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RANCHI, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 6, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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BJP IN HUDDLE TO PICK CMS

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After securing a decisive mandate in the Hindi heartland States of Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, the BJP high command is currently in a huddle to name the Chief Ministers (CM). It has been three days since the results of the Assembly polls were declared on Sunday. Party sources said several rounds of meetings, involving top leaders, including BJP President JP Nadda, have taken place in the last two days to finalise the candidates for the key positions. The party, despite having prominent leaders like multiple-time incumbent Chief Ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan in MP, Vasundhara Raje Scindia in Rajasthan, and Raman Singh in Chhattisgarh in the electoral fray, did not go to the polls with a specific chief ministerial candidate. While there has been no word from senior party leaders on the likely chief ministerial picks, names will be decided keeping in mind the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Interestingly, party sources have revealed that all three winning States may have Deputy Chief Ministers, following the model the BJP has implemented in Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath. BJP sources said the central



leadership will soon be appointing observers to oversee meetings of newly elected MLAs of the party in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where they will elect their leaders. "Party will definitely keep in mind the major Lok Sabha elections within six months," party sources said. In Rajasthan, two-time Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Mahant Baba Balak

Nath, Rajsamand MP Diya Kumari, and Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat are the top four contenders for the top post in Rajasthan. Although Vasundhara remains the front runner, at least until the Lok Sabha polls. Vasundhara is trying to impress the Central leadership and holding meetings with her loyalists since Sunday when the result were declared. On the other

hand Shivraj Singh Chouhan in MP and Raman Singh in Chhattisgarh have maintained a low profile and have left the issue with Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. Sources from Vasundhara camp claimed that nearly 50 MLAs have met her at her residence since then. She has been the Chief Minister of Rajasthan twice from 2003 to 2008 and from 2013 to 2018.

While she was the chief ministerial face in earlier elections, the party decided to go to polls without projecting any leader for the post and Modi leading the campaign. BJP Sources said the party is not very keen on Vasundhara having a third tenure as the Chief Minister. The party's in-charge for Rajasthan, Arun Singh, said the decision of the party's

parliamentary board about the Chief Minister's post will be acceptable to all, even as newly elected MLAs continued to visit Baba Balak Nath. The Lok Sabha MP from Alwar is the head of the Baba Mastnath Math in Rohtak. He was the BJP's candidate for Assembly elections from the Tijara Assembly constituency. Known as 'Rajasthan ka Yogi' Balak Nath is the eighth 'mahant' (chief priest in a monastery) of Baba Mast Nath Math. Another name that can be considered for the top job in Rajasthan is that of Gayatri Devi's granddaughter and Rajsamand MP Diya Kumari. Previously, she was an MP from Sawai Madhopur. She is known for social work and was initially considered as an outsider in Sawai Madhopur. In Madhya Pradesh among the probable names for the CM post being tossed around are incumbent favourite Chouhan, Kailash Vijayvargiya and Jyotiraditya Scindia. In a video message on Tuesday, Chouhan said he had not been a contender for the CM's post in the past, nor was he one now. "As a party worker, I have always carried out whatever work the BJP assigned me to the best of my ability, with dedication and honesty," Chouhan said in a video statement posted on his social media account.

INDIA Bloc meet postponed after key leaders snub



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid reports of differences cropping up between various parties in the INDIA Bloc, the Opposition alliance has now decided to reschedule the meeting of party heads to the third week of December. Despite many leaders of the coalition already being in Delhi for the ensuing Winter Session of Parliament, the INDIA bloc meeting, announced by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on December 6 to strategise for the Lok Sabha 2024 polls, received a lukewarm response from several major stakeholder leaders, including West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav, and senior Janata Dal United (U) leaders.

According to sources in Congress, several key Opposition leaders will not be able to attend the meeting that was earlier scheduled on Wednesday in Delhi. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin will not be able to come to Delhi as several areas of the State have been badly hit by Cyclone Michaung. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar will not be able to make it to the national Capital owing to his illness. Similarly, West Bengal Mamata Banerjee would have given it a miss owing to a wedding in her family. While Mamata claimed that she would go ahead with her state programmes as she was not aware of the meeting call, Akhilesh said if the behaviour of the Congress had been different in one of the States where polls were conducted recently, it too would have seen a change.

BRIEFS

KARNI SENA CHIEF SHOT DEAD
Jaipur: Right-wing group Shri Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena's president Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi was shot dead in the living room of his house here on Tuesday by three armed men, one of whom was also killed in retaliatory firing, police said. One of Gogamedi's security guards sustained bullet injuries in the exchange of fire with the assailants, who had gone to his house in the Shyam Nagar area on the pretext of meeting him, they said. The incident was caught on CCTV. P2

MICHAUNG MAKES LANDFALL, CLAIMS 12 LIVES
Chennai/Amaravati/Bhubaneswar/Hyderabad: Severe cyclonic storm Michaung made landfall crossing south Andhra Pradesh coast between 12.30 pm and 2.30 pm on Tuesday leaving its maximum fury to be felt on Monday in Chennai and adjoining areas in neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Southern districts of Odisha and eastern Telangana continue to be on alert. At least 12 people lost their lives in various rain-related incidents in and around Chennai. P5

DELHI'S AIR QUALITY IMPROVES
New Delhi: Pollution levels in Delhi improved on Tuesday, and were recorded in the "poor" category, with minimum temperature settling at 11.2 degrees Celsius, weather department officials said. As per Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data, the 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 297, higher than 310 ("very poor" category) recorded a day earlier. The national Capital recorded a maximum temperature of 25.4 degrees Celsius.

Ram Temple event guest list ready

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As the eagerly awaited consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya approaches, the Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has revealed the meticulously prepared final guest list. A total of 7,000 guests, including revered saints and sages from across the country, have been invited to partake in the historic event. In a bid to ensure a seamless and harmonious celebration, the Trust has issued a special appeal to all attending saints and religious leaders not to bring traditional symbols such as dand, chhatra and paduka to the ceremony. The decision was formalised during a meeting where officials from the four provinces of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Vishwa Hindu Parishad gathered in Ayodhya. Before the meeting, the officials inspected the ongoing work at the Ram Jannabhoomi site, along with assessing the progress of the statue construction and the tent city being set up in Bagh Bijesi. Following these evaluations, a two-hour meeting took place at the Trust office in Ramkot, focusing on the comprehensive arrangements for accommodating, transporting and providing sustenance for the guests. The guest list was meticulously prepared to encompass a diverse



array of individuals, with particular emphasis on extending a warm welcome to approximately 2,500 sages and saints representing various traditions from around the country. Approximately 7,000 guests, including representatives from Kedarnath, Badrinath, Baba Vishwanath Dham and Vaishno Devi temple, have been invited to witness the historic event. While the participation of priests from major temples remains uncertain, representatives from these temples are expected to attend the consecration ceremony. Emphasising the principle of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (the guest is god), the Trust is keen on extending a grand reception to the esteemed guests. Dr Krishna Gopal, former co-

secretary of the RSS, held a meeting with the officials in Ayodhya, addressing various aspects of the consecration ceremony. This included discussions on accommodation, food, healthcare, sanitation and the tent city's provisions for the devotees. Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said 21 Vedic acharyas from Kashi would conduct the consecration of the Ram temple. The throne for Lord Ram Lalla, eight feet long and four feet wide, is ready, with the final touch of a gold layer pending. "The Trust is making meticulous preparations to enshrine Ram Lalla on this golden throne during the Pran Pratishtha ceremony," he said.

Adani Group Stocks surge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Group shares continued their upward movement on Tuesday after a report stated that US agency IDFC had found Hindenburg Research's allegations of fraud against billionaire Gautam Adani-led conglomerate were 'not relevant'. Some of the group firms hit their 52-week highs and locked in upper circuit levels, with the total valuation of group companies reaching near the ₹14 lakh crore mark at close. Adani Energy Solutions and Adani Green Energy zoomed 20 per cent each to close at ₹1,082.60 and ₹1,348 apiece, Adani Total Gas surged 19.95 per cent to settle at ₹878.20, and NDTV jumped 18.41 per cent to end at ₹266.55 per share on BSE. Flagship firm Adani Enterprises advanced 17.03 per cent to finish at ₹2,960.10, Adani Power climbed 15.91 per cent to close at ₹538.50, while Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) bounced 15.15 per cent to settle at ₹1,011.85. During the day, shares of Adani Power and APSEZ hit 52-week highs on the BSE.



