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BNP GIVES HASINA A RUN FOR HER MONEY

WORLD 8
BIDEN ORDERS STRIKES ON IRANIAN-ALIGNED GROUP

MONEY 10
INDIA, OMAN FTA LIKELY NEXT MONTH

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INDIA 208 FOR 8 AS
RAIN STOPS PLAY AT
CENTURION
12 SPORTS



Rajnath vows action on sea attacks



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the ceremony for the commissioning of stealth guided missile destroyer INS Imphal into the Indian Navy in Mumbai Tuesday PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A day after the merchant vessel MV Chem Pluto reached Mumbai port, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday that the Indian Government has taken serious cognizance of the recent attacks on it and another ship MV Sai Baba. He emphasised that strict action will be taken against those behind the attacks, even locating them from the "depths of the seas."

Speaking after the commissioning of the stealth guided missile destroyer INS Imphal in Mumbai, Rajnath also stated that India has intensified patrolling of the seas following the recent attacks on merchant navy ships. "The Indian Government has taken the drone attack on MV Chem Pluto and the attack on MV Sai Baba in the Red Sea seriously. We will find those who executed the recent attacks on merchant navy ships, even from the depths of the seas, and take strict action against them," the Defence Minister said.

MV Chem Pluto, with 21 Indian crew members, was struck by a drone about 217 nautical miles from the Arabian Sea on Saturday, prompting both the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard to deploy several assets to provide assistance to the ship. A Gabon-flagged commercial crude oil tanker with 25 Indian crew members reportedly came under a drone attack in the Southern Red Sea. Indian officials later clarified that the commercial oil tanker was not an Indian-

flagged vessel. Meanwhile, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar mentioned that four warships have been deployed to counter piracy and drone attacks on merchant ships. He stated that P-8I aircraft, Dorniers, Sea Guardians, helicopters, and Coast Guard ships have all been deployed jointly to counter the threats of piracy and drone attacks. On Monday, the Navy revealed that, after the oil tanker MV Chem Pluto reached Mumbai, analysis of the area of the attack and

debris found on the ship pointed towards a drone attack. However, further forensic and technical analysis will be required to establish the vector of the attack, including the type and amount of explosive used. A Joint Investigation by various agencies has commenced upon completion of the analysis by the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Team. MV Chem Pluto has been cleared for further operation by her company-in-charge in Mumbai. The ship is scheduled to undergo mandatory checks by various inspecting authorities before undertaking Ship-to-Ship (STS) transfer of cargo. This is likely to be followed by docking and repairs of the damaged portion of MV Chem Pluto. Considering the recent spate of attacks in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy has deployed Guided Missile Destroyers, INS Mormugao, INS Kochi, and INS Kolkata (Guided Missile Destroyers) in various areas to maintain a deterrent presence. Long-range maritime reconnaissance P8I aircraft are being regularly tasked to maintain domain awareness. The Western Naval Command's Maritime Operations Centre is actively monitoring the situation in close coordination with the Coast Guard and all concerned agencies.

India breaking free from mindset of slavery: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Continuing its minority outreach programme ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in 2024, the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reached out to the Sikhs on Tuesday. Union Ministers and BJP Chief Ministers then thronged the Gurudwaras in their vicinity across the country. Modi and his ministers had previously met with Christian religious leaders, and in a similar fashion, BJP leaders participated in Christmas Day events nationwide. Prime Minister Modi reached out to the Sikhs through Veer Bal Diwas, a day dedicated to honouring the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's two sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. The event took place at the Bharat Mandapam convention centre in Pragati Maidan. Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda visited a Gurudwara in Kolkata, while Union Minister Anurag Thakur and Ashwini Vaishnav, along with Union Minister Smriti Irani, visited Bangla Sahib and Rakabganj Gurudwara. Thakur also served langar to the devotees at Bangla Sahib. On the occasion, Modi said, "With the observance of Veer Bal Diwas, a new chapter has begun in the Amrit Kaal of the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets the gathering during 'Veer Bal Diwas' programme commemorating the martyrdom of two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday PTI

country's independence." He said India's goal of becoming the world's third-largest economy will benefit younger people the most, as he led tributes to the sons of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh, Zorawar Singh, and Fateh Singh, who were bricked alive at the ages of nine and six in

1705. Speaking at a "Veer Bal Diwas" event to commemorate the martyrdom of two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Modi said India is now coming out of the "mindset of slavery" and has full faith in its people, their abilities, and heritage. *Continued on Page 2*

Pakistan first Hindu woman files papers for election

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Dr Saveera Parkash has become the first woman from the minority Hindu community to run in the provincial elections in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. A doctor by profession, Parkash, 25, on Friday filed her nomination papers for the general seat of PK-25 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Buner district, her father Om Parkash told PTI on Tuesday. Om Parkash said his daughter filed a nomination for the general seat PK-25 constituency of the KPK Assembly from the mountainous Buner district as a Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) candidate. She has also filed papers for a seat reserved for women in the KPK Assembly. Parkash filed the papers at the request of the provincial leadership of the party Senator Rubina Khalid. She will formally get a party ticket during a PPP rally in Buner on Wednesday. "She is a serious candidate and will contest the upcoming elections due for February 8 on a general as well reserved seat," said Om Parkash, a recently retired doctor who had been an active member of the party for the past 35 years. According to local politician Saleem Khan, who is affiliated with the Quami Watan Party, Parkash is the first woman from Buner to have submitted her nomination papers to contest the upcoming elections from the general seat. Parkash completed her MBBS from the Abbottabad International Medical College in 2022 and is also the general secretary of the PPP women's wing in Buner. Parkash said she wanted to follow in her father's footsteps in working for the area's poor. She said she had submitted her nomination papers on December 23 (Friday). Parkash emphasised her desire to work for the welfare of women in the area to ensure a safe space for them and to help them attain their rights. *Continued on Page 2*



Leopard remains elusive in Sainik Farm

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government Forest Department has not found an elusive leopard in South Delhi's Sainik Farm area after the recovery of a nilgai carcass on Monday morning. According to Sushil Jain of Bail a Tail in Sainik Farms, there was no sighting of a leopard on Tuesday night. "My team monitored the entire night in Sainik Farm where a nilgai carcass was found. Nothing has been found. It seems the leopard has returned to the Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary," Jain added. Meanwhile, panic has gripped the residents of the area as this is the second incident this month. 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. Jain said they have asked the WARWA, Sainik Farm, to install CCTV cameras in the area adjacent to sanctuary boundaries. 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.

Congress plans to mobilise huge crowd on its Foundation Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In preparation for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the Congress is set to organise a massive rally in Nagpur to celebrate its foundation day, anticipating a crowd of 10 lakh. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, along with Sonia, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, and other top leaders, are expected to be present at the event. Interestingly, the grand old party is also leading the Opposition alliance called INDIA, and in this regard, the party has formed a committee to coordinate seat negotiations in crucial States such as Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. In Maharashtra, the Congress is an ally of Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar-led NCP. The coalition previously governed the state until a rebellion in Shiv Sena and NCP led to the formation of a BJP coalition government. The Maharashtra Congress has been assigned the task of organising the rally at the Dighori Naka area near Nagpur, expecting a turnout



of more than one lakh workers. Interestingly, the party has named the venue "Bharat Jodo Maidan," where workers and leaders will be heard chanting the slogan "Hain Taiyaar Hum". Congress general secretary KC Venugopal announced the rally, stating that more than 10 lakh party workers from across the country are expected to attend. He also chaired a meeting with leaders of the Maharashtra Congress in Nagpur. "Through this rally, we aim to convey a resounding message to every Indian that the current state of affairs will not be allowed to persist, and the Congress is committed to charting a new course for India's progress," said Venugopal. *Continued on Page 2*

He added that the entire country is "suffering" due to issues such as unemployment, rising prices, hatred, and "the erosion of India's democratic institutions." During a media briefing in Nagpur, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole remarked, "In December 1920, Mahatma Gandhi initiated the non-cooperation movement against the tyrannical British rule in Nagpur. Eventually, the British had to leave India in 1947. Nagpur has been a central hub for various movements and revolutions in the country. In 1959, Indira Gandhi was declared the national president in Nagpur itself. Celebrating the 138th Foundation Day of Congress in Nagpur, with such a historical background, is a matter of pride for the state unit of the Congress." Patole emphasised that democracy and the Constitution are currently being "undermined." "The BJP government has established an autocratic system in the country. Issues like inflation, unemployment, and the challenges faced by farmers and laborers have become severe." *Continued on Page 2*

Farooq Gaza analogy for Kashmir draws BJP fire

AGENCIES ■ SRINAGAR

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah faced criticism from the BJP for drawing an analogy between the situation in Kashmir and Gaza. Addressing the Poonch civilian deaths case, he advocated for talks with Pakistan, warning that without dialogue, the region could face a situation similar to that of Palestinians in Gaza. Speaking to reporters, the Srinagar MP referred to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statement on India-Pakistan relations that "We can change our friends but not our neighbours". The BJP objected to Abdullah's comparison. Senior BJP leader Dr Hina Shafi Bhat criticised the veteran leader's remarks, expressing regret that a senior leader from Jammu and Kashmir is still talking about talks with Pakistan. "Farooq saab should learn now; this regime is not going to bow down before Pakistan. We tried, they have backstabbed us again and again." In response to a question on whether India should hold talks with Pakistan, Abdullah referred to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's famous statement that "we can change friends but we cannot change neighbours." "If we live in friendship with neighbours, we will both prosper, but if we live in enmity, then we cannot progress rapidly. Modiji also has said war is not an option now, and issues have to be resolved through dialogue. Where is that dialogue?" He added, "Leave aside Imran Khan. Now Nawaz Sharif is going to be the PM of Pakistan and he has been saying at the top of his voice that they are ready for talks. Why are we not talking?" *Continued on Page 2*



Delhi blanketed in dense fog; flights, trains services disrupted

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi experienced the most intense fog of this winter on Tuesday, causing visibility to plummet to zero metres at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) and disrupting both flight and train operations. The minimum temperature dropped to nearly 7 degrees Celsius. As of 10 am, over 100 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport, and 14 train arrivals faced delays due to the foggy conditions. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in the national capital remained in the "very poor" category, reaching 377 by 4 pm, with specific areas recording higher AQI levels. Reduced visibility due to thick fog was observed in various parts of the city, including Safdarjung, Anand Vihar, and India Gate.

At Delhi's primary weather station in Safdarjung, visibility was recorded at 200 metres at 5:30 am, while it measured 100 metres at Palam. According to Delhi airport officials, at least 55 domestic and 17 international departures, along with 39 domestic and 12 international arrivals, were delayed due to poor visibility. Additionally, five flights were diverted from Delhi to Jaipur between 8:30 am and 10 am. The Delhi airport issued an alert to passengers regarding flight delays as dense fog persisted over the national capital for the third consecutive day, reducing visibility to nearly zero. According to the Delhi Airport Flight Information Display System data, the IGI airport is experiencing delays in both arrivals and departures for



Commuters on a foggy morning near India Gate on Tuesday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

approximately 30 flights, with five flights diverted to Jaipur between 8:30 am and 10 am. "Delhi airport is facing delays in both arrivals and departures for about 30 flights, including international ones, due to dense fog," stated airport officials. They also issued an advisory, notifying passengers

that while landing and take offs continue, flights not compliant with CAT III standards may be affected. The CAT III instrument is an anti-fog landing system activated during poor visibility. "While landings and take offs persist at Delhi airport, non-CAT

III compliant flights may experience disruptions. Passengers are urged to contact their respective airlines for updated flight information. We deeply regret any inconvenience caused," stated the advisory from Delhi Airport. The Northern Railways reported that 14 trains have been affected in the northern zone due to dense fog prevailing over the national capital on Tuesday. Delayed arrivals in Delhi include Puri-New Delhi Purushottam Express, Howrah-New Delhi Poorva Express, Kanpur-New Delhi Shramshakti, Allahabad-New Delhi Prayagraj, Azamgarh-Delhi Kaifiyat Express, Bhagalpur-Anand Vihar Vikramshilla, Gaya-New Delhi Magadh Express, Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani, Durg-Nizamuddin

Samparkranti, Chennai-New Delhi GT Express, Hyderabad-New Delhi Telangana, Habibganj-New Delhi Bhopal Express, Khajuraho-Kurukshetra Express, and Vasco-Nizamuddin Goa Express. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts that dense to very dense fog is likely to persist over northwest and parts of adjoining central India for the next 3-4 days. Foggy conditions are expected from December 29 to December 30, with a slight dip in the minimum temperature, according to the weather department. Morning scenes from Delhi's India Gate, Sarai Kale Khan, AIIMS, Safdarjung, and Anand Vihar areas revealed a dense fog, significantly reducing visibility. *Continued on Page 2*

Blast near Israeli embassy in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A blast took place on Tuesday evening near the Israel embassy located in the New Delhi district but no explosive has been found yet. A letter addressed to the Israeli ambassador has been found near the country's embassy in the national capital, minutes after reports of an explosion there. The letter, sources said, is typed and "abusive" in nature. The authenticity of the letter is being verified, police said. They also found a flag wrapped with the letter. The letter has been seized by the police.



motive, is currently under investigation. Israel Embassy is located along Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road in the national capital.

Israeli embassy spokesperson Guy Nir said, "We can confirm that around 5:48 pm, there was a blast in close proximity to the embassy. Delhi Police and the security team are still investigating the situation." Deputy Chief of Mission (Israel) Ohad Nakash Kaynar said, "All our diplomats and workers are safe. Our security teams are working in full cooperation with local Delhi security and they will investigate the matter further."

The blast was reported to the authorities on a call by an unidentified caller to the Delhi Fire Service at around 6 pm earlier on Tuesday. The caller claimed that an explosion took place on an empty plot behind the Israeli Embassy. The identity of the caller, as well as the

According to Delhi Fire Services officials, they received a call about the blast at 5:45 pm and it was transferred from the Delhi Police PCR (police control room). The fire department immediately sent two fire engines to the spot. Delhi Police and the security team are still investigating the situation. A guard deployed at Hindi Bhawan told the media that he heard a loud noise behind the embassy and informed the police. According to him, the incident took place at around 5 pm.

"This happened around 5 pm, I was on my duty and heard a huge sound. When I came out, I saw smoke coming from the top of a tree, that's all I

saw...The police have taken my statement," he said. A team of Delhi Police's Special Cell has also reached the spot. The area has been cordoned off and security personnel have been deployed. This comes amid a war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Earlier, Delhi Police had beefed up security around the Israeli embassy and Chabad House in the capital.

The local police stationed around the embassy in New Delhi and Chabad House, located in Chandni Chowk in central Delhi, had been directed to maintain a tight vigil. Additional police vehicles have been deployed outside the Israeli Embassy and the official residence of the Israeli Ambassador to India, Naor Gilon. Chabad House is a religious place of Jews in the Paharganj area of New Delhi.

Shah, Nadda form 15 members Bengal panel for 2024 polls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda on Tuesday created a 15-member election management committee for Bengal, sources in the saffron party said adding the election committee for the 2024 general polls would comprise Shah, Nadda, State party president Sukanto Majumdar, Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari and Amitabh Chakrabarty.

Among other leaders in the team are, former State presidents Dilip Ghosh and Rahul Sinha, MLAs, Locket Chatterjee, Agnimitra Paul, Dipak Burman, Jagannath Sarkar and Jyotirmoy Singh Mahato, sources said adding the reason behind inducting people from all the factions of the State party is to stem infighting that had been plaguing the BJP's Bengal unit for the past couple of years.

The central leaders inducted in the team are Amit Malavya, Sumit Bansal, Magal Pandey and Asha Lockra, sources said adding the top leadership have asked the State counterparts to focus on winning 35 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats. None of the four central ministers from Bengal have been inducted in the team.

cally sideline an emergent Left-Congress and create a binary of sorts the top BJP leadership have directed the State leadership to primarily target Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her "corrupt regime," inside sources said, adding a detailed report of all the scams perpetrated during the last one decade of the TMC rule would be created for campaigning purpose. Accordingly, Shah and Nadda have also directed the State BJP leadership to use the social media as a major campaign platform for the next year's elections. Suwendu Adhikari said adding the corruption perpetrated by Banerjee's regime would be the main focus.

"Amit Shah ji and JP Nadda ji have asked us to make all the effort to drive out this corrupt Government of Mamata Banerjee and for that he has given us a number of slogans... we have also been asked to use the social media platform at optimum level," Adhikari said emerging from a key organizational meeting with the national leaders.

Quoting Shah he said "it was the Information Technology cell of the party that had given us immense success in the 2021 Assembly elections when we increased our tally from 2 to 78 seats."

Search operations intensified ahead of Rajnath visit to Rajouri, Poonch

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch on Wednesday, the Indian army has further intensified its relentless search and combing operations in the general area of Dera ki Gali of Surankote tehsil to track down the footprints of the foreign terrorists. During his day-long visit, the Defence Minister is also scheduled to chair a high-level security review meeting here at Raj Bhawan with the top brass of the senior army, police, and UT administration.

Army Chief General Manoj Pande during his visit to Rajouri on Monday had directed the field commanders to conduct operations in the "most professional manner". Four soldiers were killed in action when these suspected foreign terrorists ambushed two army vehicles in the Dera Ki Gali area of Surankote tehsil in Poonch district on December 21. The terrorists had taken advantage of the poor road conditions and thickly forested belt, far away from the nearest residential habitats to target the army vehicles.

To prevent further collateral damage the security forces are very patiently conducting these search operations.

India to launch surveillance after vaccine-derived polio virus detection

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Following detection of vaccine-derived polio virus (VDPV) in sewage samples last year in Kolkata in 2021, an alarmed India is now gearing up to launch a nationwide surveillance from January 1, 2024 to ascertain whether the pathogen is present in any case of clinically diagnosed child with primary immune deficient (PID), a rare class of hereditary diseases. The Sentinel site based iVDPVs surveillance will be conducted at 21 identified sites in the States in the four zones of the country. A vaccine-derived polio virus is a rare variant that mutates from the strain contained in the oral polio vaccine (OPV).

To mitigate the individual and community risks posed by iVDPVs during the polio endgame and the post-eradication era, it is important to identify those PID patients excreting polioviruses and provide the strategies and treatments available to rid both the individual and the community of the risk posed by iVDPVs, said Dr Pawan Kumar, Additional Commissioner (Imm) from the Union Health Ministry to the concerned officials in the States. Doctors say, individuals with PID can excrete polioviruses (iVDPVs) for prolonged periods, which could act as a source of transmission of pathogens for months and go undetected by acute flaccid paralysis surveillance.

Bihar 2047 Vision Conclave held in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



As part of its ongoing programme across the country and world to connect 'Biharis' under the "Let's Inspire Bihar" initiative, a day-long "Bihar 2047 Vision Conclave" was held in the national Capital on Saturday where bureaucrats, professionals, students joined to express and present their viewpoints for the holistic development of the State sans a political affiliations. Enhancing the skills of the youth for the opportunities of empowerment, opportunities of employment attracting entrepreneurs in Bihar, especially a dedicated panel discussion titled 'development of entrepreneurs' was attended by dynamic entrepreneurs who threw light on their journey. On the occasion various speakers gave a clarion call to all successful Bihar entrepreneurs, settled across the globe, for mentoring the youth of Bihar towards a revolution of entrepreneurship.

India breaking free from mindset...

From Page 1
This year, America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, UAE, and Greece organised programmes related to 'Veer Bal Diwas'... Today, when we are proud of our heritage, the world has started looking at us differently... Today's India has confidence in its people, potential, and inspirations..."

"When we did not respect our heritage, the world also did not value it," he said, adding that the global perspective has now changed. When the country moves forward with pride in its heritage, the world also respects it, Modi said. Modi said his Government has a clear vision and roadmap to fulfill the unlimited dreams of India's youngsters, irrespective of the region and society they were born in. The next 25 years will bring a lot of opportunities for youngsters, he said. The government has a clear policy and no flaw in its intentions, Modi said, citing the increase in the size of the Indian econ-

omy and its global recognition. The world is looking at India as a land of opportunities today, and the country is playing a big role in resolving global challenges, he added. Shah and Nadda offered prayers at Gurudwara Bara Sikh Sangat in Central Kolkata and also offered pujas at Kalighat Temple ahead of a crucial strategy meeting for the Lok Sabha 2024 polls. "On Veer Bal Diwas, I bow to Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Sahibzade and Mata Gujri Ji. With supreme courage, they stood against the brutal Mughal rule and chose martyrdom, refusing to convert. Their

unmatched valor will continue to inspire generations to come," Shah wrote on 'X'. The Home Minister said by proclaiming their martyrdom day as 'Veer Bal Diwas', Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spread the saga of their sacrifice to every corner of the country and the world. Union Minister Anurag Thakur, who visited Gurudwara Bangla Sahib in Delhi and took part in community service by serving langar—a community kitchen meal. "Today not only the country but the whole world is celebrating Veer Bal Diwas and paying tribute to the Sahibzadas. The youth can learn a lot from their sacrifice and contribute to making a

'Viksit Bharat'," said Thakur. Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav visited Rakabganj Gurudwara and offered prayers. Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh visited Takhat Sri Harimander Sahib Gurudwara Patna Sahib and offered prayers. Puri, who is the only Sikh in the Narendra Modi cabinet, expressed delight upon visiting the historical site where the 10th Sikh Guru was born. The origins of 'Veer Bal Diwas' trace back to January 9, 2022, when PM Modi announced its observance on December 26 to honor the sacrifice of the Sahibzadas Prime Minister Modi also flagged off a youth march on the event marking 'Veer Bal Diwas'.

Delhi blanketed in first Hindu dense... Pakistan woman files papers...

From Page 1
The weather office supplemented this observation with satellite images illustrating a widespread fog layer extending over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Reports from Moradabad and Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh indicated an almost zero visibility due to a thick fog blanket. People were observed gathering around bonfires along roads and lanes to combat the bone-chilling cold in the region. In its bulletin, the weather forecast agency predicted that dense to very dense fog conditions were highly likely to persist during the early and morning hours in certain pockets of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh from Tuesday to Thursday. Additionally, these conditions were expected over Rajasthan and north Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday and Wednesday.

