

**OPINION 6**  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
SAM BAHADUR

**WORLD 8**  
HEAVY FIGHTING ACROSS GAZA  
HALTS AID DELIVERY

**MONEY 10**  
'AIRLINE INDUSTRY TO RECORD  
\$25.7 BILLION NET PROFIT IN 2024'

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# Amit Shah dares Pakistan on PoK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah thundered categorically in Parliament on Wednesday, declaring, "PoK is ours." His statement was met with a huge round of applause from the members in the Lok Sabha.

While justifying the reservation of seats from the PoK region in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, the Home Minister blamed India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for two major blunders — declaring a ceasefire without winning the entire Kashmir and taking the issue to the United Nations. These, he argued, have resulted in the sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir over seven decades.

Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, Shah said if Nehru had taken the right steps, a large chunk of territory would not have been ceded and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir would have been part of India.

"I support the word that was used here — Nehruvian blunder. Because of the blunder that was committed during the time of Nehru, Kashmir had to suffer. With responsibility, I want to say the two big blunders that

happened during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru, happened due to his decisions, because of which Kashmir had to suffer for years," Shah said.

"Kashmir had to suffer due to Nehruvian blunders. One was that when our Army was winning and as soon as Punjab area was reached, ceasefire was declared and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was born. If the ceasefire would have been (declared) three days later, PoK would have been part of India," the Home Minister said.

The ceasefire made without winning the entire Kashmir was one "blunder" and the other was taking the issue to the UN.

There was an uproar by the Opposition benches over the remarks on Nehru and they staged a walkout but returned later.

After their walkout, BJP leader Bhartruhari Mahtab said the Home Minister should also talk about the "Himalayan blunder", a reference to Nehru's actions leading up to the war with China in 1962.

Shah quipped that his talking about two blunders had upset the Opposition benches and if he had used the phrase "Himalayan blunder", they would have resigned.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said the remarks made

## Says Kashmir is ours



Parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

PTI

were not an insult to anyone and were only made to put things in context.

In his remarks, Shah also alleged that the Kashmir

matter was taken to the UN in a hurry. "If at all it had to be taken to the UN, it should have been sent under Article 51 rather than Article 35 of

the UN Charter," he said, asserting that he of course believes that the issue should not have been taken to the UN in the first place.

Shah also quoted Nehru as saying later that the ceasefire was a "mistake". Shah said it was not Nehru's mistake but a blunder. "So much land of

this country was lost, it was a historic blunder," the home minister added.

"Those holidaying in England will not notice any change in Jammu and Kashmir," he said, in sarcastic way, hitting former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, who was raising questions frequently.

Shah said when terrorism started in Kashmir, people were targeted and they had to flee. "I have seen many leaders who shed crocodile tears and consoled well with words. But Modi is the only leader who has worked to wipe out their tears," he said.

He said about 46,631 families and 1,57,967 people were displaced in their own country and were displaced in such a way that they were uprooted from their own homeland and this Bill is going to give them rights and representation.

He said after the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be 43 Assembly seats in Jammu region — up from present 37 — and in Kashmir Valley it will be 47 from 46.

Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, two members from the Kashmiri migrant community and one representing the displaced persons from the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) will be nominated to the

legislative assembly.

As many as 24 seats will be kept for the residents of PoK.

Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, Shah said it had nothing to do with going back on promise as it was a temporary article and had to go.

"You did not have the courage, PM Narendra Modi showed courage and did away with it," he said, referring to the Opposition benches. Shah pointed out that the two Bills on Jammu and Kashmir seek to nominate two Kashmiri Migrant community members, including a woman, to the assembly.

One seat in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will be set aside for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the Home Minister said. More than 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far, he said. Shah said the Government's focus is on ending the terror ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir. "I believe the Modi Government will return to power in 2024 and by 2026, I hope there will be no terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill were passed by the Lok Sabha after Shah's reply.

## BRIEFS

### KHALISTANI THREATENS TO ATTACK PARLIAMENT

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police are on alert after the US-based Khalistani supporter Gurbatwant Singh Pannu released a video message threatening to "shake the very foundation of Parliament" on December 13 — the anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament. The threat came in the backdrop of American prosecutors last month linking an Indian official to a man charged with conspiring to assassinate Pannu. Last week, the US federal prosecutors charged Nikhil Gupta, 52, of working with an Indian government employee in the conspiracy to kill Pannu.

### PORTALS BLOCKED FOR OFFERING FAKE JOBS

**New Delhi:** The Union Home Ministry on Wednesday said more than 100 websites that were being operated from overseas and involved in organised illegal investments and part-time job frauds have been blocked. These frauds typically involve targeted digital advertisements using keywords like "ghar baithe job" (Do jobs sitting at home) and "ghar baithe kamai kaise karen" (how to earn while sitting at home) in multiple languages.

### PAKISTAN WOMAN ARRIVES IN INDIA TO MARRY

**Chandigarh:** Karachi resident Javeria Khanum crossed over into the Indian side from Attari in Amritsar district where she was welcomed by her fiancé Sameer Khan and some members of his family to the beats of 'dhol'. Khanum has been granted a 45-day visa after two previous visa rejections and the Covid pandemic stalled their plans for around five years. The couple, in a brief interaction with reporters at Attari, said the marriage will be solemnised in January.

## Victorious BJP MPs head back home to their States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Amidst the parley at the highest level of the party regarding the naming of Chief Ministers for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, Union Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar and Prahlad Singh Patel resigned from the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. The BJP has decided that all 12 of its MPs recently elected to State Assemblies will resign from Parliament to join the new Governments in the Hindi heartland.

Three BJP MPs contested in the Telangana Assembly, where the Congress catapulted to power; thus, they continue to hold their Lok Sabha membership.

With this the BJP's tally in the Lok Sabha has come down to 292 and in the Rajya Sabha one down with 93 members. Sources in the Government said all three Union Ministers will also be quitting the Modi Government as a procedural formality. The move has given rise to the view that the party leadership may bring in new faces at the helm in all the three States. With the Lok Sabha elections less than five months away, the party is likely to send a larger message about its social agenda with its chief ministerial choices.



Sources also did not rule out the possibility of having Deputy Chief Ministers in the States to balance social equations and enhance administrative effectiveness.

The BJP swept to power in the three Hindi-speaking States, dismissing the challenge from the Congress in all of them as it raced to a two-thirds majority in Madhya Pradesh and comfortable majority the Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan in the polls where Narendra Modi and his guarantees powered its campaign.

BJP president JP Nadda

accompanied 10 of them as they tendered their resignations from Parliament.

Two others, Union Minister Renuka Singh and Mahant Balaknath, will also be quitting, party leaders said. Other MPs who quit are Rakesh Singh, Uday Pratap Singh and Riti Pathak from Madhya Pradesh; Kirodi Lal Meena, Diya Kumari and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore from Rajasthan and Gomati Sai and Arun Sao from Chhattisgarh. All except Meena are Lok Sabha members. Meena is a Rajya Sabha member.

Patel said the 10 MPs took Modi's blessings before tendering their resignations. The BJP Parliamentary Party will hold its first meeting during Parliament's Winter Session on Thursday and is likely to felicitate Modi for leading the party to massive wins in three Assembly polls.

The BJP Parliamentary Party, which includes all its Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members, generally meets every week during the session. In the meetings, its leaders, including Modi, speak on different issues germane to the agenda in Parliament and also to its organisational and political campaigns.

Continued on Page 5

## Distasteful remarks by DMK MP in the House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

A huge political row has erupted following the 'Gaumutra Remarks' by DMK Lok Sabha MP DNV Senthil Kumar's followed by some Opposition leaders on the North-South divide remarks with the Centre taking exception to the comments by accusing the Congress of hatching a conspiracy to insult Indian culture and identity, instead of analysing the reasons for its defeat in the elections.

The BJP asked if DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has asked party leaders, who had spoken against Sanatan Dharma, to also apologise after MP DNV Senthil Kumar expressed regret in Lok Sabha for referring to Hindi heartland States in a derogatory manner in the House.

Others political parties from the Opposition were yet to react on the statement though the Congress has distanced itself and said they

do not buy such irresponsible comments by their southern India alliance partner. "The Congress believes in Sanatan Dharma and Gau Mata, we don't agree with DMK's statements," said Congress general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Rajiv Shukla.

Union Minister Anurag Thakur questioned the silence of former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi on the issue and wondered whether the remarks on the North-South divide, reference to North India as "gaumutra States" and criticism of Sanatan Dharma had their sanction.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is spreading the message of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' but the Opposition has started using foul language and blaming the EVMs and regionalism for their loss in the Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh," the Union Minister said at a Press conference.

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## Jaipur burns

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Markets were closed in Jaipur and some other Rajasthan districts and protesters blocked roads and stopped trains on Wednesday after a bandh call by the Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena over the killing of its chief Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi.

Governor Kalraj Mishra spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the phone and summoned the State Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, police chief and Jaipur Police Commissioner to review the law and order situation in the State.

The police set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe into the killing of the Rajput leader who was shot dead by two men at his house here on Tuesday. They also killed an "accomplice" who had accompanied them to the house. On Facebook, gangster Rohit Godara — said to be linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang — has claimed responsibility and said Gogamedi was killed for "backing" his enemies.

The police have identified the two alleged killers as Rohit Rathore from Jaipur and Nitin Fauji from Haryana's Mahendragarh, and announced a cash reward of ₹ 5 lakh for information leading to their arrest.

Markets remained closed in Jaipur, Kota, Bundi, Ajmer, Sawai Madhopur, Chittorgarh, Jhalawar, Baran and some other districts while a mass rally was taken out in Udaipur and a demonstration was held at the collectorate circle amid heavy deployment of police.

## Gujarat's Garba finds a global audience

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Garba, an all encompassing iconic dance of Gujarat performed for nine days during the Navratri festival, has now earned a place on the global cultural map. It has been included in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The inclusion has been made under the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 18th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which began in Kasane, Botswana on Tuesday.

In August 2022, India had nominated garba for inclusion in the UN cultural agency's list. Soon after the announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to the social media X expressing his happiness.

"Garba is a celebration of life, unity and our deep-rooted traditions. Its inscription on the Intangible Heritage List showcases to the world the beauty of Indian culture. This honour inspires us to preserve and promote our heritage for future generations.



Congrats for this global acknowledgment," he posted.

Incidentally, the inclusion of the iconic garba of Gujarat in the prestigious list comes a few days after the Prime Minister released a music video titled 'garbo', based on a garba song penned by him. "The 190-second song was penned years ago," Modi wrote on his X timeline

about the video.

"Garba of Gujarat is the 15th ICH element from India to join this list. This inscription underscores garba's pivotal role as a unifying force that fosters social and gender inclusivity. "Garba as a dance form is entrenched deeply in ritualistic and devotional roots, involving people from all walks of

life and it continues to thrive as a vibrant living tradition bringing communities together," an official release from the Gujarat Government said. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel called it as a 'proud moment'.

Patel wrote on social media X, "Garba's inclusion in the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage list is truly a proud moment for Gujarat and India. It is an honour given by the world to the ancient culture of India."

Union Minister of Culture G Kishan Reddy also

shared a post on the same, saying the listing is a testimony to the "tireless efforts of this government under the leadership of Modi to showcase our rich culture, traditions and heritage to the world"

Meenakshi Lekhi, Minister of External Affairs, too took to the social media to express her happiness calling it 'a proud moment for Bharat as Gujarat's vibrant Garba is now inscribed as the 15th recognised element in @UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.

Continued on Page 5



# Those creating divisions in name of caste disrespecting Babasaheb: Adityanath

CM YOGI PAYS RICH TRIBUTES TO BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath paid rich tributes to Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on his death anniversary on Wednesday and also recalled Babasaheb's contributions towards building a modern India.

Describing Babasaheb as a great human and cautioning people against divisive forces, the chief minister said that the double-engine government was working towards realising Babasaheb's dreams for the country.

"Some people are currently trying to weaken the country by dividing society. We have to be careful of such people. Such individuals truly disrespect Babasaheb," he said.

He wrote on social media platform X, "The entire life of Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, who made an unforgettable contribution in the building of modern India, is a living school (of learning) of democracy. Every work, every decision of the architect of the Constitution, Bharat Ratna Babasaheb was dedicated to 'Antyodaya'. Humble tributes to such a martyr on his Mahaparinirvan day."

The chief minister offered floral tributes at Babasaheb's



statue at Atal Chowk in Hazratganj and Dr Ambedkar Mahasabha premises on Vidhan Sabha Marg.

"Babasaheb had stated that first and foremost we are all Indians. Today, some people criticise India and disrespect Indian identity. They engage in creating divisions in society in the name of caste. Such individuals truly disrespect Babasaheb," he added.

He further said that though

Babasaheb was also lured with personal offers, he refused to bow down and continued to work for India and Indian identity. "Whenever there is discussion on uplifting the downtrodden anywhere in the world, Babasaheb Ambedkar's name invariably comes to mind," he stated.

He said Bharatiya Janata Party governments at Centre and in the state had taken several steps to realise Babasaheb's

dreams. The establishment of Babasaheb's 'Panch Teerth' was carried out by Prime Minister Modi. "We worked not on the basis of caste, but on the basis of needs," he added.

Yogi further mentioned that before 2014, having a house was just a dream. Today, around four crore people in the country have got their own permanent houses and the government intends to provide houses to all those who are still

without it. He said that whether in villages or cities, the government would provide housing to every Dalit, deprived and poor person.

"The campaign for every home to have a toilet has addressed the unsanitary practice of manual scavenging," Yogi said and added, "Had the COVID-19 pandemic occurred before 2014, the country would not have been able to control the devastation as the government at that time lacked the vision."

He said that the provision of ration to the poor, free testing, treatment and vaccination were ensured. Yogi remarked that previously, governments had their own preference among people, with some supporting Dalits and others opposing them. "Even those who claimed to support Dalits would exploit their name for personal gain," he pointed out.

He further said, "The issues of Musahar, Vantangiya, Bahariya, Sahariya, Kol, and Chero were never addressed. Babasaheb had suggested creating programmes for their uplift, but for 70 years, they were deprived of even the right to vote."

The chief minister invited everyone present at the event to visit the Atal Residential Schools built for the children of labourers and see the arrangements made there.

Discussing the Abhyudaya coaching initiative, he mentioned that it was preparing children of Dalit communities for competitive exams.

# Woman duped of Rs 96,000 in Chinhat

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A woman was duped of Rs 96,000 in an ATM card swapping case in Chinhat.

The incident took place on December 1 but a case was registered on Wednesday.

As per reports, the woman, identified as Anjali Patel of Yamuna Enclave in Chinhat, had gone to withdraw cash from an ATM booth at Matiyari crossing in the evening.

"I was withdrawing money from the ATM when a youth entered the booth. He confused me by speaking about the transaction method and replaced my ATM card with another one. I tried swiping the card in the ATM several times to withdraw the money but in vain. But it did not strike me that the miscreant had changed my ATM card. When I reached home I found the ATM card was in the name of one Ajay Kumar Gautam. A little later I got 10 messages about withdrawal of Rs 96,000 from my bank account," she said.

Police registered a case on the complaint of the victim. A team is scanning the CCTV footage to find out the suspect.

The police said they were close to get a lead.

SUICIDE

A 28-year-old student preparing for competitive exams ended his life at his house in Krishna Nagar on Tuesday night.

Reports said the youth, Deepak Prakash Rawat of Shakti Nagar, was found hanging at his house with a gamcha tied around his neck.

The incident came to light in the morning on Wednesday and the family members rushed Deepak to Lok Bandhu Hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Police sent the body for autopsy. An investigation is underway.

ACCIDENT

Reckless driving claimed the life of a man who succumbed to the critical injuries he suffered in an accident on December 1 while his companion is still battling for his life at the King George's Medical University Trauma Centre.

The accident took place in Malihabad.

As per reports, the victim, identified as Pati Ram of Behta in Hardoi district, was returning home along with his friend, Mukim Khan, also of Hardoi, from Lucknow by a motorcycle on December 1. When they reached Faridpur village in Malihabad, a speeding Roadways bus coming from Hardoi collided with the motorcycle. Due to the heavy impact, the motorcycle was stuck under the chassis of the bus and it was dragged several feet.

Both Pati Ram and Mukin suffered critical injuries. They were rushed to the KGMU Trauma Centre where Pati

Ram died on Wednesday.

The wife of the deceased, Ranjana, lodged a complaint on Wednesday and the police have started the investigation.

THEFT

Thieves made off with Rs 60,000 in cash and ornaments worth several lakh rupees from a house in Sarojini Nagar when the house owner and his family had gone out of city.

The house owner, Dilip Kumar Mishra of Sai Suraksha Colony in Amausi, said he along with his family had gone to their native place in Kushinagar on the occasion of Chhath Puja on November 17 and returned to the city on November 21.

"I found the house burgled and I complained to the police but the cops took time in registering the case," he said.

A police spokesman said a case was registered on Wednesday.

RAPE ATTEMPT

A man made an attempt to rape the daughter of his neighbour in Mohanlalganj on Tuesday evening.

Reports said the family of the girl sent her to bring a grinder from the neighbour's house. It was alleged that the accused asked the girl to take the grinder from the room and when she went in, he entered the room and attempted to rape her.

Police are investigating the case.

# Constable, brother die after falling into sewer tank in Hamirpur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident, a police constable fell inside a sewer tank in Terha village under Bharua Sumerpur police station of Hamirpur. His elder brother also jumped into the tank to save him but both died.

According to reports, 32-year-old Lal Bahadur alias Kallu Kushwaha of Terha village was currently posted as a constable in Manjhanpur police station of Kaushambi district. He had come to the village on leave a week ago. His elder brother was standing on the top of the sewer tank and talking to gram panchayat member Ramsevak alias Bhura about getting the old sewer tank reconstructed in the house. While they were talking, the lid of the sewer tank suddenly broke and Lal Bahadur fell into it. His elder brother, Ramsevak, also jumped into the tank to save him.

However, as the tank was filled with sewage and poisonous gas, both fell unconscious. The relatives tried hard to save both of them but were

not successful. Later, a backhoe (JCB) broke the tank and both were taken out after about an hour. During this time both of them turned unconscious. The relatives immediately took both of them to the primary health centre in Sumerpur where the doctors pronounced them dead. In another tragic incident, a 45-year-old doctor, identified as Arun Kumar Singh, allegedly took his own life after killing his wife and two children late on Tuesday night. The incident took place at the Modern Rail Coach Factory at Lalganj in Rae Bareilly. Following the incident, Rae Bareilly's Superintendent of Police Alok Priyadarshi accompanied by the Lalganj SHO, ASP, and a forensic team visited the spot. Preliminary investigations revealed that Dr Arun Kumar Singh, an eye specialist at the Modern Railway Coach Factory, was battling depression.

According to Priyadarshi, the forensic team's initial findings suggest that Singh first took the lives of his wife, son and daughter and then ended his own life.

# Suicide victim's body gnawed by rats at mortuary in Lalitpur

PTI ■ LALITPUR

Rats gnawed at the body of a woman, who allegedly committed suicide by hanging, at a mortuary here, officials said on Wednesday. The district authorities have formed a three-member team to investigate the matter, they said.

The 21-year-old woman committed suicide by hanging on December 2. The same day, police shifted her body to the mortuary at around 11 pm, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the district Dr Imtiaz Ahmed told PTI.

"It appears that the body was not covered properly and was gnawed at by rats in the night," he said.

The bite marks were noted by the family members, police and the hospital staff before the post-mortem on December 3. Following this, the victim's mother filed a complaint to the CMO alleging negligence in handling of the body, officials said.

"On the mother's complaint, we formed a three-member team of doctors headed by Additional Chief Medical Officer Virendra Singh the same day to probe the matter and file its report within a week," the CMO said.

According to police, the woman committed suicide at her-laws house. On the complaint of her family members, an

FIR of dowry death against the victim's husband and her in-laws has been registered. The case is under investigation.

MAN KILLED IN ROAD MISHAP

Bareilly: A 50-year-old man was killed after the auto-rickshaw he was travelling in was hit by an unidentified vehicle in this district in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

Superintendent of Police (Rural) Mukesh Chandra Mishra said, Khushaliram, a farmer, was travelling to Bareilly city to sell his produce. He died on the spot in the accident, the SP said.