Shares of Adani Wilmar rose 9.93 per cent to end at ₹380.70, ACC gained 8.20 per cent to close at ₹2,185, Ambuja Cements went up 7.22 per cent to settle at ₹508.70. Meanwhile, Sanghi Industries jumped 4.97 per cent to finish at ₹129.90 apiece on the exchange. The combined market valuation of all the 11 firms soared to ₹13.91 lakh crore at close on Tuesday. It stood at around ₹11.98 lakh crore at the close of trading on Monday. Thus, the combined market valuation of all the 11 firms, including Sanghi Industries went up by about

₹1.92 lakh crore on Tuesday. This was the first time that the group stocks hit the ₹14 lakh crore mark after facing a rout early this year following a report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research that alleged financial wrongdoing and stock manipulation by the conglomerate. However, the company denied all the allegations. Meanwhile, a report stated that the US International Development Finance Corp, or DFC, examined the allegations against the Adani Group before extending a loan for the Indian conglomerate's port project in Sri Lanka.

Panic subsides as leopard returns to natural habitat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The leopard, which spread panic in South Delhi's Sainik Farms and its adjoining areas for the last five days, seems to have returned to its natural habitat. According to the Delhi Government's forest department officials the leopard has not been seen since Saturday evening but the department's team remain stationed in the area. However, residents were advised to remain vigilant for a couple days more. The operation to capture it continued on Tuesday with the help of drone surveillance and at least 50 police personnel were deployed to monitor the situation. Several arterial roads in the area were blocked. Deputy Conservator of Forest (South Division) Mandeep Mittal said the Forest Department teams combed the area but did not find anything. "The leopard has not been seen since Saturday evening. We are expecting that it has gone



back but our team is still there," he said. The cage that was set up is also there," he said. Sushil Jain, a wildlife expert from Bail A Tail NGO, who led the search operation along with the forest department, wildlife and the Delhi Police for the last five days, told *The Pioneer* that search operation was on Tuesday evening. "A joint team of the force, Forest Department,

Western Avenue Resident Welfare Association (WARWA) and an NGO (Bail A Tail) conducted an hour-long search operation in the area in the afternoon but could not find the animal. There was no sighting of leopard for the past two days. That's why we decided to end operation," Jain said. After the search operation, the Residents Welfare Association of

Sainik Farms issued an advisory informing that the forest department officials have completed their search. "As per them the animal seems to have returned to its natural habitat. We can relax for now but still keep our eyes & ears open atleast for a couple of days more. We take this opportunity to thank our SHO Surinder Rana and his team and the forest officials for their support in this crisis. We on behalf of all residents thank our wonderful Member Sushil Jain for his relentless support," reads the advisory. "Last but not the least we salute our Quick Response Teams and our guards who have been on their toes all this time. Meanwhile lets try to keep the story alive so that the unwanted elements stay off our area," it said. "On Monday again, a thorough search operation was conducted in the area but the animal was not spotted. Exits were closed from three sides and only the one leading

towards the jungle was left open. It is likely that the leopard has gone back into the jungles of Aravallis but we are still on alert," the police official said. On Sunday, the Forest Department team conducted a search operation using drones but the leopard was not spotted anywhere, the official added. The Asola Wildlife Sanctuary shares boundaries with densely populated settlements like Sangam Vihar, Chattarpur, Sainik Farms and Fatehpur Beri and villages such as Mangar and Pali in Faridabad. In 2021, a leopard was caught on multiple cameras in southwest Delhi's Najafgarh, leading to cages being installed to catch the animal, but in vain. A similar exercise was also undertaken in 2016 to trap a leopard that had reached the Yamuna Biodiversity Park (YBP). The state forest and wildlife department eventually trapped the animal, which was then released in the Shivaliks.

Revanth is Telangana new Chief Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana Congress chief A Revanth Reddy will be the new Chief Minister of the State. Announcing the decision at the party headquarters in national Capital on Tuesday, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal said the swearing-in will take place on December 7 in Hyderabad. "After considering the report of observers and after discussion with senior leaders, the Congress president has decided to go with Revanth Reddy as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) in Telangana," he said. Revanth was the frontrunner for the top post in the State after the party staged a stupendous victory in Assembly elections by

winning 64 seats in Telangana, upstaging the BRS. Venugopal said the Congress Legislature Party in Telangana had unanimously decided to authorise the Congress president to take a decision to appoint the CLP leader in its meeting earlier. He said the party had appointed four observers, including Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, Deepa Dasgumshi, Ajay Kumar and K J George, besides AICC general secretary in-charge Manikrao Thakre. Shivakumar and Thakre were present as Venugopal announced the party high command's decision on Telangana. He did not answer queries on how many Ministers would be sworn in and whether there would be any Deputy Chief Ministers.

CM in Jamshedpur today, preparations all set



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In view of the arrival of the Chief Minister, Hemant Soren, the East Singhbhum district is abuzz with preparations for the two-day visit scheduled on December 6 and 7. The Chief Minister is slated to participate in the district-level program 'Aapki Yojana Aapki Sarkar Aapke Dwar' organised at the Savanadih Football Ground in Potka on December 7. In a proactive move, Deputy Commissioner, Manjunath Bhajantri, and Senior Superintendent of Police, Kishore Kaushal, conducted a thorough inspection

of the route, covering Sonari Airport, Circuit House, and Sidgora Town Hall. The officials provided crucial instructions to ensure the smooth functioning of security and law and order maintenance during the Chief Minister's visit. Following the route inspection, the senior officials examined the venue at Potka where the district-level program is set to unfold. Emphasis was placed on cleanliness, seating arrangements for dignitaries, provision of drinking water, toilet facilities, medical support, ambulance services, and necessary barricading. Bhajantri urged all departments to expedite their preparations by fostering mutual coordination. "Assets will be distributed among the beneficiaries during the program," stated Bhajantri. He was assigned the task of enhancing the traffic system in the district, ensuring all necessary arrangements from the airport to the circuit house. Officials at every level were instructed to review and guarantee the absence of any negligence in security and law and order maintenance.

Key officials including Deputy Development Commissioner, Rural SP, SDM Dhalbhum, ADM Law and Order, SOR, DCLR, SDM Ghatshila, DTO, DPRO (Public Relations), DSP Musabani, BDO, CO Potka, and others were present during the inspection. The anticipation is palpable as the district gears up to welcome Chief Minister, promising a successful and organised visit that reflects the dedication and collaborative efforts of the administrative and security personnel.

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DDC flags off Prachar Rath against practice of witchcraft

PNS : DALTONGANJ



DDC Ravi Anand and district social welfare officer Neeta Chouhan flagging off Prachar Rath against practice of witchcraft. Photo by PNS

A Prachar Rath was rolled down today in Daltonganj, flagged off by the DDC Ravi Anand for creating awareness about the ill effects of the Dayan Pratha and how to prevent and curb this practice in the society. The Prachar Rath, under the aegis of the social welfare department will cross the length and breadth of Palamu asking people especially women to shun any belief in dark blind faith as there is never anything like witchcraft. Palamu has recorded 47 cases of witchcraft this year. It has to be brought to zero and this can be possible only when people of all walks of life just begin to say no to witchcraft.

City police implements 'Daily Meeting System' to enhance efficiency

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a strategic move aimed at improving crime control, investigation processes, and the overall maintenance of law and order within the urban police station area, the Superintendent of Police, City, Mukesh Lunayat has instituted a comprehensive Daily Meeting system. This initiative seeks to establish clear roles and accountabilities for all police officers and personnel operating at the police station level. Under this systematic approach, the police station in-charge conducts daily meetings to meticulously deliberate officer-wise responsibilities, focusing on critical aspects such as the execution of pending warrants, attachments, and summons.

One of the primary objectives of these meetings is to expedite the arrest of fugitives and ensure the physical verification of chargesheeted criminals. Moreover, discussions centre on the completion of character and passport verifications that are pending within the police station. The implementation of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) entry is also emphasized to streamline information management and sharing.



Crucially, the Daily Meeting system addresses the research and execution of pending cases, providing a structured platform for officers to collaboratively devise strategies for case resolution. By dividing and assigning specific duties within the system, the initiative aims to enhance overall efficiency and effectiveness in crime control and investigation processes.

An inherent aspect of this approach is the fixation of accountability, ensuring that each officer is responsible for the successful execution of their assigned tasks. This not only fosters a sense of responsibility but also promotes a collaborative environment

where officers work cohesively towards the common goal of maintaining law and order.

"The Daily Meeting system is designed to bring about a positive shift in our approach towards crime prevention and resolution. It establishes a framework for officers to collaboratively address key challenges, ensuring accountability and efficiency in our daily operations," said a police official.

The daily meetings, spearheaded by the police station in-charge, serve as a platform for detailed discussions on officer-wise execution of pending warrants, attachment, and summons. The initiative aims to expedite the arrest of fugitives, as emphasized by the Superintendent.

Superintendent:

"By focusing on the daily activities and responsibilities of our officers, we aim to significantly reduce the time taken in executing pending warrants and apprehending fugitives. This proactive approach is essential for effective crime control," he said.

Meanwhile, City SP said: "We are placing a strong emphasis on the thorough verification of chargesheeted criminals and expediting character and passport verifications. Integrating our processes with CCTNS ensures seamless information flow, aiding in investigations and maintaining up-to-date records."

