps. Choosing profiles that align with the brand's values and appeal to its target audience should be the deciding factor. It's important to consider factors such as audience demographics, credibility, and content quality. The relevancy and authenticity of the influencer's content are what will drive up the engagement levels for your brand campaign.



Brands and advertisers need to realize that influencers have a deeper understanding of their audience than they do. Building genuine relationships with influencers comes through sheer transparency. Influencers must have the creative freedom to create content that is impactful and resonates with their audience. In any collaborative effort, mutual respect and freedom are essential. Brands must keep influencers informed with recent updates, encouraging them to create content in their authentic style.

Steer clear of the conventional

Remember, one size does not fit all. Taking a tailored

approach that brings the target audience closer to the influencer personas will guarantee the success of the campaign.

Recognize the influencer's strengths

Studying the strengths of the influencers you are considering for a campaign plays a key role in its execution. Let the influencers bring out the best with their creative skills. It's not just about them; it's their unique way of highlighting your product that will drive engagement.

Try a Mix and match approach

Having access to a mix of micro, macro-influencers, and niche influencers will help you target a broader audience, ensuring better reach and engagement for your campaigns.

Set up performance metrics

Before you dive deep into executing your campaigns, ensure you have performance metrics in place. What defines the success of your influencer marketing campaign: engagement rates, audience growth, conversion rates, brand sentiment, or something else?

Tap on multiple channels

From podcasts to videos, consider how you can amplify the reach and effectiveness of brand collaborations. Remember, it's not just influencer marketing alone that builds brand recall. Marketing initiatives that support your influencer marketing efforts can further propel your brand, creating a holistic and memorable brand experience.

Collaborative influencer partnerships

Instagram's ecosystem encourages collaborations among influencers and content creators. Brands must not miss this opportunity to rethink content creation, harnessing the combined strengths of both content creators and brands. There are no rules set in stone for influencer marketing. The best approach is to try something different. When both parties benefit, the partnerships tend to last longer. The secret sauce is taking a collaborative approach, which leads to authentic conversations about your brand among the audience.

(The writer is the founder and CEO of icewines; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

FRUITS OF OUR KARMA ARE UNAVOIDABLE

Keep Faith and the quality of life will be good, pain will not overwhelm you



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

What is 'karmaphala?' It is the fruit of all acts done by us through our bodies, minds and words. Every act of ours, done by either of these three, is recorded for future rewards and punishments. As a matter of fact, the creation is based on the 'Karmaphala Principle'. Even God, who is all-powerful, does not interfere in its onset, though He can. This will amount to giving liberation (moksha), which is awarded only upon leaving the present body.

Why does He not? There are many logical reasons. The creation cannot exist unless there are set rules for its functioning. The karmaphala principle is the bedrock upon which it is founded. Dharma requires that there must be justice regarding the results one gets. That is the reason why good people run into bad times, because of their earlier bad acts. What they are doing now will bring good results in future. Similarly, bad people have good times also, because their earlier good acts have come to fruition. They will be punished in future for their present acts. There had to be a deterrent, otherwise how many of us, would toe the line? Even devotees of God are not spared. Citing a famous example, King Dasharatha – the father of Lord Rama suffered separation from his favourite son, which caused his death. He had been cursed to die in this fashion. Lord Rama did not prevent it, which He could have. Before I continue with this topic, let me clarify about the matter of 'shapa' (curse). All those who suffer on account of shape given are destined due to their earlier bad acts; the person giving shape just acts as a medium. This is similar to 'siddha' (purush) (the perfected ones) blessing someone, and the recipient gaining something desirable. The law is clear: "We reap what we sow". Curses, which are not destined, do not affect. Aren't many



curse thrown around indiscriminately by bitter people? Then, how does God help His devotees, who have qualified for special treatment due to their devotion? Some famous examples will help. Meerabai was given poison to drink as her punishment for worshipping Lord Krishna. Her Lord made the poison harmless, and Meerabai continued to be healthy. The examples cited above should inspire us to get started; this journey is long and hard; and it involves doing many spiritual practices. That is how you develop God's consciousness.

It is wise to get started, because without God's protection anything can happen, as destined, due to previous bad karma. We are in fact sitting ducks. This is the reason we must take shelter from God, earlier the better. Then, what will happen? Troubles will certainly come because this is the material world, which is an impermanent place of miseries. (8.15) And one will get out of them, as God will intervene and help. The reality is this for devotees of God: "Troubles will certainly come, and we will certainly get out also."

However, it is difficult to have this faith even for devotees, who are just getting started on the spiritual journey. They begin to feel that no troubles should come to them, because they have taken God's shelter. But this is not how the system works. It is unlike our relationships with our parents, who do their level best to try to prevent troubles coming to us. Unfortunately, they are in the ultimate sense helpless, and troubles come, and we suffer. In the case of God, troubles do come, as destined, but God bails us out. How does it matter if troubles come, if we are assured that we will safely negotiate them? Faith should not be allowed to be shaken. If one has become a devotee, life will go on in this birth and the next and so on till one is liberated after many births. (6.45) Therefore, take shelter from God actively. Do whatever is appropriate. Troubles will come and God will take care of them. Pain will be there, but it will be tolerable. Faith must be kept, and quality of life will be good, as different from the lives of non-devotees, who are likely to be derailed at any time. That way it is a nasty place, this material world.

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

Unlock the potential of manufacturing sector



AS MITTAL

The manufacturing sector in India needs to prioritise technology-driven approaches to achieve growth and prosperity. It can be the best bet for 'viksit Bharat'



The remarkable boost in India's growth projections, majorly driven by its manufacturing sector, surging at an impressive 10.4 per cent growth in October has turned its turbulent road into fueling optimism and prospects. Rewinding a year the manufacturing sector's growth was discouraging at a - 5.8 per cent. However, from a yearly perspective, the sector concluded the year on a robust note, driven by a resurgence in demand. In a year marred by geopolitical tensions, persistent inflation, and turbulent demand on the global stage, India's manufacturing sector defied expectations by exhibiting remarkable resilience. Despite the headwinds, India stood its ground, which was later reflected in the manufacturing sector's performance and has been identified as a crucial driver of economic growth.

The government has taken several initiatives to strengthen the sector, such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, robust policy thrust, and fresh investments. However, despite these efforts, there are still several challenges that need to be addressed to unlock the potential of the manufacturing sector fully. The manufacturing industry is a crucial component of our country's economic activity, and it has shown signs of growth after several quarters of subdued performance. To enhance employment in this sector, we need to increase its contribution to at least 25% of our gross domestic product (GDP) from the current 17%. This will require the right kind of effort and direction to achieve our ambitious export goals of \$8.3 trillion by 2047 from New India- 'Viksit Bharat'. We are not able to derive the full benefits of the manufacturing industry, despite the age of liberalization, privatization, and globalization. However, India's goods exports have increased significantly over the past few years, reach-



THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IS A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF OUR COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, AND IT HAS SHOWN SIGNS OF GROWTH AFTER SEVERAL QUARTERS OF SUBDUED PERFORMANCE

ing \$453 billion in 2022 from \$9.1 billion in 1985. In comparison, China's goods exports have grown more than 131 times from \$27 billion in 1985 to \$3500 billion in 2022.

China's merchandise exports surged because it adopted an export-oriented approach, specialising in industries with higher export potential. It tried to benefit from economies of scale and focussed on SEZs and other trade-related infrastructures like ports, logistics and effective single-window clearing systems. China adopted a long-term strategy of skilling its labour force which made technology absorption much easier and allowed it to move up in the global value chain, leaving low-end products to low-wage countries like Vietnam and Indonesia. India could not achieve the desired level of skilling, leading to export inefficiency.

India's weak infrastructure continues to be a fatal flaw for the manufacturing sector. Our country uses only 3% of its GDP for infrastructure construction each year, as compared to China's 20% of its GDP. Even today, India's surface transportation systems simply cannot meet the expectations of modern high-speed logistics – the backbone of efficient manufacturing.

The manufacturing sector in India needs to prioritize technology-driven approaches to achieve growth and prosperity. This includes affordable digitization and automation, homegrown technology, sustainability, innovation and emerging manufacturing technologies, and adopting sustainable practices. Automation is crucial for

success in this sector, but its adoption in India remains low and requires immediate attention. A holistic approach that considers product, process, and sustainability is essential.

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) account for 36 per cent of India's total manufacturing output. However, MSMEs face several challenges, including limited market reach, lack of access to finance, and inadequate technology. To enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of logistic processes, efforts should be directed towards streamlining them. Improving energy efficiency will also be critical for the growth of MSMEs. Priority financing and guidance are required to help MSMEs grow their business in the international marketplace.

The startup boom is also a great asset for the economy, as it has the potential to bring in investments and scale up manufacturing. A collaborative model that incentivizes the industry and supports stakeholders along the value chains is essential for building a resilient manufacturing sector. The focus should be on supporting fragile stakeholders, starting with suppliers, to achieve a shared vision.

India's manufacturing industry requires a significant investment in infrastructure, including transportation systems, power and water supply networks, and high-speed internet access. India has a wealth of talent in science and technology, and fostering innovation will be key to building a strong manufacturing sector. The government can support this by providing funding and incentives for research and development. To

achieve the goal of becoming a developed country by 2047, India needs to modernize its regulatory system and business laws. Simplifying regulations and reducing bureaucratic red tape can attract more investments, as India's regulatory environment can be complex for manufacturers to operate efficiently.

India has great potential in the manufacturing sector, which can make it an industrial superpower. To achieve this goal, all industry stakeholders need to work hard and strive for competency and competitiveness. It is also important to encourage more young entrepreneurs to come forward and contribute to this dream of making India a globally competitive hub for the industry.

In conclusion, India has the potential to emerge as a major global player in manufacturing. The government has initiated various measures to strengthen the sector, and businesses must adopt successful strategies in uncertain times. One such strategy is "To grow global, go local". By focusing on local markets with the right incentives and infrastructure, businesses can significantly enhance revenue streams and meet the needs of both local and global customers, invigorating local economies. It is expected that from 2024 onwards, India will be on the verge of crossing the milestone of becoming the world's third-largest economy, with a target of \$5 trillion by 2025.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy; Views expressed are personal)

Women-centric initiatives in Bihar are a game changer

Bihar's extensive array of schemes have transformed the lives of women across urban and rural areas

Governments, both at the central and state levels, are implementing various initiatives nationwide to empower women. The unanimous approval of the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament underscores the consensus across all political parties on this crucial issue. Bihar's efforts in the direction of women's empowerment are gaining attention as a model for other states. The extraordinary changes witnessed in the lives of half the population over the past two decades deserve recognition. From promoting girl child education to providing 33% to 50% reservation for women in local governance and jobs, the Bihar government has made notable strides in involving women in nation-building.



RINKU KUMARI

As a result of these initiatives, young girls and women, who were confined to the thresholds of their homes a few years ago, are now actively contributing to various governmental and non-governmental offices, as well as Panchayati Raj institutions. The increasing number of girls in schools and colleges reflects the rising literacy rate among women in the state.

The Chief Minister's Bicycle and Uniform Scheme, launched with much acclaim, brought attention to Bihar's innovative approach. Schools that were once deserted are now thriving with enthusiastic students. The regions and communities where there was little interest in girl child education are now actively sending their daughters to schools



and colleges. Despite numerous slogans and promises, the economic and social backwardness in communities where girls' education was neglected has been reversed, thanks to the successful implementation of government schemes. After the initiation of the Chief Minister's Kanya Cycle

Yojana, many beneficiaries have not only uplifted themselves through education but have also secured jobs in the Bihar Police and become teachers. The transformation of the lives of the girl children in the state is not only an exemplary case of women's empowerment but also a beacon of hope for other states.

Witnessing the empowered daughters, even parents in rural areas now find confidence, realising that daughters are not burdens but indeed bring prosperity to the family. The shift in mindset is evident, and today, daughters are cherished in every household. The success of the Bicycle and Uniform Scheme marked only the beginning. Bihar is now implementing several other schemes that play a crucial role in the holistic development and upliftment of women. The reservation of 50% for women in the third-tier Panchayati Raj institutions has significantly contributed to bridging gender disparities. Bihar became the first state in the country to provide 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj insti-

tutions. Additionally, the government has ensured 35% reservation for women in the police force, challenging the dominance of men. This reservation has resulted in a notable increase in the representation of women in the Bihar Police Force, reaching 21.21% in 2022, compared to a mere 3.4% in 2013.

