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WRESTLING CONTINUES

Centre suspends newly formed wrestling body

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Sports Ministry on Sunday suspended the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), three days after it elected new office bearers, for not following the provisions of its own constitution while taking decisions and also asked IOA to constitute an ad-hoc panel to manage the affairs of the sports body.
In suspending the WFI, the Government cited its "hasty announcement" of organising the U-15 and U-20 nationals "without following due procedure and not giving sufficient notice to wrestlers" for preparations.
Hours after getting elected as WFI president on Thursday, Sanjay Singh had announced that age group national championships will be held from December 28 in Gonda, UP.
The Ministry felt the new WFI body was working under the complete control of its former office-bearers, which was not in conformity with the National Sports Code.
Soon after WFI's suspension, BJP chief JP Nadda called Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for a meeting after which the former WFI boss announced that he was taking "retirement from the sport."
"The new body has not followed the WFI constitution.



BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh addresses the media after the Sports Ministry suspended the newly-elected Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) body for not following rules, in New Delhi on Sunday

The Federation stands suspended till further orders. WFI will not be taking care of day to day activities of wrestling. They need to follow the due process and the rules," a Sports Ministry official told PTI.
The source explained further the reasons for WFI's suspension. "This announcement is hasty, without giving sufficient notice to wrestlers who are to take part in the said nationals and without following the provisions of the constitution of WFI.

"Such decisions are to be taken by Executive Committee, before which agendas are required to be placed for consideration. As per Article XI of the WFI constitution under the Heading 'Notices and Quorum for Meetings', minimum notice period for EC meeting is 15 clear days and quorum is of 1/3rd of representatives. "Even for Emergency EC meeting, minimum notice period is 7 clear days with quorum requirement of 1/3rd of repre-

sentatives." The Ministry also did not appreciate the fact that WFI secretary general Prem Chand Lochab, who won from the rival Anita Sheoran-panel, was not consulted before taking decisions. "It seems secretary general has not been involved in the said meeting of EC, which was held without any notice or quorum," the source added. The source said the new body had started functioning from

the same premises (Brij Bhushan's official bungalow) where the previous office-bearers operated and where the alleged sexual harassment of the players had taken place. "Newly-elected body appears to be in complete control of former office-bearers in complete disregard to the Sports Code. WFI chief Sanjay Singh told PTI that they will seek revocation of the federation's suspension by explaining to the Government that they have not flouted any rules and if the issue is not resolved, they may explore legal options. "We are seeking time from the Sports Minister and will request him that the suspension be lifted. If the issue is not resolved through dialogue, we could explore legal options," Sanjay Singh said. "We will explain that we have followed rules in taking decisions. We will present the proofs. Whatever decisions were taken, were taken by consensus. It was not my personal decision. 24 State associations had given affidavits and we have got e-mails, we have everything in writing," the sports administrator added. Sakshi Malik, one of the prominent faces of the agitation against former Brij Bhushan, welcomed the Ministry move.

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COVID rears its head again

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The rise in the new JN.1 subvariant of the Covid virus globally has alarmed countries, including India, which has now directed the States to send samples of all Covid-19 test swabs for whole-genome sequencing. This measure aims to keep vigilance on the variant, as advised by the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen surveillance. India has reported 656 cases and one death in the last 24 hours, according to Government data. Authorities said the numbers could be higher, as people are not coming forward to conduct tests ahead of festivities and the winter season. So far India has reported 22 cases of JN variant. Meanwhile, the WHO has called upon nations in the South-East Asian region to enhance their monitoring efforts in light of the rising instances of respiratory ailments, including Covid-19 and its emerging sub-variant JN.1, as well as influenza. Additionally, the WHO has encouraged individuals to adopt precautionary measures. The WHO's advice for people not to lower their guard holds significance, considering that in May, it declared that Covid-19 no longer constituted a public health emergency of international concern due to a sustained decline in infection



trajectory, hospitalizations, and deaths, along with high levels of population immunity to SARS-CoV-2. "The Covid-19 virus continues to evolve, change, and circulate in all countries globally. While current evidence suggests the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is low, we must continue to track the evolution of these viruses to tailor our response. "For this, countries must strengthen surveillance and sequencing, and ensure sharing of data," said Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director, WHO South-East Asia. WHO has classified JN.1 as a variant of interest following its rapid global spread. In recent weeks, JN.1 was reported in multiple countries, and its prevalence has been rapidly increasing globally. Considering the limited available evidence, the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low at the global level, Singh said. It is anticipated that this

variant may cause an increase in Covid-19 cases amid surge of infections of other viral and bacterial infections, especially in countries entering the winter season. "As people travel and gather for festivities during the holiday season, spending a lot of time together indoors where poor ventilation facilitates the transmission of viruses that cause respiratory diseases, they must take protective measures and seek timely clinical care when unwell," said Dr Khetrapal Singh. The regional director also emphasised on the importance of vaccination against Covid-19 and influenza, especially for people at high risk. "All WHO-approved Covid-19 vaccines continue to protect against severe diseases and deaths from all variants including JN.1," she said. While considerable progress has been made in establishing and strengthening a global system to detect and rapidly assess risks posed by SARS-CoV2, testing and reporting of Covid-19 cases has decreased. On the vaccine efficacy to contain the new variant of Covid, former AIIMS director and senior pulmonologist Randeep Guleria is quoted by an agency saying, "We need a vaccine which covers a broader type of the virus. We have had multiple mutations: Jn.1 is a sub lineage of Omicron. So a vaccine which is made against Omicron will be effective against this variant also."

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Ultras kill retired police officer in Kashmir mosque

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Shattering peace in the Kashmir valley, a retired police officer was shot dead by 'unidentified' terrorists while he was giving the call for 'azaan' from inside a mosque early Sunday morning in the Gantmulla locality of Sheeri area in North Kashmir's Baramulla district. The incident took place at a time when thousands of tourists and adventure sports lovers had already landed in the Kashmir valley to join the Christmas and New Year celebrations across the ski resorts of Gulmarg and Pahalgam. This is the first such incident where a worshipper has been targeted inside a religious place by 'unidentified' terrorists in recent years. The religious places had earlier witnessed a hostage crisis where security personnel safely evacuated civilians to prevent any collateral damage during gunfights with terrorists holed up inside religious places. The deceased worshipper has been identified as retired Superintendent of Police Mohammad Shafi Mir. He retired from his active services in 2012. Mir had become the local "muezzin" — a person who calls for prayers — and he was devoted to his duties at the mosque, a resident said. "Terrorists fired upon Shafi, a retired police officer, at Gantmulla, Sheeri Baramulla, while praying 'azaan' in the mosque and he succumbed to injuries," the Kashmir Zone Police said in a post on X. He was later laid to rest in his ancestral graveyard in Baramulla. The killing of a retired police officer has been widely condemned by a section of political leaders and the residents in the area. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha in his condolence message wrote on X, "Pained beyond words on the dastardly terrorist attack on a retired police officer, Shafi while he was giving a call for prayer in the mosque. Cowards responsible for this barbaric act will not be spared. My condolences to the bereaved family in this hour of grief."

Recalling the moments before Shafi was killed, his cousin Mohammad Mustafa, who was at home, said the call for the pre-dawn prayers was being given by a loudspeaker and suddenly it stopped. His last words were "reham (mercy)," he said.

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Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar and UP CM Yogi Adityanath at the Convocation Ceremony-2023 of Gautam Buddha University, in Noida, on Sunday

Fissure in INDIA Bloc over anti UP, Bihar rant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI/PATNA/NEW DELHI

A video clip of an alleged derogatory remark made months ago by DMK Lok Sabha MP Dayanidhi Maran, where he commented on workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar cleaning toilets and performing other menial jobs in Tamil Nadu, was widely circulated on social media on Sunday. This circulation led to a war of words between the BJP, the ruling party in Tamil Nadu (DMK), and the RJD. The RJD is an alliance partner of the DMK in the large Opposition Bloc INDIA led by the Congress. In the State, the DMK and the Congress are in a coalition Government. What is now being called yet

another offensive remark by a DMK member comes after the Gau Mutra row involving the party's Lok Sabha MP Senthilkumar, and before that, the controversial remarks on Sanatan Dharma made by the State's Deputy CM Udaynidhi Stalin, which were also advocated by several other party leaders in the southern State, sparking a huge controversy at that time. Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav condemned Maran's alleged remark albeit in a defensive way. Yadav said like his RJD, the DMK headed by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin was a party that believed in social justice and it was unbecoming of a leader of such a party to have made such a remark.

"Had the DMK MP highlighted caste inequities, had he pointed out that only people from some social groups took up such hazardous jobs, it would have made sense. But to speak disparagingly of the entire populace of Bihar and UP is reprehensible. We condemn it. We believe that people should be respectful towards those coming from other parts of the country," asserted Yadav at Patna. In the video clip, Maran purportedly said people in the States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who had learnt 'only Hindi', construct houses, clean roads and toilets in Tamil Nadu, after learning Tamil. "This is the scenario if Hindi is learnt," Maran is allegedly heard.

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The City of Joy echoes with a sacred symphony of Gita Hymns

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as the City of Joy created yet another world record on Sunday, with more than a lakh people jointly reciting the hymns from The Holy Gita, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the initiative, iterating through his message, "The recitation of Srimad Bhagavad Gita by such a large gathering of people who have come together from different walks of life will not only boost social harmony but also infuse energy into our nation's development journey." Praising the Lokkho Konthe Gitapatha, organised by the Lokkho Konthe Gitapatha Committee — an association of Sanatan Sanskriti Sansad, Matilal Bharat Tirtha Seba Mission Ashram, and Akhil Bharatiya Sanskrit Porisad — the Prime Minister said, "Our cultural heritage is an amalgamation of lofty traditions, profound knowledge, and philosophical-spiritual wisdom. "Inclusivity, cultural diversity, and harmony are our inherent strengths. From the times of Mahabharat to our Freedom Movement, down to the present day, Srimad Bhagavad Gita continues to inspire one and all." The pluralism of the path that The Gita offered transcended the boundaries of time and space, he said, adding how it offered "insights into the true nature of the world, one's own self, and the entire universe." Expecting that the recitation of The Gita by such a large number of people would bring sufficient energy to society, the Prime Minister said, "The period till 2047 is an opportunity to fulfill the vision of building a strong, developed, and inclusive Bharat through collective efforts." More than one lakh people jointly chanted the eternal slokas of The Gita led by Shankaracharya of Dwarka



BJP supporters and devotees participate in 'Lokkho Kanthe Gita Pathi' (one lakh Bhagwad Gita recitation) event, at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata, on Sunday

Math and many other seers and sadhus — all amid the blowing of 20,000 conch shells. The air was spiritually electric, as many visitors expressed. The recitation of The Gita on Christmas Eve transported Kolkata's own brand of "renaissance spirituality" to a different height where you saw no difference between Krishna (the Lord) and Krishna (the Jesus)," said one of the sadhus, adding, "Now one understands that Kolkata is truly the City of Ramakrishna Parmahansa and Swami Vivekananda." Meanwhile, politics also caught up with the holy hymns, even as the State BJP, which provided massive backup support for the programme to be a reality, claimed that after Sunday, the history of Kolkata and Bengal would change once and for all. "The Trinamool Congress has polluted the air and culture of Bengal ... it had started with the agnostic Left rule who advocated playing football rather than chanting The Gita ... now the

people of Bengal tread a different path ... there will be a new reawakening in Bengal," said an upbeat State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar. "Brigade Parade Ground (where the program was organized) has seen a new era unfold in Kolkata ... this Ground has seen huge political meetings but not a religious program of such magnitude and one is sure the people will change after this," he said. Though State Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari earlier said his party had nothing to do with it and that The Gita path was "not at all linked to the coming general elections," his teammate Majumdar made no bones about his party's active involvement, asking "where is the wrong if the BJP men have actively taken part in it?" Quoting the Prime Minister, Majumdar said how "The Gita is the gift of India to the world, and the world had no bigger thing to get from India than the preaching of The Gita."

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Mega campaign lined up ahead of Ram Temple opening event

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of January 22, the day of the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple, traders and business communities have decided to launch a national campaign "Har Shahr Ayodhya-Ghar Ghar Ayodhya", from January 1, 2024, across the Country. The consecration day will be celebrated like the Diwali festival across India. Under the campaign, more than 5,000 "Ram Ferries" (Ram Shobha Yatra) will be organised in the markets across the country.

These "Ram Ferries" will create enthusiasm and connect the people in the markets through chanting Ram Bhajans, while more than 2,500 "Ram Samvad" programmes will also be organised. Traders body also asked traders and business communities to put up Shri Ram Mandir stickers and posters on their shops, establishments and vehicles.

It is also suggested that, to preserve the memory of Ram Mandir, they should gift the "replica of Ram Mandir" to each other and keep them at their homes and establish-



ments. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has issued an advisory to thousands of trade organisations across the country, advising that from January 1 to January 22, trade associations in every city of all the States of the country should join hands with other social and cultural organisations. CAIT national secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said a target has been set to organise bhajan-kirtan programmes of Lord Shri Ram by organising more than 5,000 "Ram Chowki", in maximum markets and houses of traders

across the country. He said the Vishva Hindu Parishad has called to make memorable the consecration programme of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22, and to celebrate the day like Diwali festival. "On the day of the consecration of Lord Ram, all the markets across the country including Delhi will be illuminated with attractive lights, while on the same day, Shri Ram Mandir will be lit at many places in temples and other public places in all the cities across the country including Delhi.

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Army Chief likely to visit J&K to review security

Mortal remains of 4 soldiers dispatched to their native places

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Army Chief General Manoj Pande is likely to visit Jammu to review the security situation and discuss the measures needed urgently to further strengthen the counter-terrorism grid.

The recent surge in terrorist strikes in areas south of Pir Panjal has already caused a lot of heartburn in the security grid in the region. A change of guard in the Nagrota-based 16 corps is already on the cards. The incumbent Lt Gen Sandeep Jain is scheduled to hand over the baton to Lt Gen Naveen Sachdev. Meanwhile the mortal remains of four soldiers, who sacrificed their lives when two army vehicles were ambushed by highly trained foreign terrorists in the Dera Ki Gali area of Surankote tehsil in Poonch on December 21, were dispatched to their native places after a formal wreath-laying ceremony in Rajouri on Sunday.



On the other hand, a search operation to track down the fleeing terrorists continued near the scene of the ambush, while mobile internet services remained suspended in the twin districts for the second day on Sunday.

The family members of soldiers also attended the solemn ceremony where Army commander of the Northern Command Lt-Gen Upendra Dwivedi led from the front and offered floral tributes to the bravehearts. The soldiers Naik Birender Singh of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand, Rifleman Gautam Kumar of Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Naik Karan Kumar of Kanpur, and Rifleman Chandan Kumar of Nawada in Bihar made the

supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. Lt Gen Dwivedi interacted with the next of kin of the slain soldiers at the wreath-laying ceremony. General Officer Commanding of Jammu-based White Knight Corps Lt Gen Sandeep Jain, Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Vikas Kundal, Senior Superintendent of Police, Rajouri Amritpal Singh and other officers and ranks of the Army also paid floral tributes. The residents in Rajouri also paid rich tributes as the cavalcade of army vehicles, carrying the mortal remains, passed through the area. A large number of people, standing atop rooftops, saluted the mortal remains and shouted patriotic slogans.

Jaishankar to begin Russia tour today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will pay a five-day visit to Russia beginning Monday with an aim to discuss various bilateral and global issues. Jaishankar will travel to Moscow as well as St. Petersburg, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday, announcing the trip. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit Russia from December 25 to 29 as a part of the ongoing high-level exchanges between the two sides, it said. "The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterized by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," it said. The MEA said the external affairs minister will meet Russia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov to discuss matters related to economic engagement. Jaishankar will also hold talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for discussion on bilateral, multilateral and international issues, it added. "Focusing on the strong people-to-people and cultural ties

between our two countries, the external affairs minister's programme will include engagements in Moscow and in St. Petersburg," the MEA said. It is learnt that the two sides are expected to discuss various aspects of the bilateral relations, especially in areas of trade, energy, defence and connectivity. Jaishankar's visit comes as it has become clear that the annual India-Russia leaders' summit will not take place this year too. The summit between the prime minister of India and the Russian president is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two sides. So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternatively in India and Russia. The last summit took place in New Delhi in December 2021. The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. India's import of Russian crude oil has gone up significantly despite increasing disquiet over it in many Western countries. India has not yet condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

Indigenous INS Imphal to be commissioned tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indigenously designed and built warship INS Imphal will be commissioned into the Navy on Tuesday in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at a ceremony in Mumbai. It is the first ship to have been named after a city from the Northeastern region, Navy officials said here on Sunday. The warship weighing 7,400 tons is a stealth guided missile destroyer equipped with Brahmos surface-to-surface missiles. The ship is 164 meters long and is a potent and versatile platform equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Powered by Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) propulsion, the ship is capable of achieving speeds in excess of 30 knots (56 km/hour). The ship boasts of a high indigenous content of approximately 75 per cent that includes BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, medium range surface-to-air missiles, anti-submarine indigenous rocket launchers and 76mm super rapid gun mount, officials said. The naming of the ship after the capital city of Manipur underlines the importance of the Northeastern region for national security and prosperity, they said. INS Imphal was delivered to the Indian Navy on October 20 after completion of a rigorous and comprehensive trial programme both in the harbour and at sea. Subsequently, the ship successfully test-fired the extended-range supersonic BrahMos missile last month, a first for any indigenous warship before commissioning. Following this milestone, the ship's crest was unveiled by Rajnath Singh in New Delhi in the presence of the chief minister of Manipur.



Upon commissioning, INS Imphal will join the Western Naval Command. The commissioning ceremony will mark the formal induction into the Navy of the third of the four 'Visakhapatnam' class destroyers, indigenously designed by the Indian Navy's in-house organisation, Warship Design Bureau. The ship was constructed by Mazagon Dock Limited, Mumbai. "Imphal can rightfully be regarded as one of the most potent warships to have been constructed in India -- a testament to India's growing shipbuilding prowess in pur-

suit of the national vision of 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat'," an Indian Navy spokesperson said. The ship is fitted with a modern surveillance radar which provides target data to the gunnery weapon systems of the ship. The ship's anti-submarine warfare capabilities are provided by the indigenously developed rocket launchers, torpedo launchers and anti-submarine warfare helicopters. "The ship is equipped to fight under Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions and has a high degree of automation and stealth features further enhancing her combat capability and survivability," the Navy said. It said the time taken to build INS Imphal and for her trials is the shortest for any indigenous destroyer. Imphal's keel was laid on May 19, 2017 and the ship was launched into water on April 20, 2019. "INS Imphal sailed out for her maiden sea trials on April 28 and has completed a comprehensive schedule of trials, both in the harbour and at sea, leading up to its delivery on October 20 within a record time frame of six months -- the fastest for a ship of its size," it said in a statement. "The ship Imphal will have the unique distinction of being the largest and the most advanced destroyer to be ever named after a city from the North-east. This is a befitting tribute to Manipur's sacrifices and contributions in India's freedom struggle -- be it the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891; or Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's hoisting of the INA flag for the first time on April 14, 1944 at Moirang," it said. It said the commissioning of INS Imphal, thus, underscores the salience and contribution of the city of Imphal, the state of Manipur and the larger North-eastern region to national security, sovereignty and prosperity.

The City of Joy echoes with a sacred symphony...

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He said some people (TMC leader Kunal Ghosh) are mocking the event "but soon they will see what effect the hymns of The Gita left on the people of the State." When asked whether he was pointing at the general elections, he said he was "speaking about the general thought process of the people."

The Trinamool Congress, however, refused to attach any importance to the programme, saying the BJP's dirty efforts to divide people were read through by the people of the State when they rejected them in the 2021 Assembly elections.

"No amount of religious programmes would fetch them votes ... they will draw a blank in Bengal," Ghosh said, rejecting the BJP's claim that 1 lakh people had assembled at the Brigade Parade Ground. "We had organised similar programmes earlier where little more than 5,000 people had attended ... this was not bigger than that," Ghosh said.

Ultras kill retired...

From Page 1

The "azaan" had stopped at "Ashhadu Anna Mohammad Rasul-Allah (I bear witness that Mohammad is the messenger of Allah)", he said. Mir is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter.

Mir's younger brother Abdul Kareem said he was sleeping, but was woken up by sounds which he assumed could have been caused because of a problem in the microphone. "My daughter-in-law said she heard people crying..." he said. "Mir used to give the call for 'azaan' every day. I think this was planned as the Imam Sahib (prayer leader) goes home on Saturday and returns on Sunday," Kareem said.

Congress spokesperson Ravinder Sharma condemned the murder saying this is "not Jihad, this is the killing of humanity and sheer terrorism". The National Conference (NC) said violence can never be tolerated in any form. "JKNC president Dr Farooq Abdullah and VP @OmarAbdullah express profound sadness over the tragic Baramulla incident, where retired SP

Mohammad Shafi was senselessly shot dead," the party said in a post on X. Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti said innocent people have become "collateral damage to maintain the facade of normalcy touted" by the Centre.

The BJP termed the act dastardly and said terror and terrorists have no religion. "Dastardly act of killing of 72-year-old retired police officer by those who have no religion. The sons of the devil can't even tolerate 'azaan'... Terror and terrorists have no religion. Strongly condemn this killing, express my solidarity with the bereaved family," BJP's Jammu and Kashmir spokesman Altaf Thakur said. Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party chief Altaf Bukhari in a post on X said, "Condemn the cowardly killing of retired SSP Mr. Mohammad Shafi Mir in Gantmulla, Baramulla. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family in this hour of utter grief and demise. May the departed soul rest in peace and solace in the world hereafter."

Centre suspends...

From Page 1

The source added that the new body had started functioning from the same premises (Brij Bhushan's official bungalow) where the previous office-bearers operated and where the alleged sexual harassment of the players had taken place.

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not resolved through dialogue, we could explore legal options," Sanjay Singh said. "We will explain that we have followed rules in taking decisions. We will present the proofs. Whatever decisions were taken, were taken by consensus. It was not my personal decision. 24 state associations had given affidavits and we have got e-mails, we have everything in writing," the sports administrator added.

Sakshi Malik, one of the prominent faces of the agitation against former Brij Bhushan, welcomed the ministry move. "It is the first step towards something good happening. I hope the government understands more the cause we were fighting for," Malik, who had announced her retirement from sports after the WFI elections, said. "If a woman federation president is there, it will be better for the safety of women wrestlers. It was a fight for sisters and daughters of the country," she added.

Bajrang Punia, who had returned his Padma Shri medalion to the government on Friday in protest over election of Brij Bhushan loyalist Sanjay Singh, said he won't take back his award. "Now that I have returned it, I am not going to take it back. The honour of our sisters

and daughters is bigger than any award. All of you have seen what is happening," the Tokyo Games bronze medal winner told PTI. "I will think about taking it back only after justice is delivered. The matter is in court and we are waiting for justice," he added. Bajrang, Sakshi and Vinesh Phogat had accused Brij Bhushan of sexually exploiting women wrestlers during his tenure as WFI president. Tarun Pareek, under secretary to the Government of India, wrote to Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha, requesting her to constitute an ad-hoc panel at the earliest.

"It becomes incumbent on part of the IOA to make suitable arrangements for the interim for managing the affairs of WFI so that sports persons of wrestling discipline do not suffer," he wrote. The Opposition leaders said the Government's decision was not enough to give justice to the protesting wrestlers and questioned why a loyalist of Brij Bhushan was allowed to contest the elections. "By suspending the committee if the BJP-led ministry thinks they are absolving themselves from not helping the women wrestlers, they are mistaken," Sharad Pawar-led NCP's national spokesperson Clyde Crasto said on X.