The innovative Daily Meeting system not only streamlines the research and execution of pending cases but also assigns specific duties to officers, fixing accountability for their execution. According to a senior police official: "This system represents a paradigm shift in how we approach our daily responsibilities. By dividing tasks and holding officers accountable, we aim to enhance overall efficiency and deliver prompt and quality services to the community we serve."

Dhanbad jailer, five jail staff suspended

PANKAJ : DHANBAD

Murder of sharp shooter Aman Singh in Dhanbad jail hospital appears to be a deep rooted conspiracy having links with Uttar Pradesh(UP). This came to fore after interrogation of main accused Sundar Mahto, who entered jail on fake identity and a simple case of suspected bick lifter actually happens to be Rohit Yadav of UP.

This indicated a deep rooted conspiracy as two pistols have been recovered in jail premises during a search operation initiated by district administration following the shoot out incident.

In another move the IG prisons has ordered suspension of jailer Mustakim Ansari and five other jail staff for their alleged dereliction of duty.Besides two ex army men on contract too have been removed with immediate effect.

It's worth mentioning that Aman Singh who also operated a criminal gang was shot at from very close range in jail premises three days ago.

Police have filed four different cases in this case and also have taken the main accused Sundar Mahto alias Rohit Yadav in police remand for interrogation.

DAV National Sports 2023 kicks off in Bokaro



PNS : BOKARO

In the current competitive world along with studies, participation in sports improves the physical and mental development of Students. In this episode DAV Public school lead by (Zone G) ARO Arun Kumar always aligned with new education policy emphasized over sports for all round development of students and made Sports an integral part along with studies in DAV institutions and in order to visualize same ideology in true sense Institution organizing a gala DAV National Sports 2023 event from December 6. While sharing information on the same DAV Sector 4 Principal

A.K Jha said that this event promises to be an exhilarating display of talent, Sportsmanship and teamwork. Notably in this Sport Event participants from various schools of DAV showcasing students skills in a range of sports and is all set to be a highlight of the academic year. It is noteworthy that recently organized two day badminton cluster level games concluded in DAV Sector 4. During this closing ceremony Chief Guest ARO Arun Kumar, also State coordinator said that It is important to play the game fairly and participating in the competition is the beginning of the step towards victory. Continuous practice, skillful leadership,

patience, courage and the ability to take quick decisions are developed in children through Sports considerably. Further Principal DAV Sector 4 A.K Jha said that under the clear guidelines of DAV CMC, children are performing their best in the field of education and are not lagging behind in showing their strength in the sports field also and best wishes to all the winners from DAV Sector 4 School. Notably during this Sport event about 140 players from thirteen schools displayed their talent by playing with sportsmanship in the courtyard of DAV Sector-4 school playing the role of Host School with complete ownership.

Villagers should take advantage of Govt schemes: DC

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

Aapki Yojna-Aapki Sarkar-Aapke Dwar program was organized on Tuesday in Jori Panchayat of Sadar block, Gudi Panchayat of Kairo block and Udarangi Panchayat of Bhandara block. Blankets were distributed among the beneficiaries by Deputy Commissioner Dr. Waghmare Prasad Krishna in a program organized at Jori Panchayat of Sadar Block. Earlier, the Deputy Commissioner inspected the stalls set up by the departments of Rural Development, Welfare, Social Welfare, Revenue, Circle Office, Education, Health Department, Supply, JSLPS, MGNREGA, Electricity etc. in the program. The DC called upon the common people to take advantage of the schemes. Here the district administration informed that a total of 27240 applications were received in Lohardaga district from November 24 to December 4. Out of which 5196 applications have been processed so far. Among the blocks, a total of 5638 applications have been received in Sadar block Lohardaga, 4859 in Senha block, 4738 in Kudu block, 3965 in Kisco block, 3903 in Bhandara block, 2880 in Kairo block, 992 in Peshawar block and 337 in Municipal Council. Out of which 5196 applications have been processed so far. Other applications have been forwarded for execution. Block Development Officer Pratibha Kujur, Circle Officer Ashutosh, local public representatives and a large number of villagers and beneficiaries were present in the programme.



CMPDI Regional Institutes' cultural meet begins

PNS : RANCHI

CMD, CMPDI Manoj Kumar, inaugurated the C M P D I, Regional Institutes Cultural Meet-2023 organised by RI-III, Ranchi from 05th-7th December, 2023 at Mayuri Hall, Ranchi. On this occasion, Rupali Gupta, President, Mahila Kasturi Sabha; Shankar Nagachari, D(T/CRD); Ajay Kumar, D(T/ P&D); Satish Jha, DI (T/ES); Achyut Ghatak, DI(TRD&T); Sumeet Kumar Sinha, C.V.O., CMPDI and other GM/HoDs and employees were present. On the inaugural day of Cultural Meet, Competition on Bhajans and Ravindra sangeet was organised.

All the Regional Institutes of CMPDI located at Asansol, Dhanbad, Ranchi, Nagpur, Bilaspur, Singrauli and Bhubaneswar along with CMPDI(HQ), Ranchi are participating in this cultural meet. The Programme begins with the Coal India Corporate song. Earlier, Jayant Chakraborty, RD, RI-III, Ranchi welcomed the distinguished guests.



Distribution of artificial limbs by CSR Dept of BSL



PNS : BOKARO

On the occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a Prosthesis Distribution Camp for Disabled Persons and Senior Citizens was organized by the CSR Department of BSL in

collaboration with Artificial Limbs Corporation of India (ALIMCO) at Ashalata Disability Development Centre, Bokaro as a CSR initiative on the occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. During this distribution camp, the chief

guests of the program were Suresh Rangani, Executive Director (Finance and Accounts), B.B. Karunamoy, Chief Medical Officer and Incharge (Medical and Health Services), Kundan Kumar, Chief General Manager (Town Administration), B.S. Jaiswal, Director (Ashalata Divyang Vikas Kendra) and Nitish Kumar, In-charge of Alimco were present.

It is noteworthy that during the distribution camp, various types of assistive devices were distributed to about 150 senior citizens and Divyangyan beneficiaries, who were identified by public representatives from peripheral villages of Bokaro Steel Plant and students of Asha Lata Viklang Vikas Kendra.

Bokaro police lays trap, arrest motorcycle thief

SURESH NIKHAR : BERMO

Sector VI Officer in-charge cum Inspector and Bokaro Steel City Officer in-charge Inspector Sanjay Kumar, by laying a trap, succeeded in catching a bike thief from Sector VI with a stolen bike. Incidents of motorcycle theft have been continuously increasing in Bokaro city for the last several days. Theft of two bikes from Sector 6 of the city had troubled the police recently. On the instructions of SP Priyadarshi Alok, City DySP Kuldeep Kumar formed a team. Under the supervision of DySP, Sector 6 SHO Inspector Anil Kachhap and Bokaro Steel City SHO Inspector Sanjay Kumar laid a trap on Monday and caught a bike thief Bhola Ram 24, from Sector 6 with a stolen bike (JH09U-7880). During his interrogation, the thief said that he had sold a stolen bike (JH09AA-5412) to Bharat Prasad in Mahuda in Dhanbad. The police immediately raided and arrested the buyer along with the stolen bike from Mahuda.

In a press conference at Sector VI police station on Tuesday, Inspector Anil and

Inspector Sanjay said that one has been arrested for stealing a bike and the other for buying a stolen bike.

The arrested youth has a criminal record and he is an accused in Sector 6 police station case number 39/2023, 40/2023. Both the arrested accused have been sent to jail on Tuesday. The raiding team included Inspector Anil Kachhap, Inspector Sanjay Kumar, Puni Bhim Ram, PNI Abhimanyu Prasad, PNI Dilip Kumar, constable Naresh Mandal, home guard Ranjit Kumar Singh and Santosh Singh.



It is noteworthy that the aim of Happy Street is to inspire people to lead a healthy lifestyle. For this event one lane in Happy Street from Bokaro Mall turn to Gandhi Chowk will be temporarily closed for vehicular traffic



on a few Sundays from 7 am to 9 am. In Happy Street, Bokaro residents will be able to benefit and enjoy various activities under the call of Active Bokaro, Healthy Bokaro with Real sense togetherness which somehow provides much needed platform to the peoples which nowadays are missing from our so called developed society. Notably the concept of Happy street, a unique initiative of BSL which received huge applause last year and hence this year too TA Chief Kundan Kumar also appealed to all institutions for their active involvement to make Happy Street 2023 memorable.

