

**OPINION 6**  
PANDEMONIUM IN  
PARLIAMENT

**WORLD 8**  
26/11 BUTCHER HAFIZ FIELDS  
CANDIDATES IN PAK POLL

**MONEY 10**  
DISINVESTMENT FETCHES ₹4.20  
LAKH CRORE IN 10 YEARS

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY DECEMBER 26, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Established 1864

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 33 Issue 356  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



ROHIT MEN GEAR UP  
TO END 31 YEARS  
WAIT FOR SERIES WIN  
12 SPORTS

## Christ life guiding light for us: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted an event on the occasion of Christmas on Monday at his residence in the national capital. During an interaction with members of the community at his residence on Christmas, Prime Minister Modi praised the community for its continuous contributions in the health and education sectors, running institutions that have made a substantial impact nationwide.

In the interaction with the members of the community at his residence here on Christmas, Modi recalled his old, intimate, and warm relations with Christians since his days as the Gujarat Chief Minister. He said they have always been at the forefront in serving the poor and deprived.

Many thinkers and leaders from the community were part of the country's freedom struggle, he added. Educational and healthcare institutions run by the community continue to make a significant contribution across India.

Modi highlighted that Jesus Christ's life message was centred on compassion and service. He worked for an inclusive society where justice was for all. These values serve as a "guiding light" in his government's development journey, the Prime Minister



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Christian community members during Christmas celebrations at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, in New Delhi, on Monday

noted, mentioning that the Upanishads, considered the fount of Hindu philosophy, also focus on realising the absolute truth like the Bible. Some leading Christian community members also spoke on the occasion and praised different initiatives of the Modi Government. In his remarks, Modi suggested that people can focus on their shared values

and heritage to move forward. The spirit of cooperation and coordination, coupled with the ethos of "sabka prayas," can take the country to new heights. He mentioned that the Pope sought Jesus Christ's blessings for those working to end poverty. The Pope's words reflect the same spirit visible in the BJP-led

development mantra of "sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas." Modi stated that his government ensures that development reaches everyone, benefiting Christians, especially the poor and deprived. He asked Christian community leaders to spread the word about his government's programmes aimed at youngsters, such as

"Fit India," the use of millets, and the campaign against drugs.

Noting the community's social consciousness, Modi said Christians can play an important role in his government's environmental campaigns to ensure a minimal carbon footprint and promote a sustainable lifestyle. He also sought their support for his "Vocal for Local" programme.

The Prime Minister recalled his 2021 meeting with Pope Francis, describing it as a memorable moment where they discussed means to make the earth a better place and issues of social harmony, global brotherhood, climate change, and inclusive development.

He expressed the wish that the festive season further strengthens the country, brings citizens closer, and enhances the bond that keeps them together amid their diversity. Modi has been making concerted efforts to reach out to Christians. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been organising campaigns to connect with the community during its festivals, especially in states like Kerala, where they are in large numbers.

The Prime Minister has cited the party's poll performance in the northeastern States, where Christians live in large numbers, as evidence of its growing acceptability among them.

## OBC gets lion's share in MP cabinet expansion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

In keeping with its "commitments," as many as 12 members of the newly formed Madhya Pradesh cabinet on Monday are from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, including the new Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, highlighting the BJP's ongoing efforts to balance caste/class arithmetic ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Others who took the oath included former Union Minister Prahlad Patel and BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, among the 28 MLAs sworn into the Madhya Pradesh cabinet. While 18 of them will hold cabinet berths, the other 10 will be junior ministers, or Ministers of State. Former Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has already been elected as the Speaker. The party has also added a mix of the old and new, attempting to balance the aspirations of its newer faces (particularly those who crossed over from the Congress three years ago) and the expectations of its more veteran State leaders, including those who served with Chouhan.

The maximum strength of the Council of Ministers is 35, including the Chief Minister. Madhya Pradesh's



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia during administration of oath to the newly appointed ministers at Raj Bhavan in Bhopal on Monday

new ministers were chosen after extensive talks with the BJP's Central leadership, including party president JP Nadda. Yadav had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and discussed the cabinet formation. However, the BJP failed to meet the aspirations of keeping 33 per cent representation for women, as there are only five women in the new cabinet. The party had previously emphasised success over the women's empowerment platform and ex-Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's "Ladli Behna Yojana" scheme, which contributed to the Congress' defeat in the polls. Although Congress emerged

victorious in the 2018 Assembly polls, the Kamal Nath Government fell after one and a half years as Jyotiraditya Scindia switched sides with a large number of MLAs, joining the BJP to reinstate the outgoing Shivraj Singh Chauhan government. Governor Mangubha C Patel administered the oath to Yadav and his two deputies, Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla, Scheduled Caste and Brahmin faces in the new cabinet. Among those sworn in were Nirmala Bhuria, Narayan Kushwaha, and Nagar Singh Chouhan. Bhuria was previously the junior Health Minister, and Kushwaha was the junior Home Minister.

Continued on Page 2

## Capital struggling to breathe

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Dense fog enveloped Delhi on Monday, reducing visibility to zero at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Eight flights were diverted from the Delhi airport on Monday morning due to bad weather, leading the Delhi airport to issue an advisory urging passengers to contact their respective airlines for flight information.

The air quality index (AQI) recorded 411 (severe category) at 8 am, which later settled at 383 (very poor category) at 4 pm. The AQI reached 999 (very hazardous level) at 4 pm in Noida and Ghaziabad. The 24-hour AQI on Sunday was 411. As the cold wave tightened its grip on North India, it was a cold Christmas morning in the national capital. The minimum temperature was recorded at 7.8 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of the year.

According to the air quality bulletin for Delhi, the air quality is likely to improve but remain in the "very poor" category on Tuesday. It is



expected to deteriorate and enter the "severe" category on Wednesday, while it is likely to be in the upper end of the "very poor" category on Thursday.

Dense fog resulted in a major accident on Monday on the Hapur-Bulandshahr highway in Uttar Pradesh. According to officials, a total of seven flights were diverted to Jaipur in Rajasthan, and one was diverted to Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The diversions occurred between 6 am and 9 am, as stated by the officials. Similarly, dense fog also affected several flight operations at Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. While

passengers expressed complaints of delays and disruptions on social media, airlines, including IndiGo and SpiceJet, informed them about the 'low visibility.' "While landings and take-offs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may be affected. Passengers are requested to contact the concerned airline for updated flight information. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," reads the advisory issued by Delhi Airport. The airport authorities initiated the anti-fog landing system, technically called the CAT III Instrument Landing System.

The CAT III system assists with a precision approach and landing when the runway visibility level is low. While landings and take offs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may be affected. The CAT III instrument landing system is an anti-fog landing system initiated during poor visibility. While CAT III helps with a precision approach for landing, it will not be helpful if the visibility level is below 50 feet.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a report indicating that very dense fog had descended upon the airport early in the morning, with the Runway Visual Range (RVR) on all runways registering between 125 to 175 metres. This compelled the implementation of CAT IIIB operations for both takeoffs and landings. Very dense fog with zero visibility prevailed at IGI Airport since 0530 hrs IST today. RVR at all runways was 125 to 175m, and operations are under CAT IIIB, as per IMD in a post on X.

Continued on Page 2

## Nilgai carcass sparks leopard alert in S Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A carcass of Nilgai (Boselaphus tragocamelus) was found on Monday morning in South Delhi's posh Sainik Farm area, triggering panic among the residents. Authorities and Delhi Police personnel rushed to the spot after the news spread. Officials of Delhi Government's Forest Department have confirmed that the Nilgai was killed by a leopard. Following that, the Residents Welfare Association of Sainik Farm issued an advisory urging residents to be careful while stepping out and also advised keeping their pets inside.

"A carcass of Nilgai was found this morning at the end of Lane W-23. We immediately informed the forest authorities, who came and confirmed that it is a leopard kill. We request the residents of Lanes W-17, 19, 21, 23, 26 & 27 to please be careful while stepping out. Please keep your



pets in and avoid going to Tilpat Valley for walks at any time. We are in constant touch with the Forest Department and will be updating as we go along," WARWA Sainik Farm said. Sushil Jain, from the NGO Bail a Tail in Sainik Farms, said it has been confirmed that the Nilgai was killed by a leopard. "We have seen the videos circulated by the

RWAs, but a leopard was not sighted. A team has been deployed in the area, and we will monitor the situation at night," Jain said. Earlier this month, after three days of rigorous searches, the Delhi Police and Forest Department officials called off their hunt for a leopard that was spotted in the Sainik Farm area. However, pugmarks believed

to be a leopard's were seen in the area where the forest department hunted for a big cat but did not find one.

The Asola Bhatti Wildlife sanctuary shares boundaries with densely populated settlements like Sangam Vihar, Chattarpur, Sainik Farms, Fatehpur Beri, and villages such as Mangar and Pali in Faridabad. One settlement, Sanjay Colony, is situated within the boundaries of the sanctuary. Experts say the reason for their more frequent sightings is simply India's growing urban habitations. For instance, Gurugram and Delhi have grown into the Aravallis. Meanwhile, protected areas have become more crowded with big cats, although leopards have always been more urban and social than people think. A 2022 study by the forest department found eight leopards at the Asola Bhatti sanctuary.

Har Pal Aapke Saath

**Dear Customer, at LIC your security is our priority.**

**Beware of FRAUDSTERS**

**CAUTION**

- **DO NOT** entertain calls, messages or emails from unverified sources.
- **DO NOT** be tempted by any exaggerated promises for any monetary benefit and reveal your Policy and KYC details or make any payment to any individual name or account.
- **LIC of India** will never Call/ SMS/ WhatsApp/ E-mail for verification of KYC.
- **DO NOT** share your Personal/Bank details with fraudsters and Beware of Phishing E-mails, Links.
- **Stay** vigilant against online fraud. Safeguard your personal data.
- **Register** on the Customer Portal of our official website www.lcindia.in. Download LIC Digital App from Google Play Store/iOS App Store.

**Together, let's stay one step ahead of Cyber Threats.**

In case you receive such spurious calls, WhatsApp messages or e-mails, please report it to us at spuriouscalls@licindia.com.

Please report complaint regarding online financial fraud Immediately to the National Cyber Crime Portal at <https://cybercrime.gov.in/> or call the helpline on 1930.

Download LIC Mobile App

SMS LICHELP > Policy No. > to 92224 92224

Visit: [licindia.in](http://licindia.in)

Call Centre Services (022) 6827 6827

Our WhatsApp No. **8976862090** Say 'Hi'

Follow us: LIC India Forever | [www.lcindia.in](http://www.lcindia.in) | IRDAI Regn No.: 512



# Conduct operations in most professional manner: Pande

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A day after shunting out three senior officers including the Brigade Commander of the 13 Sector Rashtriya Rifles, pending a formal court of inquiry into the recovery of three civilian dead bodies under mysterious circumstances in the Surankote area of Poonch, Indian Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Monday urged Army commanders on the ground to conduct operations in the "most professional manner". Four soldiers were 'killed in action' during the ambush of two army vehicles by the foreign terrorists on December 21 in the Dera Ki Gali area of Surankote. The three civilians along with six others were picked up for questioning from the Topa Peer village in connection with the attack on the army vehicles. After the residents and aggrieved families alleged they were killed in custody, the Army authorities launched an internal probe into the matter. "General Manoj Pande COAS visited the Poonch sector and was given an update on the prevalent security situation. COAS interacted with commanders on the ground, and exhorted them to conduct the operations most professionally and remain resolute & steady against all challenges," the additional directorate general of public information (ADGPI) of the Indian Army said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. During his day-long visit, the Army Chief visited the Dera Ki Gali and took stock of the ongoing anti-terrorist operations to flush out the terrorists and later interacted with the

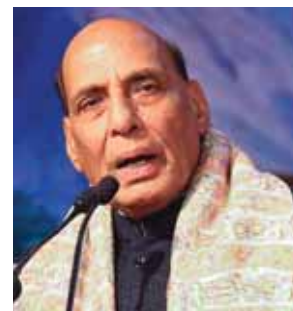


Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande during a visit to review the security situation in the Poonch sector, on Monday PTI

senior officers in Rajouri. The Army Chief was also briefed by the GoC 16 Corps, Lt Gen Sandeep Jain about the ongoing counter-terrorist operations. He was also briefed about the steps taken to further strengthen the security grid and the death of the three civilians. The Jammu and Kashmir

Police have also launched a formal investigation into the case after registering a first information report (FIR) under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (murder) in connection with the death of the three civilians. The FIR against unknown men was registered at the Surankote police station on Friday evening.

## Rajnath to visit Jammu on December 27



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is scheduled to visit Jammu on December 27 to review the prevailing security scenario in the wake of a recent surge in terrorist strikes on army personnel in the twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is scheduled to visit Jammu on December 27. He will be in Jammu for a day, during which he plans to meet top Army officers at Nagrota based 16 Corps, official sources said. Rajnath will also visit the forward areas of Rajouri and Poonch with Army officials. In Poonch, the defence Minister may meet the families of three civilians besides interacting with both troops and civilians. Furthermore, he will conduct a security review meeting at Jammu Raj Bhawan before returning to New Delhi.

# No question of apology on Dhankar mimicry: Kalyan

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA



Senior Trinamool Congress leader and MP Kalyan Banerjee who had earlier this month courted controversy after mimicking Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar outside the Parliament House on Monday justified his action saying it was a part of his fundamental right to expression. "There is no question of any apology for exercising my fundamental rights," Banerjee told a gathering. "Being a lawyer you (Dhankhar) know that the expansion of the Right to Freedom of Expression which is a Fundamental Right guaranteed in the Constitution ... insofar as mimicry is concerned it is an art and a way of expressing oneself ... by mimicking I had only expressed myself by exercising my fundamental right to freedom of expression," Banerjee said. Banerjee, a Trinamool Congress MP from Serampore Lok Sabha seat in Hooghly district further attacked the Vice President for failing to appreciate the dignity of his Chair and bowing before Prime Minister Narendra Modi to remain in his good books. "He is the Vice President of the country ... but he fails to understand the dignity of his Chair ... he is only trying to please Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in doing so he is bowing down and

down before him ... how much he will bow down like this," Banerjee asked, comparing him with former Vice President Venkaiah Naidu. "Even Venkaiah Naidu was the Vice President of the country ... and before being that he was the president of the BJP ... but when it came to discharging his duties as the Speaker of Rajya Sabha he never acted in a partisan manner so as to please the Prime Minister ... he never allowed the Opposition a chance to criticize him ... he was far better than Dhankhar," the TMC MP who has often courted controversy even in Bengal by using unparliamentary sentences against senior opposition leaders said. Reacting to Banerjee's statements, Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said the TMC leader was one of

such TMC politicians who had "no sense of decorum." He said, "this man has done this earlier also ... but the problem with a portion of our electorate is that they still vote for such people and as they get elected year after year they take it as their license to defy norms ... these people can only be tamed down by the people ... only after they are defeated in the elections they will realise their mistakes and mend them ... otherwise it is very difficult to teach them decency." Another BJP leader Samik Bhattacharya said that Kalyan Banerjee represented the "breed of politician that TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee has created and nurtured ... he definitely enjoys her backing in such acts otherwise he would ever have the courage to do so."

## Alumni Day held in SRM



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former students of SRM Institute of Science and Technology appealed to the current batch of students to channelise their energy towards becoming entrepreneurs, establishing startups, and generating opportunities for others. Speaking at the Alumni Day, 2023 celebrations held at SRM IST in Kattankulathur, the former students said there were plenty of opportunities for the current students of science, engineering, and technology to give wings to their innovations and establish their own units. In his address, Dr. P. Sathyanarayanan, Pro-Chancellor (Academics), SRM IST, appealed to alumni to engage more actively and frequently with the institution and their department, especially with the current batch of students. "The current batch of students is very aspirational. Your interaction with them and your help to make them come up in life will be a great service to the institution," Dr. Sathyanarayanan remarked.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
It is hereby informed that the expulsion procedure of the members namely Mr. Sushil Kumar Agarwal, Smt. Binila Devi & Mr. Rajeev Agarwal having joint membership no-127 all R/o. 26, Kapil Vihar, Pitampura, Delhi-34 has been initiated under Section 86(1) of DCS Act 2003 read with Rule 99 of DCS Rules 2007 by the Delhi Union Cooperative House Building Society Ltd, Commonly known as Kapil Vihar, Pitampura, Delhi-34. Society had already forwarded this matter to Registrar, Cooperative Societies for approval of expulsion. Society is informing that hearing in this matter is fixed for 28.12.2023 at 3.00 PM by the Registrar, Co-operative Societies. The above Stated members shall appear in person or through authorised representative before the court of the Registrar, Cooperative Societies, Old Court Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-1. Secretary, Delhi Union Co-operative House Building Society Ltd.

# Vaishnaw inspects Amrit Bharat Express

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday inspected the newly built push-pull rake at New Delhi Railway Station also called the Amrit Bharat Express, a non-AC Sleeper Cum Unreserved Class service that is designed to cost less and serve longer distances. Prime Minister Narendra Modi

is likely to flag off two 'Amrit Bharat Express' trains on December 30. The first train will be launched from Delhi to Darbhanga (Bihar) via Ayodhya. Meanwhile, the second train will operate from Malda to Bengaluru. On December 30, the Prime Minister will be in Ayodhya, where he is expected to flag off six Vande Bharat Express as well. Speaking to the media at the

New Delhi Station, Vaishnaw said that the train has been built on push-pull technology. He further said that the train will have better acceleration with the push-pull technology. "PM Modi always guides us to implement new technology into the Railways. "After Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat train is ready based on the push-pull technology, which will be flagged off by PM Modi

very soon," Vaishnaw added. The Amrit Bharat Express is a superfast express service operated by Indian Railways. It is a non-AC Sleeper Cum Unreserved Class service that is designed to cost less and serve longer distances. These are planned to be night express train services that will connect Indian cities that are at distances of more than 800 km or take more than ten hours to

travel with existing services. Indian railways had announced plans to make a non-AC Amrit Bharat Express with sleeper and general coaches for long-distance travel, slated to replace Antyodaya Express, Jan Sadharan Express and Hybrid ICF-LHB coached trains. This train will have 22 LHB coaches and two WAP-5 Locomotives at the front and rear ends.

# OBC gets lion's share in MP cabinet...

From Page 1

Tribal leader Sampatiya Uikey was sworn in, along with Vijay Shah, Karan Singh Verma, Rakesh Singh, Vishvas Sarang, Rakesh Shukla, Chaitanya Kashyap, Inder Singh Parmar, and Uday Pratap Singh. Also added were Pradhman Singh Tomar, who was previously the Energy Minister; Tulsu Ram Silawat, the former junior Water Resources Minister; Govind Singh Rajput, the former Revenue and Transport; and Aidal Singh Kansana. All four were among the 22 who supported Scindia when he quit the Congress in 2020, triggering the fall of Kamal Nath's government. Junior ministers (with independent charge) are Krishna Gaur, Dharmendra Bhav Lodhi, Dilip Jaiswal, Gautam Tetwal, Lakhn Patel, and Narayan Singh Pawar. MLAs who took the oath as Ministers of State are Narendra Shivaji Patel, Pratima Bagri, Dilip Ahirwar, and Radha Singh. Twelve from the earlier cabinet had contested and lost the election. Of those who contested and won, only six have been given ministerial berths this time around. Among those not included were Bhupendra Singh, who is close to former Shivraj Chouhan, and Gopal Bhargava, a nine-time MLA. The BJP claimed a landslide win in last month's election, winning 163 of the Hindi heartland state's 230 seats, shrugging off most exit polls' predictions of a tight race with the Congress, which claimed just 66 seats compared to the 114 it won five years ago. The saffron party also routed its rival in

two other states that voted then - Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, both of which the Congress had ruled. Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot slammed the BJP government in the state on Monday over the delay in cabinet formation, claiming that disappointment has started to spread among people due to it, and governance has come to a standstill. He also said people are watching which ministers they should approach with their problems and added that the cabinet should be formed at the earliest so that the government can run smoothly. While the cabinet is already in place in Chhattisgarh, where the BJP wrested power from Congress, all eyes are now on the other state Rajasthan that came into the kitty of BJP this year's assembly polls. Sources in the BJP said the cabinet formation is expected in a day or two, and around 15 MLAs are likely to be inducted into the council of ministers. Former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has hit out, questioning the delay in cabinet announcement. "Disappointment has now started being spread among the public because the people of Rajasthan gave a clear mandate to the BJP on December 3. But even after 22 days, the cabinet has not been formed, due to which governance has come to a standstill. Every department is also in a state of confusion," Gehlot said. In Chhattisgarh, nine BJP MLAs took oath last Friday as ministers in the CM Vishnu Deo Sai government in the tribal-dominated State.

## Ingestible vibrating capsule taken before meal could cure obesity: MIT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

If nonmedical interventions such as diet exercise or existing medical interventions including gastric bypass surgery, as well as gastric balloons are not helping you to shed those extra kilos then fret not. MIT engineers have now come up with a new way to take advantage of that phenomenon, using an ingestible capsule that vibrates within the stomach. These vibrations activate the same stretch receptors that sense when the stomach is distended, creating an illusory sense of fullness. In animals who were given this pill 20 minutes before eating, the researchers found that this treatment not only stimulated the release of hormones that signal satiety, but also reduced the animals' food intake by about 40 percent. Scientists have much more to learn about the mechanisms that influence human body weight, but if further research suggests this technology could be safely used in humans, such a pill might offer a minimally invasive way to treat obesity, the researchers say. "For somebody who wants to lose weight or control their appetite, it could be taken before each meal," said Shriya

Srinivasan, a former MIT graduate student and assistant professor of bioengineering at Harvard University. "This could be really interesting in that it would provide an option that could minimize the side effects that we see with the other pharmacological treatments out there." Srinivasan is the lead author of the new study, which has appeared in Science Advances. Giovanni Traverso, an associate professor of mechanical engineering at MIT and a gastroenterologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, is the senior author of the paper. In a study in animals, the researchers showed that once the pill begins vibrating, it activates mechanoreceptors, which send signals to the brain through stimulation of the vagus nerve. The researchers tracked hormone levels during the periods when the device was vibrating and found that they mirrored the hormone release patterns seen following a meal, even when the animals had fasted. The researchers then tested the effects of this stimulation on the animals' appetite. They found that when the pill was activated for about 20 minutes, before the animals were offered food, they consumed 40 percent less, on average, than they did when the pill was not activated.