WRESTLING CONTINUES

From Page 1

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Bajrang, Sakshi and Vinesh Phogat had accused Brij Bhushan of sexually exploiting women wrestlers during his tenure as WFI president. After his meeting with Nadda, Bhushan announced that he won't be involved in the running of WFI anymore. "I served wrestling for 12 years, good or bad only time will tell. I have taken retirement from wrestling. I am breaking my relationship with the sport. "Now whatever decision has to be taken, whether to liaise with the government or handling the

legal processes, those decisions will be taken by the elected members. The Lok Sabha elections are round the corner and I have to move ahead," he said. Bhushan clarified that the decision to hold the U15 and U20 Nationals was taken in haste because he did not want the young players to lose one precious year of their careers. "In haste, the old committee had to take the decision to organise the U15 and U20 Nationals because on December 31 the competition cycle (of year 2023) was ending and if those tournaments happen after that, one full year of the wrestlers would have been wasted," said Bhushan.

Tarun Pareek, under secretary to the Government of India, wrote to Indian Olympic Association president PT Usha, requesting her to constitute an ad-hoc panel at the earliest. "It becomes incumbent on part of the IOA to make suitable arrangements for the interim for managing the affairs of WFI so that sports persons of wrestling discipline do not suffer," he wrote. The Opposition leaders said the Government's decision was not enough to give justice to the protesting wrestlers and questioned why a loyalist of Bhushan was allowed to contest the elections. "By suspending the committee if the BJP-led Ministry thinks they are absolving themselves from not helping the women wrestlers, they are mistaken," Sharad Pawar-led NCP's national spokesperson Clyde Crasto said on X.

Fissure in INDIA Bloc over anti UP...

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The video clip showing Maran's alleged remark resurfaced on social media and the BJP said that the DMK MP's comment is very objectionable and has derogatory references to Hindi speaking people. The reason for the matter cropping up now is not clear and it could not be ascertained immediately. Citing the example of Sundar Pichai, a native of Tamil Nadu, Maran said he now heads Google and had he learnt Hindi, he would have been employed in the construction sector as a worker. Since children from Tamil Nadu get educated and learn English well, they find employment in the Information Technology sector and earn good salaries. Reacting to the latest comments surfaced, BJP spokesperson Shehzaad Poonawalla said that this has become a habit of the DMK 'for sure'. Many leaders one after the other make such comments and earlier they attacked Sanatan Dharma too. Further, he said: "But the

reason why Congress party and other parties of INDIA alliance are not saying anything is because, perhaps, they are all in it together." Tamil Nadu BJP Vice-president Naryananan Thirupathy said, though it was an old remark, it shows the 'true colours' of DMK leaders who use abusive, and derogatory language against north Indians. DMK spokesperson J Constandine Ravindran however condemned BJP functionaries for deliberately spreading 'falsehood'. "DMK is fully committed to an egalitarian society. No particular state like Tamil Nadu is superior. No other state like Uttar Pradesh or Bihar is inferior. The mala fide intent of the BJP people is evident as they are claiming something that Dayanidhi Maran never said or meant," Ravindran said. The substance of Dayanidhi Maran's speech is all about opportunities available to a person, when she or he, in addition to mother tongue, also learnt the English language well, he clarified.

North Eastern farmers to reap first ever crop of saffron in region

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a major breakthrough led by Indian scientists, a group of aspiring farmers from far north-eastern regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Sikkim are all set to reap the fruits in the first crop of saffron, which may be any time soon. Saffron, whose cultivation has traditionally been limited to specific regions like Jammu & Kashmir is said to be the most expensive spice in the world because of its huge medicinal value.

To meet the huge gap between demand and supply as well as boost the farmers income in the regions outside the valley, the autonomous body has been working on expanding saffron cultivation to the northeastern states too, identifying potential sites by cross-referencing through desktop studies and Geospatial techniques with the geographical and climatic parameters of Pampore region of Kashmir as standard reference. "There is an increasing demand for saffron globally, and the cultivation in new regions is aimed at filling the gap in both domestic and international markets," he said.

So far, as many as 64 farmers (22 in Sikkim, 37 in Arunachal Pradesh and 5 in Meghalaya) have joined hands with the NECTAR to cultivate the saffron at the 15 cultivation sites in the mentioned States intensively assessing the related parameters needed for saffron cultivation, said the scientist. The efforts have started yielding



results. Saffron corms that were sown between last week of September and first week of October in the three North-eastern States are now blooming with flowers. "As of the first week of November, approximately around 37,000 plus flowers were blooming. As saffron flowers spread, at least 200 grams of dried saffron is expected from the region this season," said a scientist from NECTAR. It was in 2021-22, that the NECTAR had carried out pilot cultivation in Sikkim in the Northeast and the results were encouraging enough to spread the cultivation sites. Saffron is a rich source of several bioactive compounds such as crocin, picrocrocin and safranal which renders several therapeutic properties like anti-convulsive, anti-cancer, anti-diabetic, anti-depressant, anti-psoriasis, anti-seizure, antinociceptive, anti-inflammatory, anti-genotoxic and hypolipidemic. It is also widely used in the textile and cosmetic industry. For the past few years, there has been an increasing demand for this spice while the domestic production is not enough to meet the daily demands, said the scientist.

15,000 posts for PwDs filled in special drive: Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Sunday claimed that around 15,000 posts meant for persons with disabilities, which were lying vacant for the past several years have been filled under a special central drive.

Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Dr Jitendra Singh, who is also Incharge, DoPT (Department of Personnel & Training), also said "Under 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016', the categories of disabilities have been increased from 3 to 5 and the Central Government retains the power to add more types of disabilities. "Besides, the reservation quota for Divyangs has been increased from 3 to 4 per cent in Central Government Services and 5 per cent in Education for them."

He was sharing this information with a delegation of Divyang Employees national organisation who called on him here. He highlighted that in addition to the earlier three categories of blindness and low vision; deaf and hard of hearing, and locomotor disability including cerebral palsy, leprosy cured, dwarfism, acid attack victims and muscular dystrophy, the two more categories included are autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and mental illness, and multiple disabilities from amongst persons under clauses (1) to (4) including deaf-blindness.

Mega campaign lined up...

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Arrangements will also be made to show live telecast of the Ayodhya event to the people through big LEDs by placing models and pictures and on that day, traders will fully celebrate all the programs decided by Vishwa Hindu Parishad in their cities", Khandelwal said. He said a target has been set to organise bhajan programmes of Lord Shri Ram by organising more than 5,000 'Ram Chowki' in maximum markets and houses of traders across the country. The traders body has also requested that hoardings should also be put up in the markets. Shri Ram Mandir

stickers, posters etc. should be put up on shops and vehicles and Shri Ram cards will be distributed. The Yogi Government in Uttar Pradesh will hold recitation of the Ram Charitmanas and Hanuman Chalisa in all prestigious temples and 'muths'. The programme will start from January 14 and continue till the consecration ceremony. As per plan, every district, through the District Tourism and Culture Council, local artists will continuously recite Ramcharitmanas and Hanuman Chalisa from Makar Sankranti on January 14 till the consecration of Ramlala on January 22, 2024.

Common stomach bacteria may increase risk of Alzheimer's

New Delhi: A common stomach bacteria found in two thirds of the world population may be linked to a higher risk of Alzheimer's disease, a new research has suggested. The study, published in Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association, investigated whether a clinically apparent Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection increased the risk of Alzheimer's disease in people aged 50 and older. The prevalent infection can trigger indigestion, gastritis, ulcers, and even stomach cancer. PNS



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Hanzalah, S/o. Mohammad Ozair, R/o. AB-452, Amarपुरi, Nabi Karim, Paharganj, New Delhi-110055 have changed my name from Hanzalah to MD Hanzalah for all future purposes.

PD(228)A

Withdraw drugs that failed quality tests, Health Department told

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the procurement and supply of spurious and non-standard drugs, including some life-saving medicines, in Delhi government hospitals and Mohalla Clinics, the Directorate of Vigilance of the Delhi Government has written to the health department to withdraw the drugs that failed quality standard tests and asked to ensure that no payments are made to firms for such drugs. The Vigilance Department has also sought clarification about when these drugs were being procured and supplied. It directed for an action-taken report to be submitted in the next 48 hours. Saxena had recommended the probe into the alleged supply of drugs that "failed quality standard tests" and have the "potential of endangering lives" in Delhi government hospitals. The drugs that were found to be of "sub-standard quality"



included critical life-saving antibiotics used for the treatment of lung and urinary tract infections Cephalexin, according to officials. They also included a steroid for curing life-threatening inflammation in lungs, joints and swelling in the body Dexamethasone, anti-epilepsy and anti-anxiety psychiatric drug Levetiracetam and anti-hypertension drug Amlodipin, they said. "You are requested to ensure that all such drugs which have failed the prescribed norms should be immediately quantified and seized as per due process of law on war footing."

Secondly, you are also requested to ensure that no further payment is made to such companies and all the failed drugs may be immediately identified and should be removed from the stock of all the hospitals where such drugs have been supplied so as to ensure that the general public are not administered with such "Not of Standard Quality Drugs". May also clarify since when these drugs are being procured and supplied," read the official communication dated December 24 by Special Secretary (Vigilance Department) YVVJ Rajasekhar to Secretary Health.

In the communiqué, the Vigilance Department has requested to clarify as to how much payment is made till now to these companies and manufacturers and how much payment is pending. "Besides this, you are requested to take possession of all the documents related to the procurement of drugs inter-alia including tender documents and files relating to the same immediately and provide the original copy of the same to the Directorate of Vigilance, GNCTD on or before 26.12.2023. You are also requested to provide terms and conditions of the appointment of dealers /distributors for execution of supply in respect of above failed drugs," read the letter. According to the vigilance department, three of the 43 samples sent to government labs failed the test while 12 reports were still pending, adding that another five from a different batch of 43 samples also failed. Drugs such as amlodipine, levetiracetam, and pantoprazole failed in both government as well as private labs. Further,

cephalexin and dexamethasone failed in private labs. The report of 11 samples was still pending with the government lab of Chandigarh. The drug samples were lifted by the drug controller on July 25 from the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences, Lok Nayak, and Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospitals which cater to millions of patients, after allegations that several frequently-used medicines, procured from government hospitals were ineffective on patients. The samples were sent to approved government and private labs for testing. These drugs were procured by the Central Procurement Agency (CPA), under the Delhi government's health department and supplied to various government hospitals. The reports of the labs were sent by the drug controller and the health department for further action to the Directorate of Vigilance (DoV) in November. The DoV, based on the reports, found that more than 10% of the samples failed and were "not of standard quality".

Make alternative arrangements for substandard drugs: Bharadwaj

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj directed the Secretary (Health) to make prompt alternative arrangements, in place of 'sub-standard drugs' so that the public is not inconvenienced and the treatment of patients is continued uninterrupted. Bharadwaj expressed his displeasure at the fact that hospital authorities then didn't make any alternative arrangement. In a written communication, the minister expressed his anguish that patients were inconvenienced since they were required to buy these consumables out of their pocket. Directing the Secretary (Health), the minister solicits information on the alternative arrangements of medicines of standard quality by DGHS and the hospitals within a

week. In a note to Secretary (Health), Bharadwaj said it has been brought to my notice that the Vigilance Department has directed Secretary (Health) to immediately remove the five drugs which were not of standard quality namely amiodine, levetiracetam, pantoprazole, cephalaxin and dexamethasone from the stock where they have been supplied. "It was observed that in the recent past certain essential consumables like absorbent cotton wool and rolled bandages were found 'not of standard quality' and were removed from the stock where they were supplied. The hospital authorities then did not make any alternative arrangement for the same and consequently patients were inconvenienced since they were required to buy these consumables out of

their own pocket. Since the aforementioned five drugs which are to be removed from the stock, are also essential in nature and required for treatment of hypertensive disorder, seizure disorder, gastritis infections and respiratory diseases, hence, alternative arrangements should immediately be in place to make them available so that the general public is not inconvenienced and the treatment of patients is continued uninterrupted," Bharadwaj said. "You are directed to inform me regarding the alternative arrangements made by DGHS and the hospitals for making available the five medicines namely, amlodipine, levetiracetam, pantoprazole, cephalaxin & dexamethasone, of standard quality, and their fresh stock position in the healthcare facilities, latest within a week."

Services Department conspiring to bring DJB work to standstill, alleges Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Water Minister Atishi has accused the Services Department of planning a conspiracy to bring works at the Delhi Jal Board to a standstill, and directed the chief secretary to ensure that DJB has full-time members in charge of water, drainage and finance within the next seven days. In a letter to Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar, Atishi on Sunday expressed strong displeasure over the non-appointment of water and drainage members in the Delhi Jal Board resulting in several projects coming to a standstill, and gave seven working days' time to ensure the DJB has full-time members. In the letter Atishi said that DJB is critical civic utility for the people of the national capital as it is responsible for water and sewerage facilities. "The most senior most official responsible for managing water supply is the Member (Water) and the senior most official responsible for managing the sewerage network is the Member (Drainage). However, it is a matter of grave concern that currently the DJB does not



have a Member (Water) or Member (Drainage) since mid-October," she highlighted in her letter. She also said that the incumbent members finished their tenure in mid-October and no interim or permanent members have been appointed. "It is absolutely shocking that DJB has been left bereft of the senior most technical members. This has meant that several projects have come to a standstill because technical approvals can only be given by these technical members," she said. She also said that the files for recruiting the two new members have been shuttling between DJB, Department of Urban Development and Services Department for the last two months. "Both the concerned Ministers

— Water and Urban Development — have been kept in the dark, claiming that it is a 'services' matter and therefore outside the purview of the elected government," Atishi said. She further said that there has been no full-time member (Finance) for more than three months, since the incumbent member is on medical leave. "The Member (Administration) is handing the additional charge of Member (Finance) for several months," the Minister said. "How is DJB supposed to provide water and sewerage facilities to the people of Delhi if it is kept bereft of senior administrators? At worst this seems like a conspiracy to bring DJB to a standstill and at best it is sheer callousness towards the people of Delhi," Atishi said. The Chief Secretary is directed to coordinate between all concerned stakeholders -- DJB, Department of Urban Development and Services Department -- and ensure that Delhi Jal Board has a full time member (Water), member (Drainage) and member (Finance) within seven working days.

Health Minister orders probe into allegations of sexual harassment at Burari hospital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj has directed the chief secretary to constitute an enquiry committee to look into the allegations of molestation and harassment of women contractual workers at a hospital in north Delhi's Burari. A woman, working as a housekeeping staff on a contract basis in Burari Government Hospital, has accused her manager and three supervisors of molesting and harassing her and two other employees, police said. Based on the woman's complaint, her manager and three supervisors of the firm that provide multitasking manpower to the hospital have been booked and asked to join the probe, a police official said. In an official communication to the chief secretary, Bharadwaj said he had learnt from social media that "some unfortunate incident related to outraging the modesty of women & sexual harassment of outsourced workers" has been reported at the Burari Hospital. "However, it appears Delhi Police has been soft against the



accused persons, thereby causing much outrage on social media. Such incidents cannot be tolerated in any situation. You are directed to ensure that the strictest action is taken by Delhi Police against the culprits," read the note. In her complaint, the woman claimed the four accused molested and harassed her and two other female employees on December 17 and December 19. On December 17, the accused allegedly molested the woman and on December 19 they threatened to sack them if she did not agree to their unreasonable demands, an official said. Bharadwaj directed the constitution of an enquiry committee headed by the Health Secretary. "He must submit a preliminary report in 24 hours while the final report must be submitted within a week."



Devotees lighting the candles and pray at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Church, on the eve of Christmas, in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjani Dimri

Religion not method of worship but form of morality, duty: Yogi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said religion is not a method of worship, but a coordinated form of morality, moral values and duty. Addressing the convocation ceremony of Gautam Buddha University in Greater Noida, Adityanath invoked the teachings of Gautam Buddha, saying his life is not only inspirational but also shows a new path to the country and the world. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar was the chief guest at the ceremony. Adityanath said that Gautam Buddha's teachings inspire people to accept problems first in order to be able to find solutions and also to work as a team, adding that working under a single leader is more rewarding. "Buddha gives the message of following the path of religion with wisdom and discretion and acquiring knowledge," he



said. The chief minister said the convocation ceremony has come from the Gurukul tradition of India, in which a Guru, after teaching, preaches to his disciples that the essence of whatever knowledge they have acquired is to speak the truth and follow the path of religion. Buddha also says to take refuge in religion, he pointed out. "Religion is not a method of worship, but a coordinated

form of morality, moral values and duty. It remains the same in every country, time and situation. The method of worship varies according to the country, time and circumstances. But religion is an eternal system," Adityanath said. "Buddha has asked each of his followers to acquire wisdom and prudence. Apart from this, he asked them to work with team spirit. Be it university, industry or family, teamwork

always gives results. However, only that team, which works under one leadership, gives results. Buddha's teachings pave the way for the welfare of humanity," he added. During his address, the chief minister described the vice president as an ideal example of someone reaching from "zero to zenith". The chief minister told the students, who received the degrees on Sunday, that endless possibilities awaited them after university, adding that the young generation has to decide the course of the welfare of the world. He also said educational institutions should not be reduced to become "mere centres for distributing degrees". Educational institutions are built with the money received with the support of the society, so we should be grateful not only towards our mother, father and teachers, but also towards the society," he added.

Need to generate climate to nip in bud anti national narratives: Dhankhar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said there was a need to "generate a climate" to nip in the bud anti-national narratives set afloat by design, by a strategy to malign institutions, high constitutional offices, they must be nipped in the bud," the Vice President said. "Let me tell you boys and girls that India is the only country in the world that has constitutionally structured democracy at the village level, at the panchayat level, at the district level, at the state level and the Central level," Dhankhar said. The vice-president drew a comparison between India of the past and that of the present to say, "Today's India is not in anyone's grip. India has its own thinking in foreign affairs. Our voice is being heard. Our passport has that respect that we had never imagined. We are in

then "they go to Harvard and say this", Dhankhar said. "We have to generate a climate that anti-national narratives set afloat by designs, by a strategy to malign institutions, high constitutional offices, they must be nipped in the bud," the Vice President said. "Let me tell you boys and girls that India is the only country in the world that has constitutionally structured democracy at the village level, at the panchayat level, at the district level, at the state level and the Central level," Dhankhar said. The vice-president drew a comparison between India of the past and that of the present to say, "Today's India is not in anyone's grip. India has its own thinking in foreign affairs. Our voice is being heard. Our passport has that respect that we had never imagined. We are in

a position to take tough steps." "But people must keep in mind the teachings of Gautam Buddha also," he stressed, adding that India is the only country which has not tried to expand outside its territory and instead tolerated invasion. Dhankhar said that India's prime minister has given a message to the world that this is not an era of expansion and not an era of war. "Issues must be decided by diplomacy and dialogue," he said. The vice president told the gathering that a handful of people want to undermine India's growth and ethos and the youth should not stay silent on such issues. "Silence will ever resonate in your ears. Therefore, use your mind, use your discretion, be judgmental about it and then take the right course," he said,

adding, "We have unbreakable faith in Indianness. We will always keep the interest of the nation above everything else. We are proud citizens of Bharat." Dhankhar heaped lavish praise on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the transformation of Uttar Pradesh in terms of investments, and law and order. He said Uttar Pradesh has been catapulted to the status of a "role model of role models." "Desh ki baat to chhodiye duniya mein koi baat hoti hai role model ki to maan-neeey mukhyantri ji Ko yad Kiya jata hai (Let alone the country, across the world whenever role models are discussed, the chief minister's name is mentioned)," the vice president remarked. He noted that Uttar Pradesh has also made its mark in getting investments.

Delhi Metro has changed way Delhiites go to work, party in 21 years of its journey

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

It has been 21 years of the Delhi Metro, 21 years of a public transport system that has been the great class leveller and transformed the way Delhiites work, party and manage their hectic lives in a city that stretches across three states. From its humble beginning in December 2002 with a corridor of just 8.2 km spanning six stations on the Red Line, the Delhi Metro has grown into a network of over 393 kms and 288 stations in 2023, completing an eventful journey of 21 years of opera-

tions. Delhi Metro had begun its commercial operations on December 25, 2002, a day after then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had inaugurated DMRC's first stretch from Shahdara to Tis Hazari on the Red Line. Since then, the Delhi Metro has emerged as the lifeline of the city of Delhi and the entire National Capital Region. More than six million passenger journeys are being performed every single day on the Delhi Metro making it one of the largest mass transit systems in the entire world. The multi-hued network now with lines in

yellow, blue, green, grey and in multiple shades of pink, including magenta and violet transformed the landscape of the city and boosted its transport infrastructure. In the last 21 years, more than 380 km of additional lines have been laid in the NCR, which is a "staggering feat" and probably, the biggest infrastructure marvel created in the country, the Delhi Metro said in a statement on Sunday. In addition, another 65 km of new lines are being laid across the national capital, which will take the network length beyond 400 km in days to come, it said.



The Delhi Metro said 2023 was also a "year of achievements" for the urban transporter. From the September 17, the DMRC started to operate the Airport Express Line at a "massive speed of 120 kilometres per hour." "This historic increase in speed of India's fastest Metro corridor

gradually from 90 kmph to 120 kmph was made possible by meticulous planning and time-bound implementation by DMRC's engineers in consultation with a number of other government agencies and domain experts," the statement said. The total journey from New Delhi to Yashbhoomi Dwarka Sector-25 now takes about 21 minutes. Earlier, the travel time between New Delhi and Dwarka Sector 21 was approximately 22 minutes and now it has reduced to around 19 minutes between these two stations, which saves three minutes.

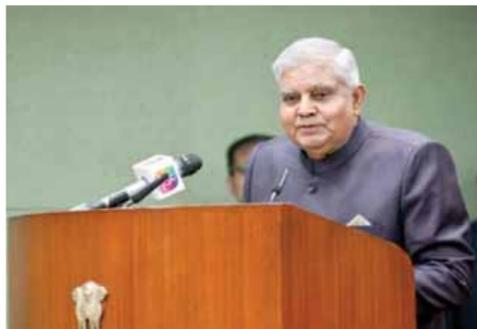
The approximate travel time between New Delhi and Terminal 3 Airport is now about 15 minutes and 30 seconds. Earlier, it was a little more than 18 minutes. In the year gone by, the Delhi Metro introduced a number of new digital ticketing solutions that have made ticketing extremely convenient. While the entire system was made compliant with the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) system, a QR code-based ticketing system was also introduced whereby now commuters can purchase QR code paper tickets or QR code

tickets on the app, officials said. On November 1, the Delhi Metro achieved a milestone with the launch of 'Momentum 2.0,' an innovative platform set to redefine the daily commuting experience for millions in the NCR. The app - 'Momentum 2.0' - provides instant and direct access to services such as Integrated QR Ticketing (mainline and airport line), a wide array of e-shopping choices, digital lockers for quick and safe deliveries, smart utility payments and last-mile connectivity options, the statement said.