Police have sent the body for post-mortem and they are trying to identify the vehicle that hit the auto-rickshaw and arrest its driver.

4 BROTHERS GET LIFE TERM FOR KILLING COUSIN

Chitrakoot: A court here on Wednesday sentenced four brothers to life imprisonment in a 2017 murder case.

The court of District Judge Vikas Kumar convicted Umesh, Dinesh, Raju and Bhaiya for killing their cousin Lavlesh Yadav, District Government Counsel Shyam Sunder Mishra said.

"The court also slapped a fine of Rs 12,500 on each of the convicts," he added.

# Police keeping an eye on speed limit offenders

Lucknow (PNS): The Lucknow police are keeping an eye on speed limit offenders after the G20 road accident in which the son of ASP Shweta Srivastava was killed by occupants of a speeding car recently.

As of now, the Lucknow police have registered 34 FIRs against those who raced their vehicles at 100 kilometre per hour and above speed in the city.

"Out of these 34 cars, three cars have VIP registration numbers and the police are finding the owners of these cars and those who were driving them at the time the images of these cards were captured by ITMS (Integrated Traffic Management System) cameras," sources in the police said.

They said these cars even broke the speed limit more than two times as per the ITMS camera records.

"The police will recommend cancellation of the registration numbers of these vehicles. The police are very alert on speed violation cases and only in November, the police chal-

langed 5,540 vehicles for violation of speed limit or for over speeding in the city," the source said.

They said over 450 persons were killed in road accidents in 2022-23 as per a rough survey.

"In most of these cases, the deaths were caused by over speeding, followed by reckless driving. The police are planning to tame the speed violators and also spot the places which are accident prone and take measures accordingly to minimise road accidents," the sources said.

They said it was strange that the offenders of traffic rules were driving cars at a speed even over 80 kmph when there was no road in the city where one could drive at that speed.

The sources said the guardians of such violators were also responsible for the menace of over speeding in the city. "They do not stop or counsel their children from buying motorcycles with features of high speed or racing motorcycles," the police lamented.

# Revenue dept employee arrested while accepting bribe

PTI ■ BALLIA

A revenue department employee and his assistant have been arrested for taking a bribe of Rs 5,000 for measuring a piece of land, police said on Wednesday.

A team of the Anti-Corruption Organisation's Azamgarh unit caught Lekhlal Navneet Kharwar and his assistant Chunnun Kumar red-handed while taking the bribe on Tuesday. Deputy Superintendent of Police Shiv Narayan Vais said.

The action came after a resident of Sultanpur complained that Kharwar was demanding money for measuring his land.

Meanwhile, members of the Lekhlal association led by their district president Nirbhay Kumar Singh reached the police and sat on strike protesting against Kharwar's arrest.

Additional forces from Sahatwar, Maniyar, Bansdih Road, Sukhpura and other police stations reached the spot and ended the protest, the SDP said, adding the situation was under control.



## NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sarvan to Sarvan Rathor. In future me known as Sarvan Rathor S/o Munna Lal. Badali Purwa Bhikaripur Unnao.

## NOTICE

I have changed my name from Parmar Mohinder Mangalsingh to Mohindar Singh Parmar. In future me known as Mohindar Singh Parmar S/o Mangall Singh. 142 Amauli Gujeta Kanpur Nagar.

## NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sahid Ansari to Mo Salahuddin Ansari for all future purpose, Mo Salahuddin Ansari S/o Mo Amir Ansari R/o Eklakh Nagar, Katrina Piper Kheda, Gangaghat, Unnao

## NOTICE

Be it known to all that the Original deed of my building number 125/2 A, Jhulelal Nagar Lukerganj Prayagraj, book number two, block number three, page number 79/102, number 2352 dated 26.5. 2005 acquired from former owner Krishna Pratap, lost somewhere. Its use by any person will be considered illegal. Brijesh Kumar Tripathi.

## CITYBRIEFS

TRIBUTES PAID

Tributes were paid to Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on his Mahaparinirvan Diwas at Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO) on Wednesday.

Paying tributes to Dr Ambedkar, RDSO Director General Ajay Kumar Rana said the personality of Babasaheb was a wonderful confluence of versatile talents. "Babasaheb was a skilled jurist, constitutionalist, social inspiration, educationist and nationalist as well as a scholar writer," he said.

Rana said that we all should rise above discrimination and contribute to make the huge RDSO organisation of Indian Railways stronger and more successful, so that the country could touch new heights of success.

"Only by doing this we can pay true tribute to Babasaheb, the great son of India," he said. STSC Association secretary Subhash Chand, Madhvi Verma and others expressed their views on the personality and works of Dr BR Ambedkar.

Senior officers of RDSO, including Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, Dinesh Shukla, Suresh Kumar, Dr Anirudh Gautam, Dr Ashish Agarwal, Arun Kumar, and employees were also present in large numbers.

FUNDS RELEASED

The state government on Wednesday, released a fund of Rs 8 crore to carry out repair works at the residential colony of class IV employees of the Forest Department located at Vibhuti Khand in the Gomti Nagar area. The colony was established in 1997, and since then no repair work has been undertaken. Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi said that maintenance was not the job of the development authority since the building was sold to the Forest Department and now, it was the duty of the Forest Department to look after the residential colony.

INAUGURATED

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat inaugurated the Deendayal Weaver Centre in Mathura, which is being run by the national award winner Virendra Dutt Semwal.

Bhagwat mentioned that handloom was being promoted at the centre. "While power looms are being installed at many places, handlooms will generate more employment and Sangh is continuously promoting such processes," he said.

# Right wing groups' members march towards Shahi Idgah, detained

PTI ■ MATHURA

Police detained about a dozen members of right-wing groups when they tried to march towards Shahi Idgah here, which they claim to be Shri Krishna's birthplace, on the 31st anniversary of the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

Senior Superintendent of Police Saitesh Kumar Pandey said, "Prohibitory orders are in place across the city; some

people who tried to violate it were detained for a few hours to ensure law and order."

Additional police forces were also deployed across the city to avoid any untoward incident on the day.

Several right-wing groups had earlier announced to organise various programmes in Mathura on the occasion but the programmes were cancelled following the intervention of local administration. Despite this, when the

members of Hindu Mahasabha and some of Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Sangharsh Samiti tried to march towards Shahi Idgah, despite the appeal of the administration, they were taken into custody, according to police.

Those detained include Swami Tarakeshwar and Dinesh Sharma of Sant Raksha Sangathan.

Similarly, three women and two men of the Agra unit of the Hindu Mahasabha were

also detained by the police for violating prohibitory orders.

Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha leader Rajashree Choudhury said, "Pind daan", a last rite ritual, was done at the Vishram Ghat on the banks of Yamuna for karsevaks who were killed during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in 1990." Choudhury was referring to the 1990 incident in Ayodhya during which police had opened fire at karsevaks marching towards the city.



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# BJP will win all 80 seats in LS elections, claims Pankaj Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

State vice-president of BJP and MLA Pankaj Singh on his first visit here after being made incharge of Kanpur, said the party will win all the 80 seats in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections. For this preparations are on a war footing at the party level. He said based on the faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the role of BJP workers the party will start work in all parliamentary constituencies to ensure its victory in the Lok Sabha elections. Speaking at a meeting organised at the party office on Wednesday, he condemned the murder of Karni Sena president Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi in Rajasthan and said he was receiving death threats during the Congress rule. It was the duty of the Congress Party to ensure his security but now strict penal action will be initiated against the assailants. He alleged that the Congress had always worked against the sentiments of people and was never concerned about the interests of the country. He also expressed his doubt over the continuance of opposition parties' alliance INDIA as it did not have any positive agenda. He said EVMs were found fit when the Congress was voted to power in Karnataka. Now with their defeat in the recently held assembly elections in the three states, they start blaming the



State BJP vice-president Pankaj Singh speaking at a meeting at the party office on Wednesday.

role of EVMs and other management of the Election Commission, he said.

**FEST:** The campus school at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) orchestrated Saptrang-2023, a Sports and Cultural Fest. The two-day celebration comprised sports and cultural activities. The Sports Day unfolded with the ceremonial inauguration by Prof Kantesh Balani, Dean of Resources and Alumni (DoRA), and Prof Niraj Sinha, PI to Campus School Governing Board (CSGB). Both the dignitaries shared insightful perspectives commemorating the occasion with the gathered audience. Setting the tone for the day, students from class V welcomed everyone with a melodious 'welcome song.' The day showcased a spectrum of captivating performances including a graceful

'Ribbon drill' by kindergarten students, an artistic display titled 'Beautiful creations with colourful dupattas' by class Prep, a spirited 'Maratha drill' by class I, an impressive 'Surya Namaskar' by class IV and a dynamic 'Fit India' presentation by class III. The highlight of the day was the riveting 'Lezium and Stick drill' performed by class V students.

In addition the school hosted finals of various races and a ceremonious prize distribution ceremony, acknowledging achievements across various activities held throughout the year. Noteworthy were the races designed for parents - categorised for both mothers and fathers adding an inclusive and participatory dimension to the event. Transitioning to the second day, the cultural fest unfolded at the Open Air Theatre (OAT) with an inauguration

presided over by Prof Braj Bhushan, Dean of Administration (DoAD), joined by Prof Niraj Sinha and Prof Kantesh Balani. The cultural extravaganza commenced with a soulful rendition of Ganesh Vandana by the students of class V. The stage came alive with the vibrant performance of 'Mera Naam Chin Chin Chu.' Pertinent issues were brought to the forefront by students of class II and Prep who adeptly presented the disadvantages of excessive plastic use and mobile device usage, respectively. The cultural spectrum expanded with captivating performances such as 'Masti ki Pathshala' by class I and 'Safarama' by class IV artfully portraying the unity in diversity through folk dance. The English play, 'My Dream,' added a narrative touch to the festivities, transporting the audience into a realm of fairy tales. The traditional music ensemble, 'Ritu Rang' by class V provided a fitting end to the cultural revelry. The day culminated in a formal prize distribution ceremony graced by the invited dignitaries followed by the presentation of the annual report by Achla Josan, Principal of Campus School who also proposed the vote of thanks expressing gratitude and acknowledgment for the collective efforts that made Saptrang-2023 a memorable celebration of six decades of educational excellence.

## 5 human traffickers arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A case of human trafficking has come to light in Kokhraj police station area. Where a young woman was allegedly purchased for Rs 1 lakh and was being taken to Rajasthan forcibly in a car by the accused. The woman somehow escaped from their clutches and reached Kokhraj police station.

After a complaint at the Kokhraj police station, the police arrested five human traffickers from the car while they were heading to Rajasthan. All of them have been sent to jail. The incident is said to be of a dhaba located on the national highway under the Kokhraj police station where a young woman from Ghazipur was trapped by a human trafficker from Mughalsarai and allegedly sold for Rs 1 lakh to the people of Rajasthan. Five people left for Rajasthan in the car with the girl. After the mother complained to the Ghazipur police a case was registered. Late on Tuesday night all the people stayed at a dhaba located in the Kokhraj police station area and the girl managed to escape. After this she reached the Kokhraj police station and informed the police about the entire incident.

The SHO said on the complaint of the woman, the police caught all the five accused.

## Workshop on production of green hydrogen from sugar industry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Managing Director, Maharashtra State Sugar Federation Limited, Sanjay Khatal, while addressing a workshop on 'Production of green hydrogen from sugar industry- Opportunities and challenges' at National Sugar Institute on Wednesday said the contribution of Indian sugar industry can make a major impact on bio-energy sector and national economy. He said the industry had to look beyond bio-power, bio-ethanol and compressed biogas to green hydrogen which was being considered as the future fuel for attaining zero carbon emissions by 2070.

NSI Director Prof Narendra Mohan while delivering the keynote address said the present global green hydrogen consumption was 100 million metric tonnes (MMT) per annum which was expected to increase to 500 MMT per annum by 2050. He said as per the National Green Hydrogen Mission, India is expected to have green hydrogen production of six MMT per annum by 2030. He said the Indian sugar industry can contribute to the extent of 0.1 MMT per annum by producing CBG from filter cake and then converting it to green hydrogen. He said there are several challenges in production of green hydrogen with respect to cost of produc-



tion, safety and transport. He said looking to the challenges for developing a low cost technology, NSI had worked out a model in collaboration with Pagnism Innovations Pvt Ltd, Sangli for production of green hydrogen in sugar industry wherein firstly compressed bio-gas having about 92-94 per cent methane was produced from filter cake, which was then converted to green hydrogen and carbon black, a product used in rubber, tyre and toner industry. Dr Gaurav Mishra, scientist, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy also graced the occasion. The demonstration of a pilot plant based on production of green hydrogen from compressed bio-gas was also made at the experimental sugar factory of the institute. The production of green hydrogen had two basis targets, electrification and serving hard to abate sectors like refineries, chemicals, fertilisers, steel and transport. In his presentation, Dr Mahesh Pagnis, Chief Executive Officer, Pagnism Innovations Pvt Ltd,

Sangli detailed the 'Rudra' technology developed for converting compressed bio-methane into hydrogen and carbon black. He said every 100 kg of compressed bio-methane was going to yield about 25 kg of green hydrogen and 75 kg of carbon black. He said the methane pyrolysis is carried out in a specially designed reactor under controlled conditions and after considering revenues from carbon black, the cost of production of green hydrogen is considered to be cheaper as compared to conventional electrolysis process. Neelam Dixit and Shalini Kumari of the institute spoke on various types of hydrogen, comparison of different technologies for production of green hydrogen, challenges in production and also the areas of probable utilisation of green hydrogen with major thrust on transport sector. Besides, Triveni Eng & Industries Ltd Unit Milak Narayanpur, Rampur, UP, making commendable contribution in production of clean, green and renewable energy was conferred the 'Green Initiative Award'.

## Tributes paid to Baba Saheb



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

On the 68th Mahaparinirvan Diwas of Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on Wednesday General Manager, North Central Railway (NCR), Prayagraj, Satish Kumar paid floral tribute to him. Thereafter AGM CP Gupta, CPPO Anurag Tripathi, all heads of department, officers and employees paid tributes to Baba Saheb. The GM threw light on the life, struggle and achievements of Baba Saheb. He said we get inspiration from the life of Baba Saheb. The other speakers included Dinesh Kumar, zonal secretary, All India Railways Employees Scheduled Caste/Tribe Association. At the end the vote of thanks was proposed to all officers and employees present.

**ATIQ'S PROPERTY:** How

much property did the slain mafia Atiq Ahmed make? This question still persists. It is because in the investigation details of Atiq's property in Noida have not been found. Officials suspect that the property here may have been taken in the name of someone else and not in the name of Atiq and his family. A reply has been sent by Noida Authority to Prayagraj Commissionerate. The files were searched for about 10 days. But not a single property detail belonging to these people was found. However, the authorities concerned are not ruling out that the property belonging to these people is not in Noida. It is possible that the property might have been taken under some other name. Atiq was killed along with his brother Ashraf in April this year. Atiq's family is struggling to manage the

remaining properties. It is learnt that the family has been planning to sell the Noida property for some time now. Friends of Atiq's sons are finalising the deal and many relatives are also involved in it. The police are searching for land worth crores acquired illegally. A letter was sent to the Noida Authority in which it was clear that action is being taken against nine people, including Atiq, under Gangster 14 (I) Act. In this sequence, details of property of Atiq Ahmed, his wife Shaista, their sons, Ali, Omar, Asad, Elzhm and Aaban besides Ashraf and his wife were asked to be found.

The process of confiscating illegally acquired nameless and anonymous properties of Atiq and his gang members associated with IS-227 is going on. Police and ED have so far taken action by identifying assets worth Rs 12,000 crore of Atiq, Ashraf and his family. Most of Atiq's assets are in the names of others.

**SHAKTI RASOI:** As per the orders of the government, Shakti Rasoi is being started by DUDA in the entire state. Now Shakti Rasoi has been started here. Mayor Ganesh Kesarwani on Tuesday started its operation by cutting the ribbon. The government is working towards providing self-employment to women. The operation of Shakti Rasoi is being started in the entire state, including Prayagraj. In the first phase its operation is starting at five major sites here. Only women will make and sell tea, snacks etc here. The mayor said today women are registering their participation in every field, the government is also supporting them in this. This Shakti Rasoi has been opened at the back end of the Municipal Corporation i.e. towards the gate of the railway station.

## Minor raped

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A sensational case of rape with minor girl by taking her hostage has come to light in Kaushambi. A 65-year-old retired employee allegedly raped a six-year-old minor girl by locking her inside the house in an area under Pashchim Sharira police station. The minor somehow freed herself from his clutches and narrated the ordeal to the family members. On complaint the police have registered a case against the accused under serious sections. The accused is in police custody. The police are investigating the incident. It is learnt that the accused belonging to the same village called the victim girl on the pretext of giving her a toffee, took her to a secluded house in the village, raped her and ran away. On getting information about the incident, the police reached the spot and took the victim to the district hospital where she is undergoing treatment. DSP Abhishek Singh said Pashchim Sharira police station had received information that the girl had been raped following which the victim was taken to the district hospital. The police immediately arrested the accused. On complaint the police registered an FIR under revelation sections of the IPC.

**IEEE WORKSHOP:** The sixth IEEE International workshop on 'Recent Advances in Photonics' (WRAP) will be held at Indian Institute of Information Technology, Allahabad from December 7. WRAP, a biennial event organized by the IEEE Photonics Society in India aims to provide a platform that brings together global experts and researchers to disseminate and highlight novel contributions and challenges in the field of photonics. The first edition of WRAP was organised at IIT Delhi in 2013.

## Various concerns of industries addressed by DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar District Magistrate Visakh G Iyer, while chairing the Zila Udyog Bandhu Meet at the newly-constructed auditorium, Sarsaiya Ghat, took up various issues related to industries. He expressed concern over parking of unauthorised private vehicles causing traffic jams at many places which hindered the smooth flow of traffic and caused undue hardships to the industrialists. He directed the RTO and the traffic police to ensure that all such vehicles parked illegally on the side of the roads be heavily fined.

He said in the Chakeri industrial area there was no street light at the entrance and directed the Kanpur municipal commissioner to ensure that proper illumination be carried out at the earliest. He said in addition to this on account of absence of sewer linkage there was a problem of water-logging and directed the UPSIDA to ensure a survey. He said from Dada Nagar to Panki site 1, 2, 3 the waste material purchasers had encroached the



Kanpur Nagar District Magistrate Visakh G Iyer addressing the Udyog Bandhu meeting.

government land and directed the officials to ensure that the land be identified and freed from encroachments. Iyer said in the Panki Industrial Area the battery discarded materials were being burnt openly and directed that the solid waste should not be burnt and disposed of as per the norms.

He said it had been brought to the notice that after the Zila Udyog Bandhu meetings the directives issued were being followed at a very slow pace and asked the officials

concerned to ensure that all the directives given in the meeting were followed on top priority.

**PNEUMONIA CASES:** Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Alok Ranjan while addressing a meeting of the health officials at the Kanshiram Hospital and Research Centre on Wednesday said in view of sudden change of weather there has been a steep rise in pneumonia cases, especially among children and senior citizens. He said it had been decided to set up more OPDs at all govern-

ment hospitals. He advised people to take precautions so that they do not fall victim to pneumonia which was the most common winter illness.

He said pneumonia was inflammation and fluid in one's lungs caused by a bacterial, viral or fungal infection. He said it made breathing difficult and can cause a fever and cough with yellow, green or blood mucus. He said the treatment depended on the cause and severity of pneumonia. He said it can affect one or both lungs. He said bacterial pneumonia tended to be more common and more severe than viral pneumonia as it required a hospital stay. Dr Ranjan said infection with streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria, also called pneumococcal disease, was the most common cause of CAP.

He said pneumococcal disease can also cause ear infections, sinus infections and meningitis. He said that viruses can cause the common cold, the flu (influenza).

He said people above 65 and children under the age of two were at risk.