In an unprecedented move, Bihar is providing 50% reservation for women in the recruitment of teachers for classes one to eight through the Bihar Public Service Commission. Furthermore, 35% of seats in secondary and higher secondary schools are reserved for female candidates. Bihar's commitment to women's reservation is setting a new benchmark, and its positive impact is visible at the

ground level. Women are now present in every school, government office, and police station, showcasing their active participation in various spheres of society.

Bihar's extensive array of schemes, including the Chief Minister's Women Entrepreneur Scheme, Chief Minister's Kanya Uthah Yojana, Chief Minister's Balika Protsahan Yojana, Janani Bal Suraksha Yojana, and Chief Minister's Kanya Vivah Yojana, among others, have transformed the lives of women across urban and rural areas. These initiatives have successfully altered the landscape of women's lives in Bihar.

(The Writer is a teacher and a senior journalist from Bihar. Views are personal. Charkha Features)

US court bans Trump from running for presidency

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

In a stunning verdict, the Colorado Supreme Court has barred Donald Trump from running for president next year in the state citing his role in the unprecedented attack on the US Capitol in 2021 and ordered the exclusion of his name from the state's Republican presidential primary ballot.

The disqualification of the 77-year-old former president on Tuesday was based on the Constitution's 14th Amendment, which says officials who take an oath to support the US Constitution are banned from future office if they "engaged in insurrection." The 4-3 ruling by the seven-member Colorado Supreme Court does not apply outside of the state.

Trump is currently the front-runner in the Republican Party's nomination process for the race for the White House in 2024. Trump's campaign has vowed to appeal against the "flawed" ruling by the Supreme Court of Colorado in the US

Supreme Court.

The Colorado Supreme Court upheld a trial judge's decision that Trump engaged in the January 6, 2021, insurrection and also overturned her conclusion that the ban does not apply to the presidency.

The landmark decision from the divided top state court marks the first time a court has found Trump ineligible to return to the White House due to his conduct surrounding the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol, CBS News reported.

Never before has a court determined that a presidential candidate is disqualified under the Civil War-era provision clause, it said. The state high court stayed its ruling until January 4 — a day before the deadline for the state secretary to certify the candidates for Colorado's March 5 primary election.

"President Trump's direct and express efforts, over several months, exhorting his supporters to march to the Capitol to prevent what he falsely char-



acterised as an alleged fraud on the people of this country were indisputably overt and voluntary," the justices wrote. "Moreover," they wrote, "the evidence amply showed that President Trump undertook all these actions to aid and further a common unlawful purpose that he himself conceived and set in motion: prevent Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election and stop the peaceful transfer of power."

"We conclude that because President Trump is disqualified from holding the office of

President under Section Three, it would be a wrongful act under the Election Code for the Secretary to list President Trump as a candidate on the presidential primary ballot," the ruling stated.

The ruling follows a months-long challenge in the state to the former president's ballot eligibility under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which deems former officeholders ineligible from running again if they took an oath to support the Constitution and then engaged in "insurrection or rebellion" against the US.

The ruling also denied Trump's appeal on 11 issues and found that his actions on January 6, including a speech outside the White House that morning, were not protected by the First Amendment free speech protections, ABC News reported.

Trump has denied wrongdoing regarding the January 6 insurrection and has decried the 14th Amendment lawsuits as an abuse of the legal process. He is under federal and state indictment in connection with his attempts to overturn the 2020 election won by Joe Biden, a Democrat, and he has pleaded not guilty.

Trump has attacked the Colorado 14th Amendment challenge — and similar such lawsuits against him around the country — as baseless and anti-democratic.

A Trump spokesman has vowed to file an appeal against the court's decision.

"The Colorado Supreme Court issued a completely flawed decision tonight We have full confidence that the US

Supreme Court will quickly rule in our favour and finally put an end to these un-American lawsuits," spokesman Steven Cheung said in a statement, according to US media reports.

Representatives for President Biden's re-election campaign declined to comment on the Colorado ruling. But a senior Democrat affiliated with the campaign told CBS News that the decision would help Democrats by supporting their argument that the US Capitol riot was an attempted insurrection. Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy came out in support of Trump on Wednesday. Taking to social media platform X, the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur pledged to withdraw from the Colorado Republican party primary ballot until Trump is allowed to be on the ballot.

Responding to Trump's disqualification, former South Carolina Governor and a rival to Trump in the Republican

primaries, Haley, said that "the last thing we want" is judges deciding who can and cannot be on the presidential ballot.

"I will tell you that I don't think Donald Trump needs to be president. I think I need to be president. I think that's good for the country," 51-year-old Haley was quoted as saying by The Des Moines Register newspaper.

Trump lost the state of Colorado by a wide margin in the 2020 presidential election. But if courts in more competitive states followed suit on Tuesday's ruling, Trump's White House bid in 2024 could face serious problems. Trump has so far faced multiple 14th Amendment challenges in various states. Lawsuits citing the 14th Amendment were dismissed by nine courts: in Michigan, by the district court in Colorado — leading to the appeals battle there — and by the Minnesota Supreme Court, a district court in Washington and federal courts in Arizona, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Florida, the reports said.

Ramaswamy, Nikki Haley oppose US court's decision

Washington (PTI): Indian-American presidential candidates Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy on Wednesday opposed the Colorado Supreme Court decision to disqualify Donald Trump from the presidency next year in the state because of his role in the attack on the US Capitol in 2021. The disqualification of the 77-year-old former president on Tuesday was based on the Constitution's 14th Amendment, which says officials who take an oath to support the US Constitution are banned from future office if they "engaged in insurrection."

Trump is currently the front-runner in the Republican Party's nomination process for the race for the White House in 2024.

Responding to Trump's disqualification, two-term former South Carolina Governor and a rival to Trump in the Republican primaries, Haley, said that "the last thing we want" is judges deciding who can and cannot be on the presidential ballot.

"I will tell you that I don't think Donald Trump needs to be president. I think I need to be president. I think that's good for the country," 51-year-old Haley was quoted as saying by The Des Moines Register newspaper. "But I will beat him fair and square. We don't need to have judges making these decisions; we need voters to make these decisions," said the former US Ambassador to the UN.

"I want to see this in the hands of the voters," Haley said, adding, "We're going to win this the right way; we're going to do what we need to do, but the last thing we want is judges telling us who can and can't be on the ballot." Meanwhile, Ramaswamy, 38, pledged to withdraw from the Colorado Republican party primary ballot until Trump eligibility is restored.

Taking to social media platform X, the biotech entrepreneur called upon other Republican Party primary opponents to take the same stand. "I pledge to withdraw from the Colorado GOP primary ballot until Trump is also allowed to be on the ballot," he said.

Sunak celebrates 'good news' of falling inflation

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday welcomed the "good news" of falling prices ahead of the Christmas holiday period as official statistics revealed that inflation had dropped to 3.9 per cent, hitting the lowest level for the economy over two years. It comes as some much-needed festive cheer for the British Indian leader who had made halving inflation one of his top priorities at the start of the year, when it was hovering around the 11 per cent mark.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), inflation — or the rate at which prices are rising in the UK economy — dropped from 4.6 per cent last month and is now under double the 2 per cent target aimed for by policymakers at the Bank of England. "Inflation has more than



halved, from over 11 per cent to 3.9 per cent — so we can see the plan is working," said UK Chancellor Jeremy Hunt.

"With inflationary pressures easing, alongside the major business tax cuts I announced in the autumn statement, we are back on the path to healthy sustainable growth... Once you do the hard work to squeeze inflation out of the system, you can start looking forward to the kind of growth that will see people's wages go up," he said. It is being dubbed as an early Christmas present for the Sunak-led government which is lagging behind most of its other targets set for the year, such as stopping the boats of illegal migrants crossing the English Channel and cutting long waiting lists for medical procedures on the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

US defense secy makes visit to aircraft carrier defending Israel

Aboard The USS Gerald R Ford (AP): US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin flew out to the USS Gerald R Ford aircraft carrier Wednesday to meet with the sailors he has ordered to remain at sea to prevent the Israel-Hamas war from spilling over into a deadlier regional conflict. Austin was in the region to press Israel to shift its bombardment of Gaza to a more limited campaign and more quickly transition to address Palestinian civilians' dire humanitarian needs. At the same time, the US has been concerned that Israel will launch a similar military operation along its northern border with Lebanon to expel Hezbollah militants there, potentially opening a second front and widening the war.

Death toll mounts to 134 in China's quake-hit areas

PTI ■ BEIJING/JISHISHAN

China has stepped up rescue and relief work in the earthquake-hit areas of Gansu and Qinghai provinces in the country's northwest where the death toll on Wednesday climbed to 134 with over 980 injured. Amidst the biting cold, rescuers were making frantic efforts to pull those who were still stuck under the rubble of collapsed structures. Monday's 6.2-magnitude earthquake killed 113 people and injured 782 others in Gansu Province, officials told media in Jishishan county, which witnessed widespread destruction.

The earthquake, the worst in nine years, also has claimed 18 lives in neighbouring Qinghai Province, with 16 people still missing, local authorities said. A total of 14,939 homes had collapsed and 2,07,204 homes were damaged, affecting 1,45,736 people from 37,162 households in



Ten years old Ma Yuanke, in red, grieves as his mother Han Suofeiya who died in the earthquake is buried in Yangwa village near Dahejia town in northwestern China's Gansu province, Wednesday. AP/PTI

Gansu, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Over 4,500 rescuers from the provincial public security department, fire department, and the military, as well as more than 820 vehicles, were dispatched to the disaster area to search every corner for survivors. A total of 87,076 people

from 20,457 households have been temporarily relocated to safe places.

In Qinghai province nestled in the hills north-east of Tibet region, survivors were anxious as rescuers approached the remote villages to pull the people buried under the rubble of their buildings.

Top Hamas leader in Cairo for talks on war

AP ■ DEIT AL-BALAH

Hamas' top leader arrived in Cairo on Wednesday for talks on the war in Gaza, where the militant group is putting up stiff resistance after more than 10 weeks of heavy Israeli bombardment and fierce urban combat that has killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians. The visit by Ismail Haniyeh came a day after Hamas fired rockets that set off air raid sirens in central Israel, a show of strength during a war that has devastated much of northern Gaza and driven some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85 per cent of the population — from their homes.

Israel has called on the rest of the world to blacklist Hamas as a terrorist organization, saying it must be eradicated in the wake of its October 7 rampage across southern Israel that triggered the war. But the sides have recently relaunched indirect talks, mediated by Egypt and Qatar, aimed at instituting another cease-fire and freeing more hostages captured in that

attack in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Despite a flurry of activity by high-level officials in recent days, the two sides appeared to be far from an agreement. Hamas said in a statement that Haniyeh would discuss the war with Egyptian officials, without providing more details.

Egypt, along with Qatar — where Haniyeh is believed to be based — helped mediate a weeklong cease-fire in November in which Hamas freed over 100 hostages in exchange for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners.

ISRAEL: FINAL CLEARING UNDERWAY IN NORTH

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said on Tuesday that Israeli forces were entering Hamas' tunnel network in northern Gaza as part of a "final clearing" of militants from the region. The densely built urban north — including Gaza City, the territory's largest — has seen ferocious fighting, with Palestinian health officials

reporting dozens of people killed in bombardment in recent days.

Gallant said that in southern Gaza, operations will take "months," including the military's assault on Khan Younis, the enclave's second-largest city. "We will not stop until we reach our goals," he said.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said on Tuesday the death toll since the start of the war had risen to more than 19,600. It does not distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths.

Hamas and other militants abducted some 240 people in the October 7 attack. They are still holding an estimated 129 captives after most of the rest, mainly women and children, were released last month.

Israel's military says 131 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza ground offensive. Israel says it has killed some 7,000 militants, without providing evidence, and blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields when it fights in residential

areas.

