

OPINION 6

USE THE SC VERDICT TO
NORMALISE KASHMIR

WORLD 8

NORTH KOREA'S KIM AGAIN
THREATENS USE OF NUKES

MONEY 10

SENSEX REBOUNDS
358 POINTS

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY DECEMBER 22, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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Unprecedented Parliament Winter Session

Crucial Bills passed without 146 suspended MPs

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

Parliament was adjourned sine die on Thursday, a day before its scheduled time, after the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha passed the pending crucial Bills in the complete absence of Opposition benches from both Houses, making it unprecedented. While the Lok Sabha was adjourned after the passage of important Bills, including the appointment of election commissioners and the Press registration process, the Rajya Sabha passed important legislations on three criminal Bills and the Telecom Bill. The last time such a large number of MPs were suspended was under the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on March 15, 1989, by then Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar. A total of 63 MPs from the Opposition benches were suspended for the remainder of the week, which was three days during the Budget session. The suspended MPs included VP Singh, Somnath Chatterjee, VC Shukla, Indrajit Gupta, S Jaipal Reddy during the 8th Lok Sabha, sources said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Lok Sabha Speaker



Union Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

Om Birla and the leaders of some political parties in a customary meeting on Thursday after Parliament's winter session, during which the government's legislative agenda was passed, was adjourned sine die. Official sources said Modi thanked everyone. The Prime Minister and the leaders of different political parties generally visit

the Speaker after the end of every Parliament session. Opposition leaders, most of whom were suspended from the two Houses for their continuous protests over an incident of security breach in Parliament, kept away from the meeting. Biju Janata Dal's (BJD) Bhartruhari Mahtab and Shiv Sena's Rahul Shewale were among the leaders

present at the meeting, besides Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Pralhad Joshi, among others. Before the Lok Sabha adjourned sine die, three more MPs from the Opposition were suspended for the "remainder" of the Winter Session, taking the total number of suspended MPs in the Lower House to

100 for unruly behaviour and misconduct. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi moved a motion for the suspension of DK Suresh, Deepak Baij, and Nakul Nath on Thursday. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had warned the three MPs against protesting in the House. With this, the total number of MPs suspended for



CISF tasked to secure Parliament

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant overhaul of security following the Parliament security breach earlier this month, the government has opted to entrust the "comprehensive" security of the Parliament building complex to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

The CISF will manage access control to both the new and old Parliament complexes in a manner akin to airport security. This approach involves body frisking using hand-held detectors, while belongings will undergo scrutiny through X-ray machines.

Detailed report on P4

unruly behaviour from the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha stood at an unprecedented 146 since December 14. In both the Houses, the Opposition had been demanding a statement in the House from Home Minister Amit Shah for the security breach on December 13. The Opposition leaders under the INDIA bloc banner will protest against suspension of INDIA parties MPs at Jantar Mantar on Friday. The Lok Sabha passed three key Bills to replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act on Wednesday, followed by the same in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. During his reply in the Upper House after the Bill was moved by him, Home Minister Amit Shah said over 70,000 people were killed due to terrorism on account of Congress government's wrong policies.

"We had been deliberating and discussing on this since August 2019. I feel joyous to be presenting this today. Not just the names of laws have been changed, but major changes have been made in their objectives. Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, and Evidence Act were

formulated to safeguard the British rule," the Home Minister said. The Lower House also cleared a bill to establish a mechanism for the appointment of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners. With the passage of the Bill in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, the Parliament approved the Bill that seeks to allow the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security and also provide a non-auction route for the allocation of satellite spectrum. The Telecommunications Bill, 2023, was approved by the Rajya Sabha through a voice vote. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday after a short debate in the absence of Opposition MPs. TMC's Mahua Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha after the House adopted a resolution accepting the recommendation of the House ethics committee, which found her guilty of asking questions in Parliament in return for cash and gifts. The Winter session began on December 4 and was scheduled to conclude on December 22.

Continued on Page 2



4 Army jawans martyred in terror ambush

Poonch/Jammu: Four soldiers were killed and as many injured when heavily armed terrorists ambushed two Army vehicles in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, officials said. The vehicles, carrying the personnel to the site of a cordon-and-search operation, came under attack at Dhatyar Morh between Dhera Ki Gali and Bufliaz under the jurisdiction of Surankote police station around 3.45 pm.

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Sakshi Malik quits wrestling as Brij aide wins WFI race

New Delhi: Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's loyalist Sanjay Singh was on Thursday elected as President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) with his panel comfortably winning 13 of the 15 posts in the much-delayed polls, an outcome that triggered outrage among protesting wrestlers and Sakshi Malik announced her retirement from the sport. The trio of Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Malik had launched an agitation against Brij Bhushan in January this year, aggressively pushing for a change of guard in the WFI but a close associate of the BJP MP is now at the helm.

Detailed report on Page 2

Act against Rahul for Modi jibe: HC to EC

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Election Commission to take a decision as expeditiously as possible, preferably within eight weeks, on a notice it has issued to Rahul Gandhi for his alleged "pickpocket" jibe targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the statement made by the Congress leader during a speech delivered last month was "not in good taste". A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan was hearing a public interest litigation seeking action against Rahul as well as formulation of guidelines to prevent such "malpractice" by political leaders.

Detailed report on Page 2

Anurag bats for journalists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

On Thursday, the Centre passed a historic Bill in support of press freedom and simultaneously expressed concern over continuous attacks on journalists in West Bengal. The Centre urged the State to ensure the safety of mediapersons. In a landmark decision, the Lok Sabha passed the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, repealing the colonial-era law of the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867. The Bill simplifies the process of title allotment and registration of periodicals through an online system without the need for any physical interface. This Bill had already been passed by the Rajya Sabha in the Monsoon Session. During the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha earlier in the day, Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur stated that law and order is a State subject, and the State Government should provide an environment for mediapersons to work independently. Thakur was responding to a question raised by TMC member Dola Sen, who was not present in the House, having been suspended along with a few other MPs for the remainder of the winter session. Responding to a supplementary query on steps being taken by the government to ensure the safety of journalists, the minister mentioned that the main question was asked by an

MP from West Bengal who is not in the House. Thakur expressed hesitation to point out a particular State but noted that several incidents had occurred one after the other in West Bengal, including reports of deadly attacks on journalists.



He emphasised the serious concern for the safety of journalists, citing specific incidents in various districts. "The media is the fourth pillar of democracy," the minister asserted, urging West Bengal and other States to take steps to ensure the safety of journalists within their borders. Regarding The Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, passed in the Lok Sabha, it enables the Press Registrar General to fast-track the process, ensuring that publishers, especially small and medium publishers, face little difficulty in starting a publication. Introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Minister for Information & Broadcasting Anurag Singh Thakur said, "the Bill reflects yet another step of the Modi Government towards jettisoning the mentality of slavery and bringing new laws for new India."

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Fragile INDIA Bloc starts to whittle before time

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

As Bengal Pradesh Congress leaders seek 6-8 seats from the Trinamool Congress in potential pre-poll alliance talks, the prospects of such collaboration are becoming increasingly uncertain. In the 2019 general elections, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) secured victory in 22 out of 42 seats, while the BJP, experiencing a meteoric rise, claimed 18 seats. The Congress, in contrast, managed only 2 seats, and the Left drew a blank for the first time since Independence. Prominent Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) leaders, including Adhir Chowdhury, Deepa Dasmunshi, AH Khan Chowdhury, and Shankar Malakar, have conveyed their demand for 6-8 seats to party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi. According to Pradesh Congress sources, the leaders insist on a dignified allocation, stating, "Anything less



than 6-8 seats is not acceptable because the Congress' strength post panchayat elections has increased in Bengal." The Bengal unit of the party has requested seats for Darjeeling, Raiganj, Malda South, Murshidabad, Purulia, and, if possible, Basirhat. This is in addition to Baharampur and Malda North, currently held by Congress members Adhir Chowdhury and AH Khan Chowdhury, respectively.

These seats were once traditional Congress strongholds until the TMC eroded its influence by engineering mass defections after coming to power in 2011. PCC leaders noted. They emphasise the need to reclaim dignity and resist yielding these seats to those who tormented the party over the years. Bengal PCC leader and former party spokesperson Kaustav Bagchi goes further by outright rejecting the idea of an alliance

with the TMC. In a letter to Kharge, he asserts that such an alliance would carry pitfalls, as the TMC leadership is marred by credible corruption charges. Bagchi argues that aligning with the TMC would make the Congress responsible for the corruption against which it has long fought. Bagchi also underscores that Bengal politics revolves around the TMC, and if an alliance is formed, the BJP would benefit, as opposition votes would consolidate in its favor. At this juncture, he argues, an alliance with the TMC would ultimately aid the saffron outfit. While the TMC leadership remains tight-lipped about the PCC's demand, a senior leader in the party indicates there is no intention of offering more than 2-3 seats to the Congress. The leader suggests that, given the current atmosphere, the Congress may struggle to retain even the 2 seats it won last time without TMC support.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has interrogated two additional individuals, including the son of a retired Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) from Karnataka's Bagalkote area, in connection with the Parliament security breach case on December 13. The individuals have been identified as Sai Krishna, the son of the retired Deputy Superintendent of Police from Bagalkote, Karnataka, and Atul Kulshreshtha, a resident of Jalalpur, Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, Special Judge Hardeep Kaur on Thursday extended the custody of the accused—Manoranjana D. Sagar Sharma, Amol Dhanraj Shinde, and

Parliament breach probe deepens; son of former cop under scanner

Neelam Devi — by 15 days as requested by the city police. Sai Krishna, reportedly a techie and close friend of one of the Parliament intruders, Manoranjana D, who entered the Lok Sabha chamber on December 13, releasing yellow gas from canisters, was questioned by a team from the Special Cell on Wednesday. Sai Krishna and Manoranjana D were batchmates at a Bengaluru engineering college. Manoranjana is among the four accused in the

case now facing charges under the anti-terror law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Sai Krishna was taken into custody from his residence in Vidyagiri, Bagalkote, on Wednesday night by a team from the Delhi Police. He works for a multinational company in Bengaluru and was Manoranjana's roommate during college. Another individual detained by the Delhi Police is Atul Kulshreshtha from Jalaun, Uttar Pradesh. Preliminary

investigations revealed that Atul, also known as "Baccha", has no past criminal records or political affiliations. However, he has been passionate about the ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh since his student life. Atul, connected to the Bhagat Singh Fans Club, was caught on record chatting with the Parliament intruders on Facebook, leading to his arrest for interrogation. Atul, a participant in the farmers' agitation, has two sons and a daughter.

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Be sensitive to Divyang, EC asks political parties

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking move, the Election Commission (EC) has issued guidelines to political parties, urging them to use disability and gender-sensitive language. Political parties are advised to refrain from using derogatory references to persons with disabilities (PwD) in public speeches, campaigns, and writings. Examples of ableist language highlighted in the advisory include words like

"dumb" (gunga), "retarded" (pagal, sirphira), "blind" (andha, kana), "deaf" (behra), and "lame" (langda, lula, apahij). The EC emphasised the need to avoid such derogatory language, stating, "PwDs have to be accorded justice and respect in political discourse and campaigns." The advisory cautioned that any usage of derogatory language or insults directed at PwDs may attract provisions of Section 92 of the Rights of Persons with



Disabilities Act, 2016. The EC appealed to political parties and their candidates to abide by the guidelines in both letter and spirit, recognising their role as important stakeholders in the electoral process. For the first time, the Commission has issued a set of guidelines to promote inclusivity and respect in political discourse toward the PwD community. The EC is consciously striving to promote the principles of accessibility and inclusivity in

elections through various initiatives. In an advisory issued to parties, the poll panel highlighted that the foundation of democracy lies in the representation of all communities in the electoral process. It expressed concern about the use of derogatory or offensive language in political discourse about PwDs and warned that such language could be interpreted as an affront to the PwDs.

Continued on Page 2

4 Army jawans martyred in terror ambush in Poonch

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In yet another provocative strike targeting Indian army personnel, a heavily armed group of foreign terrorists Thursday ambushed two army vehicles in the general area of Dera Ki Gali, Poonch in which four army personnel were 'killed in action' and three others received critical injuries. The Indian army personnel were passing through the Thannamandi-Surankote road link in two separate vehicles including one gypsy and an army truck at the time of the attack. Till the time of filing the report, none of the terrorists was neutralized. Unconfirmed reports suggested one of the terrorists received injuries during the intense gunfight but there was no official confirmation. According to a Jammu-based Defence Spokesman, Lt-Col Suneel Bartwal, the army vehicles were targeted at approximately 3:45 PM on Thursday. The vehicles carrying troops



were moving to the operational site in the general area of Dera Ki Gali. The terrorists, hiding in the area, targeted the army vehicles. The fire was retaliated effectively. In the ongoing operation, three Indian army jawans laid down their lives and three others received injuries. Meanwhile, some of the images circulated on various social media platforms captured the intensity of the 'dastardly' attack. It showed a blood-stained helmet, AK rifle magazines, and human blood splat-

tered near the front door of the gypsy. According to ground reports, the Indian army has cordoned off the general area and fresh reinforcements were rushed to the area to track down the footprints of the terrorists. A joint operation was launched in the Dera Ki Gali on December 20 soon after receiving intelligence reports about the suspected movement of terrorists in the area. The contact was established with the terrorists after the gruesome attack took place.

A month ago on November 22, five Indian army personnel including two army officers were 'killed in action' during a fierce gunfight with a group of well-entrenched terrorists in the Solki forest area of Kalakote in Rajouri district. Twenty-two security personnel have been killed in action since April 2023 in five similar strikes by the terrorists in Jammu Kashmir. Five Indian soldiers were charred to death after a moving truck was ambushed in the Poonch district on April 20, 2023. Fifteen days later on May 5, 2023, Five elite commandos of Para Special forces were 'killed in action' by a group of heavily armed terrorists in the thickly forested belt of Kotranka in the frontier district of Rajouri. Later on 4 August 2023, 3 soldiers of 34 RR were killed in action in the Kulgam district. On September 13, 2023, three officers and one sepoy were killed in action in the Kokernag forest area of Anantnag.

Sakshi retires in protest after Bhushan loyalist becomes new WFI president

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh Loyalist Sanjay Singh was on Thursday elected as President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) with his panel comfortably winning 13 of the 15 posts in the much-delayed polls - an outcome that triggered outrage among protesting wrestlers and Sakshi Malik announced her retirement from the sport. The trio of Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Malik had launched an agitation against Brij Bhushan in January this year, aggressively pushing for a change of guard in the WFI but a close associate of the BJP MP is now at the helm. Sanjay Singh, the UP Wrestling Association vice-president hailing from Varanasi, secured 40 votes as against seven of his rival and 2010 Commonwealth Games gold medallist Anita Sheoran. The panel of Sheoran though managed to win the key post of secretary-general with Prem Chand Lochab, a former Railways Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) secretary, defeat-



ing Darshan Lal 27-19. Devender Singh Kadian, who runs a chain of food joints on National Highways and is considered to be close to protesting wrestlers, claimed the senior vice president's post, beating I D Nanavati 32-15. The victory of these two candidates from the Sheoran camp suggests a compromise formula must have been worked out since Sanjay Singh won by a huge margin while votes were split in the elections for these two posts. "It's a triumph for thousands of wrestlers in the country who suffered in the past 7-8 months," Sanjay Singh told reporters after his huge win. "We will respond to politics with

politics and wrestling with wrestling," Sanjay replied when asked about politics being played within the federation. Given the tremendous interest outgoing chief Brij Bhushan has in the sport, it is expected that RSS-affiliate Sanjay Singh, who runs a construction business, will consult him in key policy decisions. The WFI office expectedly wore a festive look with Brij Bhushan supporters shouting victory slogans. Slogans such as 'Sanjay bhaiya kya le ke chale, Brij Bhushan ki khadau le ke chale' (What did Sanjay carry with him, Brij Bhushan's wooden slippers) reverberated inside the BJP MP's bungalow that houses the WFI office.

The Brij Bhushan camp swept all the four vice-president posts with Delhi's Jai Prakash (37), West Bengal's Asit Kumar Saha (42), Punjab's Kartar Singh (44) and Manipur's N Phoni (38) winning the elections. Uttarakhand's Satyapal Singh Deshwai, who is also from Brij Bhushan camp, was elected as the new treasurer. He beat Jammu and Kashmir's Dushyant Sharma 34-12. All five executive committee members were also from the outgoing chief's camp. The new Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav, who did not turn up for the polls, got only five votes in the VP election. Less than one kilometre away from the WFI office, the country's top wrestlers Punia, Phogat and Malik addressed the media, expressing their disappointment with the outcome of the polls. Sakshi, as a mark of protest against the election result, quit the sport. She had been struggling of late and had lost trials to young wrestler Sonam Malik several times before winning a gold at the Birmingham CWG Games in 2022.

Decide in 8 weeks notice to Rahul over pickpocket jibe at Modi: HC to EC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Election Commission to take a decision as expeditiously as possible, preferably within eight weeks, on a notice it has issued to Rahul Gandhi for his alleged "pickpocket" jibe targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the statement made by the Congress leader during a speech delivered last month was "not in good taste".



against Gandhi as well as formulation of guidelines to prevent such "malpractice" by political leaders, observed the Election Commission (EC) was examining the matter and has even issued a notice to Gandhi on November 23 seeking his stand and therefore its outcome should be awaited. "The (EC) notice said action will be taken. (So) let us leave it to them," said the court. "Considering that deadline for filing reply is over and no reply (from Gandhi) has been received, the court directs EC to decide the matter as expeditiously as possible, preferably within 8 weeks," the bench, also comprising Justice Mini Pushkarna, ordered.

Petitioner Bharat Nagar told the high court that Gandhi made speeches on November 22 at rallies in Rajasthan, levelling "heinous allegations" against individuals holding "highest governmental positions", including the prime minister and the home minister. The former Congress president took the "pickpocket" dig at Modi during a poll speech, alleging that the prime minister diverts people's attention while industrialist Gautam Adani picks their pockets. This is how pickpockets operate, he had alleged. The petitioner also objected to certain other statements by Gandhi referring to the prime minister as "panauti".

A Hindi slang, "panauti" loosely refers to someone who brings bad luck. Senior advocates Kirti Uppal and Adish C Aggarwala contended before the court that action should be taken for such "vilifying speeches during elections" but the EC lacked the power to enforce any strict measures.

Mamata announces 4 per cent DA for Govt employees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

With pressure building on her ahead of the general elections, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday announced an additional 4 per cent Dearness Allowance for the State Government employees. With Thursday's announcement the State government staff would now get 10 percent DA from January 1. "Though DA is not a matter of right for the State government employees ... rather it is optional for the State to grant DA ... still I am announcing additional 4 percent DA from January 1 next year taking the total DA to 10 percent," Banerjee said, reminding how difficult it would be for her cash-starved Government which got nothing from the Centre to discharge its new liabilities. "The increased DA would benefit state government employees including teachers, health staff, pensioners and all such persons," Banerjee said. The Government employees have for the past several years



been agitating for a DA hike on par with the Centre which presently gives 46 percent DA to its staff. The decision of the State Administrative Tribunal and Calcutta High Court too have gone in their favour and the case is presently lying in appeal in the Supreme Court. Reacting to Banerjee's DA announcement Bhashkar Ghosh a leader of the joint committee of the State employees' unions said, "when the Centre and many other states are giving 46 percent DA this Government is exploiting us by drawing our blood and not paying us our rightful dues ... our movement will continue anyway till the Government does not allow the remaining 36 percent DA."

Man kills wife, two kids with cricket bat

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a shocking triple murder, a 29-year-old jobless alcoholic from Haryana on Thursday allegedly clobbered his wife and two children to death with a cricket bat and absconded from a chawl at Kasarvadavli in the neighbouring Thane city. Identifying the accused as one Amit Dharamveer Bagdi from Khararalipur village in Hisar district of Haryana, the police said that they were looking for Amit who had absconded after beating his wife Bhavana (24), his children Ankush (8) and Khushi (6) with a cricket bat. According to the police, Amit has been living in Thane for the past seven years. A jobless man, he had taken to drinking heavily. Fed up with Amit, his wife Bhavana had gone to her brother-in-law's place along with her two children. Subsequently on Thursday morning when Vikas was away at his workplace, Amit went to his brother's place and allegedly battered his wife and two children to death.

SEBI like regulatory body needed for social media: BJP MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A SEBI-like regulatory body is needed for social media platforms to curb growing deepfakes and synthetic videos, BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi demanded in Rajya Sabha on Thursday. Raising the issue through a Zero Hour mention, he said deepfake videos and synthetic videos are threatening democracy in the country. "There is a lot of disinformation... People don't have tools to verify," he said, adding women are soft targets of deepfakes. While an app is in circulation that can generate a nude picture of any fully dressed person, digitally altered faces of celebrities like Shah Rukh Khan are being used to promote betting platforms. "This is a new threat to democracy," BJP MP said, adding the government should ask social media companies to detect, remove, strengthen reporting and create public awareness about the new phenomenon.

Congress learnt valuable lessons after Assembly polls rout, says Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said his party has learnt valuable lessons from the recent assembly polls and urged party workers to focus on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections now. Addressing party leaders at a crucial meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) at the AIACC headquarters, Kharge said the Congress is committed to not repeating the same mistakes. He also said several Congress leaders want Rahul Gandhi to undertake another Bharat Jodo Yatra from east to west but the final decision is up to him and the CWC, the Congress' highest decision-making body. This is the first CWC meeting after the Congress' recent poll debacle. The assembly elections were held in five states -- Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram. The Congress won only in Telangana.



While the BJP swept Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the Zoram People's Movement won in Mizoram. Noting that the outcomes of the elections in the five states, barring Telangana, were "disappointing", Kharge said the Congress has conducted a preliminary analysis of the results and identified the reasons behind its performance. "Despite the results, there are some positive indicators, such as the vote share in these states, that give us definite hope that given due attention, we can certainly turn things around. We have learnt valuable lessons from the mistakes we have made and are committed to not repeating them," he said.

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REG.NO.HR38AE9452-YOM-2023
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REG.NO.HR38X2450-YOM- 2018
 - 5) EICHR VECV VE1110FB
REG.NO.MH40CD1242-YOM-2018
 - 6) EICHR VECV EICHERS016
REG.NO.HR38X5982-YOM- 2018
 - 7) TATAMOTORS TATA_1512
REG.NO.BR01GM1022-YOM-2022
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Be sensitive to Divyang, EC asks political...

From Page 1
Political parties and their representatives were advised not to use disability-related terms in the context of "human incapacity" and to avoid comments that may be offensive or perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices. The EC stressed that any use of such language would attract punishments under the RPD Act. The guidelines also recommended that political parties include more PwDs at various levels, such as members and party workers, to overcome attitudinal barriers. It urged all campaign materials, including speeches, social media posts, advertisements, and press releases, to undergo an

internal review process within the political party to identify and rectify any instances of ableist language. Additionally, political parties were advised to declare on their websites that they will use disability- and gender-sensitive language and etiquette, respecting inherent human equality, equity, dignity, and autonomy. The EC suggested using rights-based terminologies mentioned in the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and making all public speeches, campaigns, activities, and events accessible for all citizens. The EC also recommended providing a training module on disability for party workers at all levels of the

political process and appointing a nodal authority to address complaints from PwDs regarding the usage of ableist language. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has consistently emphasised the abilities of PwDs, stating that they possess faculties that are often better than those without disabilities. He reiterated the commitment of the EC to embed the concept and practice of accessibility in all its processes and functioning. According to CEC Kumar, the real challenge is not the disability itself but developing the right attitude towards it, ensuring the system is sensitised to the needs of all individuals.