One must never deviate from path of service: VP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday described himself as a "sufferer" and asserted that despite taking all affronts and insult, one must never deviate from the path of service. He also said that one must give space to the points of view of others but people must show their "spinal strength" when views are presented with a design to derail others from their path. Addressing a group of Indian Statistical Service probationers here, Dhankhar said though he is the vice president and chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, "people don't spare me". "Should I change my mindset? No. Should that result in deviation of path? No," he told the gathering. His remarks come against the backdrop of disruptions in Parliament and large-scale suspension of opposition MPs from the Rajya Sabha during the just-concluded Winter session of Parliament. While the opposition had alleged that the voice of dis-



sent was being suppressed, Dhankhar has maintained that it was the last step after all attempts to have a dialogue to resolve impasse in the House failed. He also said as young officers, they should never get deterred by those who have a poor digestive system towards the country's growth. "I am a sufferer. A sufferer knows how to withstand from inside. Take all affronts, all insults with one direction -- we are in the service of Bharat Mata. You will have to show integrity and high standards," he said. While describing himself as a

Nadda summons Brij Bhushan for meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president J P Nadda on Sunday summoned party MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for a meeting in a bid to defuse the crisis that erupted as some leading wrestlers restarted their protest after people close to Singh took control of the Wrestling Federation of India. It was only after the nudge from the party leadership that Singh, who has long run the WFI like a pocket borough, announced that he no longer has anything to do with the Federation, sources said. "I am now retired. I have a lot of other work. I have to oversee elections (Lok Sabha) too," Singh, an eastern UP strongman, told reporters after the meeting with Nadda following the announcement of the suspension of WFI by the Sports Ministry for alleged violation of procedures. Asked what transpired in the meeting, Singh merely said that Nadda is his leader and claimed that there was no conversation between them on the wrestling row. The five-term Lok Sabha MP, who is generally combative with a visible swagger, on Sunday appeared self-restraint



in his replies to questions on the wrestling issue, maintaining that he is done with the field. Asked if he will fight the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Kaisarganj again, he said it will be his priority but the decision belongs to the party. His boast about having "dabdaba" (domination) which he had asserted will continue after his confidant Sanjay Singh won the WFI president polls was also gone and some posters carrying the statement were brought down. "I realised that some of these posters smacked of arrogance," Singh conceded. With some of the best-known wrestlers, almost all of them from Haryana and belonging to the Jat community, leading the protest against his sway in the WFI, the BJP is wary of opposition from the farming community, which is concentrated in Haryana, western UP and Rajasthan, in the election period.

Another India bound oil tanker attacked, all crew safe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Another India-bound merchant ship came under suspected drone attack in the Red Sea reportedly by Houthi. The 25 Indian crew members were not injured in the incident on Saturday. Meanwhile, the other merchant vessel hit by drone in the Arabian Sea is likely to reach Mumbai early Monday morning with Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships providing security to it. The Indian Navy is probing into the incident which targeted MV Chem Pluto. It is a Liberian flagged ship and has about 20 Indian crew. No one was injured in the explosion and fire on board. The ship, however, suffered some damage and is now moving toward Mumbai for repairs. The vessel, carrying crude oil to the New Mangaluru port from the Al Jubail port in Saudi Arabia, was struck about 217 nautical miles from Porbandar. As regards the drone attack in the southern Red Sea, it took place on the Gabon-flagged commercial crude oil tanker MV Sai Baba with 25 Indian crew members, Indian officials and the US military said on Sunday. The US Central Command said the vessel, MV Sai Baba, was targeted by a drone launched by Houthi militants in the Southern Red Sea on Saturday.



The US military's statement on the attack came a day after merchant vessel MV Chem Pluto, with around 20 Indian crew members, was hit by a suspected drone about 217 nautical miles off the Porbandar coast in the Arabian sea. "All 25 crew members of MV Sai Baba are learnt to be Indians," said an Indian military official. There were no reports of any casualties. The official said MV Sai Baba is a Gabon-flagged vessel and it had received a certification from the Indian register of shipping. The US Central Command described the vessel as an Indian-flagged tanker. The vessel was reportedly on its way to India. The officials said the Indian Navy is closely monitoring the situation. In a post on 'X', the US Central Command mentioned the

Saturday soon after the UK Maritime Trade Operations, or UKMTO, reported the drone "attack" on MV Chem Pluto that has around 20 Indian crew members. The Navy has launched an investigation into the incident including into the origin of the strike, sources said. The Navy sent stealth guided-missile destroyer INS Mormugao to the location of the drone strike on Saturday and the officials said the warship is in the process of examining various details relating to the attack, the officials said. The incident came against the backdrop of Iran-backed Houthi rebels stepping up attacks on ships in the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. Late Saturday night, the Indian Coast Guard said MV Chem Pluto started making way towards Mumbai post undertaking damage assessment and repairs on its power generation systems. "The Coast Guard Dornier aircraft has sanitised the area and established communication with Chem Pluto. The vessel has started making way towards Mumbai post undertaking damage assessment and repairs on its power generation systems," it said. "The vessel is likely to enter Mumbai and sought escort assistance due to steering issues. Indian Coast Guard Ship Vikram will be escorting the ship during its passage. The Indian Coast Guard

Operations Centre is monitoring the situation closely," it said. Earlier on Saturday, the UKMTO, that operates under Britain's Royal Navy, said it received a report of an attack by Uncrewed Aerial System (UAS) on a vessel causing an explosion and fire, adding the incident took place 200 nautical miles South West of Veraval in India. It said the fire was "extinguished" and there were no casualties. The Coast Guard said its Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Mumbai received information regarding the fire onboard MV Chem Pluto. "The MRCC established real time communication with the vessel's agent and ascertained no loss of life and assured all assistance, he said adding the Coast Guard immediately diverted other merchant vessels in the vicinity of Chem Pluto for rendering assistance," it said. The UKMTO is a British military organisation that provides maritime security information and largely acts as the primary point of contact for merchant vessels involved in maritime incidents. It receives reports and information on suspicious incidents from merchant shipping and shares that information with its regional, national contacts, as well as Industry and vessels operating in that area, according to UKMTO.

'High BP before 55 can impact risk on heart disease later'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Having high blood pressure or high cholesterol before age 55 can have a lasting impact on your risk of heart disease in later life -- even if you subsequently lower your levels, a study published in the journal PLoS ONE has said. The researchers had conducted a three-sample Mendelian randomisation analysis using data from the UK Biobank including 136,648 participants for LDL-C (low-density lipoprotein cholesterol), 135,431 participants for SBP (systolic blood pressure), and 24,052 cases for CHD (coronary heart disease) to assess the effect of duration of exposure to the risk factors on risk of CHD. They discovered that when high LDL-C and SBP levels could be predicted using genetics, there was an increased risk of coronary heart disease, regardless of age at diagnosis. They also stated that those with elevated SBP and LDL-C levels in their early to middle years were at a greater risk of coronary heart disease, regardless of their SBP and LDL-C levels later in life. In addition, they mentioned



that coronary heart disease is often caused by a person's cumulative exposure to risk factors such as SBD and LDL-C, which can have long-term consequences on a person's risk. "These findings support the importance of lifelong risk factor control in young individuals, whose risk of CHD accumulates throughout life," said the researchers. Moreover, the researchers proposed that treating young people with increased SBP and/or LDL-C is critical in order to reduce accumulated exposure over their lives. "Our findings suggest that old age alone should not be a reason to withhold otherwise appropriate LDL-C and BP-lowering treatments, because the effect of genetically mediated LDL-C and SBP on the incident risk of (coronary heart disease) is consistent throughout life," they wrote.

Three new features on iGOT to be launched on Good Governance Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre will launch a curated training programmes for Government employees on Good Governance Day on Monday. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) is going to celebrate Good Governance Day on December 25, an official statement issued on Sunday said. Singh, the Union Minister of State for Personnel, will launch three new features on the iGOT (integrated government online training) Karmayogi platform: My iGOT, blended programmes, and curated programmes, it said. My iGOT delivers targeted training courses on the home page of individual officers that directly address the unique capacity-building needs of the officer as identified in the capacity-building plan for their ministries/departments thereby facilitating a highly personalised, focused and targeted capacity-building experience, it said. More than 28 lakh users have onboarded the platform till now with about 830 high-quality e-learning courses being made available on the platform, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry.



Blended programmes on the iGOT-Karmayogi platform will facilitate equitable access to training methodologies across all levels to meet the dynamic training needs of the officials, it said. Blended programmes integrate traditional offline (in-person) classroom courses with online learning components, it said. It enables officers and faculty to leverage the flexibility and convenience of online courses while retaining the invaluable benefits of face-to-face classroom interactions, the statement said. Curated programmes on iGOT Karmayogi are designed to cater to the diverse learning needs of the ministries/departments and training institutions. The course providers will be able to curate relevant content, resources, and assessments from the repository of iGOT with a programmatic

approach to provide a tailored learning journey, it said. Singh will on Monday launch 12 domain-specific capacity-building e-learning courses developed in two months as part of the Annual Capacity Building Plan of the DoPT by Karmayogi Digital Learning Lab. These 12 courses will not only directly address the domain competency requirements of the civil servants working in DoPT, but also help the other government organisations in handling functional matters on a day-to-day basis in an effective manner, the statement said. The minister will also launch a new blended learning programme named VIKAS (Variable and Immersive Karmayogi Advanced Support) meant for capacity-building of middle management civil servants in the central secretariat.

JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited		
Corporate Identity Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287		
Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Energy, Appasabhe Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025		
T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223 www.jmfinancialarc.com		
DEMAND NOTICE		
Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd (formerly known as Dewan Housing and finance corporation Ltd) have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("the Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFINARC (JM) (herein referred as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of (JM) assignee. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act), in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Nnotice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.		
Name of the Borrower (s)/ Guarantor (s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Description of secured asset (Immovable property)
(LC No. 2560000206 of Karkarduma Noida Branch) Manish Verma (Borrower) Sunita Sukhpal (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4207037 /- (₹ Forty Two lakh Seven Thousand Thirty Seven Only) NPA (05-04-2017)	A-22, T4, Rye, Plot No Gh 06a, Rye Sector Chi - 5 Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 19700042337 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Ashu Sethi (Borrower) Abhishek Yadav (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8984251 /- (₹ Eighty Nine lakh Eighty Four Thousand Two Hundred Fifty One Only) NPA (04-12-2018)	Flat No Ta 104 1st Floor Tower A Aranya Residency Unnati Fortune Plot No Gh-2 Sector 119 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 01400004038 of New Delhi Branch) Jyotsna Rattan (Borrower) Amit Sharma (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8977611 /- (₹ Eighty Nine lakh Seventy Seven Thousand Six Hundred Eleven Only) NPA (04-12-2018)	Unit No 2006 20th Floor Tower 5 The Aranya Gh 02 Sector 119 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 13100001170 of Noida 1 Rajendra Place Branch) Geeta Wahi (Borrower) Pawan Kumar Wahi (Co Borrower 1) Punet Wahi (Co Borrower 2) Himani Tuli (Guarantor 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8837191 /- (₹ Eighty Eight lakh Thirty Seven Thousand One Hundred Eighty One Only) NPA (11-04-2017)	Apartment No- 1606, 16th Floor Tower-a, Sarvotta m Shree Plot No- 51-2 Dps Road Indraprastha Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201010
(LC No. 29700002062 of Greater Noida Branch) Gurnam Singh (Borrower) Paramjeet Kaur (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 15161284 /- (₹ One Crore Fifty One lakh Sixty One Thousand Two Hundred Eighty Four Only) NPA (03-02-2016)	Flat No 519 Fifth Floor Block No- B Sector-29 Rohini New Delhi Delhi - 110085
(LC No. 01400005150 of New Delhi Branch) Saurav Agarwal (Borrower) Sushil Kumar Agarwal (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 7946202 /- (₹ Seventy Nine lakh Forty Six Thousand Two Hundred Two Only) NPA (09-07-2021)	Flat No. A-104, 10th Floor Meadows Vista Phase - 1, Pargana Jalalabad, Morda Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201010
(LC No. 26600002030 of Delhi Rajouri Garden Branch) Md Isteayque Ahmad (Borrower) Farha Bano (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 3333103 /- (₹ Thirty Three lakh Thirty Three Thousand One Hundred Three Only) NPA (03-02-2018)	Flat No. 604, 6th Floor, Tower No. B-6, Palace Heights Plot No. Gh-02 B, Sector 1 Greater Noida (west) Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 13300000421 of Cannught Place Branch) Mukesh Kumar (Borrower) Rekha Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 3001064 /- (₹ Thirty lakh One Thousand Sixty Four Only) NPA (04-01-2020)	Unit No. GA-1-A-1708, 17th Floor Tower A, Gayatri Aura Plot No-gh-11, Sector 1, Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 26600002062 of Delhi Rajouri Garden Branch) Giridhari Lal (Borrower) Lali Devi (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 10315274 /- (₹ One Crore Three lakh Fifteen Thousand Five Hundred Seventy Five Only) NPA (06-06-2017)	Apartment No. E 22/ T 4, Rye Sec Chi-v Yamuna Expressway Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 09200002430 of Rohini Branch) Mandhir Gaba (Borrower) Shanti Parkash Gaba (Co Borrower 1) Archana (Co Borrower 2) Anita (Guarantor 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 13278906 /- (₹ One Crore Thirty Two lakh Seventy Eight Thousand Nine Hundred Six Only) NPA (10-03-2021)	G-36, Upper Ground Floor Radhey Puri Delhi Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110051
(LC No. 09200001355 of Rohini Branch) Moneet Nagpal (Borrower) Anurag Nagpal (Co Borrower 1) Kvm Steel Pvt Ltd (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 12028930 /- (₹ One Crore Twenty lakh Twenty Eight Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty Only) NPA (06-05-2019)	1) Unit No 02 5th Floor Tower P06 Sector-92 Crescent Park Sare Home Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana - 122001 2) Unit No 1, 7th Floor Tower -115, Crescent Parc Green Parc-II Sare Home, Sector-92, Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana - 122001 3) Unit No 02 19th Floor Tower P04 Sector-92 Crescent Park Sare Home Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana - 122001
(LC No. 25600002093 of Karkarduma Noida Branch) Birender Tamsay (Borrower) Priyanka Tomsoy (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8655348 /- (₹ Eighty Six lakh Fifty Five Thousand Three Hundred Forty Eight Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Villa No VF-66, M/5 Royalgolf Link City Projects Pvt Ltd, Rep-2, Sec-27, Noida Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 27900000806 of Greater Noida Branch) Randhir Kumar (Borrower) Kundan Kumar Jha (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4735451 /- (₹ Forty Seven lakh Thirty Five Thousand Four Hundred Fifty One Only) NPA (05-04-2017)	Flat No. 006, G, F, Tower N18 Jaypee Aman Sector 151 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201310
(LC No. 20000042056 of Noida -sector 2 Branch) Pradeep Kumar (Borrower) Inder Pal (Co Borrower 1) Somveer Singh (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2739931 /- (₹ Twenty Seven lakh Thirty Nine Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty One Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Flat No FF-1, First Floor Front Rhs Side Plot No - C3/6 Df Ankur Vihar Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201010
(LC No. 26600002080 of Delhi Rajouri Garden Branch) Vikash Kumar (Borrower) Prakash Jha (Co Borrower 1) Anju Devi (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2060603 /- (₹ Twenty lakh Six Thousand Six Hundred Three Only) NPA (08-09-2020)	Flat No. 1906, 19th Floor Tower 9, Habitech Panchtatva Plot No. Gh-8a, Tech Zone Iv Greater Noida West Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 20000041988 of Noida -sector 2 Branch) Asif Khan (Borrower) Shahjahan Khan (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2510588 /- (₹ Twenty Five lakh Ten Thousand Five Hundred Eighty Eight Only) NPA (05-03-2020)	Flat No - 606, Tower H, Floridaa Sector-82, Faridabad, Haryana Faridabad Haryana - 121004
(LC No. 13300000445 of Cannught Place Branch) Ajay Kumar (Borrower) Ragini Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4121889 /- (₹ Forty One lakh Twenty One Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Nine Only) NPA (04-01-2020)	Flat No A-2301 23rd Floor, Tower Aqua Gayatri Life, 1 F, Sec-16 Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201307
(LC No. 19600042417 of Delhi - Safdurg Branch) Rupesh Kumar Arora (Borrower) Lata Rawat (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 1332298 /- (₹ Thirteen lakh Thirty Two Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Eight Only) NPA (31-07-2021)	Flat No 01 Ground Floor Block B Plot No 41 Spring View Floors New Indraprasth N 24 Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201001
(LC No. 19700043028 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Rajinder Singh (Borrower) Arshpreet Kaur (Co Borrower 1) Amanpreet Kaur (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8598657 /- (₹ Eighty Five lakh Ninety Eight Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Seven Only) NPA (06-05-2017)	Flat No A 1105 11th Floor Block A Sector 1 Nh 8 Piyush Horizon Dharuhera Haryana Gurgaon Haryana - 122106
(LC No. 19700043165 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Vishal Srivastava (Borrower) Preeti Sonthalia (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 11555091 /- (₹ One Crore Fifteen lakh Fifty Five Thousand Ninety One Only) NPA (06-03-2017)	Pyush Horizon Flat No A 306 3rd Floor Block a Sec 1 N H 8 Dharuhera Dharuhera Haryana Mahendragarh Haryana - 123101
(LC No. 19700043095 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Praveen Kumar Sharma (Borrower) Isha Sharma (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 8927437 /- (₹ Eighty Nine lakh Twenty Seven Thousand Four Hundred Thirty Seven Only) NPA (03-11-2017)	Unit No. G-1101 11 Floor Tower G Newtech La Galsida Hra Sra C Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201310
(LC No. 19700043111 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Rohit Kumar (Borrower) Anamika Kumari (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 9305103 /- (₹ Ninety Three lakh Five Thousand One Hundred Thirty Eight Only) NPA (03-11-2017)	Unit No G 1603 16th Floor Block-g Hra 11 Ia Surajpur Site C Newtech La Galaxia Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 19600044861 of Delhi - Safdurg Branch) Gaurav Jatik (Borrower) Deepika Gandhi (Co Borrower 1) Tamanna Jatik (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 5578642 /- (₹ Fifty Five lakh Seventy Eight Thousand Six Hundred Forty Two Only) NPA (10-03-2021)	House no.-C82 Third Floor Sudesthan Park New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110015
(LC No. 28200001333 of Lajpat Nagar Branch) Vishal Tyagi (Borrower) Geeta Tyagi (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2151580 /- (₹ Twenty One lakh Fifty One Thousand Five Hundred Eighty Nine Only) NPA (04-10-2019)	Flat No T1-005, Tower - 9, First Floor 'Riddhi Siddhi' Sector 9 Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana - 122001
(LC No. 1900000988 of Raj Nagar Branch) Mukesh Jain (Borrower) Neha Jain (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 5994683 /- (₹ Fifty Nine lakh Ninety Four Thousand Six Hundred Eighty Three Only) NPA (04-01-2019)	9th Floor 903- Tc Shivalki Homes Cosmos Infrastructure Phase-2 Surajpur G B Nagar Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 2660000622 of Delhi Rajouri Garden Branch) Vikas Kumar (Borrower) Sanje Rathi (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2058432 /- (₹ Twenty lakh Fifty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Thirty Eight Only) NPA (31-08-2021)	Part Of Kharsa No. 175/1 M, Pvt Plot No. 03, Cassia, Village Bherunari (alliance City One), Rudrapur Rudrapur, Uttarakhand Nainital Uttarakhand - 263152
(LC No. 19600042856 of Delhi - Safdurg Branch) Jatini Tehri (Borrower) Praveesh Goel (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 13656659 /- (₹ One Crore Thirty Five lakh Sixty Six Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Nine Only) NPA (06-05-2019)	Unit No. 0601 6th Floor Tower G2 The Grand Sare City Sector 92 Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana - 122001
(LC No. 19600042804 of Delhi - Safdurg Branch) Rashid Ali (Borrower) Ujjayati Ali (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4615304 /- (₹ Forty Six lakh Fifteen Thousand Three Hundred Four Only) NPA (03-02-2019)	Flat No 1006 10th Floor Tower Jazz Rhythm County Gic 16e Sector 1 Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 19600042774 of Delhi - Safdurg Branch) Anesh Saxena (Borrower) Nitish Saxena (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 10655295 /- (₹ One Crore Six lakh Fifty Five Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Five Only) NPA (04-01-2019)	Unit No. 1801, Block-18th Floor, Antriksh Forest Sector-77 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 14600007111 of Meerut Branch) Arun Kumar (Borrower) Pooja (Co Borrower 1) Neeraj Kumar Kansal (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2688773 /- (₹ Twenty Six lakh Eighty Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Seventy Three Only) NPA (03-09-2020)	Ground Floor Plot No C-137 Block - Ark City Delhi Roorki Bypass Road Near Sainik Vihar Nanglatashi Meerut Meerut Uttar Pradesh - 250001
(LC No. 19000001197 of Raj Nagar Branch) Ashwani Kumar Sharma (Borrower) Shweta Sharma (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4317591 /- (₹ Forty Three lakh Seventeen Thousand Five Hundred Ninety One Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Flat No F15-1204, 12th Floor O2 Habitat Builder Pvt Ltd Situated At Gh-05 Tech Zone Se Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 20000042226 of Noida -sector 2 Branch) Vaibhav Mishra (Borrower) Raj Kumar Mishra (Co Borrower 1) Kaushal Kumar Jha (Co Borrower 2)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2301334 /- (₹ Twenty Three lakh One Thousand Three Hundred Thirty Four Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	FF-3 First Floor Ihs plots No A-70 Block-a Sff Ved Vihar Lohi Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201012
(LC No. 0920001609 of Rohini Branch) Sudhir Ranjan (Borrower) Ritu Ranjan (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 5066624 /- (₹ Fifty lakh Sixty Six Thousand Six Hundred Twenty Four Only) NPA (04-10-2019)	Flat No 1206, 12th floor tower - A, Spring View Heights, Nh-24, Gram Bamheta, Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201002
(LC No. 19800041450 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Vikas Ahuja (Borrower) Priya Ahuja (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2668805 /- (₹ Twenty Six lakh Sixty Eight Thousand Eight Hundred Five Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Unit No. T-13/0803, 8th Floor Lake Appt Lake Grove City Ghatil Sonipat Sonipat Haryana - 131028
(LC No. 01400004627 of New Delhi Branch) Suresh Chand Yadav (Borrower) Rawl Yadav (Co Borrower 1) Suneta Devi (Co Borrower 2) Rajavir Kumar (Guarantor 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4392105 /- (₹ Forty Three lakh Ninety Two Thousand One Hundred Five Only) NPA (04-04-2020)	Flat No. 7, First Floor Property No. D-60 Kh No. 602, 605 & 607 Krishna Park Khanpur Devli Road Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110062
(LC No. 19900041633 of Faridabad - Sector 19 Branch) Ruchi Salwan (Borrower) Jitender (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2638536 /- (₹ Twenty Six lakh Thirty Three Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Six Only) NPA (06-03-2019)	Flat No-n202 Second Floor Tower-n The Golden Palms Plot No- GH01/e Sector-168 noida Up Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 25600007729 of Karkarduma Noida Branch) Ritesh Srivastava (Borrower) Tulika Srivastava (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 4887981 /- (₹ Forty Eight lakh Eighty Seven Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty One Only) NPA (04-07-2019)	Unit No E1/1504, 15th Floor, Tower-e1 Patel Neotown, Plot No Gh 03 Sector Techzone 4 Greater Noida West Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 24900001845 of Delhi Janakpuri Branch) Mukesh Kumar (Borrower) Namita (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 1363337 /- (₹ Thirteen lakh Sixty Three Thousand Three Hundred Thirty Seven Only) NPA (08-02-2022)	Dda Sfs Flats No.492, 3rd Floor, Gh-13 Paschim Vihar, New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110063
(LC No. 2560000834 of Karkarduma Noida Branch) Manoj Verma (Borrower) Poonam Verma (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 653532 /- (₹ Six lakh Fifty Three Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Two Only) NPA (31-07-2021)	1/2271-6, Old Plot No-1412/2a, Second Floor/khsara No- 2676/135, Gali No- 8, Ram Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110032
(LC No. 27900001775 of Greater Noida Branch) Mohit Kumar (Borrower) Seema Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 3972062 /- (₹ Thirty Nine lakh Seventy Two Thousand Sixty Two Only) NPA (30-04-2021)	Flat No- 205, Second Floor, Block- H, Delhi- 99, Opp. Avas Vikas Bhogura Tila More Road Ghaziabad, Up Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201010
(LC No. 01400004900 of New Delhi Branch) Amna Wahab (Borrower) Mohd Wahab (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 1553292 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Fifty Three Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Two Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Unit no- D302, 3rd floor, Tower-D, Sanskriti, Plot nagh-10, sector-10, Greater Noida Ghaziabad Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 1970UR34535 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Ajitesh Pawan (Borrower)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 2595109 /- (₹ Twenty Five lakh Ninety Five Thousand One Hundred Nine Only) NPA (03-09-2021)	H/FLAT No.503, FLOOR No. 5TH, PLOT No. TOWER D, GENESIS FLORA, VILLAGE. BHIWADI BHIWADI ALWAR RAJASTHAN - 301019
(LC No. 19700044553 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Tawaseet Ahmed Tilo (Borrower)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 3415055 /- (₹ Thirty Four lakh Fifteen Thousand Fifty Five Only) NPA (08-09-2021)	H/FLAT No. E 87, PLYUSH FLOR, SECOND, PLOT No. PIYUSE ROSETTE , PLYUSH CITY , SECTOR. ALWAR EXPRESS HI GHWAY , VILLAGE. BHIWADI BHIWADI RAJASTHAN - 301019
(LC No. 28600002328 of Haridwar Branch) Manoj Rai (Borrower) Asha Rai (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 1347971 /- (₹ Thirteen lakh Forty Seven Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy One Only) NPA (08-02-2021)	Plot No 119, Kh No 445 M, Tirth Visthapit Chetra Gram Salempur Meendoli 1 Pargana Nivalgar Haridwar Haridwar Uttarakhand - 249402
(LC No. 24000003234 of Kanpur Branch) Anuj Kumar Gupta (Borrower) Meenakshi Khurana (Co Borrower 1)	01-11-2023 / ₹ 6849669 /- (₹ Sixty Eight lakh Forty Nine Thousand Six Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (08-06-2023)	Flat No.304, Premises No 7/131-B, Swaroop Nagar, Kanpur Kanpur Uttar Pradesh - 208001