CM gifts schemes over Rs 433.09 Cr in Koderma district

‘Aim to make Jharkhand a strong and empowered State’

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren gave 194 schemes worth Rs 4 billion 33 crore 9 lakh 47 thousand 636 to the people of Koderma on Tuesday. In this, 175 schemes worth Rs 1 billion 23 crore 81 lakh 36 thousand 330 were inaugurated and the foundation of 19 schemes worth Rs 3 billion 9 crore 28 lakh 11 thousand 306 was laid. The Chief Minister distributed assets worth about Rs 10 crore 49 lakh 62 thousand 130 among 19 033 beneficiaries of various schemes to make them empowered and self-reliant.

Addressing a program organized under the third phase of “Aapki Yojana – Aapki Sarkar – Aapke Dwar” in Koderma on Tuesday the CM said, “Our policy and intention are one. Through the program “Aapki Yojana – Aapki Sarkar – Aapke Dwar” the government schemes and services are reaching the tribals, Dalits, backward classes, minorities, women, youth, farmers – labourers and the last person of the society. The government is committed to making every person a partner in the

development of the state by connecting them with schemes.”

The CM said that the camps being organized under the program “Aapki Yojana – Aapki Sarkar – Aapke Dwar” are revealing the reality of the problems and sufferings of the poor living in remote areas. On the basis of the applications received in the camps, you prioritized the problems of the people, prepared policies and action plans and worked to solve the problems of the people. The CM asked the people to come to these camps and make them empowered and self-reliant by joining the schemes of their need.

He said that it has been 23 years since Jharkhand was formed as a separate state. This state has entered adolescence. But, despite being rich with many resources during the last two decades, no seriousness was seen towards strengthening this state. Because of this the state continued to lag behind. Our government has set a target that by the year 2025, we will end the tag of backwardness associated with Jharkhand and draw a long



Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Labour Minister Satyanand Bhokta and Agriculture Minister Badal Patralekhi welcomed upon their arrival for the ‘Aapki Yojana Aapki Sarkar, Aapke Dwar’ programme in Koderma on Tuesday. PNS

line of development. Our government is working with full strength to make this state self-reliant.

The CM said that through the Phulo-Jhano Ashirwad Yojana, women selling liquor are being linked to a respectable livelihood. Earlier, the government used to give 10 thousand rupees to women as financial assistance for this, now the gov-

ernment has decided to increase it to 50 thousand rupees.

The CM said that Jharkhand will become strong only when our villages become strong. Keeping this in mind, our government is making plans to strengthen the rural economy. The all-round development of farmers, labourers and people living in our villages is the com-



Chief Minister Hemant Soren distributes assets among the beneficiaries in a programme organized during the third phase of “Aapki Yojana Aapki Sarkar Aapke Dwar” in Koderma on Tuesday. PNS

mitment of our government. Many schemes like Nilambar Pitamber Jal Samridhi Yojana, Birsra Harit Gram Yojana, Didi Bari Yojana and Mukhyamantri Pashudhan Yojana are being run keeping this in mind.

The CM said that our government has resolved to strengthen the coming generation. The government is taking appropriate steps to

improve the future of children and youth. Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana has been implemented to ensure that girls stay connected to studies. The government is providing help for everything from preparation for competitive exams to doing various courses. The work of providing financial assistance for education to students is being done

through Guruji Credit Card Scheme. Under the Marang Gomke Overseas Scholarship Scheme, 100 per cent scholarship is being given to the students for higher education abroad. At present 50 children from tribal, Dalit, backward and minority classes are getting this scholarship. But, the government will soon take a decision to increase the number of students under this scheme to 500.

The CM said that the government has made schemes for the educated as well as less educated and uneducated people. Today, recruitment is taking place on a large scale in the government sector as well as the private sector. At the same time, there is a Chief Minister Employment Generation Scheme for self-employed youth. The government has also made provision for additional funds for this scheme. In such a situation, youth wishing to start their own business will no longer face shortage of capital. The government will provide them capital.

The CM said that the till now dependence on DVC for power supply in some districts of the state is being eliminated. For this, the work

of building new sub-stations, grids, transmission and transmission lines is going on at a fast pace. With their commencement, the state government will be able to supply electricity on its own.

The CM said that the state government will now provide three-room houses to 8 lakh people on its own. For this, a provision of Rs 16 thousand crore has been made for the Abua Housing Scheme. At the same time, Mukhyamantri Gram Gaadi Yojana has been started to increase the connectivity of cities with remote villages. Under this scheme, elderly, disabled women and students will get the facility of free bus service. Every year about one crore people will be able to take advantage of this scheme.

On this occasion, Labour Minister Satyanand Bhokta, Agriculture Minister Badal, MLA Amit Kumar Yadav, District Council President Ramdhan Yadav, Twenty Point Vice President Lilavati Devi, Secretary to the Chief Minister Vinay Kumar Choubey and the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police of the district and others. Officials were present.

Congress leaders demand reorganisation of JPCC

Seek leadership posts for locals of the State



Leaders of Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee, Alok Kumar Dubey, Lal Kishore Nath Shahdeo, Dr. Rajesh Gupta Chhotu and Firoz Rizvi Munna during a press conference in Ranchi on Tuesday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

Leaders of Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee, Alok Kumar Dubey, Lal Kishore Nath Shahdeo, Dr. Rajesh Gupta Chhotu and Firoz Rizvi Munna have said in a press conference on Tuesday that for the last 5 years, the command of the organization is in the hands of Rajesh Thakur, President of the State Congress

Committee. He is leading the party in the government along with 17 MLAs, is a respected member of the coordination committee, has the status of a minister and is provided with all the facilities of a minister, then who will stop Rajesh Thakur from honouring the Congress workers? And whose responsibility is it to give respect to the workers?

Alok Dubey said that if the ministers are not working

then whose responsibility is it to take the work from them. If the ministers are not effective then there should be a review, action should be taken, and not the ministers should be publicly humiliated. The state president is engaged in his personal agenda and transfer posting of his relatives and co-workers. The organization is not visible anywhere in the government's ambitious program 'Aapki Yojana, Aapki Sarkar, Aapke Dwar' whereas the RJD whose organization is not very active in the entire state, is also present everywhere. Even BJP and AJSU supremo are joining different programmes. The State President should answer, what is Congress' participation in the 'your government, at the door' program.

Congress leader Lal Kishore Nath Shahdeo said that the organization has been divided into sections, no one in the organization gives importance to Rajesh Thakur, because of in-charge Avinash

Pandey, people participate in the program but the dignity of the organization is not there. It is completely in dust, the direct proof of which is the results of the Ramgarh by-election. If the condition of the organization in Jharkhand continues to be the same, then like Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the ministers of Jharkhand may also have to face problems in the assembly elections. If a working president is saying that the organization exists on paper and the Congress is limited to the office, then it is very unfortunate that the reins of the organization are in his hands, while if the organization is saying that it exists on paper. It is a request to the High Command That the state president should be removed as soon as possible, otherwise not only will the party have to face huge losses in the Lok Sabha, but the alliance will also have to bear the brunt of it. Senior leaders and MLAs of Jharkhand Congress will travel

to Delhi in the month of December and will meet the party leadership in the organization. I will demand a new president. Dr. Rajesh Gupta said that Rajesh Thakur is insulting the OBC community. The people of the state are seeing the neglect of the OBC community in the organization or in the board corporation. Rahul Gandhi has said that the share should be as much as the one who participates. We are hardworking people and all three of us have been beaten and jailed for the party. Our family is the family of the freedom movement. We are talking about removing the immature president appointed by RPN Singh.

Those people who have been made officers in the Board Corporation and are also getting all the facilities from the government, such hardworking comrades should be deployed in strengthening the party organization in villages, blocks and panchayats.

Marandi's bike rally aims to connect Santhal Pargana



State BJP President Babul Marandi during ‘Adiwasi Adhikar’ rally in Maheshpur of Pakur district on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

PNS : RANCHI

BJP state president Babul Marandi on Tuesday said that his party will get success in all three Lok Sabha seats of Santhal Pargana. Marandi, while participating in the motorcycle tribal rights rally organized by the party from Dumka to Littipara on Tuesday, addressed the rallies. Marandi said that BJP will win all the Lok Sabha and Assembly seats of Santhal Pargana. BJP has a strong support base among the Santhal people. Even today, two out of three Lok Sabha

Sinha raises poor law and order issue

PNS : RANCHI

Bharatiya Janata Party state spokesperson Pradeep Sinha has raised questions regarding the security arrangements of the state's jails. Questioning the JMM-led coalition government, he said that there is an atmosphere of insecurity in the entire state. The lax attitude of the government has failed to rein in the criminals. The incidents of Ranchi and Dhanbad jail are enough to show that with the connivance of jail

officials, undue facilities are also provided to influential prisoners. Lethal weapons are also delivered inside the jail premises. Despite being confined inside the jail, criminals fearlessly use mobile phones to threaten businessmen and common people and extort money. Despite having solid information about this, common people and businessmen are having to bear the brunt of the government's indifference in installing jammers in the districts of the state.

seats are with the BJP, while the BJP has won the Rajmahal seat several times. Earlier, hundreds of tribal youth also participated in the motorcycle rights rally. Marandi was welcomed by showering flowers at many places. Addressing the rally, Babul Marandi said that the law and order system of Jharkhand has collapsed in the Hemant government. No one is safe in the state with Hemant Soren as the Chief Minister. There is looting of water, forests and land in the state. There is rampant corruption in the state. Police are

busy in recovery. Brokers, middlemen and criminals are fearless. He said that the BJP government under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee gave a separate state. BJP has also developed the state and will do so in future also. The central government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is determined to connect the tribal society with the mainstream of development. The BJP government at the centre created separate tribal ministries. Today, 8 Union ministers in the Modi cabinet are from tribal communities.