UN STILL PUSHING US ON AID RESOLUTION

UN Security Council members are negotiating an Arab-sponsored resolution to halt the fighting in some way to allow for an increase in desperately needed humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza. A vote on the resolution, first scheduled for Monday, was pushed back again until Wednesday as talks continued in the hopes of getting the US to abstain or vote "yes" on the resolution after it vetoed an earlier cease-fire call.

France, the United Kingdom and Germany — some of Israel's closest allies — joined global calls for a cease-fire over the weekend. In Israel, protesters have called for negotiations with Hamas to facilitate the release of scores of hostages still held by the group. Israel says it will keep fighting until it has removed Hamas from power, dismantled its armed wing and returned all the hostages.

European Union hails migration deal breakthrough after years of talks

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders and top officials hailed on Wednesday a major breakthrough in talks on new rules to control migration, but critics said the reforms will weaken the rights of asylum-seekers and encourage more morally dubious deals with countries that people leave to get to Europe. After overnight talks, visibly exhausted EU lawmakers emerged expressing relief that agreement was found "on the core political elements" of the Pact on Asylum and Migration — a major overhaul of rules that many hope will address the challenges posed by migrant arrivals over the last decade.

"It's truly a historic day," said European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, flanked by lawmakers responsible for the key parts of the agreement. With migration likely to be a hot campaign issue ahead of EU elections next June, Metsola said, it was vital to make a breakthrough.

"Let's not underestimate the risk if we had not reached such a deal," she told reporters. "This means, hopefully, that member states will feel less inclined to reintroduce internal borders because the influx is being managed."

The pact was touted as the answer to

the EU's migration woes when it was made public in September 2020. The bloc's old rules collapsed in 2015 after well over 1 million people arrived in Europe without authorisation. Most were fleeing war in Syria or Iraq.

But little progress was made on the pact as the member states bickered over which country should take charge of migrants when they arrive and whether other countries should be obligated to help.

In recent weeks, negotiators bridged differences on rules concerning the screening of migrants arriving without authorisation — facial images and fingerprints will be quickly taken, including from children from the age of six — and the ways that this biometric data can be used.

Agreement was also found on which EU countries should handle asylum applications, the procedures for doing so, and what kinds of mandatory support other countries must provide to nations struggling to cope with migrant arrivals, notably in "crisis situations."

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles — a migrant rights umbrella body — slammed the rules as "Byzantine in their

complexity and Orban-esque in their cruelty," a reference to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who erected razor-wire fences to keep migrants out.

But lawmakers were more sanguine. Noting that he and fellow negotiators had "not slept a wink in the last couple of days," Spanish Socialist EU lawmaker Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar explained that merely agreeing a deal could be seen as a victory, and that "no one can come out of this negotiation entirely happy."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz described it as "a very important decision" that will "relieve the burden on countries that are particularly affected — including Germany."

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told his country's parliament that the pact "will allow us to have an improved, more humane and better coordinated management of our frontiers and migration flows."

Dutch caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the deal improves "control over migration" with "better asylum procedures at the external borders of the EU." Far-right lawmaker Geert Wilders aims to replace Rutte after sweeping to victory in last month's elections on an anti-migration platform.

'AI image-generators being trained on explicit photos of children'

AP ■ NEW YORK

Hidden inside the foundation of popular artificial intelligence image-generators are thousands of images of child sexual abuse, according to a new report that urges companies to take action to address a harmful flaw in the technology they built. Those same images have made it easier for AI systems to produce realistic and explicit imagery of fake children as well as transform social media photos of fully clothed real teens into nudes, much to the alarm of schools and law enforcement around the world.

Until recently, anti-abuse researchers thought the only way that some unchecked AI tools produced abusive imagery of children was by essentially combining what they've learned from two sep-

arate buckets of online images — adult pornography and benign photos of kids.

But the Stanford Internet Observatory found more than 3,200 images of suspected child sexual abuse in the giant AI database LAION, an index of online images and captions that's been used to train leading AI image-makers such as Stable Diffusion.

The watchdog group based at Stanford University worked with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and other anti-abuse charities to identify the illegal material and report the original photo links to law enforcement.

The response was immediate. On the eve of the Wednesday release of the Stanford Internet Observatory's report, LAION told The Associated Press it was temporarily removing its

datasets.

LAION, which stands for the nonprofit Large-scale Artificial Intelligence Open Network, said in a statement that it "has a zero tolerance policy for illegal content and in an abundance of caution, we have taken down the LAION datasets to ensure they are safe before republishing them."

While the images account for just a fraction of LAION's index of some 5.8 billion images, the Stanford group says it is likely influencing the ability of AI tools to generate harmful outputs and reinforcing the prior abuse of real victims who appear multiple times.

It's not an easy problem to fix, and traces back to many generative AI projects being "effectively rushed to market" and made widely accessible because the field is so com-

petitive, said Stanford Internet Observatory's chief technologist David Thiel, who authored the report.

"Taking an entire internet-wide scrape and making that dataset to train models is something that should have been confined to a research operation, if anything, and is not something that should have been open-sourced without a lot more rigorous attention," Thiel said in an interview.

A prominent LAION user that helped shape the dataset's development is London-based startup Stability AI, maker of the Stable Diffusion text-to-image models.

New versions of Stable Diffusion have made it much harder to create harmful content, but an older version introduced last year — which Stability AI says it didn't release — is still baked into

other applications and tools and remains "the most popular model for generating explicit imagery," according to the Stanford report. "We can't take that back. That model is in the hands of many people on their local machines," said Lloyd Richardson, director of information technology at the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, which runs Canada's hotline for reporting online sexual exploitation.

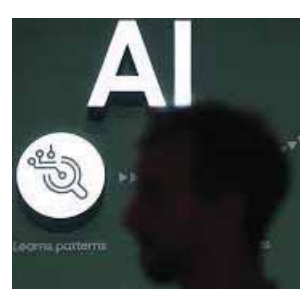
Stability AI on Wednesday said it only hosts filtered versions of Stable Diffusion and that "since taking over the exclusive development of Stable Diffusion, Stability AI has taken proactive steps to mitigate the risk of misuse." "Those filters remove unsafe content from reaching the models," the company said in a prepared statement.

UK's top court: AI systems can't be named as inventor of patents

AP ■ LONDON

An artificial intelligence system can't be registered as the inventor of a patent, Britain's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday in a decision that denies machines the same status as humans. The UK's highest court concluded that "an inventor must be a person" to apply for patents under the current law. The decision was the culmination of American technologist Stephen Thaler's long-running British legal battle to get his AI, dubbed DABUS, listed as the inventor of two patents.

Thaler claims DABUS autonomously created a food and drink container and a light beacon and that he's entitled to rights over his inventions. Tribunals in the US and the European Union



have rejected similar applications by Thaler.

The UK Intellectual Property Office rejected Thaler's application in 2019, saying it's unable to officially register DABUS as the inventor because it's not a person. After lower courts sided with the patent office, Thaler took his appeal to the Supreme Court, where a panel of judges unanimously dismissed the case. The judges said DABUS

is "not a person, let alone a natural person and it did not devise any relevant invention". Legal experts said the case shows how Britain's laws haven't kept up with technology and that policies should be updated given the breath-taking recent developments made by artificial intelligence, underscored by generative AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT that can rapidly spew out new poems, songs and computer code. "As AI systems continue to advance in sophistication and capability, there is no denying their ability to generate new and non-obvious products and processes with minimal, or perhaps even without any, ongoing human input," said Nick White, a partner at law firm Charles Russell Speechlys.

Don't pay taxes: Oppn BNP urges citizens

Calls for civil disobedience against govt

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's main opposition BNP on Wednesday called for a "non-cooperation" movement against the Awami League-led government, urging people not to pay taxes and utility bills, as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina launched her poll campaign amid political unrest ahead of the January 7 elections.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its mostly far-right allies allege that no election under the incumbent dispensation would be fair and demand the restoration of a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution.

"There is no alternative to the launch of non-cooperation of all sorts to establish the rights of every citizen," BNP spokesman Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told a virtual press conference.

He urged people to start the civil disobedience from Wednesday itself by suspending payment of taxes, and water, gas and electricity bills as part of the movement.

"We urge the countrymen to stick to the demands and boycott the farcical vote," Rizvi said, adding that he is appealing on behalf of the BNP's ailing chairperson and former premier Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, who now lives in London. Rahman is BNP's acting president.

Several Bangladeshi courts declared Rahman a "fugitive" as he took refuge in the UK to evade jail terms for several criminal charges, including a grenade attack on a rally of the then-opposition Awami League in 2004 in which 24 people were killed.

Hasina narrowly escaped the attack, which also wounded some 500 of her party leaders, activists and supporters.

Zia, 79, was also convicted and jailed on two graft charges with a 17-year jail term. However, she is now in a hospital with multiple health issues.

Meanwhile, in her maiden election rally in northeastern



Sylhet after visiting the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal, Prime Minister Hasina warned the BNP: "If you play with fire, you will burn your hand."

"The black sheep (Rahman) sits in London and gives orders. In turn, people are burned and killed here," she said.

Asking the people to vote for 'Boat', her party's symbol, in the upcoming elections, Hasina said it is "the Prophet Noah's Boat". "This is the boat that saved the human race (and) the people of Bangladesh got freedom by voting for the boat in 1971," she said.

"We talked about building a Digital Bangladesh and we did that. Now, we will build a smart Bangladesh...there will be no homeless and landless people," said Hasina, accompanied by her senior cabinet and party colleagues. Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal, meanwhile, said the current scenario did not suggest the elections to be very competitive but the election commission and the candidates should make it competitive to draw voters to the polls centres.

"We are hopeful to hold a successful election," Awal said in a brief comment after a meeting with the candidates in northwestern Rajshahi.

The BNP is boycotting the election after its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the voting was rejected by Hasina's government. The party had boycotted the 2014 election but

took part in 2018 polls.

With the BNP boycotting the election, and no other credible opposition party against it, Hasina's Awami League is likely to gain an upper hand and likely to form the government for the fourth consecutive term. Since October 29, the BNP has been holding intermittent nationwide strikes and transport blockades to press for their demand for elections under a neutral government, which the ruling party rejected saying the poll would be held in line with the existing Constitution.

According to a media tally, 11 people died and 376 vehicles were torched in the past two months in political violence. Police arrested thousands of opposition activists and figures, including de-facto BNP leader and party secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, over charges of violence.

In the latest such violence, unidentified persons on Tuesday set on fire a passenger train in Dhaka in which four people, including a child, were killed.

The arson attack on the train was the fifth such incident in the past month and the deadliest so far in terms of casualties.

Last week, one passenger was killed and dozens wounded as saboteurs uprooted railway tracks which resulted in the derailment of seven carriages of a train in Gazipur on the outskirts of the national capital.

Putin ratchets up military pressure on Ukraine

AP ■ MOSCOW

After blunting Ukraine's counteroffensive from the summer, Russia is building up its resources for a new stage of the war over the winter, which could involve trying to extend its gains in the east and deal significant blows to the country's vital infrastructure. Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to be hoping that a relentless military pressure, combined with changing Western political dynamics and a global focus on the Israeli-Hamas war, will drain support for Ukraine in the nearly 2-year-old war and force Kyiv to yield to Moscow's demands.

"As far as the Russian leadership is concerned, the confrontation with the West has reached a turning point. The Ukrainian counteroffensive has failed, Russia is more confident than ever, and the cracks in Western solidarity are spreading," said Tatiana Stanovaya, senior fellow with Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, in a



recent analysis.

An aid package for Ukraine has stalled in the US Congress as Republicans insist on linking any more money to US-Mexico border security changes opposed by Democrats. The European Union last week failed to agree on a USD 54 billion package in financial help that Ukraine desperately needs.

Amid these signs of fraying Western support, Russia has ramped up its pressure on Ukrainian forces on several parts of the more than 1,000-kilometre front line.

"The Russian military since October has been trying to

seize initiative across the front in a couple of areas," said Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment.

Ukraine's military needs to reconstitute and regenerate its combat effectiveness after a gruelling five-month counteroffensive, he said.