## CSJMU V-C takes part in UKENIC conference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Prof Vinay Pathak, Vice-Chancellor of Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) and Vice-President of AIU, took part in UKENIC annual conference in London. It brought together eminent personalities from international education sector. Prof Pathak actively participated in academic discussions with CEOs of various global educational bodies. He also contributed his insights to two high-level panels focusing on

developing closer ties between the higher education sectors of India and the United Kingdom.

During the first panel discussion, themed 'Strengthening India-UK Higher Education Collaborations,' Prof Pathak held discussions with key figures such as representatives from the Department of Business and Trade, UK Government, a spokesperson from De Montfort University, UK and the Chairperson of the Indian Students Body in the UK. He emphasised on the ongoing reforms in the Indian

education system and highlighted measures to make graduates future-ready and employable. He underscored the potential for collaboration between India and the UK in areas such as skill education and enhancing the internationalisation capacity of the Indian education system. In the second panel titled 'Diversity of provision in Indian higher education,' Prof Pathak showcased richness and depth of the Indian higher education system. The panelists from UKECTIS discussed various

aspects of the Indian higher education landscape.

Prof Pathak elaborated on governance structure and regulations governing such a vast education system in India. He elucidated the transformative goals of the National Education Policy (NEP), emphasising the move away from the affiliation system to grant autonomy to higher education institutes in India. He also provided insights into the accreditation and ranking systems employed in India for benchmarking and ensuring quality assurance.

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The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described hereinbelow in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002.  
The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited for an amount detailed below and interest thereon.  
The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. Details are as below:

S. No.	Loan No/Borrower(s), Co-Borrower	Demand Notice Amount	Date of Demand Notice	Secured Asset	Date of Affiliation
1.	OLKW1711000005009420, Shamsho Jgha, Suraiya	Rs. 22,11,808/-	22-09-2023	House No AMC/649/1 Kharsa No 699/1 VA 829 KA Min, Situated at M I N Road Azad Nagar Gram / Mohalla Farrukhabad Chhillavana, Ward Hind Nagar Tehsil Sarojini Nagar Distt.- Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - 226001	04-12-2023
2.	OLKB1801000005010217, Santosh Kumar Gupta, Gudiyaa	Rs. 22,23,614/-	22-09-2023	House No A-9, Part/Minjuma of Kharsa/Gata No 19, Area 750 Sq.Ft, Village Baghamau Tehsil and Distt Lucknow Uttar Pradesh-226001	04-12-2023
3.	OKAN2111000005041234, Dheeraj Kumar, Sakshi Gupta, Heeraj Kumar	Rs. 4,71,382/-	22-09-2023	Part Of Arazi No 1157, Mauja Barasirohi, Distt.- Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh-208017	04-12-2023

**PLACE:- GURGAON, DATE :- 06-12-2023**  
**Authorized Officer, SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.**

## Man hit by tractor, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A middle-aged man was killed on the spot after being hit by an uncontrolled tractor in Bhogan village under Koraon police station area. On getting information police reached the spot, took the body into possession and sent it to the city for the post-mortem. According to reports, Lalra Prasad Vishwambhar (52), a resident of Basha village under Koraon police station, was going on his bicycle when a tractor coming at high speed hit him near Bhogan village. He was a watchman in the Forest department office. The collision was so horrific that he died on the spot. On information of passers-by, the Koraon police reached the spot. On getting information, his family members also reached the spot and were inconsolable. Koraon police

station in-charge Vinod Kumar Singh said the body of the deceased has been taken into possession and sent for the post-mortem. A complaint has been received from the family members. Further action is being taken.

**WORKSHOP:** A workshop for ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) specialists is being organised here from December 8 to 10. While speaking to journalists in the Press Club auditorium, Institute Principal Dr Mangal Singh said about 300 representative faculty members from all over UP, will participate in it. ENT surgeon Dr LS Ojha said apart from UP many specialists are coming from Delhi, Rajasthan, Bengaluru, Haryana and Kolkata. He said this conference is being organised by United Institute of Medical Sciences, City Branch of Association of ENT surgeons of UP and Moti Lal Nehru Medical College.

## Youth commits suicide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A youth committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree near his house in Asoha police area of Unnao on Tuesday afternoon. He was upset after his paramour refused to marry him. The police sent the body for autopsy. Shobhit (26), son of Jeevanlal Raidas of Mubarakpur, had an affair with a girl of Bachholia village situated about five km away from his village in Purwa Kotwali police area. She had promised to marry him. On Tuesday afternoon, Shobhit had left the house without informing anybody and reached his paramour's house. When she refused to marry him, he hanged himself from the tree. His family members came to know about the incident around 9 pm and became upset. They brought down

Shobhit in presence of the police and took him to the CHC from where he was referred to the district hospital where doctors declared him dead. Elder brother Ganesh said Shobhit was engaged in the work of cloth cutting in Delhi. He had arrived home about six months ago. Shobhit was married to Rinki of Lauwa village 18 months ago. After one-and-half months, Rinki had left him. When the issue was referred to the court, Rinki married again. Since then Shobhit was upset. After some time, when the talk of his marriage started taking place with a girl of Bachholia village, he began to meet her. The girl had now refused to marry him. Kotwali incharge Suresh Singh said the body, recovered hanging from the tree far away from his house, had been sent for an autopsy.

**YOUTH KILLED:** A youth was killed after being hit

by a speeding train on the down track near overbridge in Jhijnjak of Kanpur Dehat late on Tuesday night. He was taken to CHC from where after first aid he was referred to Kanpur where he died during treatment. He was identified as Deepak Kumar Bhadauria of Rail Bazar, Jhijnjak (Kanpur Dehat) and was a drug addict. On Tuesday night in a bid to go to the other side of the Delhi-Hawrah rail route, when he was crossing the down railway line, the speeding Bhubaneshwar Express train going towards Kanpur from Etawah hit him and caused serious injury. GRP outpost incharge Arpit Kumar deputed the cops Sant Kumar and Ram Nivas to take the injured to CHC, Jhijnjak. As he had lost his both the limbs, doctors at CHC referred him for Kanpur after the first aid. During treatment in Kanpur, he succumbed to his injury.



# ‘No proposal to raise OBC quota as per population in local body polls’

## Centre informs Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that there was no proposal to increase reservation for Other Backward Castes (OBC) as per population in the local body elections.

Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj Kapil Moreshwar Patil, during the Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, said OBCs are provided one-third reservation under Article 243D of the Constitution.

“However, 21 state governments have increased the reservation up to 50 per cent. The member has sought increasing

the reservation for OBCs as per the population in the local body elections. There is no such proposal before us,” he said.

In local bodies, there is a 50 per cent reservation for women. Under this quota, there is a provision to accommodate OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Patil added.

However, the state governments have the right to provide reservations for OBCs. “On this subject, the states should take a call at their level,” the Union minister said while replying to another supplementary question.

He said local body elections could not be held in Maharashtra due to the OBC



quota issue. The Supreme Court has said that the reservation cannot be increased beyond 50 per cent without empirical data.

About women's reservation in local bodies, Patil said the Centre has made several efforts to empower elected women panchayat leaders, including providing them six months of training. There has been a rise in the participation of women in the governance process, he said.

The minister was responding to queries raised by YSRCP MP Ryaga Krishnaiyya, the DMK's

P Wilson and NCP leader Vandana Chavan.

Responding to another question, Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) with a budget outlay of Rs 24,000 crore was being implemented from this year to undertake tribal welfare initiatives.

“It is one of the largest Central schemes targeting the tribal community's development and aims to uplift the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG),” he said.

In the previous five-year plans, PVGT groups with less than 500 members were not covered which led to backwardness of many tribal communities. However the PM-JANMAN scheme targets to empower PVGT groups with 100 members, he said.

# Modi to launch global investors summit in Dehradun

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the 'Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit 2023' in Dehradun on December 8 as the hill state looks to boost investment in the coming years, his office said in a statement on Wednesday.

Modi will also address the gathering on the occasion, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in its statement.

The 'Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit 2023' is a step towards establishing Uttarakhand as a new investment destination and the theme of the two-day event is 'Peace to Prosperity'.

The summit will be attended by thousands of investors



and delegates from across the world.

It will witness participation of Union ministers and ambassadors of various countries along with leading industrialists, among others, the statement said.

# Karnataka facing draught, has sought ₹18,000 crore relief from Centre: Karge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka is reeling under the impact of severe drought and the state government has sought Rs 18,171 crores as relief from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said on Wednesday.

Raising the matter in the Upper House during the Zero Hour, the Congress president said Karnataka is grappling with the most severe drought in 123 years and the damage to crops is estimated at over Rs 35,162 crore.

According to him, the damage to crops ranges from 40-90 per cent.

Kharge said the state gov-

ernment has sought Rs 18,171 crore from the NDRF to help the affected people.

“This financial support is crucial for providing input subsidies, gratuitous relief and implementing other immediate growth measures due to low rainfall (in Karnataka),” the senior Congress leader said.

He further highlighted that water levels in various reservoirs have reached an alarmingly low mark and there may also be a shortage of drinking water in the coming days.

Kharge also spoke about the flood situations in certain parts of Tamil Nadu, including Chennai. He also accused the BJP of not paying heed to the problems being faced by people as they have “won elections”.

# Has Stalin also asked DMK leaders to apologise for insulting Sanatan Dharma: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday asked if DMK chief M K Stalin has asked party leaders, who had spoken against Sanatan Dharma, to also apologise after MP DNV Senthilkumar expressed regret in Lok Sabha for referring to Hindi heartland states in a derogatory manner in the House. Addressing a press

conference at BJP headquarters, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar also slammed the “silence” of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on the “repeated objectionable remarks about Sanatan”.

“I heard Mr TR Baalu say today that Chief Minister Stalin has told MP Senthilkumar to not make such statements. But there is a question that has to be

asked to Mr Baalu and (M K) Stalin.

“What about Udayanidhi Stalin's statement? Has he (M K Stalin) advised Udhayanidhi Stalin to apologise? What about A Raja? Has he (DMK chief) advised A Raja to apologise?” the BJP leader said.

“Why can't Stalin apologise?” he said.

He alleged that the opposition INDIA bloc parties



have started a “new chapter of divisive politics” with north-south divide remarks as their efforts to drive a wedge on religious lines for votes did not work in the just-concluded assembly polls.

The BJP will “firmly oppose” such politics played by the Congress and other members of the “INDI Alliance”, Chandrasekhar said.

“People of the country will also totally oppose such

politics and expose them,” he said at a press conference at the BJP headquarters.

Senthilkumar had on Tuesday used a pejorative to describe Hindi heartland states while attacking the ruling BJP. The comments led to a ruckus and adjournment in the House and were expunged by Speaker Om Birla.

BJP leaders had decried his remarks as “hate speech” and said the voters will “wipe out”

the INDIA bloc from southern India as well in the next elections. Facing flak, the DMK MP had later apologised.

“Commenting on the results of the five recent state assembly elections, I have used a word in an inappropriate way. Not using that term with any intent, I apologise for sending the wrong meaning across,” Senthilkumar said in a post on X.

# ‘Companies using vaping products to trap kids into life threatening menace’



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Citing various studies indicating that the aerosol from electronic devices such as e-cigarettes and e-hookahs can cause fatal health conditions such as lung inflammation, DNA damage and lung cancer, Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of concerned mothers combatting the escalating vaping crisis among youth, has expressed concerns that companies are using such products to trap kids into life-threatening menace.

The group called out international tobacco and vaping firms for deliberately targeting children to establish a consumer base for their addictive and harmful products including all kinds of new-age gateway devices such as e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn electronic devices. Stressing on the critical need for increased awareness, the body has repeatedly highlighted on the urgency of educating the public about such intentions of these companies.

“Despite the ban on vaping devices and e-cigarettes in India, their availability is cultivating a generation addicted to these habits, potentially leading them towards tobacco use.

“It's crucial to debunk misconceptions that paint e-cigarettes as harmless vapor inhalation. Recent research underscores the substantial harm caused by inhaling these substances, posing risks to lung health and impacting various facets of children's development, including cognitive abilities and brain development,” said Varuna Pathak, former Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at the Gandhi Medical College.

Experts have highlighted that e-cigarettes and many new age gateway products are reported to contain approximately 900 to 2,000 distinct chemical entities with a substantial number still being unknown.

“In addition to being considered a gateway to lifelong tobacco habits, these new-age gateway devices are fostering a new generation of individuals becoming habituated to these products. This rising trend is not only prevalent globally but also noticeable in India. Similar to the concerns raised by Scottish parliamentarians, our own parliamentarians should engage in discussions with experts to ensure that vaping and e-cigarettes do not take root within our country, said Bhavna Barmi, internationally-acclaimed clinical psychologist, public speaker and head psychologist at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute.

“Recent trends indicate a shift where more young individuals are initiating nicotine use through vaping rather than traditional cigarettes. This presents a significant challenge - a new generation becoming addicted solely through the use of e-cigarettes, which in turn will give rise to various psychological challenges among users,” Barmi added.

This predatory targeting of children has also been highlighted by experts globally, and most recently it was raised in discussions in the Scottish Parliament. Epidemiologist Professor Emily Banks underscored to the Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSPs the concerning and immoral intentions of vaping and tobacco giants to create ‘lifelong customers’ in children and teenagers. Her remarks aligned with growing expert support for a complete ban on disposable e-cigarettes in Scotland.

More than 45 nations which include Australia, Singapore, Thailand, Argentina, Japan, Brazil have implemented e-cigarette bans. In 2019, India commendably banned vaping and e-cigarettes under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act.

# ‘More tremors due to activation of Almora fault in Western Nepal’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Earthquake activity has increased in 2023 owing to the activation of the Almora fault in Western Nepal, the Government told the Parliament on Wednesday informing that there have been 97 earthquakes between magnitude 3.0 to 3.9 in 2023 compared to 41 in 2022.

“The activation of the Almora fault in western Nepal was the reason for earthquakes in parts of north India and Nepal,” Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a written reply in Lok Sabha.

He said the activation of the Almora fault triggered significant mainshock earthquakes on January 24 (5.8 magnitude), October 3 (6.2), and November 3 (6.4).

These mainshocks, accompanied by subsequent aftershocks, led to an increased frequency of earthquakes in 2023, Rijiju said, adding that the background seismicity remained unchanged during this period.

“It is common for northern India and Nepal to occasionally experience moderate earthquakes, and fluctuations in seismic activity.

Nepal and the neighbouring northern part of India, situated near the active faults of the Himalayan region, are highly seismically active areas prone to frequent earthquakes due to collision tectonics, where the Indian plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate,” he said.

Almora fault is a high angle west-northwest-east-southeast to northwest-southeast trending tectonic plane that separates the Garhwal group of inner lesser Himalaya in the north from Jaunsar and Dudatoli Groups of outer lesser Himalayas in the south.

Rijiju said the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published the Seismic Zoning Map of India, ranging from Zone II to V and offers guidelines for implementing the essential engineering codes and practices to construct earthquake-resistant buildings.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has been the agency responsible for various precautionary measures such as earthquake drills, awareness programs, earthquake management to enhance preparedness and response to earthquake related incidents.

On January 24, an earthquake of magnitude 5.8 hit Nepal. It was strongly felt in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

# Girls who start menstruating as they turn 13 years at risk of developing type 2 diabetes in midlife: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A US research published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Nutrition Prevention & Health has found that girls turning 13 years old who start to menstruate risk developing type 2 diabetes in mid-life.

The researchers from Tulane University and Brigham and Women's Hospital in the US also found that having periods early in life, especially before 10 years of age, is also associated with an increased risk of getting a stroke before the age of 65 in those having diabetes, researchers found after analysing data of more than 17,000 women aged between 20

and 65. However, they said that being an observational study, they couldn't establish the causes behind these associations.

“Earlier age at [first menstrual cycle] may be one of early life indicators of the cardiometabolic disease trajectory in women,” they suggested in their study.

The women included in the study came from the nationally representative cross-sectional National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2018. The women had specified the age at which they had had their first menstrual cycle. Of the women studied, about 10 per cent, or 1773, reported a diagnosis of type 2

diabetes. Further, 11.5 per cent of these, or 203, reported some type of cardiovascular disease, the researchers found.

They quantified the increased risk of type 2 diabetes due to beginning to menstruate early in life as 32 per cent (periods at age 10 or before) through 14 per cent (age 11) to 29 per cent (age 12).

They also found that menstruating before turning 10 was linked with a more than doubling in stroke risk among women below the age of 65 with diabetes. Specifically, they calculated the risk to be 81 per cent among those having their first period at the age of 11, 32 per cent at 12, and 15 per cent at 14. “One potential pathway

explanation may be that [such] women are exposed to oestrogen for longer periods of time, and early [menstruation] has been associated with higher oestrogen levels,” the researchers explained.

They also said weight could be another important factor influencing the results, as when they adjusted the data for weight, the observed associations between age at first menstrual cycle and stroke complications weakened slightly, albeit remaining significant.

The researchers said that these findings supported the possibility that age of getting the first period may be incorporated into early-life strategies for preventing diabetes and pro-

gression of diabetes complications.

“These findings add another dimension to the potentially less well understood determinants of cardiometabolic risk, particularly in women who have been relatively under-represented in this area of research,” said Sumantra Ray, Executive Director of the NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition & Health, which co-owns BMJ Nutrition Prevention & Health. “And they provide a clear steer on the need to design interventional studies looking at the prevention of cardiometabolic disease in ethnically diverse groups of women who start menstruating at a young age,” he said.

## FROM PAGE 1

### VICTORIOUS BJP MPS HEAD BACK HOME TO THE STATES

Sources said there may be deliberations on the CM face for the States where the BJP has been voted to rule however the announcement could be delayed keeping in mind the schedule of oath ceremony. The PM is scheduled to visit Uttarakhand hence the new CMs may take over the reins of the State during weekend where maximum number of party members can be present for robust impression for party cadre ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Tomar is a Cabinet Minister handling the crucial agriculture portfolio, and their departure have sparked a fresh buzz within the party on whether Modi will induct new members in his council of Ministers ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Tomar, a seasoned organisation man, and Patel, who comes from politically significant Other Backward Classes, are seen as possible chief ministerial choices in Madhya Pradesh, along with the incumbent Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who has been at the helm in Madhya Pradesh since 2005 except for 15 months when Kamal Nath headed a Congress Government after the 2018 Assembly polls.

Amid speculation within the party that its leadership may pick one of the outgoing MPs as the new Chief Minister of Rajasthan, where veteran leader Vasundhara Raje is also in race, its senior functionaries said political factors involving social equation will be a key consideration in naming three Chief Ministers. Raje (70) is a two-term former Chief Minister but her equation with the party's national leadership has not been very smooth. Sao, an OBC, and Sai, who comes from Scheduled Tribes, are seen as serious contenders due to their social background, image and relatively young profile. Raman Singh (71), a three-term former Chief Minister, is also being talked about but there is a view that the BJP leadership is looking for a generational change in leadership.

A BJP leader noted the Prime Minister's recent exhortations that women, youth, poor and farmers are

the four biggest castes for him, adding that this may play a role in final decision.

### DISTASTEFUL REMARKS BY DMK MP IN THE HOUSE

Senthil on Wednesday apologised in the Lok Sabha for his controversial ‘North-South divide’ remark which sparked a backlash. Kumar had on Tuesday used a defamatory word to describe Hindi heartland States while attacking the ruling BJP. His comments led to ruckus and adjournment in the House, and were expunged by Speaker Om Birla later. MPs from the ruling BJP on Wednesday also created a ruckus over the issue, and the House witnessed a brief adjournment during the Question Hour over the issue.

“The Congress doesn't believe in constitutional institutions. After facing defeat, they never analyse the reason for the defeat. They keep blaming EVMs and insult Sanatan Dharma, Hindus and Hindu culture,” said Thakur, the Union Information and Broadcasting Minister. He said during the election campaign, the Congress raised the issues of casteism and religion, and when it did not work the Opposition party was now resorting to a North-South divide.