Ranchi MP raises Swarnrekha River pollution issue in Parliament

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi MP Sanjay Seth raised the issue of pollution of Swarnrekha River and its cleaning in the Lok Sabha during Zero Hour on Tuesday. The MP said that the river Swarnrekha originates from a place called Nagdi in my Lok Sabha constituency. Which passes through Ranchi city and falls directly into the Bay of Bengal via Jamshepur. This 474 kilometer long river is also called the lifeline of

Jharkhand. Seth said that this river has cultural and religious importance in the ancient culture of Jharkhand. At a place called Chutiya in Ranchi, Swarnrekha river joins a tributary river, Harmu. At this confluence, there are 21 Shivalingas of the Nagvanshi period, about 500 years old, carved in the rocks of the river. This cultural relic tells the story of a vibrant and wealthy culture in Chutiya, which was once the capital of Nagvanshi kings.

BAU scientist publishes first book on analysis of properties of millets crops on the basis of Ayurveda



tem. The authors said that coarse grains have been the main food grains of our ancient lifestyle. In the context of the International Year of Millets 2023, the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India and the Office of the United Nations have also been informed about the publication of this book. This will help in wide spread of Indian knowledge tradition and use of millets. Vice Chancellor of AYUSH University, Gorakhpur, Prof. Dr. Awadhesh Kumar Singh has said in the preface of this book that this presentation will lead to widespread adoption of millets (coarse grains) at the global level. He appreciated the hard work and dedication of the authors for millets based research and scientific analysis of Ayurvedic context. It may be noted that local BAU scientist Dr. Kaushal Kumar has earlier brought glory to BAU in the country by increasing the prestige of the state and the country through the patent of Aloe Vera Village and Giloy area as well as medicinal products. Dr. Kaushal Kumar said that in this book the prehistoric importance and place of millets crops in Indian culture and nine millets crops mainly used in India have been discussed. In these, the medicinal importance and usage methods of Sawra, Kodo, Govedhuk, Kanguni, Chinak, Jurna, Madhulika (Ragi), Bajra and Nevad have been explained.

PNS : RANCHI

BAU forestry scientist Dr. Kaushal Kumar, who is moving towards giving Jharkhand state a special identity in the medicinal field, has taken the first initiative at the global level by publishing a book based on the analysis and scientific revival and verification of the Ayurvedic properties of millets crops. Due to his efforts, a book titled Millets: Scientific Revival of Ancient Indian Wisdom has been published. This is the first book in the world to discuss the detailed Ayurvedic properties and principles of Millets on the basis of scientific parameters. The book has been jointly written by Dr. Gyan Chand Maurya, Medical Officer, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Harishankar Mishra, Assistant Professor, Government Post Graduate Ayurveda College, Pilibhit and Dr. Kaushal Kumar, Head of the Department of Forest Products and Utilization, Birsra Agricultural University. In this book, all the health aspects experienced in the use of millets have been shown in the knowledge and science of ancient Ayurvedic medical sys-

Workshop held on technical accessibility for disabled people

Training given to DIOs and DPROs of all districts

PNS : RANCHI

A one-day workshop on technical accessibility was organized under the auspices of the Chief Electoral Office on Tuesday. In the workshop, the technical officers of the headquarters including District Informatics Officer and District Public Relations Officer of all the districts were trained on how to modify election related websites, web pages and social media platforms so that voters with all types of disabilities, including

the visually impaired, can be accommodated. There should be digital access to the Election Commission.

In the workshop, accessibility experts from Mumbai XRCVC and Delhi trained the officers from all the districts in two separate sessions.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the training, Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar said that as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, in Jharkhand too, apart from the physical accessibility of all

the voters like ramps, wheelchairs, home voting etc., their digital accessibility like voters suffering from all types of disabilities should be ensured through the Commission's website, Commission's mobile app and social media. Efforts are being made to ensure easy access to media handles. This workshop is a part of those efforts. He said that all the officers should make honest efforts to make the websites of the state headquarters as well as all the districts friendly for the disabled.

HC strict on gangster murder inside Dhanbad jail

Seeks status report of three-member probe committee

PNS : RANCHI

The hearing of the case of shooting of notorious shooter Aman Singh in Dhanbad Divisional Jail was held in the Jharkhand High Court on Tuesday. IG (Prisons) Umashankar Singh appeared before the court virtually and answered the questions of the court. During the hearing, he informed the court that the security lapses in the jail are being investigated by ADM Law and Order, Additional Collector and City SP Dhanbad.

A three-member committee is investigating the security lapses at jail premises. Apart from this, CID IG is also investigating the case. Meanwhile, the High court is strict in the gangster Aman Singh murder case, and has sought a report of a three-member committee sought from the government, opinion also sought regarding SIT investigation.

During the hearing, the High Court was informed that in the investigation now conducted, two pistols and 6 mobile phones have been recovered from the jail. The shooter has been identified. Four FIRs have been lodged in the matter. The main accused Sundar Mahato



has been taken on remand. Seven classroom teachers including the jailer of Dhanbad have been suspended regarding the incident. 23 prisoners will be shifted to another jail in the state. Apart from this, the jailer has been suspended. The Court asked the Advocate General, how serious is the government about the SIT investigation? The court asked Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan whether in view of the larger conspiracy and political angle in this case, the state government can consider forming SIT at the headquarters level or not in the next hearing. The court

has asked to present the report of the three-member investigation committee in the case in the court.

The court has scheduled the next hearing of the case for December 12. The case was heard in hybrid mode in a division bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjay Kumar Mishra. During the hearing, Advocate General Rajiv Ranjan and Advocate Piyush Chitresh presented the side on behalf of the government. Let us tell you that Aman Singh was shot dead inside Dhanbad jail on Sunday. After this, the court took cognizance of the matter on Monday and summoned IG Prison. Notorious shooter Aman Singh was in jail for a long time in the murder case of former Deputy Mayor of Dhanbad and Congress leader Neeraj Singh.

The incident unfolded at 3 O'clock on Sunday afternoon when Aman Singh, a key figure in the Neeraj Singh murder case, fell victim to a fatal shooting.

Singh, one of the accused in Dhanbad deputy mayor murder case, was reportedly shot during lunch time following a dispute among inmates. Singh was arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of Uttar Pradesh near Mirzapur jail in May 2021.

IWCS continues social work



Under the leadership of Inner Wheel Club Swarnrekha Ranchi President Mala Srivastava and Secretary Soma Bhaduri, the club members on Monday distributed jaggery and grams at Ranchi Gaushala Kishoreganj. There about 400 cows have grown old and are being served. They also distributed food to all the children in the Blind School of Ranchi. This was done by Inner Wheel Club Swarnrekha Ranchi under Annapurna Project. Some members of the club along with its President Mala Srivastava and Secretary Soma Bhaduri helped in making the project a success.

experientia learing trip at SBPS

To help the students learn beyond the textbooks and also to impart practical knowledge, an experiential learning trip was organized for the students of Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi to Ranchi Aquarium & Butterfly Park, Ormanjhi and Birsra Munda Biological Park, Ormanjhi, Ranchi. Children got exposure to the amazing world of animals, birds and marine life. Students of Std. III and V saw a variety of animals and were fascinated by the beauty of nature. Students of Std. IV got an opportunity to see a variety of aquatic creatures at the Ranchi Aquarium and Butterfly Park. The children noted the information gathered for preparing a project on the same. The students danced in excitement to the thumping music beats and played various games. It was an enriching learning experience for the students.