"Ukrainian forces, while motivated, are exhausted," Kofman said in a recent podcast. "They've lost a lot of units of action. They've lost a lot of assault capable troops."

One area where Russia has maintained steady pressure is the northeastern city of Kupiansk, a strategically important rail hub that Moscow captured early in the war and then lost in a Ukrainian counteroffensive in September 2022. While Russian forces have failed to make any significant gains in the area, Ukraine has had to maintain a significant force to protect the city.

Starting in early October, Russian troops also have launched an offensive around

Avdiivka, a town near Donetsk, the centre of the region that was seized by Moscow-backed rebels in 2014 and illegally annexed by Russia in 2022 with three other Ukrainian regions.

Ukraine has built multiple defenses in Avdiivka, complete with concrete fortifications and a web of underground tunnels, allowing them to repel fierce Russian attacks.

Despite massive losses, Russian troops have inched forward steadily, seeking to envelop Avdiivka and cut Ukrainian supply lines.

That battle has evolved into a gruesome grind for both parties and has been compared to the fighting for Bakhmut, the war's longest and bloodiest battle that ended with Russia capturing it in May.

The Kremlin and the Russian Defense Ministry are silent about specific plans, but some Russian war bloggers say Moscow could launch a massive offensive of its own to force

deep into Ukrainian territory.

Others warn, however, that the Russian military lacks resources for any such big push, saying that would require many more troops and weapons, exposing it to the same risks that doomed initial Russian attempts to capture Kyiv and other cities in the northeast at the start of the war.

In that botched attack, Russian armoured convoys stretched along highways leading to the capital, becoming easy prey for Ukrainian drones and artillery. Such setbacks forced the Kremlin to switch to a defensive strategy along the front line.

Putin is eager to show battlefield gains as he faces reelection in March.

He said last week that Russia has 617,000 fighters in Ukraine, a number that many war bloggers see as far short of the kind of massive force needed to strike deep into Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his ground forces number about 600,000.

N Korea, Russia clash with US, S Korea

Myanmar ethnic armed group seizes another crossing point

Bangkok (AP): An ethnic armed group in northeastern Myanmar has seized a major crossing point for trade along the Chinese border, residents and media reports said. The border gate in Laukaing township, the capital of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone in the northern part of Shan state, became the fifth crossing seized by the group since it launched a coordinated offensive on October 27 with two other ethnic armed groups. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, which took control of the crossing, joined with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army for the offensive that began in October and call themselves the Three Brotherhood Alliance. Laukaing is known for hosting major organized criminal enterprises including cyberscam operations controlled by Chinese investors in cooperation with local Myanmar warlords.

North Korea and Russia clashed with the United States, South Korea and their allies at an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday on Pyongyang's latest intercontinental ballistic missile launch, which it called a "warning counter-measure" to threats from the US and other hostile forces. North Korean Ambassador Kim Song said this is "the most dangerous year" in the military-security landscape on the Korean Peninsula, pointing to stepped up US-South Korean military exercises and the US deployment of nuclear-powered submarines and other nuclear assets to the area that have raised a "nuclear war danger".

The US and nine allies pointed to five North Korean ICBM launches, over 25 ballistic missile launches and three satellite launches using ballistic missile technology this year, violating multiple Security Council resolutions and threatening "the peace and stability of its neighbours and the international community". In a statement read just before the

council meeting by US deputy ambassador Robert Wood, surrounded by diplomats from the other countries, the 10 countries condemned the latest ICBM launch on December 17 and all launches before it.

North Korea's Song urged the international community to think about North Korea's security concerns, calling its counter-measures an "absolutely reasonable, normal and reflective response" in exercise of its legitimate right to self-defence.

He warned the US and South Korea that if they continue "with their reckless and irresponsible military threat", North Korea's armed forces "will never remain an onlooker to it and the provokers will be held entirely responsible for all the consequences".

North Korea will also "continue to build up its strategic power of a more advanced type to contain and control any threat from the US and its followers with immediate, overwhelming and decisive counter-measures", Song warned.

The Security Council imposed sanctions after North

Korea's first nuclear test explosion in 2006 and tightened them over the years in a total of 10 resolutions seeking — so far unsuccessfully — to cut funds and curb its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

The last sanctions resolution was adopted by the council in December 2017. China and Russia vetoed a US-sponsored resolution in May 2022 that would have imposed new sanctions over a spate of intercontinental ballistic missile launches. And the two veto-wielding council members have blocked any council action,

including media statements, since then.

The 10 countries — Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, South Korea, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States — said silence from the Security Council "sends the wrong message to Pyongyang and all proliferators".

They urged North Korea to abandon its unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile programs, "and instead invest in feeding the people in North Korea" and engage in diplomacy.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF PSYCHIATRY
KANKE, RANCHI-834006, JHARKHAND

NOTICE

Director, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi invites applications for the following posts on tenure basis for a period of upto three years. Details of vacant posts are as under:

a) Clinical Psychology Tutor - 02 (UR-01 & OBC-01)
b) Psychiatric Social Work Tutor - 01 (OBC-01)

Date of Written Examination (MCQ) is 09.01.2024. Desirous candidates may send their application by post on or before 07.01.2024 or submit it by themselves at the Institute in the prescribed format giving full details of academic records and experience along with photocopy of the relevant documents with recent photograph. Details can be seen on the Institute website www.cipranchi.nic.in. Sd/-Director

Covid infections going down in Singapore

Singapore (PTI): The number of COVID-19 infections in Singapore appear to have plateaued over the past week, but experts have urged people to be cautious and mask up in crowded enclosed places as a precaution. Last week, Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) reported a 75 per cent jump with 56,043 cases, compared with 32,035 cases in the previous week. The seven-day moving average of the infection was 7,870 on December 12 and decreased slightly to 7,730 on December 17, The Straits Times newspaper reported.

Experts have urged people to be socially responsible and mask up in crowded, enclosed places, even if they feel well, since the transmission of the virus occurs a day or two before symptoms appear.

"It'll be a bell curve confounded by Christmas parties," Professor Dale Fisher, a senior infectious diseases consultant at the National University Hospital (NUH), said. "You don't know if it's peaked until after it's peaked," he was quoted as saying by the newspaper on Tuesday.

While the numbers remain high, experts say it is not a cause for concern, even though serious illness and deaths tend to lag infection figures. In the week of December 3, a total of 9,763 people were hospitalised, and 23 were admitted to intensive care units (ICU).

The health ministry is providing daily updates of the COVID-19 infection figures from December 19 "to provide the latest information on the situation during this period of surge in cases", Professor Paul Tambyah of the NUH, president of the International Society for Infectious Diseases, said people do not need to worry about rising COVID-19 infections. Instead, they should "just be sensible about taking precautions about their health, not go to work or school if they are unwell and seek medical attention instead," Tambyah said.

WHO terms Covid strain JN.1 'variant of interest'

Geneva (PTI): The World Health Organisation has classified COVID-19 strain JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly increasing spread but said that it poses a "low" global public health risk. The JN.1 variant was previously classified as a variant of interest (VOI) as part of the BA.2.86 sublineages, the parent lineage that is classified as a VOI, the world body said on Tuesday.

However, in recent weeks, JN.1 continues to be reported in multiple countries, and its prevalence has rapidly increased globally. India has also reported its first case of

the JN.1 variant.

It now represents the vast majority of BA.2.86 descendant lineages reported to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID), according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"Due to its rapidly increasing spread, WHO is classifying JN.1 as a separate variant of interest (VOI) from the parent lineage BA.2.86," the global health body said in a post on X. The WHO evaluated the additional global public health risk posed by JN.1 as "low, based on the available yet limited evidence," but warned, "It is anticipated that this variant may cause an increase in SARS-CoV-2 cases amid a surge of infections of other viral and bacterial infections, especially in countries entering the winter season." The JN.1 variant has been reported in the USA, China, Singapore and India, according to India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Seven cases of the variant have been reported from China. The strain has caused an uptick of cases in various countries, including Singapore, which reported a 75 per cent jump with 56,043 cases last week, according to its Ministry of Health (MOH).

'Imran Khan to contest general elections from at least 3 constituencies'

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan will contest the upcoming general elections from at least three constituencies despite conviction and incarceration, his party announced on Wednesday. On August 5, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician was convicted by a trial court in Islamabad in the Toshakhana corruption case filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan and arrested.

The verdict meant the founding chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party was disqualified from contesting elections for five years. However, days later the Islamabad High Court (IHC) suspended his three-year sentence and he remains in jail in other cases. His conviction has not been set aside so far, making him ineligible for any public office.

However, undeterred by the legal hurdles, PTI leader Ali Zafar said that Khan would contest in the February 8 general election. "We want to inform you that Imran Khan will contest elections from at least three constituencies and we hope that the IHC will announce its judgment soon in the Toshakhana case, as the election schedule has



been issued," Zafar told the media outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi. Newly-appointed PTI chief Barrister Gohar Khan said that Khan would contest from the Lahore, Islamabad and Mianwali constituencies.

Gohar added that Khan would be provided with his nomination papers tomorrow, vowing that "Khan sahib will contest these polls, God willing". He said he too would participate in the upcoming polls from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Buner constituency. Khan was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for five years from holding any public office following the Toshakhana case verdict after he was found guilty of corrupt practices under Section 167 of the Elections Act, 2017.

Christians raise outcry over detention of another 'house church' elder

Bangkok (AP): Ding Zhongfu was awakened by loud pounding on his door. Five policemen greeted Ding, an elder in a Chinese church. The officers pinned him to the wall that Thursday morning in November and interrogated him while searching the apartment he shared with his wife, Ge Yunxia, and their 6-year-old daughter.

Ding's family now pleads for his release after he was taken from his home in China's central Anhui province on suspicion of fraud. In their first public comments on the case, the family denies that Ding committed any fraud. Instead, they told The Associated Press in an interview, it is part of a wider crackdown on religious freedoms in China.

Four others were detained, all senior members of the Ganquan church, a name that means "Sweet Spring," according to the family. All were taken on suspicion of fraud, according to a bulletin from the church. "Under the fabricated charge of fraud, many Christians faced harsh persecution," said Bob Fu, the founder of a US-based Christian rights group, ChinaAid, who is advocating for Ding's release.

दि म.प्र. स्टेट माइनिंग कारपोरेशन लि.
(म.प्र. शासन का उपक्रम)

पर्यावास भवन, ब्लॉक नं. 1 (ए), द्वितीय तल, जेल रोड, असेरा हिल्स, भोपाल - 462011, दूरभाष : 2763391, 2763392, 2763393, फैक्स : 0755-2763394, E-mail : info.mpsmc@mp.gov.in, Website : www.mpsmc.mp.gov.in, CIN : U01410MP1962SGC000937

क्रमांक : भीमिकी/न.क्र./177(II)/2023-24/19 दिनांक : 20.12.2023

फर्शी पत्थर खनिज के उत्खनन एवं विक्रय हेतु एम.डी.ओ. के चयन बाबत निविदा सूचना

दि म.प्र. स्टेट माइनिंग कारपोरेशन लि. की जिला शिवपुरी के ग्राम खाडा में 20,000 हे. एवं ग्राम टेहटा में 5,000 हे. रकबा में स्थित फर्शी पत्थर खदानों से सिलिका सैंड खनन एवं विक्रय हेतु एम.डी.ओ. के चयन बाबत ई निविदा सूचना ऑनलाइन पोर्टल <https://mptenders.gov.in> के माध्यम से इच्छुक एवं पात्रता रखने वाले निविदाकारों से निगम ऑनलाइन निविदाएं आमंत्रित करता है। विस्तृत विवरण <https://mptenders.gov.in> पोर्टल पर तथा निगम की वेबसाइट www.mpsmc.mp.gov.in पर दिनांक 22.12.2023 से उपलब्ध रहेगा।

म.प्र. माध्यम/112874/2023 प्रबंध संचालक

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF PSYCHIATRY
KANKE, RANCHI-834006, JHARKHAND

NOTICE

Director, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi invites the applications for the posts of Senior Residents on tenure basis. Selection will be made through written examination and department assessment scheduled to be held on 08.01.2024 at 11.00 A.M. at CIP campus. Details of vacant posts are as under.