## 'Medical devices sector essential constituent of healthcare sector'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday launched "MedTech Mitra: A Strategic Initiative to Empower MedTech Innovators and Advance Healthcare Solutions", a platform to handhold the country's young talents and give a final shape to their research, knowledge, logic etc. "It will also help them get regulatory approval," said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya after virtually launching the e-platform here. He said that the medical devices sector is an essential constituent of the healthcare sector and India is adopting a holistic approach to health with a vision to transform its health landscape by 2047. Noting that India's MedTech sector is highly import dependent, measuring up to 80 per cent, the health minister emphasised that "to ensure that medical devices are supplied within the country, this sector has seen phenomenal progress with the implementation of production-linked incentive schemes and investments for medical drug parks, the MedTech research policy and the MedTech research incentive scheme. He said this collaborative initiative will facilitate indigenous development of affordable and quality MedTech devices and diagnostics, leading to a considerable reduction in the import dependence of the sector.

## Rabi crops cultivation shrinks by over 17 lakh hectares this year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The cultivation areas for rabi crops have shrunk by over 17 lakh hectares (Lha) this year, which has emerged as a cause of concern among policy makers, as the sowing season is about to end. The sowing acreage of wheat and pulses has also reduced considerably. The total sowing of rabi crops has been carried out only in 606.86 lakh hectares (Lha), which is less than 624.03 Lha in the same period last year. Wheat has been sown only at 308.67 Lha, which is 1.82% less than 314.42 Lha last year. Wheat is the main rabi (winter) crop, sowing of which normally begins in November and harvesting is done from March-April. As per the data, area sown to wheat in Uttar Pradesh has increased to 9.44 million hectares till December 22 of the 2023-24 rabi season, from 9.29 million hectares in the year-ago period. However, wheat area sown in Madhya Pradesh was slightly lower at 8.17 million hectares, as against 8.39 million hectares in the said period. In case of Punjab and Haryana, wheat sown area was almost at last year's level of 3.49 million hectares and 2.31 million hectares, respectively till December 22 of this rabi season. It is pertinent to note that a scorching heatwave in March 2022 had reduced wheat yield in north and central Indian states. The domestic price of

wheat is still reeling above the minimum support price of Rs 2,175 despite the government having taken different measures in the past 10 months. Rabi paddy has been planted in only 12.67 Lha in the current Rabi, which is less than last year's 14.04 lakh hectares. However, the sowing of mustard has increased slightly in the current rabi season to 95.23 lakh hectares. To prepare farmers to deal with heatwaves in advance, the Agriculture Commissioner PK Singh told PTI the government has started issuing weekly scientific advisories educating them how to take care of the crop at different growth stages and weather conditions. "Earlier, we used to issue advisories on a fortnightly basis, but this year we are doing it weekly in order to prepare farmers well in advance," he said, and added that creating awareness and preparing farmers to face eventualities will help in addressing production concerns. "This is because there was a delay in wheat sowing in some parts where paddy harvesting got late. Otherwise, wheat sowing is progressing well," Singh told PTI. Keeping in mind the terminal heat problem that wheat farmers faced last year, the government this year has promoted climate resilient wheat varieties and kept a target to cover 60 per cent of the total cropped area, he said.

**M.P. Forest Department (I.T.) 2023-24**

**Notice Inviting tender**

**OFFICE OF ADDITIONAL PRINCIPAL CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS**  
(Information Technology), Van Bhawan, BHOPAL

**Notice Inviting tender**

The Forest Department has inviting tender for Invites Tender for Supply, Installation and Service of Network Equipments for the Forest Department IT Wing. On-line proposals & financial bid is invited for this solution. The proposals will be submitted on-line only at <https://mptenders.gov.in>.

**Important Dates**

	Date
1 Online Publishing	22-DEC-2023
2 Online Submission of Proposal Start	04-JAN-2024
3 Online Submission of Proposal Ending	15-JAN-2024
4 Opening of Technical Proposal	16-JAN-2024
Tender Document Fee	Rs. 5,000/-
Online EMD	Rs. 1,00,000/-

For Technical specifications, timelines and other relevant details, please refer the Tender document. Please read all document carefully before submitting proposal & financial bid.

**ADDITIONAL PRINCIPAL CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS**  
(Information Technology)  
Forest Department, Van Bhawan, Bhopal (MP)

G-22176/23

# Capital struggling to breathe

From Page 1

Foggy conditions improved as the day wore on, and around 9:45 AM, runway visibility was above 500 meters at IGI airport. Similarly, several flight operations at Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Mumbai were affected due to dense fog engulfing parts of the states, reducing visibility. While passengers complained of delays and disruptions on social media, airlines, including IndiGo and SpiceJet, informed them about the 'low visibility'. SpiceJet has issued a notification regarding the departure and arrival of its flights, which reads, "Due to bad weather in Delhi (DEL), all departures/arrivals and their consequential flights may get affected. Passengers are requested to check their flight status via bit.ly/2tG9xBx." Flights at Hyderabad Airport were also disrupted due to the bad weather, as reported by Vistara. Due to the ongoing tourist season ahead of the New Year and Christmas celebrations, most major airports, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad, have increased their infrastructure to accommodate the surge in winter travel - from more entry gates to an increase in X-ray machines to immigration counters. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) data showed that passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-November 2023 were 1382.34 lakhs, compared to 1105.10 lakhs during the corresponding period of the previous year, registering annual growth of 25.09 percent and monthly growth of 9.06 percent. Meanwhile, a major accident took place today on the Hapur-Bulandshahr highway in Uttar Pradesh due to the prevailing foggy conditions in the state, police said. More than a dozen vehicles collided in a chain reaction amid dense fog that has shrouded the region. The accident took place in the Hafizpur Kotwali area of Hapur, approximately 86 km from the national capital. Videos of the accident show vehicles piled up on the highway. Several of the cars involved in the crash were severely damaged. Emergency services were quickly dispatched to rescue those injured in the crash. Police officials were also seen at the accident site, guiding traffic.



# Chief Secretary submits action taken report in Burari hospital case

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Delhi Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar has submitted an action taken report on note received from Health Minister, Saurabh Bhardwaj regarding incidence of alleged sexual harassment in Burari Hospital. The office of the Chief Secretary said the health minister's note was physically delivered on December 25 at 10.10 am. The ATR stated that Delhi Police has examined and inquires into the facts of the case as per provisions of law. The Minister has himself acknowledged that a FIR No. 1349/2023 dated 19.12.2023 has already been registered at Police Station, Burari. "In case, any specific incident of Delhi Police going 'soft' against

the accused person(s) has come into the notice of Hon'ble Minister, the same may kindly be informed, as simple apprehensions on the basis of assumptions (in absence of any concrete facts / records / supporting evidence) cannot be acted upon, as criminal jurisprudence is based on the principles of "proved beyond reasonable doubt". However, the undersigned has already asked the Special Commissioner (Law and Order), Delhi Police to look into the matter for taking action as per law. Special Commissioner (Law and Order), Delhi Police has, inter-alia, informed as under in this regard. It has been further informed by the Delhi Police that statements of the complainant and other concerned have already been

recorded by the Delhi Police in terms of section 164 of the CrPC and further action is being taken in the matter as per law. The matter in presently under inquiry by Delhi Police and necessary action against the firm (if found guilty by Delhi Police) would be taken as per law," the chief secretary said in the ATR. Expressing surprise over AAP handle Tweeting Minister's note with a 6 hour deadline, being sent to him on email, the chief secretary office said they received the note exactly 6 hrs after the AAP handle tweeted the note. Earlier, Bhardwaj has lamented that Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar has not responded to his note in the Burari hospital incident. Addressing media queries,



Bhardwaj expressed displeasure and said Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar has not responded. "One can imagine how the elected government functions and how will the safety of women be ensured when the chief secretary doesn't act on an urgent note. This is when so much hue and cry has been created by the Delhi

women contractual workers at a hospital in north Delhi's Burari. In a letter to the CS, Bhardwaj expressed his displeasure alleging Delhi Police was "soft against the accused" in spite of an FIR filed on 19 December. The minister asked CS to ensure strict action by the police. The minister also directed that an enquiry committee be constituted immediately, to be headed by the health secretary, in connection with an incident of alleged sexual harassment of the contractual worker at a Burari hospital, asking the CS to submit an action taken report within six hours. Bhardwaj further stated that it becomes important to explain that yesterday the dark-rider (messenger) was sent along with the urgent UO note to the resi-

dence of chief secretary Naresh Kumar. "However, the staff at the residence of Naresh Kumar did not accept the Urgent Official note saying that they have instructions not to accept any note. After that, the note was sent to the chief secretary through e-mail ID and the note also was physically delivered at the residence of chief secretary Naresh Kumar this morning," he said. "After the recent amendment in the GNCTD Act by the Central Government, there is no control of the elected Delhi Government on the officers. The officers are only accountable to the Lieutenant Governor. Whenever any untoward incident, the questions are asked from the elected government, however, all the control over the officer lies

with the LG." Bhardwaj added. "The health minister stated that what was reported from the Burari Hospital was very shocking and it required immediate action by the Government machinery. "This is very unfortunate that even in the case of such high sensitivity where allegations have been leveled by the women workers against their manager about seeking sexual favors, the chief secretary chose not to respond to the urgent note sent to him," he added. Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has hit back at Bhardwaj saying the health minister is unnecessarily blaming the chief secretary. "Bhardwaj himself responded after 48 hours. This reflects how he is sensitive," Kapoor added.



## Traffic snarls witnessed in several parts as city celebrates Christmas

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Traffic snarls were reported from several parts of Delhi on Monday as people thronged markets and churches to celebrate Christmas. The Delhi Traffic Police asked commuters to avoid Mathura Road and Lodhi Road. "Due to high footfall and the parking issue in Sunder Nursery, Nizamuddin traffic is affected on Mathura Road and Lodhi Road near Neela Gumbad. Commuters are advised to avoid this stretch," the traffic police wrote on X. Earlier in the day, police said the churches and cathedrals of the national capital expecting heavy congregation of devotees include the Sacred Heart cathedral near Gol Dak Khana, St Thomas church (Mandir Marg), Free church (Sansad Marg), Cathedral church (in front of the Rashtrapati Bhawan), St Martin's church (Delhi Cantonment), St Thomas church (R K Puram) and St Mary's Knanaya church (Vasant Kunj). Commuters also took to X to complain about the traffic situation across the city. Heavy traffic was reported from the Miraj cinema area at Subhash Nagar towards Beti Wala Bagh. Some of the commuters said traffic was heavy on Mathura Road, near the Saket court and in front of gate number one of the New Delhi railway station. Heavy traffic was also reported from Majnu Ka Tila, the Khatu

Shyam temple in north Delhi, the Tagore Garden metro station, Alipur and other areas. Heavy traffic is expected near Gol Dak Khana and on Ashoka Road, Baba Kharak Singh Marg, Sansad Marg, Lodhi Road, Aurobindo Marg and other stretches, police said. Traffic towards Gol Dak Khana was diverted from the RML roundabout, Bhai Veer Singh Marg or the Kali Bari T-point, Patel Chowk on Ashoka Road and Connaught Place Outer Circle on Baba Kharak Singh Marg, they added. A police official said New Delhi district has divided the duty of traffic personnel in three shifts, starting from 5 pm on Sunday till the celebration ends on Monday. "We are expecting that around two lakh people will visit the cathedral near Gol Dak Khana and accordingly, adequate arrangements have been made. Keeping in mind that people may also like to visit India Gate during the festival, we have made appropriate arrangements there as well," the official said. Another police officer said an adequate number of personnel have been deployed in market areas. "Instructions are being given to the visitors to park their vehicles at the designated places to avoid traffic snarls. If anyone fails to do so, appropriate action will be taken. The personnel are also ensuring a smooth flow of traffic and informing commuters about alternative routes," the officer said.

## LG orders time bound plan for regularisation of unauthorised colonies

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena directed the officials to come up with a time-bound plan for regularisation of the unauthorised colonies and stressed that the process needed to be made simple and hassle-free, said officials of the Raj Niwas on Monday. Following the passage of the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) 2023 by the Parliament recently, Saxena chaired a meeting with the chief secretary, the officials of urban development, PWD, the vice-chairman of DDA, the commissioner of MCD and other senior officials of various stakeholder departments/agencies, they added.

The officials said that he took stock of the progress and status of works related to regularisation of the unauthorised colonies and rehabilitation of the slum dwellers under the PM-UDAY and PMAY (Urban) respectively. Saxena asked the officers to give specific timelines with regards to complete implementation of PM-UDAY, PMAY and the Land Pooling Policy of the DDA. The Lieutenant Governor was informed that ambiguity in the boundaries of the unauthorised colonies, repeated extension of cut off dates and uncertainty in notified slum clusters had kept the issue hanging for long and this finally led the Centre to formulate the PM-UDAY and

PMAY schemes in 2019. However, immediately after that, with the COVID pandemic commencing, works could not be undertaken in full swing, they said. "The LG expressed surprise and concern at the fact that this Act in different versions had been in operation since December, 2006, and yet the matter remained hanging, notwithstanding the constraints caused by the Pandemic," an official said. Saxena directed the officials to come up with a concrete time-bound plan of action for registration, verification and subsequent regularisation of the unauthorised colonies and stressed that the process of doing the same needed to be made simple and hassle-free. He warned that

no dereliction or corruption will be tolerated. The Lieutenant Governor directed the DDA to immediately identify alternate sites within a radius of five kms where in situ rehabilitation was not possible as per law and the slum dwellers be rehabilitated to a dignified life in flats/houses that have already been constructed under various schemes, the officials said. He instructed the officials to ensure that the entire plan should be put into place within a month and concrete action should start immediately. The Lieutenant Governor stressed that all tasks should be completed at least a year earlier than the outer limit of 2026 provided by the Act recently passed by the Parliament.



## Nadda visits Sacred Heart Cathedral, says Jesus inspiration for humanity

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
BJP president J P Nadda visited the Sacred Heart cathedral here on the occasion of Christmas on Monday and hailed Jesus Christ as an inspiration for humanity. Nadda met senior priests at the cathedral, in what is being seen as part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) outreach to Christians. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also visited the cathedral on Easter. After his visit to the cathedral, the BJP president said Jesus Christ dedicated his life to peace and harmony and is an inspiration for humanity. "I was fortunate to visit this church on the pious occasion of Christmas. We took the blessings of Jesus Christ," he told reporters. "All of us know that the life of Jesus Christ is a source of inspiration for the entire humanity. He dedicated his entire life to

humanity," Nadda said. Everyone must take inspiration from Jesus Christ's teachings, preaching and contributions to humanity, he said, adding, "He dedicated his entire life especially for peace and harmony in the society, taking everyone along." "We pray to Jesus Christ that we dedicate ourselves to humanity, peace and everyone's progress in our country and all over the world in a cordial atmosphere while keeping in mind the path shown by him," Nadda said, adding, "This will be our regards for him." The BJP has been making efforts to connect with the Christian community leaders, especially in states like Kerala where Christians are in large numbers. The party has cited its improved poll performance in the northeastern states, which have a sizeable Christian population, as a proof of its increasing acceptability among them.

## FIR against Goldy Brar, Lawrence Bishnoi gang for making extortion call to city hotelier

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi Police has filed an FIR against unidentified people allegedly associated with Goldy Brar - Lawrence Bishnoi gang for making extortion call to a local hotelier, police said. A south Delhi-based hotel owner in his complaint alleged that he received messages and calls from an international number on his WhatsApp on two occasions - December 18 and 20 - with the caller demanding money and threatening him to leave the possession of land on which his hotel is built.

The man received a WhatsApp voice message on December 18 with a threat to vacate the land and on the same day, a WhatsApp call from the same international number, with the caller identifying himself as a member of Goldy Brar-Lawrence Bishnoi gang, police said. The complainant said he was given two days' time to vacate the land and to give money to some residents of Nuna Majra, otherwise he would be in danger. An FIR under section 387 (putting a person in fear of death or of grievous hurt, in order to



commit extortion) of the IPC has been registered and investigation begun, police said. Gangster Goldy Brar, suspected to be hiding in US, has allegedly been involved in threatening several businessmen in Delhi-NCR in the past few months, an officer said.

A week ago, two shooters, both members of his gang, were arrested by the Crime Branch for shooting at the office of a businessman in Dwarka at the behest of Brar. Brar has previously been involved in giving threat calls to Bollywood singers Honey Singh and Gippy Grewal. His associates had allegedly opened fire at the Gippy Grewal's house in Canada, the officer said. Lawrence Bishnoi is lodged in a jail in Gujarat. His gang had claimed to be involved in shooting of Punjabi singer Siddhu Moosewala in May last year.

## Man held for killing uncle over property dispute

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
A 39-year-old man was arrested for allegedly stabbing his uncle to death over a property dispute in outer Delhi's Nangloi, police said on Monday. The incident took place at a house in Nangloi on December 23. According to a police officer, the

## Gurugram STF nabs 5 sharpshooters

**STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM**  
Five alleged sharpshooters, wanted in around two dozen cases in Delhi and Haryana, were arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) in Gurugram, an official said on Monday. The five were on Monday produced in a city court which remanded them in police custody for five days, he said. Three illegal weapons, cartridges and a car were seized from their possession. Two of them were in a double murder case in Rewari and were carrying a reward of Rs 25,000 each, the official said. Acting on information, a team of STF started checking vehicles after putting up barricades at Bar Gurjar road and intercepted the car in which the five criminals were travelling. A senior officer of STF said that the arrested were identified as Deepak alias Debu, Harikesh alias Akku, Brahmopal alias Happy, Praveen and Lalchand. "All are professional sharpshooters and about two dozen cases are registered against them for murder, attempt to murder, robbery, kidnapping, possession of illegal weapons, embezzlement, etc. We are questioning the accused," said Preet Pal Singh Sangwan, DSP of STF.

## Wall engraved with 1,040 freedom fighters names at JNU soon

**STAFF REPORTER/PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) will soon inaugurate a tribute wall carrying names of 1,040 freedom fighters from across India. The wall, which will come up outside the JNU convention centre, will be made open for school kids every month in order to spread awareness among the younger generation about freedom fighters from different states. The wall, according to Chakra Foundation which is in charge of building it, will be shaped in the form of an "old file" and will have the names of freedom fighters engraved on marble granite plaques, with a statue of 'Bharat Mata' and a 100-feet high national flag placed at its centre. "The construction work to build the tribute wall started 4-5 months back. The wall is almost ready now. It should be inaugurated by February, 2024," the official said. The wall -- which will be 10 feet in height and 60 feet in length -- will carry information such as the name of freedom fighter, their living years, and the state they were from. At each side of the wall, there

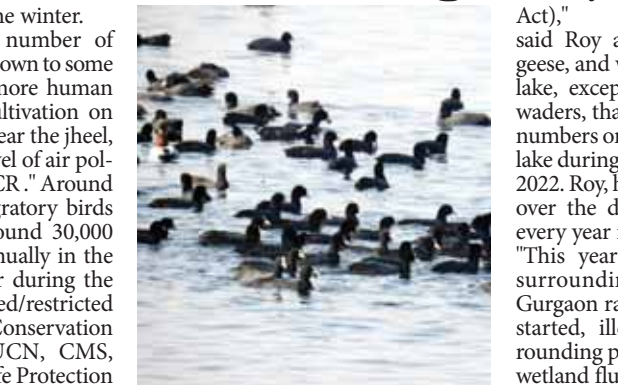
## Two thrashed by bouncers over brawl at Gurugram club

**STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM**  
Two friends were sent to hospital after they were severely thrashed by the bouncers at a club in Gurugram's Sector 29, police said on Monday. The two were part of a group which had gone to the club to celebrate a birthday and allegedly got into an argument with another group, said police. According to the complaint filed by Sachin Yadav, a resident of Raisina village, he had gone to the club Saturday night with some of his other friends to celebrate the birthday of one Saurav, a resident of Dharuhera in Rewari district, said police. "During the party, there was an altercation with some youths part of another group. The matter was settled after the other group left the club. We were still partying, when 5-6 bouncers came and met the 4-5 bouncers of the club. Then all of them came together and started beating me, Saurav, and my other friends," Yadav said in his complaint, according to police.

