

**OPINION 6**  
BJP JUGGERNAUT ROLLS  
IN HINDI HEARTLAND**WORLD 8**  
HUNTER BIDEN INDICTED ON  
NINE TAX CHARGES**MONEY 10**  
SEBI CONSIDERING TO CREATE  
NEW ASSET CLASS

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY DECEMBER 9, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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'NO COACH CAN  
CREATE ARTIST  
LIKE SHAMI'  
12 SPORTS**RBI predicts  
faster growth for  
Indian economy**

**Mumbai:** The Reserve Bank of India on Friday expected left its key lending rates unchanged for the fifth consecutive time and predicted faster growth in the world's fastest-growing major economy amid an uncertain outlook on inflation ahead of elections.

The six-member Monetary Policy Committee, consisting of three RBI and an equal number of external members, voted unanimously to keep the benchmark repurchase rate at 6.5 per cent. The central bank raised its forecast for economic growth to 7 per cent from 6.5 per cent, maintaining India's position as the world's fastest-growing major economy. **PTI**

**IT raids Congress  
MP premises in  
Odisha, Jharkhand**

**Bhubaneswar/Ranchi:** With the Income Tax department recovering a total of over ₹220 crore in cash during raids in places linked to an Odisha-based distillery group till Friday afternoon, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the money looted from the public will have to be returned.

Modi was apparently referring to political leaders in Odisha and Jharkhand who have links with the liquor firm. **PTI**

# Mahua Moitra Expelled from Lok Sabha, Exposed

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■**  
NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra was expelled on Friday from the Lok Sabha after the House adopted the report of its Ethics Committee that held her guilty of accepting gifts and illegal gratification from a businessman to further his interest.

After a heated debate over the panel report during which Moitra was not allowed to speak, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi moved a motion to expel the TMC member for "unethical conduct", which was adopted by a voice vote and the House was adjourned immediately. The Ethics Committee report found Moitra guilty of "unethical conduct" and contempt of the House for sharing her Lok Sabha credentials, including the user ID and password of the Lok Sabha Member's portal, with unauthorised persons. This had an irrepressible impact on national security.

Moitra received backing of her party as well members of the INDIA Bloc of Opposition parties on the action without giving her a chance to defend herself in Parliament.



TMC leader Mahua Moitra addresses the media with Congress MP Sonia Gandhi and other Opposition leaders after being expelled by the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday **PTI**

TMC supremo West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee denounced the expulsion of her MP from the Lok Sabha and termed the move as a "betrayal" of India's parliamentary democracy. Mamata expressed her disappointment as Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not intervene in the matter. The motion moved by Joshi

said Moitra's "conduct has further been found to be unbecoming as a Member of Parliament for accepting gifts and illegal gratification from a businessman to further his interest which is a serious misdemeanour and highly deplorable conduct" on her part. Joshi urged the House to accept the recommendation and finding of the committee

and "resolve that continuance of Moitra as member of Lok Sabha is untenable and she may be expelled from the membership of the Lok Sabha". Ethics Committee chairman Vinod Kumar Sonkar tabled the first report of the Committee on the complaint filed by BJP member Nishikant Dubey against Moitra.

**Continued on Page 5**

# Modi may launch Mission 2024 from Kashi

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■** LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch Mission 2024 from his parliamentary constituency, Kashi, following the Bharatiya Janata Party's resounding victories in the recent State elections of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh.

"This marks a significant moment as the Prime Minister has chosen Kashi for the kickoff of his Lok Sabha election campaign in 2024. Modi is scheduled to engage in various programmes during his 43rd visit to the city on December 17 and 18," Vijay Bahadur Pathak, a senior BJP leader said.

Kashi has been important centre for the BJP as any election campaign from this city is bound to affect the whole of eastern Uttar Pradesh which has 28 Lok Sabha constituencies.

During this two-day visit, the Prime Minister is expected to present projects amounting to ₹1,000 crore to the public. Among the projects, the inauguration of the Swaraveda Mahamandir, recognised as the country's largest meditation center, is anticipated. Additionally, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for several projects, including the Phulwaria Four Lane, Amul Plant, and Sarnath Beautification.

Having been elected as the Member of Parliament from Varanasi in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Modi has cultivated a strong bond with Kashi, making a total of 43 visits over the past nine years of his tenure as the Prime Minister. The upcoming visit on December 17-18 is particularly significant following the BJP's



remarkable success in the Assembly elections of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has communicated the primary details of the visit to the district administration and BJP leaders. The visit will be centered around various development projects in Varanasi. Dilip Patel, the BJP Kashi area president, stated, "The PM will arrive at Babatpur airport by special plane on the afternoon of December 17." On the first day of his visit, the PM is scheduled to visit Chhota Cutting Memorial School grounds, where an exhibition based on 'Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra' for the urban area will be showcased. Later, he will interact with the beneficiary class. In the evening, Modi will attend the Kashi Tamil Sangamam program at Namo Ghat, meeting South Indian guests and participating in the Ganga Aarti. The PM will conclude the day by resting at the BLW Guest House.

**Continued on Page 5**

# BJP selects its observers to appoint Chief Ministers

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Amid a prolonged deliberation over the appointments of new heads for the States won by the BJP last week, the party appointed Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, and Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda as central party observers for the election of legislature party leaders in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, respectively. The legislature party leaders will become Chief Ministers of the three States and the meetings to elect them may take place over the weekend. There is a view within the party that its leadership may usher in fresh faces at the helm of these States.

Singh will be joined by the party's vice president Saroj Pandey and its general secretary Vinod Tawde as central observers for Rajasthan amid an intense buzz within the BJP that the leadership will bring in a new leader, ignoring the claim of two-time former Chief Minister Vasundhara Rajé. Sources said Rajé has been making efforts to get onto

the hot seat and in this regard she called on Party chief JP Nadda.

The choice of Singh, one of the senior most BJP leaders and a Rajput leader, is likely to help build a consensus around the leadership's chief ministerial choice among MLAs, a number of whom are seen as supporting Rajé. Khattar will be joined by the party's OBC Morcha head K Laxman and its secretary Asha Lakra for the Madhya Pradesh legislature party meeting, while Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and BJP general secretary Dushwant Kumar Gautam will be central observers for Chhattisgarh along with Munda.

In Madhya Pradesh where the BJP scored its biggest victory among the three States with a two-thirds majority, current Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's stake has gone up with the win but there is a view that the party leadership is looking at a leadership change after his 18-year uninterrupted stint in power except for 15 months after the 2018 Assembly polls.

**Continued on Page 5**

# Putin hails PM Modi as a force to reckon with

**AGENCIES ■** MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, highlighting the progressive development of relations between India and Russia under Modi's guarantee. Putin also said he was "surprised" by Modi's tough stance on defending the national security interests of India.

While addressing the "Russia Calling!" Forum, Putin said Modi cannot be intimidated by any pressure from unfriendly countries, reported TASS news agency. "I want to say that relations between Russia and India are developing progressively

along all trajectories, and the main guarantor of this is the policy pursued by Prime Minister Modi," the Russian leader said at the event.

Speaking on international pressure, Putin said he "cannot imagine that Modi could be frightened, intimidated or forced to take any actions, steps, decisions that would be at variance with the national interests of India and the Indian people".

"I just look at what is happening from the outside, and sometimes, frankly speaking, I am even surprised at his tough stance on defending the national interests of the Indian state," Putin further noted in his praise of Modi at the investment forum.

The Russian President also asserted the importance of increasing settlements in national currencies between Russia and India, emphasising that Russia stands for a "truly democratic model" of global economic development, reported Sputnik.

# Heritage left unattended, history threatened

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■**  
NEW DELHI

India's invaluable treasures, the monuments of national importance, stand as cultural gems shielded by vigilant guards to prevent any harm or encroachment. Keeping this in mind, currently as many as 248 monuments/museums of national importance under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have security guards, as per the Government data. However, a significant number of them i.e. 94 per cent are left unattended, lacking security personnel. There are a total 3,693 Centrally protected monuments (CPMs) across the States.

Expressing its dismay over the low percentage of CPMs that have security guards and the insufficient number of personnel to meet the requirements, a Department-related Parliamentary Panel on Transport, Tourism and Culture has asked the Government to ensure adequate funds so as to ensure safety of these heritage structures as well as safety of tourists visiting these spots. In its report tabled in Parliament on Friday, the panel noted that security guards are posted at only 248 CPMs/sites/museums i.e. less than about 6.7 per cent of the total number of CPMs. "Also, out of the total

requirement of 7,000 personnel for protection of monuments, the Government could provide only 2,578 security personnel at 248 locations due to budgetary constraints," said the panel led by Rajya Sabha member V Vijayasai Reddy.

Taking the stringent view that budgetary constraints should not be an excuse for not providing security guards to protect our rich cultural heritage, the panel reminded the authorities that, "it is the duty of the Government of the day to protect our cultural heritage sites." The Committee, therefore, recommends that a budget may be provided by the

Government to appoint 7,000 personnel for protection of the monuments or as per the study conducted by IIT, Delhi. The Committee also suggested the Union Culture Ministry overseeing the ASI to conduct an urgent thorough assessment of the security requirements and budgetary allocation required for the same and "a strong case may be made to the Ministry of Finance requesting allocation of additional funds for this purpose so as to ensure a basic state of protection for all the monuments across the country to preserve them for generations to come."

**Continued on Page 5**

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# Youth attacks girlfriend, attempts to kill self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A youth tried to end his life after attempting to murder his girlfriend, whose marriage was fixed ten days ago, at a hotel room where they had checked in while posing as husband and wife, in Kaiserbagh police station area. The incident took place on Thursday but came to light on Friday.

Both were admitted to KGMU Trauma Centre where the condition of the youth is said to be critical. He had slit his throat before attacking his girlfriend.

The girl is a community health officer and the youth a private company employee. It surfaced that the youth, identified as Rishu Singh Gaur (26) of Bidhnu in Kanpur, was in love with the 29-year-old girl, but her marriage was fixed with another man.

Preliminary investigation revealed that both Rishu and his girlfriend reached Lucknow on Wednesday night and checked in at the Mezban hotel. Early morning on Thursday, Rishu got angry over some issue and attacked his girlfriend with a blade before slitting his own throat.

As the woman cried, the hotel staff reached the room and rushed both to the KGMU Trauma Centre. The girl had cut wounds on her face and other body parts while the youth had deep a cut wound on the throat. "The woman is out of danger but the youth's condition is critical," a doctor said. The hotel staff said when the door of the room was opened, both were found soaked in blood. After receiving

## Student threatened, thrashed by rivals

**Lucknow (PNS):** A group of students allegedly thrashed their rival, made a video clip and shared it on social media, in Sushant Golf City police station area. The victim's father lodged a complaint with police. Eight of the accused were identified by the victim.

As per the complainant, one of the accused befriended his son a few weeks ago. "A couple of days ago, he called my son and asked him to accompany him somewhere. My son politely refused, saying he was to take his exam and asked him to meet near the housing society where he lived," the complainant alleged.

He said his son went to meet the accused on December 1 evening and he was forced to sit in a car occupied by others. One of them threatened to beat my son in full public view," the complainant alleged.

He said the accused drove the car to a deserted place behind a shopping mall on Shaheed Path where his son was dragged out and beaten black and blue. "They said he was very vocal and would present himself as a leader before them. They abused my son and filmed the entire act. The attackers then bundled my son in their car and drove to the outer gate of the colony. On the way, they thrashed and abused my son again and also made a video clip. They let them off after threatening to kill him if he reported the matter to police," the complainant alleged. He said one of the accused shared the video with his the victim's friends. "My son was depressed and he narrated his ordeal to us," the victim's father said. Police registered a case under relevant sections of the IPC and started investigations into the case.

ing the news, the girl's family reached the hospital. Police said the girl's brother had filed a case against Rishu Singh.

It surfaced that Rishu was upset as his girlfriend's marriage was fixed with another man. He asked the woman to meet him one last time. The police came to know that both had been in an affair for a long time. Both wanted to get married, but the girl's family fixed her marriage with another man. In his complaint, the girl's brother alleged

that Rishu lured her into going to Lucknow where they stayed at a hotel.

"I got a call from the police about my sister's admission to the KGMU Trauma Centre. I went there and my sister told me that she had visited Lucknow with Rishu, who attacked her with a sharp-edged object when she was sleeping. "She also told me that Rishu attempted suicide by slitting his throat," the complainant alleged.

# Girl sold by mother sexually exploited

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a startling incident, a woman in Gorakhpur sold her daughter to a man based in Haryana for Rs 4 lakh under the false pretense of marriage. After the marriage, the 18-year-old girl experienced sexual harassment. However, she eventually managed to break free from her husband's hold and returned to her hometown.

The victim, who hails from Chiluatul region in Gorakhpur, filed a complaint with the police against her mother and a family friend on Wednesday.

Superintendent of Police (North) Manoj Avasthi have ordered a comprehensive inquiry into the matter and stated that suitable action would be taken against the accused after investigation.

Meanwhile, the police arrested 13 individuals, including four women, in the

Sonbhadra area of Varanasi, breaking up a human trafficking ring. Alongside recovering mobile phones, other items, and Rs 80,000 in cash from those detained, the police also managed to rescue a woman.

In Mathura, a teenage girl committed suicide by jumping in front of a moving train after being scolded by her mother for skipping school, the police said on Friday.

According to police sources, 13-year-old Khushi Sharma, daughter of Ranveer Sharma, was unwilling to go to school on Wednesday. Angered by this, her mother slapped her and insisted that she attend school. However, instead of going to school, Khushi went to the Alwar-Mathura railway track and jumped in front of a train. The police reached the spot after being informed by some locals and sent the body for post-mortem.



People picking up things of their use from a demolition site in Bhikampur on Friday

Pioneer

## SP, CPI (ML) flay Centre for Mahua's expulsion from LS

PNS/PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Sakhilesh Yadav on Friday said if the method used to expel opposition MPs from the Parliament is applied on the ruling party, it will leave them with only a handful MPs in both Houses.

Yadav's statement came hours after Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha after the House adopted the report of its Ethics Committee that held her guilty of accepting gifts and illegal gratification from a businessman to further his interest. The Samajwadi Party (SP) chief took to X to express his resentment on Moitra's expulsion.

In a post in Hindi, Yadav advised the BJP to hire a "salaahkar" or consultant for activities that involved taking away membership of Opposition leaders so that the ministers, MPs and MLAs of the ruling party could spend their time for public welfare instead of activities pertaining to conspiracies. He added that the basis on which the membership of the Opposition MPs is being taken away, if the same is implemented on the ruling party, they would be left with only one or two MPs in both Houses.

"Some people prove to be more lethal (ghatak) for the ruling party on the streets than in the House," he said. After a heated debate over the panel

**‘The basis on which the membership of the Opposition MPs is being taken away, if the same is implemented on the ruling party, they would be left with only one or two MPs in both Houses’**

— SP CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV

report during which Moitra was not allowed to speak, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Friday moved a motion to expel the Trinamool member for "unethical conduct," which was adopted by a voice vote. Mahua Moitra represented Krishnanagar constituency in West Bengal in the Lok Sabha.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India (Marxists-Leninist) termed the expulsion of TMC MP Mahua Moitra from the Lok Sabha as a shameful attempt by the Central government to silence the opposition. "The party strongly condemns this and demands her immediate reinstatement," CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav said in a statement issued on Friday.

"The expulsion clearly points to the fact that the Modi government will go to any extent to prevent any questions about Adani's huge corporate fraud or the Modi-Adani nexus. Mahua Moitra is known for her powerful speeches in parliament exposing the Modi-Adani nexus. The action against her is based on a minor complaint by BJP MP from Godda, Jharkhand, Nishikant Dubey, who has a tendency of using derogatory and misogynistic words. His complaint was immediately sent by the Speaker to the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee, which accepted it without any hesitation. Mahua Moitra was not given a fair hearing by the committee. The swiftness with which the action was taken against her suggests that the BJP already already knew about the recommendation of the Ethics Committee to protect Modi and his corporate cronies," he said.

The CPI (ML) leader said Mahua's expulsion adds to the long list of BJP's vendetta against opposition leaders such as Rahul Gandhi's expulsion from Lok Sabha, Sanjay Singh's arrest and communal targeting of Danish Ali inside parliament. "BJP wasted no time in expelling Mahua Moitra, while BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri, who made hateful and communal threats against BSP MP Danish Ali inside parliament, walks free without any consequences," Yadav pointed out.

## Gym trainer robbed of motorcycle

**Lucknow (PNS):** Three bike-borne men looted a motorcycle from a gym trainer after attacking him with sticks in Bakshi-Ka-Talab police station area late on Thursday night.

"An FIR has been registered under relevant sections at the BKT police station against unidentified accused," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) SM Qasim Abidi said, adding no belongings of the gym trainer other than the motorcycle were looted. "The accused abandoned their own bike and escaped with the victim's motorcycle," he said.

The victim, Aman Singh of Itaunja, was returning home

from his gym when he was intercepted at Asthi crossing in BKT by three bike-borne men armed with sticks.

"They attacked me in a bid to loot my belongings," Aman stated in his complaint. According to the police, when the gym trainer was attacked, his bike skidded and he fell down. The accused took his bike and fled the scene, abandoning their own motorcycle.

"The motorcycle of the accused has been impounded and the police are finding the name of its owner and chassis number. Five teams were formed immediately after the case came to the knowledge of seniors. The footage of CCTV cameras is being scanned and we are trying to identify the accused with the help of manual and technical inputs," Abidi

said. He added personal enmity could also not be ruled out at this stage.

Meanwhile, a woman was duped of over Rs 3.37 lakh in the name of an online job. Reports said Khushbu Pal of Model House in Aminabad applied for a part-time job and she got an offer by a man, who introduced himself as Niwas Paskar.

The woman said she was task to like videos and others posts to begin with. She was added by Paskar to a Telegram group. "I was also added to a WhatsApp group and asked to sign up for a trading site, which I later found to be fake. I was supposed to link my bank account to it, which I did. However, the money was siphoned from my bank account," she alleged.



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Freehold deed no. of my property HIG B/32A Nirala Nagar, Unnao. 717 dated 18/11/13 and execution and possession and allotment letters are actually lost. Sarabjeet Kumar son of Mahveer Singh, Uncha village, Saini, Unnao. Mo. 6393310264



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I Naresh s/o Late Bana Lal R/o 122/485 Sindhi Colony Shastri Nagar Kanpur-208005 have changed my name from Naresh Kumar hirwani to Naresh Kumar for all future purposes.

## Three youths booked for extorting money from food stall owners

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Three youths were booked for extorting money from food stall owners in Chatori Gali in Gautampalli police station area. Police said they were looking for the accused.

As per reports, the vice-chairman of Lucknow Development Authority and member secretary of Memorial Committee recently ordered his subordinates to register the street vendors in the Chatori Gali and give them space in the area in an orderly manner.

Recently, the member secretary of the Memorial Committee received a com-

plaint from the shopkeepers, who alleged that three youths — Manoj Singh, Deepu Yadav and Sanjay — used to extort Rs 40 per day from each of them and threatened to ransack and remove the stalls, if denied the extortion.

"The trio have a criminal bent of mind and they create hindrance in smooth functioning of stalls and also disturb and bully common man and customers," as per the complaint, which was given by assistant manager of Memorial Committee Maheshwari Prasad. A police spokesman said a case for extortion and threatening had been registered

against the accused.

Meanwhile, members of a gang sent fake summons to a Gomti Nagar Extension resident, who is a witness in a case against the accused, to withdraw himself from the case. A complaint was lodged in this regard on Thursday.

Abhijeet Tiwari of Sharda Apartment in the area said he is a witness in a case lodged under IPC sections 393/467/468/471 (attempted robbery and tampering of government documents) at Hazratganj Kotwali. The accused, identified as Poonam Kumari, Mohan Kumar, Vinit Pandey, Amit Dubey, Shyam

Dev Pandey Durgesh Rai, and Om Sahai, would often compel me for a compromise. "They used to ask me not to appear as a witness. They opted for bullying tactics and tricks. They sent me summons issued from the court of FTC (women) Azamgarh to appear there," Tiwari said.

He said he went to the court in Azamgarh only to be told by the clerk/reader that no summons were issued to him.

"They used a fake stamp of the court and the format in which they wrote my name and address and sent the summons to me by post," the complainant said.

## Second phase of demolition in Akbar Nagar from today

**Lucknow (PNS):** As part of the beautification plan of Kukrail riverfront, the second phase of demolition will begin in Akbar Nagar, Bhikampur, on Saturday. As many as 102 shops and 600 families will be displaced without being provided alternative places. The first phase concluded on Wednesday. It is a joint operation of Lucknow Development Authority, Lucknow Municipal Corporation and Irrigation department.

Lucknow Vyapar Mandal, in a meeting held on Thursday, resolved to protest against the alleged arbitrary move in a bid to prevent demolition of the shops which have been in existence for the last 40 years. The shopkeepers have been paying taxes to the civic authorities and LDA. The meeting was presided over by Lucknow Vyapar Mandal president Amarnath Mishra and attended by all the office-bearers and a large number of businessmen drawn from different markets. Additional secretary Gyanendra Verma said that the LDA administration would strictly follow the instructions of the state government. The LDA has released the land to 'Grhi Vihar Samiti', a social organisation dedicated to setting up the residential colony and shops in 1972. It came into existence in 1974 and was named after UP ex-governor Akbar Ali Khan. A large portion of the nazul land, which belongs to LMC, was given to people on lease. With passage of time, big houses and permanent structures were constructed. Small shops have transformed into big showrooms.

## Woman mistakenly shot in head by cop inside police station in Aligarh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a bizarre incident, a woman who went to a police station in Aligarh for passport verification was mistakenly shot in the head with a pistol belonging to Sub-Inspector Manoj Sharma.

The video of the incident, captured on CCTV, went viral on Friday. In the footage, the woman is seen entering the police station and standing there for a while. After some time, a police official came and handed a pistol to the sub-inspector. While cleaning the pistol, an accidental gunshot occurred, hitting the woman and causing her to fall to the ground. The injured woman was immediately taken to JN Medical College for treatment. The woman is said to be in a critical condition.

Meanwhile, three persons sustained bullet injuries at a wedding ceremony when an army personnel opened indiscriminate fire from his service pistol at Murlupur village under Dheena police station in Chandauli district. The accused was taken into police custody while injured were admitted to a hospital.

Meanwhile, a mentally-challenged man brutally killed his daughter-in-law and grandson in Sitapur on Friday morning. Reports said that one Kammo alias Kamala Prasad, a resident of Deoria, Talgaon locality of Sitapur district has been suffering from mental illness for a long time.

On Friday morning, his grandson, Ayush, started crying, which irritated him. He asked his daughter-in-law, Shikha, to quiet her son. While Shikha was attempting to soothe her crying son, Kamala Prasad lost his mental balance and, in a fit of rage, attacked his daughter-in-law and grandson with an axe.