From Page 1
The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province which borders Afghanistan is a stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban terror group, blamed for a series of attacks on security forces. She said women have been "suppressed and neglected", especially concerning the development sector. "Serving humanity is in my blood," she said, citing her medical background, highlighting that her dream to become an elected legislator stemmed from having experienced poor management and helplessness in government hospitals as a doctor. According to the ECP's recent amendments, a five per cent inclusion of women candidates is mandatory on general seats.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, KHORDHA (R&B) CIRCLE, KHORDHA
SHORT TENDER CALL NOTICE
B-1496 E-mail: rbcirclekhorda@gmail.com

Bid Identification No. CCE-Khordha (R&B) Circle-37/2023-24 Memo No - 2929 Dt. 20.12.2023

The Chief Construction Engineer, Khordha (R&B) Circle, Khordha on behalf of Governor of Odisha inviting percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for temple works as detailed in the table below:

- Nature of Work : Temple Works
- No of Work : 2Nos
- Tender Cost : Rs. 10000.00 (On-Line)
- Class of Contractor : B&A Class
- Available of Bid document in : From 10.00 AM of Dt. 27.12.2023 up to 05.00 PM of Dt. 04.01.2024 at 11.30 AM
- Date of opening of Bid : Dt. 03.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website: <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>. Any Addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Chief Construction Engineer
Khordha (R&B) Circle, Keonjhar
OIPR-34127/11/0046/2324

Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice
C-2187
Bid Identification No.44/2023-24

- Name of the work : 01 No. of work
- Estimated cost : 197.06 lakh
- Period of completion : 1 (One) Month.
- Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal : From 11.00 AM. of 27.12.2023 to 5.00 PM of 11.01.2024
- Last date / time for receipt of bids in the portal : 5.00 PM of 11.01.2024
- Name and address of the Officer inviting Bid : Additional Chief Engineer, P.H. Division, Bhubaneswar

Further details can be seen from e-procurement portal in the Website
<http://tendersorissa.gov.in>
Additional Chief Engineer
P.H.Division, Bhubaneswar

MADHYA PRADESH JAL NIGAM
(A Government of Madhya Pradesh Undertaking)
8, Arera Hills, Bhopal- 462004, CIN - U41000MP2012SGC028798
Web : mpjalnigam.mp.gov.in, E-mail : mpjalnigam@mp.gov.in
NIT No. : 152/Proc./MPJN/2023-24 Bhopal, Dated : 26.12.2023

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER (2ND CALL)

Madhya Pradesh Jal Nigam (MPJN) intends to engage System Integrator (SI) for As-is Study, Design, Development, Implementation and Annual Maintenance Service (for three years) of Project and Asset Management System (PAMS) for Madhya Pradesh Jal Nigam on Lump-Sum Contract basis. Bid is re-invited online through Madhya Pradesh Government E-Procurement Portal.

NIT No.	Tender Name	PA (Rs. Cr.)	EMD (Rs. Lakh)	Cost of Tender Document (Rs.)	Duration (months)
152	System Integrator (SI) for As-is Study, Design, Development, Implementation and Annual Maintenance Service (for three years) of Project and Asset Management System (PAMS) for Madhya Pradesh Jal Nigam.	18.15	10.00	30,000	Implementation Phase - 6 months Annual Maintenance Services - 36 months

Interested bidders can view/download/purchase the bid document online from M.P. Government E-Procurement Portal from 26.12.2023, 17:30 Hrs. Bidding process dates mentioned as critical dates on M.P. Government E-Procurement Portal will be applicable. Corrigendum/Addendum in NIT, if any, would be published on portal only and not in newspapers.

M.P. Government E-Procurement Portal - <https://mptenders.gov.in>
M.P. Madhyam/112962/2023 MANAGING DIRECTOR

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all that I, Renu Khosla W/o Late Sh. Suneel Khosla R/o Flat No.1409, Ground Floor, Sector-A, Pocket-B & C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070. I am the owner of Flat No.1409, Ground Floor, SFS Cat-III, Sector-A, Pocket-B & C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070, Vide File No.94(259)89/SFS/IG/III, have applied for certify copy of all document of the aforesaid property in DDA, The Possession Slip and Demand Letter issued by DDA, have been lost or misplaced and are not traceable inspite of the best efforts. An FIR/NCR to this effect has been lodged in Crime Branch vide LR. No 1248936/2023, dated 18/12/2023.

Any person (s) claiming any rights, interest, having any objection, may write/contact with above named person at the above address/ phone No. 981020742, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Director or Dy. Director LAB (H) DDA, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is bring to the notice of the general public that one ICID Cards of Rinku issued by ICICI Bank Ltd. having ICID no. 2338787 has been found missing and/or lost on 21st December 2023. Anyone who finds the said ICID Card, is requested to return the said ICID card to the Manager Dept. Services & Managements Group, ICICI Bank Limited, S.D. Tower Rohini Sec-8 New Delhi-110085. Therefore all the customers of ICICI Bank Limited are hereby notified not to make any payment to any unauthorized person holding the said ICID cards no. 2338787. Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ICID card shall do so at his/ her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payments. Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ICID card shall do so at his/her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payment.

Date: 27-12-2023
Place: Delhi For ICICI Bank Limited SD

छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल
पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

// सर्व संबंधित को सूचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय की ई.आई.ए. अधिसूचना दिनांक 14/09/2006 (यथा संशोधित) के अंतर्गत सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि गोडपेड़ड़ी लाईन स्टेशन स्वामी (श्री. श्रीमती संगीता तिवारी), ग्राम- गोडपेड़ड़ी, तहसील- पाटन, जिला- दुर्ग स्थित खसरा क्रमांक 363, 364 / 2, 365 / 2, 367 / 2, 367 / 3, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, एवं 373, कुल क्षेत्रफल - 1.85 हेक्टेयर में प्रस्तावित चूना पत्थर (गौग खनिज) उत्खनन शमता- 40,125 टन प्रतिवर्ष के पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति हेतु लोक सुनवाई बाबत छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर में आवेदन किया गया है। उक्त परियोजना के संबंध में आपत्ति / सुझाव / विचार / टीका टिप्पणी इस सूचना के जारी होने के दिनांक से 30 दिवस के अंदर क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, 5 / 32 बंगला, भिलाई, जिला- दुर्ग के कार्यालय में मौखिक अथवा लिखित रूप से कार्यालयीन समय में प्रस्तुत की जा सकती है। इस परियोजना के लिये लोक सुनवाई दिनांक 31/01/2024 को समय दोपहर 12:00 बजे, स्थान- इमेज एन्व्यूकेशनल सोसायटी केम्पस, ग्राम- गोडपेड़ड़ी, तहसील- पाटन, जिला- दुर्ग (छ.ग.) में नियत की गई है। यह भी सूचित हो कि :-

- लोक सुनवाई के दौरान सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों को फिजिकल / सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करना अनिवार्य होगा।
- लोक सुनवाई में सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों द्वारा मास्क का उपयोग किया जायेगा तथा समय-समय पर सेनेटाइजर का उपयोग किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।
- लोक सुनवाई स्थल पर सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों की बैठक व्यवस्था कम से कम 02 मीटर की दूरी रखना अनिवार्य होगा।
- कोरोना वायरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेतु शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-निर्देशों का अक्षरशः पालन किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन 14 सितम्बर 2006 (यथा-संशोधित) के अनुसार संबंधित व्यक्तियों के अवलोकन / पठन हेतु डाक्टर ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट कार्यपालक सार हिन्दी एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा तथा सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी) डायरेक्टर, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार, इंदिरा पर्यावरण भवन, जोर बाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार, अरुण्य भवन, नॉर्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, रायपुर, छत्तीसगढ़, कलेक्टर, कार्यालय कलेक्टर, जिला- दुर्ग, मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जिला पंचायत, जिला- दुर्ग, मुख्य महाप्रबंधक, जिला व्यापार एवं उद्योग केन्द्र, जिला- दुर्ग, सचिव, ग्राम पंचायत गोडपेड़ड़ी, जिला- दुर्ग, क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, 5 / 32 बंगला, भिलाई, जिला- दुर्ग एवं मुख्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर में रखी गई है।

सदस्य सचिव
छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल,
नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform public in general that Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd has organized an auction in below mention respect of Vehicles. VEHICLES FOR SALE

- SWRJ MAZDA SARTAJ XM REG. NO. DL1MA1554-YOM-2018 MINIMUM RESERVE PRICE-366481.26
- 344055172 TLPT1109CH REG. NO. HR55A10265-YOM 2021 MINIMUM RESERVE PRICE- 895500

UNDER HYPOTHECAATION WITH M/S KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK IS UNDER SALE IN ITS "AS IS WHERE IS CONDITION" INTERESTED PARTIES CAN GIVE THEIR QUOTATIONS (ONLINE/OFFLINE) WITHIN 15 DAYS FROM THIS PAPER PUBLICATION I.E. ON OR BEFORE 11-01-2024 (PLEASE NOTE THAT CLOSING AUCTION DATE WOULD NOT BE A WEEKLY OFF / HOLIDAY).

BRANCH ADDRESS: KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LTD., PLOT NO.6 INSTITUTIONAL AREA, SECTOR- 125 NOIDA NEAR DELL CAMPUS NOIDA (I.P) UP-201313 OR CONTACT : RAMAN AHUJA KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LTD. CONTACT / 8377988238 EMAIL-raman.ahuja@kotak.com

Congress plans to mobilise huge crowd on its Foundation...

From Page 1
"It is the Congress' responsibility to dismantle this tyrannical system created by the BJP government and work towards creating a corruption-free and tyranny-free India. To safeguard democracy and the Constitution, the party has coined slogans like 'Hain 'Taiyaar Hum'."

In an effort to mobilise people and funds, the party recently launched a crowdfunding initiative, where donors can contribute Rs 138 or multiples thereof to commemorate the grand old party's 138th foundation day.

All the top leaders have made contributions, and as of December 25, the party has secured donations worth Rs 5.35 crores within a week. Congress Treasurer Ajay Maken announced that the party collected Rs 5.35 crores a week after the campaign was initiated by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. "On the first day of the campaign, the party collected a whopping Rs 1.45 crore. By 7:30 pm on December 25, Rs 5.35 crore was realised under the 'Donate For Desh' initiative. In the crowdfunding campaign, two lakh people joined within just one week," Maken shared on social media.

Sources in the Congress also claimed that its donation website faced 20,400 cyber attacks attempting to steal data or slow the site down during the initial couple of days.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER
EASTERN MINOR IRRIGATION CIRCLE, KEONJHAR
A-1079 Tel No. (06766) 254768, e-Mail ID seemickonjhar@yahoo.com

"e" Procurement Notice
Identification No-02 EMIC (KJR/2023-24)
The Additional Chief Engineer, Eastern Minor Irrigation Circle, Keonjhar on behalf of Government of Odisha invites percentage rate bids through e-procurement to be received in online mode only for the works as detailed in the table below.

- Name of the works: Civil Construction work
- Total No. of works: 05 (Five)
- Estimated Cost: varies from Rs. 90.84 Lakh to 151.21 Lakh (Approx.)
- Class of Contractor: As mentioned against work
- Period of completion: As mentioned against work
- Date & time of Availability of Bid Document in the Portal: 30.12.2023 at 10.00 AM to 11.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM.
- Last date/Time for receipt of Bid in the Portal: 11.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM.
- Date/Time of Opening of Technical Bid: 12.01.2024 at 11.30 AM. at Office of the Addl. C.E., Eastern Minor Irrigation Circle Keonjhar.
- Date/Time of Opening of Financial Bid: 19.01.2024 at 11.30 AM
- Name & Address of the Officer Inviting the Bid: Addl. Chief Engineer, Eastern Minor Irrigation Circle, Keonjhar
- Mode of Payment of Bid Cost & Bid Security: Online
- Further details can be seen from the "e" Procurement Portal <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>

Additional Chief Engineer
Eastern Minor Irrigation Circle, Keonjhar
OIPR-32270/11/0003/2324

Court extends Vivo executives custody by two days in PMLA probe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi court on Tuesday extended by two days the ED custody of three Vivo-India executives in a money laundering case against the Chinese smartphone maker and others. Additional Sessions Judge Aparna Swami extended the custody of Interim CEO of Vivo-India Hong Xuquan alias Terry, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Harinder Dahiya and consultant Hemant Munjal on an application moved by the Enforcement Directorate. The accused were produced before the court on the expiry of their three-day ED custody granted earlier. The ED sought their remand for five days, claiming they were required to be confronted with the other accused arrested in the case earlier. China had said on Monday it will provide consular protection and assistance to the arrested employees working for smartphone maker Vivo in India and expressed its firm backing to the Chinese businesses in protecting their lawful rights and interests. The federal anti-money laundering agency had earlier arrested four people -- mobile company Lava International's MD Hari Om Rai, Chinese national Guangwen alias Andrew Kuang, and chartered accountants Nitin Garg and Rajan Malik -- in the case. They are in judicial custody at present. The ED had filed a charge sheet against the four in a special PMLA court in Delhi. The court recently took cognisance of the charge sheet. The ED alleged in documents submitted to the court with regard to the four arrestees that their activities enabled Vivo-India to make wrongful gains that were detrimental to the economic sovereignty of India. It had raided Vivo-India and people linked to it in July last year and claimed to have busted "a major money laundering racket involving Chinese nationals and multi-

ple Indian companies". The ED had then alleged that Rs 62,476 crore was "illegally" transferred by Vivo-India to China to avoid payment of taxes in India. The company had, however, said it "firmly adheres to its ethical principles and remains dedicated to legal compliance". Lava International's Hari Om Rai had recently told a court that though his company and



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ple Indian companies". The ED had then alleged that Rs 62,476 crore was "illegally" transferred by Vivo-India to China to avoid payment of taxes in India. The company had, however,

said it "firmly adheres to its ethical principles and remains dedicated to legal compliance". Lava International's Hari Om Rai had recently told a court that though his company and

Vivo-India were in talks to launch a joint venture in India a decade ago, he had nothing to do with the Chinese firm or its representatives since 2014. "He has not derived any monetary benefit nor has he engaged in any transaction with Vivo-India or any entity allegedly related to Vivo, let alone having been associated with any alleged proceeds of crime," Rai's lawyer Nitesh Rana had told the court. The probe agency filed an enforcement case information report (ECIR), the ED's equivalent of a police FIR, on February 3 after studying a December 2022 Delhi Police FIR against an associated company of Vivo-India, Grand Prospect International Communication Pvt. Ltd. (GPICPL), its directors, shareholders and some other professionals. The police complaint was filed by the Corporate Affairs Ministry alleging that GPIC-

PL and its shareholders used "forged" identification documents and "falsified" addresses at the time of incorporation of the company in December 2014. This company had its registered addresses in Himachal Pradesh's Solan, Gujarat's Gandhinagar and in Jammu. The crackdown on the leading Chinese company came after ED found that three Chinese nationals, all of whom left India between 2018 and 2021, and another person from that country incorporated 23 companies in India in which chartered accountant Nitin Garg allegedly assisted them. "The allegations (made by the Corporate Affairs ministry) were found to be true as the investigation revealed that the addresses mentioned by the directors of GPICPL did not belong to them. In fact, it was a government building and the house of a senior bureaucrat," the ED

said. It said Vivo Mobiles Pvt. Ltd. Was incorporated on August 1, 2014 as a subsidiary of Multi Accord Ltd., a Hong Kong-based company. The 23 companies incorporated in India were found to have transferred huge amounts of funds to Vivo India. Further, out of the total sale proceeds of Rs 1,25,185 crore, Vivo India remitted Rs 62,476 crore or almost 50 per cent of the turnover out of India, mainly to China, the ED has alleged. These remittances, it added, were made to "disclose huge losses in Indian incorporated companies to avoid payment of taxes in India". The action is seen as part of the Union government's effort to tighten the screws on Chinese entities that are allegedly indulging in serious financial crimes like money laundering and tax evasion while operating here.

Atishi finds seepage in Saket Court Complex

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Law Minister Atishi inspected the Saket Court Complex on Tuesday morning and found issues of seepage in newly constructed blocks of the court complex. Upon observing the poor building maintenance, the minister pulled up the Public Works Department officials and instructed them to urgently address all issues promptly. Immediate action has also been ordered to address the recent problems in the newly constructed building blocks, with strict instructions to take stringent action against the responsible engineers and contractors. During the inspection, she observed issues of seepage in newly constructed blocks of the court complex, leading to dampened walls. Moreover, severe concerns of dampened walls was also raised by the Judges and lawyers present at Court - indicating to basic architectural defects and improper construction. Expressing dissatisfaction with the state of the court premises, the Law Minister emphasised that "the Saket Court Complex is regularly used by a large number of judges, lawyers, and their staff. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that these individuals face no inconvenience while performing their duties



here." She asked officials to swiftly resolve these issues and take strict action against responsible engineers and contractors. The Law Minister stressed that "Court is a prestigious institution where thousands come in pursuit of justice every day, and negligence in the court's maintenance will simply not be tolerated. Stern action must be taken for inconvenience caused to judges, lawyers and citizens. She instructed officials to create a comprehensive checklist for necessary maintenance and repairs, addressing all issues promptly. The minister stated that the government is improving the infrastructure of court premises and providing all necessary facilities, and lapses are absolutely unacceptable in pursuit of this cause. Meanwhile, the PWD has ordered a structural audit of the judicial residential complex of Saket court, besides seeking an FIR against the contractor responsible for its poor condition. According to an internal inspection report, the condition of the building started to deteriorate within six months of its construction. The building's plaster started wearing out even as bits and pieces of the construction material started falling.

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1 labourer killed, another seriously injured in lift crash in Narela building

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 40-year-old labourer was killed and another suffered serious injuries in outer Delhi's Narela area after the cable of a lift installed at a factory snapped, police said on Tuesday. The accident took place on Monday night, when Nemi Chand and Anirudh Chauhan (28) were climbing the upper portion of the factory. "The lift was already loaded with heavy construction material. As the lift reached the first floor, its cable broke and it had a free fall from the first floor to the basement from a height of around 30 feet," a senior police officer said. "We have taken custody of the body of Chand. It has been sent for autopsy, while injured Chauhan was rushed to the hospital," the officer said. Police have registered an FIR under sections 287 (negligent conduct with respect to machinery), 337 (causing hurt



by act endangering life or personal safety of others), and 304A (causing death by negligence), of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), against the owner and the contractor of the factory. Investigation of the spot revealed that the cable of the lift snapped due to which it had a free fall, police said. "Both had received serious injuries and were rushed to hospital, where Chand died during treatment. We got to know that Chauhan, along with Chand, was going to the first floor to cook, when the cable of the lift snapped. Both were working as labourers and had been staying there," an investigator said.

AAP Government not giving old age pension for 5 years: Bidhuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Tuesday charged that the Arvind Kejriwal government has discontinued old age pension for the elderly for the last five years. Bidhuri also said not only are new applicants not receiving pensions, but even with over one lakh vacancies, new individuals are not being granted pensions, while more than two lakh elderly individuals are pleading for pensions. Bidhuri mentioned that the Delhi government not only maintains an inhumane perspective towards the elderly but is also committing contempt of the Delhi High Court's orders. It has been reported that on October 17, 2018, the Kejriwal government issued an order stating that applications for the new pension can only be made through the MLA's ID. People protested this arbitrary order and approached the Delhi High Court. The court immediately can-



celled the order, emphasizing that applications for the new pension can be submitted individually, Bidhuri said. Expressing dissatisfaction with the order of the High Court the Delhi government did not accept any new application, he added. Bidhuri stated that not only is the government not approving new applications, but it is also not providing approved pensions. While 5,30,000 elderly individuals in Delhi are eligible for pensions, only 4,29,210 receive them. This means that an additional 1,00,790 elderly individuals could be granted pensions, but the Delhi government is

not making any decision on this sensitive matter. In response to a question in the assembly, it was mentioned that the Kejriwal government needs to hold a meeting and make a proper decision on this issue. Still, no such meeting has taken place, leaving the elderly in Delhi struggling for the past five years. The Kejriwal government is not even hearing Aam Aadmi Party legislators' voices in the assembly who have raised questions about this issue. Over two lakh people have applied for pensions, but their applications are still pending with the government.

2 cab drivers, accomplice arrested for robbing commuter after giving him lift

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Gurugram Police has arrested two cab drivers and an accomplice of theirs for allegedly robbing a commuter after giving him a lift in their cab, an officer said on Tuesday. The accused revealed that they robbed the person for money to buy alcohol for a party. According to police, the incident happened Saturday night when a man hailed a cab for a lift from Sikkandarpur to his home in Delhi's Mahipalpur. The car had four people already sitting inside. Soon after, the men inside started thrashing the complainant and snatched his mobile phone and the cash on him and left him stranded on the Golf Course road in Sector 42, said police. The matter was registered at Sushant Lok Police Station. A team of crime unit, Sector



10 arrested three people from Delhi on Monday, said police. The three were identified as Sahil Khan alias Sallu, 19, Mohammad Shahid alias Channa, 24, and Wasim Ali, all natives of Pratapgarh district in Uttar Pradesh. Shahid and Wasim were the cab drivers and Sahil used to work as a waiter in a restaurant in Ambience mall, said police, adding, all three dropped out of school before they could complete Class 10. "The accused revealed that

they were going to hold a liquor party Saturday night and they committed the robbery by offering a lift to the victim in their cab to meet the expenses," said Varun Dahiya, ACP Crime. Dahiya said the car used in the crime had been borrowed by Mohammad Shahid from his friend. "We have recovered the car, stolen mobile, and cash from their possession. We are questioning the accused and further probe is underway," he said.

5 held for robbing 65 years old at gunpoint

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested five people who allegedly robbed a 65-year-old man of cash, mobile phone and a bag at gunpoint in Northeast Delhi's Gautampuri area, officials said on Tuesday. According to the police, three of the accused were involved in several cases of murder, robbery, snatching, and theft. Police said that they had stolen Rs 40,000, mobile phone and a bag to lead a lavish lifestyle and purchasing of branded cloths. "We have arrested Rizwan (28), Noor Ali (28), Nazim (26), Rakesh (33), and Kamal (40). A country-made pistol, stolen motorcycle, Rs 20,000 cash and three live cartridges were recovered from them," Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said. Around 7 pm on December 22, Gian Chand Tayal told police that he runs a grocery shop in Gautampuri and while



he was on his way home, three unidentified people overpowered him and robbed him at gunpoint. A case was registered based on Tayal's complaint and investigation taken up, police said. "We scanned and analyzed CCTV footage of the cameras installed in the vicinity. We checked one scooter following Tayal. Later, two suspects identified as Rizwan and Noor Ali were arrested on December 26 from Zero Pushta road, who confessed to their involvement," the DCP said. On their instance, police

arrested their associates Nazim, Rakesh, and Kamal, and recovered Rs 20,000 from their possession. "They told police that they committed the crime to earn easy money and to fulfil their expenses for maintaining lavish lifestyle as they were fond of wearing branded clothes, accessories and shoes. Accused Rizwan, Noor Ali and Nazim were found to be previously involved in several cases of murder, robbery, snatching and theft," DCP Tirkey said, adding that further investigation into the matter has been started.

29 years old stabbed to death over row over dues of ₹1,500

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 29-year-old man was allegedly stabbed to death by a man from his neighbourhood over a dispute regarding Rs 1,500 of prior dues in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area, police said on Tuesday. The body of the victim Vinod, alias Vinnu, was recovered from his house in Madipur JJ cluster on December 22. It had multiple stab wounds, police said. Police have taken the accused into custody, they said. According to police, it was found during investigation that Vinod had an altercation with one Mohammad Abdulla, who works as an electrician and lived nearby. Police started looking for Abdulla and nabbed him on December 25 from the area, an official said. A day before the incident, Vinod and Abdulla had an argument regarding Rs



1,500 of previous dues, police said. According to police, Vinod had gone to Abdulla's house but he did not find him there. It made him angry and he shouted at Abdulla's family members. "Abdulla came to know about Vinod's misbehaviour with his family members. Next day, he went to Vinod's place and stabbed him multiple times, leaving him dead on the spot," an officer said. Vinod lived with his elder brother in the house, police said.