## Delhi, NCR wetlands witness fewer migratory birds in this winter

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
A survey conducted by the Delhi state Asian Water-bird Census (AWC) state coordinator and ecologist TK Roy found decline in arrival of migratory water-birds at Najafgarh Jheel and Sultanpur National Park Gurugram in winter season this year. This decline has been attributed to global climate change, high level of air pollution, delay in arrival of winter season, increasing human intervention and drying up wetlands. The Najafgarh Jheel is the second largest wetland in Delhi-NCR and a prominent wetland habitat for migra-

tory water birds during the winter. According to Roy, the number of migratory birds has gone down to some extent this year due to more human interference owing to cultivation on drylands, illegal fishing near the jheel, climate change, rising level of air pollution in the Delhi and NCR. "Around 50 species of winter migratory birds with a population of around 30,000 were recorded earlier annually in the Najafgarh Lake in winter during the census includes threatened/restricted species of International Conservation Union/Conventions (IUCN), CMS, CITES and Indian Wildlife Protection



Act," said Roy adding migratory ducks, geese, and wader species left the main lake, except for 17 species of small waders, that were recorded in smaller numbers on the outer periphery of the lake during same period in December, 2022. Roy, however, expressed concern over the declining number of birds every year in the region. "This year in mid-December 2023 surrounding part of the jheel in Gurgaon range also dried, agriculture started, illegal fishing on the surrounding part, water level of the main wetland fluctuated still recorded large

number of Greylag Geese (around 2,500) than last year January and lesser number of Bar-headed Geese (around 300) than last year around 1,300 in January i.e. both Geese species approximately 4,000 on the Jheel this period as well on the drying part feeding water hyacinth and other duck species more than 2,200 on the wetland and few wader species, wagtails in smaller number on the sandy drying part of wetland approximately 1000," he said. The outer periphery of the Najafgarh Jheel on private land mostly dried up and hardly migratory birds recorded this time.

**LADY TATA MEMORIAL TRUST**  
Founded 1932  
Bombay House, Horni Mody Street Mumbai 400 001.  
Applications are invited for the below Scientific Research Awards  
**Young Researcher Award - 2024**  
And  
**Junior Research Fellowship 2024-25**  
And  
**Institutional Research Grant 2024-25**  
And  
**Teacher's Training Program**  
YRA award is instituted by the Lady Tata Memorial Trust (LTMT) to annually recognize and reward young Indian scientists with outstanding track record in biological sciences and potential for high quality research with a deep commitment to find innovative solutions to major problems related to human diseases, blood disorder with special references to leukaemia and for scientific research towards alleviation of human suffering from disease.  
Applications are also invited for Junior Research Fellowship, IRG and Teacher's Training Program for the year 2024-2025.  
For Detailed information and online application process, please access our website [www.ladytatatrust.tatatrusts.org](http://www.ladytatatrust.tatatrusts.org)  
Program Officer



# Public service, not power at centre of good governance: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said his government follows the principle of good governance that has got public service, not power, at its centre. Releasing the first series of 11 volumes of collected works of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya at a function here, Modi said his government is setting up several institutions committed towards nation-building, just like 'nation first' was supreme for Mahamana, a title often used for the Banaras Hindu University founder. The prime minister said several institutions of national and international importance being

set up today give a new direction not only to India of the 21st century, but the entire world. He said the country is indebted to the great personalities who made invaluable contributions to the nation and he was privileged to release a book of Malaviya's works. "Malaviya Ji dedicated to India, a big number of institutions of nation-building. We are glad to note that today, Bharat is again creating the nation-building institutions at unprecedented levels," Modi said. "We have made a new start by promoting Indian languages in higher education," Modi said. The function, which was also attended by Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur and Minister of Law and

## Releases collected works of Malaviya



Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, among other dignitaries, was held on the occasion of the 162nd birth anniversary of Malaviya. The bilingual (English and Hindi) work in 11 volumes, spread across about 4,000 pages,

is a collection of the writings and speeches of Malaviya, collected from every part of the country. These volumes comprise his unpublished letters, articles and speeches, including memorandums; the editorial content of Hindi weekly 'Abhyudaya' started by him in 1907; articles, pamphlets and booklets written by him from time to time. It also contains his speeches given in the Legislative Council of the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh between 1903 and 1910; statements given before the Royal Commission; speeches given during the presentation of bills in the Imperial Legislative Council between 1910 and 1920. There are also letters, articles and speeches written before and after the establishment of

Banaras Hindu University; and a diary written by him between 1923 and 1925. The work of researching and compiling the documents written and spoken by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was undertaken by the Mahamana Malaviya Mission, an institution devoted to propagating the ideals and values of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. A dedicated team of the Mission, led by eminent journalist Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, has worked on Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's original literature without altering the language and text. The publication of these books has been done by the Publications Division under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.



## Three new criminal justice Bills get President assent

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday gave assent to the three new criminal justice bills which were cleared by Parliament last week. The three new laws — the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act -- will replace the colonial era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872. While replying to a debate on the three bills in Parliament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the focus was on delivering justice rather than handing down punishment. The three legislation aim at completely overhauling the criminal justice system in the country by giving definition of various offences and their punishments. These have given a clear definition of terrorism, abolished sedition as a crime and introduced a new section titled "offences against the state". The bills were first introduced during the Monsoon session of Parliament in August. After the Standing Committee on Home Affairs made several recommendations, the government decided to withdraw the bills and introduced their redrafted versions last week. Shah had said the three bills were drafted after comprehensive consultations and that he had gone through every comma

and full stop of the draft legislation before bringing them to the House for approval. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita lists offences such as acts of secession, armed rebellion, subversive activities, separatist activities or endangering the sovereignty or unity in the new avatar of the sedition law. According to the laws, anyone purposely or knowingly, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or by electronic communication or by use of financial means, or otherwise, excites or attempts to excite secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities, or encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India or indulges in or commits any such act shall be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to fine. According to IPC Section 124A, which deals with sedition, anyone involved in the crime may be punished with life imprisonment or with a three-year jail term. Under the new laws, 'Rajdroh' has got a new term 'Deshdroh', thus doing away with the reference to the British crown. Also for the first time, the word terrorism has been defined in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Under the new laws, the magistrate's power to impose fines has been increased as well as the scope of declaring a proclaimed offender.

## Online Tender Document for M.P. Police POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL

No. PHQ/15/GPC/7282-3/2023 Bhopal, Dated 11/12/2023 "ONLINE TENDER NOTICE"

Online tender are invited for 3 months For Rate Contract by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for FSL Items on website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgcp/app>

Technical specifications of required items with quantity of MP FSLs		EMD Paid Online Through mptenders.gov.in	Tender Fees (Rs.)
S No.	Name of Plasticware	Approx Quantity	4,20,000/- 10,000/-
1	0.2 ml PCR tube with Flat Cap, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, Autoclavable, clear	100000 nos	
2	Nitrile Gloves Large thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	30000 nos	
3	Nitrile Gloves Medium thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	120000 nos	
4	Nitrile Gloves Small thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	40000 nos	
5	Latex examination gloves, Medium size, 100 pcs per pack	50000 nos	
6	1.5ml Microcentrifuge tube, DNase & RNase Free, graduated with frosted labelling surface, clear, Sterile	200000 nos	
7	2.0ml Microcentrifuge tube, DNase & RNase Free, graduated with frosted labelling surface, clear, Sterile	100000 nos	
8	96 Well plate semi skirted, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, for 3500xL Genetic Analyzer	5000 nos	
9	96 Well plate semi skirted, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, for QuantStudio 5 real time PCR System	3000 nos	
10	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 50 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw capped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos	
11	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 5 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw capped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos	
12	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 5 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw capped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos	
13	Filtered Micro Tip up to 10 XLU/20 ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free,	200000 nos	
14	Filtered Micro Tip up to 10ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	200000 nos	
15	Filtered Micro Tip up to 20ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos	
16	Filtered Micro Tip up to 50ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos	
17	Filtered Micro Tip up to 100ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos	
18	Filtered Micro Tip up to 200ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free, graduated	200000 nos	
19	Filtered Micro Tip up to 1000ul, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, compatible with universal pipettes, DNase & RNase Free, graduated	250000 nos	
20	5 ml tips compatible with brand pipettes, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, graduated, 100 nos refilling with box	10000 nos	
21	10 ml tips compatible with ependroff/gilson pipettes, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, graduated, 100 nos refilling with box	20000 nos	
22	5 ml Tip box with cover	200 nos	
23	10 ml Tip box with cover	200 nos	
24	Rack for Microcentrifuge tube (1.5ml) 48 Places	200 nos	
25	Rack for Microcentrifuge tube (1.5ml) 24 Places	200 nos	
26	Rack for 50ml tube 12 Places or more	200 nos	
27	Rack for 15 ml tube 20 Places or more	200 nos	
28	Rack for 5 ml tube 24 Places or more	400 nos	
29	Reversible rack with Cover 0.5/1 5ml tube, 96 places	400 nos	
30	PCR tube rack with cover, 96 places	400 nos	
31	Optisealer for 96 well Plate RT PCR, 100 pcs per pack	5000 nos	
32	Pipettor stand, 5 places per pack	50 nos	
33	Sterile petri plates, 90mm, 500 per pack	5000 nos	
34	Sterile petri plates, 150 mm, 500 per pack	2500 nos	
35	Tough spots 9.5mm diameter, 5000 spots per roll (Heat & dye resistant)	50 roll	
36	Disposable Mask made up of non-woven fabric, Triple layered, individually packed, Sterile, 100 pc per pack	10000 nos	
37	Disposable Apron, Medium size	2500 nos	
38	Forceps Pointed-Stainless Steel 6"	500 nos	
39	Forceps Pointed-Stainless Steel 8"	500 nos	
40	Forceps blunted-Stainless Steel 10"	500 nos	
41	Forceps blunted-Stainless Steel 8"	500 nos	
42	Forceps blunted-Stainless Steel 6"	500 nos	
43	Tissue paper roll, premium quality, minimum 250 pools	1000 roll	
44	Absolute Alcohol AR grade, Pack Size-500ml	500 nos	
45	Absolute Alcohol, Molecular Biology Grade, pack Size-500ml	250 nos	
46	DNA Concentration Device 0.5ml, Volume capacity 0.5ml, 30 kDa, vertical V-shape membrane, device compatible for Phenol-chloroform DNA extraction process.	5000 nos	
47	DNA Concentration Device 4 ml, Volume capacity 4ml, 30 kDa, vertical V-shape membrane, Device compatible for Phenol-chloroform DNA extraction process.	2500 nos	
48	Weighing Dishes	1000 nos	

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgcp/app>.  
 2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police ([www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in))  
 3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgcp/app>  
 4. Critical Date Sheet:

Published Date	12/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Bid Document Download Start Date	13/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Pre Bid Meeting Date	19/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Bid Submission Start Date	23/12/2023 Time 12:00 AM
Bid Submission End Date	02/01/2024 Time 14:00 PM
Bid Opening Date	03/01/2024 Time 16:00 PM

5. Intending Bidders are advised to visit this website regularly till closing date of submission to keep themselves updated as any change/modification in the tender will be intimated through this website only by corrigendum/addendum/amenment.  
 6. Bids will be opened as per date/time as mentioned in the Tender Critical Date Sheet. After online opening of Technical-Bid the results of their qualification as well Price-Bid opening will be intimated later.

(D.R. Taniwar)  
 D.I.G. (Provisioning)  
 For: Director General of Police M.P.

## Vessel attacked by drone reaches Mumbai port

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Commercial ship MV Chem Pluto, reportedly attacked by a drone two days ago nearly 270 nautical miles from Porbandar in the Arabian Sea, reached outside Mumbai port on Monday escorted by Coast Guard ship Vikram, officials said here. The cargo of the ship is planned to be transferred to another ship and a joint probe is being carried out by the Indian Coast Guard, Indian Navy, Intelligence agencies and other officials concerned to ascertain how the ship was attacked on December 23. Carrying crude oil, the merchant vessel was bound for Mangaluru port from Saudi Arabia when it came under attack. According to officials, the agencies would also try to find out whether the projectile used to attack the ship was a missile or

a drone. The Indian Coast Guard has also enhanced patrolling in the area to protect merchant vessels passing in the region. The officials said on Sunday that the India-bound merchant vessel, 'which came under attack by a drone', is being escorted back to native shores by Coast Guard ship Vikram in the Arabian Sea. According to officials, the merchant ship, hit by a suspected drone, requested to be escorted by the ICGS Vikram. Indian Coast Guard Dorniers are also airborne to keep an eye on the merchant vessels and carry out surveillance in the area, officials added. MV Chem Pluto, with 20 Indian and one Vietnamese crew member on Saturday caught fire after it was attacked by a suspected drone. It was later secured by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), the ICG said in an official statement. The merchant vessel reported-

ly commenced its voyage from the UAE on December 19 and was bound for New Mangalore port with an arrival date of December 25. According to the official statement, on December 23, the Indian Coast Guard Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Mumbai received information regarding a fire onboard MV Chem Pluto, reportedly attacked by a suspected drone strike or aerial platform. The Indian Coast Guard Maritime Coordination Centre (MRCC), which established real-time communication with the vessel's agent, ascertained no loss of life and assured all assistance. It was also learned that the vessel fire had been doused by the crew. To augment the vessel's safety, MRCC Mumbai has activated ISN and immediately diverted other merchant vessels in the vicinity of Chem Pluto for assistance.



## Let's not forget sacrifices of our armed forces: Chandrachud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said here on Monday let's not forget about the sacrifices of our armed forces personnel who are at the borders laying down their lives to protect the nation as we celebrate Christmas. He said the message of Jesus Christ's life was to sacrifice for the betterment of others. "We will give up everything, even if it comes to our lives as so many people in our armed forces do in the service of the nation. We lost four of our members of the armed forces two days ago. "So, as just we celebrate Christmas, let's not forget about those who are at borders...Who are giving up their lives to protect our nation. When we sing, we also sing for them in celebration," Chandrachud said, referring to the recent incident in which four soldiers were killed in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district. He was speaking at a Christmas function organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association. The CJ said a new set of chambers will be constructed for the members of the Bar. Chandrachud, who has been taking steps to reduce the pendency of cases, said he will institutionalise the process of seeking adjournments. Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Ahsanuddin Amanullah, and Supreme Court Bar Association president Adish C Aggarwala were also present at the event.

## India reports 63 more cases of JN.1 as total reaches 628

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the States across the country rush for genome sequencing of the Covid-19 cases, more number of JN.1 sub variants are being detected as at least 63 cases were reported in the country on Monday with maximum from Goa at 34 cases followed by Maharashtra where nine cases have been identified. Eight are from Karnataka, six from Kerala, four from Tamil Nadu and two from Telangana. However, there has been no clustering of cases reported so far and all the cases of the JN.1 subvariant have mild symptoms, according to officials from the Union Health Ministry. Meanwhile, overall India reported 628 new Covid cases, 1 more death in 24 hours, while the active caseload jumped to 4,054, according to Union health ministry data. The death toll stands at 5,33,334, with one new death reported from Kerala in 24 hours, the data showed. For the first time on Sunday, Pune district reported JN.1 variant of Covid-19 as the



genome sequencing results of three patients tested positive for the variant. One of the patients who tested positive to the Covid variant had a history of travelling to the USA. Both the patients from Pune had mild symptoms and have already recovered. In fact, Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Dhananjay Munde has tested positive for coronavirus, state Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said on Monday. There is no need to panic about the viral infection, Pawar was quoted by a news agency as saying. Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said there are four Covid patients in hospi-

itals in the State and they have asked for a genome sequencing report to know whether the new cases are of new variants or not. The total number of fatalities stood at 5,33,334 (5.33 lakh), with one new death reported from Kerala in the preceding 24 hours, according to the information updated at 8 am. The country's Covid case tally is currently at 4.50 crore. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has risen to 4,44,71,860 (4.44 crore) while the national recovery rate stands at 98.81 per cent, according to the health ministry website. India SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) chief Dr NK Arora said that no additional dose of vaccine is needed against the subvariant at present. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently designated JN.1 as a variant of interest, differentiating it from its parent lineage BA.2.86. Despite its swift dissemination, the global health organization has underscored that the overall risk associated with JN.1 is currently considered low based on available evidence.

## Ruling party has weaponised suspension of MPs: Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge in a letter to Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar has alleged the ruling party has "weaponised" the suspension of MPs as a convenient tool to "undermine democracy, sabotage Parliamentary practices and throttle the Constitution". In his reply to a letter written by Dhankhar, Kharge said the Chairman's letter "unfortunately justifies the autocratic and arrogant attitude of the Government towards Parliament." Replying to the points raised by Dhankhar, the senior Congress leader urged him to examine his concerns "objectively and with neutrality as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha." "The ruling party has indeed weaponised the suspension of members as a convenient tool to undermine democracy, sabotage Parliamentary practices and throttle the Constitution. If anything privilege motions have also been weaponised to muzzle the voice of the Opposition. This is a deliberate design of the ruling dispensation to undermine Parliament itself. By suspending MPs, the government is effec-



tively silencing the voice of the voters of 146 MPs altogether," Kharge said. "You have also mentioned that disorder was deliberate and strategised and predetermined. I would like to submit that if anything, it is the mass suspension of the Opposition MPs from both Houses of Parliament that seems to be predetermined and premeditated by the Government and I am most sorry to say, executed without any application of mind, as can be seen by the suspension of an INDIA party MP who was not even present in the Parliament," he said. While Dhankhar, in his letter,

before a TV channel when Parliament was in session and the Chair did not find that sacrilegious the temple of democracy," Kharge said. He said a Union minister allegedly informed an opposition parliamentarian that most opposition MPs will be suspended before the home minister is present in the Rajya Sabha. "We would have expected the Chairman to have inquired if such a threat was indeed issued. Such comments grossly undermines the Chair who we believe is the final authority on conducting the House including suspension of members". He added that by suspending the MPs, the government is effectively silencing the voice of the voters of 146 MPs altogether. Kharge said as the custodian of the House, the Chairman should protect the people's right to hold its government accountable in Parliament. "The Chairman should also kindly note that the government has escaped accountability on all crucial issues like serious border incursions by China, or continued unrest in Manipur or the recent intrusion in the Lok Sabha by visitors who had been facilitated entry by a BJP MP," he said.



# Our priority to empower poor, deprived: PM Sharad takes swipe at Ajit

PTI ■ INDORE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said his government's priority is to respect and empower the poor and deprived sections of the society. He also said investments of thousands of crores have been made in Indore's vicinity during the BJP's "double-engine" government (at the Centre and in Madhya Pradesh). This will give rise to thousands of employment opportunities, Modi said addressing via video link a programme organised to distribute dues worth Rs 224 crore pertaining to workers of the Hukumchand Mill in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city. The decision will benefit more than 4,800 labourers, he said at the programme 'Mazdooron ka Hit, Mazdooron ko Samarpan'. The PM also praised the state government for resolving this issue, which was pending for a long time, and said he was fortunate to be a part of this event. He said the Madhya Pradesh government has taken significant steps to transform the lives of the poor. "I have always said that for me, the biggest four castes are poor, youth, women and farmers. Our priority is to respect and empower the poor and deprived," he said. Modi further said that getting the blessings of labourers on the occasion of the Good Governance Day, being



observed on the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, will prove to be beneficial for the "double-engine" government and the people of the state. Workers of the Hukumchand Mill fought a long legal battle for the payment of their dues after the mill in Indore was closed in 1992, and went into liquidation. On the initiative of the Madhya Pradesh government, the state Housing & Infrastructure Development Board and labour unions sealed an agreement and the settlement amount was deposited in the high court on December 20, officials earlier said. Modi said he was told that when the package was announced for the Hukumchand Mill workers, there was a festive atmosphere in Indore.

"This decision has further increased the festive joy among our labourer brothers and sisters," he said. Today's programme is the result of years of penance of labourers, Modi said. "It is the result of many years of their dreams and resolutions. I firmly believe that the families of labourers will shower their blessings upon the new team of the double-engine government," he said. The people of Indore will remember December 25 as the day the workers got justice, he said. "I bow before your patience and salute your hard work," the PM added. He said the BJP's "double-engine" government is committed to restore the glory of Indore. "Notably, the investment corri-

dor between Bhopal and Indore is being established. Also, the Indore-Pithampur Economic Corridor and Multi-Modal Logistic Park are being developed," he said. The prime minister said amounts worth thousands of crores were being invested in these projects. "This will not only ensure development and prosperity in the region, but will also generate thousands of employment opportunities for our youth," he said. These developmental projects will strongly strengthen the economy of the region, he said. "I am well aware of the impact of the blessings and love of the labourers," Modi said. He referred to Indore's foremost position in cleanliness and delicacies, and also highlighted the textile sector's role in the industrial landscape of the city.

He also mentioned about the importance of Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar cloth market here, the Holkars establishing the first cotton mill in the city and the popularity of Malwa cotton. At that time, the rates of cotton used to be set by Indore and this place was compared with Manchester (a textile industry hub of the UK), he said. That was the golden period of Indore's textiles scene but it was neglected by the previous governments, Modi said. "The double-engine government is trying to restore the old glory of Indore," he said. Many cities in MP, including Indore, have become examples of finding a balance between development and nature, Modi said. He gave examples of Asia's largest operational Gobardhan (bio-CNG) plant here and the development of the electric vehicles charging infrastructure in the city. PM Modi also mentioned about laying the foundation stone for a 60 MW solar power plant in Jalood, which will help the Indore Municipal Corporation to save Rs 4 crore per month in electricity bills. Referring to the use of 'green bonds' in an attempt to arrange funds for the plant, he said it will ensure participation of the people in protecting nature. The prime minister also said the state government is working to fulfil guarantees offered during the recent assembly polls.