Parliament breach... Anurag bats for...

From Page 1
On Thursday, Special Judge Hardeep Kaur granted a 15-day extension to the custody of the accused—Manoranjan D, Sagar Sharma, Amol Dhanraj Shinde, and Neelam Devi—following an application by the city police. The extension was sought, stating that the accused needed to be taken to various places for investigation at a crucial stage. Public Prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh informed the court that further questioning of the accused was necessary "to find out the entire conspiracy and to get to the root of the matter." The prosecutor stressed the need for sustained custodial interrogation to determine the actual persons involved in the conspiracy and understand the ultimate objective of the offense. The counsel for the accused opposed the police's application for further remand,

suggesting that based on the prosecutor's arguments, a maximum of three more days of custodial interrogation should be sufficient. The court directed the Investigating Officer (IO) to provide a copy of the FIR to the counsel representing Neelam, the only woman accused arrested in the case. A total of six individuals have been arrested in connection with the security breach in Parliament on December 13, with Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumawat being the two other accused arrested in the case. According to police sources, the six individuals arrested in the Parliament security breach case were part of half a dozen WhatsApp groups named after Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekar Azad. Members of these groups regularly discussed the thoughts and ideas of the freedom fighters and shared related video clips.

From Page 1
Notably, publishers will no longer be required to file a declaration with the District Magistrates or local authorities and get such declarations authenticated. Printing presses will also not be required to furnish any such declaration; instead, only an intimation would be sufficient. The entire process, which presently involved eight steps and consumed considerable time, has been streamlined. The minister further added that the government's priority is to end criminality, improve ease of doing business and ease of living through new laws. Efforts have been made to substantially decriminalise the colonial-era statute, proposing financial penalties instead of conviction for certain violations.

Unprecedented Parliament...

From Page 1
On the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack, two men jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitors' gallery and released yellow smoke from canisters they were carrying. They were overpowered by MPs. The action to suspend opposition MPs drew sharp criticism from the Congress and other parties, which accused the BJP government of trying to bulldoze through key legislations in an "opposition-less" Parliament. Amid the string of suspensions, a political row

broke out after Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee mimicked Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar during the opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament against the MPs' suspension, drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was seen making a video of the performance by Banerjee, who appeared to mimic the way Dhankhar walked by leaning forward and made reference to having a spine. President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed dismay at the incident. The Lok Sabha recorded 74 percent productivity in this winter session, Birla noted in

his valedictory remarks. In his concluding remarks in the House, the speaker said the Lok Sabha held 14 sittings and worked for 61 hours and 50 minutes. Lok Sabha passed 18 bills, including Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Sanhita, to replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal procedure (CrPC), and Indian Evidence Act, respectively. A total of 17 Bills, including important path-breaking bills related to Jammu & Kashmir, Appointment of Election Commissioners, the Post Office Bill, the Telecommunications Bill, and the three Bills namely Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita,

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita were passed during this session in the Rajya Sabha. In his Valedictory remarks, Rajya Sabha chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said the upper house was able to transact business for 65 hours during the 14 sittings and addressed over 2300 Questions from treasury and the opposition benches. "I am pained to state that nearly 22 hours were lost due to avoidable disruptions adversely impacting our overall productivity that finally stood at 79 percent. Weaponizing disruptions and disturbance as a political strategy doesn't resonate with our constitutional obligation of keeping the interest of people at large above any other political considerations," Dhankhar said.

Guilty Kejriwal running away from ED : BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Political slugfest erupted as Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday skipped the second summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate, alleging they were issued at the behest of political rivals who wish to silence the voice of the opposition. The BJP hit back at the AAP, saying Kejriwal is running away from a probe by skipping the ED's summons for questioning. BJP's spokesperson Sambit Patra slammed him for questioning the summons, saying it is a case of self-certification and megalomania. He could go to courts against the summons, the BJP leader added. Kejriwal was summoned by the ED for questioning in the excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday. The chief minister left for an undisclosed location for a 10-day Vipassana meditation

course on Wednesday. Kejriwal denounced the ED's summons on Thursday, branding it as "illegal" and "politically motivated," reiterating his commitment to transparency. Kejriwal asserted that he has nothing to hide, expressing his comply with legal summons but insisted that the ED's move was unjust, echoing a similar sentiment from a previous summons. "I am ready to accept every legal summon. However, this ED summon is also illegal and politically motivated like the previous summons," Kejriwal said. "Summon should be withdrawn. I have spent my life with honesty and transparency. I have nothing to hide," Kejriwal added. Earlier, Kejriwal was summoned by the ED on November 2 but he skipped the questioning alleging the notice was illegal and politically motivated. Kejriwal sent his six pages

reply to the ED on Wednesday in which he said the summons do not specify whether he was being called as "a witness or a suspect" or as the "chief minister, Delhi or the Aam Aadmi Party's national convener". He said the fresh summons -- issued on December 18 -- should be revoked, withdrawn, and recalled. "The timing of your summons leaves much to desire and strengthens my belief that the summons being sent to me are not based upon any objective or rational yardstick but for extraneous considerations at the behest of political rivals who wish to silence the voice of opposition to the ruling dispensation at the Centre to create sensational news in the final few months leading up to the Parliamentary elections in early to mid 2024," read the reply. "Your summons appears to be a fishing and roving enquiry. In similar circumstances, where individuals are neither



informed about the case details nor the capacity in which they are being summoned by the Enforcement Directorate, High courts have declared such summons of Enforcement Directorate invalid and quashed the summons," the reply said. The AAP national convener stressed that he is "holding a sensitive constitutional post as an elected leader and incumbent Chief Minister of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi". "I have life of dignity, honour and with complete trans-



parency. As per my schedule publicly known to all, from 20.12.2023, I would be attending the Vipassana Meditation Course which I have been attending annually for the last 25 years," he said in the reply. Asserting that he is a "law-abiding", "conscientious" and an ordinary citizen of the country, Kejriwal said he does not shirk away from complying with any summons issued in compliance with the law but the 'summons is (I am advised) not in consonance with the law". Addressing a press conference, Delhi Education minister

Atishi alleged that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe into the excise policy case was an attempt to stop the Aam Aadmi Party's growth and popularity. Addressing a press conference here, Atishi alleged, "The ED is investigating this case since the last two years. In the history of India, no other policy was investigated as much as this policy is being probed by a central agency." The BJP on Thursday said that liquor and a tendency to insult others work as "Fevicol" to keep the INDIA bloc parties together, as it attacked them over the issues of corruption and alleged disrespect to Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar. Soon after opposition parties held a march to protest the suspension of their 143 MPs from Parliament, the BJP hit back at them. As Kejriwal on Thursday skipped the summons by the Enforcement Directorate over the alleged liquor scam, BJP's

Sambit Patra said Kejriwal can do vipassana in jail as well. "On November 2, when Kejriwal was called, he wrote a letter saying that he had some governance and official commitments ahead of Diwali. He also said he had to go to Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh for elections. AAP got fewer votes than NOTA," Sambit Patra said. Patra referred to the alleged involvement of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an alleged excise policy scam and the recovery of more than Rs 350 crore in cash from firms linked to Congress MP Dhiraj Prasad Sahu, and accused the AAP leader of running away from a probe by skipping the Enforcement Directorate's summons for questioning. "Somebody is running away after committing liquor scam. There are some who have made fun of Vice President Dhankhar. They are doing a march," he told reporters,

accusing the Congress and its allies of insulting India's traditions and Sanatan Dharma in the past. "These are the two things working as Fevicol to keep these parties together," he said. Patra said he cannot escape the long arm of the law for long. "You have committed a scam and you will be caught," the BJP national spokesperson said, adding mockingly that it was AAP leaders like Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj who had claimed with "confidence" that their leader will be arrested. "Arvind and accountability cannot travel together," Patra said, adding that it is the duty of elected representatives to respond to lawful summons. He said the AAP leader has cited official engagements, Diwali festivities and his engagement as his party's star campaigner in the recent assembly polls to not appear before the ED after the first summons.

AAP Government to introduce Anywhere Registration policy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Registration of the property you sell or purchase or documents related to your will is set to become easier in Delhi. The Arvind Kejriwal government has decided to introduce the 'Anywhere Registration' policy for sale and purchase of properties in the national capital. This will pave the way for Delhi residents to pick an office of their choice and convenience to get various documents registered. The chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has approved this scheme, and the file has been sent to the Lieutenant Governor for notification. According to officials, if people want to register their property, they can go to any Sub-Registrar Office in Delhi. Now, individuals will not be restricted to a specific Sub-Registrar Office for property registration. To buy or sell property in Delhi, people need to visit the Sub-Registrar Office. Whether it's a property transaction or registering the property through other means, one has to go to the Sub-Registrar Office. A sub-registrar offices on an average takes care of reg-



istrations of around 32 different documents, including the sale deeds, rent agreements, wills, and power of attorney. According to Raj Niwas official, in another path-breaking move aimed at mitigating corruption and harassment of citizens in Sub Registrar offices, the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has asked for entire Delhi to be declared as a single district for the purpose of registration of properties, on line with a similar step taken in Andhra Pradesh in 2015. "This would enable any person to get the property registered from any Sub Registrar office in the Capital rather than going to specific offices. This move is

expected to put an effective check over malpractices. Further, the issuance of NOCs by Revenue Department regarding status of a particular land will also be made online in a faceless module, thereby eliminating any human interface," official said. Saxena has earlier reviewed the performance of the Vigilance Department, Delhi government with regards to the disposal/pendency of cases and stricter enforcement to curb corruption and prevalent malpractices in government offices. During the meeting, the Lt Governor laid emphasis on making the Sub Registrar offices corruption free, so as to

cause minimum inconvenience and harassment to the people at large. To this effect, he directed to bring the entire area in all Sub Registrar offices under the surveillance of CCTV cameras the feed of which will be brought directly to the Central Command & Control Centre. The LG was informed that following his directions in the last meeting, for the first time in the country an Online Complaint Information Management System (OCIMS) had been developed that would enable online registration of complaints in corruption cases. The portal being developed by NIC will also have provisions for the complainants to upload photographic/video/audio evidences online along with their complaints. "All Sub-Registrars in Delhi will now function as Joint Sub-Registrars, and their jurisdiction will cover the entire Delhi. So, anyone residing in Delhi can make an online appointment for property registration at any of the 22 Sub-Registrar Offices in Delhi," the AAP government said in a statement. In Delhi, the erstwhile Sheila Dikshit government had tried

to connect the 16 sub registrar offices in Delhi. "Many complaints about the Sub-Registrar Office often reach chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. One complaint is that in many Sub-Registrar Offices, there are long queues and it takes a long time to book an appointment. On the other hand, some Sub-Registrar Offices do not have excessive crowds. Another complaint that often comes in is of prevalent corruption in many Sub-Registrar Offices. There are middlemen outside the offices who demand money, and people are forced to pay these middlemen to get their registry work done in the same office. To address these issues, the Revenue Department has initiated this new policy," reads the statement. At the review meeting, the LG issued a slew of directions to bring greater transparency in such government offices. The LG issued instructions for regular surprise checks and raids to be conducted in such offices that included Sub Registrar office, Transport, Trade & Taxes and Excise amongst others.

Delhi Zoo releases twin Tiger cubs for display to visitors



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi zoo on Thursday released seven-month-old twin cubs of Royal Bengal Tiger for display to visitors, officials said. These cubs were named as "Dhatr" and "Dhairya". The parentage consists of father Karan and mother tigress Siddhi, they said. "We are pleased to inform you that National Zoological Park (Delhi Zoo) has released Royal Bengal Tiger cubs on Thursday

in the visitor display area of tiger enclosure. Tigress Siddhi delivered these cubs on May 5. Now these two cubs, one male and one female, are 7 months and 16 days old," NZP Director Akanksha Mahajan said. These cubs were kept in night shelter and in the side kraal during the day time with the mother for better upkeep and spending quality time with the mother. As the cubs need more area for their movement, they are being released in a bigger area, i.E., an arena in visitor display, she said.

The purpose behind this "celebration" is to create an awareness about empathy towards tiger conservation. The NZP is a participating zoo in the National Conservation Breeding Programme of Royal Bengal Tigers and has contributed significantly, Mahajan said. The group of about 85 students and staff from Ramjas School, Daryaganj, attended the programme. At present, the zoo has seven Royal Bengal Tigers, she added.

Parliament breach: Police to conduct psychoanalysis on all accused

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police will conduct a 'psychoanalysis' test on all six people who were allegedly involved in Parliament security breach case. According to police, the test is done by a team of doctors and psychiatrists to know the mental condition of the accused. Six people, Sagar Sharma, Manoranjan D, Neelam, Amol Shinde, Lalit Jha, and Mahesh Kumawat, have been arrested and booked in UAPA by the Delhi Police Special Cell in connection with the December 13 breach. According to a police officer, the accused are highly "motivated and mind washed" and do not "cooperate" during the investigations. The accused have not even given the proper sequence of the whole act till, officials said. "This test will help us ascertain their mental condition as they are regularly changing their



statements," said the officer. The Special Cell has not ruled out the possibility of a kingpin who may have mobilised these youths to execute such a plan. The police have also scanned the financial transactions of all six. Several teams of Special Cell have questioned the family members and friends of all six accused, Gurdeep Singh, admitted to have killed the woman but was not revealing how he came to kill her, the officer said.

groups, including the now-deleted Facebook page 'Bhagat Singh Fan Club,' which was created by them before the security breach incident. A psychoanalysis test was recently done on the main accused in the murder of Swiss woman Nina Berger in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area. The accused, Gurdeep Singh, admitted to have killed the woman but was not revealing how he came to kill her, the officer said.

Fire breaks out at Gopaldas Bhawan building, no casualties

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fire broke out in the Gopaldas Bhawan building, which houses offices of several private firms, on Barakhamba Road here on Thursday afternoon, sending its occupants scurrying for safety. The fire started on the eighth floor of the 17-storey building due to a short circuit and spread to the ninth, tenth and eleventh floors, fire officials said. Black smoke was seen billowing from the building. While all occupants of the building were evacuated safely, a fireman sustained minor injuries in the firefighting operation, they said. A call about the fire was received around 1 pm and 15 fire tenders were pressed into service, said Rajinder Atwal, Divisional Fire Officer, Delhi Fire Services. "By 2:10 pm, we had doused the fire," he said. No civilian was injured but a



firefighter sustained a minor injury in the operation, he added. According to another Delhi Fire Services official, it was earlier suspected that the fire broke out on the 11th floor but it was later found that it started on the 8th floor. "The fire broke out due to a short circuit in the wires in the shaft and it spread to the 9th, 10th, and 11th floors of the building," the official said. Delhi Fire Services chief Atul Garg said the building had a

fire no-objection certificate (NOC) and it was renewed last year. Delhi Police officials the blaze spread as waste material in the building caught fire. They said a case of negligence will be registered against unidentified persons in the incident. Rashi Sharma, who was visiting a bank in the Gopaldas Bhawan building when the fire broke out, said around 1 pm, she heard people shouting that a fire had broken out and everyone should leave the building.

LG launches first domestic PNG facility at Qutabgarh



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In line with his committed efforts to change the face of the urbanized villages in Delhi through various initiatives, Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday launched the first ever domestic PNG facility in rural Delhi at Qutabgarh in North-West Delhi. These moves will provide unprecedented impetus to the development of hitherto neglected villages in Delhi. This also marks the first ven-

ture of IGL in Delhi's rural areas, which was till date confined to the selected urban residential colonies only. This paves the way for extension of PNG pipelines and services to other urbanized villages in the city as well, officials said. Speaking on the occasion, the LG announced that four more villages - Jaunti, Nizampur, Rawta and Daurala - will be provided with PNG connection within one month that will be a New Year gift to thousands of families living in these villages.

BJP holds protest at Jantar Mantar against mocking of VP Dhankhar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Thursday held a protest at Jantar Mantar here against "mocking" of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar by TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee and demanded an apology from opposition leaders including Congress' Rahul Gandhi. Several protesters had tied black bands on their foreheads. BJP MPs Manoj Tiwari, Pravesh Sahib Singh Verma, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and several other leaders were among those who took part in the protest. "Parliament is the temple of democracy. The Lok Sabha speaker and the Rajya Sabha



chairman are not individuals but institutions. Making fun of them and disrespecting them is like insulting that temple. We demand an apology from Rahul Gandhi and

other opposition leaders," Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said. Sachdeva said that if the son of a poor farmer occupies such a big position from the

grassroots level, then the Congress can not tolerate this, that is why they make indecent remarks against him because Rahul Gandhi's thinking is feudalistic and this feudalistic thinking will become the reason for the elimination of Congress from the country. Delhi BJP President appealed to everyone to go to their respective areas and expose the behavior of Congress and Aammi Party leaders. BJP leader Dushyant Gautam said that today the opposition neither has respect for democracy nor for constitutional posts. This kind of action by the opposition is only a result of the defeat in all three states which has increased their anxiety. The opposition tried

to divide the country on the basis of caste census but they failed in that and in three states OBCs and farmers did not vote for them, hence they are upset. Bidhuri said that before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi had insulted the country's army and he had to pay the consequences by forfeiting his security deposit from Amethi in the elections. But this time the deposits of both Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi will be confiscated. He demanded that TMC to expel her MP Kalyan Banerjee from the party. Mamta Banerjee has said that Rahul Gandhi's conspiracy is behind this entire incident. "Today, the movement against Rahul Gandhi is going on across the country, his effigies

are being burnt and the country will continue to protest against him until Rahul Gandhi apologizes," he said. The political row broke out after Banerjee derisively mimicked Dhankhar during the opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament on Tuesday against the suspension of MPs, drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP. Gandhi was seen making a video of the performance by Banerjee. Dhankhar has said the December 19 incident is an insult to his background as a farmer and his caste (Jat). On Wednesday, the Jat Mahasabha held a protest march near the Congress headquarters here against Dhankhar's mimicry and burnt an effigy of the party.

Jat Mahasabha volunteers demand action against TMC MP, Rahul

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Jat Mahasabha volunteers on Thursday demanded action against TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi for mimicking Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and recording the act. A political row broke out after Banerjee derisively mimicked Dhankhar during the opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament on Tuesday against the suspension of MPs, drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP. Rahul was seen making a video of the performance by the Trinamool

Congress MP. Holding placards and raising slogans demanding action against the two MPs, the Jat Mahasabha volunteers staged a protest for the second consecutive day on Thursday. A similar protest was held by them near the Congress headquarters on Wednesday. Ashok Balyan, National Secretary of Jat Mahasabha said more than 1,000 people are expected to gather at Jantar Mantar on Thursday and most of them have come from western Uttar Pradesh. Balyan said Banerjee and Gandhi should be "permanently suspended from Parliament".

States ready to check Covid spread

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Not keen to take risk, as the Covid-19 cases gradually move northwards amid fear that the JN.1 variant is responsible for the sudden spurt of infection, several States are gearing up to check its spread through self-proclaimed measures such as making mask mandatory and identifying separate Covid-wards to meet emergency, if any. This comes even as the Centre has decided to adopt a wait and watch policy on the issue of making the RT-PCR testing for Covid-19 mandatory at airports for travellers. Also, there has been no direction from the Centre on making masks compulsory. However, after Karnataka made it compulsory for senior citizens to wear masks, the Chandigarh administration on Thursday followed suit as it made masks usage compulsory for people in the crowded places, especially during the whole journey in the public transport (like buses, trains, aircraft and taxis etc); during stay inside cinema halls, shopping malls and departmental stores etc; during stay inside classrooms, office rooms, indoor gatherings. Also, those showing symptoms such as fever, cold, and difficulty breathing have been recommended immediate medical consultation while individuals testing positive for the infection have been asked to self-isolate



for 7 days. In the wake of JN.1 variant found in Kerala, the neighboring Karnataka government has made it mandatory for senior citizens to wear masks. In its preparedness measure, the state government has urged those with comorbidities, and symptoms of cough, phlegm and fever to mandatorily wear face masks. As of now there is no restriction on the movement of people from the neighbouring state Kerala which has topped the Covid-19 cases list. In the national capital, Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said that the infrastructure and resources such as oxygen cylinders, required medicines and ventilators are being reviewed to meet emergencies in case of any. At the same time, the Delhi

health department has ordered the authorities to send an “adequate” number of Covid samples for RT-PCR test and conduct the genome sequencing of the positive samples. A rise in daily positivity rate has been observed in States like Kerala, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Karnataka. In Bihar's Patna, all six sub-divisional hospitals, four community health centres and 23 primary health centres has been instructed to increase testing of all symptomatic patients using the rapid antigen test (RAT) method while the largest government hospital of the state, Patna Medical College Hospital (PMCH), has identified a 30-bed ward for Covid patients. It has sufficient medical oxygen availability for supply to patients through pipelines, said Dr AK

Jha, deputy superintendent. India on Thursday recorded 594 fresh COVID-19 infections while the number of active cases increased to 2,669 from 2,311 the previous day, according to Union health ministry data. The death toll has climbed to 5,33,327 with six more people -- three from Kerala, two from Karnataka and one from Punjab -- succumbing to the viral disease, the data updated at 8 am stated. The death toll has climbed to 5,33,327 with six more people -- three from Kerala, two from Karnataka and one from Punjab -- succumbing to the viral disease. As many as 21 cases of the JN.1 variant had been detected across the country till Wednesday. The centre said there is no increase in hospitalisation rates and Covid-19 is an incidental

finding in people hospitalised due to other medical conditions. For instance, in Karnataka, three people who tested positive for the infection and have died had other comorbidities or associated diseases like -- issues related to kidney, heart, lungs, blood pressure, diabetes, along with Covid-19 infection too. The centre said there is yet no urgency to make the RT-PCR mandatory for travelers arriving India. In the last two weeks, 22 people have died due to Covid-19 in the country. In July, India had issued revised guidelines, dropping the requirement for RT-PCR based testing of a random 2 per cent of travellers entering India. However, the States and union territories have been asked to maintain constant vigil, particularly considering the upcoming festive season and advised them to put in place requisite public health measures to minimise the risk of increase in transmission of the disease. They have been asked to monitor and report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in all health facilities regularly for early detection of rising trend of cases. The existing treatment line for COVID-19 is expected to be effective against JN.1 infection and updated vaccines are expected to increase protection against the variant, as per the ministry officials.