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risk of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date : 25-12-2023
Place: Delhi

Authorised Officer
JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited,
acting in its capacity as trustee of Aranya - Trust

First Cabinet expansion in Rajasthan expected in couple of days

PTI ■ JAIPUR
The first Cabinet expansion in Rajasthan is expected to take place in a couple of days and its inductees will be a mix of young and experienced leaders, sources in the BJP said on Sunday.
First-time MLA Bhajan Lal Sharma was sworn-in as the chief minister earlier this month along with Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa as his deputies.
Rajasthan, which has 200 assembly seats, can have a maximum of 30 ministers, including the chief minister.
"The first expansion of the Cabinet is expected on Monday or Tuesday, and around 15 MLAs are likely to be inducted in the Council of

Ministers," a source in the BJP said.
The Cabinet is expected to have a mix of young and experienced legislators as its members, the sources said. They added that among the probables for Cabinet posts are Baba Balaknath, Shailesh Singh, Nauksham Chaudhary, Sandeep Sharma, Jawahar Singh Bedam and Mahant Praptap Puri.
Chief Minister Sharma had recently met BJP president J P Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and others in Delhi, and it is believed that he discussed matters related to Cabinet expansion with them. Since, the chief minister and his two deputies were elected as MLAs from constituencies in Jaipur district, the sources said, it is expected that



Diya Kumar and Bairwa are legislators from Vidhyadhar Nagar and Dudu, respectively. "The strategy will be to maintain a balance between representation of castes and regions in the Cabinet. It is likely that most ministers will be from other parts of the state. While Sharma represents Sanganer in the assembly,

would be in the 40-55 years age bracket," the source said. "It will be an energetic team. Ever since the decision to appoint Bhajan Lal Sharma was taken, there has been enthusiasm among party workers and leaders, who believe that a dedicated worker can be elevated to a higher post," the source said. With the Cabinet expansion, government works will also pick up pace.
On Friday, the finance department had directed all departments to not invite fresh tenders for works till further orders and had said all such works will start after the approval of the government. The government has also asked its departments to not release work orders till further directions, if a work order has

not been released after inviting tenders. In an order, Additional Chief Secretary Akhil Arora has also directed departments to put new works on hold if the work has not already started for a project.
"All administrative departments have been asked to adhere to the directions in the situation of administrative and financial approval given in the past. The departments have been asked that all such approvals should be brought into the notice of chief minister or departmental ministers and the work will be allowed only after their approval," the order read.
The 10 key priorities of the BJP government in Rajasthan include setting up Mahila

police stations in every district and Mahila Desks in all police stations, formation of an anti-romeo squad in major cities and creating a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe various cases, including government recruitment examination paper leak cases. Establishing regional heritage centres at an investment of Rs 6,800 crore, providing free education to all girl students from KG to PG and investing Rs 2,000 crore in the tourism sector to generate employment opportunities for five lakh youths through training are the other priorities.
The SIT to investigate paper leak cases and the anti-gangster task force have been formed on the instructions of the chief minister.

Will abide by decision of INDIA alliance: Farooq

PTI ■ JAMMU
National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah on Sunday said his party would abide by the decision of the INDIA alliance on seat sharing in Jammu and Kashmir for next year's Lok Sabha elections. The former J-K chief minister asked why the government was not holding local bodies elections when it was claiming that peace had been restored in the Union Territory.
"We are part of the INDIA alliance and will abide by its decision," the National Conference (NC) leader told reporters while replying to a query on the sidelines of a book release function here. He was asked about seat-sharing among parties in the Union Territory.
The NC and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are among the regional parties from J-K that are part of the opposition bloc.

Abdullah said his message to the people of Jammu and Kashmir is to remain poll-ready. "We were ready for panchayat, DDC (District Development Council) and even municipality elections this year. Notice was issued but was withdrawn within five days as nobody knows what happened and the elections were deliberately delayed.
"They are claiming normalcy but could not hold an election. If an election can be held in Kargil, why was it not held in Jammu and Kashmir," he said.
Abdullah said his party supports setting up industries that benefit the people, create jobs and will be environment-friendly.
"We do not want industries which spread pollution... We want progress and also desire that J-K moves forward. Our children are unemployed," he said.

Uddhav to sound poll bugle with convention on January 23

PTI ■ NASHIK
The Shiv Sena (UBT), headed by former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, will hold a "mahashibir" and a public rally here on January 23, 2024, the birth anniversary of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray, Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said on Sunday.
Uddhav Thackeray will participate in both the events, Raut told reporters.
The former CM is expected to sound the poll bugle for the next year's Lok Sabha elections with the convention and rally.
"Uddhav Thackeray will hold a mahashibir and address a public meeting in Nashik on January 23," Raut said.
All the party leaders will arrive in Nashik on Monday to work out details for hosting the two events, the Rajya Sabha member said.
The (then undivided) Shiv Sena contested the Nashik Lok



Sabha election in alliance with the BJP and won the seat in 2014 and 2019. Later, two-time MP Hemant Godse switched over to the Shiv Sena camp led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. In June 2022, Shinde and 40 other MLAs revolted against the Shiv Sena leadership, leading to a split in the party and collapse of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas

Aghadi (MVA) government. Shinde then joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form government in the state.
In 2019, the undivided Shiv Sena was part of the BJP-led NDA alliance.
The Uddhav Thackeray-led party is now part of the MVA which includes the Congress and Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party. Raut on Friday said his party will contest 23 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra. The Rajya Sabha member had said he, along with Sena (UBT) leaders Uddhav Thackeray and Aaditya Thackeray, held talks with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi as well as AICC general secretary K C Venugopal before the meeting of the opposition bloc INDIA in the national capital some days back.

Telangana to give ₹5 lakh accident insurance policy for gig workers, cab, auto drivers

PTI ■ HYDERABAD
Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has said the state government will provide Rs 5 lakh accident insurance to gig workers such as those involved in food delivery, and driving cabs and autorickshaws. According to an official release on Saturday, he also assured the gig workers that the government would provide Rs 10 lakh health cover under the Rajiv Arogyasri scheme.
Attending a meeting of cab and autorickshaw drivers and food delivery executives here, the chief minister said the state government will provide social security to workers in the unorganised sectors and will make a policy decision in this direction.
Reddy promised that the state government would study the existing policy for gig workers in Rajasthan and introduce an effective law in the next state budget session, the release said. He also announced Rs 2 lakh financial assistance to the family of a food delivery executive who died four months ago after he fell from a building.
The chief minister advised the cab and autorickshaw drivers and food delivery executives to submit their applications either online or physically in the Grama Sabhas to be organised from December 28 to January 6, the release said. IT and Industries minister D Sridhar Babu was among those who attended the meeting.

'Caste census not done systematically' Fresh survey should be done: Yediyurappa

PTI ■ DAVANGERE (K'TAKA)
Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said state's Socio-Economic and Education Survey, popularly known as the "caste census," was not done systematically, and urged the Congress government in Karnataka to get a fresh survey done and present the facts before the people. Karnataka's two dominant communities -- Vokkaligis and Lingayats -- too have expressed disapproval about the survey, calling it unscientific, and have demanded that it be rejected and a fresh survey to be conducted.
"There is a feeling in everyone's mind that the survey has not been done systematically. I too have a similar opinion. So, a fresh caste census has to be done and facts have to be made known to people. I urge the government to make honest efforts in this regard," Yediyurappa said.
Yediyurappa, a former Chief Minister hails from the Lingayat community. The then Siddaramaiah-led Congress government (2013-2018) in 2015 had commissioned the social-economic and educational survey, popularly known as the "caste census," at an estimated cost of Rs 170 crore in the state. The state Backward Classes Commission under its then chairperson H Kantharaju was tasked with preparing a caste census report.
The survey work was completed in 2018, towards the end of Siddaramaiah's first tenure as Chief Minister, but was not accepted or made public. With pressure



mounting on his government, from a certain section, to make public the state's survey, following Bihar government releasing findings of its caste survey recently, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has said that a decision will be taken once he receives the report.
The Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes under its current Chairman K Jayaprakash Hegde, which has the caste census findings, has been given time till January 31, 2024 to submit the report to the government.
Commenting on the hijab controversy, Yediyurappa said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah should stop sowing the seeds of poison between communities, and that it will in no way benefit him and his party.
"It is good that Siddaramaiah budging under our pressure has withdrawn his statement, at least now let the better sense prevail upon him. We (BJP) are not anti-minorities. BJP believes that Hindus, Christians and Muslims should live together like children of one mother, PM Narendra Modi has said this several times," he said.

Congress attempting to defame previous BRS regime: Rao

PTI ■ HYDERABAD
Alleging that the white paper on state finances released by the Congress government in Telangana was full of errors and lies, the opposition BRS on Sunday said the gross loans made during its regime was only Rs 3,17,015 crore and not Rs 6,71,757 crore as projected by the government.
BRS Working President K T Rama Rao, who made a power point presentation on the financial situation and progress achieved when his party was in power from 2014

to 2023, alleged that the white paper was a jugglery of numbers and contained baseless allegations against the previous BRS government.
The BRS chose to make the presentation, named 'Sweda Patram' (document to show hard work), to expose the Congress government's "hollowness and political bankruptcy," he said.
Telangana will have an outstanding debt of Rs 6,71,757 crore, including non-guaranteed loans of corporations or institutions, by the end of FY 24 against



Rs 72,658 crore in 2014-15, the state government had said on December 20. The state government said in its white paper that the debt within the limits of FRBM

(Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) was Rs 3,89,673 crore. However, Rs 72,658 crore out of the Rs 3,89,673 crore was old loan of the Congress government before BRS assumed power in 2014, Rao said.
"The Congress government says that we pushed the state into a debt which stands at Rs 6,71,157 crore according to its white paper. But our debts are just Rs 3,17,015 crore. The rest are loans raised for capital investments under self-hypothecation and by certain corporations which have a much bigger asset base

and can clear the loans on their own," he said.
Rao claimed that the BRS government in the last decade had ensured a "value creation of more than Rs 50 lakh crore in Telangana."
"There is an attempt to discredit the work of the previous BRS government. In the recent assembly session, we were not given a fair chance to represent our views when they (Congress government) presented a white paper," he said.
Asserting that Telangana has witnessed great progress in the last 10 years, Rao said,

AIADMK founder remembered on his 36th death anniversary

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Rich tributes were paid to AIADMK founder and late Chief Minister M G Ramachandran on his 36th death anniversary.
Former Chief Minister and leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Edappadi K Palaniswami and a host of party leaders clad in black shirts paid floral tributes at the memorial of Ramachandran at the Marina beach here on Sunday.
Later, the party leaders and cadres took a pledge marking the occasion. Actor-politician Ramachandran (popularly known as MGR among his followers), had formed the AIADMK after quitting the DMK in 1972 and assumed office in 1977.
He continued as the Chief Minister for 10 consecutive years till his death on December 24, 1987.
Actor-politician Kamal Haasan in his message said, "let us remember his (M G R a m a c h a n d r a n ' s) achievements in the field of arts and politics. A great man who lives in the memories of all."
Scores of workers of the AIADMK offered prayers and paid floral tributes at the memorial on the occasion.

More than 1,000 cases of child malnutrition in Thane

PTI ■ THANE
More than 1,000 cases of child malnutrition have been found in Maharashtra's Thane district neighbouring Mumbai. Currently, there are 83 cases of 'severe acute malnutrition' and 1,161 cases of 'moderate acute malnutrition' in the district, an official release said. E v e r y effort will be made to end malnourishment in Thane within six months, Zilla Parishad chief executive officer (CEO) Manuj Jindal on Friday said after visiting the families of some of the malnourished children in the district's Shahapur taluka. To bring down the number of malnourished children,

'Kuposhan Muktisathi Dattak-Palak Abhiyan' has been undertaken in the district in which government officials will adopt one child each and take care of him/her, the release said. During his visit, the CEO took stock of the work being carried out at the public health centres in villages and child treatment centres.
He asked the officials to be in touch with the adopted children every 15 days and also directed the anganwadi workers, ASHA (accredited social health activist) workers, doctors, nurses and supervisors to visit the malnourished children daily and check their progress.

Loss of lives during cyclones averted due to world-class equipment: RMC Chennai

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Failed to predict the accurate amount of rainfall in its forecast for the southern districts which faced 'historic' rains last week leading to severe flooding.
Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, however, countered the comments by Stalin and said the RMC in Chennai has 'modern' equipment and is a 'state-of-the-art' facility and it had forecast 'heavy rains' in southern states well in advance.
The RMC Chennai, in a statement, on Sunday said



there were media reports that the centre did not have any modern equipment and was lacking in advanced tools. "There are several equipment -- high speed computers, ISRO's satellite support

Doppler Radars. "These are X-band type radars built in association with ISRO technology. The World Meteorological Organisation also commended the infrastructure at the Centre as world-class," it said. It was due to these facilities that a lot of lives were saved during the impact of various cyclones including Vardah, Gajah, Nivar and Michaung, the centre said. "Making such criticism hurt the sentiments of the dedicated employees of the centre and it is an insult to Indian technology.

LDF announces Cabinet reshuffle, two Ministers resign

New Ministers to take oath on December 29

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Honouring the commitment made to all coalition partners, the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) on Sunday announced a Cabinet reshuffle and said new Ministers will take oath on December 29.
LDF convener E P Jayarajan told the media that

Transport minister, Antony Raju of the Democratic Kerala Congress and Ports Minister Ahammed Devarakovil of the Indian National League have tendered their resignations. "Two ministers have tendered their resignations. New ministers will take oath on December 29. Their portfolios will be decided by

the Chief Minister," Jayarajan told the media at a press meet here.
R a m a c h a n d r a n of Congress (S) and K B Ganesh Kumar of Kerala Congress (B) will take oath as ministers for the rest of the term.
When the second LDF government came to power

in the state in May 2021, partners in the CPI(M)-led alliance had reached an understanding to allocate cabinet berths to four single-MLA parties on a "sharing the term" basis.
The LDF then took the decision to share the term, citing the constitutional clauses that restrict the cabinet to 21 members.



Addressing the media after submitting his resignation, Raju said he was ready to resign in November itself but it was delayed due to the Nava Kerala Sadas. "But maybe due to the Nava Kerala Sadas, the CM and the LDF asked me to continue. Yesterday, it was the culmination of Nava Kerala Sadas and I got the

opportunity to preside over the historic event," Raju said. He also said that he was happy to resign as the Transport minister after clearing all the salary dues to the KSRTC staff.
Devarakovil, who met the media said he was fully satisfied with his role as a minister for the past two-and-a-half years.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bigger mandate

A boost in vote share and seat count in 2024 is on the mind of BJP leaders; it is already setting targets

The BJP plans to roll out its well-oiled, mammoth poll machinery and heavy guns as the nation gears up for the crucial 2024 general elections. The party's recent office bearers meeting, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah took the centre stage, underlined its commitment to strategise and mobilise resources for a formidable electoral campaign. At the two-day meeting, Modi asked workers to work in mission mode and set the party a target of getting 35 crore votes. The BJP's focus on a significant boost in vote share indicates its aspirations to consolidate power and maintain its dominant position in Indian politics. Modi's charismatic leadership has been a key factor in the party's electoral successes. The party is likely to build on the 'Modi wave' by showcasing the Government's achievements and emphasising the leadership's commitment to development and national security. The BJP aims to capitalise on Home Minister Amit Shah's acumen and ability to



strengthen the organisational structure, streamline communication and enhance ground-level mobilisation. Its poll strategy is expected to focus on key States like Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra, which are traditionally considered electoral battlegrounds where the party will strive to maximise its seat count but may encounter tough resistance from satraps and the INDIA bloc. Though the BJP won an impressive 303 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, this time it would have to work harder as it would be pitched against united or partially united Opposition, which may affect its chances in one-on-one fights.

The BJP's traditional stronghold in the Hindi heartland may see a fight from the INDIA bloc, particularly in States where regional parties have a strong presence. The party would be factoring in the fact that the INDIA bloc's vote share in the recent Assembly elections was more than its own. It will need to navigate these regional dynamics and tailor its strategies to address local concerns. To counter the Opposition bloc, the BJP might need to engage in strategic alliance-building. The southern States, traditionally less receptive to the BJP's overtures, present another set of challenges for the party. The cultural, linguistic and political differences in States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana require a nuanced approach. The BJP will need to exhibit cultural sensitivity and acknowledge the distinct identities of these States. Focusing on State-specific issues and showcasing effective governance models will be vital in winning the trust of the southern electorate. The party's ability to strike a balance between national and regional dynamics, leveraging PM Modi's appeal and addressing local issues will determine its success in the upcoming electoral battle. The 2024 elections would test the resilience and adaptability of all political parties in the fray. The stakes are high, the winner takes it all!

PICTALK



Artists in the attire of Hindu deities celebrate Hanuman Jayanti at Patala Anjaneya Temple, in Bengaluru

Atal Bihari Vajpayee: A politician and a gentleman



J S RAJPUT

A poet, politician, statesman and a sophomore – remembering the legacy of Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary

Atal Bihari Vajpayee born on 25th December 1924, firmed up his determination to devote himself to a social and cultural cause, in free India. As a teenager, he was comprehending the national developments and had matured by 1947 to realise how tough a task it was for the nation to re-establish itself on the global stage, and simultaneously give its people what they needed to lead a dignified life. He understood the pulse of the people and was blessed with the gift of a flawless oratory that touched the hearts of the listener, both through his speeches, and also his poetry. He endeared himself to the masses, stuck dexterously to his ideological moorings in thick and thin.

Young Atal Bihari Vajpayee became a member of parliament in 1957 when he was only 33 years old. He was very young in the house of veterans of the freedom struggles. It was not only his oratorical skills that impressed everyone including the prime minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, but the content and intensity of analysis, understanding and inference that he presented before the people. He grew up as a talented young person liked and admired by all around him. A reference is often made to his having compared Prime Minister India Gandhi to Durga, after her admirably courageous handling of the war resulting out of the butchery of Pakistan on its people, and the unprecedented rush of refugees to India. As the major leader of the Opposition, Vajpayee unequivocally gave all the credit to the Prime Minister and praised the defence forces! Whether he used the phrase Durga or not becomes immaterial. Let one also recall that the entire opposition and the people of India –negligible minor exceptions apart – stood firmly behind the leader of the nation. We are a free country, but were we successful in sustaining the democratic values in the true sense, as new generations of politicians entered the precincts of the parliament? The decline could well be understood if one recalls the episode of April 17,



1999, when a no-confidence motion against the Vajpayee government was put to vote in the Lok Sabha! While some of the constituents of the NDA played truant, there was a real serious lapse that would go into history as a dark spot. Girdhar Gomango had taken over as the Congress chief minister of Odisha but had not resigned from the Lok Sabha seat. He was specifically asked to fly to New Delhi and vote against the Vajpayee government. He did cast his vote! Had he not, there would have been a tie, and the speaker could have saved the government. The political chaos was so complex that the opposition could not offer any alternative, and the Lok Sabha had to be dissolved, and the TINA factor worked, and Vajpayee continued as the Prime Minister! Historians shall incisively examine whether this Girdhar Gomango vote heralded a new chapter on the decline of political ethics! To me, it was an instance of ethical adherence on the part of Vajpayee, who could have asked for a recount, and would certainly have won! He did not indulge in any



VAJPAYEE HAD THE GIFT OF SARASWATI, THE TENDERNESS OF HEART, AND THIS WAS HIS ART OF WINNING THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE. HE WAS AFFECTIONATE AND EMPATHETIC. ADVERSITIES COULD NEVER DEMORALISE HIM

maneuverings which became a common practice in later years. The strength of Indian democracy was re-iterated when Vajpayee submitted his resignation after a one-vote defeat! Vajpayee's decision to go ahead with Pokhran -II and the manner he withstood all pressures during the Kargil War were two of the most courageous instances of decision-making. Prime Minister Vajpayee continued the policies of liberalisation and globalisation as accepted by India in the times of P.V. Narasimha Rao and his finance minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh. Additional economic reforms introduced during his tenure of 1998 to 2004, resulted in India maintaining a GDP growth rate of 8%, the inflation level came down to around 4% and foreign exchange reserves were flourishing. It was a daring step to end the monopoly of government telecom companies. It also led to competition and hence lowering of call tariffs. Vajpayee was held as the father of modern telecom in India. Mobile phone connectivity was very heartening not only in the life of common men but its availability also removed an irksome

hurdle that was often a point of complaint by the foreign investors. Vajpayee could take a long-term view of the developmental initiatives that could help India in decades ahead, not necessarily thinking in terms of the next election only. In his long parliamentary life, it would be impossible to find someone who did not like him as a person, ideological orientations being another matter. Vajpayee had the gift of Saraswati, the tenderness of heart, and this was his art of winning the hearts of people. He was affectionate and empathetic. Adversities could never demoralise him, rather these occasions gave him greater determination to succeed. He accepted challenges. For, party management was an art and not a craft as practised by the new generation of most politicians. His poetry indicates his concern for the nation and the people. Most of his time was spent in opposition, but I never found him desolate, or withdrawn. (Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. He is also the Atal Fellow at the PMML, Teen Murthi, New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Three bills passed without debate



Narendra Modi was genuine given the unprecedented nature of the security breach. However, using their absence from the two Houses the government has been able to pass three controversial new criminal law Bills and sundry others without any debate. Had a proper debate been allowed just days before the current session of Parliament was coming to an end, it is quite likely that the Bills would not have become law so easily. However, now with the three criminal law Bills having the stamp of the legislature, the role of the courts has become marginal. By inviting suspension, however unjustified, has the Opposition once again played into the hands of the government and the ruling BJP?