Tulips to bloom all across Delhi after NDMC, DDA plan to increase plantation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time, the city would see tulips blooming in such a large number not just in Lutyens' Delhi but other parts of central, west and north Delhi. While New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) will plant two lakh bulbs in its area compared to 1.23 lakh bulbs in 2022 and 65,000 bulbs imported in 2021 from the Netherlands, DDA will plant one lakh bulbs in its parks. The increase in plantation of Tulips and other flowers across the city is in line with the emphasis given by Lieutenant Governor's goal of turning the Capital into a 'City of Flowers'. At least 500 Tulip bulbs have also been planted

in the Raj Niwas Campus for the first time. While Tulips will be planted in 65 locations, other winter flowers would adorn the Capital at 91 locations. These bulbs and other flowering plants will sprout in places such as Central Park, NDMC headquarters, Akbar Road, Windsor Place roundabout, Shanti Path, Talkatora Garden, Ashoka Road, India Gate, Race Course Road, Mandi House, Parliament roundabout and the vicinity of the Vice-President's bungalow (Akbar Road and Maulana Azad Road), and 11 Murti. This year, tulip bulbs will grow into flowers of six colours — white, yellow, red, pink and two in shades of yellow.



low-red and white-red and other varieties of seasonal flowers like Petunia, Salvia, Cineraria, Antirrhinum, Poppy, Verbena, Dianthus, Hollyhock, Nasturtium, Coreopsis, Pansy, Lianum, etc will be planted soon at prominent locations for full public view. Each of these bulbs cost Rs 26. According to Raj Niwas official, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena over the year chaired meetings and discussions with Horticulture Divisions of various Departments and Agencies and their future preparedness with regards to flower plantation and other activities. "The LG had issued instructions for double the number of

Tulips to be sourced and planted this season. In this regard, the LG had taken up the matter of sourcing Tulips with the Lt. Governors of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, and the Government of Himachal Pradesh. He had asked NDMC to source it from these UTs or Himachal Pradesh, rather than sourcing them from abroad. This, he had said will, apart from encouraging and boosting indigenous suppliers, also ensure cost cutting in procurement," official said. "Saxena had also asked agencies like MCD, DDA and NDMC who own and operate nurseries of their own to try and achieve temperatures between 10-12 degree centigrade, in their nurseries, so

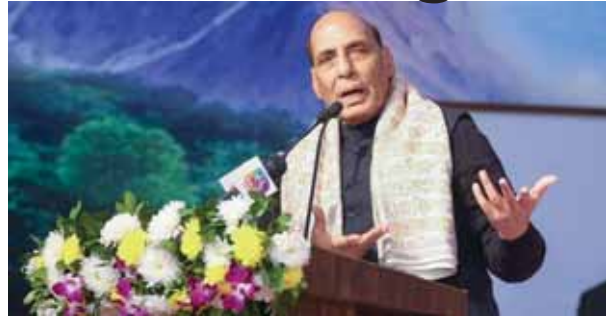
that Tulip saplings and bulbs could be nurtured in Delhi itself. He had also asked for the possibility of sourcing and planting Daffodils in the forthcoming season. On the instructions of the LG, the NDMC, has taken an initiative to establish a unit of the foreign flowers at Lodhi Garden in New Delhi," official added. According to NDMC, almost 54,000 imported Tulip bulbs were harvested this year, out of which 52,000 has been sent to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology in Palampur for further research. 2,000 bulbs are currently in the two chambers at the unit in Lodhi Gardens.

'India security provider in Indian Ocean region'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said India plays the role of a net security provider in the entire Indian Ocean Region and will ensure that maritime trade in this region touches greater heights by keeping the sea lanes secure.

Making this assertion, he also said "we have full confidence in the ability and strength of our Navy," after participating in the commissioning ceremony of indigenously designed and built stealth guided destroyer INS Imphal in Mumbai. The event marks the formal induction of the third of the four indigenous Visakhapatnam class destroyers designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai. The ship measures 163m in length, 17m in breadth with a displacement of 7,400 tonnes and is amongst the most potent warships built in India. It is propelled by four powerful Gas Turbines and can travel at a speed in excess of 30 knots. Rajnath defined INS Imphal as a conglomeration of different strengths of the nation. "Brahmos Aerospace installed Brahmos missile on the ship. Torpedo tube launchers are of Larsen & Toubro (L&T). Rapid Gun Mount has been installed by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), and Medium Range missiles by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). In addition, many start-ups and MSMEs are involved in its construction. Just like many elements have given a concrete form to INS IMPHAL, people from all walks of life should work together for us to become 'Viksit Bharat'. Every citizen is a carrier of India's security and progress. Whenever one works,



the betterment of the nation must be kept in mind," he said. Rajnath reiterated the Government's resolve to lay equal emphasis on the modernisation of all the three Services to safeguard national interests, stating that earlier governments focussed only on protecting the country from land-based threats. He pointed out that with the Himalayas in the north and the hostile behavior of Pakistan in the west, most of India's goods trade comes through sea, which makes it an island country from 'trade' perspective. He stressed on the need to continuously develop the Navy's capabilities as global trade is of great importance to India to secure its national interests. In his address, Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar stated INS Imphal possesses the distinction of being a shining symbol of Indian Navy's unflinching commitment towards achieving the vision of self-reliance in defence. INS Imphal has the unique distinction of being the first warship to be named after a city in the North-east, underscoring the importance and contribution of the region and Manipur to the nation and the Indian Navy. Its keel was laid on May 19, 2017 and the ship was launched on April 20, 2019. The ship sailed for her maiden sea sortie on April 28, 2023, and underwent comprehen-

Modi YouTube channel surpasses 20 mn subscriptions Becomes most subscribed channel among global leaders



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's YouTube channel achieved a significant milestone on Tuesday by surpassing 20 million subscriptions, making it the most subscribed channel among top global leaders.

Officials noted that the videos posted on Modi's channel have more than 4.5 billion views, far ahead of his global peers. Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro is second on the list of subscriber numbers with around 64 lakh -- less than a third of Modi's. In terms of views, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is second to the Indian prime minister with 22.4 crore, a small fraction of Modi's. The prime minister set up his YouTube channel in 2007 when he was Gujarat chief minister and is considered a pioneer in Indian politics in understanding the potential of social media in public communication and is credited for harnessing it to huge success.

Public Notice: Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mrs. Kuldip Kaur, Mr. Charanjeet Singh & Mr. Joginder Wario, Late Sangit Singh who are owners of Industrial Plot No. 72/32, area measuring 253.33 sq. yds, i.e. 211.80 sq. mtrs., comprised in Khata No. 25/30n, situated at Rajendra Nagar, Industrial Area Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Paragani Loni, Tehsil and District-Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, which got inheritance from her/his/husband/father Late Mr. Sangit Singh, who was owner of the aforesaid property & other land vide Khataoni record for the year of 1414-1419, and intend to mortgage the aforesaid property against the financial assistance from Profium Finance Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim (right / title / interest / creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP 136, Basement Floor, Uday Park, near Mohit Dairy, New Delhi-110049 Contact# 011-40046316 & 41667327

Public Notice: General public is hereby informed that We (1). Pradeep Kumar Ghosh (2) Sudeep Ghosh both late Shri Satya Ranjan Ghosh are filing application in L&DO for substitution of the property No. B-171, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110019 in the name of (1)Pradeep Kumar Ghosh (2) Sudeep Ghosh, on the grounds of Will / Relinquishment Deed. If there are any objections / claims from the general public on this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi or through an email at ldo@nic.in, within 30 days of publication of this notice. Name : Pradeep Kumar Ghosh Sudeep Ghosh Address : B-171, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110019 Phone : 9811486266

JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited Corporate identity Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287 Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Energy, Appasahae Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025 T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223 www.Jmfinancialarc.com DEMAND NOTICE Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd (formerly known as Dewan Housing and finance corporation Ltd) have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI Act") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("Assignment Agreement") in favour of JM Financial (JM) (herein referred as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorized Officer (JM) assigned for the Securitisation And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Table with 4 columns: Name of the Borrower (s)/ Guarantor (s), Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date, Description of secured asset (Immovable property). Rows include various borrowers like Vinod Kumar, Anurag Sehgal, Pardeep Kumar, etc., with their respective loan details and asset descriptions.

NRCW project in Gujarat inching closer to reality

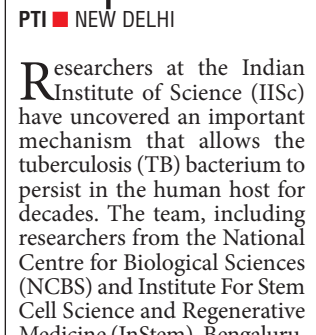


PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The much-ambitious National Referral Centre for Wildlife (NRCW) project proposed at Junagarh in Gujarat is inching towards reality with officials from the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) under the Union Environment Ministry is preparing blueprints on disease/species-based research from the perspective of emerging infectious diseases, national wildlife disease surveillance program and prevention and management of wildlife diseases in emergent situations. The proposed NRCW will be equipped with the highly sophisticated investigation and surveillance facilities for research and to pick up diseases both in animals and humans. The need for such an institute has been felt in view of the recent emergence and re-emergence of the threatening zoonotic diseases which calls for safe handling of animals by humans. While the land is being acquired, blueprint is being charted out for skill-based training and continued capacity-building of wildlife professionals and command control data & information management (Analytics) besides shaping wildlife health policy to be implemented at the Centre. These issues were discussed threadbare at the 2nd national stakeholder workshop on wildlife health and One Health Collaboration here. The workshop, chaired by Union Minister of State for Environment Ashwini Chaubey aimed at advancing the development of the national centre for wildlife (NRC-W) and fostering collaboration for One Health initiatives. The workshop served as a plat-

form for insightful discussions and a consultative approach towards the development of the National Referral Centre for Wildlife. Member Secretary, CZA Sanjay Shukla and DIGF, CZA Akanksha Mahajan deliberated on critical aspects of wildlife health management, said a statement from the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) under the Union Environment Ministry. Chaubey underscored the need for integrated surveillance covering humans, livestock, and wildlife. His statement comes amid reports that of 1407 human pathogens, 816 are zoonotic, i.e., capable of being transmitted naturally between animals and humans. "Mtb needs humans to survive. In many cases of Mtb infection, the immune system can detect the bug and clear it out," said Mayashree Das, a PhD student at IISc, and first author of the study published in the journal Science Advances. However, in several asymptomatic individuals, Mtb hides within deep oxygen-limiting pockets of the lung and enters a state of dormancy in which it does not divide and is metabolically inactive, successfully evading the immune system and TB drugs. "Due to persistence, there is a bacterial reservoir in a subset of the human population at any point which can reactivate and cause infection. Unless we understand persistence, we will not be able to eradicate TB," said Amit Singh, Associate Professor at IISc and corresponding author of the study. Singh's team grew Mtb in liquid cultures containing special supplements needed for its growth. Several proteins in Mtb depend on iron-sulphur clusters for functioning. These clusters consist of iron and sulphur atoms organised in various configurations like chains or cuboids. The iron atoms in the cluster can pass on electrons from one site of a protein complex to another in cellular reactions such as respiration and carbon metabolism. "The iron-sulphur cluster-containing proteins are impor-

Researchers uncover mechanism that allows TB persistence in body

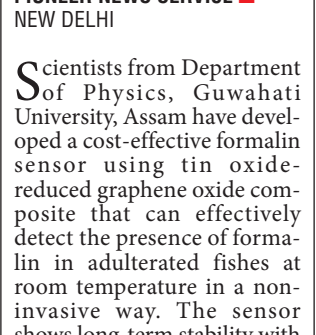


PTI NEW DELHI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have uncovered an important mechanism that allows the tuberculosis (TB) bacterium to persist in the human host for decades. The team, including researchers from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) and Institute For Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine (InStem), Bengaluru, found that a single gene involved in the production of iron-sulphur clusters could be crucial for the persistence of the TB bacterium. TB is caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis (Mtb), which can be present in the human body for decades without any symptoms. "Mtb needs humans to survive. In many cases of Mtb infection, the immune system can detect the bug and clear it out," said Mayashree Das, a PhD student at IISc, and first author of the study published in the journal Science Advances. However, in several asymptomatic individuals, Mtb hides within deep oxygen-limiting pockets of the lung and enters a state of dormancy in which it does not divide and is metabolically inactive, successfully evading the immune system and TB drugs. "Due to persistence, there is a bacterial reservoir in a subset of the human population at any point which can reactivate and cause infection. Unless we understand persistence, we will not be able to eradicate TB," said Amit Singh, Associate Professor at IISc and corresponding author of the study. Singh's team grew Mtb in liquid cultures containing special supplements needed for its growth. Several proteins in Mtb depend on iron-sulphur clusters for functioning. These clusters consist of iron and sulphur atoms organised in various configurations like chains or cuboids. The iron atoms in the cluster can pass on electrons from one site of a protein complex to another in cellular reactions such as respiration and carbon metabolism. "The iron-sulphur cluster-containing proteins are impor-

tant for essential processes such as energy production by respiration, enabling the bacteria to survive harsh conditions of the lungs and causing infection. So, we wanted to study the mechanisms that Mtb uses to build these iron-sulphur clusters," said Singh. These clusters are mainly produced by Mtb's SUF operon, a set of genes that get switched on together, the researchers said. However, there is another single gene called IscS that can also produce the clusters, they said. To solve this mystery of why the bacterium needs both, the researchers generated a mutant version of Mtb that lacked the IscS gene. They found that under normal and oxygen-limiting conditions, iron-sulphur clusters are produced mainly by the action of the IscS gene. However, when the bacterium faces a lot of oxidative stress, the iron atoms of the clusters become oxidised and released, damaging the clusters. Therefore, there is an increased demand for producing more clusters, which switches on the SUF operon. The researchers then sought to find out how the IscS gene contributes to disease progression. They infected mice models with the mutant version of Mtb lacking the IscS gene. The absence of the IscS gene led to severe disease in the infected mice rather than a persistent, chronic infection typically seen in TB patients. This is because, in the absence of the IscS gene, the SUF operon is highly activated - but in an unregulated fashion - leading to hypervirulence, the researchers said. Depleting both IscS and the SUF system dramatically reduced the persistence of Mtb in mice, they said.

Assam scientists develop sensor to detect fish food adulteration



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Scientists from Department of Physics, Guwahati University, Assam have developed a cost-effective formalin sensor using tin oxide-reduced graphene oxide composite that can effectively detect the presence of formalin in adulterated fishes at room temperature in a non-invasive way. The sensor shows long-term stability with a low detection limit. Food adulteration is the practice of adding illegal or harmful substances to food to make it appear more appealing or to increase its shelf life. Formaldehyde is a colourless, pungent gas that is used in a variety of industrial processes, including as a preservative in some foods, commonly in fish in developing countries. However, the use of formaldehyde in food is illegal in many countries, as it is a known carcinogen. Commercial formalin sensors for fish are primarily electrochemical-based or colorimetric-based. Electrochemical sensors are extensively used but are expensive. On the other hand, calorimetric sensors are less expensive. But both methods are invasive in nature, according to a statement here from the Department of Science and Technology. Moreover, low-level detection and selective detection are two major issues with these sensors. The development of 2D materials-based gas sensors has created a new avenue of effective detection of toxic vapors at room temperature. These sensors have the potential to detect the formalin evaporated from adulterated food products. Nanomaterials and Nanoelectronics Laboratory, headed by Dr. Hemen Kr. Kalita, Assistant Professor, Department of Physics, Guwahati University, Assam has developed this new technology. Graphene oxide (GO), the oxidized form of graphene, exhibits high solution processability and ease of chemical modification with other materials such as metals, metal oxides, or polymers.

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act. Authorised Officer JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited, acting in its capacity as Trustee of Aranya - Trust Place: Delhi

Rumours swirl around JD(U) chief resignation

PTI ■ PATNA
Rumours were afloat in Bihar on Tuesday that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's key aide Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan' has told the former he wanted to step down as JD(U) national president. At the state headquarters of the party here, leaders had a tough time fending off queries of journalists, who also wanted to know whether speculations of a rift between Kumar and Lalan, on account of growing proximity of the latter towards RJD president Lalu Prasad, had a grain of truth. "You speak of fissures in the JD(U). I say there is not even a scratch," asserted state minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, who had turned up at the party office on his weekly round. Chaudhary also blamed the rumours surrounding Lalan in the media, saying, "We, in the party, have heard nothing of that sort, but you people give things whatever spin you wish and then drop it when it suits your news cycle". He evaded a direct reply when asked whether Lalan was likely to make a formal offer of his resignation at the JD(U)'s meeting scheduled in Delhi later this week. "Please be informed that on



December 29, the party's national executive and national council meetings are going to be held. These were long overdue. Also, JD(U) leaders from across the country will sit together and discuss strategy for the Lok Sabha polls due in a

few months," said Chaudhary. His attention was drawn to a claim of senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi, who as a former deputy CM had known Kumar from close quarters, that the JD(U) supreme leader was growing uneasy with his party chief's closeness with his ally, and fearing a sabotage. "You will always see Sushil Kumar Modi speaking about JD(U), but never about his own party. This is because in the BJP he has become a nobody. His sense of mortification has caused his imagination to run wild," Chaudhary said. However, a senior JD(U) leader, requesting anonymity, said that Lalan has, indeed, expressed his desire to give up the top party post, which he has been occupying for more than a couple of years. The issue was understood to have come up for discussion when Kumar visited Lalan's house last week. The CM was said to be not happy with the request of Lalan, who wants to concentrate on retaining his Munger Lok Sabha seat, and feels responsibilities as party's national president made a lot of demand on his time and energy.

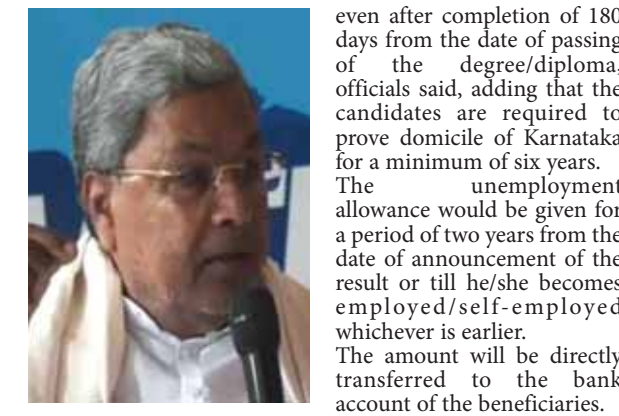
Criticism by Ajit shows my stand to side with Sharad: NCP MP Kolhe

PTI ■ PUNE
NCP MP from Shirur Lok Sabha constituency in Maharashtra, Amol Kolhe, on Tuesday said criticism by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who heads the rival faction of the party, shows that his stand to remain with Sharad Pawar was correct. Kolhe met Nationalist Congress Party founder Sharad Pawar at his residence in Pune a day ahead of launching a morchha on farmers' issues. In a veiled attack, Ajit Pawar recently targeted Kolhe, a member of the Sharad Pawar camp, for "neglecting" the Shirur constituency. The Deputy CM had also hinted at fielding a candidate from the Shirur seat in Pune district in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "I will ensure that the given candidate wins," he had told reporters. Speaking to reporters, Kolhe said the 'aakrosh morchha' of farmers will start from the foothills of Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, on Wednesday. The foot march will culminate at the collector's office in Pune after covering 70 km distance. "We will highlight



farmers' demands including lifting the ban on onion export, farm loan waiver, regular power supply, low price of milk and other issues," Kolhe told reporters. He said he met Sharad Pawar to seek his guidance. Queried about Ajit Pawar's criticism, Kolhe said it shows that his political stand (to remain loyal to Sharad Pawar) was correct. "I come from a middle-class background and I feel proud that I am challenged by leaders of such stature. Dada (Ajit Pawar) was our leader and it is not appropriate for a small worker like me to give a counter-reaction. I respect him. If he has made some remarks given that our political stands are different, I will meet him," he said.

Karnataka CM launches fifth poll guarantee 'Yuva Nidhi'



PTI ■ BENGALURU
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday launched the registration of the fifth and last poll guarantee 'Yuva Nidhi' here offering unemployment assistance to graduates and diploma holders. The disbursement of the scheme will start from January 12, 2024, which is the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The scheme offers monetary assistance of Rs 3,000 to the graduates and Rs 1,500 to the diploma holders who passed in the 2022-23 academic year. The money would be given to those who do not get a job

Kin of criminal open fire, constable killed

PTI ■ KANNAUJ (UP)
A constable was shot dead when a police team that had gone to arrest a history-sheeter came under fire from his family members, officials said on Tuesday. The alleged criminal and his son were also shot in the exchange of fire in Vishungarh police station area here and were then sent to a hospital in Kanauj for treatment, they said. Police constable Sachin Rathi (28) sustained a bullet injury in the incident and was sent to Kanpur for treatment where he succumbed to his injuries, Superintendent of Police (SP) Amit Kumar Anand said. Rathi, who was recruited into the police force in 2019, was to get married to another



constable this coming February, his family members said. The SP said Ashok Kumar alias Munna Yadav was a history-sheeter with 20 cases registered against him and there was a non-bailable warrant against him. On Monday police received information that Kumar was at his home following which a

Kanpur for treatment where he succumbed to his injuries late in the night, he said. The history-sheeter and his son have been sent to Tirva Medical College in Kanauj, he added. Anand said that two pistols have been recovered from Kumar and his son with which they were firing at the police. During a search at the house, a double barrel rifle was also found, police said. The mortal remains of the deceased were given full state honours at the police lines in the afternoon by officers, including SP Anand. Later, family members took the mortal remains of the deceased to Muzaffarnagar. Rathi's family members and the woman he was to marry in two months were inconsolable.

No lives lost in Assam in 2023 violence: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday asserted that no lives were lost in the state due to extremist violence in 2023, a year which also witnessed a "complete end to tribal militancy". Gradual removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act or



marking a successful year for the state," he said. The CM maintained that Assam has been transformed into an "abode of peace" and 2023 was "an unprecedented year as our policing and peace efforts bore fruit". The AFSPA has been gradually removed from the northeastern state, with only four districts now under its

jurisdiction, he said. It empowers security forces to conduct operations and arrest anyone without any prior warrant, besides giving immunity from arrest and prosecution to the forces if they shoot someone dead, officials said. Sarma also claimed that there has been a "complete end to tribal militancy" in Assam in

2023. A total of 8,756 former militants have been rehabilitated in the last two years, with over Rs 300 crore invested for the purpose, he said. Sarma added that skilling and ability enhancement training has been imparted to the surrendered militants, who are now "aiding in the state's economic growth".