## Says 1978 move was not a rebellion

PTI ■ PUNE

Nationalist Congress Party founder Sharad Pawar on Monday took a swipe at Ajit Pawar's reference of the 1978 move by the former against then Maharashtra chief minister Vasantdada Patil and said that was not a rebellion but a decision taken after mutual consultation. In 1978, Sharad Pawar had walked out of the government with 40 MLAs, leading to the collapse of the Patil dispensation. The NCP supremo, on July 18 that year, was sworn in as chief minister. He was the youngest on the post at 38. On Sunday, while speaking in Baramati, Ajit Pawar, who split the NCP on July 2 and joined the Eknath Shinde government, had taken a swipe at Sharad Pawar by saying his stand came after crossing 60 while some went down that path at the age of 38. The deputy chief minister had further claimed Yashwantrao Chavan had opposed Sharad Pawar's move as a leader like Vasantdada Patil was pushed aside. "Vasantdada was a good leader but he was kept aside and the experiment with Janata Party was done. So it is not as if nobody in the past took the kind of step that I took. I took the decision after crossing 60, so



everyone needs to understand my stand," Ajit Pawar had further said. Hitting back, Sharad Pawar said, "In our times, there was no rebellion. We used to sit and take decisions. So there was no such thing (rebellion). It was a mutual decision so there was no question of anyone complaining." Queried about the opposition bloc INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) not having a prime ministerial face, Sharad Pawar said even in the 1977 Lok Sabha polls (post Emergency) no one was projected as PM. "After the polls, Moraraji Desai was made PM. There are no consequences if a face is not projected. If people are in the mood for change, they will take a call to bring about that change," the former Union minister asserted. Asked that a poll survey had given the Maha Vikas Aghadi an edge over the ruling alliance in the 2024 LS polls, he said surveys are just indications and one should not jump to conclusions

on the basis of such exercises. Queried about Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Ambedkar stating that his outfit could fight all 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra if an alliance with the INDIA bloc does not materialise, Sharad Pawar said all political groups have the right to take their own decisions. He said he had told Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a meeting held in Delhi, to take Ambedkar along, adding that Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had also contacted the VBA chief. "I welcome the move by Ambedkar and our colleagues to work together," the NCP founder asserted. Asked about issues related to ethanol, Pawar said "this year something is lacking in the Centre's ethanol policy". Vehicles are increasing in the country and crude oil is being imported, while countries like America and Brazil are mixing ethanol and fuel on a large scale, he pointed out.



## Two soldiers from Uttarakhand killed in terrorist attack in JK's Poonch cremated

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

The mortal remains of two Army soldiers from Uttarakhand who were killed in a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch four days ago were consigned to flames on Monday in their hometowns with full military honours and a large number of people in attendance. Naik Birendra Singh (33) was cremated on the banks of Triveni Sangam — the confluence of three rivers — in Narayanbagar while Rifleman Gautam Kumar (28) was consigned to flames at Muktidham on the banks of the Khoh river in Kotdwar. Their elder brothers lit the funeral pyres. Kumar was to get married in March next year. Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami laid wreaths on the mortal remains of the two soldiers at the Jolly Grant airport here and said, "The sacrifice made by our soldiers for the defence of the nation will continue to inspire us all."

## Nitish speaks out for first time since INDIA meet

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday rubbished speculations that he felt having been passed over at INDIA bloc's meeting in Delhi last week when it was suggested that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge be made the prime ministerial face. The JD(U) leader maintained that having taken the initiative to bring parties opposed to the BJP, he desired nothing for himself but admitted having stressed at the meeting the need to expedite seat-sharing arrangements. "I felt no disappointment (maayusi)...No resentment (naaraazgi)," asserted Kumar when journalists approached him with queries here at a memorial of late Atal Bihari Vajpayee where he had turned up to pay tributes on the former prime minister's birth anniversary. "At the meeting the issue (of naming a leader came up). I made it clear at the outset that I was not interested. Then another name was proposed, I said it was okay with me," said the Bihar CM alluding to the proposal by his Delhi and West Bengal counterparts, Arvind Kejriwal and Mamata Banerjee respectively. The JD(U) leader's detractors in the BJP-led NDA have latched on to the development and claimed that Kejriwal, who heads the Aam Aadmi Party and Banerjee, who is Trinamool Congress supremo, had in effect snubbed Kumar's alleged prime ministerial ambitions. Notably, in the post-meeting press conference that Kharge addressed, the Congress president had expressed the desire to keep the issue of prime ministerial face on the backburner, underscoring that the INDIA



coalition needed to first win adequate number of Lok Sabha seats. Kumar, who interacted with journalists in presence of his deputy Tejashwi Yadav and a couple of senior cabinet colleagues, was also asked about his reported insistence on finalising seat sharing by January, preferably within three weeks of the December 19 meeting held in Delhi. Without going into specifics, Kumar said "Yes I said that seat sharing should be finalised at the earliest. I had expressed the view on earlier occasions as well. I am confident that it will be done in good time across all states". Yadav, who belongs to RJD and had attended the meeting in Delhi, concurred saying seat sharing will be "done in good time (sahi samay par ho jagga)". Kumar was also asked about speculations in a section of the

media that a major crisis was brewing in his JD(U) which may even suffer a split or agree to merge with RJD. "All are working together in my party (Sabhi log ekjut hain)," said the JD(U) supreme leader, dismissing the speculations of turmoil with a broad grin. "Just look at the progress my government is making. I had promised 10 lakh jobs and we are already halfway through," said the state's longest-serving CM, referring to an announcement he had made on Independence Day last year. The promise of 10 lakh jobs was made within weeks of his exit from NDA and the formation of a new government with his party in Mahagathbandhan, helmed by RJD. Yadav, the son and heir apparent of RJD president Lalu Prasad, had promised 10 lakh jobs to the state's youth in the 2020 assembly polls, which caught the fancy of voters and helped his party win the highest number of seats. Kumar, who has been accusing the Narendra Modi government at the Centre of muzzling the media, added "I have always respected journalists. Those who have known me since my tenure as Union minister will testify to that. But today you all are not able to show the good work we do because of pressure from above. Don't worry. Things will change when the regime changes". He also spoke of the immense respect he had for late Vajpayee and highlighted that "people of no religious sect felt uneasy when he was in power". To a pointed query as to whether Vajpayee's party BJP still showed the spirit of inclusiveness, Kumar exclaimed in disgust "What on earth are you saying (arrey! Kya Baat karte hain)"

## Shah, Nadda to visit Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda are scheduled to arrive here on Monday night on a two-day visit to assess the organisational landscape in West Bengal ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls next year, according to a party leader. Shah's visit comes weeks before the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. On Tuesday, Shah is scheduled to visit a Gurudwara at Central Avenue in North Kolkata and the Kalighat Temple, where he will offer prayers. Following that, the Home Minister will hold a meeting with senior Bengal BJP leaders at a five-star hotel in the New Town area. During the meeting, the senior

leader may address issues such as the selection of candidates for the upcoming general elections and streamline the saffron party's campaign strategy leading up to the polls, according to sources. When asked if he will provide any advice on how to utilise the inauguration of the Ram Temple post-January during the poll campaign, a senior State leader stated, "Though the Ram Temple should not be viewed as a political tool, there will definitely be an impact." On Tuesday afternoon, the BJP leader will address a meeting of party workers at the National Library, where he may openly define the campaign strategy, as per sources. Meanwhile, commenting on Shah's visit, senior Bengal min-

ister and Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim said on Monday that such visits would be a routine affair before the elections. He added that his party was not at all worried about such visits. "Before 2021, Modi ji, Amit Shah ji, Nadda ji, and their entire brigade traveled to Bengal as daily passengers with a longing to capture power in Bengal. They were expecting to win more than 200 seats in a 294-strong Assembly. However, they only secured 77-78 seats. This time also, they will come and go like daily passengers, but their tally will come down to single digits," Hakim said. In 2019, the BJP surprised the entire country by winning 18 parliamentary seats from Bengal. The State sends 42 MPs to Delhi.

## ULFA(I) linkman injured in police firing, DGP warns violence by banned organisation unacceptable

PTI ■ RANGIA

A suspected ULFA (I) linkman was injured in a police firing while allegedly attempting to escape from custody in Assam's Kamrup (Rural) district on Monday, an officer said. The police had raided the house of Pranjal Das alias Bhelu in Baihata Chariali area on Sunday night and recovered a flag of the outfit, following which he was taken into custody, Kamrup (Rural) Superintendent of Police Hitesh Roy said. Das tried to escape from police

custody in New Market area and the police opened fire in which he was injured on Monday. He was admitted to the Gauhati Medical College Hospital for treatment. The SP said that Das was a close associate of another ULFA(I) linkman, Ashim Adhikary, arrested in Guwahati last week for allegedly recruiting cadres to the outfit. Das was allegedly involved in hoisting the outfit's flag at Baihata Chariali recently, the SP added. Meanwhile, Director General of Police G P Singh warned that initiation of violence by a

banned organisation was unacceptable. He said "Our initial plan, after the first grenade blast, was peace and conflict resolution through discussion". "However, our peace initiative was taken as a weakness and further violence was committed. We still believe that peace and conflict resolution is the best way ahead but initiation of violence from a banned organisation is unacceptable", Singh posted on 'X'. The incident occurred a day after a suspected ULFA(I) cadre and three youths, who were allegedly en route to join the

banned outfit, were injured in two separate incidents of police firing at Sivasagar and Tinsukia respectively when they attempted to escape from police custody. The ULFA (I), however, claimed in an e-mail statement to the media that Das and the three youths, who were injured in police firing were not involved with the outfit. Earlier, three suspected ULFA (Independent) linkmen were arrested from a house in Guwahati last week, close on the heels of recent blasts in three major towns of Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Jorhat.

## Kerala plans to tap its vast coastline for beach tourism

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala is planning to tap the tourism potential of its 580-km coastline dotted by some of the finest seaside getaways that includes Asia's longest drive-in beach in Muzhappilangad, state Tourism Minister P A Mohamed Riyas said on Monday. Riyas said that in order to efficiently utilise the state's potential of beach tourism, the government intends to link tourist places along its vast coastline spread across nine of its 14 districts. The Minister made the announcement while inaugurating the first floating bridge in the district at Papanasam Beach here, a Tourism Department release said. Riyas said the floating bridge, the seventh in the state, will add to the tourist attractions in the coastal districts, according to the release. "There is a huge potential for beach tourism in Kerala, and it will be utilised effectively. Kerala's coastline is ideal for water sports. But there are a few projects now. If effectively utilised, it will immensely contribute to the state's revenues," the minister was quoted as having said in the release. He also said that many investors had come forward at the first Tourism Investors' Meet held in the state capital last month, expressing their interest in



investing in beach tourism. The minister further said that the government intends to implement more beach tourism projects in public-private partnerships. A master plan has been formulated to comprehensively develop Varkala as a major entertainment and pilgrimage centre in the state to be implemented in 2024, he said according to the release. "New projects like the floating bridge in Varkala, which currently has many water sports activities, will attract more tourists here," Riyas said. The floating bridge has been set up by the Department of Tourism in association with the District Tourism Promotion Council, Kerala Adventure

Tourism Promotion Society and the Municipality of Varkala, the release said. The bridge has a 100-meter length and a three-meter width with pillars on both sides. At the bridge's end is a platform- 11 meters long and seven meters wide-, enabling visitors to enjoy the scenery far off the sea, it said. Constructed with 1,400 high-density floating polyethylene blocks, the bridge, held by 700 kg anchors, is equipped with all protective measures, including safety boats, life jackets and life-guards, it said. Around 100 visitors can enter the floating bridge at a time and move along the sea's waves. The entry will be from 11 am to 5 pm, the release said.

## Karnataka BJP names Poojari as LoP in Legislative Council

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka BJP on Monday announced the appointment of senior party MLA and former Minister Kota Shrinivas Poojari as the Leader of Opposition in the State Legislative Council, and MLA Arvind Bellad as Deputy Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly. The BJP also has also appointed its MLAs Sunil Vallyyapure and N Ravikumar respectively as the Deputy Leader of Opposition and its Chief Whip respectively in the legislative council — the upper house; while party MLA Doddanagouda G Patil has been named as the Chief Whip in the lower house of the state legislature. In a press release announcing these appointments, state BJP President B Y Vijayendra said, "appointments have been made as per the directions of party national President J P Nadda." After the Assembly polls in May in which Congress swept to power, the BJP participated in two legislative sessions -- in July and earlier this December -- without appointments to these key posts, which had drawn large-scale criticism from ruling Congress and some sections of the society. In fact, the post of legislature party leader too was vacant till November, until R Ashoka was appointed, ahead of the session earlier this month.

## Owaisi slams Karnataka Govt for not lifting hijab ban, says it takes just 30 minutes to issue orders

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi on Monday slammed the Karnataka Government for not issuing orders lifting the hijab ban in the State even after the Congress party came to power seven months ago. Speaking to reporters here, while condemning the killing of four Indian Army personnel by Pakistani terrorists in Kashmir, the Hyderabad MP demanded the arrest of the personnel allegedly involved in the

"killing" of three civilian people whose bodies were found after they were reportedly picked up for questioning. "Why has it taken them (Congress government in Karnataka) seven months and why are they going back? After addressing a public meeting, the Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that they can wear whatever you want and then he tells within one hour that we are yet to take a decision. It is very unfortunate. The Muslims of Karnataka are feeling let down," he said.

The AIMIM chief wondered what is stopping the Congress Government in Karnataka from issuing such orders which will take just 30 minutes. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday clarified that the administration was only contemplating lifting the ban on wearing hijab in educational institutions in the state and a decision will be taken after holding discussions with the government level. On the deaths of three civilians in Kashmir, Owaisi said compensation and other measures

by the government are not enough and that the officials who are involved in it should be arrested immediately. Three men were found dead under suspicious circumstances on December 22 near the site of an ambush by terrorists on two Army vehicles in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district that left five soldiers dead and two injured the previous day. The deceased were among the eight people reportedly picked up by the Army for questioning in connection with the attack at Dhatyar Morh.





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## On the mat

Sports Ministry suspends the Wrestling Federation of India; it may mean end of the road for Brij Bhushan Singh

After grappling for long with the Opposition's charges and public sentiment against Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) ex-president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the Government has declared the election of its new president and Brij Bhushan's aide Sanjay Singh null and void, besides suspending the federation. The Sports Ministry, responsible for regulating the national sports bodies, took the unprecedented step after the WFI hit the headlines for a long time for the wrong reasons. Indicating that it was endgame for Brij Bhushan, the Ministry claimed that even the new wrestling body was under the influence of a former WFI chief, violating the National Sports Code. Immediately after the suspension order came, Brij Bhushan apparently took the Government's hint and declared his disengagement from the sport. The controversy surrounding Brij Bhushan includes allegations of sexual harassment by top wrestlers such as Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik. Punia even returned his Padma Shri award in protest against Sanjay Singh's election while Sakshi Malik announced her retirement from wrestling for the same reason. The controversy began when the wrestling federation initiated the process of selecting a new president after allegations against Brij Bhushan surfaced. The move was met with anticipation and excitement as the wrestling community eagerly awaited the appointment of a leader who could guide the federation to new heights. However, the selection process quickly turned controversial due to allegations of favouritism, lack of transparency and violation of WFI's own guidelines.

Given the long agitation by sportspersons for removing Brij Bhushan from WFI's top post, the Ministry's decision is a step in the right direction, though rather late in the day. However, it does not augur well for autonomous institutions and sets a bad precedent. The move has sparked a heated debate about the Government's involvement in internal affairs of sports federations. While some argue that the Ministry's intervention was necessary to uphold the principles of fairness and transparency, others view it as an infringement on the autonomy of sports organisations. Given the structure of our sporting bodies, one cannot overlook the fact that they are highly politicised bodies; be it cricket or athletics, they are governed and managed by the party in power. So, the autonomy of such institutions is actually a farce. The erstwhile WFI president did not budge from his position despite a lot of hue and cry and an impending FIR over his alleged conduct in utter disregard to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cherished goal of "Beti bachao, Beti Padhao." Now that he is gone and it is likely that a deserving sportsperson would be at the helm, things should improve at WFI and all the agony wrestlers went through would be adequately compensated. However, the whole set of events that unfolded in the months gone by gives a glimpse of the rot that runs in our sports bodies.

### PICTALK



People take a look at newly constructed Sanjauli-Dhali tunnel in Shimla

# Pandemonium in Parliament

## Better coordination between the government and the Opposition is essential to ensure the smooth running of the House

The recent security breach in Parliament has severe political, electoral, legislative, and security implications. The resultant unprecedented suspension of 146 has now united the Opposition Coalition. Lok Sabha witnessed two intruders jumping from the visitor's gallery and throwing canisters, creating smoke. It is a mystery how they entered the House despite five-tier Security in Parliament. Unfortunately, parliaments of various countries have been attacked in the past. They include the 1981 Spanish coup attempt, the 2017 U.K. Parliament Terror Attack, and the 1987. The Sri Lankan Parliament Grenade Attack, the 2021 US Capitol Attack, and the Oct 2023 Turkish government building attack also need to be mentioned. However, in each case, appropriate corrective measures were taken immediately following the attack. Let's start by discussing the security impact of the situation. Soon after the incident, security was tightened further, and Parliament House was fortified. More measures are expected after the high-level enquiry report is submitted. The recent incident highlights the importance of strictly implementing the already rigorous security measures that were introduced after the 2001 terrorist attack. It is crucial to ensure that thorough screening is carried out. Members of Parliament need to be cautious when recommending passes and should be held accountable for their actions. The intruders obtained their passes on the recommendation of a BJP MP from Mysuru. The government responded quickly by ordering a thorough investigation, which led to the arrest of all six individuals involved in the incident. They were then presented in court to face charges. After the shocking security breach, the Opposition demanded a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah, which he refused to provide. This led to chaos and confrontations that could have been avoided if Shah had made a brief statement. The Opposition created an uproar that led to the suspension



of 146 unruly members, mainly from the INDIA Alliance. According to the rules, there are two reasons for which members can be suspended from the House. The first is when a member disrespects the authority of the Chair. The second is when a member intentionally and persistently obstructs the proceedings of the House. In this instance, the suspended members went against the authority of the Speaker and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. The 146 members were suspended for insulting Parliament, mimicking the Rajya Sabha chairman, and defying the Speaker. The Rajya Sabha Chairman and the Lok Sabha Speaker made their decision, stating that such unruly behaviour was unacceptable. With the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on the horizon, it appears that neither side is mainly focused on running the House. The upcoming budget session, slated for next month, may also encounter some confrontation, but a vote on the account budget must be passed nonetheless. The shocking incident has had a significant electoral impact as the opposition parties have come together to protest against the Modi government's alleged authoritarianism. They have taken the



AFTER ALL, THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE CALLED "LAWMAKERS" FOR NOTHING, AND THE LEGISLATIVE BODY IS WEAKENED WHEN LAWS ARE NOT THOROUGHLY EXAMINED AND DEBATED

issue to the streets and made it a significant election matter. The Opposition aims to criticise the government for its failure to protect the Parliament and question how it can safeguard its citizens. Additionally, they plan to damage Modi's reputation as a strong leader in the upcoming 2024 polls. As a first step, they have decided to put a joint candidate against the BJP candidates in the Lok Sabha elections to avoid splitting Opposition votes. As for legislation, crucial bills like the Criminal Law Amendment Bill were passed while the suspended members protested outside. Even in the past, a bunch of laws were passed in just a few minutes. Former Supreme Court Chief Justice NV Ramana expressed his disappointment that Members of Parliament did not thoroughly debate and discuss the bills as lawmakers. Members of Parliament (MPs) have five primary functions. They include making laws, reviewing budgets, overseeing government activities, representing people, and holding the government accountable. Despite the best efforts of the MPs, they face difficulties when Parliament is not functioning smoothly. Without order in the House, it becomes

challenging to highlight issues and establish a good understanding of specific topics. Although it is the government's responsibility to ensure the efficient functioning of Parliament, the Opposition should also offer productive feedback. After all, the members of Parliament are called "lawmakers" for nothing, and the legislative body is weakened when laws are not thoroughly examined and debated. What is the reaction from the public? The public is appalled by the behaviour of the members and the subsequent suspension of the unprecedented number of 146 MPs. They are disappointed that instead of addressing the concerns of their constituents, they create chaos in the House. The task of creating laws is assigned to the legislature by the Constitution. On the other hand, the government executes these laws, while the judiciary is responsible for enforcing them. For a democracy to thrive, the effective functioning of the Parliament is crucial. Better coordination between the government and the Opposition is essential to ensure the smooth running of the House. (The writer is a popular columnist, views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### MERRY CHRISTMAS

Sir — It is Christmas Season and so a reason to feel happy. For many people, the weekend after Thanksgiving is when you can start decorating for the Christmas Season. Any earlier than that is considered tacky and premature. New Year's Day is right in the middle of the Christmas Season, traditionally speaking. Now Christmas is when Jesus Christ was born in an animal stall in a barn because there was no room at the inn. He laid in a manger with hay for his little bed. Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes so he wouldn't have to lay right on the hay. Jesus was sent from God to come and show us how we are supposed to live and love one another and ask for forgiveness for our sins. So Christmas is about Jesus' birthday.

CK Subramaniam | Chennai

#### PROTECTING THE DOWNTRODDEN

Sir — Social writer James Baldwin said "If one wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony." Taken in its true spirit and import, the humble beat constable is at once the first responder, the counsellor, the social activist, the chastiser, and the mighty satrap of the government, all rolled out as one. In what manner and order he wishes to enact these roles is dictated by his inner values, wisdom and training. That said he is but the creature of the government in power. Even in most democratic dispensations, governments tend to treat the Police as their handmaiden. Writer Njau Kihia, says "When the Govt theanthropic itself in matters of leadership and governance and takes the constitution and its guardians secondary to his decisions, the judiciary should assume the role of the decide of the allied beast.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

#### Illegal migrants: Taking risk for better life



News has emerged regarding the grounding of a plane carrying 303 Indian passengers at an airport in northeastern France on suspicion of human trafficking. The flight, originating from the United Arab Emirates and destined for the Nicaraguan capital, Managua, included 303 individuals, including minors. There is speculation that these Indian passengers may have intended to travel to Nicaragua with the goal of illegally entering the United States or Canada. However, attempting such border crossings entails significant risks, as evidenced by past instances where

Indians lost their lives at the US/Canada borders. Tragically, millions of Syrian refugees seeking a better life in Europe have lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean Sea, with over 700 asylum seekers recently perishing in three separate incidents. Addressing the issue of human trafficking requires proactive measures beginning in the migrants' home countries. This involves educating people about the risks associated with illegal migration and implementing urgent initiatives to improve economic conditions in those nations. The fate of migrants is often marked by tragedies orchestrated by unscrupulous illegal agents who exploit vulnerable individuals. To combat this issue, it is suggested that the union government establishes a Special Investigation Team (SIT) for a thorough investigation. This effort should aim to dismantle the nexus of human trafficking by apprehending agents based in India and their overseas handlers. Additionally, stringent action must be taken against traffickers who exploit individuals desperate for a better life.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

If he shows signs of the faint-hearted, the judiciary firewalls become weak to not withstand the threats posed by the executive thus turning into the executive's de facto corporation. This is how autocracy is midwived! A conscientious policeman and a good judge would yet be the best defence for a citizen of any nation.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

#### MIMICRY OF VP IS IN A BAD TASTE

Sir — On Tuesday after the suspension of several MPs in Rajya Sabha, a video of Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee has been in controversy, in which he was mimicking the Vice President of India Mr Jaydeep Dhanekar outside the parliament. This happened during the presence of the senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who was recording the video and silently listening to him and laughing. Drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP is Shameful, ridiculous, and unacceptable that an MP is mocking.