Hearing their screams, other family members rushed to rescue them but till then, Ayush was already dead. The family members rushed Shikha to the district hospital for treatment but she too succumbed just a few minutes after reaching hospital.

Superintendent of Police, Chakresh Mishra reached the spot with the forensic team. The team collected samples from the spot and arrested the accused.

### RDSO JOINT DIRECTOR TO BE HONOURED

**Lucknow (PNS):** Joint director (testing) of RDSO Amit Kumar Sisodia has been chosen to be honoured with 'Ati-Vishisth Rail-Seva Puraskar' at the railway minister level in recognition of his efforts and contribution in the category of 'Completing Projects in Record Time'. Sisodia, an IRSME officer of 2013 batch, has been selected for this highest honour by the Ministry of Railways, owing to his efforts and leadership in the conduct of Vande Bharat (Version-II) trials.


**NOTICE :** I the Advocate Pradeep Yadav on behalf of Upendra Kumar S/o Siliokhan Kumar R/o 6/190 Swaroop Nagar, Nagaheshwar Tower Kanpur Nagar inform to all that Upendra Kumar S/o Siliokhan Kumar has offered to Mortgage the concerned Private Plot having area 83.64 sq.mtrs. Part of Arazi Nos. 309 MIN & 460 MIN & 470 Situated in Gram Majharaparkhera Pargana Hadaha Teh. & Distt. Unnao. It is said by Upendra Kumar S/o Siliokhan Kumar that the concerned afore said Private plot of original sale deed dated 19.09.1991 executed by Ram Lal & Chhota sons of Pusuva Alias Pushu through Regd. power of Attorney Ram Narayan Dwivedi S/o Rama Adhar Dwivedi in favour of Ram Prakash Dwivedi S/o Late Puttu Lal Dwivedi of the afore said Private plot which is duly registered in the office of sub-Registrar Unnao in Bahi No. 1 2ld No.253 on pages 141-150 on SL No. 4973 dated 19.09.1991 is really lost somewhere else. It has been informed by above Upendra Kumar dated 14.09.2023 with the Lost Article Information Report U.P. Police, L.A.R. No. 202300013310/2023. If any person of financial institute has any claim with under signed advocate within 15 days from publication of the notice, failing which will be presumed that proposed mortgage is free from Encumbrances & my Client L.I.C., H.F.L. Kanpur will be free to process further accordingly. Pradeep Yadav, Advocate L.I.C., H.F.L. Kanpur. Mo 9935712367



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**E-Tender Enq. No.7493/P-1/EMPWP-12428 dated 05-12-23**  
Dy. Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-1) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-tender ID No. 2023\_POWER\_113503\_1 for Procurement of Anion Exchange Resin and Cation Exchange Resin. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 07-12-23/ 4.00 PM onwards. Note:- Corrigendum & Addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

**76155/12/2484/2023/30483 Dated CHD :- 12/8/2023**

बैंक ऑफ़ इंडिया Bank of India		BOI 		Zonal Office: "Star House" Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010, Ph.: 0522-2721512		POSSESSION NOTICE	
<p>Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest, Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (12) read the Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, had issued a Demand Notice, calling borrower to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of same. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property/ies described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the dates mentioned hereunder. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property/ies and any dealings with the property/ies will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India for mentioned amount 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.</p>							
S. No.		Name & Address of the Borrower & Guarantor		Description of Immovable property mortgaged / Owner of the property		Amount o/s as mentioned in the Notice u/s 13(2) Date of Demand & Possession Notice	
Branch: Terhi Pulia							
1		Borrower : (1) Mr. Santosh Kumar Dubey, S/o Mr. Sabah Jeet Dubey, Add: (1) 4/103-0, Sector-4, Gomti Nagar Extension Scheme, Lucknow- 226010, Add: (2) 747/R, Ramjanki Nagar, Basharatpur, Gorakhpur- 273004, (2) Mrs. Vibha Dubey, W/o Mr. Santosh Kumar Dubey, Add: (1) 4/103-0, Sector-4, Gomti Nagar Extension Scheme, Lucknow- 226010, (2) 747/R, Ramjanki Nagar, Basharatpur, Gorakhpur- 273004, Guarantor : Mr. Ram Chandra, S/o Late Shri Radhey Shyam, 1/243, Vikrant Khand, Lucknow		All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Plot No. 4/103-0, Type-C, Sector-4, Gomti Nagar Extension Scheme, Lucknow, Area: 290.00 sq mtrs, Mortgagor by :Mrs. Vibha Dubey W/o Mr. Santosh Kumar Dubey. Boundaries : East : Premises no. 4/103N & 9 MTR wide road, West : Commercial plot, North : Commercial plot, South: Plot No. 4/103P.,		₹ 74,53,727.23 + interest & other charges	
						Demand Notice dt. 29.08.2023	
						Possession Notice dt. 05.12.2023	
Date : 09.12.2023, Place : Lucknow				Authorised Officer, Bank of India			



# CM Yogi reviews law and order situation, development works

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, conducted a review of the law and order situation as well as the ongoing development works in Noida, Greater Noida, Noida Authority, and Meerut division at the auditorium of Gautam Buddha University in Greater Noida.

During the review meeting, he emphasised the participation of universities in the statewide campaign against illegal drug dealers. The chief minister asked the universities to establish internal teams dedicated to addressing the issue of drug addiction.

He directed senior police officers to intensify and enforce stringent measures in the ongoing anti-drug campaign. The chief minister said that suspicious people hovering around universities and educational institutions should be investigated. The chief minister stressed the importance of taking decisive action against those enticing students into the world of illegal drugs, including the seizure of their assets. Furthermore, he instructed the establishment of rehabilitation centres within medical col-



leges. While reviewing the Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra, the chief minister emphasised the inclusion of a maximum number of citizens and beneficiaries of various schemes. He also sought updates on the ground-breaking ceremony, New Noida development, and theme-based parks. The officers also gave information to the chief minister about waste management, startups, YEIDA Master Plan-2041 and the New Delhi-Mumbai Greenfield Expressway through a presentation.

Yogi also instructed offi-

cials to ensure the installation of high-quality CCTV cameras as part of the Safe City initiative. He further directed to establish a control room to store the CCTV footage.

The chief minister issued directives to ensure the timely submission of master plans by authorities to the government. Additionally, he emphasised the need to formulate a comprehensive plan for the removal of illegal encroachments.

He provided strict instructions for the timely resolution of matters related to IGRS and revenue. Furthermore, officers

were directed to address issues raised by public representatives with both efficiency and quality in a timely manner.

Among those present at the meeting were Noida MLA Pankaj Singh, Dadri MLA Tejpal Nagar, Jewar MLA Dharendra Singh, MLC Shri Chand Sharma, Divisional Commissioner, Meerut Selva Kumari J, Police Commissioner Lakshmi Kumari, District Magistrate Manish Kumar, CEO Noida Authority Lokesh M, CEO YEIDA Arunveer Singh and CEO Greater Noida Ravikumar NG.

## Must connect institutions to industry to become developed country: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To transform India into a developed country by 2047, we must connect our institutions to industry and set goals for the next 25 years, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said while addressing the fifth convocation ceremony of Bennett University in Greater Noida on Friday.

“When the country’s population of 142 crore moves forward with one voice and resolve, there is no reason why our country cannot become a developed India,” Yogi said.

As part of the event, the chief minister planted saplings on the university campus. The vice-chancellor of the university presented him with an ‘angavastram’. On this occasion, a BTech student presented a portrait of Shri Ram Darbar to the chief minister.

In his address, the chief minister extended best wishes to the graduating students and said: “Our university convocations are a transformed version of ancient India’s university and Gurukul convocations. The universities of ancient India were renowned centres for research and development for graduates worldwide.”

Mentioning a verse from the Taittiriya Upanishad, ‘Satyam vada dharmam chara swadhyayanama pramadahi’, Yogi emphasised the importance of speaking truth, practising righteousness, avoiding laziness in self-study, and staying on the path of truth and righteousness. He urged the graduates to avoid negligence in virtuous actions, seize opportunities for greatness, and show respect to parents, teachers, and guests as if they were deities.

“What we commonly refer to as ‘religion’ in everyday life may not be true religion; it could be just a part of it,” he philosophised. He mentioned that rituals and worship practices could not be considered as religion as these are per-

sonal activities. “Religion is a broad concept that inspires us to follow the path of duties, ethical values, and virtuous conduct. Whenever the youth of India has followed this path, India has quickly become a major force in the world,” the chief minister said.

Further discussing the ‘Panch Pran’ of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yogi said that every Indian should adopt this resolve, regardless of the field they are working in. “This can only happen when we have a vision of ‘Nation First’ in front of everyone. Prioritising the country over personal and family interests is crucial for national progress,” he added.

Lauding the accomplishments of Bennett University, the chief minister said that it has achieved many successes in just seven years. He emphasised the university’s progress towards becoming a global institution and also stressed on the importance of educational institutions making efforts for their local communities.

Furthermore, he highlighted the need for institutions to connect with industries for India to establish itself as a developed country.

The chief minister appreciated Bennett University by noting that it has collaborations with more than 20 CEOs from different industries, guiding the students. He also guided the students on the importance of a clear vision, teamwork, and gaining experience, particularly in the context of the challenges posed by encephalitis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

He mentioned that India has the highest youth population globally and that the state has the maximum number of youth in the country. He emphasised the need to move forward with this strength, stating that success in life comes through hard work and dedication. He assured the university continuous support from the state government.

## Gyanvapi row: Order on handing over basement key to DM on Dec 11

PTI ■ VARANASI

The Varanasi district court on Friday could not take up a case seeking that the key to the basement of the Gyanvapi mosque complex be handed over to the district magistrate due to mourning over the death of a lawyer and fixed December 11 to pronounce the order.

The court completed the hearing on the appeal of advocate Vijay Shankar Rastogi for becoming a party in the case on Monday and reserved the order for Friday. But the matter could not be taken up on Friday due to mourning over the death of a lawyer, the counsel for the Hindu side to the dispute, Madan Mohan Yadav, said.

The authorities had barricaded and locked the basement of the mosque complex in 1993.

Shailendra Kumar Pathak, the grandson of priest Sonmath Vyas, who used to perform puja in the basement before its closure in 1993, filed the petition in the court of civil judge Nitesh Kumar Sinha in September, expressing apprehensions about the Muslim side’s attempt to establish its influence over the courtyard and pleaded that the key be handed over to the DM.

## Ayodhya undergoing rejuvenation process ahead of consecration

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In preparation for the upcoming grand consecration programme of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple scheduled for January 22 in Ayodhya, the entire city is undergoing a rejuvenation process as the key routes leading to the temple will be adorned with captivating depictions of significant episodes from the Ramayana period.

In line with CM Yogi’s vision, the Ayodhya Development Authority has initiated the adornment of walls along the major roads leading to Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple with terracotta fine clay

mural artifacts. As part of this endeavour, the authority is inviting applications to engage potential agencies through a Request for Proposal.

ADA is actively committed to advancing tourism in Ayodhya through a public-private partnership. Significant endeavours are underway to develop state-of-the-art infrastructure in Ayodhya, fostering a dynamic blend of antiquity and modernity within the city.

According to ADA, the upcoming design, construction, and installation of terracotta artworks and murals along the iconic Dharma Path Road demon-

strates Ayodhya’s commitment to preserving its heritage while enhancing its contemporary vibrancy.

This endeavour goes beyond mere decoration; it represents a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, inviting pilgrims and visitors to immerse themselves in the timeless charm of Ayodhya.

The creation of terracotta murals along the Dharma Path Road is expected to draw a substantial number of pilgrims and travellers seeking spiritual peace. Serving as cultural guides, these frescoes will play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the

sacred past and the complex present. Beyond their role as artistic expressions, the murals are envisioned to be conduits for knowledge, fostering understanding and unity among those who encounter them. In addition to contributing to the beautification of the city, they will transform Ayodhya into an open-air gallery.

The terracotta mural initiative is in line with the ADA’s strategy of historic city circuits and heritage walks. By merging art, heritage, and infrastructure, this initiative strategically aims to create spaces that evoke pride and a sense of belonging among both residents and pil-

grims. Beyond this, the project plays a pivotal role in advancing ADA’s mission to boost cultural tourism and position Ayodhya as a global destination.

As part of this initiative, over 50 mural sculptures and paintings will be crafted, each standing at an impressive nine feet in height and 20 feet in width. Themed around different episodes from the Ramayana, these artworks will utilise fine soil (only fine clay from the river bed).

The soil selected for making the artifacts will be free from urea and salt to avoid corrosion. At the same time, the baking (firing) of

the artifacts will be done at a temperature of 970–1050 °C.

Ahead of the scheduled consecration on January 22, work is going on at a fast pace on the completion of many projects in Ayodhya.

Notably, rapid progress is being made in the selection of a development agency for Residential Holistic Infrastructure Development in Vashishtha Kunj. Simultaneously, there is swift progress in the installation of multi-coloured outdoor neon lights, and efforts are on to finalise the agency responsible for installing the Ayodhya logo across the city.

## UP govt makes extensive preparations for Road Safety Fortnight

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government has made extensive preparations for the Road Safety Fortnight starting in Uttar Pradesh from December 15 to 31. The fortnight aims to prioritise road maintenance, with a specific emphasis on road engineering.

Notably, the government plans to replace conventional, jolting speed-breakers with more driver-friendly table-top speed-breakers along various routes. Additionally, there will be mandatory applications of thermoplastic paints and cat’s eye technology, among others, to enhance road safety.

Repairing damaged pavements and removing illegal cuts will also be expedited to keep the roads pothole-free. Additionally, throughout various cities and roads, as needed, CCTV cameras and ANPR cameras will be installed to enhance surveillance.

During the fortnight, the Yogi govern-

ment’s focus is not only on raising awareness about safety among the public but also on enforcing strict measures against those who repeatedly violate traffic rules.

According to the plan, directions have been given to upgrade the established medical aid posts at NHAI toll plazas. Under emergency care, Aapda Mitras of the Revenue department and petrol pump dhaba personnel, vehicle mechanics will be given first responder training by the Health department, while health cards will be compulsorily issued to commercial drivers. “Instructions have also been given not to renew driving licences without health check-ups,” an official said.

An action plan has been prepared for monitoring Road Safety Fortnight from the district administration level. Under this, for the implementation of Uttar Pradesh Road Accident Investigation Scheme-2023, action will be taken at the district administration level to constitute an Accident Investigation Committee and District Level Coordination Committee to

investigate accidents involving three or more road accidents and deaths in each district.

Road safety videos will be compulsorily shown at the beginning and interval of the movie in all the cinema halls and multiplexes of the state. Hoardings emphasising not driving while intoxicated will be mandatory at all liquor shops (thekas, model shops, bars).

Action will be taken to remove encroachments in cities and on important roads, and effective patrolling for fog-related effects will also be ensured.

The task of enforcement will be delegated to the police and Transport department, with a focus on rigorous action. Under this, effective enforcement action will be ensured in cases like red light jumping, overspeeding, use of mobile phone while driving, overloading, drunk driving, helmet/seatbelt, wrong side driving as directed by the Committee on Road Safety of the Supreme Court because of road safety.

## Duty of citizens to protect, preserve rivers: Minister

**Lucknow PNS):** Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh said it is the duty of each citizen of the country to protect and preserve the rivers as these are the lifeline of the human civilisation that nurtures the ecosystem.

“It is our collective responsibility to preserve and protect these vital natural resources. We should acknowledge the contributions of women involved in Ganga cleanliness as they have played a pivotal role in bringing about positive transformations,” he said while addressing people during a felicitation programme here on Friday. Women working in voluntary organisations for Ganga cleanliness in various districts of the state were honoured during the programme. Addressing the gathering, the minister highlighted the significant improvement in the condition of all rivers in the country over the past 10 years, particularly under Prime Minister Modi’s leadership. Singh commended the progress in urban sewage and solid waste management in Uttar Pradesh, saying that small rivers are undergoing revitalisation, thanks to public awareness efforts. Furthermore, the minister directed officials to set up water chaupals at pump houses in every village, fostering continuous monitoring of the drinking water supply. He commended the officials for their active involvement in the Ganga cleanliness campaign. He urged officials to engage with rural communities through water chaupals, ensuring constant vigilance over water supply. In the same programme, officials from various districts of Uttar Pradesh, demonstrating outstanding performance in the National Survey of the Jal Jeevan Mission, were honoured by the minister.



## MK Singh appointed BIDA Chairman

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Industrial Development Commissioner Manoj Kumar Singh has been appointed as the Chairman of Bundelkhand Industrial Development Authority (BIDA). The Uttar Pradesh government had in September announced to set up BIDA. The Bundelkhand Industrial Development Authority will be on the lines of Noida, formed in 1976 for developing townships. The aim is to speed up industrialisation in the backward

Bundelkhand region.

BIDA will be set up under the Bundelkhand Chief Minister Industrial Area Expansion and New Industrial Area Promotion Scheme.

This is the first time after nearly 50 years that such an industrial development authority is being set up in the state. In the first phase of the project, an industrial city will be established by acquiring 35,000 acres of land from 33 revenue villages in Jhansi. The cost of the land is estimated to be Rs 6,312 crore.

## Man killed for spitting outside neighbour’s house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking case, a man was killed allegedly by his neighbour just for spitting pan masala outside his house. The incident took place in the Kotwali Nagar area of Sitapur district.

The victim, identified as Anurag (28), reached his house in Ambedkar Nagar Colony late on Wednesday night. He spat outside the house of his neighbour, Narendra Mohan alias Lucky. It resulted in a dispute between Anurag and Nardandra.

As the dispute escalated, Anurag’s neighbour brought a sharp-object and attacked him. He then fled the scene, leaving Anurag bleeding.

Anurag’s family members rushed him to the district hospital, where he was admitted to the emergency ward. However, his condition did not improve and the doctors at the hospital referred him to KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow where he succumbed. The bereaved family members created a ruckus. In the meantime, police reached the spot on being informed and

tried to reason with the protesting family members. They assured them proper action and also passed on the message to their counterparts in Sitapur. CO, City, Sushil Kumar Singh said that the dispute started after Anurag spat pan masala outside his neighbour’s house.

The police had initially registered a case under Section 307 (attempt to murder) but after the victim died, the case was filed under Section 302 (murder). The police said they were now trying to arrest the accused, Narendra, who is absconding.

## UPCC to invite Rahul, Priyanka, Kharge for Parivartan Yatra

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) plans to invite Rahul Gandhi, All-India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary (Uttar Pradesh in-charge) Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge to lead the Parivartan Yatra to be taken out from Shakumbhari Devi, Saharanpur to Naimisharanya, Sitapur.

The Parivartan Yatra, expected to be launched later this month, is likely to extend for nearly 25 days to connect with the people. With a ‘Soft Hindutva’ agenda in mind, the Yatra is planned to commence and conclude at prominent Hindu religious places.

“We want Rahul Gandhi and

Priyanka Gandhi to visit Saharanpur for the launch of the Parivartan Yatra later this month,” said Imran Masood, a former MLA who joined the Samajwadi Party before the 2022 Assembly elections. He switched to the Bahujan Samaj Party after elections, and returned to the Congress fold following his expulsion from the BSP. Though senior leaders assert that the yatra will connect with the people of all classes and communities, the origin and culmination points suggest the route has been worked out to give a ‘Hindutva’ push to the event. After Saharanpur, the Parivartan Yatra will cover Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Amroha, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur and Kheri before reaching Sitapur.

“We propose to connect with the people of all castes and communities. We will visit all the religious places on the way that may include the ‘dargah’ in Saharanpur, Bareilly and other places,” said UPCC general secretary Anil Yadav.

“We will invite all the senior leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge. We are giving final touches to the route of the yatra and names of leaders who may attend it,” Yadav said.

The Congress has been out of power in the state since 1989. Over the years, it has been making efforts to connect with different sections of society to win back its lost support base. It recently launched Dalit Gaurav Samvad to woo the Dalits on the death anniversary of Bahujan

Samaj Party founder Kanshi Ram on October 9. It has also undertaken programmes to woo the backward classes and the Muslims in recent months. The party is a part of INDIA, a bloc of major opposition parties formed ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress entered into electoral alliances with the BSP and the Samajwadi Party in the 1996 and 2017 UP Assembly elections, respectively, but these alliances did not benefit the Congress.

In the 2017 Assembly elections, the party contested 114 seats in alliance with the Samajwadi Party, but it only won seven seats. It secured 6.25 In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, it received 6.36 per cent of the votes.

बैंक ऑफ़ इंडिया

Bank of India

BOI



Zonal Office: "Star House"

Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010,

Ph.: 0522-2721512

POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security interest, Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (12) read the Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, had issued a Demand Notice due to non receipt was published in 2 newspapers (The Pioneer - Hindi & English) on 30.08.2023 calling borrower to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of same. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property/ies described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the dates mentioned hereunder. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property/ies and any dealings with the property/ies will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India for mentioned amount 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.**

S. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower & Guarantor	Description of Immovable property mortgaged / Owner of the property	Amount o/s as mentioned in the Notice u/s 13(2) Date of Demand & Possession Notice
Branch: Terhi Pulia			
1	<b>Borrower : Mr. Ravi Singh, S/o Mr. Arun Kumar Singh, House No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow</b> <b>Guarantor : (1) Mr. Arun Kumar Singh, S/o Mr. Bachan Singh House No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow,(1) Mrs. Madhuri Singh, W/o Mr. Arun Kumar Singh House No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow. (2) Mr. Rohit Singh, S/o Mr. Arun Kumar Singh House No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow (3) Mr. Rahul Singh, S/o Mr. Arun Kumar Singh House No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow</b>	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of EWS H. No. 7/319, Sector-7, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow. <b>Area: 43.28 sq mtr, Mortgagor by : Mr Arun Kumar Singh.</b> <b>Boundaries : East : 6 mt wide road, West : H. No. 7/297, North : 6 mt wide road, South: H. No. 7/297/16,</b>	<b>₹ 11,54,293.36</b> + interest & other charges  <b>Demand Notice dt. 07.08.2023</b>  <b>Possession Notice dt. 05.12.2023</b>
Date : 09.12.2023, Place : Lucknow			Authorised Officer, Bank of India



# Preparations in full swing for PM's Varanasi visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Preparations are going on in full swing by both the district administration and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the two-day visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to his parliamentary constituency on December 17. Giving this information, regional BJP president (Kashi region) Dilip Patel said after the party's historic victory in three states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, there is great enthusiasm among party workers as it will be the first visit of the PM in which he will participate in various programmes. "The people of Kashi and workers will give a historic welcome to the PM as a gift of victory," Patel said, adding that on the first day the PM will visit the exhibition based on Vikas Bharat

Sankalp Yatra organised in the Chhota Cutting Memorial School grounds located in the Cantonment area and then the PM will reach Namohat to pay obeisance to Maa Ganga and participate in a Tamil Sangamam event there. It is expected that the event will be attended by a good number of intellectuals from the South Indian states. According to Patel, after night rest the next day morning the PM will go to Swarved temple in Umrahon Varanasi-Ghaziabad highway and then the PM will address the proposed public meeting in Sewapuri assembly constituency area. The venue has yet not been finalised though it could be either in Bhorkala or Shahanshahpur. The PM is proposed to take night stay at the Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) Guest House. Modi will

also visit the exhibition based on Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra in rural areas and will interact with some prominent people and discuss the strategy for 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Meanwhile, according to sources, during his stay in Kashi, Modi will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate projects completed at a cost of more than ₹1,000 crore including Namohat (Phase-2), Phulwaria Four Lane, two railway over bridges (ROBs), rifle shooting range, 50 bed residential building in Pt Deendayal Upadhyay Hospital, drug warehouse in Shivpur, training centre of DIET, teaching room lab in BLW, five major and 15 minor roads. Preparations are going on to build helipads in Swarved temple premises and public meeting site. Modi also visited Swarved temple in 2021

and addressed gathering of thousands of followers on the occasion of 98th anniversary celebration of Vihangam Yoga of Swarved Mahamandir. On December 18 Modi will inaugurate the world's largest meditation centre and probably a rare temple where no gods are worshipped. Named after Swarved by Vihangam Yoga Sansthan, the seven-storey Mahamandir is spread over 68,000 square feet and it is a symbol of wonderful harmony of craft and cutting-edge technology. It is a spiritual temple dedicated to Swarved, a spiritual text with seven floors originally dedicated to the seven chakras. A 100-feet high sand stone statue of Sadgurudev has also been installed in the Mahamandir complex. The carving done on pink stones in three lakh square feet is special.