Senthil's comments come in the backdrop of some referring to the recent Assembly election results as reflective of the ‘North-South divide’ after the BJP trounced the Congress in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the Congress won in Telangana. “What is the Congress' compulsion to stick with the DMK which has been insulting Hindi, Hindus and Sanatana Dharma,” Thakur wondered. The Minister recalled that even Chief Minister-designate of Telangana A Revanth Reddy had made comments that his “Telangana DNA was better than the Bihar DNA” of his rivals. Thakur said Stalin and his son Udhayanidhi had also made remarks insulting Sanatana Dharma. Thakur claimed the trend of fuelling a North-South divide started with Rahul's defeat in the Lok Sabha elections from Amethi in 2019.

Rahul had made certain statements

demeaning north Indians in his Lok Sabha seat of Wayanad after his electoral defeat in Amethi, Thakur alleged, adding the Congress leader had also made common cause with people who were keen to see India being divided into pieces. “We had said back then that someone was standing with the ‘tukde-tukde’ gang. Now, the insulting comments by Congress' allies are sowing the seeds of dividing the country on regional lines. This reflects the real thinking of the Congress of divide and rule,” Thakur added.

In the Lok Sabha when the House reassembled for the Zero Hour, Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal raised the issue, and asked if DMK leader TR Baalu, and Congress leader Rahul agree with the comments. Baalu said remarks made by Senthil were not correct. “Statement made by Senthil Kumar was not correct. MK Stalin has warned the particular member,” Baalu said. Soon after, addressing a press conference at BJP headquarters, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar also slammed the “silence” of Congress leaders Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on the “repeated objectionable remarks about Sanatan”. “I heard TR Baalu say today that Chief Minister Stalin has told MP Senthilkumar to not make such statements. But there is a question that has to be asked to Mr Baalu and (M K) Stalin. What about Udayanidhi Stalin's statement? Has he (M K Stalin) advised Udhayanidhi Stalin to apologise? What about A Raja? Has he (DMK chief) advised A Raja to apologise?” the BJP leader said.

He alleged that the Opposition INDIA bloc parties have started a “new chapter of divisive politics” with North-South divide remarks as their efforts to drive a wedge on religious lines for votes did not work in the just-concluded Assembly polls.

### GUJARAT'S GARBA FINDS A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

A celebration of feminine form of divinity, unity in diversity and social equality, garba transcends geographical boundaries. The listing is a testament to the tireless efforts of this Government under the leadership

of the PM to globally promote our rich culture, traditions & heritage, she added.

The UNESCO described garba as “a ritualistic and devotional dance performed throughout the State of Gujarat, and across India, Garba is celebrated for nine days during the festival of Navaratri. The festival is dedicated to the worship of the feminine energy or Shakti.

“The cultural, performative, and visual expressions of this feminine energy are expressed through the Garba dance. The performative and visual celebration of garba takes place within homes and temple courtyards, public spaces in villages, urban squares, streets, and large open grounds. Garba thus becomes an all-encompassing participatory community event.”

Nityanand Srivastava, former State Tourism Commissioner and Managing Director of State Tourism Corporation and now Chief Wildlife Warden in Gujarat Government said the high-energy folk dance that originated in Gujarat and is performed with passion and fervour at the auspicious Navratri festival runs in the bloods of Gujaratis and it is no surprise that the dance found place in the prestigious global list. “Garba is something that resonates happiness. It has been existing for years in this part of the country and now drawing many non-Gujaratis too also in many other regions across the States because of its uniqueness, vibrancy and multi-colors. In Gujarat, Garba is another name for celebration,” he added.

Tim Curtis, director of UNESCO New Delhi Regional Office for South Asia and UNESCO Representative for Bhutan, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, too joined several Indians in celebrating the moment.

The UNESCO ICH India List consists of the Sankirtana, drumming and dancing of Manipur, Durga Puja, Kumbh Mela, Yoga, Novruz, Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Buddhist chanting of Ladakh, Chhau dance, Kallbia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan, Mudiyyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala, Ramman, Tradition of Vedic chanting and Ramlila.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## INDIA hits roadblock

With certain satraps demanding their pound of flesh, Congress forced to be on the defensive

The Congress seems to be spiralling down the goodwill and credibility meter. After the drubbing it received in three recent Assembly elections, its partners in the INDIA bloc are also not extending it the courtesy it has grown accustomed to. After burning most bridges with its co-parties on account of its preoccupation with the State elections, where it miserably failed to score a point, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had convened a meeting of the INDIA bloc on December 6, but key alliance partners cocked a snook at the abrupt invite and expressed unavailability to attend, forcing Congress to reschedule the gathering. The absence of prominent figures, including TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar, SP's Akhilesh Yadav and DMK's MK Stalin underlined the growing discontent within the alliance. Mamata cited commitments, Nitish is reportedly down with viral fever, and Stalin is engaged in relief efforts after cyclone Michaung. The unexpected nature of these absences left the Congress in an awkward position.



The lack of communication and coordination reflected poorly on the Congress's ability to manage the alliance. To address the discontent, the Congress scaled down the meeting to include only floor leaders, rescheduling the heads of parties' meeting to the third week of December. This move aims to accommodate the busy schedules of alliance leaders and foster better participation, which should have been the priority right from the start. However, the rescheduling indicates the need for Congress to reassess its approach to alliance management and communication.

These are difficult times for the Congress. The decimation of the party must have had a demoralising effect on the INDIA alliance as well, which was keenly watching the elections and hoping for a turnaround in the northern region. The development also indicates that though Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra created good impact, it failed to translate into votes. The fissures in the alliance were actually visible even before the elections. Several bloc parties, including the TMC, AAP, SP and JD(U), expressed frustration with the Congress for stalling alliance activities, such as seat-sharing talks, citing Assembly polls. The delay raises concerns about the cohesion and effectiveness of the alliance, with some members believing that the political momentum gained after previous meetings has been lost. The Congress must address the issues of perceived dissension, EVM tampering controversy in Assembly elections and work towards restoring the alliance's stability, effectiveness and cohesion for the political battle ahead. The rescheduled meeting presents an opportunity for the Congress to regroup, re-establish communication with alliance partners and chart a course that strengthens the unity and purpose of the coalition. It will also be the litmus test of the INDIA bloc's ability to survive together.

### PICTALK



Eminent dancer Dona Ganguly's troupe performs on 29th Kolkata International Film Festival, in Kolkata

PTI

## Insurtech is the next big thing after FinTech

By merging insurance with technology, this burgeoning sector promises to revitalise the traditional insurance sector

In the past decade, FinTech's revolutionary impact has been marked by the integration of cutting-edge technologies across various sectors. Thriving on innovation, these FinTech companies have disrupted traditional processes, raising billions in the process. Even with a funding slowdown, the sector managed to secure \$1.3 billion in H1 2023. Building on this momentum, Insurtech emerges as India's new digital frontier. Merging insurance with technology, this burgeoning sector promises to revitalise the traditional insurance. Its innovative solutions aim to enhance customer experiences, streamline operations, and increase insurance accessibility. Currently valued at US\$ 20,667.5 million, Insurtech is projected to surge to an estimated 210,664.3 million by 2033, growing at a CAGR of over 26%. This remarkable growth trajectory positions Insurtech not just as a trend, but as a transformative force in India's digital economy.

**Insurtech and its scope**  
Insurtech (made of two words: Insurance and



Technology) refers to the use of technological innovations designed to squeeze out savings and efficiency from the current insurance industry model. It is not just limited to digitising the existing insurance framework; rather, it's a reimagining of insurance operations using cutting-edge technologies like AI, blockchain, and IoT to create more personalised, automated, and customer-centric services. Insurtech in India represents a transformative force within the traditionally manual and paperwork-heavy insurance sector. Leveraging technological innovations, Indian Insurtech start-ups are streamlining policy management, claims processing, and risk assessment. This simplification makes insurance more accessible and user-friendly. There is still a large proportion of the population uninsured, for instance around 40 crore individuals

do not have access to any health insurance. This significant presence of an uninsured population, coupled with growing digital adoption, positions Insurtech for substantial growth. **Success of the Fintech**  
The success of fintech companies and the rapid adoption of the services offered by these enterprises have laid the groundwork for the emergence and growth of Insurtech. The current trajectory of Insurtech which promises high growth rates and is also characterised by disruptive innovation and swift market penetration, is quite similar to how the Fintech sector has evolved in the past decade. **Investors are for Insurtech**  
Even though the comparison of numbers with the fintech sector would not be fair, it is critical to mention that Insurtech enterprises have raised more than \$2.6 billion in the past five years. With exciting forecasts, it is rather a surety that VCs and investors would be more than happy to pour more money into a sector that has a forecasted CAGR of more than 25%. Here are some of the

most critical reasons, besides the growth trends, that have enhanced investors' interest in the sector: **Filling gaps in insurance**  
Traditional insurance models are often hindered by inefficiencies like lengthy claim processes and limited customer interaction. Insurtech addresses these gaps through technological solutions that streamline operations and enhance customer engagement. This ability to solve longstanding problems in insurance makes Insurtech a particularly attractive investment for those looking to fund ventures that combine innovation with practical, market-driven solutions. **Data-Driven Insights**  
The fundamental appeal of the sector is based on data analytics and AI. These technologies enable more accurate risk assessment, personalised policy offerings, and predictive analytics to anticipate future trends and customer needs. For VCs and investors, the efficiency and customer-centric nature of these data-driven solutions presents a compelling investment case. (The writer is the founder, of Alwrit; views are personal)



ADITYA DADIA

## The significance of Sam Bahadur

The biopic on Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw depicts him as a fearless man of honour and integrity but skips the scruffy treatment he got in his twilight years

Undoubtedly, many parents will be writing about Sam Bahadur, the biopic on Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. It not only shines a light on the life and times of a genuine military hero but also on what it means to be an officer and a gentleman. Whatever one's views about the movie or its shortcomings, of which there are a few, it is undeniable that the director, Meghna Gulzar, has brilliantly caught the very essence of the Field Marshal, both as a human being and a military leader nonpareil. For that, she and the cast certainly deserve ample praise and accolades.

For unknown reasons, the biopic has skirted the issue of the horrendous treatment meted out to the Field Marshal in his twilight years by our political establishment and the bureaucracy. That is rather unfortunate. For instance, though appointed Field Marshal in January 1973, he only received the arrears of his pay and allowances in 2007, a full thirty-four years later, and that too because of the personal intervention of President Abdul Kalam. Interestingly, in 1972, when Mrs Gandhi first proposed to promote him to the rank of Field Marshal, she also wanted him appointed Chief of Defence Staff. A proposal vigorously opposed by bureaucrats not unexpectedly, but also by the other two Services as well. Unfortunately, we are still paying a very high price for the short-sightedness of our military hierarchy to this day. On his demise in June 2008, while the Government did honour him with a State Funeral, neither the President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Pratibha Patil, nor Prime Minister Manmohan Singh nor his defence minister AK Antony, could spare time to attend. Instead, the Government was represented at the funeral of India's greatest military icon since Independence, by the Minister of State for Defence, Mr. Pallam Raju. What it says about our politicians needs no elaboration! Indeed, one would not be surprised if the unflattering depiction of politicians and bureaucrats in the movie was deliberate and not



miscasting as many suggest. The unkindest cut of all though, was the absence from the funeral of the Naval and Air Force Chiefs, Admiral Suresh Mehta and Air Chief Marshal Fali Homi Major. As per newspaper reports, this was supposedly because of the short notice and their inability to organise appropriate transportation. In fairness to them, they were represented, but if the reasons for their absence were true, it was certainly a grievous error of judgement on their part and reflected very poorly on them. Coincidentally, the Army Chief, General Deepak Kapoor, was also absent, but on an official visit to Russia, and was represented as per protocol, by the Vice Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Naidu. The significance of their absence was not lost on the serving and veteran community, as it clearly reflected the direction the military was heading, where displaying fealty to political masters overrode the necessity to live up to the traditions and ethos of the military. A trend, that has only taken deeper roots over time, as increasing politicisation within the military has started taking its toll. Today, interference in purely military mat-



MANY AMONGST OUR TOP MILITARY HIERARCHY ARE COMPROMISED AS THEY OWE THEIR PRESENT POSITIONS MORE TO POLITICAL MUNIFICENCE, THAN THEIR OWN PROFESSIONAL ABILITIES

ters by politicians and bureaucrats, who have neither military experience nor domain knowledge, and will never be held accountable is clearly visible. The unviable Agnipath Scheme that is causing grave damage to our military ethos and capability is just one example. That there has been no opposition from within the military to all of this can be attributed to the sad fact that many amongst our top military hierarchy are compromised as they owe their present positions more to the political munificence, than their own professional abilities. Moreover, reputations, standing and self-respect were greatly damaged by the unwillingness of the Service Chiefs to speak up when military veterans and families were illegally and mercilessly beaten up by the Delhi Police as they sat in peaceful protest at the Jantar Mantar against the Government's failure to grant OROP, a promise that incidentally it has yet to honour in full. Indeed, those unwilling to defend their own will never garner any respect. Ironically, the situation our military is in presently has created a fundamental problem for the political leadership,

though it appears they may have failed to comprehend this as yet. One aspect that stands out in the movie is the fact that the Field Marshal endeared himself to Mrs Gandhi not by submitting to her every whim or a flagrant display of personal loyalty, but by giving her straightforward professional advice, regardless of consequences. Thus, despite all her inherent fears regarding the Field Marshal's likely motives or ambitions, she came to place implicit trust in his professional judgement and abilities. The results were there for all to see. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Modi does not have that luxury, which probably explains our weak-kneed response to Chinese provocations. As Napoleon so aptly put it, "If you build an army of 100 lions and their leader is a dog, in any fight, the lions will die like a dog. But if you build an army of 100 dogs and their leader is a lion, all dogs will fight as a lion".

(The writer is a military veteran and a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with the Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. Views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### IMRAN KHAN CRIES OVER HIS DOINGS

Sir — On the face of it, predicaments for cricketer-turned-politician and former Pak Prime Minister Imran Khan are turning from bad to worse with each day passing and seeming far from over given that Mr Khan has been on the tenterhooks since he put in his papers as Prime Minister following a no-confidence motion passed against him in the National Assembly with 174 votes on April 10 in 2022. Mr Khan and his close aide and ex-foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi are already behind bars in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, a special court judge on Monday ruled that Mr Khan and Mr Qureshi would be again indicted in the cypher case on December 12 for allegedly leaking state secrets in violation of the country's laws. Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqernain heard the case in the Rawalpindi prison where the duo is incarcerated.

To remind you, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) filed the chargesheet against the PTI leaders duo on September 30 under sections 5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Acts which entails a death sentence or up to 14 years in jail in case of conviction. Given that the Army in Pakistan has largely been in the driver's seat since the creation of the country in 1948, Pakistanis have taken the army rule in their country in their stride.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

#### COP28 CONTINUES TILL NEXT WEEK

Sir — The COP28 global climate conference will continue for another week. That means its formal completion will be announced on the 12th of December. But this meeting held in Dubai, in many cases, seems to be entangled in a web of controversies even before it has started. First, there was controversy over the name of its chairman, Sultan al-Jaber, who is himself the head of an oil company. Secondly, that document became public, which also includes the draft which states that the UAE is going to use this platform to increase the sales of its oil. Second, con-

#### Opposition parties must introspect



It is indeed a pity that opposition parties are still not sensitised on the need to exhibit unity among themselves to bring about the much-

needed change in the political course of the country. People seem to have acted in desperation and kept the non-BJP parties at a distance. Telangana stands apart as the leader of the Congress party in the state and could successfully take all the factions with him.

In Rajasthan, at least, Congress has only two major factions whereas in Telangana the party has too many leaders and each leader leads a faction. But they all acted under a single command in exposing the misrule of BRS and emerged successful. But, at least, now the party should act with more sense of responsibility and spirit of nationalism as advised by the Prime Minister, though his utterance was more sarcastic. A bigger task is before them and let us hope better counsel will prevail in their mind.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

sensus was not seen on an agreement that pledged to triple installed renewable energy capacity by 2030. Only 118 out of 200 countries signed it. China, the world's second-largest country in terms of emissions, and India, the third-largest, did not sign. This historic decision was discussed at that time only. India, as G20 chairmanship, had also given its consent to this drafting. No one can understand India's sudden rejection of it. Anyway, all the COP series meetings are also held, and so far, we have seen only a boom in tourism. No concrete achievement from this is visible in any part of the earth. The temperature is increasing exponentially. Forests are being reduced to ashes by wildfires. With the expansion of the sea coast, cities and towns are coming under submergence. The world is becoming plagued by floods, storms and extreme heat. The countries of the world are still looking at every agreement from the perspective of their profit and loss.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamsheedpur

#### COUGH SYRUP IS SWEET POISON

Sir — As per a report more than 40 companies manufacturing cough syrups in the

country have failed quality tests, a Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) report said, citing lab tests conducted in different states in the aftermath of reports potentially linking India-made cough syrups to 141 child fatalities globally. As per the CDSCO report, of the 1,105 samples tested, 59 were declared "not of standard quality". The report was released by CDSCO in November under a list of drugs, medical devices and cosmetics declared as "not of standard quality", "spurious", "adulterated", or "misbranded". The move came after several deaths were reported among children globally after consuming India-made cough syrups. Concerns surrounding these cough syrups were raised after the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that about 70 children in Gambia had died from acute kidney injury potentially linked to cough and cold syrups produced by Indian manufacturer Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd. With this, the image and credibility of India have fallen in the world.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

DISCIPLINE YOUR SENSES

Our senses would always seek their objects but we must keep them on a leash



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI


We have six senses, which are actively looking for gratification by contact with their objects. For example, our tongues look for tasty foods except when we are full. There is nothing wrong with it if these pleasures are within 'dharma'/'maryada' (within allowable limits). God has allowed it, as stated by Lord Krishna in verse # 7.11 of the Bhagavad-Geeta, in which He stated, "I am passion in beings, according to religious principles." He emphasised this point further in verse # 6.17, when He counselled, "One whose eating and recreation are appropriate; of one who strives appropriately in activities; of one who sleeps and stays awake, as required; his sufferings are less. Because sufferings there will be in this material world, described by the Lord as a place of miseries." (8.15) But despite such warnings, we are forever ready to transgress allowable limits hoping to escape punishment. What happens will be clear as we go through the activities of these six active senses. Beginning with our tongue, all of us are guilty of indiscretions sometimes or other. Picture yourself invited to a very rich buffet dinner. You survey what is on offer, which will be a lot unless you are on a restricted diet. What should I eat? People load their plates as if they are starving. This explains our control over our senses. Shouldn't we consider what is best for us to eat? Is it on offer? Then, why think so much? Just eat enough because more food will be available in a few hours for breakfast.