There is one famous dialogue from a Hindi movie. A person indulging in theatrics for playing on the emotions of good people for his petty and personal interests. Such mimicry of the honourable vice president does not depict the democracy of India which the opposition always criticizes against the ruling party. This is not the insult of Jagdeep Dhanekar, the position he holds in the country is also getting disrespected. Strict action was taken against Kalyan Banerjee by advocate Abhishek Gautam at Defence Colony Police station on Tuesday evening for such an act and it should set the benchmark for other people. This is what our educated and respectful MPs of parliament dare to do in the largest democracy. This is the big question of our democracy.

Prakshal Bakliwal | Indore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# The UAE Consensus is a win-win for all

## COP28: a climate conference breakthrough - unprecedented inclusivity and impact set new standards for a sustainable climate

World leaders in Rio de Janeiro sensed the danger facing humanity from the climate crisis some 30 years ago, but this sense of danger was not enough at that time, as the Earth Summit, for which they chose an emotional title, was devoid of any commitments and was dominated by multiple wills and divergent interests. However, the good thing was the agreement on the periodicity of holding the summit under the banner of the United Nations. Since then and as past COP editions laid important groundwork, COP28 stands as a watershed moment in the fight against climate change. For the first time in around three decades, the conference yielded concrete and realistic commitments from nations around the world. This is the first time world leaders, international and non-governmental organisations, and business leaders have agreed on clear and specific outlines to save the planet after marathon discussions that need to go into overtime. Upon ending, the discussions gave birth to 'The UAE Consensus', a historic set



of measures outlining a solid plan to keep global temperatures below 1.5°C. UAE's COP28 scored an early win on the global event's first day when nations agreed to put into operation the loss and damage fund and triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. The landmark deal is set to help the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries pay for the irreversible impacts of climate disaster. On the second day, President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced the launch of ALTERRA, a new investment platform aimed at driving private capital towards climate investments and improving access to climate finance in emerging markets. It aims to mobilise \$250 billion globally by 2030. Until December 11, COP28 has mobilised over \$83 billion in funding, setting the pace for a new era in climate

action. These include the first-ever declarations on food systems transformation and health, plus declarations on renewable energy and efficiency, as well as initiatives to decarbonise heavy-emitting industries. Eleven pledges and declarations have been launched and received historic support. These commitments are characterised by their comprehensiveness and for the first time include food systems, health, renewable energy, and carbon removal. COP28 served as a powerful testament to the world's collective commitment to tackling the climate crisis. Through collaboration and shared responsibility, a previously unclear path forward has been illuminated. All nations and peoples have been called upon to do their part in ensuring that the critical goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius remains within reach. COP28 embraced a pragmatic approach, prioritising effective and robust policies that achieve carbon neutrality and zero emissions while simultaneously fostering economic growth. This recognis-

es that climate action drives growth and prosperity, and conversely, economic prosperity enables further investment in achieving net-zero emissions. Despite diverse international perspectives and visions on achieving the UN's carbon neutrality goal and compensating developing nations, COP28's Presidency successfully delivered a clear message. For the first time, COP28 officially included health, international parliamentarians, and religious representatives. Additionally, the Inter-Parliamentary Union held its meetings concurrently and on-site, highlighting the shared responsibility between the executive and legislative branches in tackling climate change. The landscape after COP28 is set to shift dramatically. Notably, a historic climate commitment that recently emerged from China and the United States, to reduce methane and other non-carbon dioxide gases across their entire economies marks a significant step forward in tackling global emissions. (The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH





## FIRST COLUMN

## WHEN TECHNOLOGY PINS YOU DOWN

Though it makes lives faster and smoother, it also fuels anxiety, impatience and stress



BHIKKHU SIRI SIVALI ABHASARO

Technology is not only connecting people but also establishing and binding them to timelines, time limits, and time-oriented duties and responsibilities. Even today's relationships are becoming time-constrained, leading to the emergence of concepts like 'situationships.' Our lives have become fast but short. In the past, letters took months to reach their destinations, but now our messages take nanoseconds. However, late replies still make us uneasy, contributing to our growing impatience. We're all in a hurry, wanting to learn, grow, and earn quickly. Due to this, we may easily see, hear, or experience many things at a young age, thanks to the availability of resources compared to our prior generations.

However, we have fewer memories to cherish. We have platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and other social media to share media and showcase our lifestyles to others, yet we lack the time to sit calmly and reminisce about our old memories. Consequently, we live unexamined lives, often driven by subconscious desires or unwholesome latent tendencies. We may harbour ambitions beyond our domain and capabilities, leading to feelings of inferiority. This makes us ignorant and indulgent, lacking mindfulness. Haste often results in ignorance, reinforcing latent cravings.



To practice mindfulness, one must cultivate skillful thinking. Without it, being mindful in every situation becomes challenging. Mindfulness involves avoiding the influence of prejudice or latent desires. Understanding thoughts profoundly is crucial, as sometimes restraint without complete comprehension may suffice, while other situations demand clarification, perspective, understanding root causes, or recognizing characteristics for overcoming challenges. It's essential to exercise caution in discerning which thoughts to restrain, abandon, control, or accept, and which ones not to. Not every situation merits acceptance; rebellion is necessary at times.

Sometimes, even delving too deeply into certain thoughts or seeking clarification and understanding the root causes can be more harmful, highlighting that mindfulness goes beyond merely "living in the present moment" or adopting an attitude of "let it go" or "let it be, it happens." Rather, it's a way of skillfully dealing with unhealthy situations.

In the relentless march of technology, our lives have become not only fast-paced but also paradoxically short-lived. The instant connectivity that defines our era has led to relationships characterized by time constraints, giving rise to the novel term 'situationships.' While we can communicate at the speed of light, the impatience fostered by this instantaneity persists. The drive for quick learning, growth, and earnings accelerates our pace, allowing us to encounter a myriad of experiences at a young age, yet robbing us of the time to savor and reminisce about our own memories. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook offer us the means to showcase our lives, but the frenetic pace of existence often leaves little room for quiet reflection on our past. Consequently, we risk living unexamined lives, propelled by subconscious desires and unchecked tendencies. The pursuit of ambitions beyond our capacities can breed feelings of inferiority, fostering ignorance and a lack of mindfulness.

To navigate this whirlwind, cultivating skillful thinking is imperative for mindfulness. It involves a nuanced understanding of thoughts, knowing when to restrain, abandon, control, or accept them. Mindfulness transcends the clichés of "living in the present moment" or adopting an attitude of "let it go." Instead, it's a strategic approach to skillfully navigate life's complexities and challenges. In a world hurtling towards the future, mindfulness becomes our anchor, grounding us in the art of wise decision-making amidst the chaos of modern existence.

(The writer is a Buddhist monk; views are personal)

## The intricacies of tree dynamics

Trees can be read like a book. They tell a lot about the landscape they belong to, unravelling secrets about their environment and even the local culture



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA



Trees stand as one of nature's most captivating and diverse creations, each a unique entity shaped by its genetic blueprint and the environment it inhabits. The differences one observes between trees extend beyond the cosmetic, revealing a complex interplay of factors that govern their survival and growth.

Factors like sunlight, temperature, precipitation, and seasonal changes play a crucial role in life-sustaining processes like photosynthesis and transpiration. Moreover, a tree's physical characteristics - its shape, size, health, and growth - are influenced by a combination of edaphic factors, aspect and topography of the landscape, associates, and wind conditions. Unlike mobile species, these silent sentinels, fastened in one location, endure all attacks on their vulnerabilities. Does one ever compare the challenging aspects of their existence with the degree of freedom humans enjoy on this planet?

The life of every tree is a unique story of adaptation and survival in the wake of numerous natural as well as anthropogenic forces that threaten trees as well as their symbiotically connected intricate ecosystem. Tree's story of resilience and survival is a testament to the enduring power of nature. Reading trees transcends being a mere hobby; it evolves into a fervent journey to connect with them, uncovering the narratives inscribed in their leaves, stems, bark, branches, stumps, and roots, and appreciating the concealed chronicles of nature. Amidst concrete jungle, the language of adaptation becomes a call to witness the tenacity of life confronting unexpected levels of anthropogenic interferences. Analogous to how humans pull their arms closer in harsh weather, trees too exhibit transformations in response to their surroundings.

In the intricate ballet of adaptation, broad-leaf trees respond to harsh winds or chilling cold by crafting smaller leaves. Conifers, with their compact stature, sport small needles - a strategic adaptation to minimize heat loss and protect branches from snapping under the weight of snow. The waxy pine needles aid in reducing evapotranspiration losses. In wind-exposed locales, one finds smaller, thicker leaves compared to their counterparts in sheltered spots. Aligning with the tree's priorities, the mor-

phological features of leaves also change from the young to the mature stages of life. Noteworthy changes include the transition from round to elongated leaves in certain eucalyptus trees as they age, and the foliage of young conifers being typically shorter, thinner, softer, and more brush-like than that of older trees. Studies show that environmental stressors, such as extreme temperatures, can also trigger accelerated maturation of trees.

Leaves, the vibrant palette of nature, exhibit fascinating responses to varying light levels. Sun leaves, perched high on the canopy, are compact, thick, and lighter in hue, basking in the abundant sunlight. In contrast, shade leaves, nestled within the inner canopy and the northern side, adopt a broader, thinner, and darker profile, adapting to the lower light levels. This adaptive prowess, known as plasticity, is particularly striking in arid regions where leaves shrink in size to avoid overheating, showcasing the tree's strategic water conservation approach. In stark contrast, moist environments nurture large, floppy leaves, with the largest ones observed in multi-story forests. Decoding the language of leaves unveils nature's master design to support life.

The branching pattern of a tree also evolves following a ballet of shadows, sunlight, and wind patterns. Large trees with small leaves unfurl a plethora of branches, allowing light to filter through and reach the lower layers of a multi-layered forest.

This collaboration between leaves and branches is an energy-conscious masterpiece. Leaves, the food factories of the tree, strategically adjust their angles and lengths of petioles or stalks to optimise light exposure, avoiding overlaps. Positioning themselves to maximise photosynthesis, branches on the sunnier side stretch horizontally, and those on the cooler side grow more vertically. In snowfall areas, the branches

droop, allowing the snow to slide down and prevent damage to the trees.

Trees can also be identified by their bark typified by colour, texture, and pattern. Trees develop a tough layer called the periderm which acts as a protective shield for the inner tissues against both biotic and abiotic stresses.

Some species fortify periderm's defensive capabilities with substances like tannin, resin, or gum. Interestingly, the bark of pine trees gradually becomes flaky towards the top whereas oak trees display deep fissures and ridges. Eucalyptus trees are known for their smooth, thin bark; Sal trees have rough and fissured bark, while the bark of the gum-yielding ghost tree is smooth and shiny.

As one navigates the urban streets, each tree becomes a signpost, silently communicating its struggles, adaptations, and resilience. The scanty foliage and leaves' yellowish hue often are 'distress signals' and not mere peculiarities. The roots and stem, often restricted by the predominantly paved urban landscape, grapple to secure space, water, and nutrients.

The leaves, subjected to the relentless onslaught of wind and traffic, bear the marks of forced pruning. Comprehending this narrative transforms a casual urban stroll in urban ecosystems, prompting the urge to share their silent communication with passersby: "Why don't you see?" Despite numerous challenges, an amazing symbiotic relationship exists between trees and seed dispersal agents that support the regeneration of trees. Some seeds hitch a ride on animals and even humans while others navigate waterways. Further, birds and wind become willing accomplices dispersing seeds far and wide. Despite ongoing debates surrounding the phylogenetic and physiological definitions that attempt to address the issue of signal transmission within and amongst trees, it is evident that

each part of a tree - be it a leaf, branch, flower, or root - responds to its microenvironment. Responses of different parts of trees to various microclimates showcase their silent awareness of immediate surroundings and serve as a reminder that in nature's quiet symphony, every element plays a unique and crucial role. Trees, in all their splendour, are more than just a beautiful sight. To the keen observers, they unravel intriguing secrets about the environment, landscape, and even the local culture. The growth rings in a tree stump serve as a historical record narrating tales of past climatic conditions, fire incidents, wind patterns, and droughts. Gaining an understanding of these aspects can enrich one's experience of both forest visits and countryside strolls. On the spiritual front, the tree offers profound lessons. Its seed symbolises the immense potential within each of us.

The tree teaches us to seek light, exhibit patience, stay grounded, and flourish wherever one is planted. The sight of branches bowing under the weight of fruits imparts lessons of humility and generosity to those blessed with abundance. Tree also inspires us to provide shelter to others; remain resilient in the face of adversity; and grow stronger through life's experiences, yet remain flexible, adaptable, and open to change. Every part of a tree, from its roots to its leaves, contributes to a captivating narrative of life's survival on our planet. These leafy companions not only remind us to take a moment to observe and appreciate the hidden wonders within them but also underscore our connection to nature and our responsibility towards it. A lingering question, however, remains - have we truly understood the trees, or are we merely scratching the surface?

(The writers are Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra, views are personal)



ON THE SPIRITUAL FRONT, THE TREE OFFERS PROFOUND LESSONS. ITS SEED SYMBOLISES THE IMMENSE POTENTIAL WITHIN EACH OF US. THE TREE TEACHES US TO SEEK LIGHT, EXHIBIT PATIENCE, STAY GROUNDED, AND FLOURISH WHEREVER ONE IS PLANTED

## Micro venture capitalist: Small in size, big on impact

Investment goals of micro venture capitalists (MVCs) align perfectly with small businesses. They are flexible and supportive of the new ventures they fund

One cannot emphasise enough that small businesses are the lifeline of any economy in the world. Over the past half-century with the emergence of the knowledge economy, there has been a profound shift from an industrial economy consisting of large corporations to an innovation-driven entrepreneurial economy consisting of small businesses. According to the World Bank, 95% of all enterprises in India are small businesses. Although small in size, their contribution to a country's overall growth is immense. The importance of small enterprises is well captured in the latest Forbes report, according to which small enterprises contribute



HIMA BINDU KOTA

as much as 33% to India's GDP, 40% to India's overall industrial production and 42% of its exports.

As small businesses are very crucial for a country, an entire ecosystem to encourage them to thrive and survive is essential. Many times for small businesses to take off, the availability of smaller funding options is a boon, because 50% of the enterprises fail to make it beyond the first few years. This has led to a tremendous rise in micro venture capital funding in India. In a start-up ecosystem having other types of investors like angels, incubators and accelerators, family offices, India-focused large funds and large global VC funds, micro-VCs have made their mark and how.

As reported by Praxis, their number increased from around 30 in 2014 to 90 in 2020.

A typical micro-VC engages in pre-seed and seed funding rounds with a smaller capital corpus of USD 10-100 Mn. This is in contrast to a large VC with a fund size of USD 50 Mn to USD 1 bn. The currently available statistics show that micro-VCs have infused USD 346 million in 574 Indian start-ups via 741 deals from 2014 to 2020. Micro VCs in India are a mixture of sector-specific and sector-agnostic funds. Some of the prominent sector-agnostic funds are Blume Ventures, gradCapital, Atrium Angels, Better Capital, Capital A and PointOne Capita;

whereas Eximius Ventures, Yatra Angel Network, Fluid Ventures and Pentathion Ventures are some of the well-known sector-specific micro-VC funds.

The difference between angels, family offices and micro-VCs is at best blurry as often micro-VC market in India consists of wealthy individuals, HNIs, family offices and angel investors, who want to take advantage of the growing start-up market by pooling their funds and expertise to steer the start-ups efficiently for a potential of high-returns from their high-risk investments.

Due to their low-ticket size funding, micro-VCs find it more probable to expect a 100X return. Let us take an

example of a VC and a micro-VC to understand this further. A traditional VC with a fund corpus of Rs. 5000 crores invest Rs. 10 crores in a start-up at the seed stage. To provide the value of 100x, the startup has to create a value of Rs. 1000 cr without dilution. On the other hand, consider a micro-VC with a fund corpus of Rs. 500 crores that invests Rs. 5 crores in a seed stage funding of a start-up. Here it is easier for the start-up to generate a return of Rs. 500 crores without dilution for the investor. Also, a micro VC has to decide its investment size and invest in a larger number of companies to take full advantage of its investment strategy.

Getting funds from micro-VCs is beneficial for start-ups in several ways. Firstly, micro-VCs show more flexibility than traditional VCs - in their choice of the stage of funding, in their choice of the sector and so on. Secondly, start-ups can benefit from the hands-on approach of micro-VCs and take advantage of their expertise in marketing and strategy. Thirdly, micro-VCs are likely to be more approachable, meeting the entrepreneurs more often and providing them their valuable feedback on various business strategies and decisions. Fourthly, micro-VCs are more likely to be patient and wait longer for the return on their investments. Last but not least, since the

funding is smaller, micro-VCs are less likely to have more control over the ownership of the start-ups. So, if entrepreneurs want to hold on to their companies for a little longer, getting funding from micro-VCs can be a great option.

A typical micro-VC may have limited financial and non-financial capital when compared to traditional VCs, but their growth is surely an encouraging development in the Indian start-up ecosystem as they provide options for pre-seed funding which is a crucial initial burst of much-needed support for small entrepreneurs.

(The author is an academician and entrepreneur, views are personal)



# 26/11 butcher Hafiz fields candidates in Pak poll

PTI ■ LAHORE

A new political front organisation of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed has fielded candidates for most of the national and provincial assembly constituencies across Pakistan for the February 8 general elections, saying it wants to make the country an Islamic welfare state. Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has been in jail since 2019 after being convicted for several years in multiple terror finance cases along with some other leaders of the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). The Pakistan Markazi Muslim League (PMML) party - set up by Saeed - says

it is a political party. The electoral symbol for the PMML is 'chair'. In a video message, PMML President Khalid Masood Sindhu said that his party is contesting on most of the national and provincial assembly seats. "We want to come to power not for corruption but to serve the people and make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state," he said. Sindhu is a candidate for NA-130 Lahore, from which Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supreme and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is also contesting. Saeed's son Talha Saeed is contesting from Lahore's NA-127. When contacted, Sindhu denied his



party's link with Saeed's outfit. "The PMML has no backing of Hafiz Saeed," he claimed on Monday. In 2018, the Milli Muslim League (MML) was the political face of JuD. It had fielded candidates on most seats, especially in Punjab province but failed to win a single seat. For the 2024 polls, the PMML has been formed because of a ban on the MML. The US has placed a USD 10 million bounty on Saeed, a UN-designated terrorist. Saeed-led JuD is the front organisation for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is responsible for carrying out the 2008 Mumbai attack that killed 166 people, including six Americans.

# Pakistan frees 290 Baloch activists who protested extrajudicial killings

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani police on Monday freed 290 Baloch activists who were arrested when they attempted to hold a protest last week in the capital, Islamabad. Their release came days after protest organizers gave authorities a deadline to release all those detained. The activists had travelled 1,600 kilometers (about 1,000 miles) on Thursday from Turbat, a town in Baluchistan province, to protest forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in the militancy-ravaged southwest. The protesters were mostly women and some had brought along their children, aged 7-12, when security forces used batons and water canons to disperse and arrest them. They wanted to draw attention to the case of 24-year-old Balaach Mola Bakhsh, who died in November while in police custody in Baluchistan. Authorities said he was killed after militants ambushed the police vehicle transporting him. Police said Bakhsh was carrying explosives when he was arrested. His family insists he is innocent, demanding justice for him. They also said he had been detained since October. Police said they arrested him in November. The police use of force against the protesters sparked anger among Baluchistan residents



and drew nationwide condemnation from top human rights activists. Protest organisers said that as the dozens of vehicles carrying the activists reached the outskirts of Islamabad before dawn Thursday, police used water canons against them and started beating them up to prevent them from reaching the heart of the capital. At the weekend, organizers and protesters held a sit-in outside the Islamabad Press Club to denounce the violence. "Four female police officers with batons hit me," Mahrang Baloch, one of the organisers, told reporters as she and dozens of others held portraits of those detained by the police, demanding their release. Senator Mushtaq Ahmed and top human rights activist

Farhat Ullah Baba attended the sit-in and condemned the use of force by authorities. "These peaceful demonstrators are victims of state terrorism," Ahmed said, adding that every citizen had the right to peacefully protest in Pakistan. Balochistan province - which borders Afghanistan and Iran and is rich in oil, gas and minerals - has been the scene of low-level insurgency by Baloch nationalists for more than two decades. Baloch nationalists initially wanted a share of provincial resources, but later initiated an insurgency for independence. According to human rights activists, those who demand a greater share of the province's natural resources often go missing after being detained by security forces.