# KDA extends date of e-auction of plots to December 16

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In a bid to facilitate people, the Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) has extended the date of e-auction of 608 vacant residential/commercial plots to December 16. The KDA had earlier published advertisements inviting online applications for sale of these plots from November 10 and fixing the date of e-auction on December 10 till 5 pm. As December 9 and 10 fall on the second Saturday and Sunday, all banks will remain closed which may pose problem to applicants in depositing registration fee. Hence, the date of accepting registration fee and the e-auction had been extended to December 15 and December 16 respectively. PRO SB Rai said plot Nos B-14, 15, 26, 27, 48, 53 and 60 were

already allotted and excluded from the e-auction. **L I F E T I M E ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:** Noted chest physician of the city Dr SK Katiyar has been conferred the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award by the Indian Chest Society during the inaugural ceremony of 25th Joint National Conference on Pulmonary Diseases 'NAPCON 2023' held in Hyderabad for his astounding contribution in the field. Dr Katiyar had been the principal and dean, professor and HoD of the TB and Chest Diseases Department, GSVM Medical College, Kanpur. Besides, he had been the president of National College of Chest Physician (India), Tuberculosis Association of India and Indian Chest Society. Earlier, he had been the president of IMA's

Kanpur branch and UPTB Association. Dr Katiyar had been felicitated with many other prestigious awards, including the Life Time Achievement Award of National College of Chest Physician (India); gold medal from Tuberculosis Association of India and UPTB Association. He had also been honoured with the several prestigious Oration Awards and felicitated by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry for his laudable contribution in the successful conduct of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme for the year 2021. Presently, he is the chairman of National College of Chest Physician (India) and its Scientific Committee and Academic Forum. He had been nominated the chairman of ensuing NAPCON 2024's

Scientific Committee to be held in Coimbatore. He had been the chairman/member of this committee consecutively for the past 10 years. Over 120 research papers had been published in national and international journals and some of his research work had been enforced at international level for the treatment of tuberculosis. The NAPCON 2000 organised by him in Kanpur also proved to be a milestone in the field. Other dignitaries present at the event included Padma Bhushan Dr Krishna Elle, the founder and chairman of Bharat Biotech, renowned for developing Covaxin, Padma Bhushan Prof Emeritus, Dr Farokh E Udhwadia, Padma Shree Dr Randeep Guleria, former Director, AIIMS New Delhi and Dr Prof SN Gaur, Secretary of the National College of Chest Physicians (India).

# Fire in electronic goods shop

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An electronic goods shop caught fire due to short circuit outside the Vankhandeshwar temple under the Bilhaur police area on Friday morning. All the goods were gutted in the fire. The residents controlled the fire by pouring water. Girja Shanker Mishra of Bhagat Singh Nagar runs his TV, radio and other electronic goods shop near Kakwan Road Chauraha outside the Vankhandeshwar temple. On Friday morning the residents saw smoke coming out of the shop and informed its owner. On opening the shutter, the entire shop was found surrounded by flame. With the help of submersible pump, people poured water and controlled the fire but by then the entire goods had been gutted.

The victim estimated a loss of about ₹2 lakh in the incident. **YOUTH KILLED:** A youth was killed when an uncontrolled private ambulance rammed into a vehicle ahead of it near Bakothi village on the Aligarh-Kanpur highway under Bilhaur police station area on Friday morning. After the incident, ambulance driver escaped from the spot. The police took the injured youth to the CHC where doctors declared him dead. Kuldeep Gupta (40) of Jamidaran, Fatehganj Eastern Area, Bareilly, was employed in a shop by living in Maswanpur, Kalyanpur (Kanpur) with wife Manisha and son Abhishek. According to Manisha, Kuldeep had left for Bareilly on a private ambulance on Friday morning. On the highway near Bakothi village the uncon-

trolled ambulance collided with a vehicle ahead of it and got badly damaged. As a result Kuldeep sitting on the front seat sustained serious injury. Ambulance driver and the vehicle running ahead of it escaped from there. Police rescued Kuldeep and sent him to the CHC where he was declared dead by the doctors. Inspector Akhilesh Kumar Pal said after impounding the damaged ambulance raids are on to nail the absconding driver. The kin of the deceased had been informed and further action will be initiated in the matter on their arrival, he said. **COMPETITION:** The Smt Usha Chandra Memorial 'Naad Brahmah' Inter School Dance and Singing Competition was organised at the Jai Narayan Vidhya Mandir Inter College here on Friday.

The chief guest was Dr Anurag Mehrotra, Vice-President, IMA Kanpur. Raunak Bhatia, Prem Babu Gupta, Dr Santram Dwivedi (principal), Anil Kumar Tripathi (vice-principal), Dr Sunil Mishra (manager), Dr Adarsh Tripathi (retired music teacher, Guru Nanak Girls PG College Kanpur), Manjari Agarwal (Bharat Natyam dancer, Kanpur), Abhishek Tripathi and others were present. The programme began with lighting the lamp and offering of flowers to the deities. The guests were introduced by principal Dr Sant Ram Dwivedi. The students of Jai Narayan Vidya Mandir, Delhi Public School, SGM International, Kailash Saraswati Vidya Mandir, Durgawati Durgaprasad, Onkareshwar Saraswati school participated in it.

# Tree plantation drive organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A tree plantation drive was organised under the aegis of HQ Purva UP & MP Sub Area by 111 Infantry Battalion (Territorial Army) Kumaon at New Cantt here on Friday to address environmental challenges, promoting biodiversity, enhancing community welfare and fostering sustainable economic development. This drive offers a myriad of environmental, social and economic benefits with an aim to emphasise that if we save nature then the nature will save us. This drive promoted a sense that if every person fulfil their responsibility towards nature we will be able to give a healthier and sustainable environment to the upcoming generation.

# Rare operation conducted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Minimally invasive heart valve transplant cardiac surgery (MICS) has started in the CTVS department of Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) of BHU. In common parlance it is also called keyhole cardiac surgery. This surgery has been done for the first time in Purvanchal (eastern UP) using this method, claimed Dr Arvind Pandey under whose leadership this rare operation was conducted. Dr Pandey said a 35-year-old patient from Bihar was suffering from a serious problem of narrowing of the mitral valve of the heart for years, due to which the size of the patient's heart had increased significantly. Due to the increased size of the heart, there is a risk to the patient in undergoing the operation through normal open heart

surgery by cutting the chest from the front. "The patient was admitted to the hospital in a very serious condition whose surgery was done using this method. With this procedure, surgery was done for the first time in BHU in Purvanchal," he said. He said in this procedure valve implantation was done through a small incision between the ribs. The patient is currently recovering in CTVS ICU. According to Dr Pandey, in BHU, surgery for congenital heart hole is being done regularly using MICS method. "It is well known that open heart surgery (bypass surgery, valve transplantation, congenital heart diseases ASD, VSD, TOF, redo open heart surgery, blood vessels surgery, aortic surgery) is done regularly in SSH in BHU," he said. Dr Pandey said generally, open heart surgery is

done when the chest has to be cut, but not in MICS, due to which the patient gets quick recovery and the scar is also very small. "There is less pain in this surgery and the patient can resume his normal lifestyle within 7-10 days. Earlier this facility was available only in big metros. Now this facility is also available in BHU," he said, adding that soon coronary artery-bypass surgery (CABG) will also be started regularly with this method. In this operation the team of CTVS surgeons included Dr Narendra Nath Das, Dr Ratnesh, head of the Department of Anesthesiology Prof RB Singh, Dr Arvind Bhalekar, Dr Sonu, Dr Vivek, Dr Sonal, Perfusionist Dinesh Maiti, Soumyajeet, Akhlesh, Attendant Trivendra Tyagi, Anand Kumar, Vikas, Sutapa, Satyendra and Pooja.

# Max temp drops by 6 degrees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Westerly winds and cyclone have increased the cold here too. Due to cold winds blowing since Wednesday night, the maximum temperature dropped by six degrees. However, the temperature remained around 18 degrees at night. Similar weather is expected for the next two days. After this one will have to be prepared for dense fog. Westerly winds have started making their effect. In such a situation, the cyclone changed the entire weather. Strong winds started blowing from Wednesday night itself which continued on Friday also. There was also coolness in the air. As a result, the maximum tem-

perature was recorded at 22 degrees which is four degrees below normal. The maximum temperature on Thursday was 26 degrees. The minimum temperature was recorded at 17.6 degrees which was almost the same as on Thursday. Allahabad University meteorologist Dr Shailendra said cyclone was very strong and covered a large area. Therefore its impact was seen quickly and relatively more here. He said now the cyclone has reached land and its intensity will be less. Therefore its effect will also start reducing. Dr Shailendra said some effect will be visible for a day or two. However, he said due to westerly winds the temperature will continue to drop. According to the

Meteorological department, there are chances of cloudy sky and light rain for the next two days and dense fog is expected from Sunday onwards. **BODY FOUND:** The body of a woman was found hanging from a noose in Songada in Koraon police station area on Friday. On receipt of information, the police reached the spot, took the body into possession, sent it for the post-mortem examination and are investigating the case. Her parents accused her in-laws of dowry death. Dharmaraj of Belhat, married his daughter Anita Devi to Girja Shankar of Songada village, on May 9 this year. Her parents were informed that Anita had died in her in-laws' house.

# Medical student hurt in crossfire

PTI ■ ALIGARH

A medical student was allegedly injured after she was caught in a crossfire by two rival groups at the Aligarh Muslim University here, prompting authorities to crack down on "illegal occupants" in its hostels, police said. The incident took place when the two groups allegedly opened fire at each other near the Maulana Azad Library on the campus premises. Aneeqa Roshan Khayal who allegedly got injured in the crossfire was rushed to the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College hospital where doctors described her condition as "out of danger", the police said. AMU Proctor Prof Mohd Waseem said three persons were involved in the shooting incident and all of them were "outsiders". Following the incident, the police and the proctorial team, working on a tip-off, raided a university hostel on Wednesday night and nabbed one of the accused, identified as Mehtab, the officials said. A case has been lodged against Mehtab and two other unidentified persons who are also believed to be outsiders, they added. The firing incident has prompted AMU authorities to launch a crackdown in its different hostels against "illegal occupants" who have been reportedly taking shelter there in recent months. "AMU authorities launched the crackdown on Thursday evening and about half a dozen odd illegal occupants have already been evacuated from some hostels," AMU spokesperson Omar Peerzada told PTI. Peerzada added that "members of the proctorial team also carried out intensive checking of vehicles parked inside various hostels" in an attempt to get hold of vehicle owners whose "records are incomplete". On Thursday afternoon, a high-level meeting was held by the AMU vice-chancellor with all senior officials to take stock of the law and order situation in the campus, the varsity's officials said. The AMU authorities have also urged all bonafide students to immediately report if any unauthorised person is found staying in any hostel room, they added. Meanwhile, a senior university official told PTI, "A number of violent incidents including shootouts have been reported on the campus during the recent months and the latest crackdown, though belated, is certainly welcome."

# 'Increase in global ranking of LIC'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

LIC Chairman Siddhartha Mohanty inaugurated the modernised North Central Zone (NCZ) office and divisional office in Civil Lines, Mall Road, here on Friday. Executive Director (Engineering) Arup Kundu, zonal manager (incharge) North Central Zone RP Gupta, chief engineer Rajiv Kumar Sharma, P Vijaylaxmi, Senior Divisional Manager (SDM), Kanpur division, Rajneesh Khanna and Regional Manager were also present. The chairman also addressed the review meeting of SDMs. In his address, he said according to survey carried out by the S&P Global Market Intelligence there was increase in the global ranking of LIC. For its excel-



LIC Chairman Siddhartha Mohanty inaugurating the modernised office of North-Central Zone and Division Office here on Friday.

lent customer service and their unceasing faith, the LIC had become the fourth biggest life insurance company of the world. This had not only boosted our morale but increased commitment and responsibility

towards customer service. He threw light on salient features of LIC's new scheme 'Jeevan Utsav' which carries regular income benefit of 10 per cent of its insured amount with lifelong guarantee. The scheme was

available for people aged from 90 days to 65 years, he informed. **CONCLUDES:** In the two-day event of 'Shoetech Kanpur 2023' organised by IFCOMA concluded here on Thursday, Rymbal – a leading manufacturer of Polyurethane to the footwear industry unveiled its latest innovations. The organisation focussed its development initiatives under the theme of 'Make in India' for India. The first technology is aimed to make the safety shoe lightweight and enhance its comfort thereby reducing fatigue when worn for long working hours. In safety shoe if the midsole can be designed with these features of light weight and comfort it can immensely benefit both industrial and defence personnel.

# Emphasis on use of Hindi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A grand event of official language award distribution ceremony and poetic symposium was organised at the Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE) here on Friday. The function was presided over by its General Manager Pramod Kumar. Chief Official Language Officer Sanjay Singh Negi while welcoming the officers and employees said that today the officers and employees who make commendable use of Hindi are being rewarded under various incentive schemes. We will also enjoy the works of learned poets of different genres and this will infuse positive energy towards the use and spread of Hindi in the CORE and we all will be determined to use Hindi more and more in our government work, he said. In his presidential address, the GM congratulated the officers and employees of the Official Language department for distribution of awards and the organisation of poetic symposium and successful publication of the official language Sangam magazine. He expressed the hope that this will increase the promotion of Hindi in the organisation. He congratulated the award winners. The GM urged the officers and employees to use Hindi as much as possible in their work and take advantage of various award schemes. On the occasion, a grand poetic symposium was also organised in which Amit Shukla, Satvik Neeldeep, Shiv Kishore Tiwari 'Khanjan', Chetan Nitin Khare and Hema Pandey recit-



ed poetry. The poetic symposium was conducted by Chetan Nitin Khare. The GM gave awards to the officers and employees under various incentive schemes. Chief Administrative Officer of the CORE, Anupam Singhal, Principal Chief Engineer, AK Singh Shaival, Principal Chief Material Manager, Vinay N Ambade, Principal Chief Signal and Telecommunication Engineer, RN Singh, Senior Deputy General Manager, VK Garg, Principal Chief Personnel Officer, KK Singh and president of REWO, Poonam Kumar, including its others office-bearers were present. **FOOD PLAZA:** The world's largest gathering Mahakumbh is going to be organised here in 2025 in which devotees not only from the country but from all over the world will come. This is the reason why the government is making various arrangements keeping in mind the convenience of the devotees. In the same sequence, a food plaza is also being built at the Prayagraj Sangam railway station which will be operated by the IRCTC. Along with local food, various dishes of South India, North India and other states will be served. This railway station is

close to Sangam and Mela area. That's why it is being equipped with better facilities. ADRM Sunil Shukla said the process of tender etc. for the food plaza has been completed. It is expected that it will be inaugurated in this current financial year. **EXTORTION GANG:** The trio i.e. Ashraf, his wife Zainab and brother-in-law Saddam had also formed a separate extortion gang. Due to extortion money from Ashraf's in-laws, there had been many quarrels in the Atiq gang but Atiq pacified his own henchmen. This game of extortion continued till the murder of Atiq and Ashraf. Now the police are investigating how much property Zainab and her maternal relatives acquired in whose name. Ashraf and his wife Zainab had moved out of Atiq's house in Chakia a few months after their marriage. Zainab had gone to her maternal home in Sallahpur of Puramufi. Ashraf also stayed there most of the time. Although Ashraf had not separated from his brother Atiq, he had started his recovery away from the gang. He had built his luxurious house in Sallahpur. Saddam used to collect money from many builders, industrialists and big shopkeepers of the state. Ashraf used to take huge money for vacating disputed lands across the state. Many times there was a dispute between Atiq's henchmen and Saddam regarding recovery. After Ashraf was caught, Zainab took command of the gang. According to police sources, the trio i.e. Ashraf, Zainab and Saddam recovered crores of rupees in a few years.

# Globalisation & rise of new economic powers discussed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Department of Economic Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) hosted Arthashashtra-2023, its annual conference on economics, business, and finance. The event brought together eminent speakers from the industry to discuss a range of pressing topics, including globalisation, technological innovation, the future of work, financial volatility, leadership, banking stability and India's economic resilience amid global uncertainty. The conference commenced with a keynote address by Dr Ajay Kumar, former Defence Secretary, Government of India, Professor Sanjay Singh (IIM Lucknow), Professor Shalabh, Dean of Academic Affairs, IIT Kanpur, and Dhiraj Reli (CEO, HDFC Securities). The speakers highlighted transformative impact of globalisation on global economy, India's economic resilience and the emergence of new economic powers. They emphasised the need for India to adapt to these changes and seize the opportunities that globalisation presents. Speaking about the conference, Prof S Ganesh, Director IIT Kanpur said, "IIT Kanpur has always emphasised fostering meaningful interactions between academia and industry, facilitating collaborative initiatives, research partnerships and knowledge

exchange to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications. Arthashashtra-2023 has proved to be a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and discussion on critical economic, business and financial issues. The insights shared by industry experts will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of these complex topics." Rajan Sethuraman, CEO, Letentview Analytics spoke about AI and tech-innovation-driven economy in a session facilitated by Brahma Konda Reddy from the eMasters programme, IIT-K. Nilesh Shah, Managing Director, Kotak Asset Management Co Ltd, spoke on challenges of deglobalization and the opportunities for Indian markets. Prof Amitabha Bandyopadhyay, KENT chair for entrepreneurship and innovation IIT-K and Vikas Manwatkar, Director, Global Sourcing Solutions, Cargill led a discussion on technological innovation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution where they spoke about the disruptive potential of emerging technologies and how they are shaping the future of work and industries. The discussion was facilitated by Saurabh Kumar of eMasters programme, IIT-K. Shobha Pandey, Senior GM, HR, John Deere, Dr Ananta Raghuvanshi, President, NAREDCO, Mahi, and Tushar Desai, Global Director, Human

Resource Services, FIS Global, explored challenges and opportunities arising from automation, AI and other technological advancements in the workplace in a panel discussion on the future of work and labour economics. The discussion was facilitated by Vaibhav Shivhare of eMasters programme IIT-K. Himanish Chaudhuri, Partner, Deloitte, Mudit Mehrotra, Director, Standard Chartered Bank, Professor Wasim Ahmad, Department of Economics, IIT-K analysed the current economic landscape, India's ability to withstand global economic shocks and discussed the potential for a global recession in a panel discussion on financial volatility and the risk of a global recession. The discussion was moderated by Md Baktiyar Rahman of eMasters programme at IIT-K. Kanishk, Director, Legal, India and South Asia, Uber, Pavit Singh Katoch from Inshorts; Swati Aggarwal from SAM discussed the possibilities of moving towards technology-enabled innovation through key policies and regulations during a session facilitated by Shashank Mishra of eMasters programme, IIT-K. Dhiraj Reli, CEO, HDFC Securities and Sombit Bhattacharya, Senior vice-president, Sud Life discussed "Globalisation and the rise of new economic powers" in a session facilitated by Saurabh Kumar of eMasters programme, IIT-K.

# Bid to resolve dispute costs man his life

PTI ■ BADAUN

A 65-year-old man died after while mediating in a dispute between two groups that arose out of a tiff between children in a village here, police said on Friday. Three persons alleged to have hit the man with lathis have been arrested, they said. According to police, following a dispute among some children in Asafpur village here on Thursday night, people from two groups came face to face and started attacking each other with lathis. Village elder Ramsharan came forward to resolve the dispute and was attacked by three people with sticks resulting in serious injuries, police said. With the help of the police, he was taken to the district hospital where he died on Friday morning. A case has been registered and three persons have been arrested, SP City Amit Kishore Vaigyanik said. **UNDERPASS:** The Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) has said it is working on a proposal to make an underpass at the Char Murli Chowk - the busiest crossroad - in Noida Extension in a bid to reduce traffic jams, a report from Noida said. The GNIDA has issued a tender for the construction of the underpass at this intersection to be built at a cost of about ₹78 crore, it said in a statement on Thursday.



# India looking to take giant leap in AI to empower citizens: Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said India is looking to take a giant leap in Artificial Intelligence (AI) to empower its citizens and asserted that it will not be an exaggeration to say the country achieved in a few years with technology what took others a generation.

In a LinkedIn post inviting people to the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit 2023, which he described as a fascinating programme celebrating strides in AI and innovation, the prime minister said India is poised to be an active contributor to the evolution of AI as the world leaps into a not-so-distant future. The Prime Minister will inaugurate the two-day summit here starting December 12.

India is one of the youngest nations with a vibrant start-up ecosystem and a talented workforce, he said, adding that it offers solutions that are scalable, secure, affordable, sustainable, and replicable on a global scale. India's Digital Public Infrastructure initiative is a prime example of such pioneering efforts, Modi said.



"In the last nine to 10 years, India and its citizens have leapfrogged with the help of technology. It won't be an exaggeration to say that India achieved, in a matter of few years, what took other countries a generation," he said.

This was possible through the fast-paced penetration of mobiles along with internet connectivity and scalable models for digital inclusion, Modi added. "Similarly, in the field of AI, India is looking to take a giant leap to empower its citizens. Be it serving citizens in their language or making education easier and personalised."