2 dead after inhaling gas in fishing boat storage

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Two persons died and another was in a critical condition after inhaling gas accumulated in a storage chamber of a fishing boat here on Tuesday, police said. The incident took place at the New Fish Jetty when the workers were removing fish from the boat Anjani Putra around 11 am. The boat had returned to the coast around 2 am, and it is suspected that gas was generated due to rotting fish, said deputy commissioner of police Sanjay Latkar. A worker who climbed down into a storage chamber passed out. Five others who followed him inside also fell unconscious and all of them were rushed to the government-run J J Hospital, he said. Srinivas Anand Yadav (35) and boat owner Naga Don Sanjay (27), both hailing from Andhra Pradesh, died during treatment, he said.



Suresh Mekla, also from Andhra Pradesh, was on ventilator while the condition of the other three was stable, the official said. An accidental death case was registered at Yellow Gate police station and further probe was on, the DCP said.

Manpower abroad for software can get tax relief: Karnataka HC

PTI ■ BENGALURU
The High Court of Karnataka has set aside three reassessment notices of the Income Tax Department against EIT Services India Ltd (formerly Hewlett Packard) for three assessment years issued by the Income Tax Department and ruled that deputing manpower abroad for software development is eligible for tax exemption under Section 10A of the IT Act. The Commissioner of Income Tax (CIT), Bengaluru had ordered for the re-examination of the claim for deduction under Section 10A/80HHE of the Income Tax Act for the assessment years 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08 on the ground that "part of the petitioner's profits was related to rendering technical services outside India which was not eligible for deduction." The company filed three writ petitions challenging the re-assessment notices which was heard by the bench of Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav. The HC in its judgement on December 19 cited a circular issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2013 which clarified that "expenditure incurred for services to develop software outside India could be allowed under Section 10A of the IT Act if deputation is for development of software."

'Church destroyed identity of Tripura indigenous people'

PTI ■ AGARTALA
Accusing the church of destroying the identity of indigenous people, Janajati Suraksha Manch (JSM) leader Prakash Singh Uikey on Tuesday said they will not allow those who are attempting to convert tribal families. Uikey said the day is not far when people will have to visit museums in order to witness the culture of two ethnic tribes, the Reangs and Tripuris. According to Uikey, the church has destroyed the "unique identity" of the tribals by using conversion as a tool. "For the past 70 years, tribals who continued to adhere to their own customs, rituals, beliefs, traditions and culture have been deprived of receiving benefits guaranteed by the Constitution under Article 342 because of conversion," he said while addressing a rally here demanding the delisting of converted tribals. "After conversion, do the tribals follow their old tradition, culture and custom? That's why we want the Scheduled Tribe (ST)



status to be rolled back from the converted people", the JSM central committee member said. Uikey also made a reference to the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution which used to grant special status to Jammu & Kashmir. "If the Centre could abrogate Article 370 and amend the CrPC and IPC, why converted tribals can't be delisted from ST status? We hope the government, which has established a separate tribal welfare ministry, will delist the converted tribals from ST status in 2024", he said. The rally, which was initially slated on Christmas, was postponed for a day following a request by Chief Minister Manik Saha.

MiG-29K suffers tyre burst; passenger flights hit

PTI ■ PANAJI
A MiG-29 K fighter aircraft of the Indian Navy suffered a tyre burst on the taxiway at the Dabolim airport in Goa on Tuesday afternoon, just before it was to undertake a routine sortie, officials said. Nobody was injured in the incident. Due to the tyre burst, the aircraft got stranded on the taxiway, prompting authorities to shut the airport's runway till 4 pm, affecting the services of passenger flights, officials said. The runway operations resumed at around 3:52 pm, with an IndiGO flight landing from Kolkata, said Dabolim airport's director S V T Dhananjaya. Sources said more than 13 flights were either diverted or rescheduled due to the incident. "When the aircraft was on the taxiway ahead of its routine sortie, it suffered a tyre burst. Immediately after that, the fire brigade and other services were pressed into action," a navy spokesperson said, adding that the single-pilot aircraft was towed away from the taxiway. The official did not specify the time of the incident. The Dabolim airport, located in the South Goa district, is part of the naval base INS Hansa. The facility is used by naval aircraft during certain times of the day. Earlier in the day, S V T Dhananjaya had said the airport runway would remain shut for operations till 4 pm due to the tyre burst incident. "The services of 10 flights were affected. Some flights were diverted to the Manohar International Airport at Mopa," the airport director said.

Nava Kerala Sadas Cong slams Left Govt

PTI ■ KOZHIKODE (KER)
The Congress party on Tuesday lashed out at the Left government for its reported move to give good service entry to the police personnel who provided security to the recently concluded Nava Kerala Sadas and described it as a "cruel mockery" towards the opposition's agitation against the outreach programme. The grand old party alleged that the Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was questioning the common sense of the people of the state and the move was a reflection of his intolerance towards agitations. A section of the media reported that the government was planning to give good service entry to the police personnel considering their

"exemplary service" in providing security to the mass outreach programme. The reported move came amidst widespread criticism by the opposition parties over the alleged police atrocities towards its youth wing activists who had staged black flag protest against the Sadas. Hitting out at the Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly V D Satheesan charged that intolerance was Vijayan's "hallmark" and he was keen to intimidate his critics. He was talking to reporters in this northern district. He alleged that the good service entry was going to be awarded to the officer who had allegedly tried to strangle and kill a protesting Youth Congress activist in Kozhikode and another officer who cruelly assaulted KSU workers. Targeting Vijayan, the LoP further charged that the Communist Party leader who grew up through agitations is now showing intolerance and hatred towards struggles. It was the "cruellest mockery" in the history of Kerala, he alleged. Satheesan also alleged that the CM Vijayan's office was under the control of a group of conspirators. The 36-day-long Nava Kerala Sadas, an ambitious outreach programme of the Left government in the state, had concluded in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday amidst intense statewide protests by the opposition Congress and the BJP and their youth outfits.

Reservation of Jayamahala Palace Hotel land as 'green belt' has lapsed: HC

PTI ■ BENGALURU
The High Court of Karnataka has held that the reservation of the land on which the Jayamahala Palace Hotel stands as "reserved for the purposes of parks and green spaces," under the Revised Master Plan 2015 in 2007 has lapsed. Since the acquisition of the land under the RMP was not made within five years, the HC held that the designation had lapsed from the midnight of June 24, 2012. The property, earlier in the Oobarpad village, Ulsoor Hobli, Bengaluru was designated under new survey numbers of Jayamahala Main Road in Comprehensive Development Plan 2011 (CDP) approved in 1995. It is owned by the heirs of Jyotendra Sinhi Vikramsinhi, the erstwhile royal family of the Gondal State. "It is declared that the designation of the land of the petitioners for parks and green spaces, sports/playgrounds, cemeteries/burial ground in the Revised Master Plan, 2015 is deemed to have lapsed from midnight of 24.06.2012," Justice Suraj Govindaraj said in his judgment on December 15 on a petition filed by



Maharani Kumud Kumari and Maharaja Shri Himanshusinhi. The HC said that the acquisition process was not completed in the designated time period leading to the lapse. "The land of the petitioners having been designated for public use in terms of Clause (c) of subsection (1) of Section 12 of the Karnataka Town and Country Planning (KTCP) Act under the Revised Master Plan which came into effect on 25.06.2007, such designation is deemed to have lapsed from the midnight of 24.06.2012 since no acquisition has been made of the said land in terms of Subsection (1) or Subsection (2) of Section 69 of the KTCP Act," the HC held. The petition claimed that in the CDP of the year 2011 which was approved in 1995,

the aforesaid land was earmarked for usage for residential purposes. But in the RMP 2015 approved in 2007, it was changed and reserved for "purposes of parks and green spaces, sports/playgrounds, cemeteries/burial ground," and classified as a "green belt/zone." This was challenged before the HC in the petition filed in 2015. The HC gave its judgement recently. The HC said that the reservation "would lapse after a period of five years in terms of Subsection (2) of Section 69 of the KTCP Act, if the same were not acquired within the said period by agreement or by initiating proceedings under the Right To Fair Compensation And Transparency In Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation And Resettlement Act, 2013."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Gaining currency

The first payment in rupees to the UAE for crude oil gives a major push for making it a global currency

In a significant development in global trade and finance, India has made its first-ever payment for oil in rupees to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), marking a potential turning point in the quest to establish the rupee as a global currency. This move not only strengthens economic ties between India and the UAE but also has broader implications for the international financial landscape. The historic transaction took place as part of a trade agreement between India and the UAE, where India paid for a consignment of crude oil in its own currency rather than the traditionally used US dollar. This departure from the standard practice is seen as a bold step that could have a cascading effect on global trade dynamics. The move by India to make payments in rupee aligns with the nation's broader strategy of diversifying its currency reserves. Historically, the US dollar has been the dominant currency for international trade. By opting for the rupee, India is taking a step towards reducing its dependence on dollar and promoting the use



of its currency. The arrangement with the UAE proves that India has truly arrived in the world arena. Not only do many countries look up to India for direction and support but also follow the path it treads. As External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar rightly pointed out, the era of a bipolar world is over and "we are into a multipolar world" where a number of countries play pivotal roles. The payment in rupees not only has economic implications but also strengthens economic and strategic ties between India and the UAE.

It reflects confidence in each other's economies and sets a precedent for other nations to explore alternative currency options. However, it is not to suggest that the Indian rupee is anywhere near the dollar. The US dollar has long been the dominant currency in global trade, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of all foreign exchange (Forex) reserves and more than 80 per cent of global forex trading worldwide. One of the advantages of conducting trade in local currencies is the reduction of currency exchange risks. By sidestepping the need for conversions into a third-party currency like the US dollar, both India and the UAE can potentially save on transaction costs and minimise exposure to exchange rate fluctuations. Other countries may now be inspired to explore similar arrangements, challenging the longstanding dominance of the US dollar in the international financial system. But the initiative to make rupee payments poses certain challenges, too. The rupee is not as widely traded as the US dollar or the euro, which may hinder its immediate adoption on a large scale. Additionally, concerns about the rupee's stability and the need for a robust financial infrastructure will need to be addressed for the currency to gain broader acceptance. While challenges remain, the move surely signifies a shift in the traditional dynamics of international trade and finance. The global financial landscape may witness further diversification in currency usage, challenging the dominance of the dollar and contributing to a multipolar world economy.

PICTALK



Devotees take part in a 'shobha yatra' to celebrate Datta Jayanthi, in Chikmagalur

BNP gives Hasina a run for her money



ASHOK K MEHTA

Bangladesh goes to poll as Sheikh Hasina faces anti-incumbency and the BNP emerges as the favourite

Bangladesh's 12th parliamentary elections are to be held 11 days from now. The question is will it be a walkover/cakewalk for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League into her fourth consecutive and fifth overall term in office? When I was in Dhaka last month and asked people who would win the election, most including one person from our Embassy responded that if it was a free and fair election under a caretaker government Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh National Party would win. Anti-incumbency, price rise, unemployment and corruption, the usual culprits, were quoted as reasons for people's discontentment. In Dhaka, I witnessed mass mobilisation protests by the BNP that were countered by AL counter-protests leading to violence and wide scale arrest of BNP leaders and workers. Readymade Garment Workers - garment factories account for 85 per cent of Bangladesh's USD 53bn exports - also called hartal over wage dispute. Since 28 October, BNP's 12th hartal was held last week.

Former Ambassador to Bangladesh, Veena Sikri has noted that Dhaka has had elections under Army-backed and independent caretaker governments before. In the 2008 elections under the caretaker regime, AL won 260 of 300 seats. In the two following elections held sans caretaker government AL won both, with 259 and 245 seats. Begum Hasina won more seats under a caretaker government than in the one without. The question of freedom and fairness is left to the Election Commission and watchdogs, especially security forces. Similarly, on legitimacy, this time AL has given 26 seats to the third-largest Jatiyo Party and some seats to independent candidates while some 40 parties are registered to contest the elections. BNP is making the mistake of demanding a caretaker government - a provision was removed by a constitutional amendment by the Awami League - when it should be voicing people's grievances and discontentment. A senior journalist who must remain unnamed has said that India must do everything possi-



ble within the rule of law and concerning Bangladesh's sovereignty to ensure BNP does not come to power as it is pathologically opposed to India. Jamat e Islami an ally of BNP which was opposed to Bangladesh's independence and colluded with Pakistan Army's genocide during the army crackdown, has been banned from elections and its members facing charges of treason under the Special International Tribunal set up by AL. India cannot forget that the BNP provided sanctuaries to ULFA militants. India has called an "internal matter", the backsliding of democracy and persecution of minorities under "the authoritative Awami League government". I met a Hindu family belonging to the privileged class - educated, rich but most importantly, fought in the Liberation War, who are called Bada Lok/Bhadralok (intellectual). Between the very rich and the very poor, the middle class is very small. The minorities - Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Chakmas have declined from 12 per cent to 9 per cent of the population. Hindus celebrate their festivals escorted by police within allotted timings but they are always vulnerable. The preamble to the Constitution reads: "Bangladesh is a secular country" but later the provision 'Islamic State' was added. Mercifully there is no Shariah or blasphemy law - yet. India-Bangladesh relations are



IRONICALLY, CHINA AND INDIA ARE ON THE SAME PAGE ABOUT SHEIKH HASINA'S LIKELY RE-ELECTION IGNORING US CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY BACKSLIDING AND CONSEQUENT SANCTIONS

rated as the 'best' in the neighbourhood. Bangladesh has registered six to 7 per cent growth despite COVID and other international impediments overtaking India in human development indices, notably women empowerment. Trade relations are promising and zero tariffs despite no FTA. Bangladesh's decision to join China-backed RCEP will certainly worry India. Connectivity by land, air water is highest in the region. Bar the Teesta Agreement hitch, both sides describe relations as mutually beneficial though some irritants exist, more with Dhaka complaining about Home Minister Amit Shah referring to illegal immigrants as termites and the killing by BSF of 300 civilians on the India-Bangladesh border.

It is in the 'enhanced defence cooperation' that is growing phenomenally thanks to the rejuvenated legacy of the 1971 Liberation War, a monumental event that has faded from contemporary conversation and instead hyped anti-India feelings. India has provided USD 500 mn LOC for buying Indian military hardware which is so far mainly non-kinetic. The Chinese are prettily ensconced and are primary (75 per cent) providers of military equipment including light tanks. Defence procurement is regulated under Group A from West, Group B from China and Group C from India. Turkey has also become a leading military

goods supplier. The Chinese have built a naval submarine base at Pekua near Cox's Bazar and gifted two submarines. They are fishing for a naval base close by. China has invested heavily in civilian infrastructure including the latest Padma Bridge, Sylhet airport and the Kainefuli tunnel. Beijing enjoys goodwill as well as influence, despite sometimes being openly critical of Bangladesh's endorsement of Indo-Pacific and QUAD though it is a recipient of Chinese USD 41bn investment in BRI.

Ironically, China and India are on the same page about Sheikh Hasina's likely re-election ignoring the US critique of democracy backsliding and consequent sanctions. Bangladesh Army which deposed AL, obliterated Sheikh Mujib's legacy and ruled between 1971 and 1991, has been tamed by Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hasina. She has raised the defence budget by 123 per cent since 2011 and bought over the Army by giving it power, status and money by insulating it from politics. Ironically it still treats India as Foxland in its war games. In this era of uncertainty, India has put all its eggs in the Hasina basket.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PUNISH THE GUILTY FOR ATROCITIES

Sir - The army has ordered a "high-level" internal probe into the alleged torture and custody deaths of three (Shawkat Hussain (22), Safer Hussain (45) and Shabir Ahmed (32) civilians in the Poonch district of Jammu and identified local commanders who are likely to face action, military sources said. But it is clear like daylight when the government has announced compensation for each of the deceased (who were given electric shocks and chilli powder was inserted in their private parts, no questions were asked of them) and also compassionate appointments to the next of kin of each deceased.

Had they not died in army custody, the government would not have announced compensation and jobs. The Indian Army stands committed to extending full support and cooperation in the conduct of investigations. But despite registering cases in multiple instances earlier against the army, the accused soldiers have rarely been prosecuted. People wonder if this is what 'Naya Kashmir' that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah always blabbered about in Parliament is all about.

However, people want that there has to be a speedy investigation and punishment meted out to those responsible. People of Jammu & Kashmir, who have long suffered from such acts of impunity, expect accountability to be fixed in the matter and justice done

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

RAMPANT INFLATION

Sir - Today, inflation has become a major challenge at the global level. The common people suffer from the brunt of inflation the most. Prices of vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, peas, garlic and ginger have been skyrocketing in the last few months. The prices of vegetables, spices, grains, milk and other fertilisers also continue to rise. Due to the high cost of pulses, today pulses have disappeared from the plates of the poor. Inflation on the ground is much higher than the figure. Daily items like vegeta-

Judiciary gets wings



A country's progress is often measured on how much it caters to the needs and aspirations of the common man in terms of speedy disposal of pending cases. It becomes much more important, given the diversity and increasing population of a nation as more manpower is needed for the efficient delivery of justice. However, ever since November 2022 when Justice D Y Chandrachud took charge as the Supreme Lawgiver of India's justice delivery system, there has been a spurt in terms of disposing of cases. At a time when crores of cases have been moving at a snail's pace for years leading to the

delaying of the justice delivery system often equated with denial of justice, 52191 cases were disposed of in 2023 against 39200 cases that were decided in 2022 this must be seen as a positive development, an increase of 33% from the previous year.

Some of the key takeaways and early interventions were hybrid hearing systems, an RTI portal SCR electronic version of SC online access report to thousands of judgements. With the modern system of communication making major strides personal liberty, bail, and habeas corpus, are being given a new lease of life as they are being taken up in summer vacation. With technology being integrated into the system, listing of cases has come down from 10 days to seven. The time frame for verification is now on Integrated Case Management Information system, launched in 2017. This is a significant departure from the past that must be appreciated. Lower courts must take a leaf out of the Supreme Court's books so that justice delivered is fast-paced.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

bles, fruits, oils, medicines, shoes, slippers, etc. have become expensive. Despite the decline in crude oil prices in the global market, the problems of the general public are increasing due to the non-reduction in gasoline and diesel prices. Due to the high prices of petroleum products, the prices of all materials are rising. The situation is that due to inflation the demand has decreased. The government should reduce the prices of petroleum products to provide relief to the general public from inflation.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

WINTER SESSION SANS SUBSTANCE

Sir - Some worthwhile transactions were carried out and some bills were passed but both houses were drowned in protests and suspensions in the recently concluded winter session of parliament. As it turned out, a slew of bills were passed in the absence of 146 members on the last day without a meaningful discussion. The smoke bomb

incident dominated the fag end of the session; protests against the security breach and the inability to secure the statements of both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister on the floor agitated the opposition members so much that they had to face suspensions.

The opposition and the government were at each other's throats. Opposition parties thought they had a golden opportunity to put the government on the mat but failed in their 'mission'. Indeed, the session began and ended in 'peacefully with the intervening chaos and confusion. Contentious issues that begged for constructive debates were sidelined, and the nation was let down. Unsurprisingly, going by the past, the parliamentarians seem unfazed by what the tax-payers think of their behaviour.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Can AI attain parity with humans?



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The growth of AI has rapidly intruded into every sphere of scientific activities as well in research activities

Every year, the prestigious scientific journal Nature selects ten individuals who played significant roles in crucial scientific discoveries from that year. The scientific journal compiles an annual list of ten people they believe have had a major impact on science, called Nature's 10. No matter their stance on science, these nominees have made a lasting impression. Reporters and editors at Nature assess people whose positions have significantly influenced science or whose impact on the world is significant as part of the selection process. The list includes short biographies of the people responsible for some of the year's most important discoveries and events.

The compilation also features five people named "ones to watch" for the coming year. This year's list, which was published on December 13, made every Indian proud as it featured our Kalpana Kalahasti, who played a crucial part in ensuring Chandrayaan-3's triumphant touchdown on the Moon, along with global stalwarts. But this year's Nature's 10 will



be written in the annals of human history, as for the first time, it featured a non-human entity. The AI-based ChatGPT has found a place in the list, along with human scientific counterparts. Why incorporate a computer program into a compilation of individuals who have influenced science in 2023? ChatGPT isn't a human being, but in numerous aspects, this software has significantly and extensively impacted the field of science throughout the past year. ChatGPT, a chatbot created by OpenAI, was released on November 30, 2022. The AI-based bot ChatGPT has gained wide acceptance among the scientific community, as well as among the public, since 2022. In just five days of launch, ChatGPT crossed 1 million users. By January 2023 (two months after its launch), ChatGPT users grew by 9900% - meaning it gained 100 million

active users. According to the latest available data, ChatGPT has around 180.5 million users.

Within a short time of its inception, ChatGPT has found profound acceptance among the research community. It acts as a valuable tool in scientific research across various domains. ChatGPT can assist researchers in performing literature reviews by succinctly summarising and extracting crucial details from an extensive array of scientific journals and articles. It offers succinct summaries of current research, aiding researchers in identifying deficiencies in the literature or locating pertinent studies. ChatGPT can assist researchers with data analysis by providing insights, hypotheses, or explanations using given datasets. It can assist in the interpretation of intricate findings, providing supplementary viewpoints or indicating possible links within the data. ChatGPT is frequently used by researchers as a writing aid, often to draft sections of research papers, proposals, or reports. The generation of content that is coherent and well-structured

can be facilitated by it. The basic objective of ChatGPT is to maintain discussions reasonably and compellingly that are consistent with its training data. Nevertheless, in the process of achieving this objective, it, along with other generative artificial intelligence (AI) programmes, is transforming the landscape of scientific endeavour. The advent of this transition has rekindled conversations about the limits of artificial intelligence (AI), the fundamental nature of human intellect, and the most effective ways to regulate the interaction between the two. One of the reasons that a non-human entity was chosen to be included in this year's edition of Nature's 10 is because of this issue. Nature's list also recognises the creators of such AI-based technologies. Ilya Sutskever, the chief scientist and cofounder of OpenAI, the organization that created ChatGPT, has also found a place among Nature's 10.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

DOWRY IS A SOCIAL EVIL, NEEDS TO GO

Despite progress, dowry still remains a menace in the Indian society



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood said by Mahatma Gandhi it is being said over and again that 'India is on the verge of becoming a Developed Nation.' This sounds really good to all the Indians, as we might then be at par with other developed countries of the world. No more we would now be considered as a backward nation with poor technological know-how & below the average education system. However, with all this positive & hopeful news, how should we react to various news about 'Bride Burning' resulting from the age-old dreadful evil system of "Dowry."