Let us go to our eyes next. It used to be okay till multiple channels came and now smartphones. There is so much to see, especially now one can watch with no one watching. Unfortunately, we are being watched all the time because 'karmaphalas' are being made by our acts. Wise people restrict themselves to what is useful and at worst, what is harmless like a sports programme. The pleasure of speaking occupies a very high place in modern man's desires. Everyone is an expert on everything with Google playing its role. Doctors get frustrated when patients begin telling them what they should know. One doesn't want to consider that if one was so wise why should he or she be in so much trouble? The fourth sense, which is also very active is our ears. What do we want to hear most? Our appreciation, which is how good we are compared to everyone around us. Again, like question begs an answer: why aren't we satisfied with our lives then? Our skin occupies an important position in how we think. We place comfort in all considerations. Air conditioners, heaters, etc are all fine, but how about a little sweating it out with walks, yoga exercises, etc? What does a modern person value the most? Muscles of course to show off. People spend hours in gyms to build what is not needed which gives them trouble as they age. I have saved the next sense for the last, which gives us the maximum trouble. Yes, you have guessed it right. The sex pleasure is considered the topmost pleasure of all by almost everyone. Our thinking is normally defined by it. Lord Krishna has warned us about it in verse # 18.39, when He cautioned about 'pramad'. The conclusion is obvious. We have senses and they would always seek contact with their objects. This is normal, but what is not normal is not restricting oneself to what is allowable. God would not have made such a system if it was not workable. It is very much so; only we have to be highly disciplined in thinking and acting, and we can live a satisfactory life. (The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

# Artificial Intelligence is transforming the steel industry

A step-by-step approach is the best to implement artificial intelligence. Scores of AI models are available for use in the steel units which can be tried without much hassle



ALOK SAHAY

Technology is ever-evolving. While it becomes difficult to keep pace with rapid technological advancements in all expanses of life, it is equally difficult to discount them because these are highly value-accretive. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one such technology. The manufacturing sector, in general, and the steel sector, in particular, are integrating AI into their daily operations to improve productivity, health and safety, reduce operational costs and reap countless other operational and functional benefits. Survival will be at stake for those who will not. In a developing nation or the Global South, cheaper availability of steel is a prequel to ensure sustainable development. Since raw materials for

# Is India losing sheen for investors?

The slowdown in foreign direct investment in India is a cause for concern, as multinational corporations are finding other competitors more attractive

India's GDP grew by 7.6% in the second quarter (July-September) of the year, a positive sign of economic growth. However, the steepest declines in foreign direct investment (FDI) are a matter of concern, especially considering India's recent emergence as a promising investment destination and a viable alternative to China. This decline is particularly worrying as it is happening despite positive projections of India's growth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank. According to the latest report by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), FDI inflows have slowed down drastically. The decline in FDI inflows has been steep, and the situation has only worsened, with a further decline of -24% in April-September 2023. The current FDI inflows stand at \$20.48 billion, down from \$26.91 billion over the same period last year. Even the overall FDI inflows in 2022-23 witnessed a 16% decline, standing at \$71.3 billion from \$84.8 billion in 2021-22. The steepest declines in FDI have been in crucial sectors such as computer software and hardware, automobile, infrastructure construction activities, and metallurgical industries. For instance, inflows in computer software and hardware fell from \$14.4 billion in 2021-22 to \$9.3 billion in 2022-23, in the automobile industry from \$6.9 billion to \$1.9 billion, in infrastructure construction activities from \$3.2 billion to \$1.7 billion, and in metallurgical industries from \$2.2 billion to \$219 million. The slowdown in foreign direct investment (FDI) in India is a cause for concern, as multinational corporations (MNCs) are finding Vietnam, Indonesia, and other competitors more attractive. This is a clear indication that the "China plus one" strategy of MNCs is not working for India. During January-September of this year, FDI in Vietnam increased by approximately 8% compared to the same period last year, reaching about \$18 billion. In the case of Indonesia, FDI flows stood at around \$10 billion during January-September of this year, similar to the levels seen last year. The factors that influence capital flows into countries include the global and domestic macroeconomic environment, the domestic policy and regulatory environment, and political stability. Since India is expected to benefit greatly from the "China plus one" strategy, policymakers must pay closer attention to these FDI trends. It is well known that FDI flows are more likely to gravitate towards countries with broader and deeper trade agreements. Lower tariffs and other benefits negotiated through free trade agreements (FTAs) incentivise foreign investment. Therefore, the decline in FDI flows to India may reflect this. A deeper assessment of the country's prospects is needed to address this issue. India is genuinely the alternative to China for companies looking to diversify if it is the "one" in China plus one strategy if the Government's PLI scheme is a powerful enough incentive to draw in investments, and if the solid foundations of India's growth forecasts are taken into account, then MNC investor should be long on India. Any concerns regarding an uncertain business environment, an uneven playing field, or the fear of arbitrary



THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CAPITAL FLOWS INTO COUNTRIES INCLUDE THE GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT, THE DOMESTIC POLICY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

changes to the rules of the game must not deter investors from investing in India. More states should be in the ambit of FDI: The scope of FDI must be expanded to more Indian states. FDI has been concentrated in only a few states due to their location and favourable business environment. Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat have together attracted a staggering 69% of the FDI inflows into the country, with Maharashtra being the top recipient. However, it is disappointing to note that Punjab ranks a lowly 12th in attracting FDI, with a cumulative investment of a meagre Rs. 7693 crore in the past four years, which is a paltry 0.49% of the total inflows of Rs. 15.08 lakh crore from October 2019 to September 2023. In contrast, the neighbouring state of Haryana has been more successful, ranking sixth with FDI equity inflows of Rs. 67,502 crore, accounting for a substantial 4.17% of the total inflows during the same period. Punjab's successive governments have been striving to attract investments, particularly from foreign investors, but they have been facing major hurdles such as location disadvantage, poor connectivity, and frequent protests. The existing industry in Punjab has also been complaining about disruptions in their operations and movements due to the aforementioned issues. Haryana is way ahead in this regard with a significant advantage due to its proximity to Delhi NCR and superior connectivity. It is high time that Punjab takes firm steps to improve its position in attracting FDI, as its highest ranking was only ninth in 2020-21, when it attracted FDI equity investment of Rs. 4,719.45 crore, primarily in food processing, auto components, engineering goods, and textiles. The declining trend in FDI inflows to Punjab since then is a cause for concern. Therefore, the state must create a more conducive environment for businesses and investors, and promote its potential in various sectors, to attract more FDI and boost its economy. Disadvantage: Despite signing and negotiating bilateral free trade agreements, India has failed to secure a trade agreement with the European Union or become part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) countries including China, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea for free trade agreements. The trade agreement between the 10 member states of ASEAN and their free trade agreement partners - Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea - has deepened economic integration between these countries, which are at the heart of manufacturing supply chains. As a result, India's exclusion from such agreements and the supply chains that run through these regions puts it at a significant disadvantage in this manufacturing ecosystem. The Way Forward: Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) have a far greater potential to facilitate the growth of the Indian economy than Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI). However, India needs to take swift and assertive action to speed up structural reforms, root out corruption, and reduce red tape in bureaucracy to strengthen its position as the most attractive investment destination for FDI. India has adopted a negative list approach in its FDI policy, which outlines only those sectors and activities where foreign investment is regulated. Sectors not mentioned in the document are open to obtaining 100% FDI under the automatic method. The liberal and attractive policy regime for investors, combined with a favourable business climate and reduced regulatory framework, have resulted in higher FDI inflows. But this alone is not enough. India needs to complement this with a sound trade policy that boosts exports, encourages inclusive development, and incentivises R&D to make our manufacturing ecosystem globally competitive, thereby fetching FDI at a large scale. (The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are strictly personal)

making steel are unlikely to be economical in the foreseeable future, adaptation of modern disruptive technologies and processes is the only way out. Estimates suggest that the proper adaptation of AI in the entire value chain of steelmaking can save between \$60 and \$100 per tonne. Apart from this, a key takeaway from the recently concluded ISA Steel InfraBuild Summit in Lucknow was that the use of AI in architecture will enable engineers and architects to design, plan, and build steel structures more efficiently, resulting in proper economics and savings in infrastructure and real estate. In the steel sector, AI can be adopted from R&D and innovation to procurement, manufacturing and back-office process digitalisation to supply-chain inventory, marketing, and whatnot. All these can lead to a 60% growth in EBDI-TA in three years. Greenhouse gas emissions can also be reduced by 5-10%. Maintenance is, as always, a difficult task. Each manufacturing unit has its maintenance plan tailored to its particularities. Proper implementation and use of AI can help predict the exact timing of maintenance, thereby reducing shutdown time, cutting maintenance costs, and enhancing the lifespan of the machinery. The Indian steel industry has been the early adopter of AI. Adaptation of AI has the highest impact on steel manufacturing in the entire value chain. In the coke oven plant, sinter plant, blast furnaces, continuous caster and rolling, among others, the implementation of AI has multiple benefits ranging from 1-2% yield improvement to a 50-80% reduction in quality losses. Energy consumption also improved by roughly 10%. Autonomous or semi-autonomous data or content examination also makes predictions and recommendations easier. Integration of sales and production data improves revenue management and customer satisfaction. With precise data, AI's ability to predict market data and price fluctuations helps manufacturers adjust production, manage inventories, and respond swiftly to changing market conditions. Enhancing safety is also another essential aspect. No wonder steel manufacturers worldwide are embracing AI to ensure faster delivery of business requirements. This is the age of intelligent manufacturing. Far from having a steel-producing smart factory, intelligent manufacturing encompasses all of it - sourcing raw materials to production to marketing products through an integrated intelligent supply chain. Steel consumption mirrors the health of an economy. Aspiring to be in the league of a developed nation, India has miles to go to catch up with the global steel consumption average. The building, construction and infrastructure sector consumes nearly 70% of all steel in India. The growth of the steel sector will largely depend on the demand emanating from the infrastructure sector. While AI adaptation will benefit the steel sector, implementing AI in the infrastructure sector will help assess the sector's specific needs - such as identifying cost-effective high-strength steel structure-based designs and offering tailor-made products. Adaptation, both in the steel and the infrastructure sector, is a challenging task. A mindset of experimentation and a determination to bring about positive changes are required. With AI, the ultimate goal is to implement an automated and unsupervised process linked with software and processes to improve performance over time. However, there is no substitute for human capital, and once integrated with AI, it will do wonders if used for the benefit of mankind and planet Earth. The apprehension that AI will displace jobs is unfounded. However, the dynamics of the job will change, requiring manpower with digital skills. It also warrants upskilling existing employees. A step-by-step approach is the best to implement AI. Building on the following line from the learnings of the first will yield the best results. Scores of AI models are in use in different steel manufacturing units in the country. The use of transformative technology will only go up in the days ahead. We need to be ready to adapt to the changes and implement it. (The writer is the Secretary General of the Indian Steel Association (ISA), views are personal)



# Heavy fighting across Gaza halts aid delivery

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces battled Hamas militants across Gaza on Wednesday after expanding their ground offensive to its second-largest city, further shrinking the area where Palestinians can seek safety and halting the distribution of vital aid across most of the territory. The assault on the south threatens further mass displacement within the besieged coastal enclave, where the U.N. says some 1.87 million people — over 80 per cent of the population — have already fled their homes. North, including large parts of Gaza City, has been completely destroyed, and Palestinians fear the rest of Gaza could suffer a similar fate as Israel tries to dismantle Hamas, which has deep roots in the territory it has ruled for 16 years.

Israel says it can no longer accept a Hamas military presence in Gaza after the October 7 attack that triggered the war, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control over the territory, something opposed by the United States and much of the international community. The Israeli military said Tuesday that its troops were “in the heart” of the southern city of Khan Younis after what it described as “the most intense day” of fighting since the start of the ground operation five weeks ago, with heavy battles in the north as well.

## PUSHED TO THE EDGE

For the past three days, aid distribution — mainly just supplies of flour and water — has been possible only in and around Rafah, on the southern border with Egypt, because of fighting and road closures by Israeli forces, the U.N.’s humanitarian aid office said.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said fuel and medical supplies have reached “critically low levels” at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, north of Khan Younis. Up to 200 wounded people have been brought in every day since December 1, when a weeklong truce expired, it said. “Without electricity, ventilators would



Relatives of Israeli hostages Eli and Yossi Sharabi, Tsachi Idan and Idan Shitvi attend a ceremony and a prayer for their liberation at the synagogue in Lisbon, Tuesday. The families are in Lisbon to ask for the help of the Portuguese government in securing the hostages release.

cease to function, blood donations would have to stop, the sterilization of surgical instruments would be impossible,” said Marie-Aure Perreaut Reval, the aid group’s emergency coordinator in Gaza. She said they are also running low on surgical supplies and external fixators for broken bones.

Gaza has been without electricity since the first week of the war, and Israel has severely limited fuel imports, forcing several hospitals to shut down because they cannot operate emergency generators.

Thousands of people have fled to the Rafah since Israel resumed its offensive after the cease-fire, including many from the north who have been displaced multiple times.

Hamza Abu Mustafa, a teacher who lives near a school-turned-shelter and is hosting three families himself, said “the situation is extremely dire.”

“You find displaced people in the streets, in schools, in mosques, in hospitals ... everywhere.”

A Palestinian woman who identified herself as Umm Ahmed said the harsh conditions and limited access to toilets are especially difficult for women who are pregnant or menstruating. “For women and girls, the suffering is double,”

she said. “It’s more humiliation.” Palestinian women have recently taken to social media to request menstrual pads, which are increasingly hard to find. “I apologize for raising such a matter,” one user wrote on X, adding that there were 15 girls staying in her house. “What are we supposed to do?”

## HUNDREDS KILLED SINCE CEASE-FIRE

The war has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza — 70 per cent of them women and children — and wounded more than 42,000, according to the territory’s Health Ministry, which released new figures late Tuesday. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but its overall tally tracks with a figure released by the Israeli military this week.

The ministry says hundreds more have been killed since the cease-fire ended Friday, and many still are trapped under rubble.

The military accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields when the militants operate in residential areas. But Israel has not given detailed accounts of individual strikes, some of which have leveled entire city blocks. Military Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi

said militants keep weapons in homes and other buildings so fighters in civilian clothes can use them to fire on troops.

“Striking them requires significant use of fire, both to target the enemy but also to, of course, protect our forces,” he said Tuesday. Israel says it must remove Hamas from power to prevent a repeat of the October 7 attack, when Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took captive some 240 men, women and children after bursting through Israel’s vaunted defenses. More than 100 hostages were released during last week’s cease-fire, along with 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But an estimated 138 hostages remain in Gaza, mostly soldiers and civilian men, and accounts of widespread rape and other atrocities committed during the rampage have deepened Israel’s outrage and further galvanized support for the war.

## NO END IN SIGHT

Hamas’ continuing ability to fight in the north, where Israel entered with overwhelming force weeks ago, signals that eradicating the group without causing further mass casualties and displacement — as Israel’s top ally, the US has requested — could prove elusive.

# Hamas raping Israeli hostages appalling: Biden

AP ■ BOSTON

President Joe Biden has forcefully denounced the reported rape and sexual violence against Israeli girls and women by Hamas militants following the October 7 attack on Israel, calling on the world to condemn such conduct “without equivocation” and “without exception.”

Speaking at a campaign fundraiser in Boston on Tuesday, Biden noted that in recent weeks, female survivors and witnesses to the attacks have shared “horrific accounts of unimaginable cruelty.”

“Reports of women raped — repeatedly raped — and their bodies being mutilated while still alive — of women corpses being desecrated, Hamas terrorists inflicting as much pain and suffering on women and girls as possible and then murdering them,” Biden said. “It is appalling.”

Israel has said it is investigating several cases of sexual assault and rape from the Hamas attack on Israel. Witnesses and medical experts have said that Hamas militants committed a series of rapes and other attacks before killing the victims in the October 7 attack, though the extent of the sexual violence remains unknown.

Experts have been piecing together evidence in recent weeks in a case that is complicated because there are no known victims to testify and limited forensic evidence.

Biden’s comments come as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has sought to put greater focus on the sexual violence it says Hamas committed during the October 7 attack that killed some 1,200 people on Israeli soil and led to another 240 being taken hostage. Some recently released hostages have shared testimonies of sexual violence and abuse during their time in

Gaza.

Hamas has denied that militants committed sexual assaults. Netanyahu railed against the lack of international response during a press conference on Tuesday evening.

“I say to the women’s rights organizations, to the human rights organisations, you’ve heard of the rape of Israeli women, horrible atrocities, sexual mutilation — where the hell are you,” asked Netanyahu.

Israel hosted a special event at the United Nations on Monday where former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, and former Meta chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg were among those who criticized what they called a global failure to support women who were raped, sexually assaulted and in some cases killed.

The comments from Biden came one day after White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the militants’ alleged assaults on women “reprehensible.”

Jean-Pierre, who underscored that she was speaking on behalf of the president, was responding to a question about comments made by Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a California Democrat, during a CNN interview in which she responded to a question about rape by Palestinian militants by saying, “I think we have to be balanced about bringing in the outrages against Palestinians, 15,000 Palestinians have been killed.”

Jayapal later issued a statement clarifying that she “unequivocally” condemns “Hamas’ use of rape and sexual violence as an act of war.” As a senator, Biden was the author of the Violence Against Women Act, which was signed into law in 1994. He referenced his work on the issue as a lawmaker as he spoke out against the allegations of sexual violence by Hamas.

# US President: If Trump wasn’t running I’m not sure I’d be running

AP ■ BOSTON

President Joe Biden told campaign donors Tuesday that he wasn’t sure he’d be running for reelection if Donald Trump wasn’t also in the race, warning that democracy is “more at risk in 2024” and that the former president and his allies are out to “destroy” democratic institutions. The president was using a trio of fundraisers to caution against what might happen should his predecessor again claim control of the White House, noting that Trump has described himself as his supporters’ “retribution” and has vowed to root out “vermin” in the country.

“We’ve got to get it done, not because of me. ... If Trump wasn’t running I’m not sure I’d be running. We cannot let him win,” Biden said, hitting the last words slowly for emphasis.

Biden’s forceful rhetoric came as Trump, the current GOP front-runner, who tried to overturn the 2020 election he lost and is facing criminal charges connected to those efforts, attempted over the weekend to turn the tables by calling Biden the “destroyer of American democracy.”

Trump on Tuesday was asked by Fox News Channel’s Sean Hannity to promise he “would never abuse power as retribution against anybody.”

“Except for day one,” Trump responded. “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.”

“After that I’m not a dictator,” Trump added.

Biden, who said he is not alone in sounding the alarm over Trump, noted that Trump is the “only losing candidate” in US history to not accept the results.

Biden also said that on Jan. 6, 2021, as Trump supporters violently stormed the US Capitol in a failed attempt to stop the certification of the election results, Trump sat in his dining room just off the Oval Office, “watching them threaten his own vice president.”

# Trump declines to rule out abusing power to seek retribution if he returns to WH

New York (AP): Former President Donald Trump declined to rule out abusing power if he returns to the White House after Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity asked him Tuesday to respond to growing Democratic criticism of his rhetoric.

The GOP presidential front-runner has talked about targeting his rivals — referring to them as “vermin” — and vowed to seek retribution if he wins a second term for what he argues are politically motivated prosecutions against him. As Trump has dominated the Republican presidential primary, President Joe Biden has stepped up his own warnings, contending Trump is “determined to destroy American democracy.”

“Under no circumstances, you are promising America tonight, you would never abuse power as retribution against anybody?” Hannity asked Trump in the interview taped in Davenport, Iowa.

“Except for day one,” Trump responded. “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.” Trump then repeated his assertion. “I love this guy,” he said of the Fox News host. “He says, You’re not going to be a dictator, are you? I said: ‘No, no, no, other than day one. We’re closing the border and we’re drilling, drilling, drilling. After that, I’m not a dictator.’” Earlier in the interview, Hannity had asked Trump if he “in any way” had “any plans whatsoever, if reelected president, to abuse power, to break the law to use the government to go after people.”

# Ex-UK PM Johnson says ‘sorry’ for COVID pain & loss



PTI ■ LONDON

Britain’s former prime minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday said he is “deeply sorry” for the pain and the loss caused by COVID-19 as he gave his evidence to the ongoing official public inquiry into the government’s handling of the pandemic which hit the country in early 2020.

Johnson, who was in charge as the prime minister of the day, admitted he should have “twigged” the widespread health impact of coronavirus but insisted he had to take “very, very difficult decisions” as the crisis was fast unfolding. Inquiry chair Baroness Heather Hallett, who has been hearing evidence in London since June, had to get a protester removed from the room as they held up a poster reading: “The dead can’t hear your apologies.”

“I am deeply sorry for the pain and the loss and the suffering of those victims and their families,” said Johnson, after swearing on the ‘Bible’ for his evidence.

“I do hope that this inquiry will help to get the answers to the very difficult questions that those victims and those families are rightly asking so that we can protect ourselves better, help each other to protect ourselves better and prevent further suffering,” he said.

The former PM was reminded by barrister Hugo Keith of the more than 230,000

COVID-linked deaths in the country as a “shocking figure and a terrible loss of life”. Johnson acknowledged that was the “core of the tragedy” and that “inevitably...we may have made mistakes”.

“The tragedy is that we were operating on a fallacious, inductive logic about previous reasonable worst case scenarios, and this one and this was the one where I am afraid the worst predictions turned out to be correct,” he told the inquiry.

“I think we were doing the best we could at the time, given what we knew, given the information we had at the time, I think we were doing our level best. Were there things that we should have done differently? Unquestionably,” he said.