The prime minister spoke about the goals of making healthcare more accessible and making agriculture more informed and added that India is using AI for various productive purposes. The world today is witnessing that when India grows, it does so to ensure an equitable and inclusive model of growth, Modi said.

"When India innovates, it does so to ensure that no one is left behind. When India leads, it does so to ensure that it can take everyone along towards the goal of the greater good," he said.

With the same spirit in the realm of AI, India's approach has been to enable a universal understanding and a conducive environment, steering the use of AI towards the betterment of humanity, Modi added. Noting that the world is living in a very interesting time, Modi said decades of fast-paced innovation and the power of human endeavour have brought to life what was once considered to be only in the realm of imagination.

## Goyal, Vaishnav seek action against Rajya Sabha members making false charges in garb of questions

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Leader of House in the Rajya Sabha Piyush Goyal and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Friday demanded that Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar take action against members who make false allegations and sensationalise issues without basis in the garb of asking questions. Goyal termed it as "shoot and scoot".



The two ruling party members were reacting to what they called false allegations by opposition members Saket Gokhale (TMC) and John Brittas (CPM) on two different matters raised during the question hour. Gokhale had sought to know the reasons for many states rejecting dal (pulses) and other grains supplied under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).

Brittas said elderly passengers were facing difficulties due to the "discontinuation" of concessions for senior citizens by the railways. He also said "there is a premium tatkal which has been brought in to fleece the passengers" and that sleeper and general compartments have been replaced with AC coaches, and asked if the railway minister "will review his stand?". In response, Vaishnav said, "The honourable member could not ask a question. He has made some comments, which are very misleading comments and I fully, fully refute all the points that he has made."

The minister further said if Brittas had any specific matter related to the particular question being discussed, he was most welcome to come forward and discuss. Immediately, Goyal stood up and said, "This is the second instance in one day that a member shoots and scoots. First I had the case of dal and now we have the case (pointing to Vaishnav)...I want a ruling on what will happen to a member who makes false allegations or just sensationalises an issue to draw your attention to some thing which is not factual. If found so what action will be taken against such a member?"

## Golden future awaits Indian youths, says Shah



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said a golden future awaits the country's youths as corruption, nepotism and casteism have been replaced by growth and development in the last 10 years. Speaking at the inauguration of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad's (ABVP) national conference at Burari here, he said education is not just for shaping careers but also for nation building.

A golden future awaits the country's youths. In the last 10 years, great changes have taken place in the country with corruption, nepotism and casteism replaced by growth and development, Shah said. Youth power is the backbone of the country and drives its growth and development, he said.

## Time of post lunch session of Rajya Sabha changed

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said the time of the post-lunch session of the House has been changed to 2 pm from 2.30 pm on Fridays earlier in line with the Lok Sabha schedule. He made this assertion after T Siva (DMK) in the morning session of the house pointed out the change of time printed on the business schedule of the day and wanted to know the reason.



"The convention is that on Friday the afternoon session convenes at 2.30 pm. But today in the revised list of business, we have received it as 2 pm. When such a decision was arrived at, the members were not aware. We would like to know why there was such a change," Siva remarked. To this, the chairman said the time was changed by him during the last session itself as the afternoon session in the Lok Sabha starts at 2 pm. "This is not being done for today. This has already been done earlier by me. And the reason was given. Lok Sabha sits at 2 pm. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha being integral parts of Parliament need to adhere to the same time to the extent possible. Therefore it was 2 pm on earlier occasion as directed by me. So this is not a beginning today," Dhankhar said.

## 6 crore hospital admissions authorised under AB PM-JAY till November 30: Mandaviya

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Approximately six crore hospital admissions entailing an expenditure of Rs 77,298 crore have been authorised under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana till November 30, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya told Lok Sabha on Friday.

As of December 2, a total of 26,774 hospitals, including 11,733 private facilities, across the country have been empanelled to provide healthcare services to the scheme beneficiaries, he said, adding that 4.98 crore claims have been submitted between financial years 2020-21 and 2023-24 as of November 30. The AB PM-JAY is the largest publicly funded health assurance scheme in the world which aims to provide health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family yearly for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization to 12 crore families, the Union health minister said.

## Indian Navy facing shortage of 10,896 personnel: Defence Ministry



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy is facing a shortage of 10,896 personnel including 1,777 officers, according to details provided by the defence ministry in Parliament on Friday. Responding to a question in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt also said 9,119 posts of sailors are lying vacant in the Navy as on October 31. He said the shortage in the officer-rank is 1,777.

## MAHUA MOITRA EXPELLED FROM LOK SABHA, EXPOSED

Reacting sharply to her expulsion, Moitra equated the action with hanging by a "kangaroo court" and alleged a parliamentary panel was being weaponised by the Government to force the Opposition into submission. She told reporters outside Parliament that she has been found guilty of breaching a code of ethics that does not exist and that there was no evidence of cash or gift given to her. "We are ready for Mahabharat in Parliament," Moitra said in an obvious reference to the Draupadi episode in the epic.

As soon as the House met after adjournments again at 2 pm, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi moved a motion for discussion on the panel report. Speaker Om Birla said if some strict decisions have to be taken against any member, they have to be taken to uphold the dignity of the House.

He said it was painful that at times the House has to take up such matters. But, he said, it is because the dignity of the institution has to be maintained at any cost. Birla said it was the collective duty of the House to take steps to ensure the prestige of the institution remains unblemished.

## HERITAGE LEFT UNATTENDED, HISTORY THREATENED

The Committee also recommended that the local panchayats and police may be involved in safeguarding the monuments and if necessary, the AMASR Act may be amended in this regard. The Ministry in its reply told the panel about the pact inked between ASI and the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi on collaboration for providing expertise in the field of security and surveillance on monuments, sites, museums, and offices. The panel has also sought amendment in the AMASR Act ensuring provisions for fixing accountability of concerned Government officials to ensure that necessary steps are taken timely for tackling encroachment of Centrally Protected Monuments.

## MODI MAY LAUNCH MISSION 2024 FROM KASHI

On December 18, Modi will travel to Umarhar by helicopter from the BLW Guest House to attend the inauguration ceremony of Swarved Mahamandir. He is expected to engage with the public by inaugurating the event, which will include a 25000 Kundi Swarveda Gyan Mahayagya. The ceremony will witness the participation of three lakh devotees associated with the Vigyan Dev Maharaj Temple and attendees from various States and countries.

As part of his visit, Modi will present projects worth ₹1,000 crore to Kashi, encompassing initiatives such as Namo Ghat, Phulwaria Four Lane, two railway overbridges, a rifle shooting range, a 50-bed residential building in Pt Deendayal Upadhyay Hospital, a drug warehouse in Shivpur, a diet training center, a teaching room lab in BLW, and five major and 15 minor roads.

## FROM PAGE 1

INDIA Bloc leaders accused the BJP-led Government of doing "vendetta politics". Mamata Banerjee extended gratitude to the INDIA alliance leaders for supporting Moitra, stating, "I commend the INDIA alliance for standing united and resisting the BJP."

Janata Dal (United) MP Giridhari Yadav who is also member in the Ethics Committee took a jibe at the ruling dispensation and questioned why Nishikant was called for questioning while businessman Darshan Hiranandani was not. He reminded the House he does not upload questions on the Lok Sabha's website himself as he does not know how to operate a computer.

The search for a suitable location for the Prime Minister's public meeting in Bhorkala and Shahanshahpur is underway. BJP officials and district administration representatives have stated that the venue for the public meeting will be

## BJP SELECTS ITS OBSERVERS TO APPOINT CHIEF MINISTERS

The BJP is looking to hand over the reins to an OBC or tribal leader in Chhattisgarh to ST leaders like Lata Usendi, Gomati Sai and former Union Minister Renuka Singh as they are natural contenders for the top job besides State party president Arun Sao and bureaucrat-turned-politician O P Choudhary, both from backward castes.

The party will like to pick at least one woman Chief Minister at a time Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been highlighting women voters' support to the BJP and often speaking of the need for women-led development. Two of three observers for Chhattisgarh are from tribal communities while Gautam comes from the Scheduled Castes.



## Toying with lives

The authorities were not geared to deal with cyclone Michaung despite early warnings on path, intensity

The devastation caused in Chennai recently by Cyclone Michaung, despite early alerts and enough time to be safe and secure, is proof enough that the Tamil Nadu Government is a very slow learner, if not altogether dyslexic. Just eight years back, a similar situation was witnessed during the infamous Chennai floods but nothing to help address the residents' woes has been done since 2015. Despite early warnings predicting the cyclone's path and intensity, the State Government's lack of preparedness has resulted in widespread suffering for the coastal city. Meteorological agencies had been closely monitoring Cyclone Michaung for days, providing timely and accurate information but the Government failed to take proactive measures. All it did was to declare a public holiday in four districts when the cyclone hit the coast with unprecedented force, leaving behind a trail of destruction. One of the key areas where the Government exhibited lapses was in planning. Many vulnerable, low-lying areas were not evacuated in time; then the lack of coordination between authorities and residents led to chaotic evacuation efforts.



As the cyclone made landfall, it became evident that the relief measures and existing shelters were woefully inadequate; these were overcrowded, lacking basic amenities such as water and sanitation, besides medical aid. Power lines broke down, leading to widespread outages and disrupting communication. Roads were flooded, making it difficult for emergency services to reach the affected areas. The lack of investment in resilient infrastructure has

proved to be a significant shortcoming. A city's drainage, which is the most important aspect in such situations, is still a mess with clogged sewers and overflowing wastewater drains. Another critical aspect was the delayed response in initiating rescue operations even after the cyclone made landfall and there were clear indications of stress among the residents, which cost precious lives. The toll could have been much higher had there been no early warning: Now there are modern machines and technology to correctly predict such natural calamities, the authorities need to only show the will and determination, besides acting on the information in a timely manner. The cyclone, now weaker, has moved to Andhra, but leaves behind many questions. In the aftermath of the cyclone, there is a growing call for accountability and a thorough investigation into the lapses. It is imperative that lessons are learned from this apathetic attitude to ensure better preparedness for natural disasters. Moving forward, it is crucial for authorities to prioritise investment in infrastructure, improve coordination in evacuation and relief efforts and foster a culture of preparedness to protect communities from the increasingly unpredictable forces of nature.

### PICTALK



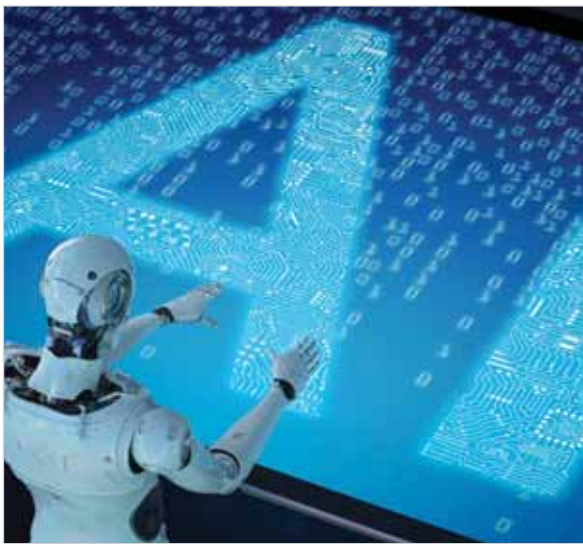
Artists perform during the inauguration of 'Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit 2023', in Dehradun

PTI

## Use AI tools with caution; it is a double edged sword

Nature of AI will be inherently changing the face of work and we have to understand the technology behind it and be careful in how we use it

Back in late 2022, few were surprised to learn that someone in Silicon Valley had finally managed to build a better chatbot. A chatbot that could actually raise the bar in terms of what consumers should expect? Many agreed that it was about time. What almost no one had prepared for, on the other hand, was a chatbot of the kind eventually unveiled. ChatGPT, it soon became clear, as hundreds of thousands of people gave the tool a try, was more than just the latest iteration of artificial intelligence (AI)-powered customer-assistance software. Many used the word "revolutionary" to describe what the system was capable of doing. Others said the technology seemed sentient like they were interacting with another human and not a machine. And now, attention is turning to the technology's next phase: the one where businesses put it to work. Across industries and at companies of all types and sizes, there are already countless examples of ChatGPT deploy-



ments in action. From 'wow' to 'wait and see'

In nearly every case, business leaders acknowledge that it's still early days for ChatGPT. They're trailing the technology, "playing with the tool," getting a feel for what it can and cannot do. According to the Dell Technologies 2023 Innovation Index report, 59% of Indian businesses are currently investing or exploring the feasibility of

investing in AI to advance innovation. Many say they've already seen enough to know that they could be onto something big. In a report on generative AI that McKinsey published soon after ChatGPT was made available to the public, they pointed out that the technology is one of several recently released platforms that make up the "latest class" of deep learning systems.

### Challenges and opportunities

Platforms like ChatGPT are trained on data from the internet, not on information held by individual businesses. This is getting underlined starkly with businesses not knowing how to fully extract value from data coming through AI channels employed across supply chains. The chatbots also come with their limitations. They will be vulnerable to inaccurate information and bias if the input is not tailored to these chatbots. The rampant use of ChatGPT might also open channels to security threats. ChatGPT is exciting for Indian businesses but it is changing every day. The nature of AI will be inherently changing the face of work. We have to understand the technology behind it and be careful in how we are using it. ChatGPT might be very smart but it is far from perfect.

(The writer is a lead solution architect, at Dell Technologies India, views expressed are personal)



SRINIVASCHARY T

## BJP juggernaut rolls in Hindi Heartland

The BJP fought the Assembly elections on Modi charisma and won but it may have to rework its strategy in the South for 2024



K S TOMAR

BJP will go into 2024 polls with more aggression, renewed strength and confidence which will be laced and embedded in Modi Magic and center's ten-year achievements but its southward journey has been stopped by Congress in Telangana though it has won 8 seats in the House 119. Earlier, BJP had to face defeat in Karnataka and the loss of its ally, AIADMK in Tamil Nadu had also put the saffron party in a dilemma. It was all the way Modi through collective leadership led by the PM did wonders for the BJP in these poll-bound states. A huge gamble and risk was taken by RSS and BJP's high command to make Modi as face of these assembly polls but it paid rich dividends.

It did help in generating the trust of voters who did not hesitate in reposing faith in his leadership though the situation would have been different had CM candidates been declared by BJP. Modi's outreach to tribals also created history as they shifted their loyalty from Congress and supported Modi who promised to look after their welfare in future.

The caste census narrative of Congress was neutralized by PM who stressed the need to have faith in four castes viz. women, youth, farmers and the poor, such connotation worked to the hilt. PM's focus on the Congress party's image of corruption also neutralized the anti-incumbency factor in MP besides women voters' overwhelming support of welfare schemes of the Shiv Raj Singh government.

Contrary to it, Hindutva's dose in Rajasthan bore the fruit which was compounded by the fielding of ministers and MPs who influenced surrounding assembly segments. It was true in MP also which is considered the factory of experimentation of Hindutva politics. The well-oiled machinery of RSS strengthened the killing spirit of BJP cadres in these poll states besides vast resources at BJP's command.

Last but not least, the poll management and strategy of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and party president, J.P. Nadda was successful in putting the rivals on the mat which matters a lot in



winning the elections. Bjp May Re-Work Its Strategy For South. While riding high on the extreme popularity of Modi coupled with the Ram Temple-led Hindutva campaign, the BJP may rework its poll game plan for the south to improve its performance in 2024.

According to national president, J.P. Nadda, BJP will focus on the new game plan to have allies in the south and people will vote for PM Modi owing to their faith in his guarantee to fulfil poll promises, unlike the opposition which believes in misleading the voters to win elections. Nadda is confident about victory in 2024 as cracks have appeared in INDIA which happens to be the group of contradictions and satraps of inflated egos. Congress' defeat may be a good omen for INDIA. The experts feel that Congress party's defeat in Madhya Pradesh and its failure to retain Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh may act as a blessing in disguise for the future of INDIA. First, Congress's victory could have enhanced its bargaining power but defeat has snatched it from the grand old party. Second, it will bring Congress to at equal playing level with other constituents of INDIA



BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER, NITISH KUMAR WAS FEELING ALIENATED DUE TO POLITICAL MANEUVERING BY CONGRESS WHICH WAS AIMING FOR A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE INDIA BLOC

thereby neutralising any iota of arrogance and inflexibility. Third, the jolt to Congress will act as an eye-opener to leaders like Kejriwal, Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav etc. who may be forced to shed anti-Congress rhetoric and see reasoning in 2024 polls while agreeing to the seat-sharing formula in states like Delhi and Punjab (AAP) and West Bengal (TMC) and Samajwadi Party (UP) respectively. Fourth, the critics of Kejriwal and Mamata argue that both leaders may face corrupt cases and land in jail if Modi returns to power for the third time which may be the predominant reason for their desire to be part of the INDIA alliance.

Fifth, Bihar chief minister, Nitish Kumar was feeling alienated due to political maneuvering by Congress which was aiming at a pivotal role in the new INDIA Bloc. One cannot deny the fact that it was Nitish Kumar who had been responsible for bringing warring regional straps to one platform but hurdles were created in assigning him the important position of convenor of INDIA. Now Congress president, Mallikarjun Kharge has convened the meeting of INDIA to iron out differences and move forward with an eye

on 2024. The biggest challenge INDIA faces relates to seat sharing and the finalisation of the common minimum programme. The glitches are huge and may require flexibility and a broad-minded spirit of 'Give and Take' to make the INDIA alliance a reality because it is still confined to paper only.

Congress was optimistic about metamorphosis in its fortune as it expected to retain Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and snatch power from the saffron party in Madhya Pradesh. Modi factor has dashed their hopes to the ground as BJP has performed exceedingly well in three states. But BJP proved an outside ring player in Telangana and it will have to console with an increase of its one-seat tally to 8.

The BJP and RSS will bank on the Modi factor and the centre's ten-year performance to win in 2024 but there will be a dire need to formulate a new poll strategy for the South as dominance in Hindi states may not be sufficient. The scare of Modi's return to power for 3rd successive time may contribute to this phenomenon.

(The writer is political analyst and senior journalist, views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### STAY ALERT IN WINTER

Sir — Even as temperatures have started to dip, cardiologists have called on people, especially those with pre-existing heart conditions, to be mindful of the winter season, which is known to increase the risk of heart attacks. Cold weather can exacerbate cardiovascular conditions, posing significant risks, particularly for individuals with pre-existing heart issues. The drop in temperature prompts physiological changes, leading to increased blood pressure and heart rate. It is imperative that everyone, especially those with known heart conditions, take proactive measures during the winter months. It is crucial to adhere to prescribed medications, maintain regular follow-ups with your healthcare provider, and adopt lifestyle adjustments such as staying physically active, managing stress, and adhering to a heart-healthy diet. The disruption to the sleep cycle and hormonal balance impacts cardiovascular health, and shovelling snow, engaging in winter sports, and other activities common in cold weather can further stress the heart. The role of 'traditional food habits with a higher intake of salt and lipids of animal origin. It is also possible that the influence of day duration and lack of sunlight or UV light in this season stimulates the synthesis of vitamin D3 in the skin and liposoluble cholesterol sulphate, whose deficiency can favour atherosclerosis and inflammation, and be the cause of higher incidence and increased mortality during winter.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### KASHMIR: NEHRU'S BLUNDER?

Sir — Under the present dispensation, the more you imprecate Nehru, the more nationalist and patriotic you are. True to form, Amit Shah has blamed Nehru for his blunders over the Kashmir issue. To be fair to Nehru, he was the PM of India at a time when the PM's job was an unenviable one, what with the horrors of partition and abject poverty casting an ominous dark shadow.

### Textile industry suffers loses



The onslaught of the coronavirus has had a drastic impact on the global textile industry as well as the Indian textile industry. Even though several sectors like industrial, medical, education, etc. were subjected to a major setback during the pandemic, the textile industry in India was massively affected in terms of productivity, functioning, and employee relations since the entire workforce involved the supply chain. In the last few years, the Indian textile industry has wit-

nessed a huge downfall, particularly in the domestic garment market, with plenty of cancellations in orders and no fresh orders coming through either.

This has resulted in the workforce getting hugely affected, leaving millions of skilled and unskilled labourers with no option but to migrate to their native countries. The Union government should consider the industry's demands and take steps to support them. This should include temporary relief from the import duty on cotton, especially during the off-season. The government should also invest in research and development to help the industry produce cotton more efficiently and sustainably, which will enable it to create more job opportunities, boost exports, and grow the economy. One hopes that the Union government will support this industry to the maximum and revive it soon to get back to its halcyon days. After all, 'cloth' is one of the three immediate and fundamental needs for human life.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

This was the age of a trillion problems and not about making India a \$5 trillion economy. So why does the BJP always behave like an eczema patient who loves to scratch old wounds? "Never be a prisoner of your past. It was just a lesson, not a life sentence." The BJP would do well to read this quote, abide by it, and will continue this.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

### WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE IN MARRIAGE

Sir — The wedding season has started. According to data from various cities in the country, at least 38 lakh marriages will occur in the next few days, and at least Rs 4.74 lakh crore will be spent on them. The cultural richness and traditional rituals should indeed be celebrated, but the excessive emphasis on material grandeur can weaken the sanctity of the marital bond, as the economic strain caused by unnecessary expenditure at weddings can have far-reaching consequences.

Therefore, it is important to think about the growing culture of unnecessary expenditure at weddings. At weddings, people spend their entire life savings, but extravagant spending only for sheen and reputation is not sensible. Still, people do it for their reputation among their relatives.

These festivals can be celebrated while still sticking to their traditions with a practical approach to spending, which is not only culturally enriching but also economically responsible. By reevaluating our priorities and embracing the beauty of simplicity, we can ensure that weddings remain a true celebration of love, unity, and cultural richness without the unnecessary burden of financial stress. This practice will help aged people and parents to save more for their twilight of life.

Md Ashraf | Lucknow

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOME MENTAL APARTHEID

We must lead a disciplined life and adopt spirituality to tap the law of attraction



RAVI VALLURI

The human mind is cannonaded with innumerable thoughts. It is estimated that around sixty thousand thoughts arise in our mind, on any given day. When the human mind is not at rest or lacks peace, this acts as an obstruction in the pursuit of spiritual growth.

**The Banana Swing bowler**  
Accuracy and rigour were the forte of the master swing bowler John Kenneth Lever. This ubiquitous workhorse for Essex had the uncanny ability to prodigiously bring the ball into the right-handed batsman (universally termed the Banana Swing) with quotidian ability.