It is quite surprising that in spite of so much development, we Indians have still not had success in total abolition of the 'Dowry System' that is as old as man is. 'No dowry No marriage' is the biggest fear in India as a result no parents wish to have a daughter in their home. In fact, some Indians shamefully believe that bringing up a daughter is like watering one's neighbour's land. Unseasonable dowry demands from the groom's family negatively affect the financial conditions of the bride's family. The rapacious in-laws make all sorts of attempts to extort maximum dowry from the bride's parents as a result of this, today a girl who comes without dowry has little or no value at all in the marriage market. As recent news reports suggest, this barbarous practice has either led parents to borrow huge sums of money or it has driven brides to commit suicide or has caused recrimination and an alarming number



of cases of wife-burning and wife-beating, thereby bringing loom and disaster to countless homes. It would not be exaggerating to say that the increasing amount of female foeticide in India is in some way because of this evil system of dowry. If we see its root then we will find that this evil is a typical expression of a socio-economic system that is built on the axiom that a woman is of less intrinsic value than a man.

Leave aside the reference to the old days, even today the laws of the state transfix the husband's name on the woman, for in official transactions, a woman is required to give her 'married name' also. Thus, bride burning or wife burning which has caused a countrywide wave of consternation is an outcome of our very own defective value system. It is a sign of extreme moral decay. It is a disease that afflicts a society that has come to regard money as the highest god.

Moreover, it should be realised that a greedy man, in pursuit of personal gain, would always brush aside consideration of legal barriers and invent covert means to circumvent the law. The real solution, therefore, lies in moral and social reform which cannot be accomplished in isolation. It can form only a part of a comprehensive scheme for the outlook and the belief that fundamentally, men and women are souls and that each has a role complementary to the others.

Society must also be given the realisation that there is a moral law in the world, which none, however high and influential can violate with impunity that a person who can go to the extent of extracting dowry from his wife and can indulge in wife-beating or wife-burning, is a mere degenerate who, in his day-to-day dealings, can throw all moral norms to winds and the first thing, therefore, needed is to reform this potential criminal rather than give him a girl in marriage. So, c'mon let us all make a strong resolve to educate our girls and sensitize our boys to burn this evil system from its roots & make a society where each soul has a right to live with dignity & self-respect.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

A recap of turmoil and triumphs in 2023



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

The defining year of AI, 2023, offered us glimpses into understanding the plight of humanity under 'despotic democracy' in many purported democratic nations

The year 2023 witnessed a profound clash between human existence and technological ascension. As machines surpassed algorithmic boundaries, humanity, paradoxically, embraced a perilous sprint towards self-imposed ignorance. From the ruthless expulsion of Afghan War refugees by Pakistan to the relentless march of Artificial Intelligence reshaping life's core, the world grappled with unprecedented shifts. Emerging threats in space programs and manufactured wars in Ukraine and elsewhere set a foreboding tone, while natural disasters claimed lives across Turkey, Morocco, and Afghanistan. In the midst of these upheavals, the demographic landscape transformed, as India eclipsed China as the most populous nation. In this crucible of change, humanity stands at the crossroads of technological marvels and enduring struggles, navigating an uncertain future.

In the Middle East, optimism for improved relations crumbled as Hamas attacked Israel, leading to the deadliest day in the nation's history. The conflict escalated, drawing global condemnation for alleged war crimes and prompting a U.S. shift from unequivocal support to calls for protecting civilians, leaving the resolution and aftermath uncertain as the year concluded. Simultaneously, Artificial Intelligence (AI) reached a pivotal juncture in 2023, notably exemplified by the advancement of technologies like large language models (LLM). The latest iteration, reportedly ten times more sophisticated, fueled rapid interest from governments, businesses, and individuals. Optimists lauded AI's role in scientific breakthroughs, while pessimists warned of societal risks, including mass unemployment and heightened social inequalities. The year emerged as a defining moment for AI, epitomized by figures like Altman pushing boundaries, emphasizing the inevitability of business evolution, and underscoring AI's potential to reshape civilization itself, echoing Aldous Huxley's words, 'civilization is sterilization.'

In 2023, climate change ceased to be a distant threat, emerging as an undeniable global reality. The year potentially witnessed record-high temperatures in the last 125,000 years, breaching the 2°C limit set by the 2015 Paris Agreement and triggering a deluge of extreme weather events. From historic wildfires to punishing droughts and record floods, the consequences were stark. The ominous notion of 'wet bulb temperature' entered the global lexicon, highlighting the lethal combination of high humidity and temperatures. Amid this crisis, glimpses of optimism appeared, with surging investments in clean energy and the promising emergence of hydrogen. However, scepticism persisted regarding the scalability of these solutions against the backdrop of escalating fossil fuel production. International forums like the COP-28 provided conversational platforms, yet the vast chasm between rhetoric and action underscored the daunting challenge of effectively addressing climate change.

In purported 'democratic nations,' individuals often find themselves compelled to adhere to what is termed a 'despotic democracy,' where the emphasis lies on the will of the majority, fostering a system adept at constructing a series of fantasies to perpetuate its influence through human idiocy in decision-making. Conversely, the democratic fabric, particularly in Africa, is experiencing upheaval, as evidenced by



THE YEAR WITNESSED RECORD-HIGH TEMPERATURES IN THE LAST 125,000 YEARS, BREACHING THE 2°C LIMIT SET BY THE 2015 PARIS AGREEMENT AND TRIGGERING A DELUGE OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

coups casting doubt on the stability of democracies. The military ousting of Niger's democratically elected president in July triggered regional tensions while neighbouring juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso responded with threats of war. In August, Gabon witnessed a military takeover with vague promises of eventual elections.

As 2024 unfolds, elections will define the political landscape across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the West. Across Asia in particular, democracies representing 2.2 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$8.9 trillion brace for pivotal polls. From the scheduled January elections in Bangladesh to pivotal contests in India, Russia, and the United States, where the Presidential race in November holds significant weight, the global stage is set for political upheaval. Anticipation surrounds the possibility of a return to power for the ruling Awami League in Bangladesh, securing a fourth consecutive term and affirming Sheikh Hasina's status as the world's longest-serving female leader. In the electoral theatre, the ejection seat holds the fate of leaders like Justin Trudeau in Canada, with Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre eyeing a potential succession bid.

In troubled Ukraine, martial law spared President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from elections, allowing him to consolidate power. Despite a desperate plea for military service targeting Ukrainian men aged 25 to 60 abroad, over 700,000 from this group have fled since the conflict's onset, casting doubts on the enforceability of the invitation that carries the threat of sanctions for non-compliance. In 2023, Ukraine's counteroffensive against the Russian army faced resistance, leaving 18% of its terri-

tory still under Russian control. The war persists, and Vladimir Putin remains confident in Russia's ability to outlast Western support for Ukraine.

India, with its Lok Sabha election in April-May 2024, anticipates the incumbent coalition, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to secure a resounding victory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a diplomatic linchpin, played a crucial role in bridging global disparities during 2023. As the chasm between wealthy democracies and developing nations widened, Modi's adept diplomacy fostered compromises on climate policy and debt issues. Emphasizing national interest, Modi's leadership in the G7 and G20 reinforced India's standing on the global stage, though the quality of once-celebrated democracy in-house appeared to be frightening. On the flip side, President Xi Jinping, his main competitor, has played a significant role on the global political stage, engaging in BRICS and APEC, and spearheading peace efforts for Ukraine and Palestine. In the Maldives, the political scene shifts with the opposition coalition, led by the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the People's National Congress, anticipating a parliamentary majority in the 2024 elections. President Mohamed Muizzu, triumphant in the 2023 presidential race, positions himself for streamlined policymaking amidst the changing geopolitical landscape marked by uncertainty and determination. Meanwhile, Indonesia anticipates a seismic moment as presidential and legislative elections coincide in February, with predictions of a run-off in mid-2024. Prabowo Subianto, supported by incumbent Joko Widodo (Jokowi), aims for victory as the

chairman of the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) and the current defence minister. In South Korea's April legislative election, prevailing expectations point to the liberal Minjoo Party securing parliamentary dominance, albeit with a reduced seat share. Iran, too, braces for legislative elections amid another political transformation.

Pakistan's National Assembly election in February is poised to elevate the ruling coalition, led by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), with military alliances fortifying their majority. Sri Lanka, marred by economic collapse in 2022, anticipates a presidential election by September. However, the incumbent president contemplates delaying the election to extend the IMF program's impact. Mongolia charts its course with parliamentary elections in June, where the ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) aims to retain dominance, albeit with a potentially narrower margin. In 2024, the technopolar world, as framed by Ian Bremmer, may intensify the polarization of multipolarism and politics, spanning the West and the Global South. A looming spectre emerges, teasing the possibility of an investable space conflict, an unprecedented venture into the unknown. In this tumult, the certainties we once knew may dissipate, leaving a transformed world where the only constant is change. Here's to navigating the uncharted waters of 2024, where the very essence of humanity may find itself reshaped amid the dynamic forces at play. Wishing you resilience and courage in the face of the unknown.

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

Rise in child labour: Why children always pay the price

Studies by ILO show a significant rise in child labour in India in recent years, mostly driven by the Covid 19 pandemic

It was a bitterly cold winter night. But child activist Kailash Satyarthi and his team hardly felt the chill. The burning determination to rescue bonded labourers, especially children, employed at the stone quarry in Haryana's Dadri Kalan, helped them ignore the falling temperatures as they waited for the right moment to achieve their goal. Discreet investigations prior to this rescue mission had revealed that the best time to raid the quarry was between 5 and 6 am. It was around this time that the gun-toting guard took an hour-long break and went to his village to freshen up.



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

As soon as the clock struck five and the guard left, Satyarthi and his team swung

into action. They managed to rescue 40 labourers, many of them children. While the adults were helped into the waiting truck, Satyarthi bundled as many children as possible in his car and drove off as fast as he could. While driving, he remembered there were some bananas in the back of the car.

He asked one of the children to distribute them to everyone. To his shock, he realised the children had never seen a banana before when they said they had never seen an onion or potato in this shape before. When he explained the banana was an edible fruit, the children began biting into it without knowing that it had to be peeled first. The sadness that had engulfed Satyarthi on seeing

the dire condition of the children lessened when he saw their amazement and happy faces after they finally tasted the banana. Just then, a question by Devli, a small girl sitting closest to him in the car, cut short his sense of relief. "Why didn't you come sooner?" This innocent, yet anguished query was to shake him to the core. At once he strengthened his resolve to work even harder to return their stolen childhood. This was going to be a dangerous task and Satyarthi would survive several fatal attacks while carrying out these rescue missions. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts by him, his brave team and field partners, over 15,000 children have been rescued from bonded labour and slavery over the



last four decades. Devli is now married with two children of her own. The education she received at the Ballika Ashram (Home for Girls) run by Satyarthi's not-for-profit Bachpan Bachao Andolan, not only changed

her life but also nurtured her leadership qualities. She began to speak up openly against child labour and became an inspiration for others. In 2009, she was invited to speak on the right to education at the UN General

Assembly in New York. After completing her education, she moved back to her village so that she could ensure no child was forced into work or remained bereft of education. Devli's stirring journey is among the 12 narrated in Satyarthi's book on stories of children rescued from slavery aptly titled "Why Didn't You Come Sooner?" Although it took him 12 years to write, the 2014 Nobel Laureate says these stories have been waiting to be told for much longer. The 270-page book highlights how children are trafficked, physically and sexually abused and forced into child labour.

Whether it is the story of Sabo, a girl rescued from a brick kiln in 1981, or of emaciated Bhavna, who took

years to overcome her trauma of being sexually exploited at the circus she was forced to work in, or of little Kalu labouring in rug weaving, their heart-wrenching accounts are a harsh reminder that the scourge of child labour needs to be completely eliminated. According to studies by the ILO and the Campaign Against Child Labour, there has been a significant rise in child labour in India in recent years. While much of it has been driven by the Covid 19 pandemic and the closure of schools, why is it that children always pay the price?

(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)

Biden orders strikes on Iranian-aligned group

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden ordered the United States military to carry out retaliatory airstrikes against Iranian-backed militia groups after three US service members were injured in a drone attack in northern Iraq. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said one of the US troops suffered critical injuries in the attack that occurred earlier Monday. The Iranian-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah and affiliated groups, under an umbrella of Iranian-backed militants, claimed credit for the attack that utilized a one-way attack drone.

Iraqi officials said US strikes targeting militia sites early Tuesday killed one militant and injured 18. They came at a time of heightened fears of a regional spillover of the Israel-Hamas war. Iran announced Monday that an Israeli strike on the outskirts of the Syrian capital of Damascus killed one of its top generals, Razi Mousavi, who had been a close companion of Gen Qassem Soleimani, the former head of Iran's elite Quds Force. Soleimani was slain in a US drone strike in Iraq in January 2020.

Iranian officials vowed revenge for the killing of Mousavi but did not immediately launch a retaliatory strike. The militia attack Monday in northern Iraq was launched prior to the strike in Syria that killed Mousavi.

Biden, who was spending Christmas at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland, was alerted about the

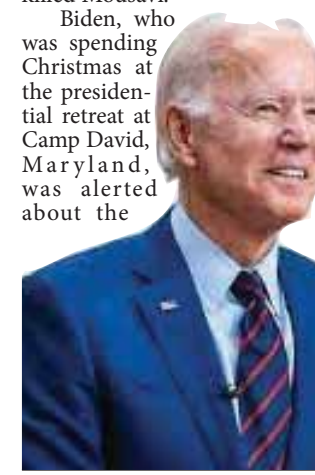
attack by White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan shortly after it occurred Monday and ordered the Pentagon and his top national security aides to prepare response options to the attack on an air base used by American troops in Irbil. Sullivan consulted with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. Biden's deputy national security adviser, Jon Finer, was with the president at Camp David and convened top aides to review options, according to a US official, who was not authorised to comment publicly and requested anonymity. Within hours, Biden convened his national security team for a call in which Austin and Gen CQ Brown, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed Biden on the response options. Biden opted to target three locations used by Kataib Hezbollah and affiliated groups, the official said.

The US strikes were carried out at about 4:45 am Tuesday in Iraq, less than 13 hours after the US personnel were attacked. According to US Central Command, the retaliatory strikes on the three sites "destroyed the targeted facilities and likely killed a number of Kataib Hezbollah militants."

"The President places no higher priority than the protection of American personnel serving in harm's way," Watson said. "The United States will act at a time and in a manner of our choosing should these attacks continue."

The latest attack on US troops follows months of escalating threats and actions against American forces in the region since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel that sparked the devastating war in Gaza.

The dangerous back-and-forth strikes have escalated since Iranian-backed militant groups under the umbrella group called the Islamic Resistance in Iraq and Syria began striking US facilities October 17, the date that a blast at a hospital in Gaza killed hundreds.



Right to protest under threat in Britain

AP ■ LONDON

For holding a sign outside a courthouse reminding jurors of their right to acquit defendants, a retiree faces up to two years in prison. For hanging a banner reading "Just Stop Oil" off a bridge, an engineer got a three-year prison sentence. Just for walking slowly down the street, scores of people have been arrested. They are among hundreds of environmental activists arrested for peaceful demonstrations in the U.K., where tough new laws restrict the right to protest.

The Conservative government has sought to prevent the Israel-Hamas war from spiraling into a wider regional conflict that either opens up new fronts of Israeli fighting or draws the US in directly. The administration's measured response — where not every attempt on American troops has been met with a counter-attack — has drawn criticism from Republicans. The US has thousands of troops in Iraq training Iraqi forces and combating remnants of the Islamic State group, and hundreds in Syria, mostly on the counter-IS mission. They have come under dozens of attacks, though as yet none fatal, since the war began on October 7, with the US attributing responsibility to Iran-backed groups. "While we do not seek to escalate conflict in the region, we are committed and fully prepared to take further necessary measures to protect our people and our facilities," Austin said in a statement.

The clashes put the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in a delicate position. He came to power in 2022 with the backing of a coalition of Iranian-backed parties, some of which are associated with the same militias launching the attacks on US bases.

al democracy. "Legitimate protest is part of what makes any country a safe and civilized place to live," said Jonathan Porritt, an ecologist and former director of Friends of the Earth, who joined a vigil outside London's Central Criminal Court to protest the treatment of demonstrators. "The government has made its intent very clear, which is basically to suppress what is legitimate, lawful protest and to use every conceivable mechanism at their disposal to do that."

Britain is one of the world's oldest democracies, home of the Magna Carta, a centuries-old Parliament and an independent judiciary. That democratic system is underpinned by an "unwritten constitution" — a set of laws, rules, conventions and judicial decisions accumulated over hundreds of years.

The effect of that patchwork is "we rely on self-restraint by governments," said

Andrew Blick, author of "Democratic Turbulence in the United Kingdom" and a political scientist at King's College London. "You hope the people in power are going to behave themselves."

But what if they don't? During three turbulent and scandal-tarnished years in office, Boris Johnson pushed prime ministerial power to the limits. More recently, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has asked Parliament to overrule the U.K. Supreme Court, which blocked a plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda.

Such actions have piled pressure on Britain's democratic foundations. Critics say cracks have appeared.

As former Conservative justice minister David Lidington put it: "The good chap theory of checks and balances has now been tested to destruction."

GOVERNMENT TAKES AIM AT PROTESTERS

The canaries in the coal mine of the right to protest are

environmental activists who have blocked roads and bridges, glued themselves to trains, splattered artworks with paint, sprayed buildings with fake blood, doused athletes in orange powder and more to draw attention to the threats posed by climate change.

The protesters, from groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain, argue that civil disobedience is justified by a climate emergency that threatens humanity's future.

Sunak has called the protesters "selfish" and "ideological zealots," and the British government has responded to the disruption with laws constraining the right to peaceful protest. Legal changes made in 2022 created a statutory offense of "public nuisance," punishable by up to 10 years in prison, and gave police more powers to restrict protests judged to be disruptive.

It was followed by the 2023 Public Order Act, which broadened the definition of "serious disruption," allowing

police to search demonstrators for items including locks and glue. It imposes penalties of up to 12 months in prison for protesters who block "key infrastructure," defined widely to include roads and bridges.

The government said it was acting to "protect the law-abiding majority's right to go about their daily lives." But Parliament's cross-party Joint Human Rights Committee warned that the changes would have "a chilling effect on the right to protest."

Days after the new act took effect in May, six anti-monarchist activists were arrested before the coronation of King Charles III before they had so much as held up a "Not My King" placard. All were later released without charge.

In recent months the pace of protests and the scale of arrests has picked up, partly as a result of a legal tweak that criminalized slow walking, a tactic adopted by protesters to block traffic by marching at low speed along roads.

At least 140 villagers killed by suspected herders in Nigeria

AP ■ ABUJA (NIGERIA)

At least 140 people were killed by gunmen who attacked remote villages over two days in north-central Nigeria's Plateau state, survivors and officials said Tuesday in the latest of such mass killings this year blamed on the West African nation's farmer-herder crisis. The assailants targeted 17 communities during the "senseless and unprovoked" attacks on Saturday and Sunday, during which most houses in the areas were burned down, Plateau Gov Caleb Mutwang said Tuesday in a broadcast on the local Channels Television.

"As I am talking to you, in Mangu local government alone, we buried 15 people. As of this morning, in Bokkos, we are counting not less than 100 corpses. I am yet to take stock

of (the deaths in) Barkin Ladi," Gov Mutwang said. "It has been a very terrifying Christmas for us here in Plateau."

Amnesty International Nigeria's office told The Associated Press that it has so far confirmed 140 deaths in the Christian-dominated Bokkos and Barkin-Ladi local government areas of Plateau based on data compiled by its workers on the ground and from local officials, though locals feared a higher death toll with some people unaccounted for. Some of the locals said that it took more than 12 hours before security agencies responded to their call for help, a claim the AP couldn't independently verify, but which echoes past concerns about slow interventions in Nigeria's deadly security crisis, which has killed hundreds this year, including in Plateau.

"I called security but they never came. The ambush started 6 in the evening but security reached our place by 7 in the morning," said Sunday Dawum, a youth leader in Bokkos. At least 27 people were killed in his village, Mbom Mbaru, including his brother, he said.

No group took responsibility for the attacks though the blame fell on herders from the Fulani tribe, who have been accused of carrying out such mass killings across the north-west and central regions where the decadeslong conflict over access to land and water has further worsened the sectarian division between Christians and Muslims in Africa's most populous nation.

The Nigerian army said it has begun "clearance operations" in search of the suspects, with the help of other security

agencies, although arrests are rare in such attacks.

"We will not rest until we bring all those culpable for these dastardly acts to book," said Abdullsalam Abubakar, who commands the army's special intervention operation in Plateau and neighbouring states.

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who was elected this year after promising to help tackle the security challenges that his predecessor failed to address, has yet to make any public comments about the latest attacks days after they happened.

Tinubu's government and others in the past haven't taken any "tangible action" to protect lives and ensure justice for victims in the conflict-hit northern region, Amnesty International Nigeria director Isa Sanusi told the AP.

Turkish parliament resumes debate on Sweden's NATO bid

Ankara (AP): The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee was poised on Tuesday to resume deliberations on Sweden's bid to join NATO, days after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan linked the Nordic country's admission on US approval of Turkey's request to purchase F-16 fighter jets. NATO-member Turkey lifted its objection to Sweden joining the trans-Atlantic alliance in July but the ratification process has since stalled in parliament. Turkey accuses Sweden of not taking Turkey's security concerns seriously enough, including its fight against Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers to be security threats.

This month, Erdogan threw another obstacle by openly linking ratification of Sweden's NATO membership to the US Congress' approval of Turkey's request to purchase 40 new F-16 fighter jets and kits to modernise its existing fleet.

The Turkish leader also called on the two legislatures to act "simultaneously" and said Canada and other NATO allies must lift arms embargoes imposed on Turkey.

The White House has backed the Turkish F-16 request but there is strong opposition in Congress to military sales to Turkey.

The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee had begun discussing Sweden's membership in NATO last month. The meeting however, was adjourned after legislators from Erdogan's ruling party submitted a motion for a postponement on grounds that some issues needed more clarification and that negotiations with Sweden had not "matured" enough. If approved by the committee, Sweden's bid would then need to be approved by the full assembly.

Israeli forces bombard central Gaza

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces bombarded Palestinian refugee camps in central Gaza on Tuesday, residents said, in apparent preparation to expand their ground offensive into a third section of the besieged territory. The opening of a potential new battle zone points to the long and destructive road still ahead as Israel vows to crush Hamas after its Oct 7 attack on southern Israel. For weeks, Israeli forces have been engaged in heavy urban fighting in northern Gaza and in the southern city of Khan Younis, driving Palestinians into further smaller corners of territory in search of refuge.

Despite international pressure for a cease-fire and US calls for a reduction in civilian casualties, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday warned that the fight "isn't close to finished".

Israel's offensive has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 20,600 Palestinians, two-thirds of them

women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants among the dead.

Meanwhile, there were new signs of the Israel-Hamas war enflaming tensions around the region. An Israeli airstrike in Syria killed an Iranian general, bringing vows of revenge from Iran. US warplanes hit Iranian-backed militias in Iraq who had carried out a drone strike that wounded American soldiers there.