CISF to secure Parliament complex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



In a major revamp of security after Parliament security breach earlier this month, the Government has decided to hand over “comprehensive” security of the Parliament building complex to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). The CISF will render access control to the new and old Parliament complex in an airport security-like fashion where body frisking of persons will be done through handheld detectors and their belongings will be checked through X-ray machines, with a provision to even scan shoes, heavy jackets and belts by putting them on a tray and passing them through the scanner, sources said. Earlier, frisking of visitors to Parliament complex was done by Delhi Police personnel. In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack on December 13, two persons jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. One of the accused had hidden a canister in his shoes. Union home ministry on Wednesday directed for a survey of the Parliament building complex so that a “regular

deployment of the CISF security and fire wing on a comprehensive pattern” could be done, it was learnt. This was done after an “in principle” approval was accorded by the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to hand over the overall security of the Parliament building to the CISF. Members of the Parliament watch and ward security will also be sent in batches to train for human and goods frisking at a CISF centre, they said. Experts drawn from the government building security (GBS) unit of the CISF, that guards central government ministries, and fire combat and response officers of the force along with officials from the current Parliament security team will undertake the survey beginning later this week. The survey will draw the exact

number of CISF personnel required for this new task and also clearly define the role of what each security agency engaged in Parliament security will do, they said. Both the new and the old Parliament complex and their allied buildings will be brought under a comprehensive security cover of the CISF which will also have the existing elements of Parliament Security Service (PSS), the Delhi Police and the Parliament Duty Group (PDG) of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the sources said. Following this Parliament security breach incident, a committee under the chairmanship of CRPF director general Anish Dayal Singh is looking into the overall security issues of the Parliament complex and will make recommendations to the Union home ministry for improvement

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

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

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immoveable 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 Authorized 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 the 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.	Suman Singhal (Borrower), Mohit Singhal (Co Applicant) Lan No. LBGHZ00002865036 and LBGHZ00002891317	Plot No. III F-1/21, Ground Floor (Without Roof Rights) Nehru Nagar, Ghaziabad, Tehsil and District: Ghaziabad- 201001. Area: 102.17 Sq. Mtr.	Rs. 36,72,214/- as on December 12, 2023.	Rs. 80,75,000/- Rs. 8,07,500/-	January 12, 2024 From 03:00 PM to 05:00 PM	February 02, 2024 From 11:00 AM Onwards

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency **M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link- <https://disposalhub.com>)**. The Mortgagors/ noticees are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till **February 01, 2024 before 05:00 PM** else this secured asset 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, Plot No.23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005** on or before **February 01, 2024 before 05:00 PM** and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before **February 01, 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, Plot No.23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005** on or before **February 01, 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 auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact **ICICI Bank Limited on 8928935040, 8584874809**.
Please note that Marketing agencies **1. NexXen Solution 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 22, 2023
Place: Ghaziabad

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

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

E-TENDER NOTICE

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

A) Fresh-Tender Work:

Sr. No.	Jobs No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (in Lacs)
1	26/DGM/SM(WC-3)/ 2023-24	M/o Village (RMC, Jaal Fixing and culvert balance work in Village Aghapur), Noida.	88.25
2	31/DGM/SM(WC-9)/ ET/2023-24	M/o Road (Restoration of Footpath, Tripot and Rotary in Hazipur Underpass in sector-128 on Noida-Greater Noida Expressway), Noida.	35.25
3	32/DGM/SM(WC-9)/ ET/2023-24	M/o Road (R/o footpath on 30 mtr. wide road Parallel to Yamuna Pusta from Junior High School Village Aagarpur to Village Ghari Shahpur cut in sector-128), Noida	64.60
4	49/DGM/SM(WC-10)/ ET/2023-24	D/o Sector-149 & 150 (C/o C.C. Drain in Village Kondali, Sector-149), Noida.	76.78
5	39/DGM/SM(WC-9)/ ET/2023-24	M/o Drain (Repair & Covering of Internal drain on 30 mtr. wide road in sector-135), Noida.	62.88
6	20/DGM/SM(WC-8)/ ET/2023-24	M/o Village (C/o Boundary wall GI Chain link of Open Gym & C.C. Parking in front of Village Hazipur, Sector-104), Noida.	61.21

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 04.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 05.01.2024 at 11.00 AM.

B) Re-Tender Work:

Sr. No.	Jobs No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (in Lacs)
7	30/DGM/SM(WC-7)/ 2023-24	Horticulture Civil Work (C/o Boundary wall in green belt of 5% Abadi Plot Sector-86), Noida.	36.41
8	37/DGM/SM(WC-10)/ ET/2023-24	Barbed Fencing work (P/F large warning Board at different locations in Work Circle-10 area) Noida.	57.65
9	44/DGM/SM(WC-10)/ ET/2023-24	D/o Sector-155, 156, 157, & 159 (Re-Painting on Central Verge, footpath, repair of footpath & Laying of cover between road Sector-155 & Sector-156), Noida.	55.32
10	23/DGM/SM(WC-10)/ ET/2023-24	topographical Survey of WC-10 Area, Noida	60.71
11	24/DGM/SM(WC-10)/ ET/2023-24	D/o Sector-151 (P/F Signage Boards for Internal roads & Demacration of Plots in Sector-151), Noda.	44.25

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 28.12.2023 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 29.12.2023 at 11.00 AM.

Dy. General Manager (Civil)
NOIDA

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

India's foremost guiding principle in foreign affairs is national interest: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said India's foremost guiding principle in foreign affairs is its national interest. Making this assertion in an interview to UK based The Financial Times, Modi said, this approach, enables India to engage with various nations in a manner that respects mutual interests and acknowledges the complexities of contemporary geopolitics. He also advocated a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. The Prime Minister described it as mix-and-match diplomacy focused on pragmatic engagement aligned with national interests. He said, the world is interconnected as well as interdependent. On India's relationship with the

United States and whether it could be characterised as an alliance, Prime Minister Modi highlighted the upward trajectory of relations. He asserted that the India-US relationship is now “broader in engagement, deeper in understanding and warmer in friendship” than ever before. Modi said the partnership between India and the United States will make the

world better in the 21st century. On the potential of India-US defence industrial cooperation, Prime Minister Modi said, that the decision to manufacture fighter jet engines by General Electric will prove to be a milestone in the journey of India's defence sector. He also said the Artemis Accord signed by India and America is

India thrice obtained consular access to man indicted by US for plotting Pannun murder: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Thursday that Indian officials thrice obtained consular access to Nikhil Gupta, who has been indicted by US authorities over an alleged plot to kill separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun. Gupta is currently in a jail in the Czech Republic. The 52-year-old Indian national was arrested in the Czech Republic on June 30 at the request of the US authorities, who accused him of being involved in the planning to kill Pannun, who is an American citizen. In a plea to the Supreme Court of India earlier this month, Gupta's family alleged that he was denied consular access, the right to contact his family, and the freedom to seek legal representation. The family had also alleged that Czech authorities had not sent any correspondence to the Indian embassy or Indian authorities in the Czech Republic or in India regarding the arrest and detention of Gupta. The family had also requested the top court to direct an Indian envoy in the European country to find out about the status of the case. However, the apex court directed the family to approach a court in the Czech Republic. Gupta was charged on November 20 by the US Justice Department for his involvement in the alleged murder plot. According to US officials, Gupta had agreed to

pay \$100,000 to an assassin to carry out the killing, with an advance payment of \$15,000 already made on June 9, 2023. However, the individual he contacted for the hitman turned out to be a confidential source working with US law enforcement. Terming the charges a “matter of concern” and contrary to government policy, New Delhi has announced a high-level probe into the allegations. Meanwhile, US officials have sought the extradition of Nikhil Gupta, who is currently lodged in solitary confinement in the Czech Republic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said India's commitment is to the rule of law and if someone gives information, it would look into it, in his first comments on the US allegations relating to an Indian link over a foiled plot targeting Sikh separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannu. Making this assertion in an interview to The Financial Times, Prime Minister Modi also said ties between India and US are robust and there is strong bipartisan support for strengthening of ties between the two nations. He also said it is not appropriate to link a few incidents with diplomatic ties. In the interview to the British daily, Modi said “If someone gives us any information, we would definitely look into it.” Modi said. He also said “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,” he said.

If emissions reduced to Covid lockdown levels, Himalayan snowmelt could be reduced by up to half: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 may have come as a doom for almost all economies across the world, but for the Himalayan glaciers it was a respite as it breathed cleaner air due to less soot deposition amid drastic decline in passenger and freight transport, industrial emissions and energy consumption in this region during the period. No wonder that an international research team from India, Germany and the UK has said if emissions of air pollutants such as soot could be reduced to at least the level of the lockdowns, snowmelt could be reduced by up to half. The move can prevent them from disappearing by the end of the century, said the team following analysis of the cleaner air during the period when less soot was deposited on the glaciers, resulting in 0.5 to 1.5 millimeter (mm) less snow melting per day.” The rapid retreat of glaciers and the loss of snow cover already pose a threat to the sustainable water supply of billions of people in Asia who live in the catchment areas of rivers such as the Indus, Ganges and Yangtze,” according to the researchers. The study, published in the journal Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, found that a switch to clean energy supplies and lower-emission modes of transport would therefore bring significant benefits for sustainable water supplies, agriculture and ecosystems in large parts of Asia. The mountains of the Hindu Kush Himalayas (HKH) and the highlands of Tibet in Central Asia form the largest snow-covered region outside the poles and

are highly vulnerable to air-pollutants. Model simulations for extreme scenarios show that the melting snow in the Himalayas could cause the glaciers there to disappear by the end of the 21st century. Satellite observations showed cleaner snow with almost a third less light-absorbing pollution during the lockdown in Asia between March and May 2020, the researchers said. This led to a decrease in snowmelt of 25 to 70 mm in 2020—compared to the 20-year average for the months of March to May in the western Himalayas, they said. The changes in snow absorption and surface albedo thus ensured that around 7 cubic kilometers of meltwater remained in the Indus catchment area, according to the study. The team used global simulations to analyse in detail the impact of reduced air pollution over high mountains in Central Asia during the COVID-19 lockdowns between March and May 2020. “The aerosol optical thickness (AOD), i.E., the atmospheric opacity, over this region decreased by around 10 per cent in April 2020 compared to before the pandemic,” said Suvarna Fadnavis from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune.

NGT fines States ₹79,098 crore for violations of solid waste management

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has cracked a whip on many States and Union Territories for violating municipal solid waste management rules and other environmental violations in 2022-23 by imposing fines totalling Rs 79,098 crore, the Government told Parliament on Thursday. Tamil Nadu earned the dubious distinction by topping the list with the highest fine of Rs 15,419 crore, followed by Maharashtra (Rs 12,000 crore) and Madhya Pradesh (Rs 9,688 crore), as per the data provided by Union Minister of State for Environment Ashwini Kumar Choubey in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha. The NGT directed Uttar Pradesh to pay Rs 5,000 crore, Bihar Rs 4,000 crore, Telangana Rs 3,800 crore, West Bengal Rs 3,500 crore, Karnataka Rs 3,400 crore and Delhi Rs 3,132 crore for not complying with the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and other environmental violations. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) monitors the water quality of aquatic resources at 4,703 locations in 28 states and eight Union territories under the National Water Quality Monitoring Programme (NWMP). The programme covers surface, coastal and groundwater locations in collaboration with the state pollution control boards (SPCBs) and pollution control committees (PCCs) on different periodic bases.

Yogi reviews preparations ahead of PM’s Ayodhya visit

PTI ■ AYODHYA (UP)

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Ayodhya next week, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday reviewed the preparations and progress of development works here.

Adityanath said the prime minister is scheduled to arrive here on December 30 before the much-awaited consecration ceremony at Ram Janmabhoomi temple on January 22 and launch a slew of projects worth thousands of crores.

On his arrival here, the prime minister should be greeted by showering of flowers and recital of mantras, he told officers, adding that all the routes that would be covered by Modi and his convoy should be decorated with flowers.

In view of the expected gathering of 1.5 to 2 lakh people from nearby districts in the prime minister’s public meeting, adequate parking arrangements and arrangements of basic facilities should be made on the major roads connecting



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inspects the construction work of Sri Ram temple in Ayodhya on Thursday

PTI

Ayodhya for the people coming to the public meeting, he said.

For the upcoming consecration ceremony, Adityanath directed hotels to cancel all advance bookings so that the administration does not face problem in accommodating the special invitees who would arrive here for the consecration ceremony.

He directed the officials to ensure that Ayodhya be decorated with the splendour of the ‘Treta Yug’. He asked them to decorate local monasteries and temples and get a grand archway prepared.

The chief minister also asked them to expedite the ongoing work on Ram Path, Bhakti Path, Janmabhoomi Path,

Dharma Path and the road connecting Ayodhya Airport bypass to Nayaghat.

It should be ensured that foot-paths are used by devotees and vehicles should move on the main carriageway. Wherever there is sufficient width, seating arrangements and other public facilities should be developed, he directed officials.

He said under the guidance of the prime minister, projects worth over Rs 30,000 crore are underway in Ayodhya and the quality of these construction projects should also be checked regularly.

The chief minister also asked officials to pay special focus on cleanliness on the occasion of Modi’s visit and deploy additional manpower if required.

Apart from the arrangement for accommodation of the pilgrims by the Ram Temple Trust in Ayodhya, arrangements should also be made for the pilgrims to stay in dharamshalas and hotels at fixed rates.

On January 22, only those who have invitation letters or are posted on government duty will be able to come to Ayodhya.

Navy deploys second guided-missile destroyer in Gulf of Aden

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy has deployed a second frontline ship in the Gulf of Aden to augment its anti-piracy mission, following the hijacking of a Malta-flagged cargo vessel by pirates.

The Navy now has stealth guided-missile destroyer INS Kochi and INS Kolkata in the region, officials said.

The Navy swiftly responded after receiving a call for help from MV Ruen, the Malta-flagged hijacked vessel, on December 14.

Days later, it evacuated one of the 18 crew members onboard the vessel off the coast of Somalia to provide medical care after he was injured by the pirates.

“In a swift response, Indian Navy’s maritime patrol aircraft deployed to investigate the incident arrived over-head MV Ruen on December 15 and established communication with the crew,” a Navy spokesperson said.

“All 18 crew (no Indians onboard) were reported to be safe in the citadel.

Concurrently, in response to the incident, INS Kochi on anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden was also diverted immediately to render assistance,” he said.

The official said INS Kochi intercepted MV Ruen in the early hours of December 16 and launched its integral helicopter to assess the situation.

“It was ascertained from the crew that the citadel onboard MV Ruen had been breached and all crew members were held hostage by the pirates. One of the crew members had also sustained injuries, but was reported to be stable,” he said.

“Whilst no armed intervention was undertaken to ensure crew safety onboard the hijacked MV, requisite actions were taken by the warship towards ensuring suitable treatment of the crew by the pirates,” he added.

The Navy spokesperson said a Japanese warship also arrived in the area on December 16 and was relieved by Spanish warship ESPNS Victoria later in the day.

BJP confident of winning over 50 seats in J&K

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The BJP will not enter into a pre-poll alliance for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir as the party is confident of winning over 50 seats and forming the Government on its own, senior leader Ashok Koul said on Thursday.

“After the elections take place, if an alliance is needed, it will happen. But, as of now, the BJP has decided that we will cross 50 seats and the support the BJP is getting in Kashmir, we are confident that we will cross 50 seats,” Koul, the BJP’s general secretary, organisation, Jammu and Kashmir, told reporters here.

When asked some political parties in Jammu and Kashmir are claiming the BJP is afraid of facing the elections in the Union Territory, Koul said his party is ready for the polls.

“It is not like that. The Supreme Court (SC) has said about the elections and so, I want to tell the parties to start preparations as the assembly elections are to take place before September (next year). The BJP is ready for the polls,” he added.

When asked that the Supreme Court’s ruling on the issue of Article 370 is not acceptable to some parties in the valley, the BJP leader said his party’s stand is that everyone should accept the apex court’s verdict.

“I do not have an answer to that. The SC is the highest court in democratic India. We have said it before as well that whatever decision the SC takes, everyone should accept that. If someone has anything to say about it, they know it, but the stand of the BJP is that everyone should accept the SC’s verdict,” he said.

Commenting on the issue of expulsion of the MPs from the Parliament, Koul said that no one should make fun of the country’s institutions.

“You saw they indulged in mimicry of the vice president and made fun. A person, who calls himself a big leader of the country shoots a video of that,” Koul said taking a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

“This is the result of the opposition parties’ loss in three big states. No one makes such fun of institutions of the country,” he added.



Peace to be theme for Christmas at Goa parishes

PTI ■ PANAJI

Among ongoing conflicts in some parts of the world including Ukraine and Palestine, parishes in Goa have chosen ‘peace’ as the theme for Christmas this year.

Preparations are on in full swing for Christmas celebrations in the coastal state, which has about 30 per cent Christian population.

“Just keep your heart clean before Christmas. This year, we are keeping the theme of peace considering what is happening around the world,” Fr Ralin De Souza, rector of Don Bosco at Fatorda in South Goa district, told PTI.

There were conflicts and unrest in parts of the world, including Ukraine, Palestine and some countries in Africa, he said.

“It looks like humankind has not learnt its lessons,” he said, adding that the messages associated with the birth of Jesus Christ are always about peace.

“People who have goodwill in their hearts will always be at peace,” he added.

Father Maverick Fernandes, director of Caritas Goa, said prayers would be offered at all the churches in the state seeking peace in the war-torn countries.

With the festival around the corner, many people in Goa are busy making cribs depicting the birth of Jesus Christ.

Charlton Dias, a seafarer from Murda village near Margao in South Goa, said, “We have been setting up the crib for several years now. It is the time when youngsters in our village come together and work for almost 15 days to put up the crib.”

The number of youngsters who would work overnight to put up the crib has dwindled over the years as many have left for foreign countries in search of work.

“The group is smaller now, but enthusiasm is the same,” Charlton said.

Local college student Elvis Dias said Goa’s Salcette taluka is known for innovative cribs.

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday said that his Government will provide employment to one member of each household in the State before the Assembly elections due in 2024.

Tamang, also the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) president, also announced several sops to woo women and state government personnel.

“We will provide employment to one member of each household before the assembly polls in 2024,” he said while addressing a gathering at Rolu in Namchi district.

The chief minister said that the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) will be restored in the state, a move which is likely to benefit about 50,000 serving and retired state government employees and officers.

Under the OPS, a government staff does not need to contribute any portion of his salary, unlike the New Pension Scheme. Employees



of a number of states are demanding restoration of the old system.

In another sop aimed at wooing women voters, Tamang said that “mothers of all households” will be provided one free LPG cylinders every quarter starting from next year.

He also announced a 100 per cent hike in the financial

assistance to women to Rs 40,000 a year under ‘Aama Scheme’, which is for non-working mothers.

The chief minister was addressing a gathering at Rolu, a picnic spot located on Jorethang-Melli highway.

It is the place where Tamang, then a rebel Sikkim Democratic Front MLA, had given a call for ‘change’ in the northeastern state on this day in 2009, at a picnic party with his supporters after being denied a berth in the government by the former Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling.

The ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) observes the day as ‘Rolu Diwas’ and hosts a picnic party for the party leaders, workers and supporters every year.

Meanwhile, former international footballer Nirmal Chhetri joined the SKM in the presence of Tamang.

The 33-year-old Chhetri said that he was impressed by the transformation taking place in Sikkim under Tamang’s leadership.

BJP relaunches Sneha Yatra in Kerala

PTI ■ KOCHI

As the Lok Sabha polls are just months away, the BJP in Kerala resumed its ‘Sneha Yatra’ on Thursday – an outreach programme aimed at connecting with the Christian community in the state.

The saffron party initially launched the initiative during this year’s Easter.

In a recent state committee meeting, the party decided to resume the yatra during the Christmas season.

BJP state chief K Surendran visited Cardinal George Alencherry, the former head of the prominent Syro Malabar Church, at St Thomas Mount in nearby Kakkanad in the morning and conveyed Christmas greetings from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also visited Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparbil of the Latin Archdiocese of Verapoly, and conveyed the wishes of the Prime Minister.

Surendran later said in a Facebook post that it marked the beginning of ‘Sneha Yatra’ in the state.

He also shared photos of his cordial meetings with the



church heads.

However, the church authorities and the BJP leadership were yet to make clear the topics of discussion that came up during the closed-door meeting.

A BJP leader said the meeting with Alencherry was extended for over 45 minutes, and it was a warm and friendly meeting.

“It was a friendly meeting... The BJP chief conveyed Prime Minister Modi’s greetings to

him. They later had breakfast together,” K S Shaiju, the party’s district president, told PTI.

When asked whether any political issues ahead of the Lok Sabha polls came up for discussion, the leader did not divulge any details.

“The objective of the visit was to convey the PM’s greetings,” he said.

He also rejected media reports that there were differences between the Church and the

saffron party after the Manipur violence issue.

“It was just a creation of the media. Both the BJP and the church have always maintained a cordial relationship,” he further said.

Though many senior bishops of various denominations have made pro-BJP statements on several occasions in the state in recent times, the alleged silence of the party-led Union government on the Manipur violence issue has reportedly created differences between the duo.

The objective of the yatra is to bring the Christian community closer to the party, BJP sources said.

The party leaders and workers would visit Christian homes with the message from the Prime Minister till December 30.

The party also recently decided to carry out ‘padayatras (foot marches)’ across the state with an eye on the Lok Sabha polls.

Prominent BJP leaders and workers had conducted the Sneha Yatra, visiting Christian homes and religious heads on the occasion of Easter earlier this year.

DMK leader gets 3 years jail in DA case

PTI ■ CHENNAI

In a disproportionate assets case, the Madras High Court on Thursday sentenced Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister K Ponmudy to three years in prison under the Prevention of Corruption Act and also slapped a fine of Rs 50 lakh on him.

Consequent to his conviction and the prison sentence awarded by the court, Ponmudy, a senior leader of the ruling DMK stands disqualified as a legislator and as a result ceases to be a Minister.

A DMK strongman hailing from Villupuram district in northern Tamil Nadu, he was elected to the Tamil Nadu Assembly from Tirukkoyilur Assembly constituency.

Justice G Jayachandran also sentenced Ponmudy’s wife P Visalakshi to three years in jail.

The judge imposed a fine of Rs 50 lakh each on Ponmudy and his wife.

When the court began its hearing before pronouncing the sentence, senior counsel N R Ellango prayed the court to grant leave to enable Ponmudy and his wife Visalakshi to file a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court and also to



suspend the sentence.

The judge, declining to entertain the plea, granted Ponmudy and Visalakshi 30 days time to surrender before the trial court in Villupuram to undergo the prison sentence.

In case the accused persons fail to surrender on or before January 22, 2024, the trial court shall secure the accused by executing warrant, the judge added.

The HC had already convicted the minister and his wife in the case and pronounced the sentence today.

Legal experts said Ponmudy, following his conviction and prison term, stands disqualified from the post of MLA and he also loses the post of Minister.

Asked about the disqualifica-

tion of Ponmudy, Senior counsel Abudukumar Rajarathinam said, “In view of his conviction, Ponmudy stands disqualified by virtue of Section 8 (1) (m) of Representation of Peoples Act for a period of 6 years from the date of his release after the sentence.”