**The infamous Vaseline incident**  
However, in 1976, this consummate fast bowler was charged with applying Vaseline on the red cherry to produce English-like conditions at the arid Feroze Shah Kotla grounds in Delhi. It was perhaps the first recorded incident of ball doctoring. The then Indian captain Bishan Singh Bedi vehemently opposed this blatantly unethical method deployed but Lever was acquitted of the charges. One can safely argue that had bowlers from subcontinental countries resorted to such unethical tactics against teams like England, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand (SENA teams) it is quite likely that deservedly rasping punishment would have been meted out. This is a crystal-clear case of mental apartheid.



**Monetary figures from international economics**  
It will be noteworthy to peruse the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures of two Asian giants, India and China as calculated by Professor Angus Maddison, Emeritus Professor at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. The figures are quite revivifying and inspiring. India's share of world GDP was slightly more than a quarter of the total in the year 1000 AD, and just a little less than a quarter between the years 1500 AD and 1700 AD.


**Reclaiming a piece of the pie:** It is indeed revealing that the Oriental world, in particular, India and China had acquired a significant world share of wealth and economy. Thus, several European trading companies, following the doctrine of Gold, Glory, and God – adopted overt and covert methods to target these gargantuan economies. Over time they successfully subjugated and enslaved these economies. Meanwhile, India's share of world GDP dropped to an insignificant 3.65%. How did things come to such a state? The vastly superior Indian culture reached a plateau.

**Yogic power and spirituality: our salvation:** However, many Indians themselves condemn and denigrate it, no matter how much the people disparage it, yet it is the Yogic power (Shakti), techniques of meditation and our spirituality which has again catapulted India to the status of prima donna and helped the country scale exalted heights. The contribution of Maharishi Patanjali, our Vedic literature, the splendidous epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana, various philosophical schools and the contribution of Jainism, Buddhism and subsequently of Islam and Sikhism had all made India the hub and cradle of mental invigoration and wondrous contribution. It is indeed the very same mental invigoration that led to the discovery of the concept of zero or even the existence of galaxies in the universe. We were then not victims of mental apartheid.

**Way out:** Today the world has become a yoga mat. Indians must strive beyond Hatha Yoga repose faith from within and work on certain cardinal principles that have stood the test of time. These are to lead a regulated life and endorse the belief that life is something sacred and precious, acquire spiritual wealth and understand the universal law of attraction. It is only then that we can unshackle mental apartheid.

*(The writer is CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty at Art of Living. Views are personal)*

# SC should declare poll freebies a corrupt practice



UTTAM GUPTA

When a candidate uses his money to bribe the voter, it is treated as corrupt practice, but when his party bribes voters using ‘public money’ it is not treated the same way

Taking a cue from the practice of mesmerizing voters with freebies - an acronym for “something is given free of charge” - started by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the February 2020 Delhi elections, early this year, in Karnataka elections, the grand old party (GOP) gave five guarantees (a more respectable nomenclature for freebies) on a grand scale. These delivered the intended result.

In the just concluded elections in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana, the guarantees have occupied the centre stage in the manifestos of all parties expanding their ‘scope’ and ‘scale’. Apart from free electricity, subsidized gas cylinders, free smartphones and tablets, free education/access to English-medium schools, OPS (old pension scheme) etc, the parties have tried to outsmart each other by promising cash transfers.

In Rajasthan, the GOP promised Rs 10,000 every year to the female head of the family under the Griha Lakshmi Yojana. In MP, BJP has promised Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli Behna Yojana; the amount will gradually be hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. Additionally, under the Ladli Lakshmi Yojana, girls will get Rs 200,000/- till they get married. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP has promised Rs 12,000 per year for married women under the ‘Mahtari Vandan Scheme’. In Telangana, the GOP has gone a step ahead by promising 10 grams of gold in addition to Rs 100,000/- cash to women getting married.

In the past, farm loan waivers have been a favourite with most parties. This time, they have also gone for a hefty increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for farmers. In MP, BJP has promised MSP of wheat at Rs 2,700 per quintal - 27 per cent higher than the current Rs 2,125 per quintal (fixed by the Centre). For paddy, it has promised an MSP of Rs 3,100 per quintal - 42 per cent higher than the current level of Rs 2,183 per quintal; ditto in Chhattisgarh.

The guarantees are being justified as welfare schemes. This is a farce. A welfare scheme is rooted in three basics viz. the state assistance goes to persons who are poor and primarily focused on bare essentials such as food, fuel, water, housing, education and health; it should be backed by well-orchestrated efforts to garner revenue so that budgetary position is not destabilized; finally, it is given for a ‘limited period’ after which the beneficiaries should stand on their own. Mooted with an eye on winning elections, freebies defy these cardinal principles. Barring a few instances where the poor tag is appended to the Scheme, most of them are given to all and sundry. The parties promising these freebies don't even make an assessment of the funding required forget making efforts to garner resources. Finally, no party ever whispers about exiting from the scheme.

In such a scenario, destabilisation of the State budgets is inevitable. In Karnataka, the five guarantees promised by the GOP imposed additional liabilities of around Rs 62,000 crore thereby doubling its fiscal deficit (FD) to over Rs 120,000 crore. The precariousness of the situation can be seen from a comment by the Deputy CM ‘The government has no money to



give to the MLAs for carrying out development work; courtesy the poll guarantees’.

In MP, at the current rate of Rs 1250 per month to 12.5 million beneficiaries, the Ladli Behna Yojana costs the state exchequer about Rs 18,750 crore per annum. This will go up to Rs 45,000 crore per annum as the quantum of assistance eventually goes up to Rs 3,000 per month. Meanwhile, the promised hike in MSP to farmers in MP and Chhattisgarh will dent their budgets. For instance, MP will have to spend Rs 5000 crore more on its purchase of paddy.

Unlike any well-intentioned scheme that could have a sun-set, a poll-induced guarantee once given, is more likely to stay eternally and over time, the quantum of assistance will only increase. Besides, it will have repercussions at the all-India level.

For instance, in view of the impending Lok Sabha elections next year, there could be pressure on Modi to give a similar hike in MSP as promised by MP and Chhattisgarh. That will upset the Centre's budget drastically. Since 2021-22, the tax revenue of both the Centre and states have been increasing at a rapid pace and this is helping them rein in their FD levels. If the taxpayers realise that their contributions are being used to indiscriminately give poll-bound freebies to all and sundry, it may even trigger non-compliance amongst them.

The giveaways covering a wide spectrum of items besides large-scale cash transfers also become a breeding ground for corruption. This is evident from the inclusion of millions of ineligible or fake persons in the list of beneficiaries. For instance, during scrutiny of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), 24 million ineligible farmers were found to have received income transfers in 2021-22 under the Scheme.

The biggest damage freebies inflict is to change the mindset of people in a way that makes them complacent towards work. When, people get access to most of their basic needs free of charge that too ‘perpetually’, they won't be inclined to make efforts. Whichever way one looks at it, freebies are a recipe for economic disaster. The only way to avoid it is to prohibit parties from promising doles. The question is: who will do it?

In an order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors in July 2013, the Supreme Court (SC) observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. “It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree.” Yet, it held:- “the promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as ‘corrupt practice’ under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state Assembly.”

After nearly nine years, of hearing a PIL seeking directions against ‘freebies’ on January 25, 2022, the SC observed “This is no doubt a serious issue, budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget. This disturbs the level playing field”. Yet, on August 3, 2022, it threw the ball in the court of political parties asking them to enact a law on curbing freebies. When the latter are deeply rooted in this practice, why would they enact a law to curb it?

A big deterrent is none other than the SC order of July 2013 which says “... it can't be construed as corrupt practice...” Within the meaning of section 123(1)(A) of the RPA, 1951, the expression ‘bribery’ has been defined to mean any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent of any gratification with the object of inducing an elector as a reward to his candidature. The irony is when a candidate uses his own pocket money to bribe the voter, it is treated as corrupt practice, but when the party on whose symbol he is seeking election bribes voters using ‘public money’, the top court doesn't treat it that way. Currently, a three-judge bench, headed by CJI is hearing a plea to take a re-look. Will it alter its stance?

*(The writer is a policy analyst, views expressed are personal)*

# Inclusivity for visually impaired is still a dream

Visually impaired experts need to be involved at every stage of decision making on inclusion and accessibility!

The recent news that Fssai has asked food operators to have QR codes on their products, is certainly very encouraging and reassuring, for making this disabling world, somewhat enabling, for people with total blindness and low vision! However, I have a few very pertinent reservations and questions about independent shopping for the visually impaired here:

Does every blind or low-vision person own a smartphone, and are they all trained and able to use this gadget properly to be able to avail of this facility?

Are there alternatives there for those blind or low-vision persons who are not technology savvy?

How will the information,



PREETI MONGA

that every food product label has a QR Code printed on it, and the blind and low-vision persons can access the same independently, while shopping; reach all end users? How can a totally blind or a low vision person, in the first place, be able to locate and reach the store where the food products with printed QR Codes are available? How will the visually impaired person, thereafter, find and then reach independently, the shelves or areas, where these food products with QR Codes printed, are placed in the store or shop? Will these shelves have any indications for the visually impaired to pick up the food product on their own, without obstruction or accidentally dropping other products

that may be lying around the same area?

My request is that we need to think more comprehensively, so all kinds of visually impaired persons are able to shop independently. For, these visually impaired persons include the entire spectrum in our population, ranging from children right people who have lost their sight due to age-related issues and have very little support. I would also like to state here; that inclusion is slowly being thought about, all it needs is to include the end-users at all stages from planning to execution of any such initiatives for them; so we come up with effective, simple and comprehensive solutions to make our environment inclusive! Awareness

needs to be created and please do not exclude the end users at any stage of how the existing environment can be made inclusive for all!

The solution lies in acknowledging a simple fact; “this world was and is made by sighted people for sighted people, and the blind and low-vision people were completely left out!” And, believe me, we are still left out! A little bit here and there is done, that too, hardly scratches the surface of the disabling environment that we are still forced to live in!

It starts with our families, and the mainstream society and goes up to enabling full participation for the visually impaired, we continue to be called as special people with special needs!

We talk about the needs of the disabled as special, because, everything was, is and is being designed for only those who have all parts of the body working perfectly! We are still not provided the same services or facilities in anything; including education, employment or should I say, everything that a non-disabled person enjoys!

We are supposed to sit and wait on the margins and wait for things to come to us, that is, if at all someone around feels that that particular thing, knowledge or activity, according to them, is something that could be important for the disabled person/child there! If we are not given the opportunity to learn and to participate in life equally, then how are we ever expected to become performing and contributing citizens?

Strangely, for the sighted world, everything and every activity is being made more and more user-friendly, but, if the same product or activity is to be made user-friendly for a blind or a low vision person, it becomes a special task! For example, modern lifts have become totally inaccessible for independent travel for the blind and low-vision!

The buttons indicating floor numbers, have been cleverly replaced by modern technology and are now only touch pads, which can only be used by a sighted person! I strongly feel, that more visually impaired experts need to be involved at every stage of inclusion and accessibility! We all do need to remember that with the kind of lifestyle and other factors around, disability of any type can easily invade any nondisabled person's life in the blink of an eye!

Please note, I do not wish this on anyone, for I have myself lived with blindness for the last 5 decades, and, have suffered, struggled and still continue to do so, and will never want to have any of my fellow humans meet with such a dreadful plight!

However, when one is not the sufferer, sympathizing with others is a real feel-good activity, but living with any disability is definitely not a cakewalk!

*(The writer is the founder and CEO of Silver Linings, views are personal)*



# Israel’s war against Hamas enters 3<sup>rd</sup> month

## Palestinians crowd into ever-shrinking Gaza areas

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Desperate Palestinians fleeing Israel’s expanding ground offensive crowded into an ever-shrinking area of the Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war entered its third month on Friday. The United Nations warned that its aid operation is “in tatters” because no place in the besieged enclave is safe. Israel’s military assault on Gaza, a tiny, densely populated territory, has led to widespread civilian casualties and mass displacements, triggering international alarm. The Israeli army said Friday that over the past day the military had struck about 450 targets in the Gaza Strip by air, sea and ground, signalling the continued intensity of its campaign. Palestinian TV stations reported airstrikes on various parts of the territory. “Airstrikes and

random artillery shelling have continued intensely since last night until this morning,” said Hassan Al Najjar, a journalist speaking by phone from northern Gaza. Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres used a rarely exercised power to warn the Security Council of an impending “humanitarian catastrophe”, and Arab and predominantly Muslim nations have called for a vote on Friday on a Council resolution to demand an immediate cease-fire. The United States, Israel’s closest ally, appears likely to block any UN effort to halt the fighting, which was triggered by the deadly October 7 attack by Hamas militants on southern Israel. Still, US concern over the devastation is growing. US officials told Israel

ahead of the expansion of its ground offensive to southern Gaza several days ago that it must limit civilian deaths and displacement, saying too many Palestinians were killed when it obliterated much of Gaza City and surrounding areas in the north. On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a call with Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer that casualties are still too high, a senior State Department official said. Blinken told Dermer that Israel must also do more to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private diplomatic discussion. Israel insists it must crush the military capabilities of Hamas, which rules Gaza, and remove it from power following the group’s October 7

attack. In the first stage of the war, Israel’s air and ground campaign focused on the northern half of Gaza, leading hundreds of thousands of residents to flee south. Intense battles continued in parts of the north in recent days, while troops there have rounded up hundreds of Palestinian men. In photos and video published on Thursday, dozens of men are seen sitting in rows on a street in northern Gaza, stripped down to their underwear with their heads bowed as they are being guarded by Israeli troops. The images were the first showing such detentions in the war. Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said troops have detained and interrogated hundreds of people in Gaza suspected of militant links. UN monitors said troops reportedly detained

men and boys from the age of 15 in a school-turned-shelter in the town of Beit Lahiya, in the north. During the war, there has also been a dramatic surge in deadly military raids and an increase on restrictions on Palestinian residents in the occupied West Bank. Israeli forces stormed into a refugee camp in the West Bank on Friday to arrest suspected Palestinian militants, unleashing fighting with local gunmen in which six Palestinians were killed, health officials said. The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on the operation. Over the past week, Israeli forces expanded their ground offensive into southern Gaza, with a focus on Khan Younis, the territory’s second largest city. On Friday, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said Israel’s air force

attacked a home facing the society’s office in the city of Khan Younis in southern Gaza. It did not give details about casualties. Medhat Abbas, a spokesperson for the Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, reported a strike in the city of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, saying it killed and wounded a number of people but gave no exact numbers. The military says it makes every effort to spare civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields as the militants fight in dense residential areas. With the entire Gaza Strip under military assault, tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting have packed into the border city of Rafah, in the far south of the Gaza Strip, and Muwasi, a nearby patch of barren coastline that Israel has declared a safe zone.

# ‘94 media workers killed this year, mostly in Gaza’

AP ■ BRUSSELS

A leading organisation representing journalists worldwide expressed deep concern on Friday at the number of media professionals killed around the globe doing their jobs in 2023, with Israel’s war with Hamas claiming more journalists than any conflict in over 30 years. In its annual count of media worker deaths, the International Federation of Journalists said 94 journalists had been killed so far this year and almost 400 others had been imprisoned. The figure for deaths is up from 67 in the same period of 2022 — including 12 killed in Ukraine — and double the total of 47 recorded for the whole of 2021. The group called for better protection for media workers and for their attackers to be held to account. “The imperative for a new global standard for the protection of journalists and effective international enforcement has never been greater,” said IFJ President Dominique Pradalié. The group said 68 journalists had been killed covering the Israeli-Hamas war since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 — more than one a day and accounting for 72 per cent of all media deaths worldwide this year. It said the overwhelming

majority of them were Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli forces continue their offensive. “The war in Gaza has been more deadly for journalists than any single conflict since the IFJ began recording journalists killed in the line of duty in 1990,” the group said, adding that deaths have come at “a scale and pace of loss of media professionals’ lives without precedent”. Ukraine also “remains a dangerous country for journalists” almost two years since Russia’s invasion, the organisation said. It said three reporters or media workers had been killed in that war so far this year. The organisation also deplored media deaths in Afghanistan, the Philippines, India, China and Bangladesh. It expressed concern that crimes against media workers are going unpunished and urged governments “to shed full light on these murders and to put in place measures to ensure the safety of journalists”. It noted a drop in the number of journalists killed in North and South America, from 29 last year to seven so far in 2023. The group said the three Mexicans, one Paraguayan, one Guatemalan, one Colombian and one American were slain while investigating armed groups or the embezzlement of public funds.

## Rocket attack targets US Embassy in Baghdad

**Baghdad (AP):** A rocket attack on the sprawling US Embassy in Baghdad caused minor damage but no casualties Friday morning, US and Iraqi officials said. The attack is the first on the embassy located in the heavily fortified Green Zone of Iraq’s capital to be confirmed since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. The Green Zone houses Iraqi government buildings and embassies on the west bank of the Tigris River. Iran-backed militias in Iraq have claimed responsibility for dozens of attacks that targeted bases housing US troops in Iraq and Syria since Israel declared war on Hamas two months ago. The US military says 78 attacks have been carried out against US facilities over the past weeks, of which 37 were in Iraq and 41 in Syria. An Iraqi security official said 14 Katyusha rockets were fired on Friday, of which some struck near one of the US Embassy’s gates while others fell in the river. The official said the rocket attack caused material damage but no casualties. A US military official said a multi-rocket attack was launched at American and coalition forces in the vicinity of the embassy complex and the Union III base, which houses offices of the US-led coalition. The official added that no casualties and no damage to infrastructure were reported. An embassy spokesperson said the US Embassy was attacked by two salvos of rockets at approximately 4:15 a.m. (0215 GMT). “Assessments are ongoing, but there are no reported casualties on the embassy compound,” the official said, adding that no specific group had claimed responsibility for firing the rockets as of Friday morning but early indications pointed to Iran-aligned militias. “We again call on the government of Iraq, as we have done on many occasions, to do all in its power to protect diplomatic and Coalition partner personnel and facilities,” the official said.

# UK says it has paid Rwanda \$300 mn for a blocked asylum deal

AP ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was under pressure on Friday to explain why Britain has paid Rwanda 240 million pounds (USD 300 million) as part of a blocked asylum plan, without a single person being sent to the East African country. The total is almost twice the 140 million pounds that Britain previously said it had handed to the Rwandan government under a deal struck in April 2022. Under the agreement, migrants who reach Britain across the English Channel would be sent to Rwanda, where their asylum claims would be processed and, if successful, they would stay. The plan was challenged in UK courts, and no flights to Rwanda have taken off. Last month, Britain’s Supreme Court ruled the policy was illegal because Rwanda isn’t a safe country for refugees. Despite

the ruling and the mounting cost, Sunak has pledged to press on with the plan. The Home Office said it had paid a further 100 million pounds to Rwanda in the 2023-24 financial year and expects to hand over 50 million pounds more in the coming 12 months. Junior Immigration Minister Tom Pursglove defended the cost, saying the money would ensure “all of the right infrastructure to support the partnership is in place”. “Part of that money is helpful in making sure that we can respond to the issues properly that the Supreme Court raised,” he said. The opposition Liberal Democrats said it was “an unforfeitable waste of taxpayers’ money”. The Rwanda plan is central to the UK government’s self-imposed goal to stop unauthorised asylum-seekers from trying to reach England from

France in small boats. More than 29,000 people have done so this year, compared to 46,000 in 2022. Since the Supreme Court ruling, Britain and Rwanda have signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants. Sunak’s government argues that the treaty allows it to pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe destination. The law, if approved by Parliament, would allow the government to “disapply” sections of UK human rights law when it comes to Rwanda-related asylum claims and make it harder to challenge the deportations in court. The bill, which has its first vote scheduled in the House of Commons on Tuesday, has roiled the governing Conservative Party, which is trailing the Labour opposition in opinion polls, with an election due in the next year. It faces opposition from centrist

Conservative lawmakers who worry about Britain breaching its human rights obligations. Former Conservative Solicitor-General Edward Garnier said the bill was “trying to define things when there is no evidence, or no safe evidence, for that being the case”. He told the BBC that changing the law to declare Rwanda a safe haven is “rather like a bill which says that Parliament has decided that all dogs are cats”. But the bigger danger for Sunak comes from Conservatives on the party’s authoritarian right wing that views curbing immigration as essential to the government’s pledge to “take back control” now that Britain has left the European Union. They think the bill is too mild and want the UK to leave the European Convention on Human Rights. Almost every European country, apart from Russia and Belarus, is bound by the con-

vention and its court. Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick piled pressure on the prime minister when he quit the government this week, saying the bill did not go far enough. Sunak insists the bill goes as far as the government can without scuttling the deal because Rwanda will pull out of the agreement if the UK breaks international law. The party differences erupted on social media after the party posted an attack ad aimed at Labour, using an image of a BBC presenter caught making a rude gesture to camera this week. While some Tory lawmakers retweeted the middle-finger image approvingly on X, formerly known as Twitter, others called it crass. “Amazed this has not – despite requests – been taken down, it is beneath us,” Conservative legislator Alicia Kearns posted.



Lebanese journalists hold a portrait of Reuters videographer Issam Abdallah, right on the poster at front, who was killed by Israeli shelling, and slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during a protest in front of the United Nations headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2023. File photo

# Hunter Biden indicted on nine tax charges

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Hunter Biden was indicted on nine tax charges in California on Thursday as a special counsel investigation into the business dealings of President Joe Biden’s son intensifies against the backdrop of the looming 2024 election. The new charges — three felonies and six misdemeanours — are in addition to federal firearms charges in Delaware alleging Hunter Biden broke laws against drug users having guns in 2018. They come after the implosion of a plea deal over the summer that would have spared him jail time, putting the case on track to a possible trial as his father campaigns for reelection. Hunter Biden “spent millions of dollars on an extravagant lifestyle rather than paying his tax bills”, special counsel David Weiss said in a statement. The charges are centred on at least USD 1.4 million in taxes Hunter Biden owed dur-



ing between 2016 and 2019, a period where he has acknowledged struggling with addiction. The back taxes have since been paid. If convicted, Hunter Biden, 53, could a maximum of 17 years in prison. The special counsel probe remains open, Weiss said. In a fiery response, defense attorney Abbe Lowell accused Weiss of “bowing to Republican pressure” in the case. “Based on the facts and the law, if Hunter’s last name

was anything other than Biden, the charges in Delaware, and now California, would not have been brought,” Lowell said in a statement. The White House declined to comment on Thursday’s indictment, referring questions to the Justice Department or Hunter Biden’s personal representatives. The charging documents filed in California, where he lives, details spending on everything from drugs and strippers to luxury hotels and exotic cars, “in short, everything but his taxes”, prosecutor Leo Wise wrote. The indictment comes as congressional Republicans pursue an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. The House is expected to vote next week on formally authorising the inquiry. No evidence has emerged so far to prove that Joe Biden, in his current or previous

office, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family’s international business. The separate, long-running criminal investigation into Hunter Biden had been expected to wind down with a plea deal where he would have gotten two years’ probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges and avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble. The agreement was pilloried as a “sweetheart deal” by Republicans, including former President Donald Trump. He is facing his own criminal cases, including charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, gave credit for the new charges on Thursday to two IRS investigators who testified before Congress that the Justice

Department had mishandled and “slow walked” the investigation into the president’s son. Justice officials have denied those allegations. The two IRS employees, Gary Shapley and Joseph Ziegler, said the indictment was “a complete vindication of our thorough investigation”. The new charges against Hunter Biden include filing a false return and tax evasion felonies, as well as misdemeanor failure to file and failure to pay. The defence signalled that it plans to fight the new charges, likely at least in part relying on immunity provisions from the original plea deal. Defence attorneys have argued those remain in force since that part of the agreement was signed by a prosecutor before the deal was scrapped. Prosecutors have disagreed, pointing out the documents weren’t signed by a judge and are invalid. Lowell said he’s also planning to push for dis-

missal of the gun charges next week, calling them “unprecedented and unconstitutional”. The three federal gun charges filed in Delaware allege Hunter Biden had lied about his drug use to buy a gun that he kept for 11 days in 2018. Federal law bans gun possession by “habitual drug users”, though the measure is seldom seen as a stand-alone charge and has been called into question by a federal appeals court. Hunter Biden’s longstanding struggle with substance abuse worsened after the death of his brother Beau Biden in 2015, according to court documents and his memoir “Beautiful Things”, which ends with him getting clean in 2019. His gross income nevertheless totalled some USD 7 million between 2016 and 2020, prosecutors said, pointing to his roles on the board of the Ukrainian energy company Burisma and a Chinese private equity fund as well as his position at a law firm.