Residents of central Gaza on Tuesday described a night of shelling and airstrikes shaking the Nuseirat, Mughazi and Bureij camps. The camps are built-up towns, housing Palestinians driven from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war and their descendants — and now also crowded with people who fled from the north. "The bombing was very intense," Radwan Abu Sheitta, a Palestinian teacher said by phone from his home in Bureij. "It seems they are approaching," he said of the Israeli troops.

Hamas' military arm, said its fighters struck an Israeli tank east of Bureij. Its report could not be independently confirmed, but it suggested Israeli forces were moving toward the camp.

Warplanes and artillery also hammered areas east of Nuseirat camp. "We couldn't sleep because of the bombing," said Ezzel-Din Mohammed Abdallah al-Masry, a Palestinian fisherman who was displaced to the area from northern Gaza with his five children and other family. "The children are terrified. We are terrified."

REGIONAL SPILLOVER

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq carried out a drone strike on a US base in Irbil in northern Iraq on Monday, wounding three American service members, one of them critically, according to US officials. In response, American warplanes before dawn Tuesday hit three locations in Iraq connected to one of the main militias, Kataib Hezbollah. The Israeli strike Monday hit a neighbourhood of the Syrian capital Damascus, killing Gen Seyed Razi Mousavi,

an adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria. The strike hit as he was entering a farm reportedly used as an office of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in the district of Sayeda Zeinab on Damascus' outskirts, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Throughout the war, a constellation of Iranian-backed militia groups around the region have stepped up attacks in support of Hamas. Hezbollah and Israel almost daily exchange volleys missiles, airstrikes and shelling across the Israeli-Lebanese border. Iran-backed militias in Iraq have launched more than 100 attacks on bases housing US troops in Iraq and Syria. In the Red Sea, attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen against commercial ships have disrupted trade and prompted a US-led multinational naval operation to protect shipping routes.

GAZA FIGHTING

Israeli troops have been engaged in nearly two months of ground combat with Hamas and other militants in northern

Gaza and weeks of urban fighting in Khan Younis. The battles and bombardment have levelled large swaths of both areas, and strikes have continued across the territory.

Still, Hamas fighters have shown a tough resilience. The Israeli military announced the deaths of two more soldiers Tuesday, bringing the total killed in the ground offensive to 158. Militants late Monday launched a barrage of rockets into Israel, triggering air raid sirens in the southern city of Ashkelon. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. Israel has vowed to continue fighting to eliminate Hamas' military and governing capabilities in Gaza, after the militants carried out their shock attack into southern Israel on Oct 7, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking some 240 hostage. Israel says it also aims to free the more than 100 hostages who remain in captivity in Gaza. Israel faces international criticism for the civilian death toll. It blames Hamas, citing the militants' use of crowded residential areas and tunnels.

Israeli airstrike kills Iranian Gen in Syria

Beirut (AP): An Israeli airstrike on Monday in a Damascus neighbourhood killed a high-ranking Iranian general, Iranian state media said. The killing of Razi Mousavi, a long-time adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria, comes as clashes along the Lebanon-Israel border between Hezbollah and Israel continue to intensify with fears of the Israel-Hamas war sparking a regional spillover with Iran-backed groups. The Israeli strikes killed two other generals earlier this month in Syria.

Israel struck the Sayida Zeinab neighbourhood, located near a Shiite Muslim shrine, Iran's official news agency IRNA and Britain-based opposition war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

IRNA described Mousavi as a close companion of Gen. Qassim Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force who was slain in a US drone strike in

Iraq in January 2020. Neither the Israeli military nor Syrian state media immediately issued a statement about the attack.

Though IRNA didn't provide other details about the attack, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Israeli military targeted Mousavi after he entered a farm in the area, which allegedly was one of several offices for Hezbollah. The Lebanese militant group, alongside Iran and Russia, has played a key military role in keeping President Bashar Assad's government in power throughout the Syrian conflict.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of war-torn Syria in recent years.

It doesn't usually acknowledge its airstrikes on Syria. But when it does, it says it's targeting Iranian-backed groups there that have backed Assad's government.

Cyberattack blocks Albania's Parliament

Tirana (Albania): Albania's Parliament reported Tuesday it had suffered a cyberattack with hackers trying to get into its data and wipe them out, temporarily halting its work.

A statement said Monday's cyberattack had not "touched the data of the system," adding that experts were working to discover what consequences the attack could have. It said services would resume at a later time.

The local media reported that a cellphone provider and an air flight company were also targeted by cyberattacks Monday from Iranian-based hackers called Homeland Justice, something which could not be verified independently. Albania suffered a cyberattack in July 2022 that

the government and multinational technology companies blamed on the Iranian Foreign Ministry. Believed to be in retaliation for Albania sheltering members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK, the attack led the government to cut diplomatic relations with Iran two months later.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry denied Tehran was behind an attack on Albanian government websites and noted that Iran has suffered cyberattacks from the MEK. In June, Albanian authorities raided a camp for exiled MEK members to seize computer devices allegedly linked to prohibited political activities. AP



Taylor Swift is seen in a suite before the start of an NFL football game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Las Vegas Raiders Monday in Kansas City. AP/PTI

UK PM Sunak celebrates Xmas with quirky skit

PTI ■ LONDON

Rishi Sunak marked the Christmas holidays with a quirky skit inspired by the 1990s Hollywood film 'Home Alone', posted on social media with the message "Merry Christmas from Downing Street" to highlight the British Prime Minister's humorous side over the festive period.

The 43-year-old British Indian leader can be seen hard at work at his desk at 10 Downing Street when he stops to ask himself: "Am I the only one here?" On realising he is home alone, he celebrates by bowling a ball against stacked cans of Coca Cola, famously Sunak's favourite drink. He follows that up by eating a plate of

spaghetti with maple syrup while watching the 2003 Christmas film 'Elf'.

Downing Street's resident cat, Larry, is there to give him company before the telephone rings in the press office and he tells a certain "Harry" it's a wrong number — believed to be a reference to Harry Cole, the 'Sun' newspaper's political editor.

The short 72-second video, shared on X on Monday, has been likened by some to the 2003 Christmas film 'Love Actually' in which actor Hugh Grant, playing a British Prime Minister, does a funny dance through the empty corridors of 10 Downing Street. With a general election expected in 2024, Sunak will be hoping this isn't his last Christmas message as British Prime Minister as the

governing Conservatives lag behind the Opposition Labour Party in the opinion polls.

Sunak also shared with the 'Politico' outlet that on Christmas Day he is in charge of cooking the traditional turkey roast dinner after watching fun films with daughters Krishna and Anoushka on Christmas Eve. "I always brine then cook the turkey. I hate the cooking, but no one else will do it! And watch 'The Snowman' with my daughters on Christmas Eve followed by 'The Holiday' on Christmas Day," he told the news website.

Sunak is married to Akshata Murty, the daughter of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy and author Sudha Murty.

Court suspends EC order to deprive PTI of symbol 'bat'

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party partially won a legal battle when the Peshawar High Court on Tuesday suspended an order of the election commission to deprive the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of its electoral symbol of a cricket 'bat'.

The Election Commission of Pakistan last week in a verdict rejected the intra-party polls of Khan's party and also stopped it from using 'bat' as the party's electoral symbol.

The party had challenged the verdict in the Peshawar High Court where after a detailed hearing, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhal suspended the ECP ruling until the final adjudication of the petition. "It is the victory of justice and we hope that in the final decision, the court would permanently revoke the ECP ruling," said Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, who was elected as the party's new chairman in the intra-party polls held in Peshawar earlier this month.

During the hearing, PTI counsel Barrister Ali Zafar highlighted that when a party provides its intra-party poll details to the ECP, the commission typically issues a certificate and posts it on its website.

However, Zafar argued that, as of now, the certificate has not yet been uploaded to the ECP website. The PTI earlier on Tuesday challenged the ECP order and urged the court to fix the matter for hearing at the earliest. The party insisted that the ECP's proceedings that questioned the PTI's intra-party polls were "coram non-judice (without jurisdiction) and without lawful authority".

It urged the court to direct the ECP to publish the results of the PTI's intra-party polls on its website and restore the symbol of the party. Imran Khan is currently incarcerated in corruption cases, including in the Toshakhana case. He was granted bail in the cypher case after the Supreme Court's intervention last week.

The ECP had issued a verdict following a first-of-its-kind microscopic examination of the inner workings of a political party and declared the party ineligible to obtain an election symbol to contest the upcoming general elections. "It is held that PTI has not complied with our directions rendered therein order dated November 23, 2023,

28,626 file nominations for Feb 8 general elections in Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

As many as 28,626 candidates, including 3,139 women, have filed their nominations to contest the February 8 general elections in Pakistan to the National Assembly and four provincial legislatures, the country's top electoral body said here on Tuesday. The election will be held for 1,085 general and reserved seats of the national and provincial assemblies. Of the total 1,085 seats, there are 336 National Assembly (NA) seats — 226 general and 70 reserved for women (60) and non-Muslims (10); and 749 provincial assembly seats — 593 general and 156 reserved for women (132) and minorities (24).

Punjab province has 371 seats, including 297 general, 66 reserved for women and 8 for minorities. Sindh has 168 seats, including 130 general, 29 reserved for women and 9 for minorities. Khyber Pakhtun-khwa has 145 seats, including 115 general, 26 reserved for women and 4 for minorities; and Balochistan province has 65 seats, including 51 general, 11 reserved for women and 3 for minorities.

According to the details shared by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the aspirants include 471 women, who have filed nominations to contest the upcoming elections on 266 general seats of the National Assembly. In Punjab, 3,871 candidates, including 277 women, filed nomination papers for 141 NA seats, while 1,681 candidates, including

110 women, submitted nominations for 61 NA seats in Sindh. At least 1,322 candidates, including 39 women, are contesting for 45 general seats in the National Assembly in Khyber Pakhtun-khwa (KP) while 631 nominees, including 12 women, filed nomination papers against 16 NA seats in Balochistan. As many as 208 candidates, including 26 women, submitted nominations for three National Assembly seats in the federal capital. About 459 candidates filed nomination papers against 60 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly, including 195 from Punjab, 118 from Sindh, 97 from KP, and 49 from Balochistan. Also, 150 nominations, including 10 women, filed nominations against 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims in the National Assembly.

Both women and non-Muslims can also contest on all 266 general seats apart from participating on the 60 and 10 seats reserved for them respectively. When it comes to the provincial assembly, at least 18,546 candidates, including 802 women, submitted their nominations for 593 general seats of the four provincial assemblies.

For Punjab Assembly's 297 general seats, 9,029 candidates have filed nominations, including 437 women. Another 4,265 candidates, including 205 women, filed nominations against 130 general seats of the Sindh Assembly, while 3,464 candidates, including 115 women, filed papers for 115 general seats of the KP Assembly and 1,788 candidates, including 45 women,

submitted documents for 45 general seats of the Balochistan Assembly.

Also, 1,365 candidates are in the run for 132 reserved seats for women in the four provincial legislatures. They include 601 against 66 seats in Punjab, 309 for 29 seats in Sindh, 321 for 26 seats in KP, and 134 against 11 seats in Balochistan. As many as 393 candidates, including 32 women, filed nominations against 24 seats reserved for minorities in provincial assemblies. The ECP data showed that 3,139 women (over 11 per cent) of the total 28,626 candidates have filed nomination papers for 2024 general elections across the country, far more than the number of women who submitted nominations for the 2018 and 2013 general elections. As many as 471 women, including Maryam Nawaz, filed nomination papers to contest elections on general seats of the National Assembly, while another 802 women are contesting on the provincial assemblies' seats.

For the seats reserved for women in national and provincial assemblies, 459 and 1,365 nomination papers were filed, respectively. Ten women have filed nominations for seats reserved for minorities in the National Assembly. A total of 32 nominations have been filed for the provincial seats reserved for minorities. The number of women candidates went up as compared to the last two elections as 1,687 women had filed nomination papers in the 2018 general elections while a total of 1,171 women in the 2013 elections.

attempt to stop PTI from [participating in the] election".

It claimed that the party would still win the general elections, maintaining that it would appeal the decision at every forum. The PTI asserted that its candidates would contest the polls with the 'bat' symbol, come what may.

"What will happen to the 225 reserved seats if a party is stopped from participating in elections under its designated symbol?" Gohar asked following the submission of the petition. He emphasised the

Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers accepted

PTI ■ LAHORE

Lahore (PTI): Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers have been accepted by the Election Commission despite questions on his eligibility to contest the February 8 general elections in the wake of 'life-long disqualification' by the apex court.

"PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers for NA-130 (National Assembly seat from Lahore) have been accepted by the Election Commission, Sharif's lawyer Amjad Pervez told reporters on Tuesday. He said no objections to 73-year-old Sharif's candidature have been raised. "Nawaz Sharif will now contest both from Lahore and Manshra city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he said. When asked whether Sharif was disqualified to contest polls for life time, Pervez said: "Sharif's disqualification has ended after his acquittal in corruption references against him."

All the leadership of the Sharif family — Sharif, his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and nephew Hamza Shehbaz — are mainly contesting from Lahore. After his return to the country this October from London where he spent four years in self-exile on medical grounds, Sharif was acquitted in two major corruption cases — Avenfield Apartments and Al-Azizia Steel Mills — by the Islamabad High Court. Barrister Zafarullah Khan said that Sharif can contest elections, citing an amendment to the Elections Act by the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement-led government. That amendment to Section 232 of the Elections Act caps disqualifications at five years.

According to senior lawyer Raja Inam Ameen Minhas, the amended law cannot benefit Sharif since the legislature did not amend Section 232 retrospectively. He said since the amendment entails penal consequences, it cannot deal with the matter in the past. "The law that deals with punishment cannot be applied retrospectively unless the legislature categorically gives this effect. The Supreme Court's 2018 ruling says disqualification under Article 62(1f) of the Constitution is lifelong," he said. Another senior lawyer Kashif Ali Malik said that the lifelong interpretation in the Elections Act cannot interpret, override or defeat constitutional provisions.

Xi hails Mao's thoughts as 'invaluable spiritual wealth'

PTI ■ BEIJING

Leading the 130th birth anniversary celebrations of Mao Zedong, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday hailed the thought of the ruling Communist Party founder as "invaluable spiritual wealth" and will remain the party's guiding spirit.

Mao's thoughts contained in his Red Book which once resonated across the world and sparked Communist movements paled into insignificance after his death as it was overtaken by his successor Deng Xiaoping's widespread economic reforms, propelling China into the second largest economy next only to the US.

Deng's opaque Socialism with Chinese Characteristics gave wide room for the successive Chinese leaders to expand reforms including the introduction of private property, shunned by Mao. The party theoreticians in recent years were also critical of some of Mao's political and economic campaigns, especially his disastrous Cultural Revolution (1966-76) in which thousands were killed in the name of purging capitalists and traditionalists.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) every 10 years observes Mao's birth anniversary. Xi's speech this year was regarded as significant as he is the only CPC leader after Mao to continue in power for the third consecutive five-year term. Like Mao, he also holds the title of "core leader" meaning that he was above the rest of the party leaders and widely expected to remain in power for life.

In an article this month commemorating Mao's legacy, Qiushi, a leading party theoretical journal of the CPC, also hailed what it called the country's "good fortune" to have Xi as the "core of the party and leader of the people" again, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper reported.

Leading the celebrations, Xi addressed a symposium at the Great Hall of the People to commemorate in which he stressed the importance of pushing forward the cause pioneered by "Comrade Mao Zedong" and called for efforts to build China into a stronger country and rejuvenate the Chinese nation on all fronts by pursuing Chinese modernisation. "Mao Zedong Thought is an invaluable spiritual wealth for our Party and will guide our action in the long term," Xi said, underscoring that the "best way to commemorate Comrade Mao Zedong is to continue to advance the cause pioneered by him."

Xi said that the life of Mao was one devoted to national prosperity, rejuvenation, and people's happiness. Mao led the people in blazing a trail for adapting Marxism to the Chinese context, forging the great, glorious and correct CPC and founding the New China with the people being masters of the country, state-run Xinhua quoted him as saying. Mao made indelible historic contributions to the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, which will go down in history, Xi said.

Asked for her comments on Mao's birth anniversary, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing that "Comrade Mao Zedong was at the core of the first generation of CPC central collective leadership and a great man deeply loved and respected by the whole Party and people of all ethnic groups in China."

"Across China, various forms of commemoration activities are held today," she said.

30 countries keen on partnership ties with BRICS, says Lavrov

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday said that 30 countries have expressed their interest in establishing partnership ties with the BRICS grouping. Lavrov said Moscow expects a wide range of solutions to be developed ahead of the group's next summit, set to take place in the Russian city of Kazan in October next year.

Addressing a session of United Russia's Commission on International Cooperation and Support for Compatriots Abroad, Lavrov said the aspiration of many countries to become closer with the five-nation bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa is "natural given that BRICS is operating on a genuinely democratic and mutually respectful basis", the state-run TASS news agency reported. "In addition to the countries

that have already joined our union, as of today, about 30 countries would like to establish partner ties with BRICS," he said. During the 15th BRICS summit held at Johannesburg in South Africa from June 22-24, the BRICS leaders agreed to admit Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as new members, effective January 1, 2024. "We will continue to work on BRICS bolstering its positions as one of the pillars of a multipolar world," the top Russian diplomat noted.

"The theme of our watch in BRICS will be 'Strengthening Multilateralism for Equitable Global Development and Security'. Over 10 Russian cities will host more than 200 economic, political and public events. It all will culminate with the BRICS summit in Kazan next October," he said. "Together with our partners, we expect to develop a wide range of solutions for the top-level event, which will be related to the key areas of cooperation," Lavrov said.

Various events would take place as part of preparations for the summit and on its sidelines, particularly on the BRICS Plus and Outreach platforms.

"The heads of many developing countries will attend these events, primarily our closest neighbours and allies from post-Soviet organisations," Lavrov said.

The leaders of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries met for the first time in St Petersburg, Russia, on the margins of the G8 Outreach Summit in July 2006. In September 2006, the group was formalised as BRIC during the 1st BRIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which met on the sidelines of the General Debate of the UN Assembly in New York City.

Russian naval ship in Crimea damaged in airstrike

Kyiv (AP): A Russian naval ship in Crimea was damaged in an airstrike by Ukrainian forces, Russia's Defence Ministry said on Tuesday. The landing ship Novocherkassk was hit at a base in the city of Feodosia by plane-launched guided missiles, the ministry said, adding that two Ukrainian fighter jets were destroyed by anti-aircraft fire during the attack.

Over the past several months, Ukrainian forces have conducted attacks around Crimea, mostly by sea drones. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy credits those attacks with allowing Ukraine to restore navigation in the Black Sea and allowing the export of millions of tons of grain. The Russia-appointed head of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said one person was killed in the attack. "The Russian fleet has become smaller," Ukrainian air force Cmdr. Mykola Oleschuk said in a mocking message on the Telegram app. He urged Russians to leave Crimea — which Russia annexed in 2014 — "while it's not too late."

The ministry did not specify the extent to which the Russian ship was damaged, but videos circulating on Ukrainian channels showed a large fire in the port area. Ukrainian authorities claimed the ship was destroyed and said it was likely carrying an ammunition shipment, possibly including drones. "We saw how powerful were the blast and detonation. It's extremely difficult for a ship to survive something like that," Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yurii Ihnat said on Radio Liberty.

Toll in Indonesia's furnace explosion climbs to 18

AP ■ PALU (INDONESIA)

The death toll following the explosion of a smelting furnace at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island rose to 18 on Tuesday, as police ordered the plant to stop operations until an investigation is completed. The blast, which occurred on Sunday, was the latest in a series of fatalities at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's ambitious transnational development programme known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Nickel is a key component in global battery production for electric vehicles. Four Chinese and nine Indonesian workers died instantly on Sunday when the furnace exploded while they were repairing it, Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho said. Three more victims died a day later while being treated at a local hospital. Two more workers died on Tuesday while hospitalized, bringing the total number of fatalities to 18, including eight workers from China, said Deputy Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP, the parent company of PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, where the explosion occurred.

The plant is in the Bahodopi neighborhood of Morowali regency. "Weings ordered PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel to stop its operation until our entire investigation is completed," said Nugroho, the police chief, adding that authorities had set up a team to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths. The blast

4 kids, mother found dead; father held

Paris (AP): Four children between nine months and 10 years old and their mother were killed in their apartment east of Paris, in what the local prosecutor called an exceptionally violent crime. Authorities said the children's father was arrested Tuesday and is the primary suspect. Neighbors spotted a pool of blood outside the family's door on Christmas Day and alerted police, who discovered the five bodies, Prosecutor Jean-Baptiste Bladier told reporters in the city of Meaux. The mother and two daughters, ages 7 and 10, were stabbed several times overnight from Sunday to Monday, he said. The couple's two sons, ages 9 months and 4 years old, were suffocated or drowned. The prosecutor described a small, blood-stained apartment in extreme disarray. The motive for the killings was unclear. The suspect, a 33-year-old man born in the Paris suburb of Colombes, was arrested Tuesday outside his father's home northeast of the French capital, the prosecutor said.

The suspect had stabbed his partner once before, when she was pregnant with their older son in 2019, but the investigation was dropped because he was declared mentally unsound at the time of the attack, the prosecutor said. The suspect had been placed in a psychiatric hospital in 2017, and also attempted suicide that year, the prosecutor said.

The couple had been together for 14 years and had known each other since high school, Bladier said.

None of the family members' names were released, according to French law protecting minors who are victims of crimes.

NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
Office of the Executive Engineer (E)
RDSS Division, Electricity Department-II
Room No. 1705, 17th Floor, Palika Kendra, New Delhi: 110001
Email.ID: eeipds.elect@ndmc.gov.in

CORRIGENDUM

Name of Work: 2nd Call Request for Proposal/Bid (RFP)/RFB for appointment of PMA for Consultancy Services for Assisting and Supporting in Project Management to NDMC for Implementation of (i) Smart System Metering Work (DT and Feeder Metering) and (ii) implementation of Loss Reduction/Modernization Infrastructure Works under Phase-I of RDSS, Gt.