1. Senior Resident - 13 Posts.

i) Psychiatry - 06 (UR-02, ST-01, OBC-02 & EWS-01)
ii) Radio-diagnosis - 01 (UR)
iii) Neurology - 03 (UR-02, OBC-01)
iv) Anesthesiology - 01 (UR)
v) Neuro-surgery - 02 (UR)

Desirous candidates may send their application by post/by hand or by E-mail ID: director@cipranchi.nic.in on or before 07.01.2024 in the prescribed format giving full details of academic records and experience along with photocopy of the relevant documents with recent photograph so that reach this office by 07.01.2024 for written examination and department assessment scheduled to be held on 08.01.2024 at 11.00 A.M. Application received after due date will not be entertained. Further details can be seen on the Institute's website www.cipranchi.nic.in. Sd/-Director

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Thermofforming Packaging film for vacuum packing of Paneer for Verka Mohali Dairy.	Annual

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.

Di, General Manager (Purchase)

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL
NEW DELHI BENCH(COURT-II)
COMPANY PETITION NO. CP(CAA)/75/ND/2023
IN
COMPANY APPLICATION NO. CA(CAA) NO.53/ND/2022
IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013
AND
PETITION UNDER SECTION 230 TO 232 AND OTHER APPLICABLE PROVISIONS OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 READ WITH COMPANIES (COMPROMISE, ARRANGEMENT & AMALGAMATION) RULES, 2016.
AND
IN THE MATTER OF:
SCHEME OF MERGER
OF
M/S AXIN OVERSEAS LIMITEDTransferor/Petitioner Company 1
AND
M/S SARLA OVERSEAS LIMITEDTransferor/ Petitioner Company 2
WITH
M/S MEGA ENTERPRISE PVT. LTD.Transferee/ Petitioner Company

Notice of Petition for Hearing

A petition under Section 230-232 of the Companies Act, 2013, for approval of Scheme of Amalgamation of M/S AXIN OVERSEAS LIMITED (Transferor Company 1), M/S SARLA OVERSEAS LIMITED (Transferor Company 2), with M/S MEGA ENTERPRISE PRIVATE LIMITED (Transferee Company) was presented jointly by the companies on the 7th day of November, 2023 and the said petition is fixed for hearing before New Delhi Bench-2 of National Company Law Tribunal on 18th January, 2024.

Any person desirous of supporting or opposing the said petition/application/reference should send to the Hon'ble Tribunal and/or Petitioner's Advocate, notice of his intention, signed by him or his advocate, with his name and address, so as to reach the petitioner's advocate not later than two days before the date fixed for the hearing of the petition/application/reference. Where he seeks to oppose the petition/application/reference, the grounds of opposition or a copy of his affidavit shall be furnished with such notice. A copy of the petition/application/reference will be furnished to the undersigned to any person requiring the same on payment of the prescribed charges for the same.

Sd/-
Iswar Ch Mohapatra
Advocate for petitioner
Dated : 20.12.2023
7/1, GF, South Patel Nagar, New Delhi-110008

Sensex, Nifty go into tailspin

After hitting fresh all-time high levels; tank over 1 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty went into a tailspin after hitting their fresh all-time high levels on Wednesday, closing down by over 1 per cent as investors cashed in on the recent rally. Erasing all its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex crashed 930.88 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 70,506.31. The index opened higher and later gained 475.88 points or 0.66 per cent to hit its all-time high of 71,913.07. However, across the board selling dragged the barometer down from record highs and it dropped to a low of 70,302.60. The Nifty fell by 302.95 points

or 1.41 per cent to 21,150.15. During the day, it climbed 139.9 points or 0.65 per cent to reach its record high of 21,593. "The domestic market saw a sharp and abrupt sell-off in the second half, despite the positive trend in global peers. This is attributable to profit-booking from the recent sharp rally stretching valuations of mid and small-cap stocks. The recent uptick in crude prices prompted investors to book profits," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

All the 30 Sensex shares, except for HDFC Bank, closed in the red. Tata Steel fell the most by 4.21 per cent. NTPC, Tata Motors, HCL Technologies,



Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and JSW Steel also declined. HDFC Bank was the only gainer from the pack. "Markets witnessed a bout of

profit-taking and lost nearly one and a half per cent. After the initial uptick, Nifty hovered in a range in the first half however a sharp cut in the heavyweights across sectors completely turned the tone," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical

Research, Religare Broking Ltd. All the indices ended lower, with utilities tumbling 4.65 per cent, telecommunication plummeting 4.36 per cent, power declining by 4.33 per cent, services falling by 4.20 per cent, metal (3.57 per cent),

commodities (3.51 per cent), industrials (2.85 per cent), capital goods (2.83 per cent) and consumer discretionary (2.55 per cent). A total of 3,177 stocks declined while 658 advanced and 86 remained unchanged. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended in the green on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 0.76 per cent to USD 79.83 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 601.52 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

SAT quashes Sebi order against Biyani, others

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) on Wednesday quashed regulator Sebi's order banning Future Retail chairperson Kishore Biyani and some other promoters from the securities market for one year in an insider trading case. Dismissing the Sebi's order, the appellate tribunal said that the entities did not trade in the shares of Future Retail Ltd (FRL) on the basis of unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) relating to demerger as such information was already in public domain through multiple media reports.

"We are satisfied that the information relating to demerger was already in the public domain and, therefore, trading done by the appellants in the shares after the publication of the interviews and news reports cannot be considered as trading while in possession of UPSI. Thus, the charge in the show cause notice fails and the findings given by the WTM cannot be sustained. The impugned order is quashed," a bench comprising Presiding Officer Tarun Agarwal and Technical Member Meera Swarup said. Further, two authorities of Sebi -- WTM (Whole Time Member) as well as the Adjudicating Officer -- accepted that if the transaction is in the public domain through newspaper reports/interviews then trading on the basis of such information cannot be treated as UPSI, the tribunal noted. The ruling came after the entities challenged an order passed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in February 2021 that had barred Kishore Biyani

and certain other promoters of Future Retail Ltd from the securities market for one year for indulging in insider trading in the shares of the company. In addition, the regulator had imposed a fine of Rs 1 crore each on Kishore Biyani, Anil Biyani and Future Corporate Resources. Besides, they were asked to disgorge Rs 17.78 crore for the wrongful gains made by them. Sebi had conducted an investigation in the scrip of FRL to ascertain whether certain persons and entities had traded during the March 10, 2017 to April 20, 2017 period on the basis of UPSI pertaining to the segregation of certain business of the firm. FRL made a corporate announcement to the stock exchanges on April 20, 2017, regarding the outcome of its board meeting, wherein its board approved the segregation of certain businesses of FRL through a composite scheme of arrangement between FRL, BlueRock eServices Pvt Ltd (BSPL) and Praxis Home Retail Pvt Ltd (PHRPL) and their respective shareholders. The scheme of arrangement has, in fact, resulted in the demerger of certain businesses of FRL. Sebi, in its order, found that Future Corporate Resources had traded in the shares of FRL during the UPSI period and made notional unlawful gains of Rs 17.78 crore.

DOMS Industries scripts dream market debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of pencil maker SDOMS Industries Ltd made a dream stock market debut on Wednesday and ended with a huge premium of over 68 per cent against the issue price of Rs 790.

The stock listed at Rs 1,400 on both BSE and NSE, reflecting a jump of 77.21 per cent from the issue price. During the day, the stock zoomed 81.55 per cent to Rs 1,434.25 on the BSE. Shares of the company finally ended at Rs 1,330.85, up 68.46 per cent. At NSE, it jumped 81.51 per cent to Rs 1,434 during the day. The stock ended at Rs 1,302.95, climbing 64.93 per cent. The company commanded a market valuation of Rs 8,076.56 crore. In traded volume terms, 7.76 lakh shares of the company were traded at the BSE and over 1.46 crore shares at the NSE during the day. The initial share sale of DOMS

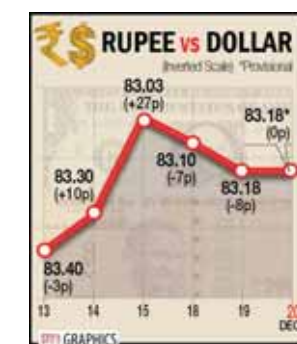


Industries received 93.40 times subscription on the final day of bidding on Friday, driven by overwhelming participation from institutional buyers. The Rs 1,200-crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) had a fresh issue of up to Rs 350 crore and an offer for sale of Rs 850 crore. The price range for the offer was Rs 750-790 a share. Funds raised through the fresh issue would be used for setting up a new manufacturing facility to expand the company's production capabilities for a range of writing instruments, watercolour pens, markers and highlighters as well as for general corporate purposes.

Rupee settles flat at 83.18 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee ended flat at 83.18 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid massive selling in equity markets as concerns over oil supplies through the Red Sea route dented investor sentiment. Forex traders said though the US dollar index below 102 level provided support, the Indian currency was weighed down by foreign fund outflow amid volatile crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.17 and traded between the peak of 83.13 and the lowest level of 83.18 against the dollar. It finally settled at its previous closing level of 83.18 (provisional) against the greenback. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.08 per cent higher at 101.87 on Wednesday.



Global oil price benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.78 per cent to USD 79.85 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 930.88 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 70,506.31. The broader NSE Nifty declined 302.95 points or 1.41 per cent to 21,150.15. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 601.52 crore, according to exchange data.

DLF sells properties worth ₹1,400 crore in Gurugram, Panchkula

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm DLF Ltd on Wednesday said it has sold independent floors and commercial plots for around Rs 1,400 crore in Gurugram and Panchkula, in Haryana, amid strong property demand. DLF, the country's largest real estate developer in market cap, has launched two projects in Sector 67, Gurugram and Panchkula. "We have launched and completely sold out 75 shop-office (SCO) plots in our new project 'Central 67' Gurugram," DLF Home Developers Joint Managing Director and Chief Business Officer Aakash Ohri told reporters here. These 75 units have been sold for Rs 700 crore, he said, the total land size of this project is 9 acres. The prices ranged between Rs 7 crore and Rs 25 crore. Ohri said the company has launched another project 'Valley Orchard' in Panchkula where it is developing 470 independent floors.

"Out of 470 units, we have launched 400 units. All of them have been sold for Rs 700 crore," he said. The company has sold floors at Rs 9,000 per square feet. Ohri noted that the demand for properties continues to be strong across major cities from end users, investors and NRIs. Asked about the DLF's overall sales bookings in this fiscal, Ohri said the company has given a target of Rs 13,000 crore and exuded confidence in achieving it. In the first six months of this fiscal year, DLF achieved sales bookings of Rs 4,268 crore. During the last fiscal, DLF sold properties worth Rs 15,000 crore, mainly driven by sales valuing Rs 8,000 crore in a single project 'DLF Arbour' in Gurugram. DLF has developed more than 158 real estate projects, covering an area of over 340 million square feet. It has about 215 million square feet of development potential across the residential and commercial segments.

Margins of north Indian tea gardens to shrink during FY24: ICRA

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Leading credit rating firm ICRA said that tea gardens of North India will suffer from shrinkage in the margins due to rise in input costs and wage hike in West Bengal and Assam during the current fiscal. Margins will also be affected due to low export demand and sluggish rural consumption, ICRA

said adding that the outlook for the sector has been revised to negative from stable. The credit rating firm said that all-India auction prices of the orthodox variety in the first 10 months of calendar year 2023 witnessed a significant decline of around Rs 51 per kilogram on a year-on-year basis. The price drop in South India was lower at Rs seven per kilo-



gram during the same period. ICRA said that the slump in orthodox tea realisation was due to lower export demand, primarily from Iran. Similarly, the all-India cumulative auction average of CTC variety also witnessed a decline during the first 10 months of 2023 to the extent of Rs six per kilogram. ICRA said that sluggish rural

demand along with headwinds in the export markets due to oversupply of Kenyan teas have contributed to the decline. Sujoy Saha, vice-president and sector head of ICRA, said, "A sharp decline in exports to Iran, Russia and the UAE has impacted tea prices at the auction centres in India." Direct exports to Iran, which is primarily an orthodox market,

have decreased 80 per cent during the first nine months of calendar 2023 on a year-on-year basis, he added. According to ICRA, all-India production of bulk teas in the first 10 months of 2023 moderated by 22 million kilograms on a year-on-year basis and full-year productions is expected to ease by one per cent as compared to calendar 2022.