Further, he said, “Ponmudy stands disqualified from the moment he is convicted. His only option is to approach the Supreme Court to seek stay of his conviction so as to not to attract disqualification under the Representation of Peoples Act. Since he stands disqualified as an MLA, he stands disqualified from holding the position of a Minister of Tamil Nadu cabinet.”

The judge had on December 19 convicted Ponmudy and his

wife Visalakshi in the case and directed them to appear before the court on Thursday to hear them before awarding them the sentence.

Accordingly, Ponmudy and Visalakshi were present in the court hall by 9.50 a.m. today.

The judge asked Ponmudy and Visalakshi, whether they had anything to say about the sentence. Ponmudy said he is innocent and 72-year old and that he is a heart patient for the last 10 years.

He pleaded with the court to impose a lesser punishment.

Visalakshi said she is 68-year old. Her husband is a ‘heart patient’ and she has to look after him and hence lesser sentence may be imposed.

Senior counsel Elango said this was an old case and Ponmudy is 72-year old and hence lesser punishment may be imposed.

The judge said based on evidence the court held Ponmudy and his wife Visalakshi guilty under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The accused have submitted their respective medical records showing history of illness and also made oral submissions seeking leniency, the judge added.

Dhami honours rat-hole miners

Hands them cheques of ₹50,000 each

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Thursday honoured 12 rat-hole miners who played a vital role in the rescue of 41 workers trapped at the Silkyara tunnel.

The rat-hole miners had manually drilled the final stretch of about 15 metres through the debris in the collapsed part of the tunnel in claustrophobic conditions to prepare an escape passage made of MS steel pipes for the trapped workers.

Dhami offered each of them cheques of Rs 50,000 and shawls.

The chief minister praised them for working in difficult conditions without caring for their own lives.

Rat-hole miners made a huge contribution to making the Silkyara rescue operation a success, he said.

The rat-hole miners also thanked the chief minister for honouring them, and said they



considered themselves lucky to get a role to play along with various other agencies in saving the lives of the trapped workers.

Rat-hole mining was the last strategy adopted by the rescuers after several attempts to reach the workers with the help of auger machines failed to produce the desired results.

The workers remained locked up in a part of the tunnel for 17 days after its partial collapse on November 12.

A multi-agency rescue operation finally led to their safe evacuation on November 29.

Vasudev picked as Rajasthan Speaker

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Senior BJP leader and former Sminister Vasudev Devnani was on Thursday unanimously elected as the Speaker of the 16th Rajasthan Assembly.

The House passed the proposal by voice vote.

Protem Speaker Kalicharan Saraf asked Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma to move a proposal to elect Devnani as the Speaker, following which Congress leader Sachin Pilot seconded the proposal.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot was also asked to approve the proposal, but he was not present in the House.

After that, former chief minister Vasundhara Raj’s proposal to this effect was seconded by MLA Rajkumar Roat.

Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari’s proposal was seconded by MLA Chandrabhan Singh.

MLA Hanuman Beniwal’s proposal to elect Devnani as the Speaker of the Assembly was seconded by MLA Dr. Subhash Garg.

Later, other MLAs approved the proposal, following which the House passed the proposal to elect Devnani as the Speaker by voice vote.

Chief Minister Sharma, former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raj, Govind Singh Dotasara, Sachin Pilot and other leaders accompanied him to the seat.

The newly elected Assembly Speaker won from Ajmer (North) seat and belongs to the Sindhi community.

NCB busts global racket, seizes narcotics worth ₹3 crore; 3 arrested

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai unit officers of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) have busted an India-Australia drug syndicate, by seizing narcotics worth over ₹3 crore and arresting three persons.

Working on the clues from the

previous investigations, the NCB’s Mumbai unit sleuths ripped the lid off an international network of operatives engaged in smuggling of pharmaceutical drugs from India to Australia.

On learning that a consignment of drugs was being readied for dispatch through an

international courier, the investigators carried out data analysis and identified a specific parcel being sent to Australia through a reputed global courier office in Mumbai, where they intercepted the parcel.

Upon opening the intercepted consignment, the NCB officers

found an innocuous steel table but a closer examination revealed that packets of drugs had been hidden inside the specially designed cavities of the table.

Further investigations led to the arrest of one suspect, identified as V. Singh. During his questioning, the suspect gave

full details of the drug smuggling racket and identified two of his accomplices — P Sharma and G Mishra — who were taken into custody by the NCB officials.

In the raids carried out on their premises subsequently, the investigators seized a consignment of 9,800 Zolpidem

Tartrate tablets and 18,700 Tramadol tablets — worth an estimated Rs 3 crore. The parcel was ready to be couriered to an international destination.

The three accused were formally placed under arrest on Wednesday. Later a court remanded them in NCB custody.

The investigators have found

that the arrested accused were familiar with the functioning of international parcel/courier firms and the misuse of official documents. The arrested trio was allegedly engaged in smuggling large quantities of narcotics from India to Australia during the three years.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Caution ahead!

Mandaviya appeals for calm amid concerns of yet another Covid outbreak as new JN.1 variant spreads

The biggest scare this generation has seen, or heard gory stories about, is back. After a few months of being mentioned as an aside, Covid has returned as the centrepiece of discussions. One of its newest variant, JN.1, has registered a sharp uptick in the number of recorded cases, both in India and abroad. Though the unwellcome development has garnered heightened attention from health authorities and public alike, India's Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has urged citizens not to panic, emphasising that the situation is under control. This latest wave of Covid infections comes while the nation is still grappling with the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has left an indelible impact on the collective psyche of the nation, in fact the entire world. The emergence of the JN.1 variant has raised serious concerns as it demonstrates a level of adaptability that demands close monitoring. It carries mutations that may impact transmissibility and potential resistance to existing vaccines. As cases surge



across States, concerns about the healthcare system's capacity to handle the influx of patients have grown in proportion. Seeking to set aside fears, Mandaviya emphasises that the increase in JN.1 cases must not trigger panic and that authorities are implementing measures to contain its spread. Even health experts, while echoing that there is no need for panic, underscore the importance of remaining vigilant. The JN.1 variant's characteristics warrant continued monitoring and adjustments to public health strategies. Increased testing, contact tracing and the promotion of vaccination campaigns are crucial components of managing the situation effectively. Though there are

no health advisories so far from the Government or health departments, it is best to avoid situations amenable for the spread of the virus. It is advisable to use masks, avoid overcrowding, not take any fever/ breathlessness lightly and consult a doctor for the same. India, like the rest of the world, has not been immune to the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis has left an enduring impact on the mental health and well-being of the population. Fear and anxiety stemming from the initial outbreak, coupled with the loss of loved ones and economic hardships, have contributed to a collective sense of unease. The trauma of the pandemic has left an imprint on the minds of individuals, influencing their perspectives on health, safety and community wellbeing. In this scenario, a sense of panic is rather natural but must be avoided as it multiplies the intensity of the virus. As we confront the surge in JN.1 cases, it is crucial to strike a balance between being vigilant and maintaining a sense of calm. The Government's commitment to monitoring and managing the situation, combined with individual responsibility in adhering to public health guidelines, will play a pivotal role in trumping this menace once again. The resilience of people, coupled with a proactive and responsive healthcare system, will surely overcome the latest wave of infections.



Devotees sort 'laddus' to be distributed among people ahead of Vaikunta Ekadashi, in Bengaluru

PTI

India's Medical Devices Soar with Tech Innovation

New-generation technology is redefining the health sector with personalised medicines and predictive diagnostics

A wave of innovation is propelling the nation into a new era of healthcare. Backed by a Thriving economy and a relentless focus on innovation, India has positioned itself as a global player in the medical devices industry. The sector's focus on research and development has given birth to a plethora of advanced medical devices and diagnostic tools, revolutionising healthcare services and positioning India as a global hub for cutting-edge technology. At the heart of this transformative journey is the infusion of new-generation technology into medical devices. From state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging equipment to smart patient aids the Indian medical devices sector is embracing technological advancements at an unprecedented pace. Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and machine learning are becoming integral components of medical devices, enhancing their precision, efficiency, and diagnostic capabilities. Notably, as of 2020, the Indian medical devices market was valued at \$11 billion, holding



a 1.5% share in the global market. Ranked as Asia's fourth-largest medical equipment manufacturer, India produces over 6,000 types of devices. Projections indicate that the market is expected to grow to an impressive \$50 billion by 2025, with the sector maintaining a steady Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15% over the last three years. The influx of new-generation technology has sparked the growth of start-ups and enterprises, creating a robust ecosystem that fosters innovation and job creation. The demand for skilled professionals in areas such as AI development, data analytics, and software engineering has surged, providing a substantial boost to India's workforce. The integration of new-generation technology has not only elevated the quality of medical devices but has also transformed India into an

exporter of excellence. The diverse range of medical devices, equipment, and software solutions manufactured in India is finding its way into international markets, bolstering the country's foreign exchange earnings, and positively impacting the trade balance. The global recognition of India as a provider of technologically advanced medical solutions is a testament to the sector's commitment to quality and innovation. As the export market continues to expand, the Indian medical devices sector is playing a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of 'Make in India' on the global stage. The adoption of advanced medical technologies is enhancing the efficiency of healthcare delivery, ensuring that even remote areas have access to state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment options. Smart patient aids, connected healthcare devices, and remote monitoring solutions are becoming instrumental in providing timely and personalised care. This not only contributes to the overall wellbeing of the population but

also enhances the productivity of the workforce, thereby making a direct and positive impact on economic productivity. Partnerships with global entities are fostering technology transfer, knowledge exchange, and foreign investments. These collaborations are not just about economic gains; they are about positioning India as a formidable player in the international healthcare market. The symbiotic relationships forged through these collaborations are fostering an environment of continuous learning and growth. The advent of new-generation technology is not just a trend; it is a paradigm shift that is redefining the possibilities within the sector. From personalised medicine to predictive diagnostics, the journey ahead is marked by innovation, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

(Deepak Sood is secretary general and Dinesh Arora is co-chair of, the National Council on Medical Devices and Diagnostics of ASSOCHAM; views are personal)



DEEPAK SOOD



DINESH ARORA

Use the SC verdict to normalise Kashmir

In the present situation, the UN Security Council Resolution is meaningless. In these circumstances, Article 370 had completely lost its relevance; it is time to rebuild Kashmir



DEEPAK SINHA

Recently, the Hon'ble Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Modi Government's August 2019 decision to nullify Article 370 of the Constitution. That Article gave Jammu and Kashmir special status within our federal structure giving it the right to have its constitution along with exemption from the complete applicability of our constitution. Bizarrely, though only a temporary provision, it de facto came to be treated as permanent because the J&K Constituent Assembly did not specify its abrogation when it dissolved itself. This seems illogical because common sense suggests whichever authority has the power to promulgate such an article, obviously also has the power to dissolve it. In essence, we created a mountain out of a molehill!

Notwithstanding this, legal luminaries and eminent commentators, former Supreme Court Justice Madan Lokur and our foremost constitutional expert, Fali S Nariman, amongst them, have gone on to express their unhappiness with the Supreme Court's verdict. Justice Lokur, for example, has pointed out that the verdict was based on inherent contradictions of the court's earlier judgements and extremely convoluted logic. Furthermore, he was also unhappy with the Court's refusal to determine whether the reorganisation of the state, which was divided into the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, was constitutionally permissible under Article 3. He saw this as a failure of the court to do its constitutional duty. Mr. Nariman was even more critical going so far as to call the verdict "totally erroneous and bad in law". More than just the question of Jammu and Kashmir, what seems to be troubling those critical of the verdict is the precedent that the Supreme Court has set. In their view, this verdict will have a significant impact on India's federalism, which it had earlier deemed to be a basic characteristic of our constitution and inviolable and sacrosanct. They believe by its actions or rather inaction, it has now permitted the Central Government, through



Parliament, to undertake the reorganisation of a state without the concurrence of its State Assembly. Academic polemics aside, the truth is this government, as we have seen over the years, has little time for either propriety or precedent once it has made up its mind, and appears to be quite unmindful of how our Courts might respond. Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister during the Great War, once famously said "War is too important to be left to the Generals." In a similar vein, affairs of state are too important to be left to Judges to decide. In any case, the issue of Jammu& Kashmir needs to be seen not so much as an issue of jurisprudence but realpolitik. The fact is the State is seen as a disputed territory by the international community, despite the very concise, clear and legally binding Instrument of Accession signed by its ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. It now seems fairly apparent that the special status had been temporarily bestowed on the state in an attempt to convince its populace that their interests would be protected if they voted in favour of acceding to India in the plebiscite that was required to

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THUS, THE MODI GOVERNMENT'S NULLIFICATION OF ARTICLE 370 WAS AN EXTREMELY BOLD AND POSITIVE POLITICAL MOVE, THOUGH ONE COULD ARGUE THAT IT DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH

be undertaken as per U N Security Council Resolution No 47. Undoubtedly, the Pakistan Government concluded that the plebiscite would favour India, not least because of the atrocities committed by the so-called Tribals. Since the plebiscite was contingent on the withdrawal of Pakistani troops from the state, this was never undertaken, allowing them to keep the dispute going through four wars, over the past seventy-five years. Today, the plebiscite is a non-starter and the relevant U N Security Council Resolution is meaningless and unimplementable. In these circumstances, Article 370 has completely lost its relevance. One could conclude that it had become an impediment to progress as it did not allow for full integration with our polity, and discriminated against many of its inhabitants, with its provisions being cynically utilised by local political parties to extend their majoritarian agenda at the cost of the minority population. More importantly, while the military can control the violence that has plagued the State since 1989, the ongoing insurgency can only be resolved through substantive political initiatives. Governments over the years

have refused to undertake such a step, leading to repeated cycles of violence, every few years. Thus, the Modi Government's nullification of Article 370 was an extremely bold and positive political move, though one could argue that it did not go far enough. Instead of the incremental approach adopted, the Government should have initiated simultaneous steps to remove AFSPA from the hinterland and move the Rashtriya Rifles to the LOC in a counter-infiltration role to stymie Pakistani support, without endangering our supply routes. In that sense this verdict, even if flawed, should embolden the Government to take far bolder measures within the Union Territory that could in the long run pay handsome dividends and greatly enhance our national security environment. There will always be naysayers and prophets of doom, but the Government should ignore them if it is truly interested in achieving a positive outcome. (The author, a military veteran, is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STABILISING INDO-RUSSIAN TIES

Sir — When India's foreign minister S Jaishankar visits Moscow next week, he should be hoping to re-establish the old warmth between the two countries. The relations between India and Russia have transcended photo-ops. India's dehyphenation international policy has been much admired, and New Delhi not condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine is in sync with its policy of independent stand on global diplomacy. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's Pakistan visit in 2021 and his assurance to Pakistan on the supply of highly sophisticated military equipment to that country and promise to conduct joint military exercises there didn't ruffle India much though New Delhi's proximity to Washington has not gone unnoticed in Moscow's diplomatic circles. But international diplomacy is a clever struggle where actions speak more than words. Though military, space, power, energy and infrastructure sectors between India and Russia are all set to be further explored during Jaishankar's visit, interpersonal relations require to be straightened because India has always referred to Russia as an "old friend". Both countries seem to have some misunderstanding on Quad and Taliban too. India's stated stand on these, however, has been unambiguous. The annual India-Russia summit has not been held after 2021, so this needs to be worked out by the two leaders.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

THALA FOR A REGION

Sir — "Thala for a Region" has been trending on social media recently. The 'Thala for a Region' trend is for MS Dhoni i.e. 'Thala'. People are busy doing 'Thala for a Region' regarding Dhoni's jersey no 07. This trend grew so much that many companies also joined this trend by associating themselves with no 07. The craziness of his fans regarding Dhoni is always visible. Dhoni won the

Tussles with Governors



In states where there are double-engine governments, the governors do not have any disputes with the local state governments. But wherever there are governments of divergent opposition parties, there is always a situation of conflict and tension with the local government between the representatives of the Centre, i.e. the Governors, who are seated in the Raj Bhavan. But why so? Not only it is common for governors to block bills, but the war of words between the two also continues almost every day. For

example, these days a war of words is going on in full swing between Kerala Governor His Excellency Arif Mohammed Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The Chief Minister hit out at the Governor for calling a group of SFI members protesting against him "criminals" and said the Central government has "sent a deranged person here." CM further said "At least the central government should understand that it is not right to leave him in this condition. We know that things are happening with the connivance of the Central Government but everything has a limit." The Left leader said that the Governor is calling every person who thinks different from his ideology a 'rascal'. "Earlier he had called famous historian Irfan Habib a rascal. He is calling the protesting students criminals." Out of all the Governors appointed by BJP, this Arif Mohammad Saheb talks too much. Whereas their Excellencies should speak in measured language. One should speak as little as possible. Only then will the dignity of the post of Raj Bhavans remain intact.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

IPL trophy in 2021 and 2023 even after his last international match in 2019 and his retirement in 2020. In the year 2023, Dhoni's magic was seen not only in Chepauk but on every ground in the entire country. Not only this, there was talk that this season would be Dhoni's last IPL, but Dhoni refused this too. Now Chennai Super Kings has confirmed that Dhoni is going to play in IPL 2024. In such a situation, even without finding 7 numbers by adding words, looking at their success one can say 'Thala for a Region'.

Mohd Ashraf Siddiqui | Lucknow

RICH NATIONS BLAMED FOR POLLUTION

Sir — According to the latest report of the United Nation's body IPCC, the rich countries of the world alone are responsible for more than 60 per cent of the emissions, while on the contrary, the

poor countries account for only 12 to 14 per cent of the total gas emissions and the situation is that the world is global. We are far from limiting warming to 1.5°C to 2°C. Apart from India, other European countries, including America and Britain, 32 countries which are most responsible for carbon emissions and fossil fuel use, have expressed concern over this by holding a conference, but America, Britain, Japan, China, and Russia. Repression is visible, they are trying to put all the responsibility on small poor countries. If carbon emissions are not stopped and the pace of fossil fuel usage continues, then most of the countries of the world including India will not be paying a heavy price for it.

Zubair Qasmi | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

YOGA AND MEDITATION FOR HOLISTIC HEALTH

Indian knowledge system has solutions to the problems faced in contemporary times



It is a well-known fact today that mindfulness is an essential survival mechanism. Mindfulness prevents stress, and anxiety and helps boost mental and thereby physical health. In an article titled “Mindfulness Matters: Can Living in the Moment Improve Your Health?” published in NIH News in Health (January 2022); it is stated that: mindfulness practices may help people manage stress, cope better with serious illness and reduce anxiety and depression. Many people who practice mindfulness report an increased ability to relax, a greater enthusiasm for life and improved self-esteem. After Yogasans and Pranayama (to strengthen the body and organs & systems), our next goal is to proceed inwards to strengthen our mind. To bring calmness and to remove restlessness. Therefore, we need to control our sensory organs so that contact with the outside world is minimised and our energies are channelled within. **Dhaarna:** this is the stage where we gradually concentrate, detach our mind from the outside noise and tend to focus within. This is the beginning of the Dhyaan or Meditation. Here slowly, our breathing becomes deeper and slower and we start feeling light in our body and mind both. There are many ways to focus and concentrate, one can focus on a picture of a Deity, or a flame of a diya or on the forehead. There is nothing wrong in any of these, everything is good and well. Moreover, down the ages, our saints have found more effective measures for maintaining a healthy mind, body and soul. These are Lotus and Chakra Meditation. Lotus & Chakra + Dharma & Dhyan (2 stages of Meditation): The Lotus is an important symbol in Meditation. The lotus can be seen as a form whose power originates at the centre and radiates outwards



symmetrically. Both the inner concentrated centre and the outward radiating petals are versions of the same powerful energy. This image can be helpful in approaching our practice of meditation. We can see a parallel process in the growth of the lotus: Its seed starts in the mud (which represents our routine, external existence). With the help of the stem, the lotus rises higher and higher, leaving the mud behind, just as the spiritual aspirant turns the attention away from external factors and seeks the pure inner self. This inward seeking is the ‘Dharna’ stage of Yoga. When it reaches the zenith of its blossoming, the perfectly formed petals and fragrances of the lotus have no trace of mud at all. This perfect attainment of the blossom is representative of the ‘Dhyan’ stage of Yoga when the aspirant has withdrawn completely from the scattered perceptions of the outside world and united all thought with the One Creator. This oneness of thought fixed on the Creator is Meditation or DHYAN. **Chakra Meditation:** As per yogic science, there are seven Chakras: five on the spinal cord, one where the spinal cord meets the brain, and the seventh one nearer to the top of the brain. Significantly, these Chakras are situated near the major glands and the nerve junctions (plexuses/plexus). Starting from the tip of the tailbone, these are: Root or Mooladhar Chakra (pelvic plexus), Swadhishtan Chakra (sacral plexus), Manipur Chakra (solar plexus), Anahat Chakra (Cardiac Plexus - Thyroid Gland), Vishuddhi Chakra (Carotid Plexus), Agya Chakra (Pituitary Gland), and Sahasrar Chakra (Pineal Gland). The objective of Chakra Meditation is to focus inwards on a specific Chakra. This energises the energy centres situated there, resulting in enhanced energy flow to the organs and systems served by that Chakra. Therefore, with regular practice of Chakra Meditation (covering each Chakra for 7 days each and repeating the cycle), all the negative energies and forces from within our body and mind go away and we are filled with positive energy and calmness. It is, therefore, only appropriate to practice these time-tested remedies; viz., Ashtanga, Chakra and Dhaarna; for a healthy mind, body and soul.