# Imran's party to challenge intra party polls verdict

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on Monday said that it will challenge the election commission's decision to declare its intra-party polls as unconstitutional and revoke the iconic 'cricket bat' symbol in the Peshawar High Court. A five-member panel of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday rejected the organisational elections of Khan's party and its plea to have a cricket bat as the electoral symbol for the general elections. PTI lawyer and central information secretary Mohammad Muazzam Butt on Monday said the party had decided to approach the Peshawar High Court and file a writ petition on December 26, Dawn newspaper reported. He said the party leadership would file the case and claimed the ECP's verdict was a "legally flawed" decision. He added the commission had failed to serve justice in its order. The electoral watchdog declared void for the second time in less than a month the PTI's internal elections in which Barrister Gohar Ali Khan was elected as the party's new chairman. With this decision, Gohar Khan, a close aide of Khan, 71, lost his position as chairman of PTI, days after his appointment. Khan, a former iconic international cricketer, is synonymous with the cricket bat. He is lodged in Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi facing multiple cases. The ECP declared the party ineligible to obtain an election symbol to contest the upcoming general elections on February 8 next year. "It is held that PTI has not complied with our directions rendered therein order dated November 23 and failed to hold intra-party election following PTI prevailing Constitution, 2019 and Election Act, 2017, and Election Rules, 2017," the poll body had said in its 11-page order. The PTI had termed the decision part of the "famous London Plan" and a "disgusting and



shameful attempt to stop the party from [participating in the] election". It had also claimed that the party would still win the general elections and maintained that it would appeal the decision at every forum. It asserted that its candidates would contest the polls with the 'bat' symbol, come what may. Butt on Monday claimed that petitions against the PTI's internal elections were filed in the ECP based on "malicious intent" and "on orders of some people". "We are not being provided a level playing field and attempts are being made to keep us away from polls," the secretary added. Meanwhile, experts have criticised both the poll watchdog as well as the former ruling party for what they called their contradictory behaviour. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) head Ahmed Bilal Mehboob said Khan's party should have been more careful about its intra-party polls. "At the same time we have seen the election commission has been soft over many other things," he added.



# Afghanistan schoolgirls finishing sixth grade in tears

AP ■ KABUL

Bahara Rustam, 13, took her last class at Bibi Razia School in Kabul on December 11 knowing it was the end of her education. Under Taliban rule, she is unlikely to step foot in a classroom again. In September 2021, a month after US and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade. They extended this education ban to universities in December 2022. The Taliban have defied global condemnation and warnings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the country's legitimate rulers. Last week, UN special envoy Roza Otunbayeva expressed concern that a generation of Afghan girls is falling behind with each day that passes. Last week, an official in the Education Ministry said Afghan girls of all ages are allowed to study in religious schools known as madrassas, which have traditionally been boys-only. But Otunbayeva

said it was unclear if there was a standardised curriculum that allowed modern subjects. Bahara is holding onto her education and pores over textbooks at home. "Graduating (from sixth grade) means we are going to seventh grade," she said. "But all of our classmates cried and we were very disappointed." There was no graduation ceremony for the girls at Bibi Razia School. In another part of Kabul, 13-year old Setayesh Sahibzada wonders what the future holds for her. She is sad she can't go to school anymore to achieve her dreams. "I can't stand on my own two feet," she said. "I wanted to be a teacher. But now I can't study, I can't go to school." Analyst Muhammad Saleem Paigir warned that excluding women and girls from education will be disastrous for Afghanistan. "We understand that illiterate people can never be free and prosperous," he said. The Taliban have barred women from many public spaces and most jobs, all but confining women to their homes.



# Iran's navy adds sophisticated cruise missiles

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's navy on Sunday added domestically produced sophisticated cruise missiles to its arsenal, state TV reported. The TV said both Talaiech 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 Talaiech 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. From time to time Iran announces the test firing, production and commissioning of new military equipment that cannot be independently verified. The country says it has a stock of various kinds of missiles with ranges up to 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles), capable of reaching its archenemy Israel and U.

# Pope Francis blasts weapons industry

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis on Monday blasted the weapons industry and its "instruments of death" that fuel wars as he made a Christmas Day appeal for peace in the world and in particular between Israel and the Palestinians. Speaking from the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica to the throngs of people below, Francis said he grieved the "abominable attack" of Hamas against southern Israel on October 7 and called for the release of hostages. And he begged for an end to Israel's military campaign in Gaza and the "appalling harvest of innocent civilians" as he called for humanitarian aid to reach those in need. Francis devoted his Christmas Day blessing to a call for peace in the world, noting that the biblical story of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem sent a message of peace. But he said that Bethlehem "is a place of sorrow and silence" this year. Francis' annual "Urbi et Orbi" ("To the City and the World") speech typically offers a lament of all the misery facing the world, and this year's edition was no different. From Armenia and Azerbaijan to Syria and Yemen, Ukraine to South Sudan and Congo and

the Korean peninsula, Francis appealed for humanitarian initiatives, dialogue and security to prevail over violence and death. He called for governments and people of goodwill in the Americas in particular to address the "troubling phenomenon" of migration and its "unscrupulous traffickers" who take advantage of innocents just looking for a better life. He took particular aim at the weapons industry, which he said was fuelling the conflicts around the globe with scarcely anyone paying attention. "It should be talked about and written about, so as to bring to light the interests and the profits that move the puppet strings of war," he said. "And how can we even speak of peace, when arms production, sales and trade are on the rise?" Francis has frequently blasted the weapons industry as "merchants of death" and has said that wars today, in Ukraine, in particular, are being used to try out new weapons or use up old stockpiles. He called for peace between Israel and Palestinians, and for the conflict to be resolved "through sincere and persevering dialogue between the parties, sustained by strong political will and the support of the international community".

# Brazil arrests top criminal leader Zinho

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil's federal police said one of the country's top criminal leaders surrendered Sunday after negotiations with local authorities. Luiz Antônio da Silva Braga, better known as Zinho, is the top leader of the largest militia group in the state of Rio de Janeiro. He had 12 arrest warrants issued against him, federal police said. "After the formalities due to his arrest, the inmate was taken for medical forensics and then sent to the state's prison system, where he will remain available for our courts," federal police said. Militias emerged in the 1990s when they originally were made up mainly of former police officers, firefighters and soldiers who wanted to combat lawlessness in their neighborhoods. They charged residents for protection and other services, and more recently moved into drug trafficking themselves. Zinho's group dominates Rio's west region, where several members of his gang were killed in recent years. He had been on the run since 2018. Ricardo Cappelli, executive secretary of the federal Justice Ministry, said on social media that the federal police had conducted several investiga-



tions until it reached Zinho. "This is work, work, work," Cappelli said. Zinho's lawyer did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. The militias are believed to control about 10% of Rio's metropolitan area, according to a study last year by the non-profit Fogo Cruzado and a security-focused research group at the Fluminense Federal University. The militias are distinct from drug trafficking gangs that control important areas of Rio. The area dominated by Zinho's group made news in October when gang members set fire to at least 35 buses in apparent retaliation for police killing one of their leaders. The attack took place far from Rio's tourist districts and caused no casualties, but it underlined the ability of the militias to cause chaos and inflict damage.

# In a troubled world, Christians strive to put aside earthly worries on Christmas Eve

AP ■ FRANKFURT

Christians around the world were striving on Christmas Eve to put aside the worries and fears of an unsettled, war-torn world as they prepared to celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Before leading Sunday Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, Cardinal Timothy Dolan reminded congregants to keep war-torn parts of the Middle East in their Christmas prayers. "As we anticipate Christmas, our hearts always go to the holy land," he said, referring to parts of Israel and the Palestinian territories. "The holy land is under a cloud, the holy land is suffering, the holy land is filled with violence and hatred and retribution. And this dulls and threatens to suffocate the joy of Christmas." Believers in Syria gathered in a country still suffering from the aftermath of a long civil war and suffocating economic blockade. Despite festive lights and Christmas decorations adorning houses and storefronts in the capital Damascus, events in Gaza and ongoing battles in parts of the country have left the holiday atmosphere subdued. In Yabroud, a city north of Damascus, worshippers gathered in the St. Constantine and Helen Cathedral to enjoy Christmas carols sung by the Joy Choir from Damascus. "Everyone should try, with what the Lord has given them, to spread joy in order to help end this sorrow," said Fadi Homs, a member of the choir. Prosperous, mostly secular Europe marked the holiday in historic cathedrals and brightly lit holiday markets, with an undertone of tension spread by the war in Gaza and by one even closer to home in neigh-



bouring Ukraine. Wages that haven't yet caught up with inflation dampened the mood during the pre-holiday shopping and dining season. Sightseeing-only visits were barred at Germany's landmark cathedral in Cologne and Christmas Eve worshippers faced security checks to get into midnight Mass there Sunday as police responded to indications of a potential attack. Still, officials urged people not to shy away from holiday celebrations out of fear. Auxiliary Bishop Rolf Steinhilber greeted people attending services with a relaxed smile and an expression of thanks for police security efforts, a day after police descended on the cathedral and searched it with sniffer dogs. With several dozen officers on duty outside, he said it was "probably the most secure church service in all of Germany." In Austria, police said they also were stepping up security around Vienna's 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.

Cologne's towering cathedral, whose twin spires rise 157 metres 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 wise men described in the New Testament as paying homage to the newborn Jesus. The European Union's home affairs commissioner, Ylva Johansson, warned December 5 that Europe faces a "huge risk of terrorist attacks" over the Christmas holidays due to fallout from the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Johansson provided no details about any police or security information that might have led to her warning. Ukraine is preparing to officially mark Christmas as a state holiday on December 25 for the first time after moving the date in line with countries in Western Europe. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed legislation in July moving the holiday to December 25 from January 7, when it is observed by the Russian Orthodox Church and also by one of Ukraine's two competing Orthodox churches. Some Eastern Orthodox churches continue to use the ancient Julian calendar, under which Christmas falls 13 days later. A note attached to the law said its goal was to "abandon Russian heritage" and cited "the desire of all Ukrainians to live their lives with their own traditions, holidays." "The nights before Christmas are the longest of the year. However, the day has already begun to lengthen and the light has begun to prevail. The light grows stronger. Darkness will eventually lose. Evil will be defeated," Zelenskyy said in a video address Sunday.



# Israeli strike kills 68 in Gaza

**AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH**

At least 68 people were killed by an Israeli strike in central Gaza, health officials said Sunday, while the number of Israeli soldiers killed in combat over the weekend rose to 15.

Associated Press journalists at a nearby hospital watched frantic Palestinians carry the dead, including a baby, and wounded following the strike on the Maghazi refugee camp east of Deir al-Balah. One bloodied young girl looked stunned while her body was checked for broken bones.

The 68 fatalities include at least 12 women and seven children, according to early hospital figures.

"We were all targeted," said Ahmad Turokmani, who lost several family members including his daughter and grandson. "There is no safe place in Gaza anyway."

Earlier, the Health Ministry in Gaza gave the death toll as 70. The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

As Christmas Eve fell, smoke rose over the besieged territory, while in the West Bank Bethlehem was hushed, its holiday celebrations called off. In neighbouring Egypt, tentative efforts continued on a deal for another exchange of hostages for Palestinians held by Israel.

The war has devastated parts of Gaza, killed roughly 20,400 Palestinians and displaced almost all of the territory's 2.3 million people.

The mounting death toll among Israeli troops - 154 since the ground offensive began - could erode public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed



communities in southern Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostage. Israelis still largely stand behind the country's stated goals of crushing Hamas' governing and military capabilities and releasing the remaining 129 captives. That's despite rising international pressure against Israel's offensive, and the soaring death toll and unprecedented suffering among Palestinians.

**HAMAS EXACTS A PRICE**

"The war exacts a very heavy price from us, but we have no choice but to continue fighting," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

In a nationally televised speech, Israeli President Isaac Herzog appealed for the country to remain united. "This moment is a test. We will not break nor blink," he said.

There has been widespread anger against his government, which many criticize for failing to protect civilians on October 7 and promoting policies that allowed Hamas to gain strength over the years. Netanyahu has avoided accepting responsibility for the military and policy failures.

"Over time, the public will find it hard to ignore the heavy price paid, as well as the suspicion that the aims that were loudly heralded are still far from being attained, and that Hamas is showing no signs of capitulating in the near future," wrote Amos Harel, military affairs commentator for the Haaretz newspaper.

The Israeli military said it had completed the dismantling of Hamas' underground headquarters in northern Gaza, part of an operation to take down the vast tunnel network and kill off

top commanders that Israeli leaders have said could take months. Efforts toward negotiations continued. The head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ziyad al-Nakhalah, arrived in Egypt for talks. The militant group, which also took part in the October 7 attack, said it was prepared to consider releasing hostages only after fighting ends. Hamas' top leader Ismail Haniyeh travelled to Cairo for talks days earlier.

**INSIDE GAZA**

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

combatants.

On Friday, Israeli airstrikes on two homes in Gaza killed 90 Palestinians, including dozens from an extended family, according to rescuers and hospital officials. One of the homes, located in Gaza City, became one of the deadliest airstrikes in the war after 76 people from the al-Mughrabi family were killed, said Mahmoud Bassal, a spokesman for Gaza's Civil Defense department.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said a 13-year-old boy was shot and killed in an Israeli drone attack while inside al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis, a part of Gaza where Israel's military believes Hamas leaders are hiding.

An Israeli strike overnight hit a house in a refugee camp west of the city of Rafah, on Gaza's border with Egypt. At least two men were killed, according to Associated Press journalists in the hospital where the bodies were taken.

At least two people were killed and six others wounded when a missile struck a building in the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza.

And Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment and gunfire in Jabalya, an area north of Gaza City that Israel had claimed to control. Hamas' military arm said its fighters shelled Israeli troops in Jabalya and Jabalya refugee camp.

Israel faces international criticism for the civilian death toll but it blames Hamas, citing the militants' use of crowded residential areas and tunnels. Israel has launched thousands of airstrikes since October 7. It says it has killed thousands of Hamas militants, without presenting evidence.

# Egypt floats plan to end Israel, Hamas war

**AP ■ CAIRO**

Egypt has put forward an ambitious, initial proposal to end the Israel-Hamas war with a cease-fire, a phased hostage release and the creation of a Palestinian government of experts who would administer the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, a senior Egyptian official and a European diplomat said on Monday.

The proposal, worked out with the Gulf nation of Qatar, has been presented to Israel, Hamas, the United States and European governments but still appeared preliminary.

It falls short of Israel's professed goal of outright crushing Hamas and would appear not to meet Israel's insistence on keeping military control over Gaza for an extended period after the war. Israel's War Cabinet, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will meet later Monday discuss the hostage situation, among other topics, an Israeli official said, but would not say if they would discuss the Egyptian proposal.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to the media.

Word of the proposal comes after three bloody days across Gaza before Christmas Day in which Israeli airstrikes killed dozens of Palestinians at a time and 17 troops were killed in ground fighting in the north, centre and south of the territory.

The war has devastated large parts of Gaza, killed more than 20,400 Palestinians and displaced almost all of the territory's 2.3 million people.



The mounting death toll among Israeli troops - 156 since the ground offensive began - could erode public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed communities in southern Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostage.

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

**EGYPTIAN PROPOSAL**

The Egyptian proposal was an ambitious bid not only to end the war but also to lay out a plan for the day after.

It calls for an initial cease-fire of up to two weeks during which Palestinian militants would free 40 to 50 hostages, among them women, the sick and the elderly, in return for the release of 120-150 Palestinians from Israeli prisons, the Egyptian official said. He spoke on condition of

anonymity to discuss the ongoing talks.

At the same time, negotiations would continue on extending the cease-fire and the release of more hostages and bodies held by Palestinian militants, he said. Egypt and Qatar would also work with all Palestinian factions, including Hamas, to agree on the establishment of a government of experts, he said. The government would rule Gaza and the West Bank for a transitional period as Palestinian factions settle their disputes and agree on a roadmap to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, he added.

In the meantime, Israel and Hamas would continue to negotiate a comprehensive "all-for-all" deal, he said. This would include the release of all remaining hostages in return for all Palestinian prisoners in Israel, as well as the Israeli military's withdrawal from Gaza and the Palestinian militants' halting of rocket attacks into Israel. Close to 8,000 Palestinians are held by Israel on security-related charges or convictions, according to Palestinian figures.

# Our hearts in Bethlehem, says Pope as he presides over Christmas Eve Mass

**AP ■ VATICAN CITY**

Recalling Jesus' birth in a stable in Bethlehem, Pope Francis in a Christmas Eve homily said that "the clash of arms even today" prevents Jesus "from finding room in the world."

The pontiff presided on Sunday over the evening Mass attended by about 6,500 faithful who took their place amid the splendour of St. Peter's Basilica behind rows of white-clad prelates.

"Our hearts are in Bethlehem, where the Prince of Peace is once more rejected by the futile logic of war," the pope said, referring to the war sparked by Hamas' deadly October 7 rampage and hostage-taking in Israel.

As Mass began, a statuette of the Christ child was unveiled before the altar bedecked in greenery and white flowers, and children representing all corners of the globe placed flowers around a gilded throne.

Francis, draped in white robes, led the Mass standing at the foot of one of St. Peter's grand columns.

Recalling that Jesus was born during a census meant to reinforce King David's power, Francis warned against "the quest for worldly power and might, fame and glory, which measures everything in terms of success, results, numbers and figures,

a world obsessed with achievement."

By contrast, Jesus entered the world humbly, taking human flesh. "Here, we see not a god of wrath and chastisement, but the God of mercy, who takes flesh and enters the world in weakness," the pope said.

A pagan deity is linked to "power, worldly success and idolatry of consumerism," the pope said. "God, on the other hand, waves no magic wand; he is no god of commerce who promises everything all at once. He does not save us by pushing a button, but draws near us, in order to change our world from within."

When the Christmas Eve Mass ended, the pope, pushed in a wheelchair, moved down the basilica with the life-sized statue of Baby Jesus on his lap and flanked by children carrying bouquets. The statue was placed in a manger in a nativity scene in the basilica.

Francis, 87, has been using a wheelchair to navigate long distances due to a painful knee ligament and a cane for shorter distances.

During the traditional Angelus blessing overlooking St. Peter's Square at midday, the pontiff remembered those suffering from war, recalling specific fighting in Ukraine and Israel's bombardment and siege of the Gaza Strip in response to Hamas' attack.



"We are close to our brothers and sisters suffering from war. We think of Palestine, Israel, Ukraine. We also think of those who suffer from misery, hunger, slavery," Francis said. "May the God who took a human heart for himself infuse humanity into the hearts of men," he added.

Speaking from the window of his studio to the thousands of faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for the Angelus prayer, the pontiff also invited the faithful "not to confuse celebration with consumerism. One can and, as a Christian, must celebrate in simplicity without waste and by sharing with those who lack necessities or lack companionship."

Traditionally, Catholics mark Christmas Eve by attending Mass at midnight. But over the years, the starting time at the Vatican has crept earlier, reflecting the health or stamina of popes and then the pandemic. The Vatican has kept a 7:30 p.m. Time originally set during a pandemic curfew.

On Christmas Day, tens of thousands of Romans, tourists and pilgrims were expected to crowd into St. Peter's Square to hear Pope Francis deliver an address on world issues and give his blessing. The speech, known in Latin as "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and to the world), is traditionally an occasion to review crises including war, persecution and hunger, in many parts of the globe.

# Ukraine shot down Russian fighter jets

**AP ■ KYIV**

Ukraine's air force on Monday reported that it shot down two Russian fighter jets during the night along with two cruise missiles and 28 Shahed-type drones.

The report said the attacks were aimed at southern and central regions of Ukraine, but that no casualties were immediately known. It said that 31 drones were launched in all, but details of what the three that weren't intercepted may have struck weren't given.

A summary from the Ukrainian presidential office said that one civilian was killed and at least four wounded in Russian attacks over the previous 24 hours.

The death occurred in the town of Chornobaivka in the Kherson region, which is partly under Russian control and experiences daily fighting.

Ukraine observed Christmas on Monday, the first time the country has officially marked the holiday on December 25 rather than the January 7 date followed by some Orthodox countries, including Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed legislation in July to move the public holiday's date. Ukraine is predominantly Orthodox Christian, but the faith is divided between two



churches, one of which had long affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which didn't recognise the authority of the Russian church and had been regarded as schismatic, was granted full recognition in 2018 by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Orthodoxy's top authority.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was a branch of the Russian church, announced in 2022 after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war that it was breaking ties with Moscow and considered itself autonomous. However, its parishes continue to follow the same liturgical calendar as the Russian church and will observe Christmas on January 7.

# China's earthquake death toll rises to 149

**PTI ■ BEIJING**

The death toll from the 6.2-magnitude earthquake that jolted northwest China earlier this week has risen to 149 with two people still missing. The quake, the worst in nine years in the region, struck midnight on December 18 at a depth of 10 kilometres.

The Quake hit Jishishan County, Gansu Province, and Minhe County in the neighbouring Qinghai Province last Saturday causing heavy death and destruction.

The death toll in Qinghai Province has risen to 32 while two people are still missing, the Qinghai Emergency

Management Department said on Monday. Search for the two missing people was continuing, the department said.

The death toll in Gansu Province stood at 117 and 781 people in injured. About 200 people were injured in the Qinghai quake.

Chinese Premier, Li Qing visited the quake-hit areas on Saturday and asked the rescue and relief teams to make sure that people live through the winter safely.

So far, about 500 individuals have been discharged from the hospital after receiving treatment, while 282 people remain under treatment. Among them, 17 are in critical condition



and 69 are severely injured, according to official media reports.

China's National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) has allocated disaster-relief materials to Gansu and Qinghai which included 1,335 pieces of cold prevention materials and communication equipment, state-run Xinhua reported.