Modi takes a swipe at critics after poll win

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a swipe at critics, saying they may remain happy with their arrogance, lies, pessimism and ignorance but people should be beware of their divisive agenda as an old habit of 70 years cannot go away so easily. He was reacting to a social media post captioned “Meltdown-e-Azam” (great meltdown) of a news clip that cited “excuses” and alleged attempts by an “ecosystem” to stoke regional divide and insult voters in Hindi speaking states after the BJP swept to power in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, brushing aside the challenge from the Congress. Congress drew some consolation by winning the assembly poll in Telangana. “May they be happy with their arrogance, lies, pessimism and ignorance. But... Beware of their divisive agenda. An old habit of 70 years can't go away so easily. Also, such is the wis-



May they be happy with their arrogance, lies, pessimism and ignorance. But...
⚠️⚠️⚠️ Beware of their divisive agenda. An old habit of 70 years can't go away so easily. ⚠️⚠️⚠️
Also, such is the wisdom of the people that they have to be prepared for many more meltdowns ahead. 😊😊😊😊😊

dom of the people that they have to be prepared for many more meltdowns ahead,” the PM posted. His reply and the expression of unusual social media aggression in reaction to a post was also punctuated by several emojis, also not very common with his remarks on X. BJP leaders said the prime minister's post reflects the party turning up the heat in its social media outreach in the recent months. “This post of the prime minister is not out of character. It is

aggressive and taking the opposition ecosystem head on,” a leader said. He added this has been the case with the BJP's content on social media in general too for the last few months now. “Its campaign and reels have seen aggressive in tone and tenor.” Many Instagram reels have generated 1.5 million views and more, he added. Commenting on Modi's post, a leader likened it to “a technically sound batsman resorting to a slog sweep to hit the ball for a six”.

Opposition looking for excuses to hide shortcomings: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday hit back after Congress's Rajya Sabha member Digvijaya Singh and some other Opposition leaders questioned the reliability of electronic voting machine (EVM) and said the Opposition was looking for excuses to hide their shortcomings. Digvijaya raised the issue of reliability of EVMs on Tuesday following his party's defeat in the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh Assembly polls. The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister claimed that any machine with a chip can be hacked and said he has opposed voting by EVMs since 2003. As the BJP emerged victorious in three Hindi heartland states -- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh -- in the recent round of Assembly polls, several opposition leaders raised questions over electronic voting machines, even as some said they had faith in the EVMs. Union Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh slammed the opposition and



said they blame EVMs whenever they fail to win elections. “There is nothing new. The opposition, whoever it may be, when they win, they are fine with the EVMs, but when they lose, they blame it on the EVMs,” he said. Another BJP leader, S P Singh Baghel, said, “With these EVMs, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won elections in Delhi thrice and in Punjab once, the Samajwadi Party (SP) got an absolute majority (in Uttar Pradesh) in 2012, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) got an absolute majority (in Uttar Pradesh) in 2007 and the Congress won Telangana.” He used an idiom -- “Naach na jane angan tedha (a bad workman blames his tools)” -

- to explain the situation. Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) MP Chirag Paswan said the opposition is being repetitive. “There is nothing new, but if you are raising questions in three states, also question the Telangana victory. This is a done-to-death formula. It is repetitive. Why do you go for campaigning if you think the EVMs are manipulated? You do selective criticism in states where you have lost elections. You need to accept and understand your loss,” he said. Senior BJP leader Rajiv Pratap Rudy said EVMs have been around for a long time. “EVMs have been there for the last 18-19 years. They (opposition) do not raise

these questions when they win elections. Do they not trust people? I think after repeated defeats, it is ridiculous that the opposition still raises this,” he said. Actor and BJP MP Ravi Kishan said, “It was known that they would blame the EVMs. Their brains have stopped working. Their corruption and appeasement have been rejected by people, so they are saying such immature things,” he said. “The country has rejected the opposition. In the future, the BJP will win every election,” he asserted. Actor-turned-politician Dinesh Lal Yadav Nirahua said, “The opposition will keep crying over EVMs and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi will come back with 400 (Lok Sabha) seats next year.” Several opposition leaders said the doubts over the EVMs have been growing. Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Saugata Roy said there are concerns that should be addressed. “Our party has not taken a decision on this but there are, obviously, questions. Many opposition parties have raised the question that EVMs can be manipulated by telephone.

Also, an Israeli technology has come into question in this matter. The government has taken a pro-Israel stand in the recent conflict (between Israel and Hamas). This needs to be looked into thoroughly,” Roy said. “The results in several states were very surprising and led to the doubt about EVM functioning,” he added. BSP MP Danish Ali said he has always been against EVMs. “Questions on EVMs are being raised for long. It was questioned by the BJP's Lal Krishna Advani. BJP's Rajya Sabha MP G V L Narasimha Rao has written a book on it,” he said. “Even when I was elected as an MP, I had said I will continue protesting against EVMs. Winning or losing is another issue, but even developed countries have stopped using EVMs. People do not have faith. Why not use ballot paper?” he asked. Communist Party of India (CPI) MP Binoy Viswam said it is a serious matter to ponder over. “The confidence over EVMs is diminishing. More and more people are believing that EVMs are doing mischief in elections,” he said.

DMK MP calls Hindi heartland gaumutra States Senthilkumar apologises after his remark draws flak

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

DMK MP Dr S. Senthilkumar sparked a controversy on Tuesday in Lok Sabha by describing Hindi heartland States as “gaumutra States”, and said the BJP can win elections only there and not in South India. The comments few months after a DMK's ‘Sanatan Dharma’ row create ripples on social media however the major alliance partner Congress immediately said the party did not relate with the politics of DMK. Participating in a debate in the Lower House on two bills related to Jammu and Kashmir, Senthilkumar said people of this country should think that the power of the BJP is only winning elections “in the heartland states of Hindi and what we generally called as gaumutra states”.



Later in the evening, Speaker OM Birla ordered to expunct the word – gaumutra – from the records. “You (BJP) cannot come to South India. You see all the results of what happens in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka ... We are very strong over there,” said Senthilkumar, amid protests from BJP MPs. Senthilkumar is representing Dharmapuri constituency in Lok Sabha and a doctor by profession, specializing in

radiology. He went on to say, “We will not be surprised if you have an option of converting all these States into Union territories so that you can come into indirect power because you can never dream of setting foot over there and taking control of all the southern states.” BJP leaders hit back at the DMK and asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi if he agreed with the insulting remarks of its INDIA bloc partner against the north Indians. The comments come in the backdrop of some referring to the recent assembly election results as a ‘North-South divide’ after the BJP trounced the Congress in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the Congress won in Telangana. “Congress belives in Sanatan Dharma and Gau Mata, we don't agree with DMK's state-

ments,” said Congress General Secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Rajiv Shukla. During the elections, the row over some DMK leaders' remarks against Sanatan Dharma had been latched on by the BJP to target the Congress. Earlier this year, Congress had wrested Karnataka from the BJP, while other southern states are ruled by non-BJP parties including Tamil Nadu where Congress ally DMK is in power. In Tamil Nadu, state BJP chief K Annamalai condemned the “insensitive” remarks of the MP, saying the level of the party's discourse is “sinking” like Chennai and the “arrogance” of DMK will be the prime reason for its downfall. “After calling our North Indian friends Pani Puri sellers, toilet constructors, etc., I.N.D.I. Alliance DMK MP, makes Gaumutra Jibes,” he

said on X. “Chennai is sinking due to the misgovernance of DMK & and so is their level of discourse on the floor of the Parliament,” Annamalai said, referring to the flood-like situation in the state capital. The BJP “highly condemns this insensitive remark,” he said. Annamalai said the DMK MP has possibly forgotten that the NDA Alliance is in power in Puducherry and was in power in Karnataka until recently. “The arrogance of DMK will be the prime reason for their downfall!” he posted. Later in the evening, Senthilkumar apologised on his controversial remark. “Commenting on the results of the five recent state assembly elections, I have used a word in an inappropriate way. Not using that term with any intent, I apologize for sending the wrong meaning across,” he posted in X

Book Ministers making hate speeches against Sanatan Dharma: BJP MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP Rajya Sabha member BGVL Narasimha Rao on Tuesday charged some Tamil Nadu Ministers with making “hate” speeches against Sanatan Dharma and Hindu religion and asked the State Government to register a case against them. The Constitution allows every religion, every member and every sect to practice their faith and even propagate it, he said, and demanded the sacking of the state ministers for their objectionable remarks. Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in the Upper House, Rao said that a minister in the Tamil Nadu government indulged in hate speech against Sanatan Dharma and the Hindu religion. “I quote what he said, ‘Sanatan Dharma is like malaria, and dengue, and so it must be



eradicated and not opposed,” the BJP member said without naming anyone. Another minister in the same state government has mentioned that the purpose of the formation of the INDIA alliance is “the eradication of Sanatana Dharma”, the BJP member alleged, and wondered whether they wanted to pursue “this kind of anti-India agenda”. Rao claimed that another minister in the Karnataka government, who is the son of the Congress President and Leader of the Opposition in Rajya

Sabha, had supported those comments. “This is the agenda of the INDIA alliance,” he said, adding that such statements constitute “hate speech”. According to the BJP MP, these statements are deliberate and malafide acts intended to outrage religious sentiments, and there was also an attempt to create public mischief. “Therefore I call upon the state government, Tamil Nadu, to on its own, register FIR against the same ministers who spoke against Sanatana Dharma and also dismiss these ministers from the state government because what they have, what they have publicly stated, is the violation of the oath they have taken under the Constitution,” he said. He said it was a matter of regret that there are ministers in the state government who are campaigning against Sanatan Dharma and calling for its eradication.