(The writer is a Yoga exponent; views are personal)

Places of Worship Act must be reviewed

The Places of Worship Act, as a legislative instrument, must evolve to meet the challenges of the present while honouring the historical tapestry



The recent green-lighting of a survey of the Shahi Eidgah in Mathura by the Allahabad High Court has re-ignited a long-standing debate over the Places of Worship Act 1991. Amid escalating disputes mirroring the complexities seen in the Varanasi Gyanvapi case, the focus shifts to the legal framework designed to maintain the religious status quo – the Places of Worship Act. This trend is not limited only to Varanasi and Mathura. Hindu organizations also filed petitions demanding they should be allowed to offer prayers at Quwwatul Islam mosque in the Qutub Minar premises in New Delhi, while another Hindu organization claimed the Taj Mahal as the Tajo Mahal temple of Lord Shiva and asked for the court's permission to offer prayers there. This was visible in Soth too, Vishwa Hindu Parishad volunteers demanded they should be allowed to offer prayers on the outskirts of Mangaluru after a Hindu temple-like architectural design was purportedly found there underneath the Juma Masjid on April 21, 2022. The VHP claimed that the mosque was built atop Sri Ramanjaneya Bhajana Mandira. Prohibitory orders were imposed in the city after Hindu organizations said they would organize 'Tambula Prashne' at Sri Ramanjaneya Bhajana Mandira. The legal battle is the latest instance of a growing phenomenon in which Hindu groups petitioning courts demanding land where mosques are located by claiming these belong to Hindus. These petitions question the Places of Worship Act putting the Government and Judiciary in a tight spot. Enacted against the backdrop of the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, the Act has played a crucial role in preserving religious harmony in the country. However, the recent surge in disputes, notably in Mathura and Varanasi, raises pertinent questions about the efficacy and current validity of this legislative measure. The Places of Worship Act passed in 1991, emerged from the turbulent period leading up to its enactment, marked by fervent communal tensions, notably centred around the Ayodhya dispute. The legislation was conceived as a pivotal step



AS THE LEGAL QUAGMIRE UNFOLDS, STRIKING A DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES AND THE IMPERATIVE OF MAINTAINING COMMUNAL HARMONY BECOMES PARAMOUNT

towards preventing similar fractious litigations and safeguarding the social fabric of the nation. The core principle of the Places of Worship Act is to freeze the religious status of all places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947. The Act categorically exempts the Ayodhya dispute, acknowledging its unique historical and emotional significance. The explicit intent was to prevent litigation that could potentially disturb the communal equilibrium. Recent legal battles in Mathura and Varanasi have seen litigants invoking the 1991 Act, emphasizing its role in protecting the sanctity of religious places. In the Mathura case, Hindu groups claim that the Shahi Eidgah was constructed on land belonging to the Sri Krishna Janambhoomi Trust, demanding the removal of the mosque and the return of the land to the Trust. The Varanasi dispute, on the other hand, revolves around claims by Hindu groups regarding the Gyanvapi mosque. The efficacy of the Places of Worship Act is now under scrutiny as disputes continue to emerge, challenging the very essence of the legislation. One key challenge lies in the interpretation and application of the freeze date – August 15, 1947. Critics argue that freezing the religious character of places of worship at a specific historical moment may not account for the evolving social fabric and religious demographics of the nation over time. Moreover, the Act faces criticism for its seeming inability to address disputes arising from historical grievances, such as the alleged demolition of temples during medieval times. The Mathura case, where petitioners claim that the Katra Keshav Dev Temple was demolished by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, brings this historical dimension to the forefront. The Allahabad High Court's decision to allow a survey of the Shahi

Eidgah in Mathura has opened a Pandora's Box, potentially setting a precedent for similar disputes across the country. The survey, akin to the one ordered for the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, aims to verify claims made by Hindutva groups regarding the historical positioning of these places of worship. In both instances, the survey results have the potential to reshape the narrative, either affirming the claims of the Hindu groups or challenging them. The complex intertwining of historical accounts, archaeological evidence, and religious sentiments underscores the gravity of these disputes. **The Legal Labyrinth: Pending Proceedings and Confusion** Amidst the evolving legal landscape, a multitude of cases and petitions in various courts further complicate the scenario. Eighteen separate pleas in Mathura alone seek full ownership of the disputed 13.37-acre land by the temple management. The consolidation of these pleas by the high court adds a layer of complexity to an already convoluted legal web. Complicating matters further is the reluctance of the Union Government to clearly articulate its stance on the Places of Worship Act. The ongoing ambiguity raises concerns about the government's commitment to either uphold, review or scrap the legislation. The lack of a definitive position exacerbates the confusion surrounding the legal framework and its applicability in present times. In this undesirable situation, the onus is on the government to provide clarity on its position regarding the Places of Worship Act. The Supreme Court, being the ultimate arbiter, must expedite proceedings on the validity and interpretation of the Act in the context of evolving disputes. The potential consequences of leaving these issues unaddressed are far-reaching. Without a swift reso-

lution, the legal ambiguity surrounding the Places of Worship Act could lead to the reemergence of similar disputes, perpetuating communal tensions and compromising the very fabric of our social harmony. The government's hesitancy to take a decisive stand and the prolonged proceedings before the top court contribute to a sense of uncertainty. A proactive approach, both from the government and the judiciary, is imperative to prevent further deterioration of the situation. As the legal quagmire unfolds, striking a delicate balance between historical grievances and the imperative of maintaining communal harmony becomes paramount. The Places of Worship Act, while a well-intentioned measure to prevent communal discord, needs careful reevaluation to address contemporary challenges and ensure its continued relevance in a dynamically evolving society. The nation awaits a judicious resolution that upholds the principles of justice, fairness, and social cohesion. In the labyrinth of legal complexities, it is essential to recognize that the preservation of religious harmony and historical justice need not be mutually exclusive. A nuanced and inclusive approach is required to navigate these intricate contours, acknowledging the diverse tapestry of India's cultural and religious heritage. The Places of Worship Act, as a legislative instrument, must evolve to meet the challenges of the present while honouring the historical tapestry that defines our nation. Only through a harmonious blend of legal clarity, historical understanding, and a commitment to social cohesion can we ensure a future where our places of worship stand as symbols of unity rather than sources of division.

(Writer is Political Editor, The Pioneer, Lucknow edition; views are personal)

Terrorists and miscreants are far more motivated than we think

They often take a cue from fiction and execute it in real life. The nation must be ready for them, complacency has no place in the security of high places

The statement by Tammy Ben-Haim, Consul General of Israel to South India, that the 7th October 2023 attack by Hamas on Israel should be taken seriously by the comity of nations including India is a warning signal to all concerned. The observation coming from a career diplomat belonging to Israel, a long-time victim of terrorism, speaks volumes about the spreading tentacles of the dark forces which plan and execute missions with immaculate precision. The 7th December issue of The Pioneer had another startling disclosure, this time a warning by Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, a Khalistani supporter. The Sardar had issued a threat through a video message that he would “shake the very



foundation of Indian Parliament” on December 13, the anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament. Pannu did shake the nation as “assured” by him in the message. Despite the advance warning, the Indian security establishment erred while Pannun had the last laugh. The question being asked by all is how the trouble makers managed to enter the heavily fortified Indian Parliament. It seems some officials entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the temple of democracy erred somewhere and here we stand exposed before the world. Initial investigation has found that it was a BJP member of parliament from Karnataka who signed on the entry pass with which the “terrorists”

managed to hoodwink the security personnel and enter the visitor's gallery. When asked about the faux pas, the BJP spokesmen (and spokeswomen) blame the attackers for their Congress connection. One of the attackers was seen campaigning for the Congress in Haryana assembly election! But that is not the answer which the nation wants to hear. There was a British “gentleman” by name Kim Philby who had worked for the British Secret Service during the Second World War as well as the Cold War. Though he was on His/Her Majesty's Service, Philby's integrity and affinity were with the then Soviet Union and he fed the Soviet spy masters with whatever sensitive information he could lay

his hands on. India too has many Philbys capable of walking away to safety after executing their missions for other countries. Amar Bahadur, an additional secretary in RAW has authored a real-life novel based on his experiences in the agency. It was widely reported that intelligence agencies in India are handicapped because of restrictions enacted by Criminal Procedure Code. The Intelligence Bureau officers are not authorized to arrest or take into custody persons suspected of engaged in nefarious activities. It is for the local police to arrest persons pointed out by the intelligence agencies. But that itself is enmeshed in confusion. For example, the Kerala Police will not arrest anybody pinpointed by the IB for obvious

reasons. The case of gold smuggling through green channel of Thiruvananthapuram International airport is an ideal example of how a case pursued by the National Investigation Agency and Enforcement Directorate could be subverted by the State Police. Tom Clancy, a novelist who specializes in creating terrorism related works had written “Executive Orders” in 1996. The novel was about the destruction of a high rise building in Washington using a hijacked aircraft which led to the death of US President and vice-president. The subsequent events mark the rest of the story. Those who read the novel pooch-pooched the plot as well as the author. But what we

saw on 11 September 2001 was a replication of Clancy's plot and the only consolation was the US First Citizen and First Lady remained safe. Much before the 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur near Chennai by the LTTE terrorists, Frederick Forsyth had penned the novel The Negotiator based on the kidnapping of a US President's son and his murder with the aid of a belt bomb. It took hardly two years for the Tamil Tigers to replicate the same modus operandi to get rid of Rajiv Gandhi. The thin line separating fiction and realism is fast disappearing. Eternal vigilance. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and drones are the latest to join the inventory of terrorists. Assassinations using drones are being discussed in spy movies and one need not be surprised if the technology falls into the hands of Angels of Peace. How many of us remember the novel “The Fifth Horseman” authored by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins? It has the late Libyan despot Muhammar Quaddafi managing to get a nuclear bomb planted in New York city and holding the city to ransom in lieu of certain demands.. The basic rule associated with security and safety is to mistrust the obvious. The nation wants to know what are the factors associated with the 13 December goof up by security agencies and failure of human intelligence.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer, views are personal)

Top US military officer speaks with Chinese counterpart

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Gen CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with his Chinese counterpart on Thursday, in the first of what officials said will be renewed talks between the two nation's senior military leaders, as the Biden administration works to thaw relations with Beijing.

The video call between Brown and Gen. Liu Zhenli is the first senior military communications between the US and China since August 2022, when Beijing suspended all such contacts after former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. It comes on the heels of similar conversations between top US and Chinese diplomats, all triggered by the meeting last month between US President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping.

Biden's meeting with Xi, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, was aimed in part at restoring the military talks amid escalating concerns about frequent unsafe or unprofessional incidents between the two nations' ships and aircraft in the Pacific region. The US has consistently viewed military communications with China as critical to avoiding any missteps between

their armed forces and to maintaining a peaceful Indo-Pacific region.

Brown's call is the first Cabinet-level communication with China since Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on December 6 with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

While few details about Brown's call were released, a senior US defence official said it was an important first step. These are the kinds of discussions that the US needs to have with China, they said, in order to avoid misunderstandings or miscalculations as the two militaries interact. The two officials spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to provide information before the call. They said the US is talking with China at various levels to work out a series of calls and meetings in the coming weeks and months. They include plans to hold the bilateral Defence Policy Coordination Talks early next year and the possible resumption of the China-US Military Maritime Consultative Agreement talks in the spring.

In August 2022, Beijing suspended all military contacts with the US when Pelosi became the highest-ranking American lawmaker to visit Taiwan since 1997, when then-

Speaker Newt Gingrich travelled there. Her visit sparked a surge in military maneuvers by China. Beijing dispatched warships and aircraft across the median line in the Taiwan Strait, claiming the de facto boundary did not exist, fired missiles over Taiwan itself, and challenged established norms by firing missiles into Japan's exclusive economic zone.

There also has been an increase in what the Pentagon calls risky Chinese aircraft and warship incidents. The Defence Department in October released video footage of some of the more than 180 intercepts of US warplanes by Chinese aircraft that have occurred in the past two years — more than the total number over the previous decade.

In one of the more recent incidents, a Chinese pilot flew within 10 feet (3 metres) of a US Air Force B-52, which was conducting routine operations over the South China Sea in international airspace.

While officials touted the Brown-Liu call as an important initial move, the Pentagon has continued to express concerns about China's aggressive military interactions in the Indo-Pacific and has worked to build alliances with other nations in the region.

Earlier this month,

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met with defence chiefs from Australia and the United Kingdom to forge a new agreement to increase technology cooperation and information sharing, as part of a broader effort to counter China's rapidly growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. The new technology agreement is the next step in widening military cooperation with Australia that includes plans to help equip Sydney with a fleet of eight nuclear-powered submarines. And the defence leaders pointed to efforts by China to restrict freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific as a reason to bolster their cooperation. Also, earlier this week, Adm John Aquilino, head of US Indo-Pacific Command, expressed concerns about the increased joint military actions by China and Russia in the region.

Speaking in Tokyo, he said it is far beyond a "marriage of convenience" between Beijing and Moscow, and he urged China to stop escalating maritime confrontations with its neighbours. China's defence ministry, meanwhile, has criticised the US for interfering in both Taiwan and the South China Sea, charging that American arms sales to Taiwan are making the situation more dangerous.

Australia to send army personnel to help protect Red Sea shipping but no warship

Canberra (AP): Australia will send 11 military personnel to support a US-led mission to protect cargo shipping in the Red Sea, but it will not send a warship or plane, the defence minister said on Thursday. Defence Minister Richard Marles said Australia's military needs to keep focused on the Pacific region.

The United States announced this week that several nations are creating a force to protect commercial shipping from attack by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. Marles said 11 military personnel will be sent in January to Operation Prosperity Guardian's headquarters in Bahrain, where five Australians are already posted.

"We won't be sending a ship or a plane," he told Sky News television. "That said, we will be almost tripling our contribution to the combined maritime force."

"We need to be really clear around our strategic focus, and our strategic focus is our region: the northeast Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Pacific," Marles added. The US and its allies are concerned by China's growing assertiveness in the region. Australia is one of the United States' closest military allies. The US Congress last week passed legislation allowing the sale of Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines to Australia under a security pact that includes Britain.

Marles rejected opposition lawmakers' criticism that a failure to send a warship as the United States had requested made Australia a less reliable partner and ally. "That's patently ridiculous," Marles said. The United States is aware of the scale of the Australian defense force and the need to maintain its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, he said. "It is to state the obvious that to take a major asset and put it in the Middle East is to take a major asset away from what we're doing in the immediate region," Marles said. Opposition defense spokesman Andrew Hastie called on Australia to send a warship.

North Korea's Kim again threatens use of nukes

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has a policy of not hesitating to launch a nuclear strike on a rival if provoked, as he praised troops involved in its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, state media reported on Thursday.

Since adopting an escalatory nuclear doctrine last year, Kim has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively. But many foreign experts say North Korea has yet to obtain functioning nuclear missiles and is also unlikely to use its nukes first because it's outgunned by the US and its allied forces. North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, calling the drill a warning over confrontational US and South Korean moves. North Korea cited a recent US-South Korea meeting on boosting their nuclear deterrence plans.

The North's Korean Central

News Agency said Kim met troops at the General Missile Bureau on Wednesday to congratulate them on the launch of the developmental solid-fueled Hwasong-18 missile, the North's newest and most powerful ICBM.

During the meeting, Kim said the launch demonstrated the evolution of the North's nuclear doctrine and strategy "not to hesitate even with a nuclear attack when the enemy provokes it with nukes," KCNA said. Kim said peace is guaranteed by a war posture of being willing to launch preemptive strikes on the enemy anywhere to make it feel fear, KCNA said.

Last year, North Korea adopted a law that stipulates a broad range of situations in which it can use nuclear weapons. Since the beginning of 2022, it has also test-fired about 100 ballistic missiles, many of them nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. and South Korea. Monday's Hwasong-18 launch was the weapon's third test-flight this year. The US and

South Korean governments have repeatedly warned that any attempt by North Korea to use nuclear weapons would result in the end of the Kim Jong Un government. The allies have also expanded their military training, which Kim views as invasion rehearsals.

After the North's latest ICBM launch, the US, South Korea and Japan began sharing real-time missile warning data on North Korea and established details of their trilateral exercises in the coming years. On Wednesday, the US flew long-range B-1B bombers for joint aerial training with South Korean and Japanese warplanes in a demonstration of strength against North Korea.

In an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday, the US, South Korea and their partners maintained that North Korea's repeated missile launches threatened international peace and violated Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea.

Up to 300,000 Sudanese fled homes after notorious group seized their safe haven

Cairo (AP): Fighting between Sudan's military and a notorious paramilitary group forced up to 300,000 people to flee their homes in a province that had been a safe haven for families displaced by the devastating conflict in the northeastern African country, the UN said on Thursday.

The fighting erupted in the city of Wad Medani, the provincial capital of Jazera province, after the Rapid Support Forces attacked the city earlier this month. The RSF said that it took over Wad Medani earlier this week, and the military said that its troops withdrew from the city, and an investigation was opened.

Sudan's war began in mid-April after months of tensions between military chief Gen Abdel-Fattah Burhan and RSF commander Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. Both generals led a military coup in October 2021 that derailed

Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy following a popular uprising that forced the removal of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

The UN agency International Organization for Migration said that between 2,50,000 and 3,00,000 people fled the province — many reportedly on foot — to safer areas in the provinces of al-Qadiri, Sinnar and the White Nile. Some sheltered in camps for displaced people and many sought shelter in local communities, it said. Jazera, Sudan's breadbasket, was home to about 6 million Sudanese. Since the war, about 5,00,000 displaced fled to the province, mostly from the capital, Khartoum, which has been the centre of fighting, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Medani, which is about 100 kilometres (60 miles) southeast of Khartoum, had

hosted more than 86,000 of the displaced, OCHA said.

The World Food Programme announced Wednesday that it has temporarily halted food assistance in some parts of Jazera, in what it described a "major setback" to humanitarian efforts in the province. The UN food agency said that it had provided assistance to 8,00,000 people in the province, including many families that fled the fighting in Khartoum.

The conflict in Sudan has wrecked the country and killed up to 9,000 people as of October, according to the United Nations. However, activists and doctors' groups say the real toll is far higher. More than 7 million people were forced out of their homes, including more than 1.5 million who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, according to the UN figures.

Int'l astronaut will be invited on future NASA moon landing

Cape Canaveral (AP): An international astronaut will join US astronauts on the moon by decades' end under an agreement announced Wednesday by NASA and the White House. The news came as Vice President Kamala Harris convened a meeting in Washington of the National Space Council, the third such gathering under the Biden administration.

There was no mention of who the international moon-walker might be or even what country would be represented. A NASA spokeswoman later said that crews would be assigned closer to the lunar-landing missions, and that no commitments had yet been made to another country. NASA has included international astronauts on trips to space for decades. Canadian Jeremy Hansen will fly around the moon a year or so from now with three US astronauts. Another crew would actually land; it would be the first lunar touchdown by astronauts in more than a half-century. That's not likely to occur before 2027, according to the US Government Accountability Office. All 12 moonwalkers during NASA's Apollo programme of the 1960s and 1970s were US citizens.

US frees Maduro ally for ten Americans, fugitive contractor

AP ■ MIAMI

The United States freed a close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in exchange for the release of 10 Americans imprisoned in the South American country and the return of a fugitive defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard" who is at the center of a massive Pentagon bribery scandal, the Biden administration announced Wednesday.

The American detainees arrived at Kelly Airfield Annex in San Antonio, Texas, late Wednesday. The deal represents the Biden administration's boldest move yet to improve relations with the major oil-producing nation and extract concessions from the self-proclaimed socialist leader. The largest release of American prisoners in Venezuela's history comes weeks after the White House agreed to suspend some sanctions, following a commitment by Maduro to work toward free and fair conditions for the 2024 presidential election. Maduro celebrated the return of Alex Saab as a "triumph for truth" over a U.S.-led campaign of lies, threats and torture against someone he considers a Venezuelan diplomat illegally arrested on a US warrant.

"President Biden, we won't be anyone's colony," a defiant Maduro said with Saab at his side for a hero's welcome at the presidential palace. The release of Saab, long regarded by Washington as a bagman for Maduro, is a significant concession to the Venezuelan leader. Former President Donald Trump's administration held out Saab as a trophy, spending millions of dollars pursuing the Colombian-born businessman, at one point even deploying a Navy warship to the coast of West Africa following his arrest in Cape Verde to ward off a possible escape.

US officials said Biden's decision to grant him clemency was difficult but essential in order to bring home jailed Americans, a core administrative objective that in recent years has resulted in the release of criminals once seen as untradeable.

"These individuals have lost far too much precious time with their loved ones, and their families have suffered every day in their absence. I am grateful that their ordeal is finally over," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

The agreement also resulted in the return to US custody of Leonard Glenn Francis, the Malaysian owner of a ship-servicing company who is the

central character in one of the largest bribery scandals in Pentagon history.

But the exchange angered many in the Venezuelan opposition who have criticized the White House for standing by as Maduro has repeatedly outmaneuvered Washington after the Trump administration's campaign to topple him failed.

In October, the White House eased sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry following promises by Maduro that he would level the playing field for the 2024 election, when he's looking to add six years to his decade-long, crisis-ridden rule. A Nov. 30 deadline has passed and so far Maduro has failed to reverse a ban blocking his chief opponent, María Corina Machado, from running for office. Biden told reporters earlier in the day that, so far, Maduro appeared to be "keeping his commitment on a free election." Republicans, echoing the sentiment of many in the US-backed opposition, said Saab's release would only embolden Maduro to continue down an authoritarian path.

"Disgraceful decision," Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, posted on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

After approving blessings for same-sex couples, Pope asks Vatican staff to avoid 'rigid ideologies'

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis urged Vatican bureaucrats on Thursday to avoid "rigid ideological positions" that prevent them from understanding today's reality, an appeal made days after he formally allowed priests to bless same-sex couples in a radical change of Vatican policy.

Francis used his annual Christmas greeting to the Holy See hierarchy to encourage the

cardinals, bishops and laypeople who run the Vatican to listen to one another and to others so they can evolve to truly offer service to the Catholic Church. Speaking in the Hall of Blessings, Francis told them it was important to keep advancing and growing in their understanding of the truth. Fearfully sticking to rules may give the appearance of avoiding problems but only ends up hurting the service that the Vatican

Curia is called to give the church, he said. "Let us remain vigilant against rigid ideological positions that often, under the guise of good intentions, separate us from reality and prevent us from moving forward," the pope said. "We are called instead to set out and journey, like the Magi, following the light that always desires to lead us on, at times along unexplored paths and new roads."

Francis' annual appointment with members of the Vatican hierarchy came the same week he formally

approved allowing priests to bless same-sex couples, as long as such blessings don't give the impression of a marriage ceremony. The approval, which Francis had hinted at earlier this year, reversed a 2021 policy by the Vatican's doctrine office, which flat-out barred such blessings on the grounds that God "does not and cannot bless sin." The Vatican holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect but that sexual relations between people of the same sex is "intrinsically disordered."

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 15,06,914/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh Six Thousand Nine Hundred Fourteen only)** pending towards **Loan Account No. HHLNDD00439426**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **08.12.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **09.12.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SONU, SAPNA, VIKAS PANCHAL and DHARMAPAL SINGH**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 7,60,000/- (Rupees Seven Lakh Sixty Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 76,000/- (Rupees Seventy Six Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
GDA EWS FLAT NO. E-8/2A, 1ST FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS, MADHUBAN BAPU DHAM, PARGANA DASNA, TEHSIL AND DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 201010.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 41,84,358/- (Rupees Forty One Lakh Eighty Four Thousand Three Hundred Fifty Eight only)** pending towards **Loan Account No. HHLVAS00181277**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **08.12.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **09.12.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SANJEEV KUMAR, SACHIN GUPTA and POOJA**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 25,50,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Lakh Fifty Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 2,55,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Fifty Five Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
HIG FLAT NO. F-1, PLOT NO. B-1/91, DLF DILSHAD EXTN. GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 201001.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

INDIAN RAILWAYS
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(RAILWAY BOARD)
E-TENDER NO.2023RSI95410TC

Executive Director, Railways Stores(S), Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, Government of India invites e-tender for procurement of 500 Nos. Bogie Hopper Wagon type 'BOBYN' Wagons to RDSO's Specification No. WD-04-BOBYN-2011 of March, 2011 and 500 Nos. Bogie Brake Van type 'BVCm' Wagons to RDSO's Specification No. WD-01-BVCM-2017.

2.0 The interested tenders are advised to visit the website <http://ireps.gov.in> for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids.