Primary and secondary schools in Jishishan County, northwest China's Gansu Province resumed classes on Monday, state-run CGTN TV reported. The quake was China's deadliest since an earthquake killed 617 people in Yunnan province in 2014.

# China approves 105 online games

**AP ■ BANGKOK**

China's press and publications authority has approved 105 new online games, saying it fully supports the industry after proposed curbs caused massive losses last week for investors in major games makers.

The National Press and Publication Administration issued a statement on its WeChat social media account Monday saying the approvals by the Game Working Committee of China Music and Digital Association were "positive signals that support the prosperity and healthy development of the online game industry."

Tencent's "Counter War: Future" and NetEase's "Firefly Assault" were among games approved. Draft guidelines for curbs on online gaming had caused share prices of video game makers like Tencent and NetEase to plunge on Friday, causing losses of tens of billions of dollars and dragging

Chinese benchmarks lower.

The administration's guidelines said online games would be banned from offering incentives for daily log-ins or purchases. Other restrictions include limiting how many users can recharge and issuing warnings for "irrational consumption behavior."

On Friday, NetEase's Nasdaq-traded shares fell 16.1% while it's Hong Kong-traded shares sank 25%. Tencent's closed 12% lower. Huya Inc., a smaller online games maker, lost 10.7% on the New York Stock Exchange.

Overall, the companies lost tens of billions of dollars in market value.

Hong Kong's market was closed Monday for the Christmas holiday. Share prices in Shanghai were flat. The Press and Publication Administration said that in 2023, 1,075 game version numbers had been issued, of which 977 were domestically produced and 98 were imported.

It also cited a "2023 China Game Industry

Report" that it said showed sales revenue for the domestic online games market exceeded 300 billion yuan (\$42 billion) in 2023, with the number of people playing the games reaching 668 million.

The Game Working Committee hopes that member units will take this opportunity to launch more high-quality products, promote high-quality development of the online game industry, and contribute to promoting cultural prosperity and development and building a culturally powerful country," it said.

China has taken various measures against the online games sector in recent years. In 2021, regulators limited the amount of time children could spend on games to just three hours a week, expressing concern about addiction to video gaming. Approvals for new video games were suspended for about eight months but resumed in April 2022 as a broader crackdown on the entire technology industry was eased.

# Gunfire erupts at Colorado mall on Christmas eve

**One man dead, 3 hurt**

**AP ■ COLORADO**

A man was fatally shot and three people were hurt as gunfire rang out at a shopping center in Colorado on Christmas Eve, police said on Sunday.

A fight broke out between two groups of people in the afternoon at the Citadel Mall in Colorado Springs and officers received a report of gunshots and responded, the Colorado Springs Police Department said in a series of posts on the social media platform X.

One adult male was dead at the scene with a gunshot wound, and two more, each of whom had been shot at least once, were taken to hospitals in serious condition, police said.

A female also was taken to a hospital with what were said to be minor injuries.

Police said they detained "multiple people" and were "working to determine their involvement."

The mall was cleared and closed, police said, and there was no known continuing threat to the community.



# Disinvestment fetches ₹4.20 lakh crore in 10 years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With general elections on the horizon, the government's privatisation bandwagon has almost but stalled as a government wary of being accused of selling family silver opts for minority stake sales on stock exchanges over outright privatisation.

The result — the disinvestment target for current fiscal year is again likely to be missed.

Big ticket privatisation plans such as that of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) and CONCOR are already on the backburner and analysts feel meaningful privatisation can happen only after April/May general elections.

In the current fiscal, out of the budgeted amount of Rs 51,000 crore, about 20 per cent or Rs 10,049 crore has been collected through minority stake sales via IPO (Initial Public

Offering) and OFS (Offer For Sale).

Strategic sale of a host of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), including SCI, NMDC Steel Ltd, BEML, HLL Lifecare and IDBI Bank, are in the pipeline for completion in the current fiscal.

However, with the process of due diligence and demerger of core and non-core assets yet to be completed with respect to most of the CPSEs, there has been a delay in inviting financial bids.

In the case of IDBI Bank, where the government had received multiple EoIs (Expressions of Interest) back in January 2023, the bidders are yet to get security and 'fit & proper' clearance from the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), respectively.

Hence the privatisation of all the CPSEs in the list and IDBI Bank are likely to spill over into the next financial year.

In total, there are around 11



transactions which are being processed by DIPAM (Department of Investment and Public Asset Management) currently.

There are three more — Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) and subsidiaries of AI Asset Holding Ltd (AIAHL), the entity holding the former subsidiaries of the now-privatised Air India, for which 'in principle' approval of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) is already in place but EoIs have not been invited by DIPAM.

"Strategic disinvestment decisions are being governed by political necessities. With elections round the corner, we do not expect any movement on the strategic sale side," a market expert said.

administration is "most likely" to retain power in the elections. One of the challenges before the government with regard to strategic sale of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL) or Vizag Steel is vehement opposition by employee unions.

Although the government has been narrating the turnaround success story of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL), which was bought by Tata Steel Long Products (PSLP) in 2022 for Rs 12,100 crore, RINL privatisation still remains a challenge as employees are demand that it be given to a public sector company.

After the successful privatisation of the then loss-making Air India to Tata group and NINL to TSLP in 2022, the government was hopeful of going ahead with more CPSE divestments and reaching a quick conclusion.

However, 2023 has no good news on the strategic sale front. The difficulties involved in the strategic sale process, with the

involvement of multiple stakeholders, makes the task at hand a long drawn affair.

Economic think tank GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said the pace of PSU (Public Sector Undertaking) stake sales in India has slowed down recently. Compared to a more active 2021-2022, the number of major PSU stake sales in 2023 has been fewer.

"The disinvestment trend has recently experienced a deceleration due to various factors, including extended regulatory processes, global economic volatility, political opposition to privatisation in certain sectors and shifting government priorities in the run-up to the 2024 general elections," Srivastava said.

According to him, the disinvestment of certain PSUs, particularly in strategic sectors like defence (BEML) and shipping (SCI), face public and political resistance, leading to postponements and policy reassessments.

## First rupee payment for UAE oil: India looks for more deals



quidity as well as lower hedging cost.

But to boost the rupee's role in cross-border payments, the Reserve Bank of India allowed more than a dozen banks to settle trades in rupees with 18 countries since last year.

Since then, India has been encouraging big oil exporters such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia to accept the Indian currency for trade settlements, officials said, adding the first success happened in August this year when IOC made the rupee payment to ADNOC.

More such deals may happen in future, they said, insisting there was no target as internationalisation is a process and cannot happen overnight.

"We have to be mindful that it (rupee settlement) does not lead to increase in cost and is in no way detrimental to the trade," an official said.

"Settling a trade in rupee where the amount is not big does not pose much problem but when you have each shipment of crude oil costing millions of dollars, there are issues," India, they said, is navigating the situation keeping overarching national interest in mind.

The internationalization of the rupee will help reduce dollar demand and make the Indian economy less vulnerable to global currency shocks. A parliamentary standing committee report, tabled in Parliament last week, stated that there were not many takers for Indian rupee.

Officials said that situation was true for 2022-23 fiscal and there has been a rupee trade this year.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's first-ever payment in rupees for crude oil purchased from the UAE is helping the world's third largest energy consumer push for taking the local currency global, as it looks for similar deals with other suppliers, officials said, adding internationalisation is a process and there are no targets.

With the nation more than 85 per cent dependent on imports for meeting its oil needs, India has been pursuing a three-pronged strategy of buying from the cheapest available source, diversifying sources of supply and not breaching any international obligation like the price cap in case of Russian oil.

While the strategy helped save billions of dollars, when it ramped up imports of Russian oil that was shunned by some in West post Ukraine war, it is looking to settle trade in rupees instead of dollars in a bid to cut transaction costs by eliminating dollar conversions. India in July signed an agreement with the UAE for rupee settlement and soon after Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) made payments for purchase of a million barrels of crude oil from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) in Indian rupees. Some of the Russian oil imports too have been settled in rupee. Officials said the default payment currency for import of crude oil has been the US dollar for several decades and the currency traditionally has liq-

## Small stocks lead 2023 bull run

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Smaller stocks have emerged as Dalal Street's favourites in 2023 that has turned out to be a "great year" for equities, rewarding investors with big gains, driven by optimism over the country's macroeconomic fundamentals and heavy retail investors participation.

Experts said equity markets are experiencing a prolonged bull run and it is during this time that the midcap and smallcap segments tend to outshine their larger counterparts.

Till December 22 this year, the BSE smallcap gauge has jumped 13,074.96 points or 45.20 per cent while the midcap index has surged 10,568.18 points or 41.74 per cent.

In comparison, the BSE 30-share benchmark Sensex has rallied 10,266.22 points or 16.87 per cent during this period. The smallcap index scaled its all-time high of 42,648.86 points on December 20 this year and the midcap gauge also reached its record peak of 36,483.16 points on the same day.

The BSE benchmark also hit its lifetime high of 71,913.07 points on December 20.

The midcap index tracks companies with a market value that is on an average one-fifth of blue chips while smallcap firms are almost a tenth of that universe. Analysts attributed better domestic macroeconomic fundamentals and the confidence of retail investors as the major drivers for the exuberance in equity markets this year.



"When the overall economy becomes robust, small and midcap segments tend to do well," Mukesh Kochhar, National Head of Wealth at AUM Capital, said. Kochhar termed 2023 as a "great year" as far as the equity market is concerned. "We have seen a new high with broad-based participation," he said.

In all bull runs, there has always have a new set of performers and this time PSU, defense and railways emerged as the greatest performers, he said, adding there have been strong Domestic

Institutional Investors (DIIs) and retail money in a market where Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were consistently selling.

"Despite FII selling, markets have created a new history with domestic liquidity. Overall a wonderful year for equity participants," Kochhar added. But experts believe that smaller stocks may undergo corrections in the near term after a hefty rally in 2023. After a turbulent start, the market got its mojo back during the final part of the year.

The smallcap and midcap indices hit their 52-week lows on March 28 this year. The BSE smallcap gauge fell to its one-year low of 26,120.32 points on March 28 while the midcap index hit its 52-week low of 23,356.61 points on the same day. The BSE bellwether index hit its one-year low of 57,084.91 points on March 20 this year. Investors battled a slew of negative news from turmoil in large global banks to macroeconomic concerns. Selling by foreign investors in September and the outflow continuing in the succeeding month, elevated US interest rates and conflict in the Middle East played havoc in the markets in the month of October, where the BSE benchmark fell nearly 3 per cent. But markets bounced back in the months of November and December.

likelihood of additional economic reforms, coupled with assurance of interest rates reaching their peak," Sunil Nyati, Managing Director of Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. Favourable external factors, such as decline in crude oil prices, a dip in US bond yields, and a weakening dollar index also provided additional tailwinds.

"The Indian equity markets are currently experiencing a prolonged structural bull run, characterised by a notable trend where midcap and smallcap segments tend to outshine their larger counterparts during bullish phases," Nyati said.

Investors' sentiments got a big boost in November and December which helped both domestic as well as global markets to scale new highs, according to a note by Motilal Oswal Broking and Distribution.

"Midcap and smallcap witnessed huge rallies this year," it added. According to Nyati, the record-breaking Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) flows into midcap and smallcap funds, indicate a growing appetite among retail investors for these segments.

On the road ahead for smallcap and midcap stocks in 2024, Nyati said their exuberant run might pause in the near term. "The smallcap space has some froth and may correct a little bit. The midcap space still looks attractive. Largecaps may catch up as the valuation there looks cheap at this point in time," Kochhar said.

In 2022, the BSE midcap index climbed 344.42 points or 1.37 per cent while the smallcap gauge declined 530.97 points or 1.80 per cent.

The BSE barometer had ended 2022 with an annual gain of 4.44 per cent or 2,586.92 points. In 2021, the midcap index gained 7,028.65 points or 39.17 per cent while the smallcap index zoomed 11,359.65 points or 62.76 per cent. In comparison, the Sensex jumped 10,502.49 points or 21.99 per cent that year.

## Significant rise in gap between standalone, consolidated net profit of Reliance Industries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The gap between Reliance Industries Ltd's standalone and consolidated net profit has more than doubled to Rs 22,400 crore in the last couple of years, as the retail and telecom businesses housed in separate subsidiaries saw significant growth, a report said.

"The gap between Reliance's standalone and consolidated profit after tax (PAT) has increased significantly - from Rs 8,400 crore in FY20 (April 2019 to March 2020) to Rs 22,400 crore in FY23, as telecom and retail have ramped up," JP

Morgan said in a note that used data from the firm's annual reports to reconcile the difference between the two reported profit numbers.

Reliance reported a standalone net profit of Rs 30,902 crore in 2019-20 fiscal year, which grew to Rs 44,205 crore in 2022-23 fiscal. Consolidated net profit soared from Rs 39,354 crore in FY20 to Rs 66,702 crore in FY23.

As many as 335 individual standalone companies/associates/joint ventures accounted for the difference between Reliance's consolidated and standalone PAT for the year



FY23. Around 40 per cent of these (133) reported profits for the year.

This breadth of companies is down from 498, which were part of consolidated accounts in FY20.

"These look like large numbers, but several standalone sub-

sidary companies are part of a single business group / operation (such as for US shale, or the multiple ethane shipping JVs)," it said.

Reliance's telecom and retail subsidiaries / associates / JV accounted for around 89 per cent of the gap between consolidated and standalone profits (pre-minority / eliminations) in FY23 - but that still leaves about USD 400 million in net profits from other businesses.

Dwelling into the annual reports, JP Morgan said there is a sharp increase in profitability of group companies that seem to be in the business of trading

crude/product/petchem/ethane in FY23 (from Rs 170 crore in FY22 to Rs 1,460 crore).

"This could be on account of widened cracks, crude discounts and global supply chain disruptions," the report said.

The demerged petcoke gasifiers company reported PAT of Rs 3,300 crore - a relatively low return on the estimated capex for the project, it said, adding Reliance's fuel retailing JV with BP has swung into a large loss in FY23 (loss of Rs 910 crore compared to a profit of Rs 330 crore in the previous year) - likely on account of high crude and capped retail prices.

## Coal fired generation capacity in focus for energy security

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will focus on setting up more coal-fired power projects as well as keep adding renewable generation capacity to achieve 24x7 electricity supply for all in 2024 amid economic expansion and the need to ensure energy security in these times of rising geopolitical uncertainties.

In a reflection of ambitious plans, the Union power ministry has planned a whopping 91 GW of coal-based thermal power generation capacity entailing an investment of Rs 7.28 lakh crore over the next few years.

Talking to PTI, Union Power and New & Renewable Energy Minister R K Singh said, "24x7 supply of power is right of the consumer. Similarly, energy security is of paramount importance for us. You have seen what happened in Europe due to the Russia-Ukraine war."

At present, average power supply across India is 23.50 hours in urban areas and 22 hours in rural areas, he said. Singh also said that the coal-based thermal power capacity will insulate the country from any geopolitical disruption and ensure energy security for the country at a time when our economy is expanding rapidly. The coal-based capacity addition is also important in view of rising demand of electricity in the country as peak power demand was at an all-time high of 243.27 GW in September 2023. India has installed power gener-



ation capacity of about 426 GW, including more than 213 GW of coal and lignite-based projects. Earlier this month, President Droupadi Murmu said the dependence on fossil fuels is definitely decreasing but fossil fuel-based energy is also essential for the country.

India has always worked as a responsible country in the field of clean energy. India is promoting clean coal technologies so that the processes of coal extraction and use become more efficient and environment friendly, she had said at an event.

According to the 20th Electric Power Survey (EPS) report published in November 2022, peak power demand in the country will touch 366.39 GW in 2031-32, 465.53 GW in 2036-37 and 574.68 GW in 2041-42.

Explaining why renewable energy alone cannot be sufficient to round the clock power supply, Singh said that solar is available in the day and wind blows at different times.

expensive presently, he said. Singh said the ministry has planned 91 GW of new coal-based thermal power generation capacity, which includes 27 GW under construction.

Around 31 GW of coal-based thermal capacity which is at an advanced stage of implementation.

Out of the total, construction would begin on 17 GW in 2024, the minister said, adding that another 33 GW thermal power capacity has also been planned. The 17 GW thermal capacity addition entails an investment of about Rs 1.36 lakh crore at an average cost of implementation of Rs 8 crore per MW at the current prices. It works out to be USD 16.4 billion dollar at the foreign exchange rate of 83 against the dollar, as per back of the envelope calculations.

Anil Sardana, Adani Power Managing Director and Chairman of industry body CII's National Committee on Power, said that while renewable sources will continue to play a central role in the energy mix, meeting high base load demand growth will require additional thermal power capacity.

He noted that as per the Central Electricity Authority, the peak power demand is expected to soar above 256 GW in 2024. Further, he said that the power sector, particularly in India, faces a complex set of challenges as it stands at the intersection of multi-decadal growth and transition towards becoming a developed nation.

## Adani Green Energy inks pact with SECI for 1,799 MW solar power

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Green Energy (AGEL) on Monday said it has signed a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) to supply 1,799 MW of solar power.

With the signing of this balance PPA, AGEL has completed the power offtake tie-up for the entire 8,000 MW manufacturing-linked solar tender awarded to it by the SECI in June 2020, a company statement said.

According to the statement, AGEL has announced the execution of a PPA with the SECI to supply 1,799 MW of solar power.

"We are glad to conclude the largest green PPA and enable a



sustainable energy landscape. Aligned to India's target of 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, Adani Green is determined to deliver in excess of 45 GW renewable energy, a five-fold increase from our current operating portfolio," Amit Singh, CEO, AGEL, said in the statement.

AGEL has progressed on the commitments of the SECI manufacturing-linked solar PV tender, including setting up 2 GW of PV cell and module manufacturing facilities.

AGEL has already commis-

sioned a solar PV cell and module manufacturing plant with a capacity of 2 GW per annum through its associate company Mundra Solar Energy Ltd (MSEL), it stated.

The plant is located at Mundra, Gujarat. AGEL holds 26 per cent shares of MSEL through its wholly-owned subsidiary Adani Renewable Energy Holding Four Ltd.

With this, Adani Green now has tied up PPAs of 19.8 GW and the balance is merchant capacity in its 20.6 GW locked-in portfolio, it stated.

With over 2 lac acres of land already tied up in resource rich areas of India, the portfolio is fully de-risked for execution of 45 GW capacity by 2030, the statement added.

## Semiconductor policy to help realise Gujarat's self-reliance commitment: CM

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The 'Gujarat Semiconductor Policy' will help realise the state's commitment for a self-reliant India and Gujarat, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has said.

The policy is setting the stage for a future in the world of technology and manufacturing, and helping Gujarat transform itself into a semiconductor powerhouse, he said.

According to the state government, chip maker Micron Technology's decision to set up a USD 2.75-billion plant at Sanand near Ahmedabad indicates that Gujarat's dedicated semiconductor policy is bearing fruit and attracting global players.

Under the policy, the state

government will set up 'Dholera Semicon City' near Ahmedabad where eligible projects will be given subsidies for setting up manufacturing units, it said ahead of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit (VGGGS) to be held in Gandhinagar next month.

The summit is a forum for business networking, knowledge sharing and strategic partnerships for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

In June this year, the Gujarat government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Micron Technology for setting up a semiconductor assembly and test facility at Sanand.

With the prime minister's guidance, Gujarat has emerged as a policy-driven State, he said.



# Jaismine, Manisha cruise to 60kg semifinals

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

World Championships bronze medallist Manisha Moun and Jaismine Lamboria cruised to the 60kg semifinals with facile victories at the Women's National Boxing Championship here on Monday. Representing Services, Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine used her long reach to literally pummel Poonam Kaithwas of Maharashtra and notch up a Referee Stops Contest (RSC) win in the quarterfinal. The talented southpaw made good use of her straight jabs to disorient her opponent. She then landed a deadly hook to force the first of two standing counts. Less than 20 seconds later, she landed a strong jab on Poonam to force a second count in round 1. Jaismine continued to dictate terms for the remaining six minutes even as Poonam adopted a defensive approach. When Poonam did attack, Jaismine cleverly evaded the punches by skilfully sidestepping. She will take on Menka Devi of Himachal Pradesh, who defeated Tamil Nadu PS Girja by a 4-1 split verdict, in the semifinals. Haryana's Manisha, who won the bronze medal in the 2022 Worlds, registered a 5-0 win over TC Lalremruati of



BOXING NATIONALS

Mizoram. Having moved up a weight class for a shot at the Olympics, Manisha began on a tentative note but slowly found her groove as the seconds ticked. She danced around the ring, taking her time to pick out the perfect moment to land accurate punches. She will take on another seasoned boxer in 2018 World Championship bronze medallist Simranjeet Kaur of Punjab in the lightweight semifinals. The 60kg and 66kg weight class are the only two categories where Indian boxers are yet to secure a quota for the Paris Olympics. The top three boxers at the Nationals in these two categories will head to the national camp, where they will undergo assessment ahead of the next Olympic qualifiers in February. Arundhati Chaudhary, the 2021 World Youth champion, made it two out of two for Services as she also made her way to the semifinals in 66kg weight class. Arundhati used her height advantage, landing punches at will while her opponent Komalpreet Kaur of Punjab resorted to clinching. Arundhati did not leave any opportunity to attack to eventually win by a 5-0 unanimous verdict. Reigning world champion Saweety Boora too advanced to the 81kg semifinals with a RSC win.