India expected to be surplus in coal production by FY26

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country is likely to be surplus in coal production by FY26, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. India may be surplus in coal production except for some high quality fossil fuel and coking coal needed for the steel industry and imported coal-based power plants. Replying to a query in Lok Sabha, coal and mines minister Pralhad Joshi said, "India is expected to be surplus in coal production by the year 2025-26 except for some high quality coal and coking coal required for steel sector and ICB plants." To another query, the minister said that against the estimated coal demand of 1,196.60 million



tonne (MT) in the current fiscal, the country's production target of the fossil fuel is 1,012.14 MT. Joshi said "the estimated coal demand for 2023-24 is 1,196.60 MT." The coal production target for 2023-24 is 1,012.14 MT, the minister said. The government, he said, under a central sector scheme, carries out exploration of coal and lignite through Central Mine Planning & Design Institute Ltd (CMPDI) in two

broad stages -- regional exploration and detailed drilling. "Coal exploration is also carried out through National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) funding," he added, adding that the Geological Survey of India (GSI) also undertakes exploration of coal and lignite. As per the Inventory of India published by GSI for coal and lignite on April 1 last year, 6,457.72 MT of lignite resource are available in Rajasthan. One open-cast lignite mine with a capacity of 2.1 million tonne per annum (MTPA) at Barsingsar, Bikaner district of Rajasthan, is operated by Neyveli Lignite Corporation India Ltd (NLICIL), and there is no immediate proposal for further mining activity in the desert state.

India Yamaha Motor launches R3 and MT-03

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Two-wheeler major India Yamaha Motor has launched its latest sports motorcycles -- R3 and MT-03 -- widening its product portfolio in the domestic market, the company said on Wednesday. The two products -- the track-oriented R3 and the street fighter MT-03 -- have been launched as part of the brand campaign -- The Call of the Blue -- and would be sold in the country as 'completely built-up units' (CBUs). "These two iconic motorcycles truly represent Yamaha's racing DNA and underscore the brand's unwavering commitment to advancing the premium motorcycle segment in the

Indian market," a company statement said. The R3 motorcycle is priced at Rs 4,64,900 while the MT-03 is priced at Rs 4,59,900 (ex-showroom Delhi). Both motorcycles are exemplary specimens of Japanese technology and would be exclusively sold through select Blue Square dealerships in the country, the statement said. "As an integral aspect of the Call of the Blue Brand campaign, Yamaha is committed to strengthen its premium segment range by introducing models that appeal to the need of young Indian consumers. The R-Series and MT series models enjoy a huge fan base in India because of their superior performance and iconic design," Yamaha Motor India Group of Companies

Chairman Eishin Chihana said. "We are excited to announce today the launch of our latest -- R3 and MT-03 in India. We are confident that both these models, showcasing Yamaha's cutting-edge technology and innovation, will undoubtedly captivate the interest of our young customers in the country," Chihana said. "With the addition of these step-up models in the R-series and MT-series, we look forward to further nurture the growing premium motorcycle segment in India," he added. The motorcycles are equipped with 321cc liquid cooled engine, two-cylinder, 4-stroke, and 4valve per cylinder fuel injected engine, multi-function LCD instrument cluster, LED headlight among others.

Government closely monitoring rice situation in domestic, global markets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is closely monitoring the rice situation in the domestic as well as international markets on weekly basis and it can increase the percentage share in global rice trade when favourable conditions arise, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. India has banned export of broken and non-basmati white rice in view of uncertainty around rice production here and other rice producing countries due to geopolitical scenario, El Nino sentiments and extreme climatic conditions to check domestic prices and ensure adequate availability in the market here. "The government is closely monitoring the rice scenario in the domestic market as well as in international forum on weekly basis and the government can increase the percentage share in global rice trade when favourable conditions arise," Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said in a writ-



ten reply to Lok Sabha. India was the largest rice exporting country in the world from 2018 to 2022 followed by Thailand and Vietnam. Rice export from India was 22.24 million tonne in 2022, which accounts for 40.63 per cent of the world's rice exports. Export of broken rice has been prohibited from September 2022 and non-basmati white rice from July this year. Export of basmati and parboiled non-basmati rice is continuing. Replying to another question, Patel said that agriculture exports during April-September 2023 declined 11.6 per cent over the same period last year.

India steel import to be elevated at 6MT in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India imported 4.26 MT finished steel in April-November 2023 and the import may touch 6 MT mark in the current fiscal mainly on account of strong domestic demand, according to a report by Crisil. The report comes at a time when steel players are registering strong concerns of surging imports. Global steel demand, which has been subdued since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, is expected to grow

1.6 per cent in 2023, after a sharp fall of 3.3 per cent in 2022, the global analytics company said. The tepid rate of growth rides largely on a buoyant 13 per cent growth in demand in India, which has bucked the trend so far, Crisil said. This fiscal, the steel sector in India is poised to clock its third consecutive year of double-digit growth at 11-13 per cent after growing 11.4 per cent and 13.4 per cent in fiscals 2022 and 2023, respectively. "Strong domestic demand,



supported by government spending on infrastructure, building and construction segments, is expected to keep

India's steel imports elevated around the 6 MT (million tonne) mark this fiscal even as the global steel industry bat-

tles a slowdown," Crisil said. Chinese mills have started pushing volumes into the global market at highly competitive prices. Between January-November this year, exports from China increased 35.6 per cent to 82.7 MT - the highest since 2016. Chinese exports to India have also surged. As of November this fiscal, India imported 4.26 MT of finished steel, up 13.4 per cent on-year even as its exports declined 6.2 per cent to 4.03 MT, making the country a net importer of finished steel.

"Last fiscal, steel imports were around 5.6 per cent of domestic demand at 6.7 MT. We expect imports to be around 5.5 per cent mark this fiscal, too," Sehul Bhatt, Associate Director, Research, Crisil Marketing Intelligence and Analytics, said. Although global prices increased in November, by 23 per cent in the US and 6 per cent in Europe, a few domestic steel mills have cut prices by Rs 1,500 per tonne in December from the October list prices with an eye on local demand, Bhatt said.

Walmart bid to aid millet yield

New Delhi: Commemorating the International Year of Millets 2023, Walmart Foundation highlighted its grantees Action for Social Advancement, ICRISAT, PRADAN and SRIJAN's efforts, initiatives aimed at promoting millet cultivation, a climate resilient grain in India.

To promote millet farming as a sustainable agricultural practice, Walmart Foundation has decided to continue to revive millet cultivation in the country. "We will continue to support grantees as they revive millet cultivation," said Julie Gehrki, Walmart Foundation vice president.

India record lone win of 5 nations tournament

PTI ■ VALENCIA (SPAIN)

Captain Harmanpreet Singh and Jugraj Singh struck a brace each as the Indian men's hockey team beat France 5-4 in its fourth and final match to notch up its lone win in the five-nation tournament here on Wednesday. Jugraj scored in the 20th and 60th minutes while Harmanpreet found the target in the 25th and 56th minutes. Vivek Sagar Prasad (16th) struck once in the match that went back and forth throughout its duration. India thus ended their largely disappointing campaign with a win. They had lost all their earlier three matches in the tournament -- 0-1 to Spain, 2-7 to Belgium and 2-3 to Germany. France are the lowest-ranked side at ninth while India are at third. The first quarter saw France take the lead through a penalty-corner conversion from Lucas Montecot in the 11th minute. India equalised early in the second quarter through a field goal from Vivek.



Jugraj then put India in the lead after converting a penalty corner before Harmanpreet doubled the lead through another penalty corner. France were soon awarded a penalty stroke and Etienne Tynevez (28th) scored to make full use of it as the score read 3-2 in favour of India at half time. France restored parity late in the third quarter with a field goal from Gaspard Baumgarten (43rd minute). As the scoreline read 3-3, both the teams tried to break through each other's defence in the final quarter. France stole the lead through another penalty-corner conversion by Etienne Tynevez (53rd) but their joy was short-lived, as Harmanpreet scored through a penalty corner to bring up his second goal. Jugraj returned to score his second goal through yet another penalty corner in the last minute of the match as India emerged 5-4 victorious to end the tournament with a win. The five teams play each other once and the side finishing on top of the points table after all matches will be the winner.



Vita becomes first Indian to be inducted as ITTF governing board member

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sports entrepreneur Vita Dani has become the first Indian to be inducted as a governing board member of the International Table Tennis Federation's (ITTF) Foundation. The Foundation was established in 2018 by the ITTF to attract more people to the sport. Commenting on her new role, Vita said, "It is a great feeling to be inducted into an organisation that aligns perfectly with my vision for the growth of table tennis and its impact on the community. "Table tennis is a sport that anybody can play. It has great mental and physical

benefits, and our aim is to spread that message and make the game accessible to everyone." ITTF and ITTF Foundation President Petra Sorling said, "I am delighted to welcome Ms Vita Dani to the ITTF family as a new member of the ITTF Foundation Governing Board. Her passion for growing our sport and using it as a catalyst for development makes her a valuable member." Vita and her organisation (Dani Foundation) have played a big role in shaping the upward trajectory of Indian table tennis. She is also the co-owner of the Chennaiyin Football Club, which features in the Indian Super League.

Sanjay confident of getting WFI top job

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sanjay Singh, the Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh loyalist, on Wednesday exuded confidence of sweeping the much-delayed Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) elections, saying the fraternity knows who would be beneficial for the sport and who could inflict damage to it. UP Wrestling Association vice-president Sanjay, who hails from Varanasi, is up against Commonwealth Games gold medalist Anita Sheoran for the post of president. Anita is backed by the country's top wrestlers, who had accused outgoing WFI president Brij Bhushan of sexually exploiting women grapplers during his tenure. The WFI office was teeming with the state officials who have gathered for Thursday's elections. A few coaches and referees were also present and all hoped for a favourable outcome.



of Brij Bhushan's family members or associates will be allowed to contest the elections. Consequently, neither Brij Bhushan's son Prateek nor son-in-law Vishal Singh entered the fray. Sanjay Singh is a close associate of Brij Bhushan, the BJP MP from Kaiserganj in Uttar Pradesh, but the returning officer had cleared his nomination. "There is tremendous trust in the ability of Brij Bhushan that he has done a good job to bring about improvement in the level of sport. The financial health of the federation has also improved considerably under him. That's why he still has the backing of the fraternity," said a member of the electoral college. Besides the post of the president, elections will also be held for the posts of senior vice-president (1), vice-presidents (4), secretary-general (1), treasurer (1), joint secretaries (2), executive members (5). The election process, which was set in motion in July, has been delayed because of court cases. This has further led to the suspension of the WFI by the international federation, United World Wrestling, for failing to conduct fresh polls in the time stipulated by them. The Supreme Court recently set aside the stay imposed on the Punjab and Haryana High Court, paving the way for the process to elect the new WFI governing body.