3.0 No manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.

4.0 Tender will be closed at 15.00 hours on 18.01.2024.

5.0 Any corrigendum to this tender will be published on the website <http://ireps.gov.in> only and not in print media.

Director, Railway Stores (S),
Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, New Delhi
for and on behalf of the President of India.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 44,63,796/- (Rupees Forty Four Lakh Sixty Three Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety Six only)** pending towards **Loan Account No. HHLNDD00275311**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **08.12.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **09.12.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **RAHUL AGGARWAL and DEEPTI VYAS**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 36,60,000/- (Rupees Thirty Six Lakh Sixty Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 3,66,000/- (Rupees Three Lakh Sixty Six Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
RESIDENTIAL FLAT BEARING NUMBER C-1 ON FIRST FLOOR, H. I. G. BACK SIDE, (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) HAVING COVERED AREA OF 850 SQUARE FEET I. E. 88.25 SQUARE METERS IN "SHIVAM APARTMENT - II", BUILT ON PLOT NUMBER 90, BLOCK - B SITUATED AT RESIDENTIAL COLONY SHALIMAR GARDEN EXTENSION-II, IN VILLAGE PASONA, PARGANA LONI, TEHSIL AND DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, GHAZIABAD - 201005, UTTAR PRADESH AND THE PLOT IS BOUNDED AS UNDER:-

EAST : SERVICE LANE, NORTH : PLOT NUMBER B-91
WEST : ROAD 40 FEET WIDE, SOUTH : PLOT NUMBER B-89

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to Notify Transfer of ownership of Residential Plot No. 406, Housing Board Colony, Ward 31 Distt. And Tehsil Palwal. As per the owner of Flat No. B-21 Ground Floor, Shekhar Co-operative Group Housing Society Ltd., now known as Shekhar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Extension Phase-I, Delhi-110091, I lost/misplaced share Certificate, Allotment Letter and Possession Letter pertaining to the said flat. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, vice LR No. 125957/2023 dated 21/12/2023. Any person claiming any right, interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No.965467889 within 15days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to: D/o Director (SFS) H or Asstt. Director (SFS) H o-Block, Third Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 19,65,084/- (Rupees Nineteen Lakh Sixty Five Thousand Eighty Four only)** pending towards **Loan Account No. HHLNDD00516649**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **11.12.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **12.12.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **BAJIJT SINGH BHATIA, SURINDER KAUR BHATIA and DALINDER SINGH BHATIA**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 15,00,000/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 1,50,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
BUILT-UP UPPER GROUND FLOOR (REAR SIDE / SOUTHERN PORTION) WITHOUT ROOF / TERRACE RIGHTS, BUILT ON PROPERTY/ PLOT BEARING NO. 45, WITH PROPORTIONATE AREA MEASURING 50 SQUARE YARDS (I. E. 41.81 SQUARE METERS), OUT OF TOTAL AREA 100 SQUARE YARDS (I. E. 83.61 SQUARE METERS) OUT OF KHASRA NO. 26/10 SITUATED IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE RAZAPUR KHURD, DELHI COLONY KNOWN AS MOHAN GARDEN, IN BLOCK - P EXTEN., UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI - 110059, WITH COMMON RIGHTS TO USE OF ENTRANCE, PASSAGE, STAIRCASE AND ONE SMALL CAR PARKING AT GROUND FLOOR AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS UNDER:-

EAST : OTHER'S PROPERTY
WEST : PORTION OF PLOT
SOUTH : GALI 8 FEET WIDE
NORTH : FRONT SIDE UNIT/ROAD 20 FEET

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Date : 15.12.2023
Place : NEW DELHI

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

EU pays final tranche of Ukraine budget support

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union on Thursday paid the final tranche of a multibillion-euro support package to Ukraine to help keep its war-ravaged economy afloat this year, leaving the country without a financial lifeline from Europe as of next month.

The EU has sent 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) each month in 2023 to ensure macroeconomic stability and rebuild critical infrastructure destroyed in the war. It's also helping to pay wages and pensions, keep hospitals and schools running, and provide shelter for people forced from their homes.

To ensure that Ukraine has predictable, longer-term income, the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, proposed to

provide the country with 50 billion euros (\$55 billion.) At a summit last week, 26 of the 27 nation bloc's leaders endorsed the plan, but Hungary imposed a veto. The decision came as a major blow to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, days after he had failed to persuade US lawmakers to approve an additional \$61 billion for his war effort.

Hungary's nationalist leader, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, is widely considered to be Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in the EU. Critics accuse him of putting Moscow's interests ahead of those of his EU and NATO allies.

Orbán has called for an immediate end to the fighting, which has ground on for almost two years, and pushed for peace talks between

Moscow and Kyiv. Last week, he accused his EU partners of seeking to prolong the war and said that sending more money to Ukraine was a "violation of (Hungary's) interests".

Orbán is set to meet again with fellow EU leaders on Feb 1 to try to break the deadlock.

The 50-billion-euro package is included in a revision of the bloc's long-term budget. More money is needed to pay for EU policy priorities given the fallout from the war, including high energy prices and inflation, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Announcing that 2023 macro-financial support to Ukraine had come to an end, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen offered no hint of what help Kyiv might receive come January.

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

The year started with high hopes for Ukrainian troops planning a counteroffensive against Russia. It ended with disappointment on the battlefield, an increasingly somber mood among troops and anxiety about the future of Western aid for Ukraine's war effort.

In between, there was a short-lived rebellion in Russia, a dam collapse in Ukraine, and the spilling of much blood on both sides of the conflict.

Twenty-two months since it invaded, Russia has about one-fifth of Ukraine in its grip, and the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line has barely budged this year.

A crunch has come away from the battlefield. In Western countries that have championed Ukraine's struggle against its much bigger adversary, political deliberations over billions in financial aid are increasingly strained.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is playing a waiting game

two years into a war that proved to be a costly miscalculation by the Kremlin. He is waging that the West's support will gradually crumble, fractured by political divisions, eroded by war fatigue and distracted by other demands, such as China's menacing of Taiwan and war in the Middle East. The international political outlook could turn sharply in Putin's favour after next November's elections in the United States — by far Ukraine's biggest military supplier and where some Republican candidates are pushing to wind down support for its war.

Nearly half of the US public believes the country is spending too much on Ukraine, according to polling published in November by The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research.

"The political landscape on both sides of the Atlantic is changing," says Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the

Council on Foreign Relations in Washington D.C. "Transatlantic solidarity has been steady. But I don't think it will remain steady forever."

The shifting sentiment could benefit Putin, analysts say, as he seeks at least to keep Ukraine in limbo and eventually compel it to accept a bad deal to end the war. Putin announced in early December that he will run for reelection in March, all but guaranteeing he keeps his repressive grip on Russia for at least another six years.

"It's been a good year, I would even actually call it a great year" for Putin, says Mathieu Boulegue, a consulting fellow for the Russia-Eurasia programme at Chatham House think tank in London.

Western sanctions are biting but not crippling the Russian economy. Russian forces are still dictating much of what happens on the battlefield, where its defensive lines feature minefields up to 20 kilometres (12 miles) deep that

have largely held back Ukraine's monthslong counteroffensive.

The counteroffensive was launched before Ukraine's forces were fully ready, a hurried political attempt to demonstrate that Western aid could alter the course of the war, said Marina Miron of the Defense Studies Department of King's College London.

"The expectations (for the counteroffensive) were unrealistic," she said. "It turned out to be a failure."

Putin got a victory he desperately wanted in May in the fight for the bombed-out city of Bakhmut, the longest and bloodiest battle of the war. It was a trophy to show Russians after his army's winter offensive failed to take other Ukrainian cities and towns along the front line.

A mutiny in June by the Wagner mercenary group was the biggest challenge to Putin's authority in his more than two decades in power. But it backfired. Putin defused the revolt and kept the allegiance of his

armed forces, reasserting his hold on the Kremlin.

Wagner chief and mutiny leader Yevgeny Prigozhin was killed in a mysterious plane crash. And any public dissent about the war was quickly and heavily-handedly stamped out by Russian authorities.

Still, Putin has had setbacks. He fell afoul of the International Criminal Court, which in March, issued an arrest warrant for him on war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. That made it impossible for him to travel to many countries.

Ukraine has so far clawed back about half the land that the Kremlin's forces occupied in their full-scale invasion in February 2022, according to the US, but it's going to be hard to win back more.

The big Ukrainian push fell far short of its ambitions, even though Western countries had given Kyiv a variety of weapons and training.

Congo enters its 2nd day of voting

AP ■ KINSHASA (CONGO)

Congo entered its second day of voting Thursday after a chaotic roll out and lengthy delays forced the election's extension, drawing criticism from some opposition candidates as concerns mount that the logistical hurdles could challenge the result's credibility.

At stake is the future of one of Africa's largest nations and one whose mineral resources are increasingly crucial to the global economy. Congo has a history of disputed elections that can turn violent, and there's little confidence among many Congolese in the country's institutions. President Felix Tshisekedi, who is seeking his second and final five-year term, has spent much of his presidency trying to gain legitimacy after a disputed 2018 election. There is no second round of voting and the winner, expected to be announced no later than December 31, needs to get a majority of votes.

A fractured opposition makes Tshisekedi the likely favourite to win.

Some 44 million people — almost half the population — were expected to vote for Congo's next president. But many, including several million displaced by conflict in the vast country's east, found it difficult to do so. The fighting prevented 1.5 million people from registering to vote.

The election commission said Wednesday there was a delay in the deployment of certain materials and equipment during the vote, which resulted in some polls opening late and others not opening at all. It's unclear how many voting stations weren't operational.

Voting stations that didn't open Wednesday will allow people to cast their ballots between 6 am and 5 pm Thursday, according to a statement by the commission.

Locals sat outside polling stations Thursday acting as witnesses to ensure the votes were counted credibly.

Those polling stations that completed voting began counting results late Wednesday night. Each of the 75,000 polling stations is expected to post its results outside before the final results are tallied and announced.

Polls were supposed to stay open for 11 hours regardless of when they started. But in the eastern city of Goma, Associated Press reporters saw some stations open late in the afternoon and close by 8 pm, preventing people from voting. It was unclear if those booths would reopen Thursday.

An initial poll three hours after official voting began said that more than 31 per cent of stations in major cities and towns had yet to open, according to Bishop Donatien Nshole, spokesperson of the Electoral Observation Mission of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo and the Church of Christ in Congo, basing the figures on reports from around a fifth of its large network.

Additionally, voting machines were faulty in 45 per cent of polling stations, he said. Opposition candidate and Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege criticised the election process, saying "the results of such a chaotic vote will not reflect the will of the people."

On Wednesday, some polls didn't open until the late afternoon and some people waited for 10 hours or more to vote. Associated Press reporters saw frustrated voters at one station in the capital, Kinshasa, aggressively try to push past police wearing riot gear into one of the booths.

Pak demands UN probe into terror group acquiring lethal weapons

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

Pakistan has urged the United Nations to conduct a thorough investigation on how the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group acquired sophisticated military equipment left behind by "foreign forces" in Afghanistan.

Drawing attention to several terrorist groups that are operating from neighbouring Afghanistan, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, Munir Akram on Wednesday said, "We have lost hundreds of our brave soldiers and civilians in these attacks just this year alone and last week, TTP affiliated group carried out a heinous attack on our security personnel in Dera Ismail Khan, resulting in the loss of more than 23 precious lives."

Six terrorists linked to Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP), a newly formed militant group that is an affiliate of the TTP, rammed an explosive-laden truck into the security post in Dera Ismail Khan in the South Waziristan tribal district in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on December 12, killing 23 soldiers.

Akram was speaking at the United Nations Security Council's UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), (UNAMA) briefing on the

topic of 'Situation in Afghanistan' prepared by Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioglu (Turkey).

He said the TTP and its affiliates have carried out a series of organised cross-border terrorist attacks on his country's soil, "evidently under the protection of the interim Government. "These attacks have become more lethal and sophisticated since the TTP terrorists have acquired and used advanced military equipment. These weapons obviously originate from the considerable stocks left behind by foreign forces. Yet, the question is: how did the TTP – a listed terrorist organisation – secure these weapons?"

Akram was apparently referring to some of the American weapons that were left behind by the US military in Afghanistan after the US completed its withdrawal from the war-torn country in August 2021.

Akram then said Pakistan demanded that the United Nations – whether UNAMA or another agency – conduct a thorough investigation to elicit "how these weapons got in the hands of the TTP and to identify ways of retrieving them."

UNAMA is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), whose Secretary General Roza

Isakovna Otunbayeva, said that there must be more direct engagement with the de facto authorities, including in Kabul.

Meanwhile, Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), said that more than 20 million people require humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan after the October quakes, and also mentioned the Afghan nationals repatriated from Pakistan.

"Following three earthquakes in October in Herat, thousands of families are now living in tents and makeshift shelters, exposed to fast-falling winter temperatures. The eastern and southern regions have, meanwhile, seen a dramatic surge in the number of Afghans returning from Pakistan, following that country's decision to send back undocumented Afghan nationals," Rajasingham said.

The UN official was referring to the mass exodus of Afghans returning to their home country after Pakistan threatened them with a deadline. An estimated 1.7 million Afghans had been living in Pakistan when authorities announced its nationwide crackdown, saying that anyone without proper documents had to leave the country by October 31 or else get arrested.

Major political parties seek extension to file nomination for Pak polls

Islamabad (PTI): Major Pakistani political parties, including the PML-N led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, sought extensions on Thursday to file nomination papers for the upcoming February 8 general elections, saying they need more time to complete the "time-consuming exercise."

According to the schedule issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), potential candidates are required to file nomination papers from December 20 to 22. The top election body began accepting nomination papers from prospective candidates on Wednesday. Three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party sought a two-day extension on Thursday for the filing of nomination papers, Geo News reported. In a letter written to the ECP, the Chairman of the party's election cell, Ishaq Dar, said, "To facilitate thousands of candidates desirous of taking part in elections, it would be appreciated if only a two-day extension is granted in filing nomination papers by amending the schedule issued on December 15, 2023, without changing the polling day, i.e., February 8, 2024."

9 terrorists held in attack on Pakistan security forces

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistani police on Thursday arrested nine terrorists, including the mastermind and seven facilitators, involved in one of the worst terror attacks targeting security forces in recent years that killed 23 soldiers in the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, authorities said.

Six terrorists linked to Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP), a newly formed militant group that is an affiliate of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), rammed an explosive-laden truck into the security post in Dera Ismail Khan in the South Waziristan tribal district in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province on December 12, killing 23 soldiers.

The nine terrorists were arrested by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), a wing of the KPK Police. The mastermind involved in the terror attack belongs to the Daraban area of Dera Ismail Khan while six terrorists involved in the attack hail from Afghanistan, officials said.

Hasan alias Shakir, the terrorist who carried out the suicide attack, belongs to Afghanistan and released a video before the attack.

The national identity card

and domicile of the other suicide bomber, Sifat Ullah Marwat, killed in the attack also established that the attacker belonged to Afghanistan, they said.

The father of the suicide bomber Sifat Ullah has confirmed his son's connection with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban-led Afghan government), they added.

According to the documents, five terrorists of the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Gandapur group were also embroiled in this attack. US-made weapons and ammunition were recovered as well from the terrorists' possession.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations, the media wing of the army, 23 Pakistan Army soldiers were killed while all six terrorists were "effectively engaged and sent to hell."

On the same day, Pakistan summoned Afghan Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad and delivered a strong demarche to the interim Taliban government in the context of the deadly attack.

Pakistan later asked Afghanistan's Taliban government to hand over those involved in the deadly attack on the army post.

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that Smt. Urmila Singhal W/o Late Sh. Ashok Kumar Singhal R/o B-21, Shekhar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Extension Phase-I, near Chilla Village, Delhi-110091, am the owner of Flat No. B-8-21, Ground Floor, Shekhar Cooperative Group Housing Society Ltd., now known as Shekhar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Extension Phase-I, Delhi-110091. I, lost/misplaced Share Certificate, Allotment Letter and Possession Letter pertaining to the said flat. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, village LR No. 1259567/2023 dated 21/12/2023. Any person claiming any right, interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9654677889 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to: Dy Director (SFS), H. or Asst. Director (SFS) H, D-block, Third Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of our client i.e. Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited that 1) Mr. Rakesh Kumar, 2) Mrs. Poonam & 3) Mr. Surender Singh intend to mortgage the Plot No. 24, admeasuring 217.16 Sq. Yds., at near Kachcha Chamarla Road, Raj Luxmi Fire Works, Village, Tehsil & District Rohtak (Haryana) with our client, against the financial assistance. Whereas, out of the entire chain link documents Original Sale Deed dt. 02-12-2005, Doc. No. 9644 in favour of Mr. Radhey Shyam was already lost/misplaced and in this regard online NCR/IR No. 132590072300643 has been filed with Haryana Police on 20-12-2023.

Public is hereby warned not to deal with the above-mentioned documents & the property. If anyone do the same, then he will be responsible for all consequences. If any person(s) having objection with regard to mortgage of the said property is/are requested to intimate in writing to undersigned within 07 days from the date of issue of this notice at below address:

DEEPLYOT SINGH, ADVOCATE
A-13, LGF, South Extn-II,
New Delhi-49 Gh 011-40587824

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**
W/O Late Sh. Ashok Kumar Singhal R/o B-21, Shekhar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Extension Phase-I, near Chilla Village, Delhi-110091, am the owner of Flat No. B-8-21, Ground Floor, Shekhar Cooperative Group Housing Society Ltd., now known as Shekhar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Extension Phase-I, Delhi-110091. I, lost/misplaced Share Certificate, Allotment Letter and Possession Letter pertaining to the said flat. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, village LR No. 1259567/2023 dated 21/12/2023. Any person claiming any right, interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9654677889 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to: Dy Director (SFS), H. or Asst. Director (SFS) H, D-block, Third Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

FILE No. CMO-OE-A-GL-40/12/2023/3768
DATE: 15.12.2023
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
E-tenders are invited on behalf of Paradip Port Authority for the work Providing manpower for office work Housekeeping and par-medical work for PPA Hospital for a period of 2 years The last date & time of Submission of Dt. 04.01.2024 on 17.15 Hrs. For details, please refer website Website for details [http://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app]
Sd/-Chief Medical Officer
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/70/2023-24
dt.20.12.2023

PUBLIC NOTICE
NOTICE is hereby given that Anu Gupta claims to be owner and in possession of Flat No. 209, 1st Floor, Block-B, Pkt-B, Cat-II SFS, in BG-1, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110087 (hereinafter called the said property) by virtue of inheritance and has also got the surviving member certificate issued from Revenue Department Govt of NCT of Delhi Dated 21.06.2023 stating that Anu Gupta is the Only Surviving Legal Heir of Late Swarn Sarma and Said Swarn Sarma as the owner of said property by virtue of Conveyance Deed Dated 23.08.2002 reg vide Doc No. 12065 said Anu Gupta being the only legal heir of Late Swarn Sarma through attorney has agreed to sell the said Property to Mr. Rohit Kapoor & Said Mr. Rohit Kapoor has agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients Axis Bank Limited, East of Kailash Branch, New Delhi, any person/s having claim against the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise however, are hereby intimated to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 14 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 and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof.

Vishal Diwan (Advocate)
For Diwan and Company LLP
H. No.2 (LGF), NRI Complex New Delhi-19
Mobile No. 9818399999

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 25,52,351/- (Rupees Twenty Five Lakh Fifty Two Thousand Three Hundred Fifty One only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLRHN00323461, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **GUNJESH SRIVASTAV, KUMARI ANKITA SRIVASTAVA, PANKAJ BHASIN, VINEET KUMAR and DEEPAK GUPTA**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 17,25,000/- (Rupees Seventeen Lakh Twenty Five Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,72,500/- (Rupees One Lakh Seventy Two Thousand Five Hundred only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
PROPERTY No. 052 AND 53, UPPER GROUND FLOOR (REAR RHS / SOUTH- WEST PORTION S/G + UGF + 3 STRUCTURE), KHASRA No. 7/20/1, BLOCK - F, GALI No. 10, VILLAGE MATIALA, OM VIHAR EXTENSION, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI, DELHI - 110059.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 15.12.2023
Place : NEW DELHI
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 23,85,280/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Eighty Five Thousand Two Hundred Eighty only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLVA500282990, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SUNITA GULERIA and AMIT GULERIA**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 15,80,000/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh Eighty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,58,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Eight Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
FREEHOLD RESIDENTIAL MIG FLAT NO. G-1, ON THE GROUND FLOOR (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS), HAVING ITS SUPER COVERED AREA OF 700 SQ. FT., FRONT PORTION L. H. S., BUILT ON PLOT NO. B-1/14, FRONT PORTION L.H.S., SITUATED IN THE RESIDENTIAL COLONY KNOWN AS "DLF ANKUR VIHAR", LONI, GHAZIABAD - 201010, UTTAR PRADESH.
BOUNDARIES:
EAST : COMMON PASSAGE AND FLAT NO. G-2
WEST : PLOT NO. V-A/13
NORTH : OTHER'S LAND ROAD
SOUTH : 12 MTRS. WIDE ROAD
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 23,34,526/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Thirty Four Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Six only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLDMT00256161, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SANJEEV and SANGEETA ANAND**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 14,20,000/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakh Twenty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,42,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Forty Two Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
FLAT NO. G-1, LIG, BACK SIDE, ON GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS, SUPER MEASURING AREA 41.805 SQ. MTR, BUILT ON PLOT NO. 572, SITUATED AT RESIDENTIAL COLONY SHALIMAR GARDEN EXTN. - 1, VILLAGE PASONDA, PARGANA LONI, TEHSIL & DISTRICT-GHAZIABAD-201010, UTTAR PRADESH.
EAST : ROAD 60 FT WIDE
WEST : SERVICE LANE
NORTH : PLOT NO. 571
SOUTH : PLOT NO. 573
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 20,22,593/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh Twenty Two Thousand Five Hundred Ninety Three only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLNOI00330206, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **GOVINDA and RACHNA THAKRE**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 14,50,000/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,45,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Forty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
FLAT NO. UG-2 ON UPPER GROUND FLOOR, FRONT MIDDLE RIGHT SIDE (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) HAVING SUPER COVERED AREA 400 SQUARE FEET EQUIVALENT TO 37.16 SQUARE METERS CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT NO. B-18, SITUATED IN DLF DILSHAD EXTENSION - II, VILLAGE BRAHMPUR / BHOPURA, PARGANA & DISTRICT LONI, GHAZIABAD - 201005, UTTAR PRADESH.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 17,21,486/- (Rupees Seventeen Lakh Twenty One Thousand Four Hundred Eighty Six only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLDCP000315411, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SANJEET VERMA and RITA VERMA**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 12,20,000/- (Rupees Twelve Lakh Twenty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,22,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Twenty Two Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
RESIDENTIAL FLAT BEARING NO. M-218-A, 1ST FLOOR, (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) HAVING COVERED AREA 33.07 SQUARE METERS SITUATED IN SECTOR - 23, SANJAY NAGAR, GHAZIABAD - 201002, UTTAR PRADESH AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS UNDER:-
EAST : FLAT NO. 219A
WEST : FLAT NO. 215A
NORTH : FLAT NO. 223A
SOUTH : ROAD 25 FEET WIDE
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 15.12.2023
Place : NEW DELHI
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale 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 to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 17,21,486/- (Rupees Seventeen Lakh Twenty One Thousand Four Hundred Eighty Six only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLDCP000315411, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.12.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 08.12.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **SANJEET VERMA and RITA VERMA**. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 12,20,000/- (Rupees Twelve Lakh Twenty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,22,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Twenty Two Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
RESIDENTIAL FLAT BEARING NO. M-218-A, 1ST FLOOR, (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) HAVING COVERED AREA 33.07 SQUARE METERS SITUATED IN SECTOR - 23, SANJAY NAGAR, GHAZIABAD - 201002, UTTAR PRADESH AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS UNDER:-
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Date : 15.12.2023
Place : GHAZIABAD
Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Sensex rebounds 358 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty recovered by more than half cent on Thursday following buying in index majors HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 358.79 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,865.10 with 21 of its stocks ending in the green and nine in the red. The barometer opened lower and fell further by 585.92 points or 0.83 per cent to a low of 69,920.39. But, markets found the winning momentum in the afternoon session and climbed 452.4 points or 0.64 per cent to 70,958.71.