## It came a bit late but will motivate me: Chirag on national crown

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After living in the shadows of his illustrious younger brother Lakshya Sen, shuttler Chirag finally wins the men's singles title in the Senior National championships and he says the crown will motivate him to achieve success in the international circuit. Chirag on Sunday beat fourth seed M Tharun 21-14 13-21 21-9 in the final to win the national crown in Guwahati which Lakshya could never win, having finished second best twice in 2017 and 2019. "It came a bit late but I am really happy to finally win this. I have been playing well for the last 3-4 months but now got that breakthrough. I am looking forward to start doing well in international circuit also," Chirag, a winner of 2020 Kenya International challenge, told PTI. The 25-year-old Chirag, who has been playing in the domestic circuit for the past few years, admitted that Lakshya had contributed in his career growth. "We both share a great bond. It has been a great journey for us as we have been in the academy together, taking care of each other and his contribution is immense in my career," said the world no. 97. "During the Denmark camp, I got a lot of confidence as I was

sparring with him. I got this feeling that I too have the game to beat the top 30 players. It is just that I have to play well during the match." While Chirag won the title, reigning Commonwealth Games champion Lakshya lost to fellow academy-mate Bharat Raghav in the quarterfinals. Lakshya stayed back to support his older brother. "He waited for my final after cancelling his 9 pm flight to Bengaluru. He was sitting behind me along with my dad during semifinal and final and it motivated me and helped me a lot." Chirag will have Lakshya as a sparring partner as he gears up for the Asian tour, including the Malaysia Open (super 1000), India Open (super 750) and Indonesia Masters (super 500). The Uttarakhanda shuttler, who started playing men's doubles as well in 2023, said he lost his confidence after facing losses in the senior circuit. "It was about confidence. I was lacking in that earlier. When I started in the senior circuit I had faced a lot of losses and I didn't have any confidence," said Chirag, who will be playing in Iran and Sri Lanka next. "I started playing doubles with Dhruv (Rawat) this year. I trained in doubles and I feel it helped me as it is not usual for others as I have a mixed game."



## Sharad welcomes suspension of WFI

PTI ■ PUNE

NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Monday welcomed the suspension of the newly-elected Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), but said the Sports Ministry should have taken the decision earlier. 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 constitution while taking decisions. The ministry asked the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to constitute an ad-hoc panel to manage the affairs of the sports body. Speaking to reporters here, Pawar said, "The decision (to suspend the WFI) should have been taken earlier. There was a complaint about objectionable conduct towards women wrestlers." "A decision should have been taken against such elements long back. Although it is delayed, I welcome the decision," he said. 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 December 21, Sanjay Singh announced that age group national championships will be held from December 28 in Gonda, UP. Wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat had accused BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexually exploiting women wrestlers during his tenure as WFI president. After Brij Bhushan's loyalist Sanjay Singh was elected as the WFI president, Malik announced her retirement from the sport, while Punia returned his Padma Shri medallion to the government.

## Pakistan Hockey could face suspension by FIH



PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan hockey could face suspension from the International Hockey Federation after the appointment of a new President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation by the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar was challenged by predecessor, Brig (ret'd) Khalid Sajjad Khokar. In a scene reminiscent of a movie script, the newly-appointed PHF President Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti took charge of the federation headquarters on Saturday in Lahore surrounded by police and his own security guards. Khokar, who has remained President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation since 2015, told a news conference on Sunday that he would challenge his removal and the appointment of Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti as the new President. "I will be approaching the courts and will not give up until this unconstitutional and illegal decision is changed," Khokar said. The Caretaker PM took the decision to bring in Bugti as President in his capacity as Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Hockey Federation. Bugti, a former MPA from the Balochistan province, was appointed on Friday but Khokar said he would contest the decision. The new PHF chief has been given mandate to constitute a five-member committee to deal with the day-to-day affairs of the body besides scrutinising clubs and the electoral college to set the foundation for its "free and fair elections". After taking charge of the PHF

offices in Lahore, he immediately restored the old national selection committee headed by Olympian, Kaleemullah and another former stalwart, Shahnaz Sheikh as the head coach of the national senior team. Khokar had removed the selection committee and Sheikh last month. Khokar said he is the legal head of the PHF as he is recognised by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) as the legitimate president of the PHF. "I will be filing a court case against the government's decision on Tuesday," he said. "I am the legitimate and elected president and I will fight against this decision till my last breath." Khokar has faced criticism for his handling of the PHF and tendency to take U-turns on his decisions and is blamed by many former Olympians and critics for the gradual slide in Pakistan hockey. Khokar claims he has spent his own money and from his friends and well-wishers to keep the federation running. He also claimed that the PHF office in Lahore was "taken over through illegal actions". "I wanted to avoid confrontation but I have now been forced to approach the IOC and FIH," he said. Khokar has been on a warpath with the government since last year when the Pakistan Sports Board's (PSB) rapped him for not holding the PHF elections. The PSB constituted a committee to hold the elections but Khokar called a congress of the PHF and held elections himself which led to his re-election as the controversy was put to bed.

## Gujarat Giants beat Rajasthan Warriors to begin Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 with victory

PTI ■ CUTTACK

Gujarat Giants produced a complete performance in attack and defence as they defeated Rajasthan Warriors 41-30 to begin their Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 campaign on a winning note here on Monday. P Narasayya contributed to the Giants' win with eight points while Sanket Kadam and Suyash Gargate secured six points each. Shubham Thorat, Abhinandan

Patil and Akshay Bhangare defended brilliantly for more than 6.53 minutes to earn crucial dream run bonus points for the winning team. Gujarat Giants stayed on the top of the game from the get-go as they earned a dream run in the first turn, allowing Rajasthan Warriors to get only 14 points. They maintained their positive intent when they switched to chase and notched up 22 points to obtain a big lead in the first

inning. Rajasthan Warriors began the second inning aggressively and got the first batch of Gujarat's defence in just 1.30 minutes. Gujarat Giants then earned two dream run bonus points to turn the match completely in their favour. Rajasthan managed to gain 16 points during the third turn but it wasn't enough as Gujarat secured 16 points in turn four as well to clinch the contest.

## FIFA threatens to suspend Brazil

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

FIFA warned Brazil it could suspend its national teams and clubs from international competitions if an intervention by its soccer body leads to the election of a new president in January. FIFA said in a letter to a Brazilian soccer executive that the country's soccer body CBF could face suspension if it does not heed its call to wait and instead holds a swift election to replace Ednaldo Rodrigues as president regardless. The document was obtained by The Associated Press. A Rio de Janeiro court removed Rodrigues and all his appointees at CBF from office on Dec. 7 due to irregularities in his election last year. Brazil's two highest courts upheld that ruling last week. Soccer's governing body FIFA historically rejects government and third-party interference in its member associations, which ultimately could leave five-time World Cup winners Brazil out of major competitions until the crisis is solved. The Rio court ruling also named José Perdz, the head of Brazil's top sports court, as an intervenor to organize new elections for the presidency within 30 working days. FIFA said in previous letters to CBF it considers the intervention to be undue. Sunday's letter was signed by FIFA's Kenny Jean-Marie, its chief members' association officer, and CONMEBOL's deputy



secretary-general, Monserrat Jiménez Garcia. FIFA and South American soccer body CONMEBOL also said in the letter they will form a commission to discuss the matter in Brazil on Jan. 8. "FIFA and CONMEBOL would like to strongly emphasize that, until such mission takes place, no decision affecting CBF, including any elections or call for elections, shall be taken. Should this not be respected, FIFA will have no other option but to submit the matter to its relevant decision-making body for consideration and decision, which might also include a suspension," the letter said.

"For the sake of good order, we would also like to underline that should CBF be eventually suspended by the relevant FIFA body, it would lose all of its membership rights with immediate effect and until the suspension is lifted by FIFA. "This would also mean that teams would no longer be entitled to take part in any international competition while it is suspended," it added. The document also says that any irregular interference in its member associations "can lead to sanctions as provided for in the FIFA Statutes, including a suspension, and this even if the

third-party influence was/is not the fault of the member association concerned." Perdz said in a statement he sees FIFA's letter "as a positive sign." He also added he will "call for the elections within the established deadline, with the transparency and integrity that are demanded." Spokespersons for Rodrigues did not respond a request for comment from the AP. Rodrigues first took the job as interim president in 2021 after predecessor Rogério Caboclo was suspended. Local media reported he is currently in negotiations with other Brazilian soccer executives to either bid again for the presidency in new elections or to support another candidate. Rodrigues' term in office runs through 2026. He is yet another CBF president to face legal problems in recent years, though he is not involved in corruption cases like predecessors Ricardo Teixeira, José Maria Marin and Marco Polo del Nero. Caboclo was suspended from the presidency in September 2021 in connection with a sexual harassment case at the CBF, which opened the path for vice presidents to elect Rodrigues as the first Black president of the soccer body. The ruling against the 69-year-old Rodrigues could hurt Brazil's bid to host the Women's World Cup in 2027 and his quest to hire Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti to lead the national team next year.



## AIFF president calls review meeting with Referees Committee

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chaubey has called for a meeting with the Referees Committee and Chief Refereeing Officer Trevor Kettle on December 31 to review the refereeing situation in the country. A team of referee assessors will also attend the meeting which will also discuss the way forward on the matter. "AIFF President @kalyanchaubey is set to meet the members of the Referees Committee, AIFF Chief Refereeing Officer Trevor Kettle, and a team of Referee Assessors on December 31, 2023, to review refereeing issues and discuss a way forward," the AIFF said. Refereeing decisions have been a hot topic of discussion in the footballing world recently, and even more so in India, after seven players were sent off in the Indian Super League (ISL) match between Mumbai City FC and Mohun Bagan. Additionally, seven yellow cards were also shown in the match won 2-1 by hosts Mumbai City on December 20. East Bengal had also lodged a complaint about the refereeing decisions in their match against FC Goa in the ISL. Earlier this month, Chaubey had called for better respect shown towards match officials, after a Turkish Super League match was suspended following violence directed towards the referees. AIFF President, it is believed, has told senior officials of the federation since several ISL and I-League clubs have complained over the supervision of some of the matches this season. In the meeting, he is expected to take a stock of the situation and formulate appropriate steps for taking Indian football ahead. "He has decided to meet the members of the refereeing community and find out what exactly could be the right way to improve upon the situation," according to a source.

## Jyoti eyes spot in India's squad for Olympic Qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Boosted by her experience on Valencia tour, young forward Jyoti Chhatrri is now eyeing a place in the Indian women's hockey team for next year's FIH Olympics Qualifiers in Ranchi. The 19-year-old was part of the Indian team at the recently-concluded 5 Nations Tournament in Valencia. She has been a key figure in the Junior team setup for the past year and played across all six games for India at the Junior World Cup, scoring a goal during the thrilling 3-3 (3-2 SO) win over New Zealand. She also played a prominent role

during India's gold medal-winning performance at the Women's Junior Asia Cup this year. "The preparatory tour in Valencia has boosted my confidence as an individual and I am hopeful to get a chance to be a part of the Indian squad for the FIH Hockey Olympics Qualifiers Ranchi 2024," she said in a press release issued by Hockey India (HI). "This past year has really helped me develop as a player and I am eager to grab on to every opportunity that comes my way. "The senior players, coaches, and support staff have been thoroughly supportive and have helped me a lot whenever need-

ed. It is a dream for every player to represent India at the Olympics, and our journey to Paris as a team will hopefully begin in January." While Jyoti made her senior team debut at the 4 Nations Women's Invitational Tournament in Barcelona earlier this year against England, the 5 Nations Tournament in Valencia was another good chance for her to compete against some of the top teams - Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Belgium. Jyoti believes her experience in Valencia has helped her grow as a player. "I was elated to be considered for the squad for the Valencia



tour. It is always a great opportunity to learn when you get to train alongside the senior team," she said. "Having competitive matches against such strong oppositions also helped me understand the tenacity and mental strength needed to fight to win at the highest levels." India began the tournament with a 2-3 loss to Spain and a 1-2 defeat to Belgium in Valencia. After losing 1-3 to Germany in their third game of the competition, India recorded a thrilling 2-1 win over Ireland to end their campaign on a positive note. Jyoti said, "While the results were not in our favour on the tour, we could recognise the

important areas where we have to focus on and we were able to improve with each game. "It was an important series for us with bigger tournaments coming up next year. We feel we were able to take a lot from the series, which has helped our growth as a team." India will be competing in the Olympics Qualifiers in Ranchi, aiming to secure a spot in the Paris Games. India will begin the campaign against the USA on January 13 before facing New Zealand on January 14. Their last Pool B clash will be against Italy on January 16. Pool A comprises Germany, Japan, Chile, Czech Republic.



# Rohit men gear up to end 31 years wait for series win

PTI ■ CENTURION

He endured the heart-break of a lifetime 36 evenings back but Rohit Sharma will give his all to erase the memories of a World Cup final defeat as he trains his eyes on ending India's 31-year wait for a Test series win on South African soil.

The two-match Test rubber, starting here on the Boxing Day, will be India's ninth away series in the Rainbow Nation since 1992, and captain Rohit will have an onerous task of traversing a difficult terrain in order to conquer what has always been dubbed the team's 'final frontier'.

However, for the action to start at Supersport Park, the heavy rains predicted on the first two days need to subside.

The Centurion track offers variable bounce and is one of the fastest in the region. And that makes up for a compelling contest between bat and ball in relatively cooler and windy conditions in an open ground where it can jag around a bit.

In the last 50 over World Cup, skipper Rohit, at best would have emulated Kapil Dev and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, but if he and his men manage to pull off a coup in this country, he would stand first among the equals.

Mohammed Azharuddin (1992) failed, so did Sachin Tendulkar (1996) and Sourav Ganguly (2001). Rahul Dravid (2006-07), Dhoni (2010-11 and 2013-14) won Test matches, and so did Virat Kohli (2018-19 and 2021-22) but none of them could win the elusive series in South Africa. So Rohit will have a job at hand and a win might just be the

much-needed soothing balm required to heal the World Cup wounds even though the scars will remain.

For the golden generation of Indian cricketers, this is also their last African Safari and a chance to conquer what no other team could on eight previous tours.

In Temba Bavuma's South Africa, they have a team that has a crack fast bowling attack, which could make some of the young Indian batters look like cats on hot tin roof.

For Yashasvi Jaiswal, it will be the first big test against a quality attack comprising Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen and Gerald Coetzee. There will be way more bounce than what he got in the Caribbean, and the variable nature of it will ask him probing questions.

Similarly, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer, who have proven their mettle on sub-continental pitches, need to up their game in more challenging batting conditions.

Iyer, especially, with his well-documented weakness against the short ball, will have to churn out something really special. Coach Rahul Dravid doesn't want Jaiswal and Gill to change their style but wants them to develop game awareness and play as per the need of the hour.

"We encourage the players to play (in a manner) they feel most comfortable. In the end they are judged by the results they produce. They know that," Dravid said. But that freedom comes with a rider.

"We want to encourage them in the way they play but also keeping the conditions in mind and

## SA VS INDIA



certain, sort of tactical thing they have to adopt when they play in South Africa.

"The nature of ball, how it behaves over 80 overs, shots that they play early and later on. I think it's about finding balance

between having cricket smarts to read the game and understand the situation, and of course allowing to express yourself.

"Hopefully, they make smart decisions," the coach had said on Christmas eve.

But all said and done, India's performance will depend on three factors: how well the skipper executes his hook and pull shots, for how much time Virat Kohli decides to leave balls outside the off-stump, and how well

the team covers up Mohammed Shami's absence. The skiddy Mukesh Kumar looked better at the nets but the extra bounce available makes a case for Prasidh Krishna. Bavuma, the retiring Dean Elgar,

the stylish Aiden Markram, the exciting Tony de Zorzi, and the dogged Keegan Petersen constitute a good batting unit that can make Indian bowlers toil hard. KL Rahul donning the big gloves is another aspect of this game.

The team management handing over keeping responsibilities to Rahul can be viewed from two different prisms.

The positive one would be the faith in his ability as a glovesman in 50-over cricket and hoping that he can do it for 90 overs in a day.

The not-so-positive aspect will be the sheer desperation not to lose that extra batter in Iyer and also not looking at the bigger picture that Rahul could find it extremely difficult to stand up to Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja in a month's time against England at home, provided Ishan Kishan isn't back from his mental health break.

It will be another away Test match which Ashwin might have to miss because of conditions and combinations.

At Supersport Park, it normally takes three and half to four days to achieve results and if the toss happens on the second day, after a washout on opening day, batting first will surely be a very difficult proposition.

### TEAMS:

**India:** Rohit Sharma (captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Prasidh Krishna, KS Bharat (wk), Abhimanyu Easwaran (2nd Test).

**South Africa:** Temba Bavuma (captain), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Dean Elgar, Keegan Petersen, Kyle Verreynne (wk), Tristan Stubbs (wk), Nandre Burger, Marco Jansen, Wiaan Mulder, Gerald Coetzee, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, David Bedingham.

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian captain Pat Cummins on Monday came in support of his teammate Usman Khawaja, saying the opener's attempt to bring to the fore the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was "not offensive".

Cricket's global governing body ICC has rejected Khawaja's application to have a sticker showing a black dove holding an olive branch on his bat and shoes during the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan.

Cummins said he finds no difference between Khawaja displaying a dove logo on his shoe and bat to raise awareness of humanitarian issues and teammate Marnus Labuschagne displaying an eagle on his bat which signifies a personal religious message.

"We really support Uzzy. He's standing up for what he believes and I think he's done it really respectfully," Cummins told reporters on the eve of the second Test at the MCG.

"As I said last week, 'All lives are equal', I don't think that's very offensive and I'd say the same about the dove."

Backing his 37-year-old colleague who was born in Pakistan capital Islamabad, Cummins added,

## 'We really support Uzzy'

### CUMMINS BACKS KHAWAJA ON DOVE LOGO FOR GAZA CRISIS



"That's Uzzy. I think he can really hold his head high with the way he's gone about it.

"But obviously there's rules in place and I believe the ICC have said they're not going to approve that. They make up the rules and you've got to accept it."

Notably, the ICC reprimanded Khawaja for wearing a black armband during Australia's 360-run win over Pakistan in Perth, the action coming after he was barred from wearing boots with the messages "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" in the colours of the Palestinian flag during the match at the Optus Stadium.

Labuschagne displays the symbol of an eagle on the back of his bats which represents a verse from the bible and has long been allowed to have the sticker on his bat in international cricket.

Last week, Khawaja spoke about the impact that the Israel-Hamas conflict had on him.

"When I'm looking at my Instagram and seeing innocent kids, videos of them dying, passing away, that's what hit me the hardest," he said.

"I don't have any agendas other than trying to shine a light on what I feel really passionately, really strongly about."

## ODI squad for Australia series



## Plenty of new faces in Indian women squad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque and Titas Sadhu were on Monday included for the first time in the Indian women's ODI squad for the upcoming limited overs assignment against Australia. The Indian women's team will play in three One-day Internationals and as many T20Is against the visiting Australian team from December 28 with the first ODI at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

A crafty left-arm-spinner, the Patiala-born Kashyap, 20, was earlier called up for the T20I series against England but did not get a game.

Shreyanka earned her maiden ODI call-up after she made her debut in the T20I series against England earlier this month. In three matches against Heather Knight's women, Shreyanka picked up five wickets and won the Player of the Match award in the third and final T20I of the series.

Kashyap was part of India's victorious women's Under-19 World Cup winning squad in February, and so was Titas Sadhu. Saika Ishaque was one of the top bowlers for the Mumbai franchise in the inaugural Women's Premier League.

The three-match ODI series will be played at the Wankhede Stadium and will start on December 28. The next two matches will be played on December 30 and January 2. The action will then shift to DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai which will host the three T20Is on January 5, 7 and 9.

Harmanpreet Kaur remains the captain of both the teams with Smriti Mandhana being her deputy. India won the one-off women's Test against Australia by eight wickets in Mumbai on Sunday.

### ODI SQUAD

Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Sneha Rana, Harleen Deol.

### T20I SQUAD

Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Kanika Ahuja, Minnu Mani.

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Pakistan goes into Tuesday's Boxing Day match against Australia on a 15-match test losing streak, not having won Down Under since November 1995.

The team's ever-expanding injury list heading into the Melbourne Cricket Ground test won't make ending the streak any easier.

Pakistan spinner Noman Ali became the second player in two days to withdraw from the touring squad for the remainder of the three-test series due to illness and injury. Left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz will replace Ali in the squad, the selection committee said on the weekend. Ali, who didn't play in the 360-run defeat in the first test at Perth last week, underwent surgery for appendicitis in Melbourne on Saturday.

"Noman Ali complained of sudden and severe abdominal pain yesterday, leading to examinations and scans in emergency that confirmed a diagnosis of acute appendicitis," a Pakistan team statement read.

"Post-surgery he is stable and doing fine. He will be discharged later (on Saturday)."

The latest blow for the tourists comes after fast bowler Khurram Shahzad, who took match figures of 5-128 in his impressive test debut in Perth, was ruled out for the remainder

## Injuries mean Pakistan's 15-test losing streak in Australia may be hard to break at MCG

of the series with a rib stress fracture and muscle tear on Thursday.

Leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, who missed out the first test, was also ruled out of the test because of a leg injury.

Pakistan traveled to Australia with a weakened bowling lineup after fast bowler Naseem Shah was ruled out due to a long-term injury and Haris Rauf opted to play in Australia's Big Bash League instead of joining the touring squad.

"It is really unfortunate that Noman Ali is not available for the test matches," chief selector Wahab Riaz said. "Due to logistical challenges, including visa issues for any new player, and considering the requirement for a left-arm spinner, Nawaz was the best available choice for the side."

Australia opener Usman Khawaja, who was reprimanded by the International Cricket Council for wearing a black armband in support of Palestinians in Gaza during the first test, was not expected to wear it on Tuesday for the start of the second. He risked further sanction by



the ICC if he wore it again, and said last week he had no plans to wear the armband again dur-

ing this series. ICC regulations prevent cricketers from displaying messages

of political, religious or racial causes during international matches. Khawaja was born in