Tender Value : Rs. 4,83,00,000/-
Tender ID No. : 2023_NDMC_250860_1

Corrigendum No.	Particulars	Original Date	Extended Date
1.	Bid Submission End Date	29.12.2023 at 15:00 Hrs	04.01.2024 at 15:00 Hrs
	Bid Opening Date	29.12.2023 at 16:00 Hrs	04.01.2024 at 16:00 Hrs
2.	Amendment in Technical Bid		

Further details can be seen at <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in> and <https://www.ndmc.gov.in/tenders.aspx>

Note: To participate in e-tender in NDMC registration Executive Engineer (E) RDSS with application services provider NIC is mandatory New Delhi Municipal Council

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot
Ph: 01639-256232, 256236
Advt. No. BFU-23/28

VACANCIES

Online applications are invited w.e.f 27/12/2023 to 15/01/2024 from eligible candidates through University website for the recruitment to posts of Registrar (UR-1), Dean (College Development) (UR-1), Controller of Examination (UR-1), Secretary to Vice-Chancellor (UR-1), Finance Officer (UR-1), Audit Officer (UR-1), Executive Engineer (UR-1), Public Relation Officer (UR-1), Law Officer (UR-1) under **Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot**. The candidates who have applied earlier through proper channel need not to apply again. In case of non availability/non suitable candidates, the conditions may be relaxed by competent authority. For details/updates/eligibility/No. of Posts/terms & conditions visit website www.bfuhsc.ac.in

REGISTRAR

00/12/166/2023/30944 Dated **CHD - 12/26/2023**

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

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

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029]** ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **28.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.** for recovery of **Rs. 22,96,865/- (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Ninety Six Thousand Eight Hundred Sixty Five only)** pending towards Loan Account No. **HLLMD00285236**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **19.12.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **20.12.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **KUMAR NEHRU, PINKI KUMARI, RSN HEALTHCARE PRIVATE LIMITED (THROUGH DIRECTOR) and TEJ BAHADUR (GUARANTOR)**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 22,70,000/- (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Seventy Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 2,27,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Twenty Seven Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) OF FREEHOLD BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING FLAT NO. 248, ADMEASURING 25.90 SQUARE METERS, BLOCK/POCKET F-3, SECTOR 16, ROHINI, NEW DELHI-110089 AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:-
EAST : SERVICE LANE 3 METERS NORTH : PROPERTY NO. 247
WEST : ROAD SOUTH : OPEN

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

Date: 21.12.2023
Place: NEW DELHI

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
PARADIP-754142, ODISHA (INDIA)
(An autonomous body under Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Govt. of India)

No. AD/RSC-I-21-66/2011/2714 Dated, the 19th December, 2023

Advertisement

Applications are invited from Indian Nationalities for engagement of 01 (one) **General Duty Medical Officer** on contractual basis in Paradip Port Authority.

For further details, visit our website www.paradipport.gov.in.

Sd/- Sr. Asst. Secretary,
Paradip Port Authority

PPM/PR/17/2023-2024 Dt. 26.12.2023

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

The Dy. Chief Engineer/Survey & Construction/Northern Railway, Tilak Bridge, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites open e-tender under Single-packet system for the following work:

- Name of work and location : "Carrying out Preliminary Engineering Cum Traffic Survey (PET)", Preparation of GAD of Bridges, L-section, yard plans, Drawing of other structures, Preparation and submission of DPR & other preliminary activities in ctw. PET Survey for new line between Mullanpur station - Barnala railway station via Raikot."
- Completion of the work : 08 (Six) months
- Approx. Cost of work : Rs. 21,12,283,99/- (Rs. Twenty One lakhs Twelve thousand Two hundred Eighty Three rupees and Ninety Nine paise only).
- Earnest Money to be deposited : Rs. 42,300/- (Rs. Forty Two thousand three hundred only).
- Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender : Tender may be uploaded up to 15:30 hrs. on 15.01.2024 on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in. The bidders can participate in the e-tender, the Bids of which will be opened at 15:30 hrs. on 15.01.2024.
- Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document : The detailed e-tender notice is available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in on 23.12.2023 to 15.01.2024 and bidders will be able to offer their technical and financial bid from 01.01.2024. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document.

No. 301-W-SNC-TKJ-PET-NEW LINE-Mullanpur-Barnala Via Raikot/2023 Dated: 23.12.2023 4038/23

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

APPENDIX IV-A
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The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 13,86,000/- (Rupees Thirteen Lakh Eighty Six Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 1,38,600/- (Rupees One Lakh Thirty Eight Thousand Six Hundred only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT NO. J-705 HAVING CARPET AREA 321.20 SQUARE FEET + BALCONY AREA 63.81 SQUARE FEET ON 7TH FLOOR, Tower - J OF THE RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT PROJECT KNOWN AS "SPORTS VILLER" SITUATED IN SECTOR 2 & 35, SOHNA, GURUGRAM – 122001, HARYANA, TOGETHER WITH ONE TWO - WHEELER PARKING SPACE.

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

Date: 21.12.2023
Place: GURUGRAM

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

CAD declines sharply to 1 pc of GDP in Q2: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India's current account deficit declined sharply to 1 per cent of the GDP or USD 8.3 billion in the second quarter of this financial year, mainly due to lower merchandise trade deficit and growth in services exports, according to a RBI data released on Tuesday. The current account deficit (CAD), which represents the difference between the total amount of money sent abroad and money received from overseas across the economy, was 3.8 per cent of GDP or USD 30.9 billion in the July-September quarter in 2022-23. CAD was USD 9.2 billion or 1.1 per cent of GDP in the first quarter (April-June) of the current financial year 2023-24.

"Underlying the lower current account deficit on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis in Q2:2023-24 was the narrowing of merchandise trade deficit to USD 61.0 billion from USD 78.3 billion in Q2:2022-23," said the data on Developments in India's Balance of Payments during the second quarter (July-September) of 2023-24. Services exports grew by 4.2 per cent on a y-o-y basis on the back of rising exports of software, business and travel services, the Reserve Bank said. Net services receipts increased both sequentially and on a y-o-y basis, it added. In the first half of the fiscal, CAD moderated to 1 per cent of GDP from 2.9 per cent of GDP in the year-ago period, on the back of a lower merchandise trade deficit. During the July-September quarter (Q2), the RBI data showed that net outflow on the primary income account, primarily reflecting payments of investment income, increased to USD 12.2 billion, from USD



11.8 billion a year ago. Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, amounted to USD 28.1 billion, an increase of 2.6 per cent from their level during the corresponding period a year ago.

Also, non-resident deposits recorded net inflow of USD 3.2 billion, as compared with net

inflow of USD 2.5 billion in the second quarter of the last financial year. RBI also said there was an accretion of foreign exchange reserves (on a BoP basis) to the tune of USD 2.5 billion in the quarter under review, as against a depletion of USD 30.4 billion in the corresponding period of the last fiscal. According to Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head-Research and Outreach, ICRA Ltd following the expansion in the merchandise trade deficit in October 2023, "we expect the CAD for the ongoing quarter to widen appreciably, to around USD 18-20 billion. Nevertheless, we now foresee the FY2024 CAD in a range of 1.5-1.6 per cent of GDP, unless commodity prices chart a sharp rebound."

According to Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head-Research and Outreach, ICRA Ltd following the expansion in the merchandise trade deficit in October 2023, "we expect the CAD for the ongoing quarter to widen appreciably, to around USD 18-20 billion. Nevertheless, we now foresee the FY2024 CAD in a range of 1.5-1.6 per cent of GDP, unless commodity prices chart a sharp rebound."



PLI schemes bring ₹95,000 cr investment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes for 14 sectors have attracted over Rs 95,000 crore in investment till September this year, an official statement said on Tuesday.

According to the Commerce and Industry Ministry, as many as 746 applications have been approved till November 2023 under these schemes. In the Union Budget 2021-22, the government announced an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore for the schemes. The sectors included electronics, telecommunication, pharma, white goods (AC and LED light components), and textiles. The aim is to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and exports. "746 applications have been approved till November 2023. PLI units are established in more than 150 districts (24 states). Over Rs 95,000 crore of investment reported till September, which has led to production/sales of Rs 7.80 lakh crore and employment generation (direct & indirect) of over 6.4 lakh," the ministry said. It added that incentives worth around Rs 2,900 crore have been disbursed in 2022-23. "There has been a value addition of 20 per cent in mobile manufacturing within a period of 3 years," the statement said.

It added that of the USD 101 billion worth of total electronics production in 2022-23, smartphones constituted USD 44 billion, including USD 11.1 billion as exports. "Import substitution of 60 per cent has been achieved in the telecom sector and India has become almost self-reliant in Antennae, GPON (Gigabit Passive Optical Network) and CPE (Customer Premises Equipment)," the ministry said. There has been a significant reduction in imports of raw materials in the pharma sector also. "Unique intermediate materials and bulk drugs are being manufactured in India including Penicillin-G, and transfer of technology has happened in manufacturing of medical devices such as CT scan, I, it added. About PLI in the white goods (AC and LED light components), it said that 64 companies have been selected under the scheme. Out of this, 34 would invest Rs 5,429 crore for air conditioner components and 30 would invest Rs 1,337 crore for LED component manufacturing. "Further investments of Rs 6,766 crore are envisaged creating additional direct employment of about 48,000 persons," the ministry said, adding 13 foreign companies are investing Rs 2,090 crore under the scheme.

India, Oman FTA likely next month

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and Oman are moving at a fast pace and the pact is likely to be signed next month, a senior government official said.



Export sectors which could get a boost from the agreement include motor gasoline, iron and steel products, electronics, machinery, textiles, plastics, boneless meat, essential oils, and motor cars. According to a report of think-tank GTRI, these goods at present face a 5 per cent import duty in Oman. About 16.5 per cent of Indian exports to Oman, worth about USD 800 million and goods such as wheat, medicines, basmati rice, tea, coffee and fish that already have duty-free access, will not see additional benefits from the agreement, it added.

Currently, over 80 per cent of its goods enter Oman at an average of 5 per cent import duties, the report has said. Oman's import duty ranges from 0 to 100 per cent along with the existence of specific duties. A duty of 100 per cent is applicable on specific meats, wines and tobacco products. Officials of the two countries concluded the second round of talks for the pact, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) earlier this month in Muscat. "With Oman, there is a very good progress and both sides are very eager to conclude this deal. It may be signed in January 2024," the official said. India has potential for export of products such as light oils and preparations of

Stock markets rally for 3rd day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets closed with gains on Tuesday, extending the winning run to the third day on the trot after buying in HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 229.84 points or 0.32 per cent to settle at 71,336.80. During the day, it jumped 364.33 points or 0.51 per cent to 71,471.29. Index heavyweights HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries contributed around 120 points to the rally. The broader Nifty advanced 91.95 points or 0.43 per cent to 21,441.35 with 41 of its constituents ending in the green and nine closing with losses. In the three sessions to Tuesday, Nifty gained 291 points or 1.37 per cent while Sensex rose by 1.17 per cent or 830 points. Power, utilities, banking, oil and gas and commodities shares attracted buying while IT and tech shares succumbed to selling.



Global markets are rallying in anticipation of aggressive US FED rate cuts in 2024. And Indian equities too are experiencing a surge despite premium valuations driven by reversed FIIs inflows amid global risk-on," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among the Sensex firms, NTPC rose the most by 2.44 per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra advanced by 1.65 per cent, Wipro by 1.59 per cent, Kotak Mahindra Bank by

a multi-year contract worth USD 1.5 billion with it, declined by 1.12 per cent. "Optimism in world equity indices higher on the back of buying in oil & gas, power and metal stocks. With the year end round the corner investor participation is likely to remain thin, which could see the markets turn range-bound with a mixed bias over the next few days," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.72 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.48 per cent. Among the indices, utilities rallied 1.56 per cent, oil & gas climbed 1.45 per cent, commodities jumped 1.36 per cent, energy (1.28 per cent), power (1.22 per cent), healthcare (1.13 per cent), metal (0.93 per cent) and auto (0.91 per cent). IT and tech were the laggards.

1.35 per cent, Tata Steel by 1.27 per cent, and Asian Paints by 1.24 per cent. Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Titan, Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank also advanced. Bajaj Finance fell the most by 1.81 per cent, Bajaj Finserv by 1.42 per cent, and Tata Consultancy Services by 0.8 per cent. Tata Motors and HCL Technologies were also among the losers. Infosys, which on Saturday announced that a global company has decided to terminate

MGNREGA, subsidy to cause fiscal slippage in FY 24: India Ratings

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Despite the handsome growth in tax collections, there is a possibility of a fiscal slippage in FY24 because of higher spends on employment guarantee scheme and subsidies, a domestic rating agency said on Tuesday. India Ratings and Research, which is a unit of international rating agency Fitch Ratings, said the fiscal deficit for FY24 will come at 6 per cent, as against the budgetary target of 5.9 per cent. "Higher-than-budgeted revenue expenditure triggered through the first and likely second supplementary demand for grants in combination with lower-than-budgeted nominal GDP will push

the fiscal deficit," the agency said in a note. It said the fiscal slippage will happen despite higher tax and non-tax revenue collections, and also added that these will be more than sufficient to offset the lower-than-budgeted divestment proceeds. In the first supplementary demand, the union government will spend more on prioritised areas/sectors such as food, fertiliser and LPG subsidy and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, it said, giving out details of the overruns. As against the budgeted nutrient-based fertiliser subsidy of Rs 44,000 crore, the union government has now increased the fertiliser subsidy



to Rs 57,360 crore, as the budgeted amount was almost over by end-October 2023, it said. Similarly, realising the sustained demand for employment under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), whereby a sum of Rs 79,770 crore has already been spent till December 19, 2023, as against the budgeted Rs 60,000 crore, an additional sum of Rs 14,520 crore has

been allocated through the first supplementary demand for grants, it added. The agency said it expects tax revenue collections growth to exceed the budgeted projection at 11.7 per cent in FY24 due to the widening of tax base, better enforcement of compliance and use of technology in the tax collection process, and added that the amount collected in the April-October period is nearly 60 per cent of the budget estimate. "We expect it to reach Rs 24.5 lakh crore in FY24, as against the budgeted Rs 23.3 lakh crore, clocking a growth rate of 17.2 per cent and helping tax/GDP ratio to reach 8.81 per cent, as against budgeted 7.72 per cent," its chief

economist and head of public finance Devendra Pant said. However, capital receipts are lagging at Rs 22,990 crore during April-October 2023, which is only 27.4 per cent of the FY24 budgeted amount, the agency said, adding that the government is struggling this year too for achieving the disinvestment target despite being modest in budgeting it at Rs 51,000 crore and has collected only Rs 8,000 crore till October. On the expenditure front, the agency said the first supplementary demand for grants involving an additional cash outflow of Rs 58,380 crore will result in the revenue expenditure to grow at 2.8 per cent, as against the budgeted target of 1.2 per cent.

NBCC sells 5,000 flats of Amrapali for ₹2,900 cr



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-wnd NBCC on Tuesday announced sales of 5,000 units for Rs 2,900 crore across several residential projects of erstwhile Amrapali Group. As per the direction of the Supreme Court, Amrapali Stalled Projects Investments Reconstruction Establishment (ASPIRE) was formed to complete the stuck projects of Amrapali through NBCC (India) Ltd. "In a step towards the resolution of the stuck Amrapali project, NBCC has completed the sale of 5,000 flats having a value of around Rs 2,900 crore. This is a significant step towards delivering relief to the thousands of purchasers who have been waiting for years for their apartments," the compa-

ny said in a statement. With this, the company has completed the sale of over 80 per cent of the inventory available. The sale of these 5,000 units has been conducted by ASPIRE, a company floated to complete the pending Amrapali projects, under the supervision of the Supreme Court-appointed court receiver. According to NBCC, there were 46,575 apartments across 25 housing projects and out of that 8,416 units were already occupied by home buyers prior to the Supreme Court judgment in July 2019. As a project management consultant (PMC), NBCC got the mandate of completing the remaining 38,159 units and also the pending common facilities in those projects where 8,416 units were already delivered with an estimated cost of Rs 8,266 crore. In the statement, NBCC said there are 26 projects in total with 11 projects in Noida, 14 projects in Greater Noida and one project in Manesar. NBCC has completed 11 projects in Noida and Greater Noida, while 14 projects are under execution. A strong workforce of approximately 8,000 is working across various projects. One commercial project in Greater Noida Tech Park is yet to be started.

Rupee falls 3 paise to settle at 83.19 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee slipped 3 paise to settle at 83.19 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday amid a strong American currency and outflow of foreign funds. A positive equity market sentiment and softer crude oil prices, however, provided a cushion and restricted the fall in the Indian currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.17 and traded between a peak of 83.10 and a low level of 83.21 against the greenback during intra-day deals. The local unit settled at 83.19 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 3 paise from its previous close.



On Friday, the domestic currency settled at 83.16 against the dollar. Forex markets were closed on Monday on account of Christmas. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee depreciated on recovery in the US dollar and FII outflows. However, positive domestic markets and a decline in crude

oil prices cushioned the downside. He said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight positive bias amid rising expectations of a reduction in interest rates by the US Federal Reserve. "However, demand for the US dollar from imports and selling pressure from FIIs may cap the upside. Geopolitical tensions in the Red Sea may also weigh on rupee at higher levels. Traders may take cues from house price index data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.90 to Rs 83.50," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at 101.35 on

Tuesday. Global oil price benchmark Brent crude inched up 0.03 per cent to USD 79.09 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 229.84 points or 0.32 per cent to settle at 71,336.80. The broader NSE Nifty climbed 91.95 points or 0.43 per cent to 21,441.35. The RBI data released on Friday showed that India's forex reserves jumped USD 9.112 billion to USD 615.971 billion in the week ended December 15 and the quantum of increase was one of the highest for a week. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Friday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,828.94 crore, according to exchange data.

Adani Green Energy shares jump over 4 pc; mcap climbs ₹10,446 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) on Tuesday jumped over 4 per cent as Gautam Adani and his family will inject Rs 9,350 crore into the conglomerate's green energy arm to equip it to achieve the 45 GW target by 2030 and to meet debt payment obligations. The stock rallied 4.30 per cent to Rs 1,599.90 on the BSE.

During the day, it zoomed 6.26 per cent to Rs 1,630. At the NSE, it jumped 4.37 per cent to Rs 1,600.20. The company's market valuation climbed Rs 10,446.7 crore to Rs 2,53,429.36 crore. In terms of volume, 4.22 lakh shares of the company were traded at the BSE and over 28.10 lakh shares at the NSE during the day. The board of Adani Green Energy Ltd on Tuesday



approved the plan to issue 6.31 apiece to promoter group companies, Ardour Investment Holding Ltd and Adani Properties Pvt Ltd. The investment of Rs 9,350 crore "will be used for deleveraging and accelerated capital expenditure" in AGEL, the firm said in a company filing. The investment would give the promoter group firms a 3.833 per cent equity stake in the

company. The fund infusion is part of Adani's comeback strategy since it was hit by damaging allegations of corporate fraud by Hindenburg Research in January. While the company denied any wrongdoing, Adani group companies lost over USD 50 billion in market value at the lowest point. Some of that loss has been recovered in months thereafter.



Indian investors put in USD 335mn as FDI in Dubai during Jan-June: Vestian

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian companies made FDI investments of USD 335 million in Dubai during January-June, Vestian on Tuesday said. The foreign direct investments (FDI) into Dubai from Indian companies stood at USD 541 million in the entire 2022, real estate consultant Vestian said citing data of the Department of Economic Development, Dubai FDI. "Dubai witnessed significant investments (FDI) from Indian investors, amounting to USD 1.6 billion between 2020 and H1 (January-June) 2023. Dubai's strategic location along with tax-friendly policies act as a key incentive for Indian investors and business owners who are looking to expand into new markets," Vestian said in a statement. In the first six

months of 2023, India was amongst the top countries investing in Dubai with a cumulative investment of USD 335 million, it said. In terms of investments in the number of projects, India has outnumbered Canada and Latvia with investments in a total of 123 projects.

Hockey India names 34 probables for women's national camp



PTI ■ BENGALURU
A core group of 34 players will take part in a senior women's hockey coaching camp starting here on Wednesday, aiming to bolster preparations for the Olympic

Qualifiers in Ranchi and the Hockey5s World Cup. The Indian players will be joining the camp after a short break from the trip to Spain after playing against Belgium, Germany, Ireland and the hosts in the 5 Nations Tournament.

The Olympic Qualifiers are set to be played in Ranchi from January 13-19 in which India are placed in Pool B along with New Zealand, Italy and the United States of America. The Pool A consists of Germany, Japan, Chile and the Czech

Republic. India had produced a dominating performance in the Jharkhand Women's Asian Champions Trophy in Ranchi and will be returning to their happy hunting ground hoping to continue with their momentum.

"The 5 Nations Tournament served as a good litmus test ahead of the Olympic Qualifiers. We identified areas for improvement, and we will use this festive period to dot all the i's and cross the t's," said Janneke Schopman.

"The squad is eager to return to Ranchi after their triumph in the Asian Champions Trophy. With the little time left, we will focus on refining our game to ensure we are in the best position - physically, tactically, and mentally - to secure qualification for the Paris 2024 Olympics."

Team India will then proceed to Muscat, Oman, where they will take part in the Hockey5s World Cup from January 24-27.

India squad:
Goalkeepers: Savita, Rajani Etimarpu, Bichu Devi Kharibam, Bansari Solanki.
Defenders: Deep Grace Ekka, Gurjit Kaur, Nikki Pradhan, Udit, Ishika Chaudhary, Akshata Abaso Dhekale, Jyoti Chhatr, Mahima Chaudhary.
Midfielders: Nisha, Salima Tete, Sushila Chanu Pukhrabam, Jyoti, Navjot Kaur, Monika, Mariana Kujur, Sonika, Neha, Baljeet Kaur, Reena Khokhar, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Ajmina Kujur.
Forwards: Lalremsiami, Navneet Kaur, Vandana Katariya, Sharmila Devi, Deepika, Sangita Kumari, Mumtaz Khan, Sunelita Toppo, Beauty Dzungdung.



Mohite stars in Puneri Paltan's big win over Patna Pirates in PKL

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Puneri Paltan produced a dominating display to earn a massive 46-28 win over Patna Pirates in a Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 match here on Tuesday. Pankaj Mohite was the star of the show as he brought up a Super 10, while Abinash Nadarajan finished with a High 5. Puneri Paltan, playing for the first time since winning three consecutive games in their home leg last week, were the better side from the very start. Their raiding and defensive units worked in unison as the Paltan stormed to a 6-1 lead within four minutes. The Pirates showed promise when Sachin scalped a SUPER TACKLE and Manjeet came up with a multi-point raid, but their hopes of a comeback went up in smoke after a fine charge from Mohite. He got past five defenders to

inflict a SUPER RAID and the ALL OUT followed soon as Puneri Paltan climbed to a 14-8 lead in the 10th minute. The Paltan raiders kept the scoreboard ticking as the men in orange ended the first half with a comfortable 22-15 lead. The second half was a one-way traffic as Paltan continued to call the shots. Their Iranian all-rounder Mohammadreza Shadlou put on a show as he donned the role of raider and picked up four points in two raids, which included a SUPER RAID. He then single-handedly completed the ALL OUT as he trapped Sudhakar M in a double ankle hold and the Paltan's lead swelled to 16 points at 38-22. Every member of the Paltan's Starting 7 got on the scoresheet as Mohit Goyat secured nine points, while Shadlou and captain Aslam Inamdar had six points each.