He revealed that the government “underestimated the scale and pace of the challenge”, thinking the peak of the virus would come in May or June 2020. Johnson also said he took responsibility for the speed of the government’s response to the pandemic, the lockdown decisions and their timelines.

His evidence is expected to last for two days and follows the evidence of his Cabinet colleagues from the time, former health secretary Matt Hancock and levelling up secretary Michael Gove. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who was chancellor of the exchequer at the time, is expected to give his evidence in the coming weeks.

# Top US , Chinese diplomats agree to build on recent progress in ties

Beijing (AP): The top US and Chinese diplomats agreed on Wednesday to keep building on recent progress in bilateral ties and work together to keep the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza from spreading. Both Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken referred in a telephone call to last month’s closely watched meeting between the two countries’ leaders in San Francisco following years of “frigid” ties.

“The important task for both sides at present is to continue the positive impact of the San Francisco meeting, implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state, and consolidate the momentum of stabilising Sino-US relations,” Wang said, according to China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Blinken also emphasised that the two sides should build on progress at the summit, according to the US State Department. President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping agreed at their meeting to keep channels of communication open and resume military-to-military talks. Yet, major political differences between the countries remain far from resolved.

Wang and Blinken also discussed the Israel-Hamas war, where China has been trying to play a role in negotiations, and agreed to maintain communications on the situation. Last Wednesday, China presented a four-point peace plan to the United Nations on ending the conflict, although the plan lacked detail. Blinken also raised recent attacks on shipping vessels in the Red Sea by Yemen’s Houthi rebels, an escalation in a series of maritime attacks in the Mideast linked to the Gaza war, and said it was important to keep the conflict from spreading.

Wang said any solution to the crisis in Gaza requires a two-state arrangement that reflects the will of the Palestinian people.

# COP28 secures USD 83 bn in climate pledges

PTI ■ DUBAI

The first week of the COP28 global climate talks concluded with a significant milestone with the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, pledges of over USD 83 billion and the draft text for Global Stocktake mentioning phasing out of all fossil fuels for the first time in years.

However, even as over USD 83 billion was mobilised in pledges questions persist about the voluntary nature of these commitments and the actual fulfilment by the participating nations.

Amidst the discussions, the issue of fossil fuels emerged as a focal point, with a new draft text of the Global Stocktake proposing options for the phase-out of unabated coal and an orderly and just transition away from fossil fuels which might be a contentious point for India. India has repeatedly stressed that



phasing out or phasing down coal language is something that it can’t support.

India even skipped signing the pledge to commit to tripling the global renewable energy capacity by 2030 over this.

Over the reduction of greenhouse gases, India also refrained from signing the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health.

The Global Stocktake, released on Tuesday, represented the first periodic review

of global efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. India, representing the BASIC bloc, played a prominent role in advocating for accountability.

The nation emphasised the necessity for the Global Stocktake to consider the failures of developed nations.

Delegates from the BASIC grouping, comprising Brazil, South Africa, India, and China, voiced concerns about the fragmented multilateralism of

developed nations during preliminary negotiations, sources said.

Despite initial challenges in substantive negotiations, the first week of COP28 witnessed a flurry of pledges.

An analysis by independent science-based assessment Climate Tracker revealed historic declarations on food systems transformation, health, renewable energy, and efficiency, along with initiatives to decarbonise heavy-emitting industries.

Key pledges and declarations included a groundbreaking agreement to operationalise and capitalise funding for Loss and Damage, with an impressive USD 726 million already pledged.

Additionally, efforts were made to replenish the Green Climate Fund (GCF) with USD 3.5 billion, bringing the total to USD 12.8 billion.

Contributions of USD 133.6 million to the Adaptation

Fund, USD 129.3 million to the Least Developed Countries Fund, and USD 31 million to the Special Climate Change Fund were also announced.

The UAE further committed USD 200 million to help vulnerable countries through Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and USD 150 million to fund water security solutions.

International financial institutions joined the effort, with the World Bank announcing an annual increase of USD 9 billion for 2024 and 2025 to finance climate-related projects. Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) collectively pledged over USD 22.6 billion toward climate action.

As COP28 transitions into its second week, anticipation builds for increased progress in substantive negotiations, with the hope that the momentum generated by substantial financial pledges will translate into meaningful actions to address the global climate crisis.

# Bodies of 6 crew lost in Osprey crash recovered

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Air Force Special Operations Command said on Tuesday it has recovered the remains of six of the eight service members who were lost when their Osprey crashed off the coast of Japan last week, adding it is now focused on recovering the two bodies still missing and the aircraft debris. The CV-22B Osprey crashed on November 29 during a training mission. Ospreys have had a number of crashes, including in Japan, where they are used at US and Japanese military bases, and the latest has rekindled safety concerns.

Three bodies were recovered from the sunken wreckage, and a total of six of the eight crew members’ remains that had been located have now been recovered, the Air Force said. The search continues for the remains of the two crew members still unaccounted for, it added. “The depth of sorrow is immeasurable,” Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, who heads Air Force Special Operations Command, said in a statement announcing the names of the crew. “The honorable service of these eight airmen to this great nation will

never be forgotten, as they are now among the giants who shape our history.”

President Joe Biden said he and first lady Jill Biden were heartbroken by the loss. “We owe them everything,” Biden said in a statement. “Jill and I are praying for the families and friends who lost a loved one in this terrible accident.”

## LOST CREW MEMBERS WERE:

US Air Force Maj. Jeffrey T. Hoernemann, 32, of Andover, Minnesota, was a CV-22 instructor pilot and officer in charge of training, assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan. US Air Force Maj. Eric V. Spendlove, 36, of St. George, Utah, was a residency trained flight surgeon and medical operations flight commander assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Maj. Luke A. Unrath, 34, of Riverside, California, was a CV-22 pilot and flight commander assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations

Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Capt. Terrell K. Brayman, 32, of Pittsford, New York, was a CV-22 pilot and flight commander assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Tech. Sgt. Zachary E. Lavoy, 33, of Oviedo, Florida, was a medical operations flight chief assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake M. Turnage, 25, of Kennesaw, Georgia, was a flight engineer assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan. US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob “Jake” M. Galliher, 24, was a native of Pittsfield, Mass. His remains were the first to be found. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent a message

to Biden, offering his heartfelt condolences to the families of those who were lost and to the American people and his thanks for their dedication away from home for the peace and stability of Japan and the region.

The US-made Osprey is a hybrid aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter but can rotate its propellers forward and cruise much faster, like an airplane, during flight. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Japan has suspended all flights of its own fleet of 14 Ospreys. Japanese officials say they have asked the US military to resume Osprey flights only after ensuring their safety. The Pentagon said no such formal request has been made and that the US military is continuing to fly 24 MV-22s, the Marine version of Ospreys, deployed on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa.

In Tokyo, Defence Ministry Press Secretary Akira Mogi said Tuesday that deployment of Ospreys is key to a defence buildup in southwestern Japan due to current regional security concerns but acknowledged the need to address the residents’ safety worries rekindled by the crash.



# Putin visits Saudi & UAE as Ukraine war grinds on

AP ■ DUBAI

Russian President Vladimir Putin began a trip on Wednesday to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, hoping to shore up support in the Mideast from two major oil producers allied to the US as his war on Ukraine grinds on. Putin landed in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the Emirates, a federation of seven sheikdoms now hosting the United Nations' COP28 climate talks. It marked his first trip to the region from before the coronavirus pandemic and the war — and as he faces an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court over the war in Ukraine.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE has signed the ICC founding treaty, meaning they don't face any obligation to detain Putin over the warrant accusing him of being personally responsible for the abductions of children from Ukraine during his war on the country. Putin skipped a summit in South Africa over concerns he could be arrested on arrival there.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's foreign minister, met a smiling Putin after he bounded down the stairs of his presidential plane. As he arrived at Abu Dhabi's Qasr al-Watan palace to meet Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the country's ruler, the UAE's military acrobatics team flew in formation with red, white and blue smoke trailing them in the colours of the Russian flag.

Soldiers on horseback and with camels lined his arrival route, Russian and Emirati flags also hanging from light-poles.

The pageantry in the Emirates, which relies on America as its major security partner, highlights the UAE's expansive business ties to Russia that have exploded in the time since grinding Western sanctions have targeted Moscow.

Ukrainians on hand for the event expressed outrage over Putin being in the country at



United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, right, greets Russian President Vladimir Putin upon his arrival at an international airport in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Wednesday.

AP/PTI

the same time they described him as committing environmental crimes in their country.

"It is extremely upsetting to see how the world treats war criminals, because that's what he is, in my opinion," said Marharyta Bohdanova, a worker at the Ukrainian pavilion at the United Nations COP28 climate summit in Dubai, wiping away tears. "Seeing how people let people like him in the big events, ... treating him like a dear guest, is just so hypocritical in my opinion."

Officials at Russia's pavilion at the talks declined to speak to The Associated Press.

Putin last visited the UAE in 2019, receiving a warm welcome from Sheikh Mohammed, then the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. In the time since, however, the world has greatly changed.

The Russian president isolated himself during the coronavirus pandemic. He launched an invasion targeting Ukraine in February 2022, a grinding war that continues on today and has been a topic for Ukrainian diplomats at the COP28 talks.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas war remains a major

concern for the Mideast, particularly the UAE, which reached a diplomatic recognition with Israel in 2020. Recent attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels also threatens commercial shipping in the Red Sea as Iran's nuclear program continues its rapid advances since the collapse of the 2016 nuclear deal.

Putin is scheduled to meet with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Thursday for what Ushakov has described as "a rather lengthy conversation." The two countries have been discussing ways to get around the Western sanctions targeting them.

Putin will travel onto Saudi Arabia and meet with powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the one-day trip, Ushakov said. Those discussions likely will focus on Moscow's other major concern in the Middle East — oil.

Russia is part of OPEC+, which is a group of cartel members and other nations that have managed production to try and boost crude oil prices. Last week, the group expanded some output cuts into next year and brought up and-coming oil supplier Brazil

into the fold. Benchmark Brent crude traded Wednesday around USD 77 a barrel, down from nearly USD 100 in September, over concerns about a weakening economy worldwide.

The visit comes after COP28 saw a parade of Western leaders including US Vice President Kamala Harris, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and others backing Ukraine speak at the summit. So did Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, long a Putin ally.

A readout on Putin's trip from the state-run Tass news agency published early Wednesday offered no suggestion Putin might come to the COP28 site, instead quoting Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov saying he'd land and have a "meeting at the palace" and one-on-one talks with Sheikh Mohammed. Still, some reports suggest Putin could make an appearance at the climate talks.

The UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change's spokesperson Alexander Saier said at a press conference that he is "not aware that Mr. Putin will come to the conference, but I would also need to check the host country with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." He declined to immediately answer whether UN police would be obligated to make an arrest.

The Emirati organisation committee for COP28 referred questions to the UAE's Foreign Ministry, which did not immediately respond. The UAE repeatedly feted the now-deposed Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir in the past despite an ICC warrant seeking his arrest over charges of genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

I'm talking about his crimes and this person is literally right now here, somewhere near me," said Alina Abramenko, another worker at the Ukrainian pavilion that highlights the environmental damage wrought by the war. "You know, it's really strange."

# Court rejects Imran's plea to withdraw appeal against disqualification

## TOSHAKHANA CORRUPTION CASE

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani high court on Wednesday rejected former premier Imran Khan's plea to withdraw his appeal against his disqualification in the Toshakhana corruption case, on a day when the election watchdog announced to conduct an in-prison hearing of a contempt case against him.

Khan, 71, has been in jail since August 5, when he was arrested after a conviction in the Toshakhana case. He was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on October 21 in the case for failing to disclose the proceeds from the sale of gifts he got from the Toshakhana (state repository).

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader approached the Islamabad High Court Chief (IHC)

against the electoral body's decision, contending that he had purchased the assets legally; hence, there was no reason for him not to mention the gifts in his assets statement.

However, on January 18, the PTI filed a fresh plea in the IHC to withdraw the petition, saying the cricketer-turned-politician wanted the Lahore High Court (LHC) to hear the matter. A separate petition had been filed in the LHC against Khan's disqualification. A division bench of the IHC comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri announced the verdict, which was reserved on September 13, rejecting Khan's request to withdraw his petition against disqualification in the case.

In a written order, the IHC said the top election body had partially addressed arguments in the case and sought

more time.

"In the interest of justice, an opportunity is allowed to the respondent to address arguments. On the next date of hearing, if the arguments are not addressed by the respondent, the matter shall be decided on the basis of available record," it stated and adjourned the hearing till December 11.

Separately, the top election body decided to conduct the contempt case proceedings against the former premier on December 13 at the high-security Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, where he is currently incarcerated.

The decision was made after the Interior Ministry refused to produce Khan before the commission during the last hearing due to security concerns. Khan survived an assassination attempt in November 2022. The ministry also urged for an in-prison trial, and the ECP, after hearing arguments, reserved its decision on the issue on November 30.

## ECP to hold contempt case proceedings against Khan

**Islamabad:** Pakistan's election commission on Wednesday decided that contempt case proceedings against former prime minister Imran Khan and his party colleague Fawad Chaudhry will take place on December 13 at the high-security Adiala jail.

Khan, the 71-year-old founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, and Chaudhry are both currently incarcerated in multiple cases at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

Khan has been in jail since August 5 when he was arrested after a conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had also disqualified him in the same case for failing to disclose the proceeds from the sale of gifts he got from the state repository.

The decision to hold the trial inside the jail from December 13 comes a day after the ECP reserved its verdict on a petition that was filed to remove Khan as the head of his PTI party due to his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case.

On Wednesday, the Dawn newspaper said, "The ECP issued its verdict in light of the Interior Ministry's denial to produce the former premier before the Commission during the last hearing, citing security concerns." Subsequently, on November 30, the ECP reserved a verdict and suggested the possibility of holding Khan's trial in the Adiala jail. Last year, the ECP had initiated contempt proceedings against the PTI chief, former party leader Asad Umar, and Chaudhry, the former information minister, for allegedly using "intemperate" language against the chief election commissioner , the Dawn said. **PTI**

# Malala calls for making 'gender apartheid' crime against humanity

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

likening the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women in Afghanistan to the treatment of Black people under apartheid in South Africa, Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai has urged the international community to make "gender apartheid" a crime against humanity.

Yousafzai, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 when she was 17 for her fight for girls' education in Pakistan, was the speaker at the 21st edition of the annual Nelson Mandela Lecture here on Tuesday. At the event, international thought leaders share their views each year on the death anniversary of the global icon who became South Africa's first democratically-elected president after serving 27 years as a political prisoner under the white minority apartheid government.

"The theme for this year is 'Leading for a just future'," said the chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation Board, Prof Njabulo Ndebele.

In her address, Yousafzai, now 26, said that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was enforcing "gender apartheid" by denying girls and women the right to education and work. In the same way that whites in South Africa believed that it was in the natural order of things to separate Blacks, in Afghanistan, the Taliban say that oppressing girls and women is a matter of religion, she said. "So let me say this as plainly as possible – that is only an excuse but it is also not true," Yousafzai, who miraculously survived an assassination attempt by the Pakistani Taliban in October 2012, said.

Many Muslim scholars, including those from Afghanistan, have made clear that Islam does not condone denying girls and women the right to education and to work, she said.

"If we as the world accept the Taliban's (80+) edicts on girls and women, we are sending a message everywhere that they are less human. That their rights are up for debate. That we are willing to look away," she said. Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel laureate, said apartheid was more than just a description.

"It is a legal concept. South Africans fought for racial apartheid to be recognised and criminalised at the international level. In the process, they drew more of the world's attention to the horrors of apartheid. By defining systemic oppression in legal terms, they named it and made it easier to enlist allies against it," she said.

But gender apartheid has not been explicitly codified yet, so Yousafzai called on every government in every country to make gender apartheid a crime against humanity.

"We have an opportunity to do that right now. The UN is currently drafting and debating a new Crimes Against Humanity treaty. This is the moment for world leaders to stand with Afghan girls and women. Adding and adapting language on gender apartheid to the treaty will codify it under international law," Yousafzai said, adding that South Africa could play an important role in the process.

"This legal approach might seem disconnected from everyday life and human suffering, but the international law is not an obstruction – it is a practical tool," she said. She said this would hold the Taliban to account and render anyone who helps them legally complicit. "As we saw with South Africa, it can spur and strengthen collective action. Codification will stop gender apartheid from happening elsewhere. Human rights activists have a big role to play in building public pressure (to achieve this)," Yousafzai said.

## Amrita Sher-Gil's Lahore residence to turn into museum

**Lahore (PTI):** Hungary plans to turn Hungarian-Indian painter Amrita Sher-Gil's Ganga Ram Mansions on The Mall here into a museum, a top diplomat of the country said as several art lovers and intellectuals gathered for the unveiling of a commemorative plaque and an exhibition to pay homage to the celebrated artist.

In connection with her 82nd death anniversary on Tuesday, the Hungarian embassy in collaboration with the Punjab University College of Art and Design held a ceremony to install a commemorative plaque at her residence here in the capital of Pakistan's Punjab province and an exhibition to pay homage to her.

The recreated works by 13 university artists were on display at the exhibition. They recreated the artworks of Amrita Sher-Gil with the amalgamation of their ideas to pay homage to the distinguished artist.

# Iran sends capsule capable of carrying animals into orbit

**Tehran (AP):** Iran said on Wednesday it sent a capsule into orbit capable of carrying animals as it prepares for human missions in coming years. A report by the official IRNA news agency quoted Telecommunications Minister Isa Zarepour as saying the capsule was launched 130 kilometres into orbit. Zarepour said the launch of the 500-kilogram (1,000-pound) capsule is aimed at sending Iranian astronauts to space in coming years. He did not say if any animals were in the capsule.

He told state TV that Iran plans to send astronauts into space by 2029 after further tests involving animals. State TV showed footage of a rocket named Salman carrying the capsule. Iran occasionally announces successful launch-

es of satellites and other spacecrafts. In September, Iran said it sent a data-collecting satellite into space. In 2013, Iran said it sent a monkey into space and returned it successfully.

Reports said the country's Defense Ministry built and launched the Salman rocket while the capsule was built by the Iranian civil space agency. Media reports did not say where the launch took place. Iran usually makes launches from Imam Khomeini Space Centre in northern Semnan province. It says its satellite program is for scientific research and other civilian applications. The US and other Western countries have long been suspicious of the program because the same technology can be used to develop long-range missiles.



This photo released by the Iranian Defense Ministry on Wednesday claims to show a rocket with a capsule carrying animals is launched from an undisclosed location into orbit, Iran. Iran said Wednesday it sent a capsule into orbit carrying animals as it prepares for human missions in coming years.

AP/PTI

# Taliban's abusive education policies harm boys as well as girls in Af

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Taliban's "abusive" educational policies are harming boys as well as girls in Afghanistan, according to a Human Rights Watch report published Wednesday. The Taliban have been globally condemned for banning girls and women from secondary school and university, but the rights group says there has been less attention to the deep harm inflicted on boys' education.

The departure of qualified teachers including women, regressive curriculum changes and the increase in corporal punishment have led to greater fear of going to school and falling attendance.

Because the Taliban have dismissed all female teachers from boys' schools, many boys are taught by unqualified people or sit in classrooms with

no teachers at all.

Boys and parents told the rights group about a spike in the use of corporal punishment, including officials beating boys before the whole school for haircut or clothing infractions or for having a mobile phone. The group interviewed 22 boys along with five parents in Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Bamiyan and other communities in eight provinces.

The Taliban have eliminated subjects like art, sports, English and civic education. "The Taliban are causing irreversible damage to the Afghan education system for boys as well as girls," said Sahar Tetrat, who wrote the report. "By harming the whole school system in the country, they risk creating a lost generation deprived of a quality education." Students told Human Rights Watch that

there are hours during the school day when there are no lessons because there is a lack of replacement teachers. So they said they do nothing.

Taliban government spokesmen were not available for comment on the report. The Taliban are prioritizing Islamic knowledge over basic literacy and numeracy with their shift toward madrassas, or religious schools.