Man City beats Urawa 3-0

Reaches Club World Cup final and now goes for 5th title in 2023

AP ■ JEDDAH (SAUDI ARABIA)

Manchester City set aside struggles at home to ease past Urawa Red Diamonds 3-0 in the Club World Cup semi-finals and is one game away from a fifth title in 2023. The champion of Europe has never lost to the champion of Asia at a Club World Cup and it never looked likely on a balmy evening in the Red Sea port city Jeddah on Tuesday. After it took Man City until first-half stoppage time to score from an own goal by defender Marius Hoibraten, Mateo Kovacic and Bernardo Silva struck with shots in a seven-minute spell early in the second half against the Japanese team. Man City now will be favoured to beat Fluminense of Brazil in the final on Friday. "It's the only title that the club don't have," City manager Pep

Guardiola said. "The players know how important this game is for all of us at the club." Guardiola's team keeps finding respite in international games during an untypical run in the Premier League where the defending champion has won just one of its last six games while leaking late goals. A winning Club World Cup debut followed City closing out a perfect six-win streak in its Champions League group this month. City also added a UEFA Super Cup title in August to its storied trophy treble last season of Champions League, Premier League and English FA Cup. City needed some help to score first Friday when Hoibraten diverted goalward a pass across the goalmouth by Matheus Nunes that was unlikely to find another of the six midfield players in the starting lineup. With Erling Haaland still ruled



out by a foot injury, Guardiola also opted to leave Argentina forward Julián Álvarez on the bench. The biggest cheers during a lackluster first half came when the faces of City stars Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne sitting in the main stand were broadcast on the screens placed high at each end of the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium. Neither

will play in the final. De Bruyne was not risked despite taking part in a light training session Monday more than four months after having surgery on a hamstring injury sustained early in City's Premier League season opener. Otherwise the noise from a 40,127 crowd inside a far-from-full stadium was raised by about 400 red-and-black clad Urawa

fans packed behind one goal. The clapping, singing, jumping group kept time to relentless drumming by one in their ranks and continued after the goals arrived either side of halftime. In the 52nd, deep-lying midfielder Kovacic exploited the space left vacant where Haaland would be to surge forward and shoot after collecting Kyle Walker's long pass. It was shooting practice for City seven minutes later when Bernardo Silva scored with the help of a slight deflection after goalkeeper Shusaku Nishikawa pushed away Nunes' first effort. City cruised through the last half-hour and Guardiola detailed an approach in Jeddah for his squad that is on a constant two-games-per-week program this season. "The plan is to sleep and to sleep and to sleep," the coach said, praising Walker as an "incredible captain" who organises

social time for teammates. A game between the fourth-place team in England and the fourth-place finisher in the Japanese league that ended this month exposed a much wider gulf. Urawa coach Maciej Skorza acknowledged his players could not handle the Premier League champion's "huge offensive power. They know what the gap is." On Friday, another Europe vs South America final - the 13th in 19 editions - will decide the last Club World Cup title in the current format that began in 2005. Urawa also will be in the 32-team lineup when FIFA relaunches the competition in June 2025 in the United States when Europe will have 12 entries and Asia just four. "I think this experience will be very important for our club," said Skorza, who will leave Urawa after the season.

Ponzio banned for 18 months in doping case

AP ■ MILAN

American-born Italian shot putter Nick Ponzio was banned for 18 months by the Italian Anti-Doping Agency for drug-testing violations, ruling him out of next year's Paris Olympics. Ponzio reached a plea deal with doping authorities after he was unable to be found for surprise tests on three occasions. According to Italian media reports on Tuesday, Ponzio said it was not his fault and that there was a glitch with the app on his phone that meant he did not receive the notifications. Ponzio's ban runs until August 27 as it started last February. The Olympics take place from July

26 to August 11. Ponzio, who was born in San Diego but qualified for Italy because his great grandfather was Italian, competed at the Tokyo Olympics but didn't get past the qualifying round. He finished fourth at last year's European Championships. The 28-year-old Ponzio is the second Italian athlete to be suspended in less than a week after steeplechase runner Ahmed Abdelwahed was given a maximum four-year ban by the Athletics Integrity Unit on Thursday. Italy's athletics team had a breakout performance in Tokyo, winning five gold medals including a surprise victory for Marcell Jacobs in the 100 meters.

FIH Player of the Year award recognition of hard work: Hardik

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian men's hockey team vice-captain Hardik Singh on Wednesday said the FIH Player of the Year award is a recognition of his "hard work and perseverance" that he has put in over the years to excel in the sport he loves. Hardik on Tuesday became the third male player from India to win the coveted award, joining Manpreet Singh (2019) and Harmanpreet Singh (2020-21 and 2021-22). Besides Hardik, India women's team skipper Savita Punia won the FIH Goalkeeper of the Year award for the third consecutive time.



"It's an absolute honour to receive this esteemed award. I am immensely grateful to my teammates, coaches, and supporters who have been the pillars of my success. This recognition fuels my determination to continue giving my

remarkable achievements." Hardik made a successful comeback after he was ruled out midway into the 2023 World Cup jointly hosted by Bhubaneswar and Rourkela with a hamstring injury. Notably, this is Hardik's second significant accolade this year as he had won the esteemed Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year 2022 earlier this year. With 114 caps under his belt, 25-year-old Hardik played a vital role in India's bronze medal-winning feat at the Tokyo Olympics, and gold medals in this year's Asian Champions Trophy 2023 and the Asian Games.

playoff win at the Masters over Kenny Perry and Chad Campbell. Cabrera was among inmates granted two-hour visits with partners every 15 days because of good behavior. Yamila Alvarez, his partner of four years, gave birth to a son in November 2022. They married in October after Cabrera got out of prison. Cabrera said in the Golf Digest interview that being on the golf course again "felt like a rebirth" and that his hope is to return to the Masters. "I've made serious mistakes, but I've also paid my debts," he said. "I'm going to work as hard as I can to clean up my image. I want to recover the stature I had as an athlete."

Angel clear to return to PGA Tour after prison

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Two-time major champion Angel Cabrera, released on parole from an Argentina prison in August for gender violence, has been cleared to play in PGA Tour-sanctioned events. He said in a Golf Digest interview he wants to clean up his image from "serious mistakes." Without confirming Cabrera was ever suspended - the PGA Tour does not publicize conduct violations - a tour spokesman confirmed the 54-year-old Argentine is eligible to play. Cabrera, who won the US Open at Oakmont in 2007 and the Masters in a playoff in 2009, was imprisoned for two

years for threats and harassment of Cecilia Torres Mana, his partner of two years. Her case was joined by that of another former partner, Micaela Escudero. In a lengthy interview with Golf Digest published in the December-January edition, Cabrera said he was embarrassed by his behaviour and said, "I made serious mistakes." "I refused to listen to anyone and did what I wanted, how I wanted and when I wanted," Cabrera said. "That was wrong. I ask Micaela for forgiveness. I ask Celia for forgiveness. They had the bad luck of being with me when I was at my worst. I wasn't the devil, but I did bad things.



"I am deeply embarrassed because I disappointed the people closest to me - and everyone who loves me through golf," he said. "Golf gave me everything, and I know I will never be able to repay the debt I owe this sport." Golf Digest said Cabrera was undergoing treatment for alcohol addiction, including taking daily medication that causes sickness if he drinks. His long-time coach, Charlie Epps, said Cabrera was taking alcohol education courses for six hours a week. In the interview, the 54-year-old Cabrera said he was trying to complete classes to graduate the sixth grade and had two months left when he was

released on parole. Epps said he asked Ping if it could supply Cabrera with a new set of golf clubs, which the coach took down to Argentina upon the release. "I played with him for five days," Epps said on Tuesday in a telephone interview. "It's a miracle that an uneducated, poor kid can look back and say: OK, I did wrong, I'm going to learn from it and it's all up to me now." He gets a second chance and he wants to try to take advantage of it." Cabrera played a tournament in Rosario, Argentina, last week and tied for 10th. Augusta National did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether he would be invited to

the Masters, where champions have a lifetime exemption. Golf Digest obtained a letter from the tour notifying Cabrera that his suspension was lifted effective Monday and that "failure to comply with the terms of your release from prison or any additional information regarding your legal situation in Argentina may result in the immediate reinstatement of your suspension." Cabrera has seven wins on main tours around the world, his last one at the Greenbrier Classic in 2014. He is best known for holding off Tiger Woods and Jim Furyk to win at Oakmont for his first major, and for his shot out of the trees on the 18th hole that led to a

playoff win at the Masters over Kenny Perry and Chad Campbell. Cabrera was among inmates granted two-hour visits with partners every 15 days because of good behavior. Yamila Alvarez, his partner of four years, gave birth to a son in November 2022. They married in October after Cabrera got out of prison. Cabrera said in the Golf Digest interview that being on the golf course again "felt like a rebirth" and that his hope is to return to the Masters. "I've made serious mistakes, but I've also paid my debts," he said. "I'm going to work as hard as I can to clean up my image. I want to recover the stature I had as an athlete."

INDIA HOPES OF REGISTERING SECOND TRIUMPH

PTI ■ PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA)
 With a similar storyline of faltering opening combination running through the first two matches, India's hopes of registering their second ODI series triumph in South Africa will revolve around a sturdy start from the openers in the third and final match here on Thursday.
 India's lone ODI series win in the Rainbow nation came in 2018, and for an encore they require a robust beginning from Ruturaj Gaikwad and B Sai Sudharsan as a pair.
 Sai Sudharsan has been impressive in his two outings in the series so far, notching up 55 and 62. But Gaikwad could not support him from the other end. The right-hander fell for five and four as India's first-wicket alliance ended at 23 and four at Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth.
 In contrast, South African openers Tony de Zorzi, who cracked

his maiden century, and Reeza Hendricks milked 130 runs to kill the chase. Similarly, Tilak Varma, who showed some early promise in his career, seemed to have tapered off a bit in the last couple of months.
 The elegant left-hander who packs a punch struggled to touch his peak in the home T20I series against Australia and the struggle seemed to have followed him to South Africa as well. The Hyderabad batter is yet to hit his peak here.
 It is important for Gaikwad and Varma, unless he is replaced with uncapped Rajat Patidar for tomorrow's match, to rediscover their range because India no longer have Shreyas Iyer in the middle-order to shore up the innings. The 30-year-old Patidar usually bats at No. 4 for Madhya Pradesh.
 Iyer had joined an inter-squad match to prepare for the upcoming Test series after the first one-day.
 However, these top order batters

ODI AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA



can draw some solace from the Boland Park pitch, which often tends to lean towards batsmen. The Port Elizabeth pitch had a bit of uneven bounce on it, particularly in the first innings, but the Paarl deck often offers true bounce and carry, helping batters to free their arms and go through the shots without any inhibitions.
 It might also nudge the think-alike to give another chance to free-hitting Sanju Samson, who got out for 12 in the last match, and the Kerala cricketer donning the big gloves at Port Elizabeth could be an indication of that. India also have a tiny concern in their bowling department ahead of the third ODI. Mukesh Kumar is yet to pick up a wicket in two matches, and the pacer needs to slip into his striking armour sooner than later.
 The Bengal man found the going tough once Proteas opener Tony de Zorzi bludgeoned him through the on-side with

mighty hacks. Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan did the perfect demolition job in the first match, and the former continued to be thrifty in the second match as well. So, it is imperative for Mukesh to find his rhythm with the new ball and pick up a wicket or two upfront to keep South Africa on the backfoot.
 The team management might also think of giving a match to veteran leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, whose tour to SA will end on the morrow. He had shown a streak of good form in the recent Vijay Hazare Trophy for Haryana.
 But it remains to be seen whether the management can convince either Kuldeep Yadav or Axar Patel to move away for Chahal.
 Both Kuldeep and Axar have been selected for the Test series and the spin duo would want to have as much game-time as possible against their names.
 From a South African perspec-

ive, the performance of left-handed De Zorzi might have filled them with the hopes of finding an ideal, long-term replacement for Quinton de Kock. Fast bowler Nandre Burger too was fiery with the new ball and the Proteas will hope for him to give another hustle round to the Indians.
SQUADS:
India: KL Rahul (captain, WK), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Sai Sudharsan, Tilak Varma, Rajat Patidar, Rinku Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Sanju Samson (wk), Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mukesh Kumar, Avesh Khan, Arshdeep Singh, Akash Deep.
South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi, Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Mithali Mpongwana, Wiaan Mulder, Beuran Hendricks. Rassie van der Dussen, Tabraiz Shamsi, Lizaad Williams, Kyle Verreynne.