MT Farooqi | Chennai

The 146 suspended MPs could hardly have expected their protest to lead to their suspension for the remainder of the parliamentary session. Their demand for a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah or Prime Minister

selection panel and the new Bill proposes that the "Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of—(a) the Prime Minister—Chairperson; (b) the Leader of Opposition in the House of the People—Member; (c) a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister—Member." It's nothing but to grab voting power under any circumstances, and for this, the Centre has defied the Supreme Court order by dropping the CJI from the selection panel. After CJI dropped from the CEC selection panel, there was a time when Tirunellai Narayana Iyer Seshan's EC meant 'electoral credibility' but today it means 'elections compromised'.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

CHENNAI BOOK FAIR

Sir — The 47th Chennai Book Fair will be inaugurated by the TN Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on January 3, 2024. Over the years the annual Chennai Book Fair has become an important event in the cultural calendar of the city. Blissfully enough, BAPASI, the organisers of the fair, has decided to increase the number of stalls this year. This

reiterates the fact that the physical market for books will continue to grow despite the invasion of e-books. Though e-book readers have become a common sight, traditional books still have their evangelists. There are plenty of reasons why a printed book is always preferred over an e-book. 1) The light emitted from the screen places additional stress on the eyes, leading to increased fatigue and even headaches. 2) Readers are less likely to get distracted when reading a printed book. 3) They can feel their progress through a course with a printed book by gauging how much they have read, whereas an e-book doesn't offer the same level of satisfaction. 4) Print books simply work anywhere and anytime, as no batteries, chargers or internet connections are needed. The feel of the paper, its fragrance, sharing it with our loved ones, its images and illustrations, flexibility – all make a printed book way ahead of an e-book. Needless to say, a printed book is a secret door to an undiscovered world of delight and success.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Mimicry in the corridors of power

Political leaders are often the subject of ridicule and lampooning; they would best ignore it to look mature and tolerant

Kalyan Banerjee (67), a member of parliament representing Serampore Lok Sabha constituency, whose name has not been heard hitherto outside his home State of Bengal has been a national "celebrity" since early this week. His shortcut to stardom was facilitated by mimicking Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar, who is also the chairman of Rajya Sabha. What we saw on TV screens was Banerjee, a lawyer by profession, doing some kind of body movements, much to the amusement of the gang around him. Someone has to explain afterwards that he was lampooning the vice-president who is 72 years old and a lawyer like Banerjee.



Banerjee's performance went for many minutes and all had a hearty laugh at the expense of Dhankar. What and how Banerjee walks and behaves after five years from now is anybody's guess. His chief minister Mamta Banerjee and the scion of the Congress family have justified his action by providing some hilarious moments. The Bengal chief minister is on record stating that Banerjee

select secretaries of the GoI. Menon, who was in his true form after a couple of sundowners reportedly mimicked Nehru in a get-together of his colleagues, all secretaries. One of the fifth columnists present on the occasion informed Nehru that Menon had made him a butt of jokes. The next day when Nehru met Menon, the former asked him if he had been told that Menon was good at mimicking others. "We are a free nation and it does not mean that we should sacrifice our sense of humour," retorted Menon. This marked the end of Menon's career in the corridors of power and he was kicked upstairs by none other than Nehru.

This incident was recounted by MKK Nair, an IAS officer of the 1947 batch in his memoirs "With No ill will towards Anybody". For those who are not familiar with the name MKK Nair, he was Menon's Man Friday since the day the duo met each other. It is said that Nehru had a unique sense of humour. Some of his hangers-on (mainly journalists) are credited with this tom-tom to portray Nehru as a true lib-

eral. In this case, we have to go by the dictum all that glitters is not gold. The mimicry has emerged as the pastime of the Kerala population. Mimicry artists are very much in demand. Some of the top film stars like Mammooty, Jaiaram, Hariisree Ashokan, Ramesh Pisharody, and the Siddique-Lal duo, all had their roots in mimicry stages. They stole the limelight by mimicking former chief ministers E K Nayanar, K Karunakaran, Oommen Chandi, A K Antony, and V S Achuthanandan. The quality of their show was such that Antony, the then chief minister, travelling by train from Thiruvananthapuram to Malabar asked a mimicry artist who was in the compartment that was it necessary for both of them to travel to Malabar. Even Pinarayi Vijayan has not escaped from the caricaturing by these artists. But they are unanimous in their decision not to hurt the characters they portray. It is time our politicians learn one or two tricks of the trade from these real stars.

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer; views are personal)



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

WAR AFFECTING GLOBAL ECONOMY

Sir — Fifty years after the last Arab-Israeli war (1973), again on 7th October 2023, Hamas the prime Palestine militant group launched a surprise, daring and deadly attack with barrages of rockets leaving a devastating trail of death and destruction. There is a bigger threat to the global economy due to the attacks by Iranian-backed Yemen's Houthi militants on the shipping vessels crossing the Red sea-suez canals route, which has already badly disrupted international maritime trade, it has prompted the re-routing of the hundreds of large cargo-ships via southern tip of Africa to escape drone and missile attack by Houthis in the Red sea area, a much longer route adding another 10-14 days of the voyage, adding extra cost and delays potentially affecting global trade and contributing to inflation.

Hence the Israel-Hamas conflict desperately calls for world powers to bring a truce at the earliest, if the oil prices increase and ships take longer routes it will badly affect most global economies and its ramifications will be seen in days to come in all sectors of the economy, today crude oil prices are hovering around 85 dollars today.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

PARLIAMENT OVERTURNS SC VERDICT

Sir — Free and fair elections are part of the basic structure of the constitution and the Election Commission (EC) is its cornerstone – its independence and credibility must be guarded and strengthened at any cost. But to win the election the way the Modi government overturned the Supreme Court's order that had ruled that the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) shall be made by the President based on the advice tendered by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or leader of the largest Opposition party in the House, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Instead, the highly contentious Bill has dropped the Chief Justice of India from the



FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS UBIQUITOUS, EVERYTHING

But some people find it hard to accept as they are too cynical in approach



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

There is a verse in the Bhagavad-Geeta, that goes like this, "After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus as everything is very rare." (7.19) Lord Krishna spoke this verse. I have been reading the Geeta for more than three decades. I kind of didn't take this verse seriously, because its purport did not sink in. Now having many experiences in this regard, I am beginning to have faith in God's words.

I will share some experiences with my readers. I will take up a few verses and explain how they made sense to me; and how I experienced the veracity of them. The first one has to be verse # 7.16, "Four kinds of virtuous people worship Me. These are a distressed person, an inquisitive man, a seeker of wealth and a wise person." I have been highly distressed, with many kinds of fears, anxieties, etc. Finding no relief elsewhere, I turned to God with some sincerity. My initial reaction was somewhat mixed. Maybe God was helping, maybe nothing like this was happening. Having exhausted all other options, I pursued. Gradually, I began to find the connection between my prayers and what relief I was getting. Surely, I was attracted to the other part of the quoted verse about becoming a seeker of wealth. There was some evidence that God was being generous to me. Wasn't Sanjay quite convinced about it, when he said, "Where there is the Yogeshwar Shri Krishna and where there is the archer Arjuna, there will be opulence, victory, wealth and morality (dharma). This is my view." (18.78) It gradually became my view also, as I benefitted.



Now greedy for more, I sought guidance from God. Is He not omniscient? Wouldn't He know everything? This will eliminate my endless search for answers. Lord Krishna promised this, "From Me only memory, knowledge and removal of delusion takes place." (15.15) Surely, guidance in the form of instructions, and advice from near and dear ones, who act as mediums of God, began to become available. And I started to taste what was promised, "By being especially kind to them, I, situated within, destroy the darkness, born of ignorance, by the shining lamp of knowledge." (10.11)

Over some time, I began to get out of trouble, because God, was helping, which Lord Krishna has promised, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace." (18.58) Buoyed by such success, I focused on becoming more conscious, as instructed in verse #18.65, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me." Patiently, I started doing these spiritual practices. It wasn't easy because they went against my nature, which was for lusty enjoyment. Taking the next step was still more difficult, which was "Take My shelter only." (18.66) God has left no doubt what is needed to be done, which is, "In all respects take shelter of Him (God) only.

So, what should we conclude? There is too much evidence believe that God is everything. But it is hard for just anyone to accept this fact; this has to be realized over a long period. That is why Lord Krishna has stated that such a soul is very rare. One has to have faith and get started. The other option is not to accept. Then, one loses what all God can give, which is a lot in this place of misery. I will continue the way I am progressing I believe in, "Whatever you do; whatever you eat; whatever offering you make; whatever you give in charity; whatever austerities you perform, you do that as an offering to Me." (9.27) Who controls 'karmaphalas' (results of our acts)? God of course.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Cricket Australia launches Multicultural Action Plan



ASHUTOSH MISRA

As Indo-Australian relations continue to thrive, cricket will continue to add ballast at various levels—sporting, community and diplomatic, MAP can be a major catalyst



Australian demography has undergone a dramatic transformation, with communities originating from South Asia, predominantly Indian, making a significant presence across Australian society.

According to the Australian Census 2021, South Asians are amongst the fastest-growing populations including 30% of Australians born overseas. Of these 48.5% of the Australian population are multicultural and 4% (1.1 million) have a South Asia birth or descent. Since 2013, Indian migrants recorded a 128% rise (from 295,000 to 673,000), Sri Lankan 53% (86,000 to 132,000), Nepalese 392% (25,000-123,000), Pakistan 200% (30,000-90,000) and Bangladesh 82% (28,000-51,000).

This demographic transformation has not escaped Cricket Australia's attention which launched the pathbreaking Multicultural Action Plan (MAP) 2023-2027 on 22 December informed by hundreds of hours of research and engagement across the community.

Supported by the Australian Government Legacy Fund, the MAP primarily aims at the South Asian community, wherein India is expected to be the key driver of growth in the coming years. Indian diaspora would soon overtake as the largest migrant community in Australia surpassing English, and the MAP strives to create a sense of belongingness and ownership amongst them.

The MAP also highlights the 90,000 plus attendance during the India versus Pakistan match and the 85,000 plus attendance during the India versus Zimbabwe match during the ICC T20 World Cup in 2022 in Australia. Indian-Australian cricketers namely Lisa Sthalekar and Allana King, along with Harmanpreet Kaur the Indian captain feature prominently in it. In addition, Usman Khawaja, the Pakistani-origin cricketer holds a pivotal place for his inspirational struggle to make it into the national squad, and for his Foundation's Cricket Blast program



UNDOUBTEDLY, CRICKET CONTINUES TO ENRICH THE INDO-AUSTRALIAN BILATERAL NARRATIVE AND TIES AND THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ON BOTH SIDES

for kids in schools and the community.

The Multicultural Action Plan (MAP) hopes to create opportunities; break down barriers; build trust in relationships; and make a difference in the community. The rationale is simple: engage with the community which allows Cricket Australia to tap into the larger talent pool in the future, generate more participation and revenue from their participation, enlarge its fan base and encourage community members to take on more leadership roles.

Cricket, therefore, is becoming a vehicle of social cohesion and unity for all Australians, and championing diversity and inclusion at all levels.

In the coming years, MAP will roll out the following ten key deliverables: bespoke social cricket programs, products and tournaments; community coach and voluntary leadership program; working with foundations and partners to enhance talent pathways; elite coach and umpire bursary scheme; South Asian monitoring and leadership program; cultural awareness and unconscious bias training; new multicultural Ambassador program; engaging with new media channels with positive storytelling; new cultural festivals and enhanced match experience; and more personalised engagement through enhanced data capability.

Of these, the cultural awareness and unconscious bias training is very well-thought-out and also critical for promoting greater understanding in Australian cricket of their unconscious bias and the cultural differences of the community and breaking down existing barriers in the game.

MAP is aiming for 100,000 South Asian registered participants in Australian cricket by 2027, and doubling the numbers of South Asian cultural background players in first-class teams as well as Women Big Bash League and Men's BBL and 2027 to 8%.

MAP is expected to boost recruitment of more employees from the South Asian background, since only 2% of South Asians were on Australian cricket boards, and executive teams in 2022, and over 18% were on the Cricket Australia payroll. Cricket Australia has also created a specialised position of Multicultural Officers at the Queensland Cricket and Western Australian Cricket Association to introduce new initiatives and engagement programs and gather feedback for the Action Plan.

Queensland Cricket's successful taped ball format has also found a special mention in the MAP. In this format—the Multination Cup 2023 involving India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan; Rising Stars U-13 Junior Tournament and Corporate Cup involving corporate companies have created a vast constituency of cricket lovers who have been either missing out due to time and physical constraints or limited opportunities. Undoubtedly, cricket continues to enrich Indo-Australian bilateral narrative and ties and the political leadership on both sides time and again very eloquently uses the appeal of the game to promote deeper understanding and friendship. In March 2023, Queensland Cricket led a delegation to Gujarat, spearheaded by its CEO Terry Svenson, deputy chair of the QC Board Ian Healy, former cricketer Adam Dale and the

author, to attend the fourth test match of the Border-Gavaskar series. Their visit coincided with the meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese at the majestic Modi stadium. This visit built Queensland Cricket's contacts with senior BCCI officials such as Jay Shah- BCCI secretary, Roger Binny-BCCI president, Dhanraj Nathwani-president Gujarat Cricket Association, Colonel Arvind Singh-COO, Gujarat Titans and several business leaders.

The visit is expected to yield medium to long-term cricketing exchanges of players, coaches, administrators and teams between the two sides in the coming years. Queensland Cricket is also in discussion with the Baroda Cricket Association to reach an understanding to this effect and is also expected to pick up the threads of discussion with the Karnataka Cricket Association.

As Indo-Australian relations continue to thrive, cricket will continue to add ballast at various levels—sporting, community, diplomatic and also commercial. In this context, Cricket Australia's Multicultural Action Plan is very timely in positioning the South Asian/Indian diaspora at the forefront of its strategy, which offers a historic opportunity for the Indian community champions to invoke their love of cricket for an creating an inclusive, diverse and multicultural society and a stronger Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

(The writer is CEO and Executive Director Institute for Australia India Engagement and Editor-In-Chief, of Australia India News; views are personal)

Unmasking the silent epidemic threatening our youth

Indulging in new-age gateway products such as vaping is becoming a gateway for more individuals to initiate tobacco use

In the ever-evolving landscape of tobacco use, a new spectre looms large—New-Age Gateway Products including Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), heat-not-burn (HNB), e-hookah, e-cigarettes and Vapes. Beyond the familiar realms of smoking, this trend is not just a fad; it's a burgeoning concern with far-reaching consequences. Delving into the heart of the matter, we confront an escalating crisis that extends beyond traditional boundaries, ensnaring individuals including children globally in a web of lifelong addiction.

Recent studies underscore the alarming trend that indulging in New-Age Gateway Products such as vaping is becoming a gateway for more individuals,



GIRDHAR J GYANI

especially young adults, to initiate tobacco use. A notable survey reveals that a significant number of young people are getting hooked on e-cigarettes which can have a dangerous impact. This shift in initiation patterns raises serious concerns about the long-term health consequences and the potential for a new generation to be ensnared in the clutches of addiction.

One critical aspect of this issue is the data suggesting that these New-Age Gateway Products are not a substitute for smoking as pushed by international tobacco companies but a distinct and powerful initiator of addiction of a different nature. Several studies indicate that the number of individuals trying vaping is fast surpassing those who take up

smoking. The allure of flavours, discreet packaging, and the misconception that vaping is less harmful contribute to its growing popularity, particularly among the youth.

An Australian expert recently addressed the Members of the Scottish Parliament, shedding light on a disconcerting reality—the vaping industry seems to have a profound interest in cultivating a new generation of lifelong customers. The marketing strategies employed by these international tobacco companies are designed to appeal to younger demographics, creating a concerning link between the rise in vaping initiation and the long-term goals of these corporations. The expert's testimony emphasizes the urgent

need for regulatory measures to curb the influence of these entities on the youth.

While traditional smoking has long been associated with health risks, these New-Age Gateway Products introduce a different set of concerns. E-cigarettes often contain high levels of nicotine, a highly addictive substance. The ease with which one can access and use these devices, coupled with enticing flavours, makes them particularly appealing to young individuals. It is not uncommon for those who start with vaping to transition to an addictive model soon, amplifying the potential for lifelong addiction and its associated health hazards.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also expressed apprehension about

the impact of vaping on public health. The organization highlights the need for comprehensive regulations to address the risks associated with these products, ranging from their appeal to minors to the potential for serving as a gateway to other substance use. Governments worldwide are grappling with the challenge of crafting policies that strike a balance between harm reduction for existing smokers and protecting the youth from the allure of vaping.

In light of these findings, policymakers, public health officials, and communities must collaborate on effective strategies to curb the rising tide of initiation to New-Age Gateway Products. Education campaigns targeting both parents and students can play a pivotal

role in dispelling myths surrounding vaping and its perceived harmlessness. Additionally, stringent regulations must be put in place to restrict the marketing outreach of these New-Age Gateway Products companies that seem intent on creating a new generation of addicts.

There is a need to advocate for a holistic approach around stringent enforcement on the ground to address the vaping epidemic. This includes robust educational initiatives, evidence-based policy reforms, and collaboration with experts and lawmakers to create a comprehensive framework that safeguards the well-being of our youth. By acknowledging the distinct threat posed by New-Age Gateway Products and taking decisive action, we

can work towards mitigating the long-term consequences of this burgeoning public health crisis.

While it is alarming that a vast majority of children are unaware that these New-Age Gateway Products are already banned in India, access to these products seems to be at ease for those seeking them. Even law enforcement at the grassroots level needs to be made aware of this, or else porous and mis-declared imports into the country and their easy availability through those having access to school children can make this a serious upcoming health disaster waiting to happen.

(The author is Director General, Association of Healthcare Providers; Views expressed are personal)

Weekend of combat in Gaza kills 14 Israeli soldiers

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Fourteen Israeli soldiers were killed in combat in the Gaza Strip over the weekend, the Israeli military said Sunday, in some of the bloodiest days of battle since the start of the ground offensive and a sign that Hamas is still putting up a fight despite weeks of brutal war.

The mounting death toll among Israeli troops is likely to play an important factor in Israeli public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed communities in southern Israel on Oct 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostage. The war has devastated parts of the Gaza Strip, killed roughly 20,400 Palestinians and displaced nearly 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza said 166 people were killed in the coastal enclave over the past day.

Israelis still stand firmly behind the country's stated goals of crushing Hamas' governing and military capabilities and releasing the remaining 129 captives. That support has stayed mostly steady despite rising international pressure against Israel's offensive and the soaring death toll and unprecedented suffering among Palestinians.

But the growing number of dead soldiers could undermine that support. Soldiers' deaths are a sensitive and emotional topic in Israel, a country with compulsory military service for most Jews.

The names of fallen soldiers are announced at the top of hourly newscasts, and in a small country of about 9 million people, virtually every family knows a relative, friend or co-worker who has lost a family member in war.

HAMAS EXACTS A PRICE The 14 Israeli soldiers killed on Friday and Saturday died in battles in central and southern Gaza, an indication of how Hamas is still putting up tough resistance against advancing Israeli troops, even



Palestinians displaced by the Israeli bombardment bake bread at a makeshift tent camp in the Muwasi area in Rafah, Gaza Strip on Saturday.

as Israel claims to have dealt a serious blow to the militant group.

According to Israeli Army Radio, four soldiers were killed when their vehicle was struck by an anti-tank missile. The others were killed in separate, sporadic fighting.

Another soldier was killed in northern Israel by fire from the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, which has kept up low-level fighting with Israel since the war with Hamas erupted, raising fears of a wider regional conflict.

Their deaths bring the number of Israeli soldiers killed since the ground offensive began to 153.

"The war exacts a very heavy price from us but we have no choice but to continue fighting," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a meeting of his Cabinet Sunday. "We are continuing with all the force, until the end, until victory, until we reach all our goals."

Even if Israelis have been supportive of the war effort, there has been widespread anger against Netanyahu's government, which many criticize for failing to protect civilians on Oct 7 and promoting policies that allowed Hamas to gain

strength over the years.

On Saturday night, thousands of people demonstrated in pouring rain in Tel Aviv, chanting "Bibi, Bibi, we don't want you anymore," referring to Netanyahu by his nickname. Netanyahu has avoided accepting responsibility for the military and policy failures leading up to Oct 7, saying he would answer tough questions once the fighting is over.

EXPANDING THE OFFENSIVE

On Saturday, Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said forces were expanding their offensive in northern and southern Gaza and troops were fighting in "complex areas" in Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city, where Israel believes Hamas leaders are hiding.

Israel's offensive has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history and has claimed a staggering toll on Palestinian civilians. More than two-thirds of the 20,000 killed were women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said Sunday morning that a 13-year-old boy was

shot and killed by an Israeli drone attack while inside the building of al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis. It provided no further details.

An Israeli strike overnight hit a house in a refugee camp west of the city of Rafah, on Gaza's borders with Egypt. At least two men were killed and their bodies taken to the Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, according to Associated Press journalists in the hospital.

Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment and gunfire Sunday morning in the town of Jabaliya, an area north of Gaza City that Israel had previously claimed to control. Sounds of explosions and gunfire echoed across the town with Israeli warplanes flying over the area, they said. Hamas' military arm said its fighters shelled Israeli troops in Jabaliya and Jabaliya refugee camp.

"There are bombings and fierce battles during the night," said Assad Radwan, a Palestinian fisherman from Jabaliya. "Sounds of explosions and gunfire never stopped." On Saturday, rescuers and hospital officials said that more than 90 Palestinians, including dozens from an extended family, were killed in Israeli airstrikes on two homes in Gaza.

US lawmakers condemn vandalism of Hindu temple in California

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Several US lawmakers, including three prominent Indian-American Congressmen, have strongly condemned the vandalism of a Hindu temple in California and asserted that those responsible for the act must be held accountable.

The Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in Newark, California was vandalised with anti-India graffiti and the police are investigating the matter as a possible hate crime.

Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents California's 17th Congressional District located in Silicon Valley, said in a post on X that he strongly condemns the "defacing" of the Swaminarayan temple in Newark, California which is in his district. "Freedom to worship is at the heart of American democracy. Those who committed this act of vandalism must be held accountable," Khanna said.

He said he is heartened that the community is coming together to stand up against hate and remove the graffiti. "This community action is answering wickedness with goodness," he said. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi termed the defacing of the Swaminarayan temple as "despica-

ble" and said he strongly condemns it. Krishnamoorthi, the US representative for Illinois's 8th congressional district, said he is glad the community is rallying in support of the mandir.

"We must stand united against bigotry in all its ugly forms. Those who did this vandalism must be held accountable," he said.

Congressman Shri Thanedar also expressed his profound condemnation of the "disgraceful act of vandalism".

"This desecration, marked by anti-India graffiti, strikes at the very essence of our diverse and inclusive society. I denounce such attacks of intolerance and call for a thorough investigation into this heinous crime," Thanedar, the US representative from Michigan's 13th congressional district, said. "Religious freedom and communal harmony are fundamental tenets of our nation, and I urge swift action by law enforcement to bring the perpetrators to justice, ensuring the safety and sanctity of all places of worship," he added.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee from California "unequivocally" condemned the attack. "Hatred in all forms cannot be tolerated. Those responsible must be held accountable," she said. State Senator in the

Ohio Senate Niraj Antani, elected to the Ohio Senate at age 29 and the youngest currently serving member of the Senate, said that as the first Hindu-American State Senator in Ohio history, he condemns in the "strongest terms" the vandalism of the Hindu Mandir.

"The perpetrators must be caught and punished to the full extent of the law. We must root out and vanquish Hinduphobia everywhere it is," Antani said.

The US State Department on Saturday also condemned the vandalism at the temple and welcomed efforts by the police to ensure those responsible are held accountable.

"We condemn the vandalism of Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in California. We welcome efforts by the Newark Police Department to ensure that those responsible are held accountable," the US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs said in a post on X Saturday. The City of Newark Police Department in Newark, Newark, California had told PTI in an emailed statement that on Friday at approximately 8:35 am, Newark Police received a report of graffiti at the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple.

One killed in shooting at Florida mall

Ocala (Florida) (AP): A man died in a shooting Saturday at a shopping mall in central Florida in which the victim was apparently "targeted" for the attack, police said.

Ocala Police Chief Mike Balken told reporters Saturday evening that the man was killed after he was shot multiple times in a common area at Paddock Mall in Ocala, located about 80 miles northwest of Orlando. A woman was shot in the leg, police said. The suspect fled the scene and left behind the firearm, Balken said.

Police responded to the mall around 3:40 p.m. after calls of multiple shots being fired at the mall. "Officers immediately made entry into the mall (and) ultimately discovered that this was not what we would consider an active shooter," Balken told reporters. Several other mall patrons also suffered injuries during the shooting.