The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and work and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021. According to the UN children's agency, more than 1 million girls are affected by the ban, though it estimates 5 million were out of school before the Taliban takeover due to a lack of facil-

# Survivor pulled out of Zambian mine after a week of being trapped

**Lusaka (AP):** A man has been pulled alive out of a Zambian mine nearly a week after dozens of informal miners were trapped under landslides caused by heavy rain, rescuers said on Wednesday. The 49-year-old survivor was rescued on Tuesday night, according to a statement by Zambia's Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit. He told rescuers he had been struggling for five days to find a way out of one of the collapsed tunnels at the open-pit copper mine near the city of Chingola, around 400 kilometres north of the capital, Lusaka, the statement said. A body was also recovered a few hours after the miner's rescue but was yet to be identified, it added.

The man was taken to the hospital, rescuers said. They gave no details on his medical condition but said he was able to talk to officials from his hospital bed. The body was the first to be retrieved following the disaster last week. More than 30 miners may still be trapped under the rubble and debris in three separate tunnels at the Seseli mine in Zambia's Copperbelt province. Zambian authorities have differed on exactly how many miners they believe were trapped when the tunnels they were digging to look for copper ore late Thursday collapsed on them. Government officials have said there were more than 30 miners trapped underground in the late-night tragedy,

while the district commissioner of the area said there were at least 36. Zambia mines minister Paul Kabuswe said 25 families in the region have come forward to report missing relatives. Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema visited the mine on Tuesday and said he hoped that there were survivors. A rescuer said earlier in the week that they had heard multiple voices coming from under the rubble at one of the tunnel sites.

He said rescuers believed there would be survivors, although he said there were likely to be numerous deaths, too. Rescue teams have been working constantly since last Friday to clear debris and pump water out of the pit where the tunnels are, but the efforts have been complicated by more rain, which left one of the sites completely flooded. Police said over the weekend that all of the miners were presumed dead and had likely drowned in the tunnels. Their public statement was criticized by the government, which said it was too early to declare that.

Zambia is among the top 10 copper producers in the world and Chingola has large open-pit mines, some of them stretching for kilometres. They are surrounded by huge waste piles of rocks and earth that have been dug out of the mines. The government said debris from one of the waste piles collapsed on the miners' tunnels.



# Markets scale fresh lifetime highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied for the seventh straight session to hit fresh lifetime highs on Wednesday, driven by gains in index majors Reliance Industries, ITC and L&T amid persistent foreign fund inflows.

Besides, receding crude oil prices in international markets also boosted sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 357.59 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at a new record of 69,653.73. The barometer rose to 69,744.62 during intra-day.

The broader index Nifty also climbed 82.60 points, or 0.40 per cent, to hit its fresh peak of 20,937.70.

"Post-state elections, market optimism thrives, confirming policy continuity and meeting investor expectations. A robust FII reversal is fuelled by receding inflation and dropping yields in US and Indian

markets. The allure of Indian market gains post-China credit rating downgrade and decline in oil prices was followed by ease in geopolitical tensions," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

As many as 20 shares of the BSE benchmark index closed the session with gains, while 30 stocks in the Nifty ended in positive territory.

Among major Sensex movers, Wipro closed with the maximum gain of 3.85 per cent, followed by ITC -- 2.51 per cent higher. L&T and TCS gained 2.31 per cent and 2.13 per cent, respectively. Tata Motors, Nestle India, Infosys and Bajaj Finance were other gainers.

On the other hand, NTPC, Axis Bank, UltraTech Cement and ICICI Bank ended the session with a loss of up to 1.58 per cent.

In the broader market, the BSE largecap index rose 0.61 per cent, the midcap gauge gained 0.19 per cent, and smallcap advanced by 0.18 per



cent.

"A strong rebound in IT, driven by reduced US recession risks and in anticipation of robust summer demand, fuels the momentum in the power sector," Nair said.

However, he cautioned that short-term profit booking may occur due to domestic premium valuation con-

cerns.

"Further, lingering El Nino risks, a drop in reservoir levels, and reduced sowing may hold RBI to profoundly upgrade H2 FY24 growth and reduce future inflation estimates."

Among sectoral indices, utilities surged 3 per cent, followed by power

(2.41 per cent). While oil & gas jumped 1.96 per cent, the IT index went up 1.48 per cent, capital goods advanced by 1.25 per cent, and tech rose by 1.18 per cent.

In contrast, healthcare declined by 0.64 per cent, telecommunications slipped 0.58 per cent and bankex fell 0.50 per cent.

Analysts said the sustained equity buying by foreign institutional investors was attributed to declining US bond yields, while the domestic players were betting big on favourable macroeconomic data and expectations of longer political stability in the country. Besides, investors are also expecting the Reserve Bank to maintain the status quo on the interest rate in its bi-monthly monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday, they added.

Foreign institutional investors purchased shares worth Rs 5,223.51 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, in Asian markets, Hang Seng and Nikkei 225 finished with gains of 0.90 per cent and 2.04 per cent, respectively, while China's Shanghai Composite lost 0.11 per cent.

European markets were broadly higher, led by France's CAC 40, rising 1.08 per cent. London's FTSE 100

gained 0.29 per cent, and Germany's DAX was 0.7 per cent higher.

The US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 registering a marginal loss of 0.06 per cent. On Wednesday, global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.31 per cent lower to USD 76.96 a barrel.

"The bearish formation around the crucial resistance of 21,000 (Nifty) amplifies the bearish sentiment. The support lies at 20,850, below which the market may witness a healthy correction in the short term. On the other hand, a move above 21,000 might trigger a resumption of the bullish trend," Rupak De, Senior Technical analyst at LKP Securities, said.

On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 431.02 points, or 0.63 per cent, to close at a record high of 69,296.14. Nifty also climbed 168.50 points, or 0.81 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 20,855.30.

## RBI MPC meet begins amid expectations of status quo on interest rate

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI's high-powered rate setting panel on Wednesday began its 3-day brainstorming on the next set of bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectation of continued pause on the short-term key lending rate as GDP growth is gaining momentum, and inflation manageable. RBI left the benchmark policy rate (repo) unchanged in its past four bi-monthly monetary policies. It had last increased the repo rate in February to 6.5 per cent, thus ending the interest rate hike cycle which began in May 2022 in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disruptions in the global supply chain resulting in high inflation in the country.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das would unveil the decision of the six-member MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) on December 8.

On expectations from the MPC, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA said with the GDP data for the second quarter of 2023-24 appreciably higher than the MPC's last forecast, and continuing concerns on various aspects of food inflation, "we expect the MPC to pause in its December 2023 review, amidst a fairly hawkish tone of the policy document".

According to Deutsche Bank Research, RBI will likely increase 2023-24 GDP forecast to 6.8 per cent year-on-year, from 6.5 per cent earlier, while holding the CPI forecast unchanged at 5.4 per cent.

"RBI will likely keep repo rate and stance unchanged, persist with tight liquidity and ensure that short-term rates remain around 6.85-6.90 per cent, resulting in an 'effective rate hike'," it said.

India retained the tag of the world's fastest-growing major



economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in the September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing.

Director of Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) Sanjay Bhutani, said the central bank's recent MPC meetings have kept the policy rate unchanged, aligning with mar-

ket expectations.

"We anticipate a similar outcome for this upcoming meeting. However, with inflation on a downward trend, an easing of interest rates could be on the cards, potentially occurring as early as February-March 2024," he said, and added this would be a positive development for all sectors, particularly capital and research-intensive industries like

the medical technology sector.

The government has mandated the central government to ensure that the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stays at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

Retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, mainly due to cooling prices of food items. The Reserve Bank's MPC, in its October meeting, projected CPI inflation at 5.4 per cent for 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23.

H S Bhatia, Managing Director of Kelwon Electronics and Appliances, manufacturing partner for Daewoo India, said RBI's monetary policy decisions will have a significant impact on the consumer durable industry.

"The industry is hoping that RBI will keep interest rates stable or even reduce them slight-

ly in the upcoming review so that consumers get enough purchasing power," he said.

Parijat Agrawal, Head - Fixed Income, Union Asset Management Company said the US 10-year bond has corrected meaningfully from the peak in line with the incoming data and the central bank narrative, and concerns around oil prices too have reduced. "Although MPC will emphasise on bringing inflation to the 4 per cent target, we expect MPC to remain on pause on rates and stance," Agrawal said. The MPC comprises three external members and three officials of RBI.

The external members on the panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma. Besides Governor Das, the other RBI officials in MPC are Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor).



## 1,14,902 entities as startups recognised

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on October 31, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

These eligible firms are allowed to seek fiscal incentives under the Startup India Action Plan, which was launched in January 2016, and that includes income tax exemption for three years. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said the action plan includes 19 items spanning across areas such as simplification and handholding, funding support and incentives and industry-academia partnership and incubation.

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) "has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on 31st October 2023," he said. Replying to a separate question, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said subdued demand in major export destinations such as the US, Hong Kong, the Middle East and China and availability of raw materials at competitive rates were some of the challenges faced by the gems and jewellery export industry.

Export of gem and jewellery during 2022-23 was at USD 38.11 billion, a decline of 2.95 per cent compared to the previous year's export of USD 39.27 billion, she informed.

The sector constituted 8.45 per cent in the total merchandise exports during 2022-23 and the

industry employs around 5 million skilled and semi-skilled workforce.

In another reply, she said that to ensure goods imported are not of substandard quality, the customs authority follows a risk-based framework to intelligently prevent entry of non-compliant goods at the borders. "A task force has also been constituted in CBIC (Central Board Of Indirect Taxes and Customs) for enforcing national standards," Patel said.

She added that as far as imported goods such as TVs and tyre, are concerned, the trade data indicates that there are several categories of import of such products where there has been considerable reduction in imports. Citing certain examples, she provided data that showed imports of different size of TV sets, liquid crystal display television set, and different kinds of tyres declined during April-October this fiscal.

Imports of television sets of screen size exceeding 54 cm but not exceeding 68 cm dipped to USD 0.02 million during April-October this fiscal from USD 0.25 million in 2021-22.

Similarly, imports of radial tyres used in buses/lorries declined to USD 1.01 million during the seven-month period of this fiscal as against USD 16.92 million in 2021-22.

"The Department of Commerce has been regularly monitoring and sensitizing line ministries and other stakeholders from time to time and at various levels on the issue of imports," she said.



## About 33,000 notices sent by CBIC officers for discrepancies in GST returns filed in FY18, FY19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Central tax officers have sent around 33,000 GST notices to businesses for discrepancies in returns filed and short payment of taxes in 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years, a CBIC official said on Wednesday.

The National Co-ordination Committee of the State and Central GST officers, chaired by the Revenue Secretary, is likely to be held by the end of this month or early January, which among other things would also sensitise tax officers regarding issuance of notices, the official said.

Speaking at the Assocham National Conference on GST, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Member-GST Shashank Priya said the notices sent for 2017-18 and 2018-19 were a "small percentage" of the total returns filed for the two fiscal years.

He said the bunching up of demand notices was also on account of extension in the deadline given to taxpayers for filing annual returns for the two years. Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out on July 1, 2017.

The last date for filing annual returns for 2017-18 fiscal was extended till February 7, 2020, while for 2018-19 it was till December 2020.

Under the GST law, every registered person is liable to file annual return for every financial year on or before December 31 of the next financial year. Accordingly, the last date of filing annual return for 2022-23 fiscal is December 31, 2023.

"At the request of the taxpayers the time for return filing was postponed. So returns also were filed at a late juncture and officers have come under a lot of pressure (to scrutinise the returns). So this has led to this unfortunate situation. One hopes that as we progress for-

ward this situation gets addressed and we will not have all the proposed notices pending at the same time. For 2017-18, it has happened like that and we will see how best to deal with it," Priya said.

The Central GST officers have sent around 30,000-33,000 notices to GST registered businesses for short-payment of taxes, he said.

"In our interaction with the field formations, we will try to sensitise them that they should put their officers on alert, they should do a critical scrutiny of details, documents, facts given by the registrants before coming to a conclusion and passing an order. I'm sure, we will take up this issue in the National Co-ordination Committee meeting so that all tax administrations are sensitised," Priya said.

These disputes, he said, if are resolved out at the level of adjudicating authority, instead of approaching the GST appellate tribunal, would be a relief both for the tax administration as well as taxpayers.

"We are working on automated scrutiny module that would give certainty on how scrutiny is to be done and what kind of issues will be looked into return scrutiny," Priya said.

Further, the officer said the GST appellate tribunal would be put in place in the next 4-5 months and efforts are also being made to identify infrastructure, following which selection process of members will start.

With regard to curbing fake registration under GST, Priya said in many tax administration, about 25-28 per cent of the businesses registered were found to be fake.

"We are looking at how we further tighten the registration. We are also looking at how we make it less and less open for changing the GSTR-3B (monthly GST payment form)," he said.

## 'Airline industry to record \$25.7 billion net profit in 2024'

PTI ■ GENEVA

The airline industry is projected to register a net profit of USD 25.7 billion in 2024 as more normal growth is expected in both passenger and cargo segments, global grouping IATA said on Wednesday.

For 2023, the net profit is estimated at USD 23.3 billion, significantly higher than the USD 9.8 billion projected by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in June this year. IATA has more than 300 airlines as members. The airline industry's operating profit is expected to touch USD 49.3 billion in 2024 from USD 40.7 billion this year. In 2024, the total revenue is estimated to grow 7.6 per cent to USD 964 billion compared to 2023.

"Some 4.7 billion people are expected to travel in 2024, a historic high that exceeds the pre-



pandemic level of 4.5 billion recorded in 2019," IATA said.

Industry passenger load factor is nearing its 2019 level, which is supporting the financial recovery of the airlines, IATA Director Policy and Economics Andrew Matters said.

"The airline industry net profit is expected to reach USD 25.7 billion in 2024 (2.7 per cent net profit margin). That will be a slight improvement over 2023, which is expected to show a

USD 23.3 billion net profit (2.6 per cent net profit margin)," IATA said, while releasing its review of 2023 and outlook for 2024 here.

The cargo volume is expected to be higher at 61 million tonnes next year compared to 58 million tonnes in 2023.

"From 2024, the outlook indicates that we can expect more normal growth patterns for both passenger and cargo... While the recovery is impressive, a net profit margin of 2.7 per cent is

## Rupee rises 5 paise to close at 83.32 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 5 paise to close at 83.32 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, helped by a bullish trend in domestic equities and sustained foreign fund inflows. Forex traders said elevated American currency in the overseas markets and dollar buying by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) capped sharp gains for the local unit.

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range as investors remained on the sidelines ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision later this week. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.35 against the greenback.

The rupee oscillated between an intra-day low of 83.37 and a high of 83.29 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.32 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 5 paise from its previous close, even as domestic benchmark indices touched new lifetime peaks.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled at 83.37 against the dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on positive tone in the US Dollar and fresh foreign inflows. A weak tone in crude oil prices and positive domestic markets may also support the rupee. "However, the RBI interven-



tion may cap the sharp upside. Traders may take cues from US ADP Trade balance and non-farm employment change data. Investors may remain cautious ahead of RBI's monetary policy decision on Friday," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain the status quo on the short-term interest rate in its monetary policy review.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled to begin its three-day deliberations on December 6. Das will unveil the decision of the six-member MPC on December 8.

## Adani Group to invest \$75 billion to scale up AGEL RE portfolio to 45 GW: Gautam Adani

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Group has plans to invest USD 75 billion on energy transition initiatives by 2030, its chairman Gautam Adani said on Wednesday. The investments will boost the group's vision to have 45 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity by 2030, Adani said in a statement.

"We are committed to largescale renewables, develop-

ing an indigenous fully integrated manufacturing ecosystem and green hydrogen solutions. At the Adani portfolio level, a total investment of USD 75 billion by 2030 on our energy transition initiatives will further our vision to have 45 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030 and strengthen the pivotal role played by AGEL in India's glide path to decarbonization," the group chairman said.

The investments will be exe-

cuted through Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL). AGEL has emerged as the second-largest global solar PV developer in the US-based Mercom Capital Group's latest annual global report.

"The company's outstanding performance and contribution to the renewable energy landscape have earned it the prestigious second rank among the world's foremost solar PV developers," the statement said.



## India coal import drops 5 per cent in Apr-Sep period to 125.21 MT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Country's coal import has registered a drop of five per cent at 125.21 million tonnes (MT) in the April-September period of the ongoing financial year, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, coal and power minister Pralhad Joshi said that, had the production through auction, commercial coal auction not started, then as per compound annual growth rate (CAGR) there would have been a need to import 150 million tonnes (MT) of coal, but the country has actually imported only 125.21 MT of coal during the April-September period of 2023-24. "In the current year 2023-24, coal import up to the month of September 2023, was 125.21 MT, which is a decline of 5 per cent over the corresponding period last year," the minister said.

## PNB Housing Finance achieves ₹1,000 crore loan book under Roshni segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

PNB Housing Finance on Wednesday said its affordable housing segment Roshni has achieved a Rs 1,000 crore loan book in less than a year of its launch.

This achievement represents the company's steadfast focus on financial inclusion by offering low ticket-size loans of Rs 5-35 lakh for home buying, plot purchases, construction and renovation, it added.

Roshni Home Loans offers loans to individuals, focusing

on the salaried class and self-employed, along with new-to-credit applicants. It provides a customer-centric approach, characterised by tailored financial products, innovative technology and seamless experiences, to meet the unique needs of individuals seeking affordable housing finance solutions. "There is a strong demand for affordable housing in the country, owing to the rapid rate of urbanisation, growing younger population, increasing per capita income and higher demand of housing

units beyond the metro cities. We are aligned with the government's mission of housing for all and are committed to fulfilling the homeownership dreams of individuals from all walks of life," said Girish Kousgi, MD and CEO, PNB Housing Finance.

PNB Housing Finance recently inaugurated its 100th Roshni branch, also its first-ever all-women branch, cementing its position as a leader in the affordable housing category, the lender said in a release.



## Junior Hockey World Cup

# India need to guard against complacency against Spain

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Their campaign has started off positively, but India must guard against complacency when they face Spain in their second Pool C match of the FIH junior men's hockey World Cup here on Thursday.

Vice-captain Arajieet Singh Hundal came out to be India's saviour, scoring a hat-trick as India overcame some anxious moments to beat Korea 4-2 in their opener on Tuesday.

But India's coach C.R. Kumar was not too satisfied with the

performance and said his side needs to be more clinical and avoid conceding unnecessary penalty corners.

India conceded six penalty corners, while earned just two against Korea.

"We are very happy that we got the three points and that's the positive side. But we have to be more clinical in both circles. We conceded two goals in penalty corners which we need to pay attention to," Kumar said after the Korea match.

"We gave away too many penalty corners, six in the whole game where we had just



two. We need to be more cautious."

India are striving to secure their fourth podium finish in the event after having won the tournament twice in 2001 (Hobart) and Lucknow (2016).

The country had clinched a silver medal way back in 1997 in Milton Keynes, England.

Skipper Uttam Singh and his deputy Hundal are the only two players who have experience of the big event, having featured in the last edition of the tournament, where India finished fourth in Bhubaneswar, losing to France in the bronze medal

play-off match.

The Spaniards, who have a bronze medal in their kitty at the 2005 edition in Rotterdam, are India's toughest opponent in the pool, comprising Canada as the other side.

But going by form, India will start as favourites against Spain on Thursday.

India's last pool match is against Canada on Saturday.

Pool A consists of defending champions Argentina, Australia, Chile, and Malaysia, while Pool B has Egypt, France, Germany and South Africa. Pool D is the toughest of the lot

as Belgium, Netherlands, New Zealand and Pakistan will be vying for a quarterfinal berth.

The top two teams from each pool will qualify for the quarterfinals.

The Indians played an attacking game from the onset on Tuesday and would look to continue in the same vein but their defence will have to be cautious against counter-attacks which the Koreans used to great effect to earn penalty corners.

Spain too would be looking to exploit that weakness against the Indians.

## 2024 Australian Open

### Former champion Wozniacki awarded one of first wild cards

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Former No. 1-ranked Caroline Wozniacki has been awarded one of the first wild cards for the 2024 Australian Open and is planning on bringing her two young children to the scene of her biggest Grand Slam triumph.