‘₹15,000 crore seized by ED going back to public sector banks’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday informed the Rajya Sabha the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has confiscated assets worth Rs 15,186.64 crore under the stringent prevention of money laundering law and almost all of these have been restituted to public sector banks. Replying to supplementary questions in the House, she said specific actions through various legal provisions are being taken against defaulters and as a result, “huge monies” are going back to the banks. Sitharaman informed the House that as of March 31, 2023, legal suits were filed for recovery against 13,978 loan accounts, action under the SARFAESI Act has been initiated in 11,483 cases, FIRs have been filed in 5,674 cases, and an aggregate amount of Rs 33,801 crore has been recovered. “As of December 1, 2023, assets amounting to Rs 15,186.64 crores under the PMLA have been confiscated by the ED out of which Rs 15,183.77 crores have been restituted to the Public Sector Banks,” she said. Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar asked the minister to explain the meaning “phone banking” which was mentioned in reply to a supplementary question. Explaining the meaning of the phrase, Sitharaman said ‘Phone Banking’ was the method through which “political interference (during UPA rule of 2004-2014) spoilt all our banks and drove them to a loss-making situation”. “‘Phone Banking’ was at that time when people would call the banks and say ‘so and so will come to seek a loan from your bank, please grant it’, meaning that there's no need to look at their eligibility, etc & that the loan must be granted,”



the minister said. She further said the heart of the problem was during the 10 years of UPA rule between 2004 and 2014 when calls were made to grant loans to people who were not worthy of getting a loan. “The burden fell on us to sort the Indian banks out with reforms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sat with all of us, including my predecessor Arun Jaitley (former finance minister). We spent a lot of time understanding where the problem was and worked together with the RBI,” Sitharaman said. It must be looked at what contributed to the NPAs and made Indian banks actually have a twin balance-sheet problem which brought down the Indian economy to the ‘Fragile Five’, she added. Due to the measures taken by the Modi government, the minister said the Indian economy is the world's fastest-growing economy, registering a 7.6 per cent GDP growth rate in the last quarter. Sitharaman also informed the House the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank (now merged with Unity Small Finance Bank) has recovered Rs 104.02 crore with active cooperation and support from agencies. Assets amounting to Rs 692.89 crores have been confiscated under the provisions of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, she said. The finance ministry also

informed the House that over the last two financial years, the number of non-performing asset (NPA) accounts in the commercial banks has declined from 2.19 crore to 2.06 crore, showing a decrease of 6.2 per cent. Similarly, aggregate outstanding of such accounts (gross NPAs) has declined from Rs 7.41 lakh crore to 5.72 lakh crore during the same period, showing a decline of 22.9 per cent. Further, slippage ratio (fresh slippages of NPAs during the financial year as percentage of standard loans and advances at the beginning of the financial year) of banks has declined from 2.74 per cent (fresh slippages of Rs 2.86 lakh crore) in the financial year 2021-22 to 1.78 per cent (fresh slippages of Rs 2.13 lakh crore) in the financial year 2022-23. Net NPA ratio, Sitharaman said, has come down to 0.95 per cent in 2022-23 for all commercial banks from 5.94 per cent in 2017-18. In the case of state-owned banks, the net NPA has declined to 1.24 per cent from 5.94 per cent in 2017-18. Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad said banks have written off Rs 10.57 lakh crore during the last five financial years, of which Rs 5.52 lakh crore was in respect of loans pertaining to large industries, the government informed the Rajya Sabha. “As per RBI data, scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) have written off an aggregate loan amount of Rs 10.57 lakh crore during the last five financial years,” Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad said in reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha. The scheduled commercial banks have also recovered Rs 7.15 lakh crore of non-performing assets (NPAs) during the five-year period.

Tamil Nadu seeks ₹5,000 crore aid for flood ravaged Chennai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday saw an appeal for an interim central assistance of Rs 5,000 crores to provide relief to people of Tamil Nadu affected by heavy rains. Other issues like missing women, suicide by youth in coaching institutes and sale of millets through public distribution system also figured in the house. Seeking an interim assistance of Rs 5,000 crore for Tamil Nadu to rebuild infrastructure damaged by incessant rains in Chennai and some other districts, DMK leader T Siva said heavy rains due to severe Cyclone Michaung have submerged Chennai and other districts. At least nine people, including a child, were killed in the flooding and the havoc caused hours before the cyclone was due to make landfall. Cars were swept and airport operations shut down as the streets of Chennai got inundated.



“Roads have become rivers because of non-stop running waters and rivers have become like seas... All the water bodies are overflowing. Many tanks have been breached,” he said. Informing the Rajya Sabha that roads have been badly damaged due to the fury of nature, Siva said essential supplies have been hampered. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M

K Stalin and the entire Cabinet, municipal corporation officials, fire department, sanitation workers, doctors, rescue teams and electricity department have been working on a war footing to rescue people and provide relief material. As a precautionary measure, electricity supply was suspended, Siva said. He said while the state gov-

ernment is doing everything in its means, the damage to infrastructure is so huge that it cannot be repaired at the earliest. “The state government has requested an interim relief of Rs 5,000 crore.” “I urge the Union government (that) considering the condition of Tamil Nadu and five districts, kindly release Rs 5,000 crore as initial interim relief

which would help the State government in their efforts to safeguard the people of Tamil Nadu,” he said. Drawing the attention of the Upper House to missing women, Fausia Khan(NCP)said it was matter of grave concern. She called for a sustained awareness campaign to address the issue and likely reason for it was trafficking by organized groups. Sushil Kumar Modi(BJP)drew the attention of the Elders to suicides in institutes of higher learning and said 26 such incidents were reported from Kota this year. He called for appointment of counselors to interact with students facing pressure and sought review of syllabus of institutes of higher learning. Highlighting the benefits of millets as these crops required little water for cultivation, Ajay Pratap Singh(BJP)favoured sale of millets through public distribution system as it will benefit farmers.

India to provide \$250 million to Kenya to modernise agriculture, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced India's decision to provide USD 250 million to Kenya for modernisation of its agriculture sector following his wide-ranging talks with visiting Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto. He arrived here on Monday on a three-day visit with an aim to expand overall ties between the two countries. In its foreign policy, India has always given high priority to Africa and has expanded its overall ties with the continent on a mission mode in the last nearly one decade, Modi said



in his media statement after the talks. “I am confident that President Ruto's visit to India will not only strengthen bilateral ties but will give a new momentum to our engagement with Africa,” he added. The prime minister said India will pro-

vide USD 250 million as Line of Credit to Kenya for modernisation of its agriculture sector. Referring to the Indo-Pacific, Modi said closer cooperation between India and Kenya in the region will advance common efforts.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit during a meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday

Echoes of distress persist in Chennai amid deluge aftermath

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Submerged in water, with no access to power and transport, it was various social media platforms that came to people's aid in the rain hit city since Monday. Cries of help were forwarded through the night, as Chennaiites, who waded through a similar nightmare in 2015, reconnected online again and formed citizen rescue groups to deal with emergencies. Some, like the 22-year-old Harsha Vardhan, a student from Triplicane, were caught without even a morsel of food. With rain water almost rising to chest level, Vardhan said he did not dare to go out and was forced to ask people through X for some food.

At least 12 people lost their lives in various rain-related incidents in and around Chennai even as personnel on fishing boats and farm tractors were engaged in rescuing stranded people in the city on Tuesday. "Thankfully, someone got me some biscuits and water imme-

diately. In the night, my father's friend got me dinner, said Vardhan, who recently moved to Chennai to pursue international English language test coaching. Another immigrant, a 26-year-old from Kumbakonam district, Shakthiguru Radhakrishnan, who works as a driver, found himself in a predicament when water entered his employer's car that he had parked in a corner near Perambur to wait out the storm. He too took to X, asking help from officials. But unfortunately for him, none came his way. Finally, he said, he forced himself to get out of the car in the pouring rain and push it. Seeing him struggle, some people helped him push it to a place from where it cannot float off in the water.

"The real problem for me was getting back home in Thoraipakkam. "Nothing worked in that area, so I had to walk till Egmore, take a metro to Airport and then again walk to Thoraipakkam. I started around 4pm and reached

home almost at midnight," said Radhakrishnan. People gingerly making their way through water filled roads became the norm last night. Some decided to risk their lives and venture out in the pouring rain, leaving a relatively safe area, just so they could ensure that their loved ones were safe. Like Aamir Khan in Mandaveli, who had to be rescued by the fire service finally. "I rushed to my parents' house in Mandaveli. I helped them move things from the ground floor, as there was around half-a-feet of water inside our house. Power was switched on at around 1 pm on Monday itself, but we were completely marooned. My parents are senior citizens. We have three pets as well. We were waiting at the first floor of our house, when we were finally rescued today," said Khan. The intensity of the flooding could be gauged from the fact that it was almost impossible to see the ground or road in most parts of Chennai.