Cong tries to rally support for historic global challenges

Washington (AP): As the Senate wrapped up its work for the year, Sen. Michael Bennet took to the floor of the nearly empty chamber and made a late-night plea for Congress to redouble support for Ukraine: "Understand the stakes at this moment."

It was the third time in recent months the Colorado Democrat has kept the Senate working late by holding up unrelated legislation in a bid to cajole lawmakers to approve tens of billions of dollars in weaponry and economic aid for Ukraine. During a nearly hour-long, emotional speech, he called on senators to see the nearly 2-year-old conflict as a defining clash of authoritarianism against democracy and implored them to consider what it means "to be fighting on that freezing front line and not know whether we're going to come through with the ammunition."

Yet Congress broke for the holidays and is not expected to return for two weeks while con-

tinued aid for Ukraine has nearly been exhausted. The Biden administration is planning to send one more aid package before the new year, but says it will be the last unless Congress approves more money.

With support slipping in Congress even as conflicts and unrest rattle global security, the United States is once again struggling to assert its role in the world. Under the influence of Donald Trump, the former president who is now the Republican Party front-runner, GOP lawmakers have increasingly taken a skeptical stance toward US involvement abroad, particularly when it comes to aid to Ukraine.

Leaders of traditional allies Britain and France have implored Western nations to continue their robust support, but Russia's President Vladimir Putin is emboldened and building up resources for a fresh effort as the war heads towards its third year.

Trump's lawyers press immunity claims before lower court

Washington (AP): Donald Trump was acting within his role as president when he pressed claims about "alleged fraud and irregularity" in the 2020 election, his lawyers told a federal appeals court in arguing that he is immune from prosecution.

The attorneys also asserted in a filing late on Saturday night that the "historical fallout is tremendous" from the four-count indictment charging Trump with plotting to overturn the election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. No other former president has ever been indicted; Trump has been indicted four times, in both state and federal court, as he campaigns to reclaim the White House.

"The indictment of President Trump threatens to launch cycles of recrimination and politically motivated prosecution that will plague our Nation for many decades to come and stands likely to shatter the very bedrock of our Republic — the confidence of American citizens in an independent judicial system," the attorneys wrote in a brief filed with the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

At issue before the court, which has set arguments for January 9, is whether Trump is immune from prosecution for what defense lawyers say are official acts that fell within the outer perimeter of a president's duties and responsibilities. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan earlier this month rejected that argument, siding with prosecutors from special counsel Jack Smith's team and declaring that the office of the presidency "does not confer a lifelong get-out-of-jail-free pass." The appeals court's role in the dispute is center stage after the Supreme Court on Friday rejected a request from Smith to fast-track a decision on the immunity question. After Trump appealed Chutkan's order, Smith urged swift intervention from the high court in an effort to get a speedy decision that could keep the case on track for a trial scheduled to start on March 4.

British Sikh mother, son jailed for burglary conspiracy in UK

London (PTI): An Indian-origin mother and son have been sentenced to a total of just under four years of imprisonment after conspiring to steal a large sum of money collected by the local Sikh community in south-east England to pay for a wedding.

Kalwant Kaur, 41, and her son, Jung Singh Lankapal, 22, of the same address in Southampton, Hampshire, were charged with conspiring to commit a burglary, which they both pleaded guilty to back in October.

Appearing on Friday at Southampton Crown Court for sentencing, Kaur was jailed for 15 months and Lankapal handed a 30-month jail term.

"Kaur and Lankapal made a cold and callous decision to steal such a large sum of money from people they knew, money which was meant to help people in their community," said Detective Constable

Jess Swift, from the Western Area Crime Team of Hampshire Constabulary.

"Despite Kaur trying to present herself as a witness to a crime, it was quickly established she had used her knowledge to help orchestrate this burglary. Through some very comprehensive enquiries, we have been able to ensure both pleaded guilty to these offences and will serve a jail sentence. I hope this provides the local community some reassurance and gives them some justice for what happened," she said.

The money, around GBP 8,000, was taken from an address in Clovelly Road, Southampton, on September 15.

A court heard a group of women from the local Sikh community had helped organise a collection to pay for a wedding within the community and were counting up the money.

'Indian oil tanker hit by Houthi attack drone in Red Sea'

New York: An Indian-flagged crude oil tanker is among two vessels that came under drone attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Southern Red Sea, the US Central Command said. The US Central Command said in a statement that on December 23, two Houthi anti-ship ballistic missiles were fired into international shipping lanes in the Southern Red Sea from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

No ships reported being impacted by the ballistic missiles. Between 3 and 8 pm (Sanaa time), the USS LABOON (DDG 58) was patrolling in the Southern Red Sea as part of Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) and shot down four unmanned aerial drones originating from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen that were inbound to the USS LABOON. **PTI**

French judge to decide on extending stay of 303 passengers, mostly Indians

PTI ■ PARIS

The 303 passengers, mostly Indians, of a plane detained by French authorities since Thursday over suspected "human trafficking", are set to appear before a judge on Sunday at the airport to decide on their continued detention. The plane that took off from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates carrying 303 passengers and bound for Nicaragua was grounded at the Chalons-Vatry airport in Marne on Thursday over suspected "human trafficking".

Hearings before a judge of freedoms and detention will begin this Sunday to decide whether or not to keep in the waiting area of the airport the passengers of the flight, BFM TV, a French news broadcast television and radio network, reported.

Francois Procureur, lawyer and president of Chalons-en-Champagne, said: "I don't know if this has already been done in France."

On Saturday, the Indian embassy said it was continuing to work with the French govern-

ment for the welfare of the Indians currently at the Varty airport and for early resolution of the situation. Embassy consular staff were stationed at the airport, the mission posted on X. The airport reception hall has been transformed by prefectural decree into a waiting area for foreigners.

Four hearings will be organised simultaneously, with four judges, four clerks, as many interpreters and at least four lawyers, the television network reported.

The hearing should be public, but the judge can order it to be held on camera.

"We are in Varty, far from everything... It is obvious that we considered relocating, but all these people have rights," Francois said. "We are working in a hurry... it's unprecedented, we are all mobilised." Among the passengers are 11 unaccompanied minors, and according to the broadcaster, six of them have already taken steps to request asylum in France.

"These people will have to be interviewed and they will be told whether or not they can benefit from political refugee status," the news network quoted Francois as saying.

The prefecture in the north-eastern department of Marne said the A340 aircraft, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines, "remained grounded on the tarmac at Varty airport following its landing" on Thursday.

The newspaper report says the prefecture said the plane had been due to refuel and was carrying 303 Indian nationals who had probably been working in the UAE. According to the reports, the travel may have been planned by the Indian passengers to reach Central America from where they can attempt to enter the United States or Canada illegally. But an anonymous tip indicated that passengers were "likely to be victims of human trafficking" in an organised gang, alerted the authorities.

Security stepped up around Xmas celebrations in Europe over attack concerns

AP ■ FRANKFURT

Sightseeing visits were barred at Germany's landmark Cologne cathedral and Christmas Eve worshippers faced security checks to get into midnight Mass on Sunday as police responded to indications of a potential attack. However, a top security official urged people not to shy away from holiday celebrations out of fear.

Churchgoers attended multiple services at the cathedral despite the ban on visits purely for sightseeing, a day after police descended on the cathedral and searched it with sniffer dogs.

In Austria, police in Vienna also said they were stepping up security around churches and Christmas markets, apparently responding to

the same intelligence about a potential threat. They did not give further information but the dpa news agency reported without citing a source that the threat was from an Islamic extremist group.

Police in Cologne said they were taking precautions over Christmas even though the information they had was for an attack on New Year's Eve.

"Even if the reference was to New Year's Eve, there are a lot of people in the area around the cathedral, today is Christmas Eve midnight Mass, it is one of the most visited cathedrals, the main train station is nearby," said police spokesman Wolfgang Baldes, standing in front of the cathedral. "There are a lot of people and that's why we said that if there was an indication we

would do everything necessary to protect people." Cathedral Provost Guido Assmann said in an interview on the Cologne archdiocese website domradio.de that sightseeing visits had been stopped but that didn't mean a big change since such visits are normally not allowed during services anyway and services were being held throughout the day Sunday.

Cologne's towering cathedral, whose twin spires rise 157 metres (515 feet) high, is a major tourist destination visited by some 6 million people a year.

It is home to the Shrine of the Three Kings, a gold- and silver-decorated casket said to contain the relics of the three wise men described in the New Testament as paying homage to the newborn Jesus.

Celebrations halted due to Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ BETHLEHEM (WEST BANK)

The normally bustling biblical birthplace of Jesus resembled a ghost town on Sunday, as Christmas Eve celebrations in Bethlehem were called off due to the Israel-Hamas war. The festive lights and Christmas tree that normally decorate Manger Square were missing, as were the throngs of foreign tourists and jubilant youth marching bands that gather in the West Bank town each year to mark the holiday. Dozens of Palestinian security forces patrolled the empty square. "This year, without the Christmas tree and without lights, there's just darkness," said Brother John Vinh, a



Police officers patrol the entrance of Cologne Cathedral ahead of a Christmas Eve Mass, in Cologne, Germany, early Sunday

Franciscan monk from Vietnam who has lived in Jerusalem for six years. He said he always comes to Bethlehem to mark Christmas, but this year was especially sobering, as he gazed at a nativity scene in Manger Square with a baby Jesus wrapped in a white shroud, reminiscent of the thousands of children killed in the fighting in Gaza. Barbed wire surrounded the scene, the grey rubble reflecting none of the joyous lights and bursts of colour that normally fill the square during the Christmas season. The cancellation of Christmas festivities is a severe blow to the town's economy. Tourism accounts for an estimated 70% of Bethlehem's income — almost all of that dur-

ing the Christmas season. With many major airlines cancelling flights to Israel, few foreigners are visiting. Local officials say over 70 hotels in Bethlehem have been forced to close, leaving thousands of people unemployed.

Gift shops were slow to open on Christmas Eve, although a few did once the rain had stopped pouring down. There were few visitors, however.

"We can't justify putting out a tree and celebrating as normal, when some people (in Gaza) don't even have houses to go to," said Alaa Salameh, one of the owners of Aftem Restaurant, a family-owned falafel restaurant just steps from the square.

Xi warns top party men to keep kin away from graft

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping has warned senior ruling Communist Party officials to maintain personal integrity, set strict rules for relatives to keep them away from corruption and refrain from blindly following "foreign examples" and reckless actions.

"Members of the Political Bureau of the CPC (Communist Party of China) Central Committee should exert rigorous requirements on themselves according to the standards of Marxist statements, setting an example in maintaining personal integrity and self-discipline for the whole party," Xi told a key meeting of the party on December 22, details of which were released by the official media on Sunday.

"They must set strict rules for their family members, relatives, and staff workers around them when it comes to the efforts against corruption," said 70-year-old Xi, who is the only Chinese leader after party founder Mao Zedong to continue in power for a third successive term. Xi, who is also widely regarded as continuing in power like Mao by his "core leadership" status, remained powerful as he continued to head the CPC and the military



besides the Presidency. Since he took over the leadership of the party in 2012, he has been continuing with the anti-corruption campaign in which, according to official media accounts, over a million officials, including several top military generals, were punished. The intensity of the campaign also attracted criticism that Xi made effective use of it to silence his critics and rivals within the party and the government. On December 4, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the anti-corruption unit of the CPC, threatened to intensify the crackdown against corruption, saying that despite a decade-old clampdown the problem is prevalent among

thousands of cadres and officials. The CCDI said corruption was becoming harder to detect and plans to extend the crackdown on extravagant government spending, especially during the Spring festival and Chinese New Year to be celebrated in February next year. During the festival season, Chinese officials in the past were accused of accepting extravagant gifts for favours.

The CCDI said that in the first 10 months of the year, it investigated nearly 80,000 violations of the anti-extravagance regulations and some 114,238 people were placed under investigation and received a warning. Of those, 80,096 have faced party or administrative disciplinary action.

The 24-member Political Bureau of the CPC, also known as the Politburo, is the decision-making body of the party. At the Friday self-criticism meeting, presided over by Xi, each politburo member took turns to speak critically about their work. "They were open and frank in examining their conduct by the regulations of the Political Bureau on upholding and strengthening the centralised, unified leadership of the party," a detailed report by state-run Xinhua news agency said.

"The meeting resolved that the whole party, the entire military, and the people must deeply understand... and become more conscious of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment with the central party leadership," it said. The meeting took place amid concerns over the slowdown of China, and the increasing crisis in its property sector, which is one of the growth sectors of the country.

Besides the slowdown, China for the first time in recent years faced high youth unemployment. The government as a result has stopped publishing official employment data to prevent public protests.

SC returns appeal against conviction of Imran Khan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court office has returned an appeal seeking to set aside the three-year conviction of former prime minister Imran Khan in the Toshakhana corruption case, according to a media report on Sunday.

The registrar's office on Saturday returned the appeal moved by 71-year-old Khan through his counsel Latif Khosa under Article 185 of the Constitution, challenging December 11, 2023, Islamabad High Court (IHC) decision of rejecting a similar plea for lacking requirements, including the absence of actual controversies or chronology of the past litigation. The petition was filed with a plea to overturn the August 5 conviction of Khan by an additional sessions judge of the IHC for illegally selling state gifts, Dawn News reported. The Toshakhana case is based on the allegations that the former premier violated the Toshakhana or state repository rules. All gifts given by foreign leaders to Pakistani top leaders on their trips are kept in the Toshakhana.

The registrar's office, however, returned the appeal with observations that the same was suffering from several deficiencies, like the concise statement.

In addition to the existing requirements, the petition should contain actual controversy or chronology of the litigation as well as the findings recorded by the forums below. Moreover, the petition should contain questions requiring consideration and decision by the Supreme Court, relevant facts, events and documents in the case showing a breach of legal rights/entitlement to relief.

Likewise, the concise statement in the petition should be signed by an advocate of the Supreme Court. Besides, the petitioner has not informed the respondents by issuing notices to them about the filing of the petition. Consequently, the court office returned the petition to the petitioner lawyers in original for removal of the deficiencies within a fortnight by January 6, 2024.

The petition argued that the petitioner had moved an application for the suspension of the three-year sentence with the main appeal which came up for hearing before the IHC on August 28. During the arguments, a request was made to the high court to suspend the operation of the sentence. The sentence was challenged by the petitioner, the petition claimed, since it suffered from jurisdictional defects.

Candidates rush to file nomination as deadline looms

Islamabad (PTI): Candidates aspiring to contest the February 8 general elections in Pakistan are rushing to submit their nomination papers, as the deadline to file their candidature is set to expire on Sunday. The nomination process started on December 20 and was initially set to be completed on Friday but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) extended it for two days on the demand of various political parties.

The National Assembly's 266 general and 70 reserved seats and over 600 seats of four provincial assemblies are up for grabs. Several political leaders including PML-N's Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, former Islamabad mayor Pir Adil Gillani, Sheikh Ansar Aziz, federal capital's ex-deputy mayors Zeeshan Naqvi and Chaudhry Riffat Javed among others submitted their nomination papers on Sunday.

Already many leading politicians, including incarcerated former premier Imran Khan, former three-time premier Nawaz Sharif, former president Asif Ali Zardari, former prime ministers Yusuf Raza Gilani, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Shehbaz Sharif and many other influential leaders have filed their documents.

Khan has so far filed papers from two constituencies in Lahore and his ancestral town of Mianwali. But his chances of getting a green signal to contest the election are slim due to his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case for illegally selling state gifts. In a setback, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) during the week rejected his plea for suspending his conviction in the case.

Major parties in the election are the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Muttahida Quami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and others local parties are in the field. However, the fate of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party is yet not clear as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) rejected its intra-party elections and refused to let it use the bat as the party symbol. The party has announced that it will challenge it in the Supreme Court. Without a unifying symbol, it would be difficult for its candidates to contest.

147 BGB platoons deployed across B'desh as BNP calls 12-hr blockade

Dhaka (PTI): A total of 147 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh were deployed across the country on Sunday to maintain law and order ahead of the January 7 elections as a 12-hour road, rail and waterways blockade called by the opposition BNP and its allies demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina-led government is underway.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its mostly far-right allies allege that no election under the incumbent dispensation would be fair and demand the restoration of a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution. The blockade began at 6 am and will end at 6 pm, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

Of the 147 platoons deployed across the country, 16 teams are patrolling in Dhaka and adjoining districts, Shariful Islam, public relations officer at Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), was quoted as saying by the newspaper. This is the 12th such blockade called by the

opposition parties since October 31, and the first since the announcement of BNP's non-cooperation movement against the government on December 20 during which the party urged people not to pay taxes and utility bills as part of the campaign.

In the national capital, the BNP and its affiliate parties held separate protest rallies in support of the ongoing blockade and non-cooperation movement. Chanting anti-government slogans, the protesters demanded elections under a non-partisan caretaker government and the release of all detained opposition leaders and activists, including BNP's ailing chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

Zia, 79, who was convicted and jailed on two graft charges with a 17-year jail term, is now in a hospital with multiple health issues. Besides BNP, the other parties which participated in the protest rallies include Swachhshasebak Dal, Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal.

Some 10-12 BNP supporters protesting on the Dhaka-

Aricha highway were also arrested. The BNP is boycotting the election after its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the voting was rejected by the government. The party had boycotted the 2014 election but took part in 2018 polls. With the BNP boycotting the election, and no other credible opposition party against it, Hasina's Awami League is likely to gain an upper hand and likely to form the government for the fourth consecutive term.

Since October 29, the BNP has been holding intermittent nationwide strikes and transport blockades to press for their demand for elections under a neutral government, which the ruling party rejected saying the poll would be held in line with the existing Constitution. The US and other major Western countries called for dialogue between the ruling Awami League and particularly with the BNP to ensure an inclusive and credible election, which, however, saw no headway due to reluctance from both sides.



In this picture released by the official website of the Iranian Army on Sunday, December 24, 2023, a missile system is displayed in an unveiling ceremony at a naval base near the Indian Ocean in the southern Iranian port of Konarak, some 850 miles (1,400 kilometres) southeast of the capital, Tehran, Iran

Iran's navy adds sophisticated cruise missiles to its armoury

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's navy on Sunday added domestically produced sophisticated cruise missiles to its arsenal, state TV reported. The TV said both Talaeieh and Nasir cruise missiles have arrived at a naval base near the Indian Ocean in the southern Iranian port of Konarak, some 1,400 kilometers (850 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran.

Navy chief Adm. Shahram Irani said the Talaeieh has a range of more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) and called it "fully smart". Irani said the cruise missile is capable of changing targets during travel. He said the Nasir has a range of 100 kilometers (62 miles) and can be installed on warships. Last month, a container ship owned by an Israeli billionaire came under attack from a suspected Iranian drone in the Indian Ocean, as Israel wages war on Iran-backed Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Furnace blast at nickel plant in Indonesia kills 13, injures 46 others

AP ■ PALU (INDONESIA)

A smelting furnace exploded on Sunday at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, killing at least 13 workers and injuring dozens of others, police and a company official said. It was the latest in a series of deadly incidents at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's ambitious transnational development programme known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Nickel is a key component in global battery production for electric vehicles. At least four Chinese and nine Indonesian workers died when the furnace exploded while they were repairing it, said Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho. The blast was so powerful it demolished the furnace and damaged parts of the side walls of the building, said Nugroho, adding that about 46 workers were injured, including 14 Chinese nationals, some in critical condition.

Authorities are working to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths, Nugroho said. The accident occurred at PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, a subsidiary of PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP, in the Bahodopi neighbourhood of Morowali regency.

"We sincerely apologise for this incident and we are working closely with authorities to

investigate what caused the accident," said company spokesperson Deddy Kurniawan. Rescuers extinguished the fire and evacuated workers after a nearly four-hour operation, he added.

In a statement released on Sunday afternoon by the company, Kurniawan said the furnace was under maintenance and not operating at the time. However, "residual slag in the furnace" came in contact "with flammable items" driving the furnace walls to collapse and the remaining steel slag to flow out. Previously, the company said explosive liquids at the bottom of the furnace triggered a fire and a subsequent explosion in nearby oxygen cylinders. It was the third deadly incident this year at Chinese-owned nickel smelting plants in Central Sulawesi province, which has the largest nickel reserves in Indonesia.

Two dump truck operators were killed when they were engulfed by a wall of black sludge-like material following the collapse of a nickel waste disposal site in April. In January, two workers, including a Chinese national, were killed in riots that involved workers and security guards at an Indonesia-China joint venture in North Morowali regency.

Last year, a loader truck ran over and killed a Chinese worker while he was repairing a road in PT IMIP's mining area, and an Indonesian man burned to death when a furnace in the company's factory exploded.

Iran summons Russian envoy over statement on disputed islands

Dubai (AP): Iran summoned Russia's charge d'affaires after Moscow and Arab countries released a joint statement earlier this week challenging Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Persian Gulf, state media reported on Sunday. Iran's official IRNA news agency said the Russian envoy was summoned on Saturday and handed a note to deliver to Moscow in which Tehran protested the statement the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum issued in Morocco that called for a peaceful solution to resolve the conflict between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the islands.

Earlier on Saturday, Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told his Russian counterpart over the phone that "respecting countries' sovereignty and integrity is among basic principles in the ties between nations", IRNA said in a separate report.

This marked the second time this year that Iran has called for a Russian envoy in protest over comments on the disputed islands. Tehran summoned the Russian ambassador in July over a similar statement. The diplomatic spat is a rare occurrence between the two countries that have deepened their ties since Moscow

invaded Ukraine, with Iran supplying Russia with killer drones that have been used to devastating effect there. Both countries have also been strong backers of President Bashar Assad in Syria's civil war. In 2022, Iran summoned China's envoy over a similar joint statement with Arab nations. Iran took control of the three islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb after British forces withdrew in 1971. It considers them an "inseparable" part of its territory. The UAE also claims the three islands and has long pressed for a negotiated solution. The three islands dominate the approach

to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway through which about one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes. Iran says the islands have been part of Persian states from antiquity until they were occupied by the British in the early 20th century. It also says an agreement reached with Sharjah, one of the UAE's seven emirates, gives it the right to administer Abu Musa and station troops there. There is no such agreement on the other two islands. The UAE says they belonged to the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah until Iran seized them by force days before the Emirati federation was formed.

Chinese Premier Le Qing visits quake-affected areas

PTI/ AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese Premier Li Qing has asked the rescue and relief teams to make sure that people in the quake-hit areas live through the winter safely as he visited the affected villages in northwest China. Li visited several villages in Jishishan County of Gansu province as well as Minhe County in the neighbouring Qinghai province on Saturday.

The region was struck by a 6.2-magnitude earthquake at midnight Monday, leaving 148 people dead and 781 injured besides toppling many buildings. During the visit, Li talked with people affected by the disaster and learned about the work related to resettlement, relief supplies, and the construction of temporary dwellings. He said the top priority of current relief workers was to ensure

the affected people stay warm and safe in winter, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Li urged relief workers to race against time to send relief supplies and daily necessities to the victims in the settlements and build temporary houses as fast as possible for those living in tents. If needed, buildings in the quake-hit areas should be checked and reinforced so that residents can move back and essential facilities such as schools and hospitals can be reopened, Li said.

Reconstruction should be planned in a coordinated manner to help local people improve their living conditions to prevent them from falling into poverty due to the disaster, he said. He instructed authorities to provide the best possible medical treatment for those injured in the quake.

ECONOMIC SUFFERS LOSSES

WORTH MILLIONS

The strong earthquake caused economic losses estimated to be worth tens of millions in the agricultural and fisheries industries, state media said Saturday. Officials in Gansu conducted preliminary assessments that showed the province's agricultural and fisheries industries have lost 532 million yuan (about USD 74.6 million), state broadcaster CCTV reported. Authorities were considering the best use of the relief fund, set up days before, for the agricultural sector to resume production as soon as possible, the report said. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck in a mountainous region Monday night between Gansu and Qinghai provinces and about 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) southwest of Beijing, the Chinese capital.