Wozniacki, the 2018 Australian Open women's champion, and six Australian players were granted the first batch of wild cards.

The 33-year-old Wozniacki returned to top-flight tennis in August after more than three years off the tour. She played in Montreal and Cincinnati before making a run to the fourth round of the US Open, where she lost to eventual champion Coco Gauff.

"I have so many wonderful memories of Melbourne, and of course winning the Australian Open is an all-time

career highlight," Wozniacki, ranked No. 242 this week, told Australian Open organizers on Wednesday.

Wozniacki won her only Grand Slam singles title in Australia a couple of years before she left the sport in early 2020 to start a family. She spent time working as a TV analyst, and now, she and former NBA player David Lee are the parents of two children.

Wozniacki said she planned to travel to the tournament at Melbourne Park with her daughter, Olivia, and her son, James. "I can't wait to share it with my family and my kids," she said.

Tournament director Craig Tiley announced in October that three former Australian Open champions - Naomi Osaka, Wozniacki and Angelique Kerber - were set to return to the year's first major following maternity leave.

## Arsenal slew of late winners highlights resilience

AP ■ LONDON

They say little should be read into the Community Shield, the traditional curtain-raiser to the English soccer season.

Maybe this year is an exception.

Back in early August, Arsenal scored an equalizer through Leandro Trossard in the 101st minute in regulation time and went on to beat Manchester City in a penalty shootout at Wembley Stadium.

Aside from winning a piece of silverware, it was hailed by Arsenal's players as a statement victory - despite the uncompetitive nature of the fixture.

"The mental block is gone," goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale said that day, a reference to his team stumbling late in last season's Premier League title race and finishing behind City.

Well, maybe they are right. And that's not just because Arsenal woke up Wednesday to a five-point lead in the Premier League. It's because of how the team has got there.

Scoring late goals - a trait demonstrating resilience and

character - has become the norm for Arsenal. Dare it be said, it's a sign of a champion team.

Just in the first 15 league games of this season, Arsenal has scored in the 96th and 101st minutes to beat Manchester United 3-1; in the 86th minute to beat Man City 1-0; in the 84th minute to draw 2-2 at Chelsea; in the 89th minute to beat Brentford 1-0; and, on Tuesday, in the seventh minute of stoppage time to win 4-3 at Luton.

That's nine points gained with goals scored from the 84th minute or later. Maybe that late rally in the Community Shield was a portent for how this season will go.

"We don't want a draw, we want to win," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "That drive, that energy, that risk and emotion that we put in the pitch, you can sense it."

The seeds of these comeback wins were sewn last season when Arteta's teams produced a number of late recoveries in games to snatch crucial points in the title race.

The most memorable was



Reiss Nelson's winning goal against Bournemouth that sent Arsenal fans wild at Emirates Stadium. That was in the 97th minute and gave Arsenal a five-point lead in the league, just like Declan Rice did with his winner against Luton.

Arsenal again looks to be the team most likely to stop City winning the Premier League.

Last season, its title bid imploded in the final two months, weighed down by injuries to key players - William

Saliba, in particular - and a naivety in dealing with holding off a fast-finishing juggernaut like City.

Could this season be different?

Arsenal has a few things going in its favor.

Rice, a club-record signing for \$138 million in July, is an upgrade in central midfield and has already contributed crucial goals against United and Luton.

There's better strength in

depth across the squad, in terms of numbers and experience.

Arteta's approach also appears to be different this season, going for more control than chaos - before the Luton game, anyway - to help the team better last the distance in a grueling campaign that also includes playing in the Champions League. In this respect, Arteta seems to be using the playbook of City manager Pep Guardiola from last season.

"Playing every three days and you have to win every game and every game, the demands are there," Arteta said. "It's the way they go about it, how much they want it."

After the pain of the end of last season, Arsenal's players might want it even more.

There are questions marks about the wisdom of Arteta's decision to bring in goalkeeper David Raya and promote him above Ramsdale, last year's first-choice keeper. Raya was at fault for two goals against Luton and has looked shaky in other games, notably in the draw at Chelsea.



### Goalkeeper Nick will be out for four months

AP ■ NEWCASTLE (ENGLAND)

Newcastle United goalkeeper Nick Pope will be out for "around four months" after dislocating his left shoulder, manager Eddie Howe said Wednesday, in the latest injury to hit the Premier League team.

It leaves Pope in a race against time to make England's squad for the European Championship, which starts in June.

The 31-year-old Pope sustained the injury as he dived to his left in an attempt to save a shot by Manchester United defender Sergio Reguilon that was blocked in front of the Newcastle keeper. Howe said Pope will require surgery.

"The operation hasn't happened yet," Howe said, "but we're thinking roughly around four months. So, it's a big blow to us but one that we expected after the game."

"He's naturally down because at this stage of the season where we have so many games, huge games coming up - he's got, obviously, the Euros ahead of him as well, which he was determined to try to be involved in, and there's still chance of that for him."

Slovakia international Martin Dubravka will replace Pope, with Howe also having former Liverpool goalkeeper Loris Karius in the squad.

Newcastle have been linked with a move for former Manchester United keeper David de Gea, who is currently without a club, but Howe said no approaches have been made.

"We have not made any inquiries or any decisions about our recruitment leading into January," Howe said.

"This is a chance for the goalkeepers we have at the football club to consolidate their positions, and that will be the same for every other position at the club."

Defenders Sven Botman and Dan Burn and midfielders Sean Longstaff, Jacob Murphy and Harvey Barnes are among those currently missing because of injuries for Newcastle.

## Sinclair ends her 23 years career

AP ■ VANCOUVER

Christine Sinclair, the world's top international goal scorer among both women and men, played her final match with the Canadian national team.

Sinclair, 40, ended her 23-year national team career with a 1-0 victory against Australia on Tuesday at Vancouver's BC Place - renamed Christine Sinclair Place for the occasion. Sinclair has scored 190 goals since she made her national team debut in 2000. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the game's top scorer among men, has 128 international goals.

It was Sinclair's 331st appearance for Canada, second only in international soccer to retired US star Kristine Lilly, who played in 354 games.

"To see the growth of the game, see where it's at now, and the opportunities that are available, whether it's in the national team or playing pro. Honestly I never thought in my career that this was going to happen. And I just feel fortunate to be a part of that growth and it's incredible to experience the change," she said before the match.

More than 45,000 fans were on hand for the game. In addition to Sinclair, the team also honored midfielder Sophie Schmidt, who played in her final game after a 19-year national team career, and former goalkeeper Erin McLeod, who retired in January.

"Tonight, the world's greatest goalscorer - Christine Sinclair - is stepping onto the pitch with Team Canada for the last time. @Sincy12, thank you for inspiring all of us. Your impact on the game, and on sports in Canada, is something we'll be celebrating for quite some time," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau posted on social media.

When Sinclair was subbed out in the second half, Schmidt took her place on the field after an emotional embrace.

With Sinclair, Canada won the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. She won bronze medals at both the 2012 and 2016 Games.

## Botafogo squander 13-point lead to lose national league title

AP ■ SAO PAULO

There's an old saying in Brazilian soccer: some things only happen to Botafogo.

The reference to the club's historic lack of luck has never rung more true than this year.

The club of World Cup winning greats like Mané Garrincha, Jairzinho and Mário Zagallo squandered a 13-point lead in the Brazilian league and now Palmeiras is very likely to defend its title on Wednesday. It's the first time a team has lost such a big advantage in the South American nation's top flight.

The last round will take place without any hopes for Botafogo fans at Internacional but to finish in fourth position, which would be enough to secure a direct spot at the next Copa Libertadores. The Rio de Janeiro club is currently fifth.

Botafogo was on the top of the standings for 31 of 38 rounds, giving long-suffering supporters confidence their club would lift its first national title since 1995.

But now Palmeiras is in a position where it doesn't necessarily have to win its last game to secure another title. Even with a loss at Cruzeiro, Palmeiras can clinch the league as long as Atletico Mineiro doesn't erase a differential of eight goals.

Flamengo has a slim title chance, but that depends on an even more unlikely combina-



tion of results involving other teams.

Botafogo's title hopes vanished for the season after a 0-0 draw with Cruzeiro on Sunday, a match that ended with some supporters hurling insults at players and burning team shirts at the Nilton Santos Stadium.

Only a few seasons ago the fans would have been excited just to finish near the top. But after American businessman John Textor bought the club's soccer division last year, expectations rose dramatically.

"We needed to be a little bit more humble. We needed to read every match, read the moment of the club," veteran striker Diego Costa, who

arrived in the middle of the season, told journalists on Sunday.

"We needed to leave our ego outside so we could achieve better results. I hope this is a good teaching for all those who are here. Soccer makes you pay."

It was against Wednesday's rival, Internacional, that Botafogo achieved its 13-point advantage on August 12. By then, some fans had tattooed the Brasileirao trophy on their bodies, laughed at rivals losing points to relegation contenders and started debating what round the team would be crowned.

"Follow the leader!" Botafogo fans chanted after every win by their team of lit-

tle known players such as goalkeeper Lucas Perri, defender Adryelson, midfielder Eduardo and striker Segovinha.

But then ... It was something-only-happen-to-Botafogo time.

Botafogo failed to win its 10 latest matches in the competition. Last week, the team scored an apparent winner from the spot against relegated Coritiba in the 90th minute, only to see their opponents equalize 49 seconds later.

"Making fun of a Botafogo fan today is like finding a dead body on the sidewalk, kick it and run away laughing," said social media mogul Felipe Neto, one of the club's most popular supporters.

"The dead body can no longer feel anything."

Botafogo's downfall accelerated at the end of June after Portuguese coach Luis Castro left for Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal following a call from Cristiano Ronaldo. Castro's replacements, Bruno Lage, Lucio Flavio and Tiago Nunes weren't able to keep up the team's fighting spirit and attacking mentality.

Some of Botafogo's losses came in such shocking fashion that rival fans pitied the club's fate. One glaring example was a home match against Palmeiras on November 1, when Botafogo was already in a dwindling form but still could have extended its lead in the league to six points. The team led 3-0 after 37 minutes.



tests in the history of the sport in the country.

East Bengal defender Arun Malhotra was found positive

for a banned substance in a test conducted before the national team's departure for the 2022 Busan Asian Games. The All

India Football Federation (AIFF) slapped Malhotra a ban of 60 days. NADA was non-existent then as it was established in 2009.

Mumbai FC player Nishant Mehra had failed a dope test conducted after an I-League match in 2011 and was handed a two-year ban by the NADA. He was the first Indian footballer to be banned by the NADA for doping.

Another Mumbai FC player Dane Pereira was banned for one year in 2025 after testing positive for an anabolic steroid.

In 2017, former India goalkeeper Subrata Paul was let off with a warning after he tested

positive for banned Terbutaline. He was able to prove before the disciplinary panel of the NADA that he had taken a banned drug unintentionally.

Viknesh had submitted that on account of fever and cough he consulted a doctor who prescribed Ascoril syrup which "contained the prohibited substance". He submitted that he was completely unaware that the said syrup contained prohibited substance and that was why he did not mention any medical prescription in the doping control form.

Viknesh also relied upon the case of Subrata Paul but the

NADA appeal panel said "the appellant has neither filed any copy of the decision nor media report or provided any citation/date of the decision ..."

"We are of the considered opinion that the Appellant has committed an ADRV (Anti-Doping Rule Violation) ... Therefore, the Order dated 05.04.2023 ... Passed by Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel is upheld and the Appellant shall undergo ineligibility period of two (2) years from the decision of Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel which is 05.04.2023," the appeal panel of the NADA headed by Abhinav Mukerji ruled.

## Viknesh's appeal challenging two years ban rejected



ICC RANKINGS

Ravi becomes world number 1 T20I bowler



PTI ■ DUBAI

Young Indian leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi on Wednesday rose to the top spot in the ICC T20I bowling chart on the back of his recent player of the series-winning

performance against Australia. The 23-year-old was India's go-to bowler in the just-concluded series against Australia, taking nine wickets from five games. Bishnoi, who is on 699 rating points, has jumped five places to displace Afghanistan

spinner Rashid Khan (692) from the top slot. Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and England's Adil Rashid, who both have 679 points, are in joint third.

Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana (677) completes the top five. Bishnoi is the only Indian bowler in the top 10 in the shortest format even as Axar Patel climbed nine spots to be 18th.

Meanwhile, the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav, who captained India during their 4-1 T20I series win against Australia, held on to the top spot among batters, while opener Rituraj Gaikwad dropped a place to be seventh.



Mushfiquur becomes first Bangladesh batter to be out for obstructing field

PTI ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Former captain Mushfiquur Rahim on Wednesday became the first Bangladesh batter to be given out for 'obstructing the field' in a bizarre dismissal on the opening day of the second Test against New Zealand here.

The 36-year-old Rahim defended a rising delivery from New Zealand quick Kyle Jamieson in the fourth ball of the 41st over and then extended his right hand to apparently keep the ball away after it bounced up wide outside off stump.

The Black Caps were quick to appeal and the on-field umpires referred the matter to the TV umpire Ahsan Raza who gave Rahim out.

According to Law 37.1.2, "The striker is out obstructing the field if, except in the circumstances of 37.2, in the act of

receiving a ball delivered by the bowler, he/she wilfully strikes the ball with a hand not holding the bat. This will apply whether it is the first strike or a second or subsequent strike. The act of receiving the ball shall extend both to playing at the ball and to striking the ball more than once in defence of his/her wicket."

Earlier such dismissals were classified as "handled the ball" but a change in the laws in 2017 brought them under "obstructing the field" category.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan was the last batter to be given out 'handling the ball' against India in 2001.

Rahim was Bangladesh's top-scorer with his 35 off 83 balls as the hosts were bundled out for 172 inside 67 overs.

Bangladesh won the first Test in Sylhet by 150 runs.

ACC U-19 ASIA CUP

India open campaign against Afghanistan

Face Pakistan on Sunday

PTI ■ DUBAI

India will face Afghanistan in the opening match of the ACC Men's U-19 Asia Cup cricket tournament here on Friday.

Pakistan will play Nepal in the other match of the opening day. Arch-rivals India and Pakistan will face each other on Sunday.

Eight teams will compete for the top prize in the 50-over event which is being hosted by the Emirates Cricket Board.

The teams have been divided into two groups of four each. India, Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan are placed in Group A.

Bangladesh, Japan, Sri Lanka and hosts UAE feature in Pool B. The top two teams from each of the two groups will progress to the semi-finals which will be played on December 15.

The tournament final will be played at the Dubai International Stadium on December 17. All group matches and semi-finals will be played at the ICC Academy Ovals 1 and 2.

All tournament matches will begin at 9:30 am local time.

Will play IPL until I cannot walk anymore: Maxwell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Star Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has vowed to play in the world's biggest cricket league, the IPL "until he can't walk anymore".

The 35-year-old, who played a massive role in Australia's ODI World Cup-winning campaign in India recently, will once again don the colours of Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL next year.

"The IPL will probably be the last tournament I ever play, as I will play the IPL until I can't walk anymore," Maxwell was quoted as saying by Australian Associated Press (AAP) at the Melbourne Airport on Wednesday.

"I was talking about how good the IPL has been to me throughout my career, the people



I've met, the coaches I have played under, the international players that you get to rub shoulders with, how beneficial to my whole career that tournament has been.

"You're rubbing shoulders with AB (de Villiers) and Virat (Kohli) for two months, talking to them while watching other games. It's just the greatest learning

experience that any player could ask for," he said.

Maxwell feels Australian cricketers should play in the IPL for experience ahead of the T20 World Cup in the United States and the West Indies in June.

"Hopefully, a lot of our Australian players can get over to the IPL and get to work in slightly similar conditions to the

Bangladesh take control of 2nd test



After New Zealand reduced to 55-5 on eventful 1st day

AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Bangladesh took full control of the final test against New Zealand after 15 wickets fell on an eventful day one Wednesday as the hosts pursue a first ever test series win against the Kiwis.

The home side was all out for 172 but hit back strongly to reduce New Zealand to 55-5 in 12.4 overs before bad light forced stumps.

Both teams' batters struggled on a wicket where most of the balls kept low and the bounce was uneven. The New Zealand bowling attack maintained a tight line and length to create pressure by conceding just eight runs in the first seven overs after Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto opted to bat first.

Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner (3-31) and offspinner Glenn Phillips (3-65) shared six wickets to wreak havoc on the Bangladesh batting lineup. Ajaz Patel, another left-arm spinner, claimed 2-54 while skipper Tim Southee took one wicket without conceding a single run in 5.2 overs.

Mushfiquur Rahim made a team-high 35 before becoming the first Bangladeshi batter to be dismissed for handling the ball.

While defending a delivery from fast bowler Kyle Jamieson, the team's most experienced batter used his right hand to push the ball away even though it wasn't close to the off-stump.

After New Zealand appealed for the out, the third umpire checked and then gave him out for obstructing the field.

Bangladesh's first boundary came in the eighth over when Zakir Hasan drove Patel through cover for four. The pressure eventually got the better of Zakir (8) when he played a rash shot against Santner and chipped it straight to mid-on.

In the next over, Patel dismissed Mahmudul Hasan (14) after he was beaten by the drift to give a catch at short-leg.

Mominul Haque (5) was the next to go when he was caught behind off Patel's bowling.

But the biggest blow for Bangladesh followed in the next over when captain Najmul Hossain Shanto (9), who hit a century in the previous test, attempted a reverse sweep against Santner.

The on-field Umpires turned down the appeal but New Zealand reviewed it successfully to leave Bangladesh 47-4.

Mushfiquur and Shahadat Hossain, playing his only second test, shared a 57-run partnership which eventually kept Bangladesh ahead on a tricky wicket.

The dismissal of Mushfiquur triggered another collapse, which began with Shahadat (31) being caught down the leg-side off the bowling of Phillips.

The onus was on Mehidy Hasan to lead a fightback with the lower order but Santer came back to dismiss him as New Zealand bowled Bangladesh out shortly after tea.

However, Mehidy led Bangladesh's bowling attack with 3-17 and left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who took 10 wickets in the first test, took 2-29.

Tom Latham and Devon Conway started cautiously but Mehidy broke through with a delivery that Conway thought would turn. Instead it went straight to crash the stump as Conway was out for 11.

Taijul then dealt a double blow by dismissing Latham and Henry Nicholls.

New Zealand fell into deep trouble when Kane Williamson, the centurion of the previous test, ended up getting an inside edge towards short while defending a quicker delivery of Mehidy.

Just a ball later, Mehidy fired another quicker one that kept extremely low to trap Tom Blundell leg-before for a duck.

Daryl Mitchell (12) and Glenn Phillips (5) were batting when play came to an end because of bad light.

Du Plessis hints at return to international cricket

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has hinted at a comeback to international cricket ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup, saying that he has been in discussion with the Portea's white-ball coach Rob Walter for the past couple of years. Du Plessis last featured in a T20I three years ago in 2020. While his last match for South Africa was a Test against Pakistan in February 2021. "I believe that I can return to international cricket," du Plessis told the broadcaster of Abu Dhabi T10 league.

"We have been speaking about this for the last couple of years. It's just figuring out the balance of the T20 World Cup next year. It's certainly something we have spoken about with the new coach," he added.

Despite not featuring for South Africa, du Plessis has been doing well in the domestic circuit as well as in T20 leagues across the world.

With 730 runs from 14 games for the Royal Challengers Bangalore, du Plessis was the second highest run getter in the IPL earlier this year.

The 39-year-old led South Africa in the 2014 and 2016 T20



World Cups but wasn't considered for the last two editions of the tournament, despite never officially retiring from white-ball cricket. On Monday, South Africa white-ball coach Walter had said the likes of du Plessis, Quinton de Kock and Rilee Rossouw will be considered for the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be played in June next year in the West Indies and the USA.

"Given that some of our frontline bowlers are missing out and there are guys - let me throw it out there just to create some media hype - like Faf (du Plessis) and Rilee (Rossouw) as well as Quinny (De Kock) that could well be considered for a T20 World Cup and then also the SA20 that happens next year - 80% of the side picks itself but there is definitely a space for other guys to get themselves into the conversation," Walter had said.

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