## Judge rules against Prince Harry in early stage of libel case against Daily Mail publisher

**London (AP):** Prince Harry lost a preliminary round on Friday in his libel case against the publisher of the Daily Mail tabloid over an article that said he tried to hide his efforts to retain publicly funded protection in the UK after giving up his status as a working member of the royal family. A London judge said the Duke of Sussex failed to knock out Associated Newspaper Ltd’s defence that its article reflected an honest opinion. A hearing is scheduled Tuesday to discuss the consequences of the ruling. Justice Matthew Nicklin said in that ruling that “it is not fanciful that the Defendant will be successful, at trial”. He scheduled a hearing on Tuesday in the High Court to discuss the consequences of the ruling. The ruling comes just a day after another judge concluded three days of arguments — mostly behind closed doors — over whether the government unfairly stripped Harry of his security detail after he and his family moved to the US in 2020. Harry, 39, the younger son of King Charles III, is challenging the government’s decision to provide security to him on a case-by-case basis when he visits Britain. Harry has said hostility toward him and his wife on social media and relentless news media hounding threatens their safety. The Mail on Sunday and Mail Online published an article in February 2022 about the issue headlined: “How Prince Harry tried to keep his legal fight with the government over police bodyguards a secret ... then — just minutes after the story broke — his PR machine tried to put a positive spin on the dispute”. Harry claims the article was “fundamentally inaccurate” and the newspaper libelled him when it suggested he lied in his initial public statements about his case challenging the government.

## Greece may be able to benefit from Turkish power plant

**Ankara (AP):** Türkiye is considering allowing neighbouring Greece to benefit from a nuclear power plant it plans to build near its Black Sea coast, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was quoted as saying on Friday. Erdogan made the comments on his return from a visit to Athens on Thursday, where longtime regional rivals Greece and Türkiye took significant steps toward mending their troubled ties. “We strive to develop and expand cooperation with Greece not only in the field of energy but also in all areas, including nuclear energy,” Erdogan told a group of journalists on his flight back. “For example, we can provide Greece the opportunity (to benefit) from energy from our nuclear power plant to be built in Sinop (Province).” His comments were reported by state-run Anadolu

and other media on Friday. During Erdogan’s visit on Thursday, Greece and Türkiye signed more than a dozen cooperation deals on trade, energy and education and announced a roadmap for future high-level consultations aimed at avoiding crises. Erdogan travelled to Greece promising to pursue a “win-win” approach that could lay the foundation for broader cooperation. “I believe that my visit, which took place in a very positive atmosphere, will open a new page in Türkiye-Greece relations,” Erdogan said. Longstanding disputes have led Athens and Ankara to the brink of war three times in the past 50 years. The latest flare-up occurred in 2020, when Greek and Turkish navy ships shadowed each other in the eastern Mediterranean over a dispute

## French teens await verdict over their alleged roles in killing of teacher

AP ■ PARIS

A French juvenile court is handing down a verdict on Friday for six teenagers accused of involvement in the killing of teacher Samuel Paty, who was beheaded by an Islamic extremist after he showed caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad to his class for a debate on freedom of expression. Paty, a history and geography teacher, was killed on October 16, 2020, near his school in a Paris suburb by an 18-year-old of Chechen origin who had become radicalised. The attacker, Abdoullakh Anzorov, was then shot dead by police. Paty’s name was disclosed on social media after a class debate on free expression during which he showed prophet caricatures published by the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. The publication

had triggered a deadly extremist massacre in the Charlie Hebdo newsroom in 2015. All those on trial were students at Paty’s school. If convicted, they face up to two-and-a-half years in prison. Five of the defendants, who were 14 or 15 at the time of the attack, are accused of staking Paty out until he left school that day and identifying him for the attacker in exchange for promises of 300-350 euros (USD 350-400). Investigators found that the attacker wanted to target Paty but didn’t have the means to identify him. The five are facing charges of criminal conspiracy with the aim of preparing aggravated violence. The sixth defendant, who was 13 at the time, is accused of wrongly claiming that Paty had asked Muslim students to raise their hands and leave the classroom before he showed

the class the prophet cartoons. She was not in the classroom that day, and later told investigators she had lied. She is facing a charge of making false allegations. Her father shared the lie in an online video that called for mobilisation against the teacher. He and a radical Islamic activist who helped disseminate virulent messages against Paty are among eight adults who will face a separate trial for adults suspected of involvement in the killing, expected late next year. In sometimes tearful testimony, the teenagers on trial said they had no idea the teacher would be killed, according to French media reports. The trial has been held behind closed doors, and the media are not allowed to disclose the defendants’ identities according to French law regarding minors.

## ‘Increasing Covid-19 cases put strain on S’pore hospitals’

**Singapore (PTI):** Covid-19 infections and hospitalisations are increasing and putting a strain on hospitals in Singapore, the Ministry of Health warned on Friday. Though the health ministry has raised the alert, it has also reassured people that the numbers are not as high as during the pandemic and that the circulating variants are not known to cause more severe illness. In the week ended on December 2, as many as 32,035 people were diagnosed with COVID-19 — the highest number of infections recorded this year, according to a report by The Straits Times newspaper. The previous high was 28,410 infections a week in March, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said. The latest number is almost

10,000 more than the 22,094 diagnosed the previous week. The number of weekly infections has been hovering around 15,000 infections over the past two to three months. The number of people being hospitalised and needing intensive care treatment has also gone up, it said. An MOH statement on December 8 said the average daily COVID-19 hospitalisations rose to 225 from 136 the week before, and the average daily intensive care unit (ICU) cases increased to four compared with one case in the previous week. It said: “This has added workload to our hospitals, which are already busy.” Nine people severely ill with Covid-19 were admitted to a hospital in ICU in the week of November 26 to December 2, up from four the previous week.



# Putin aims to extend his rule of over 2 decades

AP ■ MOSCOW

Vladimir Putin on Friday moved to prolong his repressive and unyielding grip on Russia for at least another six years, announcing his candidacy in the presidential election next March that he is all but certain to win.

Putin still commands wide support after nearly a quarter-century in power, despite starting an immensely costly war in Ukraine that has taken thousands of his countrymen's lives, provoked repeated attacks inside Russia — including one on the Kremlin itself — and corroded its aura of invincibility. A short-lived rebellion in June by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin raised widespread speculation that Putin could be losing his grip, but he emerged with no permanent scars. Prigozhin's death in a mysterious plane crash two months later reinforced the view that Putin was in absolute control.

Putin announced his decision to run in the March 17 presidential election after a Kremlin award ceremony, when war veterans and others pleaded with him to seek re-election in what Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described as “spontaneous” remarks. “I won't hide it from you — I had various thoughts about it over time, but now, you're right, it's necessary to make a decision,” Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin after the event. “I will run for president of the Russian Federation.”

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Centre noted that the announcement was made in a low-key way instead of a live televised speech, probably reflecting the Kremlin's spin effort to emphasize Putin's modesty and his perceived focus on doing his job as opposed to loud campaigning. “It's not about prosperity, it's about survival,” Stanovaya observed. “The stakes have been raised to the maximum.”

About 80 per cent of the populace approves of Putin's performance, according to the independent pollster Levada



Centre. That support might come from the heart or it might reflect submission to a leader whose crackdown on any opposition has made even relatively mild criticism perilous. Whether due to real or coerced support, Putin is expected to face only token opposition on the ballot.

Putin, 71, has twice used his leverage to amend the constitution so he could theoretically stay in power until he's in his mid-80s. He is already the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, who died in 1953.

In 2008, he stepped aside to become prime minister due to term limits but continued calling the shots while his close associate Dmitry Medvedev served as a placeholder president. Presidential terms were then extended to six years from four, while another package of amendments he pushed through three years ago reset the count for two consecutive terms to begin in 2024.

“He is afraid to give up power,” Dmitry Oreshkin, a political analyst and professor at Free University of Riga, Latvia, told The Associated Press this year. At the time of the amendments that allowed him two more terms, Putin's concern about losing power may have been elevated: Levada polling showed his approval rating significantly lower, hovering around 60 per cent.

In the view of some analysts, that dip in popularity could have been a main driver of the war that Putin launched in Ukraine in February 2022.

“This conflict with Ukraine was necessary as a glue. He needed to consolidate his power,” said commentator Abbas Gallyamov, a former

Putin speechwriter now living in Israel. Brookings Institution scholar Fiona Hill, a former US National Security Council expert on Russian affairs, agreed that Putin thought “a lovely small, victorious war” would consolidate support for his reelection.

“Ukraine would capitulate,” she told AP earlier this year. “He'd install a new president in Ukraine. He would declare himself the president of a new union of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia over the course of the time leading up to the 2024 election. He'd be the supreme leader.”

The war didn't turn out that way. It devolved into a grueling slog in which neither side makes significant headway, posing severe challenges to the rising prosperity integral to Putin's popularity and Russians' propensity to set aside concerns about corrupt politics and shrinking tolerance of dissent.

For the first time, voting in the presidential election will take place over three days from March 15 to 17, 2024, including in four regions of Ukraine partially and illegally annexed by Russia. The election commission argued that the practice of multi-day voting, used in other elections since the COVID-19 pandemic, is more convenient for voters.

Putin's rule has spanned five US presidencies, from Bill Clinton to Joe Biden. He became acting president on New Year's Eve in 1999, when Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned. He was elected to his first term in March 2000.

Although Putin has long abandoned the macho photo shoots of bear hunting and scuba diving that once amused and impressed the world, he shows little sign of slowing down. Photos from 2022 of him with a bloated face and a hunched posture led to speculation he was seriously ill, but he seems little changed in recent public appearances.

“He's a wartime president, is mobilizing the population behind him,” Hill said. “And that will be the message around the 2024 election, depending on where things are in the battlefield.”

## Pak EC issues notice to PTI on plea against intra-party polls

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's election commission on Friday issued a notice to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party on a petition challenging its recent organisational polls, which were termed as “rigged and fraudulent”.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), held its election on December 2 following a ruling by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for fresh intra-party polls to elect its chairman and other key officer-bearers to retain the cricket bat as its election symbol. The same day, the party announced that it had elected Imran Khan's nominee, Barrister Gohar Khan, as the party Chairman.

Gohar, 45, was hand-picked by the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician after consultation with his loyalist lawyers who frequently meet him in jail where he has been kept since being arrested on August 5 after conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case. Khan himself avoided filing the nomination due to conviction and disqualification.

However, one of its founding members, Akbar S Babar, who developed differences with the party years ago, filed a petition with the ECP, terming the exercise as “rigged and fraudulent” with a plea for fresh organisational elections. At least 13 other PTI members joined Babar in challenging the election. The members in the petition maintained that no schedule was given before the elections and the voter lists were also not released. “There was no activity in the PTI central secretariat related to elections,” the plea said.

Separately, the country's mainstream parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), also questioned the legitimacy of the intra-party elections. A five-member ECP panel, led by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, conducted the hearing on the petition. Babar's counsel implored the commission to declare the PTI's polls null and void and to mandate a fresh conduct of the elections.

# Chinese military surveillance balloon seen in Taiwan Strait

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's Defence Ministry says a Chinese military surveillance balloon was spotted in the Taiwan Strait, as well as a large-scale movement of military aircraft and ships. The ministry said the balloon passed southwest of the northern port city of Keelung on Thursday night, then continued east before disappearing, possibly into the Pacific Ocean.

However, there seemed to be some uncertainty about whether the balloon was operated directly by the People's Liberation Army, the military branch of China's ruling Communist Party. The ministry referred to it both as a “PLA surveillance balloon” and as “1 PRC's balloon”, using the acronym for the People's Republic of China, China's official name.

A Defence Ministry spokesperson said they had no additional information.

China has long blurred the lines between military and civilian functions, including in the South China Sea, where it operates a huge maritime militia — ostensibly civilian fishing boats that act under government orders to assert Beijing's territorial claims.

Taiwan has threatened to shoot down such balloons, but the ministry did not say what, if any, action was taken. It said the balloon was monitored flying at an altitude of approximately 6,400 metres (21,000 feet). It also said 26 Chinese military aircraft were detected, along with 10 Chinese navy ships, in the 24 hours before 6 am on Friday.

Of the aircraft, 15 had crossed the median line that is an unofficial divider between the sides, but which Beijing refuses to recognise. Some also entered Taiwan's self-declared air defense identification zone outside the island's airspace, which encompasses the 160



kilometer (100 mile) - wide Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's military monitored the situation with combat aircraft, navy vessels and land-based missile systems, the ministry said. The incident came just over month before Taiwan is to hold elections for president and the legislature and raises questions about possible Chinese efforts to influence the vote.

Such incursions occur regularly as a means of advertis-

ing China's threat to use force to annex the self-governing island republic it considers its own territory, wear down Taiwan's military capabilities, and impact morale among the armed forces and the public, who remain largely ambivalent to China's actions.

The Chinese missions have also prompted Taiwan to up its purchases of aircraft from the United States, its chief ally, and revitalize its own defence industry, including producing submarines. Beijing strongly protests all contacts between the island and the US, but its aggressive diplomacy has helped build strong bipartisan support for Taipei on Capitol Hill. US President Joe Biden vowed sharper rules to track, monitor and potentially shoot down unknown aerial objects after three weeks of high-stakes drama sparked by the discovery of a suspected Chinese spy balloon transiting much of the country early in the year.

# Japan's leader grilled in parliament over widening fundraising scandal, link to Unification Church

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and several key Cabinet ministers were grilled by opposition lawmakers in parliament on Friday over a widening fundraising scandal and an alleged connection to the Unification Church which threaten to further drag down the government's sagging popularity.

Support ratings for Kishida's government have fallen below 30 per cent because of public dissatisfaction over its slow response to rising prices and lagging salaries, and the scandal could weaken his grip on power within the governing Liberal Democratic Party. Still, the long-ruling party remains the voter favourite in media polls because of the fragmented and weak opposition.

Dozens of governing party lawmakers, including Cabinet members, are accused of failing

to fully report money they received from fundraising. Kishida has acknowledged that authorities are investigating the scandal following a criminal complaint.

The party's largest and most powerful faction, linked to late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is suspected of failing to report more than 100 million yen (USD 690,000) in funds in a possible violation of campaign and election laws, according to media reports. The money is alleged to have gone into unmonitored slush funds. Kishida has instructed party members to temporarily halt fundraising parties. “It's a first step,” he said on Friday. “We will thoroughly grasp the problems and the cause and will take steps to regain public trust.”

Kishida also said he will step down as head of his own party faction while serving as prime minister to show his

determination to tackle the problems. Kishida was bombarded with questions from senior opposition lawmakers about the scandals during Friday's parliamentary hearing.

He separately faces allegations related to a 2019 meeting with former US House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who visited him with top officials from the Unification Church, a South Korea-based religious group that the government is seeking to dissolve over abusive recruiting and fundraising tactics that surfaced during an investigation of Abe's assassination last year. The investigation also led to revelations of years of cozy ties between the governing party and the Unification Church.

Kishida said he was asked to meet with Gingrich as a former foreign minister and that he did not remember the other guests. Photographs in Japanese media show him exchanging

business cards with Unification Church officials.

“I don't see any problem with that,” Kishida said. “If there were church-related people in the group, that does not mean I had ties with the Unification Church.”

Yukio Edano, a lawmaker for the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, accused Kishida of lax oversight and of attempting to distance himself from the fundraising scandal by withdrawing from leadership of his faction.

Media reports say Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno allegedly diverted more than 10 million yen (USD 69,000) over the past five years from money he raised from party events to a slush fund.

Matsuno was a top official in the Abe faction from 2019 to 2021 and is the first key minister implicated in the scandal by name.

## ADB approves US \$200 mn loan to debt-stricken SL

Colombo (AP): The Asian Development Bank said on Friday that it has approved USD 200-million concessional loan to debt-stricken Sri Lanka to help stabilise the country's finance sector following an unprecedented economic crisis that engulfed the Indian Ocean island nation last year.

The bank's announcement comes as Sri Lanka is awaiting International Monetary Fund approval for the second installment of a USD 2.9-billion bailout package to rescue the country from bankruptcy.

The ADB said its Financial Sector Stability and Reforms Program for Sri Lanka includes two subprogrammes of USD 200 million each that would help strengthen the stability and governance of the country's banking sector, and deepen sustainable and inclusive finance, particularly for women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

“The programme's overarching development objective is

fully aligned with the country's strategy of maintaining finance sector stability, while ensuring that banks are well-positioned for eventual recovery,” Takafumi Kadono, ADB's director for Sri Lanka, said in a statement.

He added that the “expected development outcome is a stable financial system providing access to affordable finance for businesses in various sectors of the economy”.

Sri Lanka plunged into an economic crisis in 2022, creating severe shortages and drawing strident protests that led to the ouster of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. It declared bankruptcy in April 2022 with more than USD 83 billion in debt — more than half of it to foreign creditors.

The IMF agreed in March to a USD 2.9-billion bailout package, releasing the first payment shortly thereafter. However, the IMF delayed the second tranche, citing inadequate oversight and debt restructuring.

# S Korea's defence chief vows strikes on North if provoked

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's defence minister on Friday vowed massive retaliatory missile strikes on “the heart and head” of North Korea in the event of provocation, as the rivals escalate their rhetoric over their respective spy satellite launches in recent days. The South Korean warning — unusually fiery rhetoric by Seoul directed at Pyongyang — came as the top security advisers from South Korea, the US and Japan gathered in Seoul for talks to discuss North Korea's evolving nuclear threats and other issues.

During a visit to the army's missile strategic command, South Korean Defence Minister Shin Wonik ordered command officers to maintain a readiness to fire precision-guided and powerful missiles at any time, according to his ministry. Shin said the main role of the command is “lethally striking the heart and head of the enemy,

though the types of its provocations can vary,” a ministry statement said.

Animosities between the two Koreas deepened after North Korea launched its first military reconnaissance satellite into space on Nov. 21 in violation of U.N. bans. South Korea, the U.S. and Japan strongly condemned the launch, viewing it as an attempt by the North to improve its missile technology as well as establish a space-surveillance system. South Korea announced plans to resume front-line aerial surveillance in response. North Korea quickly retaliated by restoring border guard posts, according to Seoul officials. Both steps would breach a 2018 inter-Korean deal on easing front-line military tensions.

Last week, when South Korea also launched its first military spy satellite from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base, North Korea slammed the U.S. for alleged

double standards and warned of a possible grave danger to global peace. In a statement Friday, Jo Chol Su, a senior North Korean Foreign Ministry official, said the North would make all available efforts to protect its national interests in the face of threats by hostile forces. The national security advisers from South Korea, the U.S. and Japan are to hold their first trilateral meeting in six months in Seoul on Saturday.

Ahead of the three-way meeting, South Korean national security adviser Cho Taeyong and his Japanese counterpart, Takeo Akiba, met bilaterally on Friday and reaffirmed a need to strengthen their cooperation with the U.S. to cope with provocations by North Korea. Cho and U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan also met and affirmed that Seoul and Washington remain open to diplomacy with North Korea, according to South Korea's presidential office.

## Taiwan prez candidates to hold televised debate as race heats up

Taipei (AP): The three candidates running in next month's Taiwanese presidential election will hold a televised debate on December 30 as the race heats up under pressure from China. The outcome of the January 13 election could have a major effect on relations between China and the United States, which is bound by its own laws to provide Taiwan with the weapons it needs to defend itself and to regard threats to the self-governing island as a matter of “grave concern.”

Differences over Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, are a major flashpoint in US-China relations. The debate will feature current Vice President William Lai of the Democratic Progressive Party; Hou Yu-ih, a local government leader representing the main opposition Nationalist Party, or KMT; and former Taipei mayor Ko

Wen-je, of the smaller Taiwan People's Party. Lai, whose party favours the status quo of de-facto independence, is favoured to win the election, ensuring that tensions with China will likely remain high. The KMT, which formerly ruled in China before being driven to Taiwan amid the Communist takeover of the mainland in 1949, formally backs political unification between the sides, a prospect most Taiwanese reject. Ko, who briefly flirted with an alliance with the KMT, has advocated restarting talks with China.

“The whole world wants to know whether the people of Taiwan will continue to move forward on the path of democracy in this major election, or whether they will choose to rely on China, follow a pro-China path, and lock Taiwan into China again,” Lai said in a recent speech.

## Dutch police arrest Syrian accused of sexual violence

The Hague (AP): A Syrian refugee was arrested on Friday in the Netherlands on suspicion of crimes against humanity including sexual violence while he was allegedly head of an interrogation team in a militia aligned to the government of President Bashar Assad.

The arrest of the 55-year-old man marks the first time Dutch authorities have charged a suspect with sexual violence as a crime against humanity, the National Public Prosecution Service said in a statement. He is the latest suspect charged in the Netherlands with crimes committed during Syria's grinding civil war. Under universal jurisdiction, the Netherlands can prosecute certain crimes even if they were committed abroad.

The Netherlands and Canada have also taken Syria to the United Nations' top court, accusing Assad's administration of a years-long campaign of “institutionalised” torture against its own people. Following an investigation by the Dutch National Police's International Crimes Team, prosecutors alleged that the man, whose identity was not released, was head of the interrogation department of the National Defence Force in the western Syrian city of Salamiyah in 2013-14.