Nearly 14,000 arrested in crackdown on drug-related activities in Sri Lanka

Colombo (PTI): Nearly 14,000 people have been arrested in a week-long crackdown on drug-related activities in Sri Lanka, police said on Sunday. According to an official statement, a special operation was conducted from Dec 17 to 24 which "resulted in the arrest of 13,666 suspects" with 717 of them subjected to further detention orders.

Among those detained, 174 individuals are currently under investigation for the possession of unlawfully acquired assets. Additionally, 1,097 drug addicts have been sent for rehabilitation, it said.

During the week-long operation, 1,107 suspects out of the 4,665 identified by the police narcotics bureau were also taken into custody. The operation was the brainchild of Sri Lanka's new police chief Deshabandu Tennakoon, who assumed the position earlier this month for a three-month term. However, Tennakoon's appointment has not been without controversy, as he recently faced legal challenges. On December 14, the Supreme Court ordered Tennakoon and three other policemen to pay compensation to a torture victim from an incident dating back to 2011.

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 7451/984C(Yata A)-03/2023 Dated : 23/12/2023

International/National, Expression of Interest (EOI)

Expression of Interest (EOI) is invited for Engineer consultancy work and Project Management for Construction of single span 500 mtr. Two lane A class loading motor bridge over Mahakali River near Jhulaghat in District Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand (India) and 400 mtr. Single span Two lane A-class loading Bridge in District Champawat Uttarakhand over Mahakali River between Khaldhunga (India) and Sirsa (Nepal) separately to connect India and Nepal by motorable road.

Expression of interest (EOI) is invited from reputed International/National firms, organization and joint ventures for feasibility study, Design and Drawing of Bridges, vetting of design and drawing, preparation of DPR, quality assurance, supervision and maintenance during construction of Bridge work by email or in hard copy, on or before dated 24-01-2024, 15:00 hrs. EOI will be opened on dated 24.01.2024, 15:30 hrs in office of SE, PWD, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand (India).

Expression of interest (EOI) documents/details will be available online on PWD website <https://pwd.uk.gov.in> and <https://uktender.gov.in> from dated 29.12.2023.

Superintending Engineer,
3rd Circle PWD, Pithoragarh.
E-Mail:- sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

'Steps taken to control food items prices'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday noted that the Centre has taken many pro-active steps in last few years to control retail prices of food items and said the government will keep inflation under control while ensuring country's economic growth. He was addressing an event, organised by the ministry here, to celebrate National Consumers Day. "Today, India has become the fastest growing large economy. Going forward, we will keep inflation under check and also ensure economic growth," Goyal said. Retail inflation inched up to a three-month high of 5.55 per cent in November driven by higher food prices, according to latest official data. The retail inflation based on the

Consumer Price Index (CPI) was at 4.87 per cent in October. Inflation had been declining since August when it touched 6.83 per cent. On steps taken by the central government, Goyal highlighted that 140 new price monitoring centres have been set up to keep a close watch on wholesale and retail prices of essential commodities. "Today, prices are being monitored at 550 (consuming) centres on a daily basis. This helps in insulating consumers from price rise," Goyal said. In the last two years, he said, when the entire world witnessed very high inflation, especially in the food items, India was able to control inflation through pro-active fiscal and monetary policies. "Whenever inflation (in some commodity) started rising, the government took pro-active mea-



asures and controlled it." Goyal cited measures taken by the Centre to control price rise in tomatoes and onions in a short period of time. The government sold tomatoes

and onions through retail outlets of NCFE, NAFED and Kendriya Bhandar as well as mobile vans. In case of onion, he said the government is buying onions from farmers to create buffer stock and ensure they get a fair price of their produce. He also highlighted that the Centre is selling Bharat Dal at Rs 60 per kg and Bharat Atta at Rs 27.50 per kg to provide relief to common man. The government has banned exports of wheat, broken rice, non-basmati white rice and onions. It has also reduced import duties on edible oils and pulses to boost domestic supply and control price rise. Talking about consumer protection issues, Goyal appreciated the work done by his ministry and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) to resolve

consumers' grievances. He stressed on the need to clear backlog of cases pending at consumer courts at national, state and district levels. "We are all collectively working for better consumer satisfaction," he said, adding that the country will progress if consumers would be satisfied. Goyal said his ministry is focusing on adoption of technology in consumer forums for speedy delivery of justice. To protect consumer interests, Goyal highlighted that the department of consumer affairs has issued a strict guidelines on dark patterns used by online marketplace and is also keeping a close watch on violations. The minister cited various examples of many dark patterns adopted by e-commerce firms that are detrimental to consumers interest.

Recently, the government has banned use of "dark patterns" on e-commerce platforms which intend to deceive customers or manipulate their choices. A gazette notification in this regard as "Guidelines for prevention and regulation of dark patterns" was issued on November 30 by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), which is applicable to all platforms offering goods and services in India, and even advertisers and sellers. Dark patterns have been defined as "any practice or deceptive design pattern using user interface or user experience interactions on any platform that is designed to mislead or trick users to do something they originally did not intend or want to do, by subverting or impairing the consumer autonomy, decision making or choice."



India economic growth to boost demand of corporates: Fitch

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Leading credit rating firm Fitch Ratings expects that India's resilient economic growth will boost demand of the corporates. In its latest research report on 'India Corporates: Sector Trends 2024', Fitch said that this is a sequel to the robust performance of the corporates in 2023 and will offset weakness from slowing growth in the key overseas markets. Rising demand and easing input cost pressure should boost margins of the corporates in the next financial year, Fitch said. Fitch said that with strong domestic demand growth, it is expected that India will be among the world's fastest-growing countries, with resilient GDP growth of 6.5 per cent during the fiscal 2024-25. This is despite a challenging global backdrop and the cumulative impact of the recent monetary tightening, it said. Sectors like cement, electricity and petroleum products are expected to witness a strong demand with high-frequency data in 2023 sustained well above pre-COVID pandemic levels. Fitch said that India's improving infrastructure will also boost steel demand. Slowing down in the US and the Eurozone is likely to moderate growth of the IT services. Fitch said rising domestic auto sales volume should drive revenues of the auto suppliers, while travel and tourism conditions also improved in 2023.



Infosys loses mega contract as global client terminates \$1.5 bn deal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services firm Infosys has said that a global company has decided to terminate a multi-year contract worth USD 1.5 billion with it. On September 14, 2023, Infosys announced a pact with a global company to offer enhanced digital experiences alongside modernisation and business operations services leveraging Infosys platforms and AI solutions. "The total client target spend over 15 years is estimated at USD 1.5 billion," it had said. This was subject to parties entering into a Master Agreement, Infosys had added. The deal loss comes at a time when global uncertainties and macro headwinds have challenged IT and tech companies worldwide. In fact, the UK economy has contracted in the third quarter according to official estimates, and experts have cautioned that Britain could already be at risk of a recession.

pany which was subject to parties entering into a master agreement. On the said date, Infosys informed BSE that it entered into an MoU with the global client company to provide enhanced digital experiences, along with modernisation and business operations services, leveraging Infosys platforms and AI solutions. "The total client target spend over 15 years is estimated at USD 1.5 billion," it had said. This was subject to parties entering into a Master Agreement, Infosys had added. The deal loss comes at a time when global uncertainties and macro headwinds have challenged IT and tech companies worldwide. In fact, the UK economy has contracted in the third quarter according to official estimates, and experts have cautioned that Britain could already be at risk of a recession.

'India steel production grows 11 per cent in November'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has registered an increase of 11.4 per cent in its crude steel production at 11.7 million tonne (MT) in November this year, according to World Steel Association (worldsteel). During January-November, the country's production was 12.1 per cent higher year on year (y-o-y) at 128.2 MT, the global body said in its latest report. The global steel production in November was at 145.5 MT, 3.3 per cent up over same month in 2022. The world output rose marginally by 0.5 per cent to 1,715.1 MT in January-November 2023, worldsteel said.



China produced 76.1 MT steel in November, up 0.4 per cent over November 2022. It produced 952.1 MT in January-November, higher 1.5 per cent y-o-y.

In November, Japan's output fell 0.9 per cent to 7.1 MT, while the overall production was 2.8 per cent lower at 80 MT during January-November 2023.

The US produced 6.6 MT steel in last month and 73.9 MT in the eleven-month period of 2023. Russia produced 6.4 MT in November and 70.2 MT in January-November 2023. South Korea's production stood at 5.4 MT in November and 61.3 MT in the 11-month period of 2023. In November this year, Germany produced 2.7 MT, Türkiye produced 3 MT, and Brazil 2.7 MT. With members in every major steel-producing country, Brussels-based worldsteel represents steel producers, national and regional steel industry associations, and steel research institutes. Its members represent around 85 per cent of the global steel production.

Cyber risks biggest threat faced by Indian firms: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber risks are cited as the biggest threat faced by Indian organisations with 38 per cent of respondents feeling highly or extremely exposed to it, says a survey. With this, cybersecurity has jumped two spots from number three to number one on the risk radar when compared to the 2022 Global Risk Survey, the PwC's 2023 Global Risk Survey- India edition stated. PwC said the final results of the survey are based on 3,910 survey responses from Business and Risk Management leaders (CEO, board, risk management, operations, technology, finance, audit) across 67 terri-

tories providing their views on the status and direction of risk in their organisation. 163 Indian organisations were a part of this survey. Other digital and technology risks are also top concerns for business leaders in India (at 35 per cent). To address the challenges, Indian organisations are making bold investments in cybersecurity with more than half of the respondents planning to invest in cybersecurity tools (55 per cent) and AI, machine learning and automation technologies (55 per cent) in the next 1-3 years, according to survey findings. To back these investments, 71 per cent of Indian organisations



are gathering and analysing cybersecurity and IT data for risk management and opportunity identification. Globally 61 per cent of the organisations are doing the same. Sivarama Krishnan, Partner and Leader, Risk Consulting, PwC India said that the 2023

Global Risk Survey shows that Indian business leaders are not only demonstrating an increased appetite for taking risks but are also doing a reasonable job of identifying opportunities presented by risks. "This mindset shift is critical

for an organisation's progress- it will not only help businesses be better prepared to manage risks, but also grow, build resilience, deliver outcomes and create value for all stakeholders," Krishnan added. The survey also showed that 99 per cent of Indian business leaders are confident their organisation can balance growth with managing risk effectively, of which 66 per cent are very confident of the same. Globally these figures stand at 91 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively. Further, Indian businesses are seeing technology disruptors as opportunities, with 69 per cent of Indian executives seeing Generative AI as an opportuni-

ty (against 60 per cent globally). The survey also revealed how organisations are taking the help of emerging technologies such as GenAI for risk management, with 48 per cent of Indian enterprises having deployed AI and machine learning for automated risk assessment and response to a large extent. This is slightly lower than the global response of 50 per cent. To leverage the positives brought in by risks and disruptions, the survey said 88 per cent of Indian organisations are actively investing in building resilience in their ecosystem over the last 12 months. Globally, 77 per cent of the businesses are investing in the same.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Office space demand surged 92 per cent during October-December period across six major cities on better demand of workspace from corporates and coworking operators, according to Colliers India. Real estate consultant Colliers India report shows that gross leasing of office space stood at 20.2 million square feet in the fourth quarter of this calendar year from 10.5 million square feet in the year-ago period. Helped by strong demand during the December quarter, the total leasing of office space rose 16 per cent to 58.2 million square feet during the 2023 calendar year from 50.3 million

'Office demand jumps 92 per cent in October, December in top 6 cities'

square feet last year. Colliers tracks office demand and supply of 6 cities -- Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Pune. Gross leasing or absorption does not include lease renewals, pre-commitments and deals where only a letter of intent has been signed. According to the data, the office space leasing in Bengaluru rose 58 per cent to 5.5 million square feet during October-December

period from 3.5 million square feet in the year-ago period. Chennai saw more than four-fold jump to 4.3 million square feet from 1 million square feet. In Delhi-NCR, the demand for office space grew 61 per cent to 3.1 million square feet from 1.9 million square feet. The gross leasing of office space in Hyderabad increased 57 per cent to 2.7 million square feet from 1.7 million square feet. Mumbai witnessed a 87 per cent increase in demand to 2.6 mil-



lion square feet from 1.4 million square feet. In Pune, the office leasing doubled to 2 million square feet during October-December period of this year from 1 million square feet in the previous year. Arpit Mehrotra, Managing Director, Head of Office services, Colliers India, said, "The Indian office market not only navigated initial uncertainties but exceeded expectations and emerged successfully, recording an impressive 58 million sq ft of

gross absorption during 2023." The demand momentum, particularly as seen during the last quarter, will pave way for an optimistic start to 2024, he added. "Notwithstanding unforeseen events, a stable economic outlook augurs well for Indian commercial real estate and office markets will continue to witness steady interest from domestic as well as foreign-origin occupiers," Mehrotra said. Giving details about demand

drivers in 2023, Colliers India pointed out that the contribution of tech sector to office leasing has been steadily decreasing from around 50 per cent in 2020 to 25 per cent in 2023. The sectoral contributions from BFSI and Engineering & Manufacturing sectors especially have almost doubled, increasing from 10-12 per cent in 2020 to around 16-20 per cent in 2023. Interestingly, in 2023, leasing by engineering and manufacturing players (26 per cent share) surpassed the demand emancipating from technology firms (22 per cent share) in the tech hub of Bengaluru. Demand from flexible space operators rose 24 per cent to 8.7 million sq ft in 2023.

75K sellers on Meesho hit double digit growth in sales

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Around 75,000 sellers achieved double-digit growth while over 20,000 sellers witnessed a 10-times jump in their business on Softbank-backed e-commerce firm Meesho, the company said on Sunday. Meesho is the first unicorn e-commerce firm to have reported profit this year and it claims to have maintained the profitability since it first reported the performance in July. The company claimed that nearly 10,000 Meesho sellers crossed the Rs 1 crore sales mark and 130,000 registered sales of over Rs 1 lakh during 2023. Around "60 per cent of these sellers come from small towns like Avinashi, Bharuch, Fiazabad and Silchar", Meesho said. Meesho said that it added around 7 lakh new sellers this year taking the total number to 15 lakh this year. The company recorded transactions for 14 crore customers and claimed that nearly 80 per cent of the orders came from tier 2 and smaller markets. Meesho said that it recorded a unique pattern of customers placing maximum orders on Sunday. "Indian shoppers have consistently crowned Sundays as the ultimate shopping day for two consecutive years, beginning with an early bird rush at 7 AM and culminating in the wee hours at 3 AM," the statement said.

FMCG flavours

Better volumes, rural demand revival, double digit volume growth in 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

From an uptick in rural demand to higher volumes and favourable commodity prices, the country's FMCG industry is pinning hopes on diverse catalysts for a double-digit volume-led growth in the new year after a challenging 2023. Weaker-than-expected festive demand, rainfall deficit that hampered rural growth, unseasonal rains that dampened sale of beverages and higher commodity prices all together cooked a difficult-to-digest market recipe this year even though "green shoots" of recovery are becoming more visible. The sector, which has a high growth potential especially in an emerging market like India, is anticipating 2024 to be a "better year" with favourable input prices benefitting the Home

and Personal Care (HPC) as well as certain food business segments. "We expect the demand situation to improve as we enter the next financial year. We expect FMCG innovators to increase the pace of innovation and premiumisation and also focus on significant investment behind expanding the quality of rural distribution," Marico MD and CEO Saugata Gupta said. The FMCG players are also expecting expansion of their profit margins with softening of commodity inflation that would result in increased spending on branding, return of promotional schemes for consumers and increased dividend payout to their shareholders, according to analysts. Most FMCG companies extend the benefits of moderation in key commodity prices to consumers by undertaking price



cuts or by increasing gram-mages. They are expecting a faster growth in the premium and large pack sizes, thanks to a stronger urban market and modern trade channels. Besides, analysts expect a double-digit growth for the sector with higher volumes with market share gains and increase in rural penetration with the come back of popular price packs, which gained prominence when inflation was ruling at high lev-

els. "A combination of weak demand sentiment especially in rural areas due to inflation and increased aggression of smaller players and alternative avenues of spending have led to softer growth of the FMCG sector this year. Having said that, the economy is on a sound footing, inflation is largely under control and the overall outlook is on an improvement trajectory," Gupta said.

He also said that price cuts by large, organised players in the sector will make them more competitive. Small regional FMCG players have reemerged in the market after the cooling of inflation, giving tough competition to big players, impacting their market share in their pocket of influence in segments such as soaps, tea, detergent and biscuits. Dabur India CEO Mohit Malhotra said there has been a marked improvement in consumer sentiments in 2023 with the softening of inflation. "While green shoots of recovery are visible, rural demand is still trailing urban markets. That said, we are hopeful that rural markets will post a strong recovery in the new year. We are already seeing the gap between rural and urban growth continuously shrinking," he said, adding that going forward,

Dabur is looking at both urban and rural markets to drive growth. Leading consultancy EY India National Leader - Consumer Products & Retail - Angshuman Bhattacharya said that for the FMCG sector, urban growth will continue. "The FMCG industry is expected to grow at over 10 per cent, and in urban-centric segments above 12 per cent," he said. All said, the rural market contributions around 37 to 38 per cent to the overall FMCG sales and a bulk of that comes from the food segment. According to the latest report from data analytics firm NielsenIQ, the rural market, which has been facing a consumption slowdown for the last several quarters, is showing signs of recovery while the urban market is maintaining a "stable rate of growth".

For Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL), 2023 was an "action-packed year", in which the Tata group FMCG arm had a number of new product launches across categories, expanding its total addressable market. "This financial year has seen relative stability in commodities and currencies as a result of which pricing movements have been relatively low in our businesses. And with this, we have seen a gradual uptick in volumes and we keep our fingers crossed that this trend continues," TCPL MD & CEO Sunil D'Souza said. "While I would not want to give a forecast, the industry consensus is that if macros fall in place, i.e. Inflation coming off, higher rural incomes, government interventions to spur up the rural economy, then things should start looking up," he said.

Karan, Divya emerge winners in air pistol trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Karan Sehrawat of Haryana and Divya TS of Karnataka emerged victorious at the men's and women's 10m air pistol trials (T2) here on Sunday, concluding the new season's first two national selection trials for rifle and pistol. The international season begins early in 2024, when the Indian rifle and pistol squad heads to Jakarta, Indonesia, to take part in the Asian Olympic qualifying event for which the teams have been already announced. Olympian Saurabh Chaudhary extended his good run to a second day, topping the men's 10m air pistol T2 qualifications with a world-class score of 586. He was followed by his senior Olympian Gurpreet Singh who shot the same score but had seven lesser inner 10s than Saurabh. Three Haryana shooters took the final three qualifying spots, with Aditya Marla and



Sehrawat finishing sixth and seventh, while eventual runner-up Shiva Narwal claimed the eighth and final spot with a 583. They turned the tables in the final, however, denying

Saurabh a repeat of his T1 win on Saturday. Sehrawat played the perfect final as he led throughout the 24-shot decider with his opponent giving a scare only after the 20th shot, getting within

just 0.1. That was the closest he would get as Karan took the title with a final score of 243.0 to Shiva's 242.6. Kedarling Uchaganve of the Army beat Saurabh to third, finishing with 222.4.

In the women's 10m air pistol T2 final, India international Divya denied runner-up Manu Bhaker and third-placed Anuradha Devi in yet another Haryana 1-2 with a virtuoso performance.

Her 243.8, was well ahead of Manu's 242.4. Rhythm Sangwan topped with 578 in the 60-shot qualification round which did not reach searing scoring heights. Anuradha was second with 577 while the seasoned Annu Raj Singh was third with 576. Manu finished fifth on the same score as Anuradha, while Divya just sneaked in on count-back in eighth after being tied with two others on 574. She was joint fifth after the first five singles shots series and only moved up to third after the second set of fives with Anuradha and Manu on track for a Haryana 1-2. After the 14th single shot, Divya was ahead of Anuradha and was just 0.3 behind Manu, who was in the lead. A couple of solid 10s more and she was in the lead for the first time in the final after the 16th. Manu then faltered with an 8.8, enabling Divya to go ahead by two after the 18th and she closed out the contest confidently.



Muddappa becomes most decorated motorsports athlete

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Ten-time national drag tracing champion Hemanth Muddappa became the most-decorated motorsports athlete with an unprecedented dozen titles after remaining unbeaten in top two classes to emerge a double champion in the MMSC-FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship here on Sunday. He made it a sweet double emerging triumphant in both the Unrestricted Class and the 1051 to 1650cc class in the fourth and final round at the Madras International Circuit (MIC) at Irungattukottai near here. Muddappa won the 1051 to 1650cc class title despite suffering a wheelee at the start and annexed the top place in both round 3 and 4 to bring his tally of national titles to a grand dozen. He remained unbeaten in these two classes in all the four rounds, throughout the year. Earlier in the morning, Muddappa won the 4-stroke

unrestricted category astride the Suzuki Hayabusa, beating arch-rival and Bengaluru mate Alimon Saidalvi, clocking a blistering 07.746s and went on to claim another first place in the 4S 1051 to 1650cc class, beating another stalwart Mohammed Riyaz of Hyderabad with a time of 7.779s. Riyaz, who came third in the Unrestricted Class won the 551 to 850cc Super Sport class, where Muddappa could only finish third behind another Hyderabad rider Mirza Jahangir, who took second. "It is a grand dozen and I am proud of the long and strong relationship with Mantra Racing that has brought a lot of happiness, not to talk about the hard work and struggles we underwent throughout the year. "It is an amazing journey and I am glad we got a double. My thanks to all the boys, my family and my supporters," said Muddappa, who is nicknamed as 'LightningR1' for his brute speed.

Women National Boxing Championships

Jaismine, Arundhati ease into quarters

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine (60kg) and former youth world champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) notched up identical 5-0 wins to progress to the quarterfinals of the Women's National Boxing Championships here on Sunday. Representing SSCB, Jaismine

showcased her experience in securing a commanding 5-0 victory over Thongam Kunjarani Devi of Manipur in the round of 16 bout to set up a clash with Poonam Kaithwas of Maharashtra in the quarterfinals. Arundhati, on the other hand, went head to head against Amita of All India Police. She displayed her skillset and power-packed punches to



secure a 5-0 victory. The boxer now will be up against

Komalpreet Kaur of Punjab in the quarterfinals. In other significant bouts, Sakshi (57kg) of SSCB faced Jyoti of Delhi in the round of 32 match. The match was closely contested until Sakshi unleashed a flurry of punches, ultimately winning the bout as the referee stopped the contest in the third round. She will face off against Refa Mohid of Telangana in the

round of 16. Haryana's Saweety Boora (81kg) went up against Kanishka of UP in an exciting contest. The 2023 World Championship gold medallist displayed her prowess as she defeated her opponent with the referee stopping the contest in round 3. She will face Saie Davkhar of Maharashtra in the quarterfinals.



EPL has its first female referee

AP ■ LONDON

The English Premier League has its first female referee and Burnley manager Vincent Kompany called it a "milestone moment" on Saturday. Rebecca Welch controlled Burnley's 2-0 win at Fulham. Kompany spoke to Welch at fulltime. "I wanted to congratulate her because it's a big moment," he said. "It's fair to say that it's a milestone moment and may there be more, and the best thing will always be when someone is judged on merit. "But you have to have a first and this is it, so well done (to her) and I'm happy to be part of this moment." Welch was applauded by spectators as she emerged from the tunnel at Craven Cottage. She previously made history when she refereed an FA Cup fixture in 2022 and a second-tier Championship match in 2021. Welch has already worked as a fourth official in the Premier League in November. Welch has been a referee since 2010, initially balancing the role with her job in the National Health Service before becoming a full-time match official.