The broader Nifty rallied 104.90 points or 0.50 per cent to 21,255.05 as 38 of its constituents advanced and 12 declined. During the day, it hit a high of 21,288.35 and a low of 20,976.80.

Both key indices have hit record high levels in intra-day trade on



Wednesday before closing sharply down by over 1 per cent. Sensex tanked 930 points while Nifty lost around 303 points. Most sectors participated in the rebound on Thursday with energy, metal and banking sectors emerging as top performers, analysts said.

Buying in HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries helped

indices to recover from day's lows, they said. RIL and HDFC contributed more than 300 points to Sensex gains.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid rose the most by 2.27 per cent, HDFC Bank by 1.82 per cent, Kotak Bank by 1.66 per cent, and Reliance Industries by 1.38 per cent. NTPC, State Bank of India, Tata Steel and



Bharti Airtel were also among the gainers. Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, HCL Tech and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the major laggards.

"After a subdued start, the market reversed from the day's low amid buy-on-dips strategy. However, the overall trend is subdued, FIIs stayed muted

ahead of festive break and global market traded on a negative note ahead of announcement of the US GDP data today," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

"Some consolidation is warranted in the near term due to peak valuation. A gradual rise in oil prices along with concern over high domestic food inflation

may have a hindrance to the stretched rally of the last 2 months."

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.69 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.61 per cent.

Among the indices, utilities rallied 2.46 per cent, power jumped 2.43 per cent, oil & gas (1.72 per cent), telecommunication (1.64 per cent) and energy (1.62 per cent). Auto emerged as the only laggard.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled lower while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the green.

European markets were trading in the negative territory. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.33 per cent to USD 79.96 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,322.08 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

'Mumbai region, Bengaluru, Delhi, NCR most searched locations for properties'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty portal Magicbricks on Thursday said that Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR are among the most searched regions for properties on its platform.

"MMR (20 per cent), Bengaluru (19 per cent), NCR (19 per cent) emerged as India's most searched regions for properties in 2023," Magicbricks said in a statement.



Based on the customer preferences of over 2 crore visitors on its platform, Magicbricks' latest report said that 80 per cent of prospective homebuyers continued to prefer multi-storey apartments followed by builder floors.

More than 56 per cent of home seekers preferred 3 BHK and larger units, reflecting a strong preference towards spacious apartments, it added.

Abhishek Bhadra, Head of Research at Magicbricks, said, "in 2023, the real estate sector demonstrated remarkable progress characterised by robust demand, improved supply and increased interest from Millennials and Gen Z in real estate investments."

He expects prices to stabilise next year on higher supply.

"We also expect demand to maintain its upward trajectory, especially in tier 2 towns, reflecting substantial growth prospects in these regions. This outlook aligns with the evolving landscape of the real estate sector amid a progres-

sive economic backdrop," Bhadra said.

According to the report, the affordable housing market thrived in Ahmedabad and Kolkata, whereas MMR (63 per cent) and NCR (34 per cent) led the demand for luxury homes.

NCR refers to the National Capital Region.

While rental market demand remained stable across most cities, Bengaluru exhibited remarkable growth, elevating its demand share from 21 per cent in 2022 to 24 per cent in 2023.

"Younger demographics, predominantly 18-35 years, constituted 67 per cent of pan India rental demand," the report said.

Magicbricks has monthly traffic exceeding 2 crore and an active base of over 15 lakh property listings.

It provides more than 15 real estate-related services, including home loans, pay rent, movers and packers, legal assistance, property valuation, and expert advice.

Sebi to auction properties of five firms on January 22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has said it will auction 13 properties of five companies, including Sunheaven Agro India and RaviKiran Realty India, along with that of promoters and directors on January 22 to recover money illegally collected from investors.



The other firms whose properties will be auctioned are Just-Reliable Projects India Ltd, Orion Industries, and Rakhal Bharoti group of companies.

The properties will be auctioned at a reserve price of Rs 15.08 crore, according to a public notice issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Monday said.

These assets include land parcels in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

Further, Quirk Realty has been engaged by Sebi to assist in the sale of these properties.

Of the 13 properties, seven are related to Rakhal Bharoti group of companies, two each of Orion Industries Ltd and Just-Reliable Projects India and one each of Sunheaven Agro India, and RaviKiran Realty.

Inviting bids for the sale of the properties in the recovery proceedings against the companies and their promoters and directors, Sebi said the auction will be conducted online on January 22, 2024 from 11 am to 1 pm.

The markets watchdog has asked the bidders to make

Rupee falls 9 paise to settle at 83.27 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell by 9 paise to settle at 83.27 against the US dollar on Thursday as withdrawal of foreign funds amid concerns over global trade disruption through the Red Sea route dented investor sentiment.

According to forex analysts, despite positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and a weak American currency against major global currencies, the Indian unit was weighed down by the volatile crude oil prices.



At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.19 and traded between the peak of 83.18 and the lowest level of 83.28 against the dollar during intra-day deals. It settled at 83.27 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a fall of 9 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the domestic currency settled at 83.18 against the dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per

cent lower at 101.97 on Thursday.

Global oil price benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 79.95 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 358.79 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,865.10. The broader NSE Nifty soared 104.90 points or 0.50 per cent to 21,255.05.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Wednesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 1,322.08 crore, according to exchange data.

'Shipping firms revenue may decline in next fiscal'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic shipping companies are likely to see a further 5-7 per cent decline in revenue in the next financial year amid normalisation of the rates, a report said on Thursday.

This follows a steep 23-25 per cent fall in their revenue in the current fiscal (2023-24) after a 35 per cent growth in the last financial year when charter rates had surged because of geopolitical conflicts (including the Russia-Ukraine war) and higher demand from China post-pandemic, credit rating agency CRISIL said on Thursday.

While the margin profile may vary widely across players operating in different segments, CRISIL said the average operating margin may continue to moderate to 33-35 per cent in the next fiscal driven mainly by the correction in charter rates. However, it will remain higher than the pre-pandemic levels of 25-30 per cent, the rating agency

forecast.

This along with modest capital expenditure (capex) plans, should sustain the healthy credit risk profiles of shipping companies, CRISIL said.

A CRISIL study of five shipping companies, which account for about half of the around 20-million metric tonne (MMT) deadweight tonnage (DWT) of shipping fleet in India, indicates as much, it said.

The shipping fleet of domestic companies is dominated by tankers that carry crude oil and petroleum products (contributing to around 70 per cent of total DWT), followed by dry bulk carriers carrying unpackaged commodities such as coal, iron ore and grains (around 20 per cent), according to CRISIL.

The balance is distributed between container ships, gas carriers and others.

According to CRISIL, the charter rates correlate with the global demand-supply dynamics. "We are seeing charter rates for



crude and product tankers correcting 20-25 per cent this fiscal from the average of around USD 50,000/day last fiscal, as global uncertainties (caused by Covid-19 followed by geopolitical conflicts) ease," said Anuj Sethi, Senior Director, CRISIL Ratings.

He said that expecting the current trend in global trade continues, charter rates could further moderate next year, but will

remain higher than the pre-pandemic level, supported by buoyant tonne-mile demand and limited new fleet deliveries.

"Charter rates for crude oil and petroleum product tankers will be supported by growing imports by China and India; also, to be aided by better fleet utilisation given higher tonne-mile demand due to change in trade routes following the Russia-Ukraine conflict," the

rating agency said.

On the supply side, capacity addition for tankers is expected to remain limited given the decadal-low orderbook, which will keep charter rates much higher than the pre-pandemic level of USD 15,000-25,000/day, it said.

But the charter rates for dry bulk are expected to remain range-bound this fiscal and the next, with moderate growth in demand for key commodities, especially iron ore and coal (accounting for 40-45 per cent of the global dry-bulk trade), and moderate fleet orders, it said.

According to CRISIL, the average charter rates had declined last fiscal due to lower demand of these and other key commodities due to subdued industrial / construction activities in major economies.

These corrections seen in charter rates will also impact operating profitability of shipping companies. Said Joanne Gonsalves, Associate Director at

CRISIL Ratings.

"We expect average operating margins of shipping companies to moderate 300-500 basis points to around 38-40 per cent this fiscal and further to 33-35 per cent in fiscal 2025 as charter rates normalise. Albeit, operating margins will continue to remain higher than pre[1] pandemic levels."

CRISIL Ratings said it also expects credit profile of shipping companies to remain stable, benefitted by healthy cash flows and limited debt addition as no major fleet addition is planned. This will ensure comfortable debt metrics, despite a slight moderation from fiscal 2023 levels, said Gonsalves.

It also said that any trade disruptions (including escalation of the Middle-East conflict) impacting charter rates, adverse movement in fuel costs or any regulatory changes which could impact fleet utilisation could alter performance expectations and will bear watching.

Retail inflation for farm workers rises in November

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation for farm workers rose to 7.37 per cent and that for rural labourers climbed to 7.13 per cent in November, mainly due to higher prices of certain food items. Retail inflation in October was 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent for farm workers and rural labourers, respectively, according to an official statement.

Food inflation stood at 9.38 per cent and 9.14 per cent for agricultural and rural workers, respectively, in November compared to the respective figures of 8.42 per cent and 8.18 per cent in October 2023, and 6.19 per cent and 6.05 per cent recorded in the corresponding month of previous year (November 2022), a labour

ministry statement said.

According to the statement, point-to-point rate of inflation based on the CPI-AL (Consumer Price Index-Agricultural Labourers) and CPI-RL (rural labourers) stood at 7.37 per cent and 7.13 per cent in November this year as compared to 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent, respectively, in October 2023.

The two comparable numbers were 6.87 per cent and 6.99 per cent in November last year, the ministry said.

All-India Consumer Price Index for agricultural labourers in November this year increased 12 points to 1,253, while the index for rural workers advanced 11 points to 1,262.

The two indices were 1,241



points and 1,251 points, respectively, in October this year.

Major contribution towards the rise in general index of agricultural labourers and rural labourers came from the group of food items to the extent of 10.85 and 10.50 points, respectively, driven by a rise in prices of rice, wheat, pulses, onion, turmeric, whole, garlic, mixed spices, etc.

There has been an upward trend in the index across all the states except West Bengal (both

CPI-AL and CPI-RL indices decreased) and Himachal Pradesh (CPI-AL index decreased).

In case of agricultural labourers, the index increased 1 to 10 points in 11 states, rose 11 to 20 points in four states and went up more than 20 points in three states. With 1,453 points, Tamil Nadu topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stood at the bottom with 958 points.

The benchmark for rural labourers increased 1 to 10 points in 11 states, climbed 11 to 20 points in five states and jumped more than 20 points in three states.

Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with 1,439 points each topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stayed at

the bottom with 1,015 points.

Among states, the maximum increase of 27 points in CPI-AL index was seen in Maharashtra, which was mainly driven by the increased prices of jowar, rice, wheat, atta, tapioca, arhar dal, onion and sugar etc.

For CPI-RL, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu saw a rise of 24 points each, mainly due to increase in prices of rice, jowar, ragi, fish, fresh, onion, arhar dal, vegetables and fruits (especially brinjal, tomato and lady finger) etc.

West Bengal recorded the steepest fall of 14 points in both the indices due to a drop in prices of rice, ginger, chilly green, vegetables and fruits (especially brinjal & lady finger), firewood etc, the ministry stated.

Government sells 3.46 lakh tonnes wheat 13,164 tonnes rice in open market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has sold 3.46 lakh tonnes of wheat and 13,164 tonnes of rice through e-auctions to bulk consumers as part of its effort to boost domestic supplies and control retail prices.

The government is selling wheat and rice from its buffer stocks to keep retail prices under control under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS). Food Corporation of India (FCI), the government's nodal agency for food grains procurement and distribution, is conducting the e-auctions.

The Centre has allocated 101.5 lakh tonnes of wheat for

the OMSS till March 2024.

"The 26th e-auction was held on December 20 wherein 4 lakh tonnes wheat and 1.93 lakh tonnes rice was offered. In the e-auction, 3.46 lakh tonnes wheat and 13,164 tonnes rice was sold at a weighted average of Rs 2,178.24 per quintal for wheat and Rs 2,905.40 per quintal for rice," an official statement said.

To control the retail prices of rice, wheat and atta, the government is organising weekly e-auctions of both wheat and rice.

The minimum and maximum quantity of rice that a bidder can bid has been fixed at 1 tonne and 2,000 tonne,

respectively.

The bidders can bid in multiples of 1 tonne with respect of rice under OMSS (Domestic).

This measure has been taken to enhance the sale of rice under OMSS (Domestic) and in the present e-auction, the sale of rice has increased to 13,164 MT from 3,300 MT that was sold in the previous e-auction.

Earlier this month, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra said the government is ready to offload additional 25 lakh tonnes of FCI wheat to bulk consumers during January-March 2024, under OMSS, in order to boost domestic supply and check price rise.

PTI ■ TOKYO

Japanese transport ministry officials inspected Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu on Thursday, one day after officials announced it was suspending the small car unit's shipments of all vehicles in and outside Japan after an investigation found improper testing involving 64 models.

The safety test irregularities earlier this year prompted an independent panel investigation, which found widespread and systematic problems at Osaka-based Daihatsu Motor Co. It is the latest of safety or

Toyota small car unit Daihatsu raided After faked tests lead it to suspend all vehicle shipments

other violations found at least five of Japan's major automakers in recent years.

On Thursday, transport ministry officials began a deeper investigation at Daihatsu's offices over the systematic safety scandal that apparently persisted for decades.

"It's extremely regrettable," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa

Hayashi said Thursday. "It damaged the trust of car owners and has shaken the foundation of the automobile certification system." Hayashi urged Daihatsu officials to fully explain the situation.

So far, there have been no reports of accidents or deaths due to the fudging of those tests. Toyota Motor Corp., citing



results of the panel, said Wednesday that the Daihatsu probe found 174 new cases of irregularities in safety tests and other procedures in 25 test categories, on top of problems reported earlier.

"We are sorry to have betrayed the trust of our customers," Daihatsu President Soichiro Okudaira told a news conference

Wednesday. He acknowledged the cheating on safety testing and procedures was tantamount to neglect of safety certificates.

"We take it very seriously as the problem that has shaken the foundation of an automaker," he said.

A lawyer and a member of the probe team, Makoto Kaiami, who also attended the news con-

ference, said workers under pressure to meet management demands for tight development deadlines resorted to cheating, and that the management should take the blame.

The issue first emerged in April when Daihatsu reported improper testing on door linings. Problems in the side collision testing also surfaced in May,

officials said.

The use of faked data falsifications and use of unauthorised testing procedures. The problems were found in 64 models and three vehicle engines, including 22 models and an engine sold by Toyota, Daihatsu said in a statement.

The investigation also found the problems affected some models of Mazda Motor Corp. And Subaru Corp. Sold in Japan, and Toyota and Daihatsu models sold abroad.

Daihatsu is Toyota's unit specialising in small cars and trucks that are popular in Japan. Toyota expressed "sincere apologies."

Saweety aims to defend her crown at nationals

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

All eyes will be on Saweety Boora as the reigning world champion will look to defend her 81kg title in the Women's National Championship which begins here on Thursday. The competition will feature over 300 boxers from 35 units

competing across 12 weight categories for top honours. Hailing from Haryana, Saweety, who claimed silver at the 2014 World Championships in the light heavyweight category, has also bagged gold (2022), silver (2015), and bronze (2021) at the Asian Championships. The seventh edition of the elite women's nationals will see the



likes of Tokyo Olympian Pooja Rani in the 75kg category and Haryana's Manisha Moun, the 2022 world championship bronze medallist in the 60kg category, in action. She will face stiff competition from Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine of Services Sports Control Board (SSCB).

Additionally, two Youth World Champions -- Arundhati (SSCB) and Ankushita Boro (Assam) -- will vie for top honours in the 66kg category. In the previous edition, the Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) secured 10 medals and will be eager to replicate the success in this tournament.

Savita wins FIH Goalkeeper of Year award for third time

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian women's hockey team captain Savita Punia on Thursday said her third consecutive FIH Goalkeeper of the Year Award is a testament to her progress on the right path. Savita won the recognition for the third successive time on Tuesday. "This acknowledgment serves as positive encouragement for me, confirming that I am on the right path," Savita said in a Hockey India release. "While the team has maintained good form this year, as we approach 2024, my goal is to sustain peak performance and provide the team with the best opportunity to qualify for the Olympics at the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi next month," she added. Savita credited the entire Indian team for her success. "It's difficult for me to share the overwhelming emotions I experienced upon learning that I have been honoured with this award once more, for the third consecutive year. "My desire to be the best is fuelled by the shared objective of achieving victories for the team. I am not alone in this journey, the entire team defends as one. So, I want to dedicate this award to my team," she said. Savita played her first international match in 2011 and



since then has amassed 266 caps for India. A true stalwart for the Indian women's hockey team, Savita has been a consistent performer, leading India to significant victories in recent years. She played a pivotal role in the team's title win at the inaugural FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup 2022 in Spain, also securing India's promotion to the FIH Pro League 2023-24. She then led the team to a bronze medal at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, followed by the title win at the recent Jharkhand Women's Asian Champions Trophy. Under her captaincy, India also achieved their best-ever world rankings -- No. 6 with 2368.83 points.

Leverkusen stays four points clear of Bayern

AP ■ BERLIN

Patrik Schick celebrated his first Bundesliga start of the season with a hat trick as Bayer Leverkusen consolidated the top spot and set a record for games unbeaten with a 4-0 rout of Bochum. Leverkusen stretched its unbeaten start to the season to 25 games across all competitions, beating the German record of 24 games without defeat set by Hamburger SV at the start of the 1982-83 season. Hamburg's record stood at the time as 14 wins and 10 draws before a 2-1 loss at Hertha Berlin in the third round of the German Cup. Leverkusen, meanwhile, has romped to 22 wins and three draws since the season began. The team's win over Bochum kept it four points clear of 11-time defending champion Bayern Munich going into the winter break, though Bayern has a game in hand. Jamal Musiala scored in his 100th Bundesliga game for Bayern and Harry Kane got his 21st goal of the season for a 2-1 win at Wolfsburg.

LEVERKUSEN FLYING Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso opted to start with Schick in place of Victor Boniface for the first time in a Bundesliga game this season, and the move paid off with the Czech forward grabbing a first-half hat trick. Schick opened the scoring with a penalty on the half-hour mark, converted Jeremie Frimpong's cross for his second two minutes later, then headed his third from Alex Grimaldo's corner before the break. Boniface, whom Leverkusen will be without when Nigeria is playing at the African Cup of Nations next month, went on for Schick in the 67th and scored his 10th league goal of the season two minutes after that.

MUSIALA MILESTONE Musiala became the youngest player to clock 100 Bundesliga appearances



for Bayern and the 20-year-old celebrated in Wolfsburg by heading the opener in the 33rd. Kane made it 2-0 ten minutes later with a brilliant strike from outside the penalty area that curled inside the top right corner. Maximilian Arnold took note, and pulled one back for Wolfsburg with a similar effort before the break.

STUTTGART UP TO THIRD Stuttgart capitalized on Leipzig's draw the day before to move one spot to third with a 3-0 win over Augsburg. Also, both Eintracht Frankfurt and Heidenheim scored stoppage-time goals to beat 10-man Borussia Mönchengladbach 2-1 and Freiburg 3-2, respectively.

TWENTY-SIXTH TIME LUCKY Union Berlin forward David Datro Fofana finally scored his first Bundesliga goal to seal a 2-0 win over relegation rival Cologne. Fofana sank to knees after scoring with his 26th attempt at goal this season and covered his head as teammates jumped in to congratulate him under beer showers thrown by the Union fans behind. Benedict Hollerbach had opened the scoring in the 56th, rifling the ball in from a narrow angle after going past a Cologne defender. The game kicked off to an uncanny quiet as fans continued their protests against the German soccer league's plan to bring in an outside investor.

Urs finishes T-13th, secures full card to join Aditi, Diksha on LET

PTI ■ MARRAKECH (MOROCCO)

Indian golfer Pranavi Urs earned a full card on the Ladies European Tour for 2024 as she finished Tied-31st at the Final Stage of the Qualifying School golf tournament here. Parnavi played a strong front nine and then survived some tense moments on the back to card a final round of 3-under 70 at the Par-73 Al Maaden Golf Marrakech to finish with a total of 12-under 351. Pranavi will join compatriots Diksha Dagar and Aditi Ashok, who are already full members of the Tour. Russia's Nataliya Guseva produced a final round of 4-under 69 to win the by four shots. Guseva totalled 23-under-par. The Top-20 and ties secured Category 12 membership for 2024 and there were 22 players getting the status. Thirty play-



ers finished between 21st and 50th and ties to clinch Category 16 membership. India had a total of 12 players in the final stage but Pranavi alone managed a full card. Vani Kapoor (73-70-70-76-72) at 2-under for the 90 holes, finished T-45 and earned a status in Category 16. Neha Tripathi (75-67-72-73-76) was T-55 and Amandeep Drall

(75-70-70-75-76) finished T-65 and the duo earned status in Category 19. The eight players, who missed the cut were Ridhima Dilawari (74-72-72-77) at T-88, Avani Prashanth (76-71-72-77) and Tvesa Malik (74-70-77-75) at T-92, Jasmine Shekar (75-74-75-75) at T-112, Sneha Singh (83-72-76-76) at T-144, Seher Atwal (77-73-78-81) at 146, Ananya

Datar (80-79-76-79) at 148 and Durga Nittur (80-81-76-83) at 150. Pranavi started the final day at T-11th and her birdies on third, fourth, sixth, eighth and ninth holes saw her turn in 5-under as she rose close to Top-5. She then dropped shots on the 12th and 14th and ended the day with four pars and a round of 70. Vani had four birdies and three bogeys and was T-45, while Neha had three birdies and six bogeys and failed to make the Top-50. As Guseva topped the Q-School, South Africa's Cara Gorlei finished in second place on the leaderboard on 19-under-par after shooting a round of 71. Thailand's Aunchisa Utama finished in third place on 18-under-par having carded a round of 3-under 70 on the final day at Al Maaden.