PTI ■ MUMBAI
 Australia women's cricket team captain Alyssa Healy on Wednesday revealed she had suffered severe injuries to her right index finger after being bitten by her pet Staffordshire terrier puppies, with the wicketkeeper-batter adding she is excited to back on the field following a surgery and 50 stitches.
 Nearly two months after the incident, Healy will not just lead the side as full-time captain for the Test and white-ball series, she will also be keeping wickets. Alyssa suffered grievous injuries to her right hand in October trying to separate her two Staffordshire terrier puppies. The 33-year-old said during a media interaction at the Wankhede Stadium here ahead of the one-off Test against India that she still "cannot feel any

sensation on the inside part of her right index finger", though she is excited to wear the big gloves during the match.
 "Finger-wise, all good. It has been nice to get back into the game. I did not realise how much I would miss it, watching the WBBL (Women's Big Bash) at home and coming over here and getting the opportunity to keep again and have a bat," said Healy, who played just one game for Sydney Sixers before the incident happened.
 "(The) finger has pulled up really well and, yeah, I'll have the gloves on tomorrow, which I'm excited for," Healy added. The one-off Test here will be the

After dog bite incident, Healy ready to keep wickets

start of a new era for Australian women's cricket with Alyssa taking charge as full-time skipper following the retirement of Meg Lanning, who led the side for 13 years.
 Alyssa had also led the side in the one-off women's Ashes Test earlier this year in June, which they won by 89 runs at Nottingham.
 "It is unbelievably huge shoes to fill and in the sense of replacing Meg Lanning. The success that she had not only as a player but obviously as a leader of the Australian cricket team, is fairly unmatched right around the men's and the women's game," she said.



PTI ■ BENGALURU
 Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) captain Faf du Plessis said the franchise's main focus at the IPL auction was to build a side which can put in improved performances at its own end during the IPL 2024.
 Du Plessis felt RCB made strategic acquisitions to achieve optimal team balance at the auction in Dubai on Tuesday while executing six bids.
 "After the last season, we felt like we needed to improve at home. One of the things that we did really well was to succeed away from Chinnaswamy," Du Plessis said in a statement.
 "So, we put our heads together and what that looks like to be better at home and how can we get better, in what ways can we improve?"
 "It's definitely the auction (way to improve) and the process of the last two months has been solely around planning to be better at home and the type of bowlers and batsmen that will be successful at home," he added. Boasting of strong top-order comprising the likes of Du Plessis, Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell and Rajat Patidar, RCB acquired the services of Australia all-rounder Cameron Green through a trade-in from Mumbai Indians ahead of the auction.
 Besides, RCB also strengthened its bowling department, adding West Indian pacer Alzarri Joseph (Rs 11.5 crore), New Zealand fast bowler Lockie Ferguson (Rs 2 crore) and England's Tom Curran (Rs 1.5 crore).



Auction strategy around players who can help us improve at home: Du Plessis

Need to maintain energy to secure maiden Test win over Australia: Kaur



PTI ■ MUMBAI
 India captain Harmanpreet Kaur wants the hosts to play with the same energy and intensity which they displayed against England, when they take the field in the one-off women's Test versus Australia starting here on Thursday.
 India thrashed England by a record 347-run margin in the lone Test at the DY Patil Stadium to record the biggest win for any side in terms of runs and will now look to register their maiden Test win over Australia.
 India have never beaten Australia in 10 Tests and the contest will definitely challenge them in terms of fitness and temperament, given they are playing back-to-back matches.
 "The way we played the first Test (of the season), we want to carry the same energy into this one. It is very exciting, knowing Australia is such a good team and everyone wants to beat them," Kaur told reporters after India's training session on Wednesday.
 Australia will be without Meg Lanning who has retired from international cricket recently, and in her place Alyssa Healy will lead the side.
 Kaur said Lanning's absence will not make much difference as Australia have a strong side. "They have a balanced side and everyone has experience of all formats. We can't say Meg (Lanning) is not there and take them lightly. We just need to think what best we can do rather than thinking about how good they are," she said.
 The India skipper said while the prospect of playing Test cricket excites her side, it has been slightly challenging to manage the players' workload.
 "When you are playing back-to-back Tests, it is important to recover and feel fresh. When you bat and bowl for three days - the likes of Deepti (Sharma), Pooja (Vastrakar) who didn't get enough rest - we try to take care of their loads," Kaur said.
 "They need to feel ready for the game and we made them train accordingly. The ones who had lesser loads we pushed them hard in the nets to feel more confident.
 "The more we feel fresh, the better it will be for us, because there is hardly (any) time to prepare. If there was a 10-12 day (break), you can take 2-3 days off and again prepare yourself. We were lucky we had fourth day off (against England) and then just one day off. We tried to recover in that."
 While the pitch at the DY Patil Stadium turned out to be a slow turner, there is plenty of grass on offer at the Wankhede Stadium strip.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Gautam Gambhir has justified his franchise bidding for Mitchell Starc for a record-breaking amount, saying that the Australia quick will be the X-factor and the leader of the bowling pack.
 KKR shelled out a jaw-dropping Rs 24.75 crore to get the services of Starc in the IPL auction in Dubai on Tuesday.
 "He (Starc) is an X-factor, there is no doubt about that. Someone who can bowl with the new ball, bowl in the death overs and more importantly, someone who can lead the attack," Gambhir, who was present at the auction, said.
 "He is going to be of massive help to our two domestic bowlers because both of them are very talented and you need someone to help them out in the middle and Starc covers those bases.
 "It is not only about his bowling but also about leading the attack and helping all guys around him. So, somebody will have to pay for it," the former India opener told Jio Cinema.
 Gambhir, who captained KKR to two IPL titles, said for him having a strong bowling line-up takes precedence over a strong batting line-up.
 "We have a lot of depth in our bowling line-up. We always wanted to have a stronger bowling attack and now we have the options with Mujeeb (Ur Rahman), Gus (Atkinson), Sunil (Narine), Varun (Chakravarthy), and Mitchell Starc along with two Indian seamers (Harshit Rana and Suyash Sharma) and Chetan Sakariya.
 "Now, we have enough options where we can play different combinations looking at the venue as well. For me, it has always been about having a strong bowling line-up compared to a very strong batting line-up," said the BJP Member of Parliament.
 Asked about his coming back to the franchise he had led to titles in 2012 and 2014, Gambhir said, "For me, KKR is not a team, it is an emotion. The reason is the amount of love that I have received from the people of Kolkata for seven years that I led them and, hopefully, I led them with a lot of honesty.
 "Hopefully, we can recreate the same memories that we did in 2012 and 2014. There is no guarantee that we will go out and win but there is one guarantee for sure, that we will fight till the last drop of our blood."

Shubman loses top ODI batters spot to Babar

PTI ■ DUBAI
 India opener Shubman Gill's reign at the top of the ODI batters' list was short-lived as he was replaced by former Pakistani skipper Babar Azam in the ICC Player Rankings issued on Wednesday.
 The Indian attained the top spot during the ODI World Cup last month, but since then he has not played any ODI. Babar is back at the top with 824 rating points, while Gill (810) is the second spot followed by teammates Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.
 Shreyas Iyer has dropped to 12th, while KL Rahul has moved a spot to 16th.
 In the bowlers' chart, South African spinner Keshav Maharaj remains at the top followed by Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood. Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj (3rd), Jasprit Bumrah (5th) and Kuldeep Yadav (8th) are the other Indians to feature in the top 10.
 Mohammad Shami is at the 11th spot, while spinner Ravindra Jadeja is ranked 22nd.

Sarkar's 169 not enough as New Zealand beat Bangladesh

AP ■ NELSON (NEW ZEALAND)
 Henry Nicholls made 95 and Will Young 89, trouncing Soumya Sarkar's career-best 169 and leading New Zealand to a seven-wicket win over Bangladesh on Wednesday in the second One-Day International.
 New Zealand hold a winning 2-0 lead in the three-match series which ends Saturday in Napier. Nicholls returned to form but fell just short of his second ODI century while Young narrowly missed his second straight ODI century as New Zealand made 296-3 in reply to Bangladesh's 291. Young made 105 as New Zealand won the rain-affected first match of the series by 44 runs.
 Young put on 76 for the first wicket with Rachin Ravindra who made 45 from 33 balls after making a first-ball duck in the first match on Sunday.
 Rashid then added 128, effectively in a match-winning partnership, for the second wicket with Nicholls who also bounced back after a second-ball duck in the opening ODI.

Cummins wants to use IPL as preparation for T20 World Cup 2024

PTI ■ MELBOURNE
 Australia captain Pat Cummins hoped to set IPL 2024 as a base to launch himself into the T20 mode ahead of next year's World Cup to be jointly hosted by USA and the West Indies in June.
 Cummins, who pulled out of IPL 2023 due to heavy international workload, attracted the second highest paycheck in the auction in Dubai on Tuesday — Rs 20.50 crore by Sunrisers Hyderabad.
 His teammate Mitchell Starc was lapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders for a whopping Rs 24.75 crore, the highest ever contract money in the IPL.
 "I feel like I haven't played a heap of T20 cricket and in some ways, I feel like I haven't played my best T20 cricket for a little while," Cummins was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au.
 "I'm really excited ... for next year to try to get some games before that World Cup and push a case to not only make the side but to get back to how I feel like I can bowl in T20 cricket."
 Cummins last foray in the IPL was for KKR in 2022, where he smashed the fastest men's T20 half-century by an Australian from just 14 balls.
 "Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season," Cummins said in a video on the Sunrisers' Instagram page.
 "I've heard a lot about the Orange Army. I've played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it, so can't wait to get started."
 Cummins was joined by teammate and World Cup final hero Travis Head in SRH after the left-handed opener was picked up for Rs 6.8 crore. "Great to see another Aussie in Trav Head over there as well. I think we are going to have a lot of fun this season and hopefully plenty of success," Cummins said.

Tough to replace Pandya, but Gill is right person for GT captaincy: Nehra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Gujarat Titans head coach Gashish Nehra admitted that it will be tough to replace a multi-faceted player like Hardik Pandya but banked on Shubman Gill to shoulder the responsibility of leading the side in next year's IPL.
 Pandya recently returned to Mumbai Indians and has been appointed as the skipper of the five-time champions.
 "To replace a player like Hardik Pandya is difficult considering his talent and experience. We have seen how he (Gill) has shaped up in the past three-four years. He is 24-25 years of age but he has a good head on his shoulders," Nehra said in a virtual post-auction press meet on Tuesday night.
 The former India pacer said the franchise will back Gill irrespec-

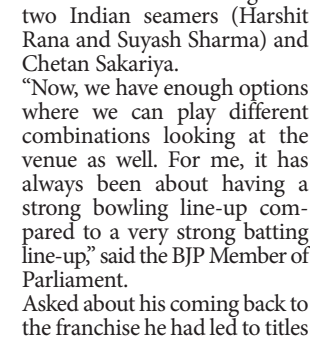
Cummins wants to use IPL as preparation for T20 World Cup 2024

tion of the results in the next edition of the IPL.
 "We believe in him. That is why we made him captain. I am not someone who will always go by results. Yes, results are important but when you come to captaincy you have to look at other things also. We are confident

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paycheck which Starc attracted. "There is nothing like being over priced in the IPL. Everybody knows what Starc can do. He is a proven player. We needed a fast bowler and every team had different strategies. We have to be satisfied with what we have. For a bowler like Starc, I don't think that is a surprise," he said.
 Happy with pacers: Boucher MI head coach Mark Boucher was delighted at the pace attack that they have managed to assemble from the auction. Mumbai signed South African quick Gerald Coetzee, who had a fine ODI World Cup recently, and Sri Lanka's left-arm pacer Dilshan Madhushanka on Tuesday.
 "We made the decision to go for him (Coetzee) because he is a young, up and coming superstar. While Madhushanka is a three-phase bowler.

Cummins wants to use IPL as preparation for T20 World Cup 2024



year to try to get some games before that World Cup and push a case to not only make the side but to get back to how I feel like I can bowl in T20 cricket."
 Cummins last foray in the IPL was for KKR in 2022, where he smashed the fastest men's T20 half-century by an Australian from just 14 balls.
 "Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season," Cummins said in a video on the Sunrisers' Instagram page.
 "I've heard a lot about the Orange Army. I've played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it, so can't wait to get started."
 Cummins was joined by teammate and World Cup final hero Travis Head in SRH after the left-handed opener was picked up for Rs 6.8 crore. "Great to see another Aussie in Trav Head over there as well. I think we are going to have a lot of fun this season and hopefully plenty of success," Cummins said.



that Gill is the right person (for captaincy)," Nehra added.
 The Titans battled intensely in the auction room in Dubai to buy Mitchell Starc before Kolkata Knight Riders purchased the Australian pacer for a record Rs 24.75 crore. Nehra wasn't surprised at the big