The NDF is a paramilitary group fighting on the side of the Syrian government in the country's civil war. “He is charged with complicity in torture in an official capacity with specific intent, complicity in torture as a crime against humanity and complicity in various forms of sexual violence as a crime against humanity,” prosecutors said.

The suspect arrived in the Netherlands in 2021 and was granted asylum. He was tracked down by police following a tip that a person with a similar name was chief interrogator for the NDF in Salamiyah, prosecutors said. Further details were not released.

# Post-summit news conferences highlight divide between China, EU

AP ■ BEIJING

From trade to human rights, the leaders of China and the European Union differed on a wide range of issues at a summit this week in the Chinese capital. China, which sees Europe as an important export market, raised concerns about trade protectionism and “de-risking”, the EU initiative to reduce its reliance on any one country — such as China — for vital raw materials and products.

The EU, which sees imports from China as a potential threat to companies and jobs, pressured China on its large trade surplus with Europe and its de facto support for Russia in the war in Ukraine. Separate post-summit news conferences on Thursday evening highlighted the divergent positions. Wang Lutong, the director general for European affairs, spoke to journalists at China's Foreign Ministry. Then

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU Council President Charles Michel held a joint news conference at the European Union office in Beijing.

### TRADE IMBALANCE

VON DER LEYEN: “If you just look at the last two years, the trade deficit has doubled. This is a matter of great concern for a lot of Europeans. Such imbalances are just unsustainable. The root causes are well known, and we discussed them. They range from a lack of market access for European companies to the Chinese market to preferential treatment of domestic Chinese companies and overcapacities in the Chinese production.”

WANG: “Sometimes the EU relates the imbalance of trade between us to overcapacity and subsidies. But we don't think there is overcapacity in such areas like green energy and

clean energy. ... China could be very useful to the green transition not only of the EU but also the whole world. So if you want us to support the EU in green transition, do not be protectionist. You make the choice between being protectionist and encouraging China to participate in your goal in order to achieve that green transition.”

### TRADE SUBSIDIES

WANG: “The Chinese side has expressed concerns to the EU side on its de-risking and restrictive economic and trade policies, including the anti-subsidy investigation against Chinese electric vehicles as well as its 5G policies. The Chinese side has urged the EU to ensure openness of its trade and investment market, provide an equitable and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises and be prudent in using trade remedies.”

VON DER LEYEN: “Politically, European leaders will not be able to tolerate that our industrial base is undermined by unfair competition. We like competition. It makes us better; it lowers prices; it is good for the consumers. But competition needs to be fair. ... Europe does not want to decouple from China. ... What we want is de-risking. De-risking is about managing the risks we see, addressing excessive dependencies through diversification of our supply chains. ... and thus increasing our resilience. And this is not exclusive to China.”

### UKRAINE

VON DER LEYEN: “Russia's war of aggression is a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter, and it is a serious threat to European security. And this is why we recalled the need for China to use all its influence on Russia to stop this war

of aggression and to engage in Ukraine's peace formula. We also reiterated (to China) to refrain from supplying lethal equipment to Russia and to prevent any attempts by Russia to undermine the impact of sanctions.”

WANG: “Sometimes European politicians said to us that China needs to speak to Russia, you need to speak to President Putin about withdrawing their soldiers. This is a very independent sovereign nation. President Putin is making his decision based on his own national interest and security. So that's why we are also urging Europeans to speak to Russians about it. We think ... it's important that Europeans and Russians talk about the possible security architecture in Europe and it's also important that Russians and Americans talk about the possible strategic stability.”

### HUMAN RIGHTS

MICHEL: “For the European Union, human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal. We will never turn a blind eye to human rights cases. Today we welcome China's resumption of the human rights dialogue, as we agreed during my visit (in December 2022). It's a step in the right direction and today we continued this conversation at the highest level. We also highlighted cases of specific concern, such as the human rights violations in Xinjiang or Tibet.”

WANG: “Earlier this year, China and the EU resumed our dialogue on human rights. It was very productive, and we will do it again. ... We also raised our concerns about human rights violations in European countries. And that dialogue should be designed to promote understanding and cooperation. (The) human rights issue should not be used as a stick

to beat China, and I think the progress we have made in human rights was very much appreciated and acknowledged.”

### TAIWAN

WANG: “The Chinese side has elaborated its principled position on the Taiwan issue ... and emphasised that the EU needs to show its commitment to the one-China principle and the principle of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs, a basic form of governing international relations, with real actions. This is to uphold the political foundation of China-EU ties.”

MICHEL: “We are concerned about the growing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and in the SCS. We are opposed to any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force, and the EU maintains its one-China policy. I trust that China is fully aware of the serious consequences of any escalation in this region.”



# Stock markets hit new peaks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty rebounded to close at their new lifetime highs on Friday after the Reserve Bank raised the growth forecast for the current fiscal and kept policy rates unchanged, triggering heavy buying in banking and other rate-sensitive stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose 303.91 points, or 0.44 per cent, to hit its new peak of 69,825.60. The index touched the highest intra-day level of 69,893.80.

The broader index Nifty also climbed 68.25 points or 0.33 per cent to reach a fresh record high of 20,969.40.

Among major Sensex movers, HCL Tech logged the biggest gain of 2.69 per cent, followed by JSW Steel (2.44 per cent) and Infosys (1.67 per cent). Other gainers included



HDFC Bank, Titan, Axis Bank and ICICI Bank.

In contrast, ITC, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were among the laggards.

"The RBI took a balanced approach by raising the economic growth forecast and also expressing concern on

food inflation, which may have an elevated trajectory in the short term. A drop in rabi sowing and dipping reservoir levels provides a perception that foodgrain prices can rise. The impact was visible on FMCG stocks, which underperformed today," said Vinod Nair, Head



of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Foreign institutional investors sold shares worth Rs 1,564.03 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The six-member Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI on Friday decided to keep the

benchmark repurchase (repo) rate at 6.5 per cent.

The central bank raised its forecast for economic growth to 7 per cent from 6.5 per cent, maintaining India's position as the world's fastest-growing major economy, after a stronger-than-expected 7.6 per

cent growth in the July-September quarter.

Elsewhere in Asia, Shanghai Composite gained 0.11 per cent, while the Nikkei 225 and Hang Seng fell by 1.68 per cent and 0.15 per cent, respectively. European markets were trading higher with France's CAC 40 gaining by 0.91 per cent and London's FTSE 100 rising by 0.55 per cent. Germany's DAX was trading 0.39 per cent higher.

The US markets ended with significant gains in overnight trade on Thursday, with the Nasdaq rallying more than 1 per cent.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 1.62 per cent higher to USD 75.25 a barrel.

On Thursday, the 30-share index fell 132.04 points, or 0.19 per cent, to close at 69,521.69. Nifty declined 36.55 points, or 0.17 per cent, to settle at 20,901.15.



## Crossborder remittances using e rupee to halve cost of such payments to 3 per cent: Ajay

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) or e-rupee can help halve the cost of cross-border remittances to 2-3 per cent, an official said on Friday.

Economic Affairs Secretary in the Finance Ministry Ajay Seth said CBDC can be used for trade, remittances, or any other cross-border payment.

"At the moment, cross-border payment is not a very efficient system, it takes time. At the same time, there is cost factor," Seth said. Giving data, he said remittances to India is around USD 100 billion annually and compared to the global level of 8-9 per cent, the cost in India is low at 5 per cent of each transaction value.

"So, for cross-border payments, CBDC can be very

effective to bring down cost further to the range of 2-3 per cent," the Secretary said at the Ficci Annual Convention here.

The introduction of CBDC was announced in the Union Budget 2022-23 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The RBI began the pilot wholesale CBDC project on November 1, 2022, while the pilot on retail version was launched on December 1, 2022.

The e-rupee is in the form of a digital token that represents legal tender.

It is being issued in the same denominations as the paper currency and coins. It is being distributed through financial intermediaries, i.e., the banks.

Users are able to transact with e-rupee through a digital wallet offered by the participating banks.

## India urea production rises to 284.95 L tonne in 2022-23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's urea production has increased to 284.95 lakh tonnes last fiscal from 225.08 lakh tonnes in 2014-15, the government informed Lok Sabha on Friday.

In written replies, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Bhagwanth Khuba said the central government ensures adequate availability of urea to meet the requirements of states/Union Territories.

To increase the availability of urea through indigenous sources, the Centre announced New Investment Policy (NIP) - 2012 to facilitate fresh investment in the urea sector and to make India self sufficient in the sector. "A total of 6 new urea units have been set up under NIP - 2012, which together have added 76.2 lakh tonnes per annum in the existing indigenous urea production capacity of the country.

"In addition, Government of India also introduced the New Urea Policy (NUP)-2015 on 25th May, 2015 with one of the objectives of maximising indigenous urea production. As a result, the indigenous production of the country increased from 225.08 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 to 284.95 lakh tonne in 2022-23," Khuba said.

The minister also said that the gap between demand (requirement) and production of fertilizers is met through imports.

Under the Urea Subsidy Scheme (USS), urea is provided to the farmers at a statutorily



notified Maximum Retail Price (MRP). Besides, under the Nutrient Based Subsidy Policy, a fix amount of subsidy is notified on annual/semi-annual basis, which ensures availability of P&K fertilizers at reasonable prices to farmers.

Urea is imported on government account. However, all P&K (phosphatic and potassic) fertilizers (DAP, MOP and NPK) are covered under Open General License (OGL) under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme and they are imported by the fertilizer companies on commercially viable terms.

According to the data, imports of urea fell to 75.8 lakh tonnes in 2022-23 from 91.36 lakh tonnes in the previous year. Imports of Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) rose to 65.83 lakh tonnes from 54.62 lakh tonnes, while the inward shipments of MoP fell to 18.66 lakh tonnes from 24.6 lakh tonnes. NPK imports increased to 27.5 lakh tonnes from 11.7 lakh tonnes.

## IIFL Securities stock settles 5 per cent higher

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of IIFL Securities settled 5 per cent higher on Friday after the SAT set aside Sebi's order prohibiting the company from onboarding new clients for two years.

The stock of the brokerage firm rallied 5.13 per cent to settle at Rs 124.05 apiece on the BSE. On the NSE, scrip of IIFL Securities jumped 4.20 per cent to close at Rs 122.85 per piece.

During the day, shares of brokerage firm IIFL Securities touched a 52-week high of Rs 134.40 each on BSE and NSE. On the volume front, 1.02 crore shares were traded on the NSE, while 8.10 lakh shares exchanged hands on the BSE, during the day.

At the close of the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex bounced 303.91 points or 0.44 per cent higher to settle at 69,825.60, while NSE Nifty rose 68.25 points to close at 20,969.40.

On Thursday, the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) set aside the market regulator Sebi's order prohibiting IIFL Securities from onboarding new clients for two years, and slashed the fine levied on the brokerage house to Rs 20 lakh from Rs 1 crore.

The order came after IIFL Securities, earlier known as India Infoline Ltd., filed an appeal against the order passed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in June.

The capital markets regulator, in June, prohibited IIFL



Securities from taking up new clients for two years for alleged mis-utilisation of client funds.

Setting aside Sebi's order, SAT Presiding Officer Justice Tarun Agarwala and technical member Meera Swarup said, "There has been no misuse of client funds and by wrongly considering the non-funded portion of the bank guarantee as per the 2016 circular, an attempt has been made out to show that there was a misuse of client funds which, in our opinion, is patently erroneous". Further, it said that there was no failure on the part of the appellant (IIFL Securities) to segregate the money of the client. It is not that these monies have been misused for their purposes, and so no penalty under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act (SCRA) could be imposed.

# India has 3 years window to attract companies moving out of China: NITI Aayog

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has a two-to-three-year window to capitalise on the global strategy of de-risking from China and the government needs to be very alert to come up with a set of policies that make the shift of businesses to India attractive and easier, NITI Aayog CEO Subrahmanyam said on Friday. Addressing CII Global Economic Policy Forum 2023, Subrahmanyam further said India is in a sweet spot due to the outcome of geopolitics and the fact that the country has a young working-age population.

"So I think, in the next 15 to

20 years time span, India has an opportunity in manufacturing. But the opportunity and the window for India is at best two to three years, because supply chains are unwinding, they're becoming shorter, and they're looking for new geographies.

"This is going to be a two-three year phenomenon, and then supply chains will get frozen," he said.

Subrahmanyam pointed out that it is not just non-Chinese companies but even Chinese companies which want to move out of China because of labour shortages.

"They are having a shortage of demand because there is a population shift in terms of the



age, a shortage of labour supply, the rising cost of labour and the stressed capital markets," he said. Noting that the capital market system is under stress in China, Subrahmanyam also

said it is a very clear signal to big MNCs from their capitals that de-risk from Beijing.

"So even if global trade does not grow in total, there could be a shift in trade from one geog-

raphy to the other. So that is something which India can capitalize in the short run," he emphasised.

The NITI Aayog CEO opined that to attract businesses from China, India will have to compete with Vietnam, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico and Bangladesh.

"So I think ...We need to be very alert to come up with a set of policies, a set of programs to make doing business and shifting business to India attractive," he said.

Subrahmanyam also pointed out India's customs rule doesn't allow import of used goods when companies shift the factory as they move pre-owned

stuff. "So you need to allow that to happen as there are half-a-dozen other countries who are going to be competing with you to get the shift out of China," he said.

On the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), Subrahmanyam said Indian companies need to adapt fast to the carbon tax if the major markets are moving in that direction.

"The fights will be fought by the government at the international level. But at the bottom level, for survival's sake, I think companies will need to adjust and the government would have to come up with policies to facilitate that," he added.

## Nayara to start polypropylene plant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nayara Energy, India's second-largest private oil firm, on Friday said it will start operations of a new polypropylene plant in the first half of next year, marking its entry into the lucrative petrochemical sector.

In the last financial year (April 2022 to March 2023), India's consumption of polypropylene stood at 6.4 million tonnes, of which around 1.6 million tonnes or around 25 per cent was imported.

With wide applications in segments like packaging, automotive applications, consumer durables and lifestyle products, the demand for polypropylene (PP) is projected to rise.

"Nayara is well on track for its entry into the petrochemicals sector with its upcoming 4,50,000 tonnes per annum polypropylene plant expected to be commercially operational during H1 2024 - when Nayara expects the demand to accelerate and margins to kick in," the firm said.

As India's GDP grows, the demand for polypropylene is expected to grow to around 7.5 million tonnes in the next two years, creating sufficient room for new and upcoming domestic capacities.

Nayara said it will be the first polypropylene (PP) producer in the country using the latest



phthalate-free catalyst for the entire PP production. Phthalate-free grades will provide cleaner PP for pharma, health and hygiene applications.

"Our customers are also expected to achieve higher throughput, quality consistency and smooth processing with our PP grades produced using advanced catalyst and technology platform," it said. "We will be packaging our products in pilferage-contamination proof HDSS bags. Our customers will also have the advantage of our all-India sales distribution network and strong technical support. We believe it will be the best product in India for food applications." Presently, refinery-based PP economics are lower due to strong fuel cracks and lower PP prices (which have fallen significantly in the last 18 months).

This is the cyclical nature of

the business and the long-term prospects of the industry remain bright. Importantly, integrated refineries with Petchem portfolios are expected to achieve margin resilience through business cycles as compared to standalone refiners.

"At the same time, we are actively considering increasing investment in the India growth story, especially in the petchem sector," Nayara said.

With its strategically located refinery at Vadinar in Gujarat, which is the largest petrochemical consumption region in the country, the company is positioned to make a strong entry into this high growth segment.

Nayara operates a 20 million tonnes a year oil refinery at Vadinar and also has more than 6,500 petrol pumps in the country. It delivers about 8 per cent of India's refining output.

## Sebi considering to create new asset class

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi is looking to create a new asset class -- which lies between mutual funds and portfolio management services (PMS) -- and the new product can cater to high-risk investors, its chief Madhabi Puri Buch said on Friday.

The Sebi chief said that there is a spectrum of asset classes for investors. Of these, "mutual funds are the highly retail investors, then you have in between a PMS and then you have AIF (alternative investment fund) for private equity".

"We feel there is room for an additional asset class somewhere between mutual funds and PMS... Sebi is looking into a whole new asset class," Buch told reporters here at the sidelines of a CII event.

In October, mutual funds industry body AMFI clarified that the idea of introducing a new asset class, which lies between mutual funds and PMS, was at a "very nascent stage".

According to the industry body, there was a deliberation within the industry for an instrument that caters to investors who are looking for an intermediate investment product between mutual funds and PMS.

When asked about the total expense ratio (TER), she said that a lot of back-testing is happening and co-creation is happening.

In May, Sebi floated a consultation paper and proposed a uniform total expense ratio across mutual fund schemes in a bid to bring in transparency in the costs charged to unitholders.

TER is a percentage of a scheme's corpus that a mutual fund house charges towards expenses, including administrative and management.

## GDP growth of 7 per cent in FY24: RBI DG Michael Patra



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank Deputy Governor Michael Patra on Friday termed the revised 7 per cent growth expectation of the RBI as a "conservative estimate".

Speaking to reporters after the announcement of the bi-monthly policy review, Patra said the real GDP growth in the first half of the fiscal year has beat all estimates, including the RBI's. Patra said if one were to add the RBI's estimates for the second half, the GDP growth for FY24 will come at 6.9 per cent. But, the high frequency data for October and November points to robust economic activity.

"So at the current time, 7 (per cent) is like a conservative estimate," the Deputy Governor in-charge of the important monetary policy department said.

Earlier in the day, the Reserve Bank sharply revised up its GDP

estimate for FY24 to 7 per cent from the earlier expectation of 6.5 per cent. Many watchers were expecting the RBI to do the revision, but the 0.50 per cent push was not expected by any analyst.

On growth, Governor Shaktikanta Das said that the demand for two-wheelers is high as seen in over 20 per cent growth during the festive season and also added that fast moving consumer goods companies are also reporting

a turnaround in rural demand. He added that private capex is also showing signs of revival, particularly in sectors like petroleum, steel cement and chemicals, and pointed out that capacity utilization has reached a threshold at 74 per cent. "It has reached a point where we can expect private investment also to start picking," he said. "Many companies in the manufacturing sector are using their own internal reserves and surpluses to invest. They're not approaching the bank or they're not resorting to any other kind of borrowing or raising funds. They're using their own internal reserves and surplus for investment," Das said.

Das also said that there is growing international confidence in India's economy, and he has seen the same in interactions with governors of other central banks, other regulators and foreign investors.



## CCI conducting market study on artificial intelligence

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fair trade watchdog CCI is conducting a market study to assess the impact of artificial intelligence on the competition landscape, the regulator's chief Ravneet Kaur said on Friday.

In recent times, there has been an increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) applications in several sectors.

"We are doing a market study on artificial intelligence... In that study (we will) try to understand the dynamics better. We can differentiate what kind of AI that we would like to support and which one is stifling competition," Kaur said at an event organized by industry chamber FICCI here.

This can provide valuable insights into the competitive landscape.

The CCI has the mandate to curb unfair business practices in the marketplace across sectors and also promote fair competition.

Since its inception, the CCI has cleared 1,000 combinations, mergers & acquisitions cases, Kaur said.

The CCI has played a key role in regulating and ensuring a competitive market in the country.



Junior Women's Hockey World Cup

India beat Korea 3-1 in classification match

PTI ■ SANTIAGO (CHILE)

India came from behind to outwit Korea 3-1 in the 9th-12th place classification match of the Junior women's hockey World Cup here.

Ropni Kumari (23rd minute), Mumtaz Khan (44th) and Annu (46th) scored for India, while Jiyun Choi (19th) was the goal-getter for Korea on Thursday.

In the opening quarter, Korea dominated possession and secured the first penalty corner, but they could not utilise the chance. India, opting for counter-attacks, kept Korea's defence busy but couldn't convert their promising entries to the opposition circle, resulting to a goal-less deadlock after the first 1 quarter.

The second quarter mirrored



the intensity of the first, with India and Korea persisting in their attacking plays.

Choi broke the deadlock with a precise penalty corner strike, but India swiftly responded through Ropni, who equalized from another penalty corner.

Korea, desperate to regain the lead, ramped up their aggression. Despite their fervent efforts, India's solid defence thwarted Korea's advances and counter-attacked skillfully, keeping the pressure on their opponent's defensive line. However, no more goals were scored in the second quarter as both teams entered the half-time break with the score levelled at 1-1.

In the third quarter, India dominated the proceedings by keeping possession and troubling Korea's defence rigorous-

ly. The strategy paid dividends as Mumtaz brilliantly slotted the ball home from a penalty corner to give her team the lead.

The penultimate quarter ended 2-1 in favour of India.

India intensified their attacks and extended their lead early in the fourth and final quarter of the game as Annu netted a superb field goal, securing a two-goal advantage for her team.

India continued to unsettle Korea's defence, maintaining their momentum and denying any chance of a comeback.

The victory means that India, who had earlier bowed out of the title contention after finishing third in Pool C, will stand a chance to finish ninth in the tournament when they take on either Chile or USA in their last match on Saturday.



Suárez wins the golden ball

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Uruguayan striker Luis Suárez, a former teammate of Lionel Messi at Barcelona, won the golden ball as the player of the season in the Brazilian league.

The 37-year-old Suarez, who played with Messi in Spain after several seasons at Liverpool and Ajax, scored 17 goals for Brazilian league runner-up Gremio. The season ended Wednesday with Palmeiras defending its title.

Suárez scored two goals on the final day of the season in a 3-2 victory over Fluminense at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian league's top scorer was Atletico Mineiro forward Paulinho with 20 goals.

Suárez said many times he feared he could not finish the season in Brazil because of intense knee pain and the hassle of long flights, but a selection of journalists voted for him to win the golden ball award.

Suárez played 53 matches for Gremio and scored 26 goals in three competitions this season.

"I am almost 37 years old, this is the year I played the most times in my career. It was also the year I was most often distant from my family. This award belongs to them," a tearful Suárez said Thursday after receiving the trophy from former national team teammate Diego Lugano.

When asked about his future, however, Suárez did not respond. But he said he will remember not only Gremio fans, but also those of other clubs who respected him as an opponent.

"It is hard to see rival fans here applaud you when you play, and that did happen to me in some places," Suárez said.

"This is all about the player's mind, it doesn't matter how old they are. It could be Endrick at age 17, Hulk, Suárez ... The mindset and the commitment have to be there for you to play and do what you like.

Soccer fans take legal action

To stop French authorities from banning away supporters at games

AP ■ PARIS

An umbrella organisation for soccer fan groups has taken legal action aimed at stopping French authorities from banning away supporters attending some games this weekend.

The National Supporters' Association said Friday it has referred the matter to France's highest administrative court as it seeks to challenge bans targeting four matches, including two in the top-tier of the French league.