Atletico edges Sevilla to end mini slump

AP ■ BARCELONA

Ten-man Atletico Madrid edged Sevilla 1-0 at home on Saturday to ensure it entered the Spanish league winter break still in touch with the front-runners. The game in Spain's capital was originally scheduled for September but was postponed due to a forecast for bad weather. Halftime substitute Marcos Llorente made an immediate impact by scoring just a minute after the restart. Atletico then defended with poise while playing a man down for the final 20 minutes after substitute Caglar Soyuncu received a direct red card in the 70th. "When you come off the bench you always try to give your team something extra," Llorente said. "We only had winning on our minds. Now it is time to disconnect and then we are right back at it." Real Madrid and surprise package Girona are at the top of the

standings with a seven-point lead over Atletico and Barcelona one round before the competition reaches its halfway point. Atletico had been in a bit of a slump after winning just one of its previous four league games. Lorente used exquisite control of a long ball from Koke Resurrección before he finished off a rebound of his own pass to beat goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic. Soyuncu was sent off for a dangerous tackle on Lucas Ocampos after the Turkey international had been on the field for four minutes. Atletico defender Reinildo Mandava went on as a late substitute in his first appearance since needing surgery to repair a torn right-knee ligament in February. Sevilla was playing its second game under new coach Quique Sánchez Flores. It beat Getafe in his debut on Tuesday. Sevilla is three points above the relegation zone in 15th place.

Osimhen sent off for Napoli in loss at Roma

AP ■ ROME

Victor Osimhen followed his contract renewal with Napoli in the worst possible way as he got sent off in a 2-0 defeat at Roma in Serie A on Saturday. Defending champion Napoli ended the match with nine men as Matteo Politano was also red-carded shortly before Lorenzo Pellegrini scored the opener. Romelu Lukaku sealed the match for Roma, which moved up to sixth, a point above Napoli and three points below fourth-placed Bologna. Napoli was looking to bounce back from a 4-0 humiliation at home to Frosinone in the Italian Cup on Tuesday. The tension was high at the Stadio Olimpico with both coaches booked for dissent in the first half amid a large number of fouls and protests. It was of little surprise when Politano was shown a straight red card in the 66th minute for kicking out at Nicola Zalewski after having his jersey tugged by the Roma midfielder. Roma broke the deadlock 10 minutes later when attempts by



Sardar Azmoun and then Stephan El Shaarawy were charged down but the latter turned into an assist for Pellegrini, who fired the home side ahead. Osimhen renewed his contract earlier Saturday to 2026 and was eager to celebrate with a goal but, instead, he received a second yellow card in the 86th, 13 minutes after his first booking, and was sent off. Roma doubled its tally in stoppage time when Lukaku combined with Evan Ndicka to finish off a counterattack. **BRAVO BISSECK**

There was an unlikely scoring replacement for Lautaro Martínez when defender Yann Bissecck bagged his first goal for Inter Milan and launched the Serie A leader to a 2-0 victory over Lecce. Bissecck - who hit the woodwork moments earlier - flicked in a free kick with the back of his head two minutes from the break to help Inter bounce back from a midweek Italian Cup defeat and consolidate top spot in the league. Bissecck also had a header fingertipped over the bar in the second half. Inter moved four points ahead of Juventus, which won at

Frosinone 2-1. Inter doubled its tally in the 78th following a moment of magic from Marko Arnautovic, who controlled a pass from Barella and waited for him to sprint into the box before sensationally backheeling it to him to slot into the bottom left corner. Lecce winger Lameck Banda was shown a straight red card and sent off five minutes later for dissent. Lautaro was unavailable for the first time in 89 matches after the Argentine World Cup winner was injured on Wednesday during the Italian Cup exit to Bologna. Lautaro, the Serie A leading scorer with 15, is expected back early in the new year. Another key player, Federico Dimarco, was also out hurt. **YOUNGEST PLAYER** Kenan Yildiz became the youngest foreigner to score for Juventus in Serie A when he netted on his full debut. The 18-year-old Yildiz had six substitute appearances this season and was made a starter for the first time by Massimiliano

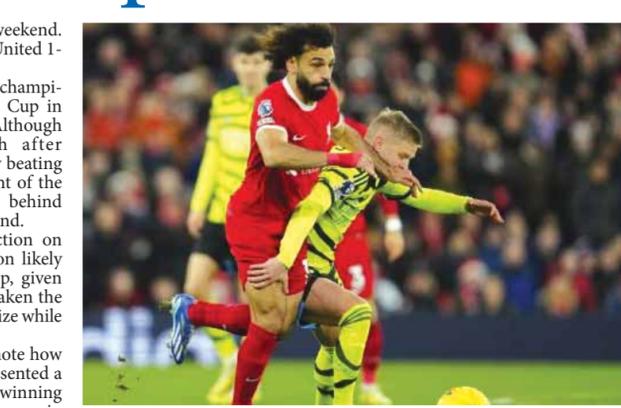
Allegri. The teenage Turkey forward netted just 12 minutes in, gathering from Filip Kostic before forcing his way past three defenders and firing into the bottom left corner. Substitute Jaime Baez levelled for Frosinone early in the second half but Juventus restored its lead nine minutes from time with a goal by a substitute of its own, when Dusan Vlahovic headed in Weston McKennie's cross. **IMPRESSIVE BOLOGNA** Bologna consolidated fourth place and closed the gap on third-placed AC Milan to two points with a 1-0 win over Atalanta. Lewis Ferguson headed in a corner with four minutes remaining. Bologna also knocked two-time defending champion Inter out of the Italian Cup midweek. Torino rescued a 1-1 draw at home against relegation-threatened Udinese. Hellas Verona beat 10-man Cagliari 2-0 to leapfrog Claudio Ranieri's side and was made a starter for the first time by Massimiliano

Arsenal, Liverpool showcase title credentials

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal leads the English Premier League at Christmas for the second year in a row after drawing with Liverpool 1-1 at Anfield on Saturday. The challenge for Mikel Arteta is to prove they can go the distance this time after a late collapse ended their title hopes last season. "We have experience of being where we are today. We should be really happy because that shows a lot of consistency for this new group ... To lead two years in a row. But that's it," the Arsenal manager said. "We are where we want to be right now, both in the Premier League and the Champions League." Arsenal led for 248 days last season until April, when a 2-2 draw at Liverpool started a slump it didn't recover from. The Gunners have drawn again at Anfield, but go into Christmas one point ahead of second-placed Liverpool and Aston Villa, third on goal difference. Defending Manchester City will be happy after seeing its three main

rivals drop points this weekend. Villa drew with Sheffield United 1-1 on Friday. Pep Guardiola's defending champion lifted the Club World Cup in Saudi Arabia on Friday. Although City dropped to fifth after Tottenham went fourth by beating Everton 2-1, it was in sight of the leaders - just six points behind Arsenal with a game in hand. City players return to action on Wednesday against Everton likely with a spring in their step, given none of their rivals have taken the opportunity to fully capitalize while they were away. Guardiola, however, will note how Arsenal and Liverpool presented a real threat to his hopes of winning a record fourth Premier League in a row after both teams showcased their credentials in a game of high quality and intensity on Merseyside. Gabriel headed Arsenal in front after four minutes and Mohamed Salah evened the score in the 29th when lashing a shot into the top corner. Trent Alexander-Arnold had the



best chance to win the game when hitting the bar with only Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya to beat in the second half. "Until the last second it was top intensity, everybody felt it, super intense. Tough game, good game, in moments spectacular," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.

"Absolutely we take confidence from the result. You have to take confidence from these results and performances against a top, top side." **UNITED SLUMP** The losses just keep on coming for Manchester United, which is off to

its worst start since 1930. A 2-0 defeat at West Ham was United's eighth in the Premier League and 13th in all competitions. In 1930, United lost 16 times before Christmas. Goals from Jarrod Bowen and Mohammed Kudus in the 72nd and 78th minutes at London Stadium propelled West Ham while United's run without a goal was extended to four games. "That's not good enough for our standards," underfire manager Erik Ten Hag said. Ten Hag has faced speculation about his position for weeks, and former Chelsea manager Graham Potter is reportedly a contender to replace him if he is fired. Ten Hag said recently he has the backing of the club hierarchy but that will surely diminish if the losses keep mounting. United won the League Cup and qualified for the Champions League in Ten Hag's first year in charge, but he has struggled to build on that success this term. His team was eliminated from the

Champions League at the group stage and exited early from the League Cup. Defeat at West Ham left United eight points off fourth-placed Tottenham. Ten Hag pointed to an extensive injury list as a factor behind his team's form. "First of all, we need returning the players," he said. "We are quite thin in this moment in the squad. But I have to say the players who were on the pitch, also young players, they had very good performances. But, yeah, it's of course the experienced players (who) bring us to higher levels." **TOTTENHAM RUN** Tottenham looks to be over its recent slump and heads into Christmas above defending champion Manchester City after beating Everton 2-1. The early season leader tumbled on the table after a slew of injuries and a damaging run of four defeats in five, with only a draw at City breaking that losing sequence. But

three straight wins have lifted Spurs up to fourth. Goals from Richarlison and Son Heung-min gave them a 2-0 lead after 18 minutes. Andre Gomes scored for Everton in the 82nd, but the visitors' recent run of four straight league wins came to an end. **NUNO LOSSES** New Nottingham Forest manager Nuno Espirito Santo suffered a cruel defeat in his first game in charge of the relegation-battling club. A Dominic Solanke hat trick secured a 3-2 win for Bournemouth with the deciding goal coming in the fourth minute of added time. Willy Boly's red card in the 23rd minute reduced Forest to 10 men but Anthony Elanga gave them the opening goal two minutes into the second half. Solanke struck back twice in seven minutes to put Bournemouth ahead. Chris Wood looked to have secured a point with his headed equalizer in the 74th but Solanke completed his hat trick in stoppage time.

India record maiden Test win over Australia

Win by 8 wickets in one off women Test

PTI ■ MUMBAI

It was a befitting end to India Women's first 'home season' of Test cricket in 28 years as they recorded a historic maiden victory over a venerable Australia in the one-off Test here on Sunday.

On the final day, India produced their best both with the ball and bat to thwart a spirited Australian resurgence, first sparking a collapse in the visitors' ranks to snaffle the remaining five wickets for 28 and then knocking off a meagre target of 75 without much ado to script an eight-wicket win.

Smriti Mandhana (38 not out) and Jemimah Rodrigues (12 not out) embraced each other in a warm hug when the objective of beating a world-dominating

side was accomplished, bringing back memories of India's shushed reaction in 2008 in Australia when MS Dhoni's side beat the hosts and made a statement by not indulging in any passionate celebrations.

Playing more than one Test at home for the first time since 1995, there was hardly a moment when the team put a foot wrong.

India Women's stuck to the promise of playing 'positive cricket', weathered all mini storms along the way and largely dictated terms against fancied opponents in Australia and England.

In fact, there was no disparity in Team India's clinical performance in the two home Tests played on different surfaces here at the Wankhede Stadium



and at the DY Patil Stadium against England, considering they were playing at home for the first time in almost a decade. While India scripted the biggest

win for any team by margin of runs against England, their first-ever triumph over Australia in 11 Tests now has ensured more entries in the column of 'match-

es won' compared to 'matches lost'. In 40 Tests, India now have seven wins and six defeats, while 27 have been drawn.

India's dominating show warrants the attention of the game's custodians to ruminate over more 'home' Tests in future since such games have only

been few and far between. If the win over England last week saw the emergence of new Test stars in Jemimah Rodrigues, Shubha Sathesh and Renuka Singh Thakur, the one against Australia witnessed the 20-year-old Richa Ghosh arriving at the scene with 52 on debut.

On the fourth day morning, Indian spinners ruled the roost as the trio of Sneha Rana (5-2-9-2), Rajeshwari Gayakwad (1-4-1-0-2) and Deepti Sharma (3-2-5-0) teamed up to wreck havoc on the Australian resistance.

Australia, looking to build on their slender lead of 46 runs, collapsed spectacularly to lose five wickets in the first 45 minutes of the day and concede the game to India.

Pooja Vastrakar began the damage by trapping Ashleigh

Gardner for seven in front of the wickets, and Rana tiled the game in India's favour when she struck twice to remove Annabel Sutherland (27) and Alana King (0).

Rajeshwari Gayakwad, who was unlucky to have not got any success on the third day when she got a breakthrough nearly thrice, cleaned up Kim Garth (4) for her first wicket in the innings. Gayakwad then bamboozled Jess Jonassen (9) with a delivery that turned into the left-hander sharply and crashed into middle and leg, with the last recognised Australian batter nearly toppling over on her front foot.

Australia were bundled out for 261 in their second innings, having scored a moderate 219 in their first essay after electing to bat.

Curran loses appeal to have BBL umpire intimidation ban overturned

AP ■ SYDNEY

English all-rounder Tom Curran's appeal to have his four-match ban overturned for intimidating an umpire during a recent Big Bash League match has been dismissed.

Cricket Australia had charged Curran on Thursday with a level-three offence under clause 2.17 in the code of conduct following an incident that occurred during the Sydney Sixers' team warm-up before its match against the Hobart Hurricanes on December 11.

Video footage of the incident showed Curran apparently refusing to comply with the umpire's direction to stay off the wicket

while warming up. Curran - who has been capped for England in all three formats and is in his fourth season with the Sydney Sixers - then went to the other end to complete another practice run-up and almost collided with the umpire, who had stood on the bowling crease to prevent Curran from again encroaching onto the pitch. A verbal altercation between Curran and the umpire immediately followed.

Cricket Australia confirmed in a statement on Sunday that the Sixers' appeal against the English international all-rounder's four-match ban was dismissed with the original sanction to stand.

Kaur spell on third day was turning point: Sneh

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's spell on the third evening was the turning point in the one-off women's Test between India and Australia which the hosts won by eight wickets, said all-rounder Sneh Rana here on Sunday.

Kaur brought herself on after Australia's resurgent batting display kept India on the field for a large part of the third day and dismissed Tahlia McGrath (73) and Alyssa Healy (32), after they had reduced the first-innings deficit of 187 runs and taken a slender lead of 46 runs.

India came out firing on all cylinders to bowl Australia out for 261 after they resumed play at 233/5 on the fourth day and easily chased the target of 75 runs.

"We were not thinking much



and wanted to stay in the present. Harmanpreet's two wickets were the turning point," Rana told the media after India's maiden win over Australia in Tests when asked about the turning point in the match.

Rana seconded India captain Kaur in acknowledging that head coach Amol Muzumdar had a key role to play in their strong performances.

"As Harmanpreet said, he had an important role in the team. He has been a very experienced player and all his inputs have been good," Rana said.

"We have tried to follow that and the result can be seen in the last two Tests. We are very thankful that he has come on as a coach. In the future too we hope to continue doing well under him," she added.

On the fourth and final day spinners Rana, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Deepti Sharma tamed the Australian batters with a superlative bowling show that saw the visitors lose five wickets for 28 runs.

Rana said the fact that they all compliment each other with on-field discussions worked in their favour.

"We try to talk a lot among ourselves when we are in (the field) and remain calm," she said.

"Each of us back our respective strengths and we discuss about what is working in terms of which kind of delivery is behaving how and what you have to bowl to a batter."

"We try to keep it simple and not overcomplicate it and whatever we speak about on the field compliments us. We have had partnerships in both batting and bowling and the result is in front of us," Rana added.

Rana said given the lack of Test assignments for the Indian team it was imperative to keep things simple.

"The preparations were simple, we had no need of experimenting a lot because red-ball cricket is a long game. We kept it simple, we were calm and I have always prepared to bowl in my channels. I back my strengths and in these two matches I tried to do the same," she said.



Healy rues not having more games

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Australia's first-ever loss to India in the one-off women's Test is not even a "blip" and next year's T20 World Cup in Bangladesh remains their ultimate goal, said captain Alyssa Healy on Sunday.

Indian Women recorded a historic maiden victory over a venerable Australia in the one-off Test, putting a befitting end to their first 'home season' of Test cricket in 28 years.

The eight-wicket win was India's first-ever triumph over Australia in 11 Tests.

"Probably not even a blip," Healy told media after the match when asked where does this defeat leave her side given their dominant record.

"It is a format where we are not overly familiar with conditions," Healy said Australia's squad has undergone a lot of change but they are comfortably placed.

"Within our group, we are really comfortable with where we are at and sort of the progression that we are on and where we want to get to moving forward," she said.

"Ultimately, there is a big T20 World Cup in Bangladesh towards the end of next year and that is a real carrot for us. These are the sort of big trophies that we are wanting to win.

"Yes, every series in between now and then is important, but at the same time, we are building towards that World Cup and we want to make sure that we are playing our best cricket to win those big those big moments."

The T20 World Cup is scheduled in Bangladesh next September and October, while the 2025 ODI World Cup will be played in India.

Healy wants to see more Tests. Healy knows that women's cricket is currently dominated by white-ball cricket but said she would love to see more Test cricket in the calendar.

"We would love to see more and

more and it would create a real contest over three games," she said.

"But the nature of the female game, at the moment, is (that) it is (a) very white-ball dominant and trying to fit red-ball in the calendar and (to) fit all the white-ball games in particular seems to be taking precedence.

"You take three one-day games out and we could probably play two more Test matches," she added. Before India took on England and Australia in one-off Test each, England's Tammy Beaumont had hoped that the home team's strong showing would add more matches to the future schedule.

Healy said the ball is in the court of the respective national boards.

"That is up to the BCCI and probably Cricket Australia as well to decide whether that is on the cards or not," she said.

"In the press conference (post match presentation) when Anjum (Chopra) asked me a question, then I thought, 'Yep, imagine playing two more of these. That would be an unbelievable experience for our group and probably a true test of both sides' abilities."

"India's relentlessness with the ball stood out"

On the final day, India thwarted a spirited Australian resurgence, first sparking a collapse in the visitors' ranks to snaffle the remaining five wickets for 28 and then knocking off a meagre target of 75 without much ado. Healy credited India's 'relentlessness' with the ball in their one-off Test.

"One-off Test match, India playing in their home conditions, you'd expect them to be heavy favourites. But the way we tried to adapt and continue to learn throughout the four days was really impressive," Healy said.

"Their relentlessness with the ball was probably what stood out to me. They are obviously heavy favourites in their own conditions."

Virat, Rohit sweat it out as life moves on

PTI ■ CENTURION

It has now been more than a month since the forgettable World Cup final but it still hurts like hell.

However, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are two battle-hardened professionals who know that it's important to move on as they sweated it out in companionable silence.

There's a 31-year jinx in Indian cricket having missed out on a Test series win in the 'Rainbow Nation' and in the twilight zone of their careers, both would want to achieve which no other

Indian teams could. While Kohli, who came back from London after a short break with family, joined the training after half an hour, Rohit did look a bit more relaxed after shutting himself off for three weeks.

The two batted in different nets and centre practice strip, and also faced throwdowns for more than an hour.

There was hardly any conversation between them even when they took short breaks in between. Unlike the World Cup nets when there was a mix of both focus and laughter, the only sound that made you sit up and



take notice was that of the red leather colliding with the willow. Coach Rahul Dravid had a hawk eye on centre nets as KL Rahul put his pads on quickly. With Kona Bharat not even

bothering to don the big gloves during the first hour, one had no doubt who would keep wickets. It became more clear with the slip formation when Rahul kept wickets and had young turks Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill for company.

Cricket is piece of life and all present at Supersport Park during the gruelling three hours were seen picking up the pieces.

Amid the silence though, Rohit's sense of humour remained intact when he joked with a well known YouTuber that "you have got competition because others are here," pointing out at other

journalists, who have come to cover the series.

The first to enter the nets, Rohit and young Yashasvi Jaiswal were seen taking turns while facing Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur for five deliveries each before coming in for next round.

However, the signature Rohit came to fore when he slog swept Ashwin deep into the grass embankments. One knew that nothing has changed as per Rohit the opener is concerned.

As the skipper was in the midst of his first stint, in walked Kohli and had a brief chat with coach Dravid as he watched Rohit's

batting.

After some time, King Kohli walked out of the main arena and padded up for the throwdown nets where Rohit and Jaiswal would join in a few minutes.

"Tujhko pehle jana ki main jaoon (You will go first or should I go)," Rohit asked his younger opening partner who wants the senior to take strike.

"Dada aapke liye kaunsa bowler rakhein, right arm ya left-arm (Should I keep right-arm or left-arm bowler for you)."

Charan joins Indian Street Premier League as Hyderabad team owner

PTI ■ MUMBAI

RRR' star Ram Charan on Sunday said he has joined the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) as the owner of team Hyderabad.

The ISPL is India's first tennis ball T10 cricket tournament that will be played inside a stadium.

The inaugural edition will feature 19 high-intensity matches, boasting a line-up of six teams - Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, and Srinagar.

Ram Charan made the announcement about joining the ISPL on his official X page.

"Excited to announce my ownership of Team Hyderabad in the Indian Street Premier League!"

"Beyond cricket, this venture is about nurturing talent, fostering community spirit, and celebrating street cricket's essence. Join me as we elevate Hyderabad's presence in the ISPL, crafting memorable moments and igniting passion," the actor wrote in the post.

Recently, Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar and Hrithik Roshan were announced as the team owners of Mumbai, Srinagar and Bengaluru, respectively.

The ISPL is scheduled to be held from March 2 to March 9 in Mumbai.

Prioritising international cricket has helped my game: Starc

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior Australian seamer Mitchell Starc has admitted that he had in the past turned down multiple lucrative offers from the Indian Premier League (IPL) to prioritise his international career, which has "helped" him in improving his game.

Starc has been roped in by two-time winners Kolkata Knight Riders for a record Rs 24.75 crore during the auction last week, and it would be his first stint in the

tournament since 2015.

Starc said that the break during the IPL allowed him to recharge himself and stay fit for the international assignments.

"Juggling one cricket schedule is hard enough, let alone when there's two in a relationship. So, I've always spent that time away from cricket with Alyssa or time with family and recharging my body for being as fit and as ready as I can for Australian cricket," he was quoted as saying by AAP.

"I don't regret any of it. I think it's

certainly helped my Test cricket. The money is always nice and certainly was this year, but I've always prioritised international cricket, and I think that's helped my game."

Starc's last outing in the IPL was with Royal Challengers Bangalore, the only he has represented in the competition till date.

Signed by the side in 2014, he has featured in 27 matches so far, scalping 34 wickets at an economy of 7.17 and best figures of four for 15.

PCB mulls regulation to forbid agents from signing more than 2, 3 players

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board is looking to implement a regulation which forbids any player's agent or company from signing more than 2 to 3 players at one time for representation.

The cricket management committee running the Board affairs is expected to take a final decision on this regulation in the next couple of days after

two agencies signed on dozens of Pakistani team players and officials for representation.

After realising that one agent, Talha Rehmani and his company Saya Corporation represented 7-8 leading Pakistani players and officials including Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Muhammad Rizwan, PCB has now learnt that another agency known as International Cricketers Association (ICA) also has contracts with many



players and officials presently touring Australia.

Concerned with the development, PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf has directed the legal department to frame new set of regulations for vetting agents/companies before they sign on players and officials and restricting the number of clients they can have at one time in Pakistan cricket.

The ICA apparently has Sarfaraz Ahmed, Imam ul Haq,

Saim Ayub, Muhammad Haris, Naseem Shah, Abdullah Shafique, Usama Mir, Aamer Jamal and Muhammad Hasnain on its clients list.

More importantly even the Pakistan team director, Muhammad Hafeez was working with ICA until recently.

While Hafeez has resigned, it has now emerged that the national team bowling coach Umar Gul, Spin bowling coach Saeed Ajmal, batting consultant

Adam Hoolioake and the teams strength and conditioning trainer and national selector Kamran Akmal are also on the ICA clientele.

Zaka Ashraf from time to time in his interviews has raised concerns that one agent or company having so many players under its umbrella basically means it can yield a lot of influence and say in the team selection and affairs.

In a recent leaked audio con-

versation, Ashraf could be heard saying that when the PCB offered Babar Azam only the Test captaincy after the ODI World Cup, he called up his agent Talha Rehman who advised him to leave the captaincy in all three formats.

"These agents basically have a lot of influence and power in the team through their clientele and we are trying to deal with that," he was heard saying in the leaked audio.