Mbappé scores twice on 25th birthday

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappé celebrated his 25th birthday with two goals as Paris Saint-Germain beat lowly Metz 3-1 to head into the winter break with a five-point lead in the French league. The France star got a birthday bonus when his 16-year-old brother Ethan Mbappé made his debut by coming on as a stoppage-time substitute on Wednesday. Kylian Mbappé extended his league-leading tally to 18 goals. He has 21 goals overall this season, and since joining PSG from Monaco in 2017 he has netted a club record 233 goals in 282 appearances. Mbappé's contract expires at the end of the season and he has yet to say whether he will sign an extension or leave on a free transfer, possibly to long-time suitor Real Madrid. Portugal midfielder Vitorinha guided in a cross from the left to put PSG ahead in the 49th minute following a drab first half and then provided the pass for Mbappé's trademark



curling shot from the left of the penalty area into the top right corner in the 60th. Although the shot was struck

firmly and accurately, veteran goalkeeper Alexandre Okidja was too far off his line and also jumped too early, allowing the ball to sail over him. After defender Matthieu Udol headed a goal back in the 72nd following poor PSG marking on a corner, Mbappé profited from a defensive error to round Okidja in the 83rd and tap in for 3-1. Metz is down in 14th place and fans may not feel overjoyed that coach László Bölöni chatted at length and then posed for a photo with Mbappé in the tunnel following the match. Second-place Nice stayed five points behind PSG with a 2-0 home win over seventh-place Lens, which had not lost in the previous 11 league games dating back to the previous defeat on Sept. 16. Nigeria striker Terem Moffi scored both goals late in the second half. Wissam Ben Yedder is the only player to keep pace with Mbappé's scoring in recent seasons. The veteran striker

scored both to reach eight goals as third-place Monaco won 2-1 at Toulouse to remain two points behind Nice. Fourth-place Brest has been a surprise this season and a remarkable individual performance saw 20-year Mali midfielder Kamory Doumbia score four times in the first half in a 4-0 home win over Lorient. After holding PSG to a 1-1 draw at home last weekend, Lille lost 2-1 at Strasbourg and dropped down to fifth. **OTHER MATCHES** Sixth-place Marseille needed a header from midfielder Jordan Veretout to draw 1-1 at southern rival Montpellier, while Japan forward Keito Nakamura's first-half goal earned eighth-place Reims a 1-0 home win against Le Havre. Rennes recovered from conceding an early goal to win 3-1 at rock-bottom Clermont and veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette's goal ensured 15th-place Lyon beat Nantes 1-0 for a third straight win under interim coach Pierre Sage.

Luton captain Lockyer out of hospital after cardiac arrest

AP ■ LUTON (ENGLAND)

Luton Town captain Tom Lockyer has had a defibrillator fitted following his on-field cardiac arrest and left the hospital to rehabilitate at home, the club said on Thursday. Lockyer collapsed in the second half of Luton's match at Bournemouth in the English Premier League on Saturday. The game was abandoned and will be replayed. It was the second time Lockyer collapsed during a match. The other time was in May during the second-tier Championship playoff final and that was because he suffered atrial fibrillation. Luton said the issue Lockyer experienced on Saturday was different. Lockyer underwent "a successful procedure that took place on Tuesday whereby Tom had an ICD (implantable cardioverter defibrillator) device fitted to prevent a repeat of Saturday's incident," Luton said. "The club, Tom and the Lockyer family would like to take this opportunity to repeat our collective heartfelt thanks to all at Bournemouth, their supporters, club officials and especially their medical staff and midfielder Philip Billing, who was the first to reach Tom on the pitch and summon assistance." Luton didn't say when, or if, Lockyer would be expected to return to the field. The team's next game is at home to Newcastle United on Saturday. "We're so proud to have Locks as our captain," Luton said, "and his leadership will continue from the sidelines where his courage will inspire his teammates, colleagues, and supporters, starting on Saturday.

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

After finishing last season empty-handed, Liverpool kept its four-pronged trophy pursuit alive by advancing to the League Cup semifinals with a 5-1 win over West Ham. Curtis Jones scored twice, with Dominik Szoboszlai, Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah also getting goals in the largely one-sided game at Anfield. Jarrod Bowen struck a consolation goal for West Ham. Liverpool will play Fulham in the two-legged semifinals, and second-division Middlesbrough will face Chelsea. "The performance, the score-sheet, the result and the individual performances put

Liverpool routs West Ham 5-1

together to make a team on the pitch," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said on Wednesday. "We were brave in our positioning, our second ball game was exceptional. It was a really, really good performance from start to finish." Liverpool can move atop the Premier League when it hosts first-place Arsenal on Saturday, is in the Europa League round of 16, and starts its FA Cup campaign next month. The Merseyside club's form this term is in stark contrast to last season when its inconsistency saw it miss out on qual-



ification to the Champions League and fail to win a trophy. Now it looks set to mount a serious challenge for the title and is one round away from advancing to its first cup final of the campaign. Having been held to a 0-0 draw by Manchester United on Sunday, the goals came flooding back for Klopp's team against West Ham. Liverpool dominated the first half and took the lead through Szoboszlai in the 28th. The home team's pressing paid off as West Ham struggled to get out of its half and Szoboszlai's

right-footed shot from about 25 yards (meters) powered into the bottom corner. Liverpool could have scored a second later in the half, but Gakpo's header from inside the box bounced just past the post. After the break, Darwin Nunez forced a save from Alphonse Areola with a shot that was headed for the top corner and Jones doubled the score in the 56th. Nunez's clever pass split West Ham's defense and put Jones in position to fire through the goalkeeper's legs from a tight

angle on the left. Gakpo made it 3-0 in the 71st with a low shot from the edge of the area that nestled into the bottom corner. Six minutes later, Bowen pulled a goal back for West Ham when he turned Jarell Quansah in the box and curled a right-footed shot past Caoimhin Kelleher. Liverpool should have restored its three-goal advantage when Nunez's shot hit the post and rebounded into the path of substitute Salah. But the Egypt international fired wide from right in front of goal with Areola on the ground. He made no mistake in the 82nd - converting when he went one-on-one with the West Ham keeper.

AP ■ MADRID

The jeers from the fans and the criticism from the media are usually a sign that things have not been going well for Barcelona. Recent lackluster performances and poor results have left the Catalan club on the brink of a crisis. Coach Xavi Hernández apparently has had enough, and is demanding immediate changes if the team still wants to succeed this season. Xavi didn't spare anyone in a heartfelt news conference after yet another disappointing performance by his team to beat last-placed Almeria 3-2 in the Spanish league on Wednesday. Fans jeered Barcelona as it struggled

Barcelona needs to wake up: Xavi

against the only team yet to win in La Liga. "If we aren't going to take our chances, at least we need to be aggressive and show some soul," he said. "Unless we run like animals we won't get anywhere. Unless we leave our skin out there we won't win anything. We need to wake up. It's not a football issue, it's about soul." The coach said the players need to step up and understand that the team can't live off its past glories. He reminded everyone that this Barcelona squad has nothing to do with the talented 2010

team he played for and won numerous titles. "We are not the Barça from 2010, we don't have the quality of the Barça from 2010," Xavi said. "We just don't have that, forget about it. We don't have that quality or that individual capability. We don't have that." Xavi was teammates with Andres Iniesta, David Villa, Dani Alves, Gerard Piqué and Lionel Messi in the 2010 team that won nearly all of the major titles at the time. All of those players are gone and Barcelona is undergoing a revamp anchored on young-



sters such as Gavi, Pedri and Lamine Yamal. "Last year we won two trophies because we put our souls into it, we gave it our all. That's my responsibility and I won't let it happen again," Xavi said. "In the second half (against Almeria) we did show some soul and that's how we won the match. That bit I did like a lot." Barcelona won the league and the Spanish Super Cup last season. It won its Champions League group this season to advance to the knockout stage for the first time after two consecutive early elimina-

tions. It will also compete in the Copa del Rey from January. Beating Almeria ended Barcelona's three-game winless streak in all competitions but still left the club four points from second-placed Real Madrid and six from Liga leader Girona. Madrid and Girona play their midweek matches on Thursday. Madrid visits Alaves and Girona is at Real Betis. "This game with Almeria may have been very good for us," Xavi said. "The first half was exactly what we are not supposed to do, the second was exactly what we should be doing." Barcelona will close its year with a friendly against Mexican club America this week in the United States.

India bundle out Aussies for 219

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Seamer Pooja Vastrakar and off-spinner Sneh Rana showed enough craft to exploit a pitch offering variable bounce to bundle out Australia for a modest 219 in their first innings on the opening day of the one-off Test here Thursday. In their first essay, India raced to 98 for 1 at stumps as openers Smriti Mandhana (43 not out, 49 balls, 8x4) and Shafali Verma (40, 59 balls, 8x4) added 90 runs.

But India's march to ascendancy began through Vastrakar (4/53) who teamed up with Sneh Rana (3/56) and Deepti Sharma (2/45) to snap Aussies innings in 77.4 overs despite an even fifty by Tahlia McGrath. However, Australia made a poor start as they lost opener Phoebe Litchfield in the first over itself after a mix-up with her partner Beth Mooney at the Wankhede Stadium. Four deliveries later, Vastrakar produced a jaffa to remove

Ellyse Perry (4) and reduced Australia to 7/2 inside the first two overs. Vastrakar beat the defence of star all-rounder Perry by getting the ball move into her to disturb the stumps. But McGrath (50 off 56 balls, 8x4s) came out firing on all cylinders to put pressure back on India, making most of the errors in line and in the field. McGrath was severe on anything that had width, racing to her third fifty in five Tests with eight fours while also utilising two lifelines in the form of dropped catches when she was on 24 and 45. While making the bulk of runs during her 80-run stand with Mooney for the second wicket, McGrath also set herself up for a big score. But an error in judgement made her pay heavily, and it also opened the floodgates. Having got her runs fluently up until then, the Australian vice-captain chipped Rana straight to Rajeshwari Gayakwad at mid-



wicket who timed her jump well to collect the ball over her head. Mooney (40) batted well despite her struggles early on against spin and pace to get close to a half-century, but Vastrakar surprised the left-hander with a sharp bouncer that shot off the surface. The resultant edge lobbed towards Rana at first slip after deflecting off the gloves of Yastika Bhatia. Having lost a chunk of batting to reach 103/4 at lunch, both Alyssa Healy (38) and Annabel Sutherland (16) showed impressive footwork during their 40-run association which ended abruptly. Australia skipper Healy could not do much when a delivery from Deepti kept very low to crash onto her stumps, after which Vastrakar pinned Sutherland in front of the wicket for her third scalp. Ashleigh Gardner (11) was Vastrakar's fourth victim as she meekly played one outside the off stump to be caught behind.

But Australia's tail produced a good fightback to take them past 200. A stubborn 30-run association between Jess Jonassen (19) and Kim Garth (28 not out) did frustrate India, who were made to work hard for the breakthrough on either side of the tea break. Jonassen and Garth took their time collecting runs as their partnership came off 93 balls, while Lauren Cheatle (6) also hung around to ensure Australia put a reasonable total on the board. But when India batted, there were no such struggles. Mandhana and Verma were also assisted by the waywardness of Australian bowlers, who dished out a lot of deliveries ripened either to drive, cut or pull as the Indians plundered their runs at nearly six an over. Their alliance ended when Jonassen trapped Verma in front of the wicket but by then India had shaved off Australia's lead to a good extent.

Gillespie backs Starc IPL deal

Questions Cummins massive price tag

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia pacer Jason Gillespie has questioned Pat Cummins' massive IPL price tag, saying T20 cricket is not the quick's best format but backed Mitchell Starc's jaw-dropping Rs 24.75 crore deal. Cummins attracted the second highest paycheck in the auction in Dubai on Tuesday after an intense bidding war between Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore, Chennai Super Kings, and Sunrisers Hyderabad, who shelled out a whopping Rs 20.50 crore for the Australian captain. "Pat's obviously a quality bowler and a quality leader, we've seen that. I just don't think T20 is his best format," Gillespie told SEN Radio. "I think he's a Test bowler, personally. I think Test cricket is



his absolute bread and butter." It was not the first time that Cummins, who has 55 wickets in 50 T20I matches at an average of 24.54 and economy of 7.37 in T20Is, attracted huge sums at the IPL auction. Ahead of the 2020 edition, KKR had paid Rs 15.5 crore for his services. "He's a good T20 bowler, make no mistake. But that's massive overs for me," Gillespie added. A little over an hour after Cummins landed his deal, Starc surpassed his captain to become the costliest player in the IPL history as Kolkata Knight Riders spent a mind-

boggling Rs 24.75 crores for the left-arm's services. Starc, who has usually prioritised international duty over playing in the IPL, has played only two seasons of the cash-rich league, taking 34 wickets in 27 games at an average of 20.38. "I think he's a great buy. It's a lot of money, we all acknowledge that, but the IPL is a very rich tournament... I'm absolutely delighted for Mitch. "I think it just highlights how important teams value left-arm fast bowling and left-arm swing bowling at pace," Gillespie said.

Seven newcomers in 15 men West Indies squad

PTI ■ ST. JOHN'S (ANTIGUA)

Seven uncapped players will travel to Australia among a 15-man West Indies cricket squad to play two test matches Down Under in January. Cricket West Indies said Wednesday that the team will again be led by Kraigg Brathwaite, with fast bowler Alzarri Joseph named as the new vice captain. The uncapped players are batter Zachary McCaskie, wicket-keeper Tevin Imlach; all-rounders Justin Greaves, Kavem Hodge and Kevin Sinclair and fast bowlers Akeem Jordan and Shamar Joseph. Team officials said Jayden Seales was unavailable for selection due to a shoulder injury and that Jason Holder and Kyle Mayers were not available because they wanted to explore Twenty20 league opportunities in January. "The squad has been affected by the unavailability of some key players," said lead selector Desmond Haynes.



"However, we have had a very strong red-ball program being run over the past year. Australia away is always a challenge, but we are confident in our team." The squad will arrive in Australia on Dec. 30 and will hold a preparation camp from Jan. 2-9 in Adelaide, followed by a four-day first-class warm-up match against a Cricket Australia XI in Adelaide from Jan. 10-13.

The two teams will again compete for the Frank Worrell Trophy - named in honor of the legendary West Indies all-rounder and captain. The first test will be played in Adelaide from Jan. 17-21 and the second a day-night, pink-ball encounter at the Gabba in Brisbane from Jan 25-29. Following the test series, West Indies will face Australia in three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 matches. Squads for those games will be announced at a later date. Australia is currently ahead 1-0 in its three-match test series against Pakistan. The teams play again beginning Dec. 26 in Melbourne and from Jan. 3 in Sydney. West Indies test squad: Kraigg Brathwaite (captain), Alzarri Joseph (vice-captain), Tagenarine Chanderpaul, Kirk McKenzie, Alick Athanaze, Kavem Hodge, Justin Greaves, Joshua DaSilva, Akeem Jordan, Gudakesh Motie, Kemar Roach, Kevin Sinclair, Tevin Imlach, Shamar Joseph, Zachary McCaskie.



Johnson makes his mum smile with hefty IPL paycheck

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Without a professional cricket contract, Australia's Spencer Johnson was a landscape gardener till last year but fast forward 18 months the pacer is proud that he put a smile on his mother's face, by bagging a hefty IPL deal with the Gujarat Titans. Johnson's IPL millionaire price tag after Gujarat Titans shelled out Rs 10 crore for him at the auction in Dubai on Tuesday capped an extraordinary rise as there was a time, not too long ago, when it looked like his cricket career could be over. "Eighteen months (ago) I didn't have a state deal or a Big Bash contract, I was working as a landscaper and greenskeeper. So fast-forward 18 months, yeah it's definitely different situations," he told reporters here. A recurring stress fracture in his foot, first suffered during his professional debut for South Australia in a one-day game way back in 2017, led to three years out of the game and loss of contract. After surgery and prolonged rehabilitation, the 28-year-old left-arm pacer regained his South Australia contract midway 2022 and made his Big Bash League debut for Brisbane Heat in January this year. Johnson was largely unknown outside of state cricket circles before he announced himself as a fast bowler of note for the Heat in last season's Big Bash League with his 150 km/h thunderbolts. It is no brainer that an IPL franchise coached by former India pacer Ashish Nehra bought Johnson who now sits behind Rashid Khan as Gujarat Titans' second most expensive player. After playing in The Hundred, Johnson also caught the eye of national selectors, and he was selected to play for Australia in the lead-up to the World Cup. He played his lone ODI against India in August in

Indore where he was wicketless for 61 runs from his eight overs. He has also played two T20Is, both against South Africa in August-September. Johnson said netting the lucrative IPL contract was a special moment but more satisfying was to see his mother smile on FaceTime. "It's obviously a pretty special moment, I never really thought I'd be in this situation," Johnson said ahead of Brisbane Heat's BBL match against Melbourne Renegades. "But it was nice to get on the FaceTime back home in Adelaide (with) mum and to see her smile. It's not just my moment, I guess it's a moment for my whole family and they've been there the whole way. So for them to experience it as well, it's pretty special." With just 30 overseas players' spots up for grabs in the mini auction in Dubai, Johnson thought his opportunity might not come. "I think the longer it went, I guess you start to lose a little bit of hope. So the longer it was going, I think the less chance I had. "But at the end of the day I was in a position where I was in the auction, and this time last year I wasn't. So whatever happened was going to happen, and anything would have been a good result." A life-changing IPL contract has been sealed but Johnson does not want to go down the T20-only route and believes Test cricket is actually where his strengths lie. "Ideally, I'd like to play more red ball. I think my body's just let me down over the last few years but my body's hardening and I'm getting ready to play, hopefully, some longer format cricket, which is, I feel, my better format. "I think post-Big Bash, we'll get back to South Australia and play the last four Shield games there. And then hopefully with a couple of performances, you never know what might happen."

Gukesh beats Erigaisi for Chennai Grand Masters title

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh won the Chennai Grand Masters Chess Championship title here on Thursday, edging out compatriot Arjun Erigaisi on the tie-break after they finished equal on points. The Chennai GM, who finished with a score of 4.5 points from seven rounds after a draw against fellow Indian GM P Harikrishna in the final round, improved his chances of qualifying for next year's Candidates tournament. Erigaisi tied Gukesh for first place with 4.5 points after he defeated Hungarian Sanan Sjugirov in the final round, but the latter came up trumps on the basis of a better tie-break score. The top three places were taken by the Indians, with Harikrishna finishing in the third place. The tournament win puts Gukesh in the lead in the Fide Circuit standings and greatly improves his qualification chances for the Candidates tournament. The Fide Circuit ends with the

World Rapid Championship to be held in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) from December 25-31. Gukesh remained unbeaten through the seven rounds, scoring two wins to go with five draws while Erigaisi, who began with a loss to Harikrishna posted three wins. Harikrishna and Aronian, who drew all their seven matches, were unbeaten. Iranian GM Maghsoodloo, who was also in contention for the Candidates and required a tournament win here, had a modest run and could only finish sixth (with 3.5 points). Results after Round 7: D Gukesh drew P Harikrishna, Arjun Erigaisi beat Sanan Sjugirov (Hungary), Parham Maghsoodloo (Iran) beat Alexandr Predke (Serbia), Pavel Eljanov (Ukraine) drew Levon Aronian (USA). Final Standings: 1. D Gukesh 4.5 points, 2. Arjun Erigaisi 4.5 points, 3. P Harikrishna 4 points, 4. Pavel Eljanov 4 points, 5. Levon Aronian 3.5 points, 6. Parham Maghsoodloo 3.5 points, 7. Sanan Sjugirov 2.5 points, 8. Alexandr Predke 1.5.

Stokes, Archer will have T20 Word Cup places kept open: Mott

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO)

Star all-rounder Ben Stokes' smatch-winning prowess and Jofra Archer's "box-office pace" are a must for England in the 2024 T20 World Cup and the two injured players will have places kept open in the team for them, said white-ball coach Matthew Mott. Stokes is recovering from a knee operation he underwent in November and hopes to be fit to captain England in the Test series in India in January-March next year. While fast bowler Archer has not featured for England since March because of an elbow injury. The duo is expected to make the T20 World Cup squad for the showpiece event starting in June, fitness permitting. "I think that's a given," Mott said when asked whether Stokes and Archer will be in the mix for World Cup selection. "Ben, aside from his incredible match-winning ability in every department, gives us that ability to have a seam bowler in



your top six that gives you so many options with your team balance...It makes selection a hell of a lot easier. So that's a given," he said ahead of the fifth and final T20I against West Indies here. "In terms of Jofra, you've just got absolute box-office pace, change of pace, bowl any over in the innings. Bowl your Super Over, bowl your last over when they need to. Him on the park is massive, everyone would agree with that." Archer has struggled with a

series of injuries which have kept him out of Test cricket since 2021. He played just seven white-ball games in 2023. He has not been selected in the Test squad to tour India in January-March next year. The T20 World Cup will be held in June next year in the West Indies and United States. Mott also indicated that the opening pair of Jos Buttler and Phil Salt is also expected to be in the T20 World Cup team. "It's looking pretty good, isn't

it?" Mott said when asked about the Buttler-Salt pairing that has put on back-to-back century partnerships in the last two innings. "We've got a lot of time between now and then. Obviously, Salty has put an undeniable case there and Jos is one of the greatest of all time. So how we get that top six or seven going will be an interesting thing." The five-match T20I series between England and the West Indies is levelled at 2-2 with the last game to be played here on Friday. The series is significant for England as all of their group-stage fixtures of the T20 World Cup are expected to be played in Antigua, Barbados and St Lucia. "We always said with this series we'll go pretty close to the side we're looking for, otherwise why would they be here?" Mott said. "We don't get many opportunities to play together before the World Cup. So this is a very strong team we've bought out here."

Kiyana, Harsh win gold in Asian Youth Chess Championships

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two Indian youngsters, Kiyana Parihar (U-8 Girls) and Harsh Suresh (U-16 open) won gold medals in the 25th Asian Youth Chess Championships (Classical), held at Al Ain Convention Centre in UAE. Kiyana had also bagged the silver

medal in the Asian U-8 Girls rapid chess championship held last week. Three Indians, AS Sharvaanica (U-8 Girls), Aarit Kapil (U-8 Open) and G Tejaswini (U-18 Girls), won silver medals in their respective classical championships, while Aadya Ranganath won a bronze in the U-10 girls category.



AS Sharvaanica, who had bagged two gold medals earlier in the 25th Asian Youth festival in U-8 Girls rapid and U-8 girls blitz categories, became the only player to win medals in all three (blitz, classical and rapid) categories. The Soviet players, who played under the FIDE flag, reigned supreme by winning four gold, four silver and two

bronze medals while China bagged two gold, one silver and one bronze medals. India had bagged nine medals, including four gold (Bhagyashree Patil U-18 girls, Sapariya Ghosh U-14 girls, A S Sharvaanica U-8 girls and Muhammad Shyan Ibrahim U-8 Open), in the Asian Youth Rapid Chess Championships held December 13.