The bans ordered by the French government and local authorities followed the death of a supporter in Nantes last weekend.

Sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera said this week that preventing supporters from traveling to rival clubs could help restore calm following a series of incidents this season.

"These appeals are in no way intended to minimize the seriousness of last Saturday's tragedy," the group said.

"No one can doubt the immense sadness in the French stands. Nor can anyone doubt our sense of responsibility."

The group argued that it's essential to let away fans attend the matches involving Reims, Lens, Auxerre and Bordeaux to guarantee safety for all, especially because many fans are already on site.

"The aim of our approach is to ensure that these matches can take place in an atmosphere of respect and freedom," the group said.

Reims said this week that its fans were not allowed to

travel to Nice because their French league match on Sunday has been identified as "at risk" of violence.

Lyon fans were not allowed to attend Wednesday's 3-0 loss at Marseille and Lens supporters have been banned from travelling to Friday's match in Montpellier.

In France, travelling fans are regularly banned from high-risk games such as those between bitter rivals Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille. But Oudea-Castera suggested the measure could be used more often.

Marseille fans at their Stade Velodrome deployed banners protesting such bans before their team's match against Lyon.

"Banned from travelling in the country of freedoms. Today more than ever, freedom for ultras," their message read, in a reference to diehard fans often described as "ultras."

The National Supporters' Association said it decided not to challenge the bans imposed on away fans for matches between PSG and Nantes, Saint-Etienne and Nimes, Lorient and Marseille, as well as Lyon and Toulouse. "These orders are highly questionable. But (these matches) will attract very large crowds. It's too late to change their framework," the group said.

The Nantes fan who died last week was killed following a fight between supporters before the club's 1-0 win over Nice.

The public prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into voluntary manslaughter.

Naruka, Raiza unstoppable in shooting trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hangzhou Asian Games silver medallist Anantjeet Singh Naruka was unchallengeable in the men's skeet national selection trials 1, while Raiza Dhillon overcame national champion Ganemat Sekhon in women's skeet at the Karni Singh range here on Friday.

Rajasthan's Naruka and Haryana's Raiza, both shot down 58 clay targets in the 60-shot final to register victories.

National champion Naruka, following his exploits in Hangzhou, shot 24 early in the morning in the final qualification round to finish on top in the 40-strong field with a score of 121 out of a possible 125.

He missed a target on his very first station in the six-man final, but only one more after that, to leave behind Sheeraz Sheikh comfortably in second



place. Sheeraz shot 56, while Gurjaot Khangura was third with 45-hits in the first 50 targets.

Sheeraz, on a comeback trail, also kept his poise throughout the day, coming second in a four-man shoot-off for two

final qualification spots. Gurjaot won the shoot-off to take the other spot.

In women's skeet, Raiza was in sublime form throughout the three-day competition and shot three rounds of perfect 25s to top the qualifiers with a score of 122. She would have broken Ganemat's current national record by two had the scores of the trials been considered.

Indian No. 1 Ganemat shot a perfect 25 on the day to get into the finals in second place with a score of 120. There was no stopping Raiza, however, as she shot down 58 targets as against Ganemat's 54 in the finals, to win. Rajasthan shooter Maheshwari Chauhan finished third with a score of 43.

The skeet finals concluded the first shotgun national selection trials and the second is due to take place in Bhopal from December 15-21.

Jon bolts for LIV Golf in stunning blow to PGA Tour

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Masters champion Jon Rahm bolted for Saudi-funded LIV Golf for what's believed to be more money than the PGA Tour's entire prize fund, a stunning blow that deepens the divide in golf as the two sides were negotiating a commercial deal.

Rahm confirmed the move in an interview with Fox News on Thursday. Wearing a black letterman's jacket with the LIV logo, he said it was not an easy decision.

"I've been very happy," Rahm said. "But there is a lot of things that LIV Golf has to offer that were very enticing."

He said he would keep private how much the deal was worth amid reports that put his compensation in the \$500 million range, which likely would include equity in his new team.

The PGA Tour's total purse in 2023 was about \$460 million. The development comes 25 days before the deadline for the PGA Tour and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund try to finalize their June 6 agreement to become commercial partners in a for-profit enterprise, along with the European tour.

Talks have been going slowly, and Tiger Woods said last week there were a lot of moving parts. The biggest moving part turned out to be the 29-year-old Rahm, the No. 3 player in the world and a two-time major champion approaching his prime, being the latest to defect.

Rahm had been adamant that he has enough money and that he cares only about history and legacy. He recently said he "laughed" whenever he saw his name linked to LIV.

"It was a great offer. The money is great, obviously it's wonderful," Rahm said.



"But what I said before is true: I do not play golf for the money. I play golf for the love of the game and for the love of golf. But, as a husband, as a father and as a family man I have a duty to my family to give them the best opportunities and the most amount of resources possible and that is

where that comes in."

He remains eligible for the majors for the next five years - the Masters for life, the U.S. Open until 2031. Still to be determined is how the move affects his eligibility for the Ryder Cup.

"It's hard to sit here and criticize Jon because of what a great play-

er he is," Rory McIlroy said in an interview with Sky Sports.

"Jon is going to be in Bethpage in 2025 (for the Ryder Cup). Because of this decision, the European tour is going to have to rewrite the rules. There's no question about that."

Rahm's addition gives LIV Golf seven of the last 14 winners at the majors.

"LIV Golf is here to stay," Lawrence Burian, the COO of LIV Golf, said in a news release sent out after Rahm's appearance on Fox News.

PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan had been scheduled to meet this week with Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the head of the PIF. The meeting was delayed until next week, but it wasn't clear if it was still on or how Rahm's announcement affects the negotiations.

Since the stunning commercial partnership was proposed on June 6, the tour has also enter-

tained offers from private equity groups. Those include Fenway Sports Group and Acorn Growth, which includes former AT&T Chairman Randall Stephenson. He resigned from the PGA Tour board out of protest with its deal with Saudi Arabia.

The agreement originally included language to end the poaching of players, but that was removed when the Justice Department had antitrust concerns.

Signing with LIV is counter to everything Rahm has said about the league. He has declared his support for the PGA Tour dating to February 2022, and as recently as August he told a Spanish podcast that "I laugh when people rumor me with LIV Golf. I've never liked the format."

He had said 54 holes with no cut and a shotgun start "is not a golf tournament."

Lake Placid offers proposal to host sliding sports for 2026 Winter Games



AP ■ LAKE PLACID (US)

Lake Placid has put forth an offer to host sliding sports for the 2026 Winter Olympics, which are scheduled to take place in Italy, where organizers are struggling to provide a venue for bobsled, luge and skeleton racing.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee

announced the bid after its quarterly meeting Thursday, only two days after the chief of the Milan-Cortina Games said it is possible the hosts could come up with a new proposal to build a track.

In October, organizers told the IOC the Italian government had ordered them to move the events due to cost overruns involved in renovat-

ing the Cortina sliding track. Sliding centers in Switzerland and Austria were considered the best options.

Lake Placid hosted the Winter Olympics in 1932 and 1980 and, as home of a U.S. Olympic Training Center, has a state-of-the-art sliding center.

Last year, a \$104 million renovation of the Olympic center was wrapped up in time for Lake Placid to host the FISU World University Games.

USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said Olympic organizers invited the proposal from Lake Placid.

"At this stage, our role is simply to help them present a proposal and to endorse that proposal and ensure that we have the broad support required from the municipalities as well as from the athlete and (national governing body) community," she said.

Milan-Cortina is hopeful of not becoming the first Winter Games to hold events outside the host nation's borders, though it's not unheard of on the Summer side: Next year's surfing competition for the Paris Olympics will be held in Tahiti.

HI names 22-member Indian women team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Goalkeeper Savita Punia will continue to lead the Indian women's hockey team, while veteran forward Vandana Katariya will be her deputy as the national federation on Friday announced a 22-member team for the upcoming 5-Nation Tournament in Spain.

India will play against Ireland, Germany, Spain and Belgium in the tournament which is scheduled to be held from December 15 to 22 in Valencia. It will serve as the preparatory assignment ahead of the all-important Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi beginning from January 13. "We are going with a well-balanced, strong team," Indian women's hockey team chief coach Janneke Schopman said in a release from HI. "The tournament gives the players an ideal platform to build on the recent performances and keep themselves in the right frame of mind heading into the all-important Olympic Qualifiers."

"The matches against the top European teams will also help us identify areas that



need improvement ahead of the tournament, and we are looking forward to making the most out of the opportunity."

The Squad: Goalkeepers: Savita (Captain), Bichu Devi Kharibam

Defenders: Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Gurjit Kaur, Akshata Abaso Dhekale

Midfielders: Nisha, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Monika, Salima Tete, Neha, Navneet Kaur, Sonika, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur

Forwards: Jyoti Chhatrri, Sangita Kumari, Deepika, Vandana Katariya (Vice-Captain), Beauty Dunderung, Sharmila Devi.

FIA ends its conflict of interest investigation into Toto, Susie

AP ■ PARIS

Formula One's governing body has dropped its probe of a potential conflict of interest between Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff and his wife Susie Wolff, who works for F1's management group.

The FIAs compliance department had been looking into the Wolffs following allegations of a conflict of interest and whether they have shared confidential information.

"The FIA can confirm that there is no ongoing investigation in terms of ethical or disciplinary inquiries involving any individual," the organization said in a statement on Thursday.

Susie Wolff is the managing director of the all-female series F1 Academy. She had rejected the claims "in the strongest possible terms" and said she was "deeply insulted."

The probe began after a report in BusinessF1 magazine that rival team executives raised concerns about whether Toto and Susie Wolff passed on information discussed in private meetings. Susie Wolff reports to F1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali.



The BusinessF1 report said team officials were alarmed when Toto Wolff made comments in a recent meeting that included details they felt could only have come from F1. The report did not detail what was discussed. The Mercedes team and Formula One Management, which runs the commercial side of F1, denied any allegations of improper sharing of information or conflict of interest.

"Following a review of Formula One Management's F1 code of conduct and F1 conflict of interest policy and confirmation that appropriate protective measures are in place to

mitigate any potential conflicts, the FIA is satisfied that FOM's compliance management system is robust enough to prevent any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information," the FIA's statement said on Thursday.

On Wednesday, nine Formula One teams released nearly identical statements denying they had complained to the FIA about an alleged conflict of interest.

The flurry of statements followed an appearance by Red Bull team principal Christian Horner on Sky Sports in which he denied instigating the investigation.



# ‘NO COACH CAN CREATE ARTIST LIKE SHAMI’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mohammed Shami possesses a rare ability of landing the ball in an upright seam position every single time and no coach in the world can create such a fast bowling ‘artist’, gushed India’s bowling coach Paras Mhambrey.

Shami, who finished on top of the bowling charts with 24 wickets from seven matches in the ODI World Cup, has been India’s go-to bowler in ODIs and Tests. Mhambrey, one of the quietest back-room workers in the current Indian set-up, doesn’t want to take any credit for Shami’s success.

Will India get another talent like Mohammed Shami?

“Well, if I tell you that coaches could create a bowler like Shami, then I would be lying. If a bowler can land it on upright seam every time then every other bowler in the

world will be Shami,” Mhambrey told PTI in an exclusive interview before leaving for the tour of South Africa.

“It is a skill that Shami has acquired with tremendous hardwork and developed himself into the bowler that he is.

“Bowling ball after ball on the seam and with that perfect wrist position and getting it to move either ways is a rare skill set. A lot of bowlers, even if they land deliveries on the seam, will see the ball straightening up after pitching,” Mhambrey said.

The former India pacer also spoke about another brilliant operator Jasprit Bumrah in the same vein.

“Even Bumrah with his unusual action gets the ball to move in or away with same action. This is an art and lot of hard work and dedication goes into perfecting the art.”

The way Shami and Bumrah



have managed to dominate the the batters around the world is something that has surprised Mhambrey. Many would be envy of their success.

“I think in Test matches, we had Bumrah, Shami and Ishant (Sharma), who created this kind of magic but frankly speaking, if you ask me now if I would have expected this kind of dominance, I wouldn’t have dreamt of this level of performance.”

“I mean to bowl out Sri Lanka for 50 and then to repeat it against a team like South Africa, score 320 odd and bowl them out for 80. That was surreal. Obviously with an attack like ours, we expected them to do well but to put up such a performance on the biggest stage for such a sustained period was something that was really commendable.”

The goal to create perfect bench-strength Mhambrey, who came on

board along with head Rahul Dravid was asked to assess the performance of Indian bowlers in the two-year cycle that ended with World Cup.

He spoke about the take-aways, like qualifying for WTC final, beating a strong Australian team and also becoming the first Indian team to win ODI series in England.

However Dravid and his team never lost sight of bigger picture, which is to create a bench strength.

“When we took over, we needed to see that two years down the line, we have also created a sufficient bench strength in every format. We had to identify at least 3-5 bowlers from next batch and also ensure that they get enough game time and are ready for the challenges of international cricket. Rahul, Vicky (Rathour), myself and (T) Dilip got together and identified the bowlers.”



## Veda desperate to revive cricket career

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tragedies and snubs are nothing new for Veda Krishnamurthy as she has seen it all in the last three years, but the out-of-favour India cricketer is desperate to make a fresh start and has pinned her hopes on the upcoming WPL to regain her spot in the national women’s side.

Having got a snub in the inaugural Women’s Premier League auction earlier this year, a leaner and much fitter Veda is now hoping to earn a WPL contract on Saturday, an opportunity which can open the national team’s door for her.

“I feel that the ability and experience I have will not take much time for me to get into a system and adjust again. It is all about going there and showcasing whatever I can,” Veda told PTI in an exclusive interview.

“Definitely, it’s (WPL) a great platform for players, especially who are on the same boat like me. I haven’t played international cricket for the last three years, so this is a platform where you want to do well, and if you are able to go and perform in situations and platforms like this it opens up the door for the Indian team as well.

“We have seen that happen in men’s cricket. So that is something which I will have in my mind.”

Veda, who has played 48 ODIs scoring 829 runs with a best score of 71, was an integral part of the Indian team that finished runner-up in the 2017 Women’s ODI World Cup final, losing to hosts England by just nine runs at Lord’s.

Veda was also part of India’s squad for the 2018 and 2020 ICC Women’s World Twenty20 tournaments in the West Indies and Australia respectively.

But twin personal tragedies halted her career in 2021 when she lost her mother and elder sister to COVID in a span of two weeks, and it took her a long time and effort to come out of that.

“Very difficult, honestly, because suddenly when you have been shaken you don’t know what to do. There was a lot of mental health issues I faced because I didn’t know how to live with the grief. There was a lot of anxiousness, there was lot of depression. I was not sleeping well. You want to come out of it but it’s not that easy. I used to be awake till 5-6 in the morning, I used to be scared of closing my eyes,” she said.

“It took me close to one-and-a-half years to get back to normal without any medicine. It still kind of comes back and haunts you, but you need to keep that side and focus of the physical aspect. It feels good to be back in shape,” added the right-handed batter, who featured in 76 T20s for India scoring 875 runs.

Once she managed to defeat her inner demons, Veda concentrated on reviving her career to be in shape for the WPL auction slated for Saturday and all she wants is an opportunity to showcase her mettle.

“I have been putting a lot of hours in my practice. I have become a lot fitter, lot leaner in the last four months. I have been hitting the ball really well. So, now, just hoping what happens on December 9.

## ICC rates Ahmedabad pitch which hosted ODI World Cup final as average

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The pitch at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, which hosted the ODI World Cup final between India and Australia on November 19, has been rated ‘average’ by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

ICC match referee and former Zimbabwe batter Andy Pycroft, however, rated the out-

field as “very good”.

Australia had won the World Cup final after beating India by six wickets on a pitch which was slow and sluggish.

Opting to bowl, India could score just 240 in 50 overs with Australia achieving the target in 43 overs, with opener Travis Head making a 120-ball 137.

The pitches used in India’s league matches against South Africa, England, Pakistan and

Australia in Kolkata, Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Chennai respectively were also rated as ‘average’ by the ICC.

However, the Wankhede Stadium pitch on which India faced New Zealand in the semi-finals received a ‘good’ rating. There were media reports ahead of that match suggesting that the hosts had switched pitch, offering a used surface instead of a fresh one.

The ICC also gave an “average” rating to the Eden Gardens pitch in Kolkata which hosted the second semifinal between Australia and South Africa.

It turned out to be a low-scoring match where Australia dismissed South Africa for 212 in 49.4 overs. Australia then managed to overhaul the target in 47.2 overs, losing seven wickets.

ICC match referee and former India pacer Javagal Srinath,

however, gave a “very good” rating to the outfield at Eden Gardens.

According to the ICC, a pitch is rated average if it “lacks carry, and/or bounce and/or occasional seam movement, but consistent in carry and bounce. A degree of turn, but with average bounce for the spinner. Falling significantly short of ‘very good’ with respect to carry, bounce and turn.”

## Glenn Phillips helps Kiwis hit back on Day 3

PTI ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Glenn Phillips played an attacking knock as New Zealand hit back strongly on Day 3 of the rain-affected second cricket test against Bangladesh on Friday to leave the game evenly poised.

Phillips struck a 72-ball 87 to help New Zealand put up 180 in its first innings and take an 8-run lead, and then New Zealand’s bowlers left Bangladesh on 38-2 before play was called off due to bad light.

Bangladesh was dismissed for 172 in its first innings.

After the entire second day and the first session of the third day were washed out, Phillips led the charge with one-day style batting as New Zealand resumed at 55-5.



Phillips hit nine fours and four sixes in his innings and was particularly harsh on Mehidy Hasan, hitting three fours and one six in his first three overs to keep the runs flowing.

Phillips formed two crucial partnerships - 49 with Mitchell for the sixth wicket and 55 with Kyle Jamieson for the eighth to help New Zealand earn the lead. Mitchell was struggling against the spinners and eventually was caught out by Mehidy at

long-on for 18 off offspinner Nayeem Hasan’s first over.

In his next over Nayeem, who took 2-21, dismissed Mitchell Santner for 1 to leave New Zealand at 97-7 but Phillips got the support of Jamieson to keep Bangladesh at bay. Shoriful (2-15) broke through with the wicket of Jamieson, who made 20 with three boundaries. Skipper Tim Southee hit a four and a six for his 14 as New Zealand went past Bangladesh’s total.

With Phillips attacking relentlessly on a tough wicket, New Zealand appeared set to take a substantial lead. But his knock came to an end when he edged a delivery of Shoriful behind. Taijul (3-64) removed Southee in the next over, to limit the lead to single digits.

## Indian women’s team face stern challenge against England

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Eyeing to keep the three-match series alive, India will look for an improved show, especially in the bowling and fielding departments, when they take on a rampaging England in the second women’s T20I here on Saturday.

England extended their dominant run against India with a comprehensive 38-run win which gave them a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. It also

was England’s 21st victory in 28 T20Is against India and eighth in 10 matches in the country.

India failed to read the conditions adequately and also made glaring errors in the first game which turned out to be a one-sided affair.

On a flat pitch not offering much to the bowlers especially in the first innings, India used four different spinners - including the rookie Kanika Ahuja - and England took them apart, scoring 121 runs from a collec-

tive 12 overs for three wickets.

India handed debuts to two left-arm spinners Shreyanka Patil (2/44) and Saika Ishaque (1/38) but both were wayward and expensive in their respective four-over spells. Senior spinner Deepti Sharma (0/28) was not even trusted with completing her quota of overs.

Indian spinners bowled short as well as full tosses at times for England batters to dominate, whereas their fielders did not support them enough. Both



Danni Wyatt and Nat Sciver-Brunt were given lifelines which proved to be costly for the home team.

The only bright spot in India’s bowling was seamer Renuka Singh Thakur, who had left England reeling at 2 for 2 in the opening over of the match.

But India not only allowed England to stage a comeback, the hosts, coming off a two-month break, also could not force their way back into the game at any stage.

# SA return just a process at moment: Du Plessis

PTI ■ BENGALURU

While a return to South African national team remains an enticing proposition for him, former captain Faf du Plessis wants to regain his peak fitness and game-touch before seriously nourishing such ambitions.

Recently, Proteas coach Rob Walter had indicated that doors to the national team are open for senior pros like Du Plessis, Quinton de Kock and Rilee Rossouw.

But for that, Du Plessis wanted to reach his highest point of fitness after an elbow surgery that he underwent in

September during the Caribbean Premier League (CPL 2023).

“I wouldn’t say the process is not on (his SA comeback). I mean, international cricket is still the pinnacle. You still feel like that’s where cricket comes with the most pressure and that’s what makes you really feel alive as a sportsman,” Du Plessis told PTI.

“But now, it’s just about getting back into cricket after my operation, and a long layoff with my arm. So yeah, just taking the pressure off and just really enjoying playing some cricket again, and allowing my arm to get back to where it

needs to get to,” he said.

“It (SA return) is just the process at the moment. South Africa has come out and said that there will be some T20 contracts coming out in March. So, then it’s up to the players to perform and do well (in leagues and other international matches) to make sure that they are eligible for selection.”

In fact, Du Plessis has been one of the early-moving free-lance cricketers hopping across T20 leagues, and he opined that the governing bodies will have to find a way to make international cricket co-exist with franchise cricket.

Du Plessis cited the example



of New Zealand cricketers Trent Boult and Jimmy Neesham, who declined NZC Central Contracts recently to honour commitments to foreign leagues.

Even England Test captain Ben Stokes declined a three-

year contract with the ECB, settling for a one-year deal instead.

“I find that cricket has changed so much now, you have all these amazing cricketers playing around the circuit. Things that’s changed probably

over the last couple of years or so that there weren’t those T20 contracts (earlier).

“Now if you look at the world, there’s a lot more players doing it (moving over to T20s). You know guys like Boult and Neesham from New Zealand recently went that way. So, it’s good to see that the leagues are growing in terms of the pedigree that players are coming in. I think both are equally important for the game,” said Du Plessis.

However, Du Plessis said the cricket boards should find a middle-path. “So, it’s happening and more. I think it’s important that the countries

realise that (players opting for T20s), and make sure that you keep your players playing international cricket.

“The last thing you want is guys stopping playing international cricket when they’re 28-29 years old when they are supposed to be reaching their prime,” he said.

The 39-year-old is currently playing in the Abu Dhabi T10 for Samp Army, and he wants to sharpen his skills and fitness, leveraging on that experience to impress the South African establishment.

In that context, Du Plessis said playing in an all-out attacking format like T10

helped him regain touch with his own game.

“I was here probably about three years ago. As someone who had a template on how to play T20, I was surprised how different T10 was. The first time I was around, I didn’t understand how to play the format. So, there’s this huge emphasis placed on maximising the power play. And I find that quite tricky.

“But this time around, I got a better expectation around what it looks like in terms of playing those first two overs and now I am certainly a bit more open to attacking,” he added.