AITA seeks Ministry advice on India Davis Cup team tour to Pakistan

NEW DELHI, DEC 26 (PTI)

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Tuesday sought the Sports Ministry's advice on the national team's travel to Pakistan for the Davis Cup World Group 1 Play-off tie against the neighbours at Islamabad in February next year. The AITA's move came after the International Tennis Federation Tribunal rejected its

request to shift the tie to a neutral venue. "We have asked for Sports Ministry's advise as to what is the policy on travelling to Pakistan. It's a World Cup of tennis. We are awaiting reply," AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar told PTI. The tie is scheduled to be played at the Pakistan Sports Complex on February 3 and 4. Dhupar had earlier told PTI that the AITA will approach the



Sports Ministry on Monday and seek guidance if they can send a team. India and Pakistan were last drawn against each other in 2019 and the tie was scheduled to take place across the border as the Indians had hosted the previous encounter in Mumbai in 2006. But the AITA managed to shift the tie to a neutral venue, Kazakhstan, citing political tensions between the two coun-

tries. The Indian Davis Cup team last travelled to Pakistan way back in 1964 when Akhtar Ali, Premjit Lall and SP Misra helped the visitors win the tie 4-0 in Lahore. The Indian cricket team last toured Pakistan in 2006 but since then the two sides have not played a bilateral series for more than a decade due to diplomatic tensions between the neighbouring nations.



I envy today athletes because I was in wrong era: Anju Bobby

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's first ever World Athletics Championship medallist Anju Bobby George says that she competed "in the wrong era", praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's eagerness for promoting and transforming sports in the country. Speaking at a programme organised at the PM's residence on Christmas, the legendary long jumper said: "As a sportsperson, I was here for almost 25 years and I'm seeing a lot of changes. When I got India's first global medal 20 years ago, even my department was not ready to give me a promotion. "But after Neeraj (Chopra) got a medal, I have seen the changes... the way we are celebrating... I envy them because I was in the wrong era," Anju said during the event. Anju, who won a bronze medal in the women's long jump at the 2003 World Championships in Athletics in Paris, spoke about women empowerment and also how the country now also celebrates athletes' accomplishments. "Women empowerment is not just a word now. Every Indian girl is ready to dream and they know their dreams will come true," she said. The PM interacted with the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas, and Anju was among the prominent persons who attended the event. "I think in the near future, we will be at the top (of sports world)," she said. Among her other achievements, Anju bagged a gold medal at the 2003 Afro-Asian Games and achieved her personal best of 6.83m at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, which brought her the fifth position.

Warner picks Marcus Harris as his Test replacement

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Veteran Australian opener David Warner has picked Marcus Harris as his replacement at the top of the order after he quits the longest format of the sport. Warner had already said that the ongoing three-Test series against Pakistan will be his last in the format. While there have been talks about his ideal replacement in red-ball cricket, Warner vouched for the 31-year-old Harris, who he feels has been around for a long time and that the selectors need to show faith in him. "It's a tough one. It's obviously up to the selectors. But from my position, I feel like the person who's worked their backside off and has been there for a while in the background," Warner was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo on Tuesday.

"I think Harry's been that person. He's toured, he's going to have that chance. He scored a hundred the other day (for Victoria XI vs the Pakistanis). "He missed out in a couple of other games, but he's always been that person who was next in line. If the selectors show faith in him, then I'm sure he'll come out and play the way he does," he said. "It's not too dissimilar to me. If he sees it in his areas, he goes for it, plays his shots, and I think he would fit well." Since making his debut in 2018, Harris has played only 14 Tests, accumulating 607 runs at an average of 25.29, including three half-centuries. I'd be going for a traditional opener: Michael Hussey. Former Australia batter Michael Hussey prefers someone who has dominated in the Sheffield Shield and been around the Australian Test team for a considerable peri-



od should replace Warner. "Opening is one of the toughest jobs in the game. So, for me personally, if I was selecting, I'd be going for a traditional, proper opener," he said. "Someone who has done it for a long period of time. Because if you haven't done it much in your First-Class career, it's

going to be very difficult to come up the order. "I like whoever's dominating the level below, who's been dominating in Sheffield Shield cricket over a period of time, and to be fair, they all have at various stages. So, it's a tough job for the selectors. Hussey refrained from taking any name as Warner's ideal replacement, but ruled out Mitchell Marsh, who has been tipped as one of the possible candidates. "I'm not saying you can't do it, and maybe someone could evolve into doing that role. But, I think it would be difficult for a player like Mitch Marsh or someone," he said. "I know there's been talk about him going up the order - I think he's probably more suited, much like Travis Head, to be in the middle order. I think that'd be the best for the balance of the Australian team."

Simranjeet, Saweety, Pooja storm into finals

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

Tokyo Olympian boxer Simranjeet Kaur cruised to the 60kg National Championships final, eking out a narrow win over Manisha Moun in the battle of the World Championship medallists here on Tuesday. The 28-year-old from Punjab, who won the bronze medal in the 2018 Worlds, registered a 4-3 split decision win in a fiery semifinal over 2022 Worlds' medallist Haryana's Manisha, who has moved up a weight class for a shot at the Olympic weight class, where India is yet to seal a quota. "All my bouts were tough. I have treated every bout as a final. This bout was tough because she is also a world medallist and I had to beat her and most important is to play well," Simranjeet said after the win. She will clash against



Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaimine Lamboria, who continued her dominant run, in the final. The 22-year-old, representing Services, notched a 5-0 win over Himachal Pradesh's Menka Devi.

Ankushita Boro of Assam and Services' Arundhati Choudhary set a final clash with each other in the 66kg event. Both Ankushita and Arundhati registered similar 5-0 wins over Deepika of Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland's Sanju respectively. World Championship silver medallist Manju Rani made a semifinal exit, going down to Minakshi by an unanimous verdict in the 48kg semifinal. Another World Championship silver medallist Raliways' Sonia Lather moved to the final with a 4-1 win over Punjab's Mandeep Kaur in the 57kg last-four match. World Champion Saweety Boora (81kg) and two-time Asian Championship gold medallist Pooja Rani (75kg) lived up to their top billing, registering facile wins in their respective semifinals.

If Proteas play 2 Tests a year how will Rabada reach 400 wickets, fumes Ntini

PTI ■ CENTURION

Kagiso Rabada is already in the pantheon of great South African fast bowlers, but if the Proteas play only a limited number of Tests a year, he can never surpass Dale Steyn's record of 439 wickets, reckoned Makhaya Ntini on Tuesday. In fact, the on-going first Test against India here is only their third traditional format match in 2023. Ntini, one of the pace greats from SA with 390 Test victims, was asked if Rabada, who now has 285 scalps can be termed among the stalwarts such as Allan Donald, Shaun Pollock, Steyn and Ntini himself. "He is already up there (among greats). When you talk about those guys, when you talk about those bowlers, they have passed the 400-mark and KG (Rabada) is chasing the 300-mark. But we have got a massive problem. "You are playing two Test matches a year and what is that? Do you think this guy (Rabada) can hold up till he gets to that milestone," Ntini, now a noted commentator, told PTI. "It's not going to be easy for

the nature of games (number of matches and formats) that is being given to South Africa to play against other countries," he said, citing the problem of Proteas playing just three Tests this year. Then there is the mushrooming T20 leagues and the money they carry. Young SA pacer Gerald Coetzee attracted Rs 5.60 crore (over a million SA Rands) from IPL outfit Mumbai Indians recently in the auction. So, is Test cricket's priority shrinking? Ntini made no bones about how he looked at the situation. "No! Your country is your priority. Take the example of Kagiso. How many Test matches has he played and he still continues to play IPL. If Gerald Coetzee today thinks that he is getting a million rands and what he should do now, that will be his biggest mistake," said Ntini.



"When you continue playing Test matches, you get more understanding of the game because in T20, you get five days to consistently put the

ball in right areas, so when you go to IPL, you know how to put the ball in right areas," he said. Ntini is an old school person,

who still believes in Test cricket's value. "We were taught Test matches give you recognition throughout the world. If I

want to bowl 10 overs and go for seven runs, they will call you expensive. But in a Test match, you will have more time to come back. Your fitness is tested. In ODIs, you bowl six overs and its okay. In T20s, you bowl 2 overs, it can be okay. Where will you be recognised?" So, has any IPL team ever approached him? "No IPL team has ever approached me. I haven't been approached here at home," pat comes the reply. Ntini feels, perhaps, his outspoken nature has caused the trouble. "Man, I would never know. From my side of things, I am available to be part and parcel of the system but they don't see it that well. Some people don't like being outspoken," he quipped. Ntini doesn't like interference in his work and that's the reason he could never be an establishment man.

"If I say to you 'My office is my office and I will come to you when I need you, and you can't barge into my office and tell me what to do, so if I don't do what you tell me to do, you are going to fire me,'" he said. Why is Bumrah special? Having played against some quality fast bowlers like Jagavallab Srinath and Zaheer Khan during his playing days, Ntini has no qualms in admitting that Jasprit Bumrah is special. "Look where Bumrah releases the ball. He releases the ball from the top of his head. So, he gets the angle to bring the ball back in. He can get deliveries to straighten after pitching. I don't know if he has powerful wrists and action is always the same, that's how beautiful it is. His yorkers, he doesn't miss any, those are the things everyone gets to enjoy. India isn't the team without Bumrah," he added.

INDIA-SOUTH AFRICA TEST

India 208 for 8 as rain stops play at Centurion

PTI ■ CENTURION

India laboured to 208 for eight when bad light and rain halted the final session's play on the first day of the opening Test against South Africa here on Tuesday. The elemental adversity stopped the play after 59 overs on a day that also saw a delayed toss due to wet patches on the field. South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada rocked India with a five-wicket haul (5/44) as the visitors hung on for dear life through an unbeaten Kagiso Rabada bowled two of the most intimidating and incisive spells witnessed in recent times to completely rock the Indian batting line-up, which struggled to 176 for 7 at tea on the opening day of the first Test against South Africa here Tuesday. One of the finest fast bowlers in contemporary cricket, Rabada (5/41 in 15 overs) bowled an absolute peach to dismiss Virat Kohli (38 off 64 balls) with the old ball after having bounced out Indian skipper Rohit Sharma (5) in his first spell. In between, Shreyas Iyer (31 off 50 balls), who lived dangerously, got a shooter that completely exposed his defence. Rabada's 14th five-wicket haul in



Tests also comprised the scalp of Ravichandran Ashwin, who was completely rocked by extra bounce, and Shardul Thakur (24), who after a gutsy effort was softened by a bouncer and

then taken out with a length delivery. KL Rahul (33 batting) looked solid but is slowly running out of partners as a first innings score of 250 looks a distant reality now.

Rabada, who was given a break from white ball leg, didn't need time to hit the rhythm as he bowled long spells, got a disconcerting bounce along with late swing that had the Indian batters

in complete tangle. The manner in which Kohli was forced into making a mistake was an education for young pacers. Rabada bowled a couple of incoming deliveries to peg him on the backfoot and then unleashed his lethal weapon. He made a nearly 31-over-old Kookaburra to move in and kept it on fuller length as Kohli shaped himself to play inside the line of the delivery. But to his amazement, the ball pitched and deviated late to take the outside edge en route to keeper Kyle Verreynne's hands. Kohli got a massive reprieve in the first session when he was on four as Tony de Zorzi dropped a dolly at square leg off debutant Nandre Burger (2/39) but he then carried out the repair work with Iyer. At the toss, Temba Bavuma took the expected decision of bowling first and his bowlers did make best use of the conditions during that first hour. The steep tennis-ball like bounce was always going to create problems for the star-studded Indian line-up which for the last six months has played only white ball formats. The compulsive puller that Rohit is, his opposite number Bavuma stationed a long leg like all international skippers deploy across formats.

SA captain Bavuma walks off with hamstring strain

PTI ■ CENTURION

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma's participation in the on-going first Test against India was thrown into jeopardy after he limped off the field with a left hamstring strain here on Tuesday. Bavuma went out of the field in the 20th over after chasing a drive from Virat Kohli off left-arm pacer Marco Jansen. "Scans have revealed a left hamstring strain. He (Bavuma) will undergo daily medical evaluations to determine his participation in the match," said an update from Cricket South Africa (CSA). Bavuma hobbled midway through that chase via extra



cover region and soon walked off the ground with the help of the South African physio. Dean Elgar, who is retiring after this series, stood-in as captain in the absence of Bavuma.



Australia at 187-3 on first day of 2nd Test against Pakistan at MCG

AP ■ MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA)

Marnus Labuschagne notched a gritty score of 44 not out to guide Australia through a rain-interrupted first day of play in the second test against Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday. Invited to bat first by Pakistan captain Shan Masood, who won the toss in overcast conditions, Australia reached 187-3 at stumps. Pakistan squandered a golden opportunity to put Australia on the back foot early, allowing openers David Warner (38 off 83 balls) and Usman Khawaja (42 off 101) to share a 90-run partnership on a pitch offering sideways movement for the seamers. Warner, in his penultimate test, played a loose shot outside off stump on 38 in the final over before lunch and was caught at slip off the bowling of spinner Agha Salman. The 37-year-old Warner, who scored 164 in the first test in Perth, was lucky to reach double figures Tuesday. Warner offered a regulation chance on 2 to first slip off the bowling of Shaheen Shah Afridi in the third over, but it was put down by Abdullah Shafique. Unbeaten on 36 at lunch, Khawaja added six runs to his total before he guided a delivery from Hasan Ali to second slip at 108-2. Khawaja is the leading test run-scorer in 2023 with 1,210 runs at an average of 55.00.

Rain interrupted play 37 minutes before the scheduled tea break, with Australia on 114-2 off 42.4 overs. Play resumed almost three hours later, rewarding those fans among the first-day crowd of 62,167 at the MCG who had waited patiently for the rain to clear. Steve Smith was given out LBW on 19 to the bowling of Afridi, but the former skipper successfully reviewed the decision as replays showed the ball was going over the stumps. On 26, Smith was given out following a caught-behind appeal from Aamir Jamal, but Pakistan successfully reviewed the decision as replays showed a faint edge. Smith struck only two boundaries in his 75-ball knock, sharing a patient 46-run partnership with Labuschagne. Travis Head was unbeaten on nine at stumps to join Labuschagne in the crease when play resumes Wednesday. Australia named an unchanged side Tuesday and Pakistan made three changes. Wicketkeeper Sarfaraz Ahmed was replaced by Mohammad Rizwan and fast bowler Khuram Shahzad was ruled out due to a rib injury. Medium-pacer Faheem Ashraf was dropped as Hasan Ali and Mir Hamza returned to the side. The third test in the three-match series is scheduled to begin Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where Pakistan won its last test in Australia nearly 30 years ago.

'India will need a little bit of luck to win series in South African conditions'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India head coach Rahul Dravid on Tuesday said his team would not mind a bit of "luck" going its way as it aims to win a maiden Test series in South Africa and breach its 'final frontier' after 31 years of attempting. Having first visited South Africa in 1992, India have made seven more tours and won four Tests but are yet to win a series, even though the Asian giants though have won Test series in England, Australia and New Zealand. "We (have) come close a couple of times and we have played some good cricket here... Just a few critical moments we have not been able to, maybe, get

over the line, get the 34-40-50 runs that you probably need to be able to... To compete here," Dravid told Star Sports before the start of the opening Test at SuperSport Park. The batting great said the team will take a lot of confidence from the manner in which it bowled on the last tour two years ago, when India squandered a 1-0 advantage to lose the three-match rubber. "Having said that, we looked at a lot of stuff and the way we bowled, I thought we bowled really well in the last series which gives us a lot of confidence that we have the ability to take 20 wickets here with the kind of attack that we have." Dravid added, "You need a little bit of luck as well in these



conditions, there are lot of plays and misses, you want to be the one playing and missing, and hopefully, the opposition edging those same ones. I think there is a little bit of luck involved. "But, as long as you do your skills well and make sure that

you are putting the ball in the right area, as batting with a certain level of discipline and patience when it is required, looking to capitalise when the ball gets a little bit softer and you are ahead of the game and recognising that you are never 'in' in these kinds of

conditions in South Africa... "You might feel that you are in when batting on 34-40, but really, if you can convert that into a much more significant score that makes a big difference. "So little things like that you need to get right against a really good team like South Africa, very strong team in these conditions, who know how to play well here. I hope that, over the course of the next two Test matches, we will be able to do that." Dravid was also asked about seamer Prasad Krishna who made his Test debut on Tuesday. The head coach called him a "promising prospect". "Prasidh is a promising prospect, but we have to be realistic that this is his first Test

match. He has not had a lot of first-class cricket to fall back on because of a number of reasons. "But I am hoping he has a good game and enjoys himself. It is such a lovely moment when we give out a new cap to someone." The Rohit Sharma-led India are currently placed at the top spot of the points table for the World Test Championship 2023-25 cycle, following a win and a draw against the West Indies earlier this year in June. On the other hand, hosts South Africa will be kicking off their campaign in this WTC cycle with this Test. Since 1996, India have played 23 Tests in South Africa and won only four and never more than once in a series.

Coca-Cola extends partnership with ICC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Beverages major Coca-Cola on Tuesday announced extending its partnership with the ICC for another eight years, becoming a brand having the longest association with the cricket body. The Coca-Cola Company and International Cricket Council (ICC) have signed an agreement at the latter's headquarters extending the partnership till end of 2031, said a joint statement. "This eight-year partnership as a Global Partner of the ICC confirmed the collaboration as one of the longest-ever associations formed by the ICC with a single brand, spanning a total timeline of 13 years (2019-2031)," said a joint statement. The agreement includes partnership for all men's and women's events including the ICC Cricket World Cups, ICC T20 World Cups, and ICC Champions Trophies through the end of 2031. In 2019, the Atlanta-based beverage major had entered into a



four-year partnership with ICC covering major events. During the recently concluded ICC Men's Cricket World Cup India 2023, Thums Up and Limca Sportz were the exclusive beverage and sports drink partners. Additionally, Sprite took centre stage with its captivating 'Thand rakh' campaign, aimed at elevating and sustaining the enthusiasm of cricket fans throughout the biggest World Cup ever. Bradford Ross, VP Global Sports and Entertainment Marketing & Partnerships at The Coca-Cola Company, said: "Sports holds immense power

to unite people, and this partnership provides us with a unique opportunity to blend our brand affinity with the fervour for the world's cricketing game. We endeavour to continue to delight consumers with our diverse portfolio and create unique experiences for fans." ICC Chief Commercial Officer Anurag Dahiya said: "This long-term collaboration ushers in a new commercial era, filled with exciting prospects for the sport. With the Men's T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies, and the Women's edition in Bangladesh just around the corner, we're poised for unprecedented global growth and engagement. This partnership not only celebrates our sport's expansion but also promises innovative opportunities to enhance our fans' experience worldwide." The beverage maker, which owns brands such as Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Thums Up, Limca, Sprite, Maaza, Minute Maid etc., has been associated with sporting events and organizations around the world.

IPL participation of Mujeeb, Naveen, Farooqi in doubt over Afghanistan NOC

PTI ■ KABUL

Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) is unlikely to offer No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Naveen Ul Haq and Fazalqah Farooqi for the next two years, putting their participation in the Indian Premier League 2024 season in doubt. According to a release issued by the ACB, the board has decided to delay the annual contracts for year 2024 for these players having formed a "dedicated committee to thoroughly investigate the matter", after they expressed a desire to be released from their central contracts from January 1. "The insistence on not signing the central contract for these players was their involvement in commercial leagues, prioritizing their personal interests over playing for Afghanistan, which is regarded as a national responsibility," the ACB said on its website. "By opting for their release, the Afghanistan Cricket Board has decided to take disciplinary measures against these players," the board added.



Afghanistan are also set to play a three-match T20I series against India with the first game to be played on January 11 in Mohali, second on January 14 in Indore and third on January 17 in Bengaluru. "In response, the ACB assigned a dedicated committee to thoroughly investigate the matter, develop appropriate recommendations that best serve the ACB's interests and share them with the ACB's top management," the ACB said. The board added that Mujeeb, Naveen and Farooqi have also requested to "consider their consent for participation in the national events". While Mujeeb was roped in by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 2

crore during the auction earlier this month for IPL 2024, Naveen was retained by Lucknow Super Giants and Farooqi by Sunrisers Hyderabad. The ACB further informed that its special committee has made a three-point recommendation. "Starting from January 1, 2024, the three players shall not be eligible for the central contract for one year. In this case, ACB will consider and decide their participation in events when needed," read the first point. The ACB said NOCs to these three players will be revoked immediately. Each of these three players represented Afghanistan in the 50-over World Cup in October-November.

How Indian blind cricket team captain found way to serve nation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Growing up, Ajay Kumar Reddy only wanted to become a soldier and serve the country. He was heartbroken when he got to know that the visually impaired cannot enter the army. But Ajay, who became partially sighted at an early age, soon found another way to serve India: by playing cricket and winning the World Cups. For his contributions, he will receive the Arjuna Award next month, becoming the first to win the honour from blind cricket.

Born in Gurazala, Andhra Pradesh, the Indian blind cricket team skipper lost his left eye in a freak accident when he was just four. "My parents were farmers. One day I wasn't able to sleep when my parents had gone to work in the field," Ajay told PTI. "I wanted my mother. As I got up, the latch of the door went inside my eye. I had surgery but I lost all vision in my left eye. I had some vision in my right eye but by the time I turned 12, I couldn't see the letters on the board." To avoid complete vision loss,



the doctors advised Ajay's parents to take him to a blind school. Ajay's parents thus moved to Narsarapet to enrol him into the Lutheran High School for the Blind in 2002, and he embarked on what would become a life-changing experience. "I got to know about blind cricket at that school. I also heard that Pakistan was the number one team, that Pakistan has beaten India and they had just won the World Cup. It was a time when tensions between the two neighbours were at a high. The Indian

Parliament had been attacked by militants and there was mass mobilisation of both nations' military forces at the border. "I felt very angry. I had always wanted to become a soldier and at that time I kept hearing about the issue at the border. So my mindset was simple - India losing is wrong. "Without knowing the rules I decided will play for India and make them win the World Cup." But life was one big ordeal for Ajay then. "It was a very hard time for us. My parents only knew farming. We started having financial

issues after a month. We needed to borrow money to eat," recalled the 33-year-old. "My parents started selling tea and set up an idli-dosa stall. They kept me in the hostel so that I get proper food but I didn't stay. I felt they were abandoning me." Ajay tried to help his parents. "I used to support my parents by cleaning tea cups, bringing water, make dosas, serve the customer. "But sometimes because of my vision, I had problems and people used to abuse me dikhta nahi kya, andha hai

kya?" (Can't you see, are you blind?) But I wanted to help my parents." He found succour in cricket and would play all night, sleep in the morning and then wake up at 1pm and start playing again. In 2010, he made his India debut and was part of the T20 World Cup-winning team. But that did not give him much joy. "The first time we won a T20 World Cup. Pakistan cricketers said 'Oh this is a new format, you were lucky that's why you won. In ODIs we are number 1'.