But for the raised road median and some young men walking over it, the road towards Velachery from Madipakkam Bazaar Road in south Chennai, for instance, could have been easily mistaken for a swollen river, as boats criss-crossed the locality to evacuate affected people. The many residential neigh-

borhoods on either side of the road such as Ram Nagar were completely flooded. The access to a prominent hospital in the same area is cut off and youths of the locality stood guard at the road's entrance, near a brimming lake, to caution people from outside about the heavy inundation. Some men equipped with huge

wooden logs could be seen helping people leave their houses and in buying essential commodities. Several men could be seen carrying water cans over their shoulders and wading through water that reached the chest in some residential colonies, some of which are posh. Vehicles parked in the parking lot in several apartment

complexes were under water. Authorities deployed boats to evacuate people and some managed to leave the place on their own. Several people like Kumaran said they are used to flood situations such as this. Even with water gushing onto the road from storm water drains and, in some places even from sewers, people dared to venture out, looking to buy essentials. A couple of restaurants and bakeries that opened by afternoon did brisk business. Suresh, a businessman from Ramalinga Nagar Main Road, who was spotted wading through water later in the day, said he didn't anticipate such a heavy rainfall. "That is why we didn't buy extra vegetables and milk," said Suresh. Residents from the nearby Sadasiva Nagar too were out and about, looking to buy essentials. "Non availability of milk is a real issue, we were told it would be made available by afternoon, but it didn't happen," they said.

Some pockets of Madipakkam that are usually not so vulnerable to inundation were also hit. Here too water entered homes, especially ones that were in relatively low-lying areas. The scenario was worse in areas like Pallikaranai. Although many things were under control once the rain stopped, some, like Manikandan and his family from New Kumaran Nagar in Sholinganallur, are still waiting to be rescued. Even after the rain stopped, water level in his area is slowly increasing, he said. "It's almost six feet now as we speak. There are about 30 families here and only one person — with his child held over his head — so far dared to go out. It was so scary watching him go. "To make matters worse, there are so many snakes in the water. So, we are holding on to our phones, switching it on every now and then to save battery, pushing our case through X, and waiting to be evacuated," says Manikandan, a 45-year-old IT employee.

ISRO unique experiment

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Propulsion Module (PM) of Chandrayaan-3 has been moved from an orbit around the Moon to an orbit around Earth, ISRO has said, terming the operation a unique experiment. The primary objective of the Chandrayaan-3 mission was to demonstrate a soft landing near the lunar south polar region and perform experiments using the instruments on the 'Vikram' lander and the 'Pragyan' rover. The spacecraft was launched on July 14, 2023, on board the LVM3-M4 vehicle from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC-SHAR). On August 23, the Vikram lander made its historic touchdown on the Moon and subsequently, the Pragyan rover was deployed.

The scientific instruments in the lander and rover were operated continuously for one lunar day as per the defined mission life. "The mission objectives of Chandrayaan-3 have been com-

pletely met," the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said in a statement. For the Propulsion Module, the main objective was to ferry the lander module from the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO) to the final lunar polar circular orbit and separate the lander, it said. After the separation, the Spectro-polarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth (SHAPE) payload in the PM was also operated, the space agency said. The initial plan was to operate this payload for about three months during the mission life of the PM. The precise orbit injection by LVM3 and optimal earth or lunar burn manoeuvres resulted in the availability of over 100 kg of fuel in the PM after over one month of operations in the lunar orbit, it added. ISRO said that it was decided to use the available fuel in the PM to derive additional information for future lunar missions and demonstrate the mission operation strategies for a sample



return mission. To continue the SHAPE payload for earth observation, it was decided to re-orbit the PM to a suitable earth orbit. This mission plan was worked out considering collision avoidance such as preventing the PM from crashing onto the Moon's surface or entering into the Earth's Geosynchronous Equatorial Orbit (GEO) belt at 36,000 km and orbits below that, the state-

ment said. Considering the estimated fuel availability and the safety of the GEO spacecraft, the optimal earth return trajectory was designed for October 2023. The first maneuver was performed on October 9, 2023, to raise apolune altitude to 5,112 km from 150 km thus increasing the period of orbit from 2.1 hours to 7.2 hours. Later, considering the estimate of available

propellant, the second manoeuvre plan was revised to target an Earth orbit of 1.8 lakh x 3.8 lakh km. The Trans-Earthinjection (TEI) maneuver was performed on October 13, 2023. In the post-TEI manoeuvre realised orbit, the PM made four Moon fly-bys before departing the sphere of influence (SOI) of the Moon on November 10. Currently, the PM is orbiting Earth and crossed its first perigee on November 22 with an altitude of 1.54 lakh km. The orbit period is nearly 13 days with a 27-degree inclination. The perigee and apogee altitude vary during its trajectory and the predicted minimum perigee altitude is 1.15 lakh km, ISRO said. "Hence as per current orbit prediction, there is no threat of close approach with any operational Earth-orbiting satellites," it said. As per the plan, the SHAPE payload is being operated whenever Earth is in its field of view. Also, a special operation of the

SHAPE payload was carried out on October 28, 2023, during a solar eclipse. The SHAPE payload operations will continue further, the statement added. "UR Rao Satellite Centre/ ISRO's flight dynamics team has developed an analysis tool from first principles for this operation which is being validated through the return manoeuvres carried out for the Chandrayaan-3 PM," ISRO said. According to ISRO, the following are the main outcomes of the return manoeuvres carried out on the PM related to future missions: Planning and execution of trajectory and manoeuvres to return from the Moon to Earth; development of a software module to plan such a manoeuvre and its preliminary validation; planning and execution of a gravity-assisted fly-by across a planet or celestial body; and avoiding uncontrolled crashing of the PM onto the Moon's surface at the end of life of the PM thus meeting the requirements of no debris creation.



NIA files chargesheet against suspected ISKP operatives

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday filed a chargesheet in the special court here in Gujarat against five persons, including a woman, for their alleged links with terror outfit Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP). The chargesheet against Ubaid Mir, Hanan Shawl, Mohammad Hajim Shah, Zubair Ahmed Munshi, and Sumerabanu Hanif Malek was submitted in the court of special judge Kamal Sojitra by NIA special public prosecutor Amit Nair. The ISKP is a UN-designated terrorist organisation. Investigations by the NIA revealed that the accused had planned to "train themselves and carry out terror attacks" in Afghanistan after reaching the war-torn country via Iran as directed by their handler, the chargesheet stated. On June 9, the Gujarat Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS) busted this ISKP module and arrested Mir, Shawl, and Shah from Porbandar city in Gujarat. A day later, the ATS nabbed Sumerabanu from Surat and Munshi from Srinagar. All four men hail from Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir. They were booked under relevant sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and section 120 B (Punishment of criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code. The NIA had found a video clip in which the accused can be seen pledging their allegiance to ISKP while flashing sharp weapons

sitting under the flag of the outfit, as per the chargesheet. The interrogation of the accused by the ATS had revealed that all of them were part of the ISKP module and radicalised by their handler Abu Hamza, officials had said. Mir, Shawl and Shah had reached Porbandar to work as fishermen on boats with the given GPS coordinates as directed by Abu Hamza. They had planned to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line and reach Afghanistan via Iran to join ISKP, the ATS had said. From Porbandar, they were to be taken to Iran on a dhow and were provided with fake passports for Afghanistan and to reach Khorasan via Herat, as per the ATS. The ATS had found mobile phones, tablets, and sharp weapons in the bags of the accused. It was revealed that their handler had planned to release the pre-recorded videos and photographs of their 'sacrifice' in Afghanistan. In a video clip, they can be seen pledging their allegiance to ISKP while flashing sharp weapons. The ATS had found copies of various publications promoting radicalisation, including ISKP's mouthpiece "Voice of Khorasan" during the search of the house of Sumerabanu Hanif Malek in Surat. Malek had "admitted" to having been in touch with Abu Hamza and being "close" to Munshi, the ATS had said. The case was transferred to the NIA by the Ministry of Home Affairs on June 28.



Karnataka mulls to implement social security schemes for unorganised sector workers

PTI ■ BELAGAVI (K'TAKA)

Karnataka Labour Minister Santosh S Lad on Tuesday assured the legislative assembly that the government will implement special social security schemes for unorganised sector workers including weavers and tailors in the state. He also said that the government will consider collection of cess in various sectors, similar to the one already being done in the construction sector, to provide social security schemes. The Minister was replying to a question by Terdala MLA Siddu Savadi and Kapu MLA Gurme Suresh Shetty during the Question Hour. "A cess of one per cent is being levied for every construction work in the state. The Karnataka Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board has implemented many social security schemes for the construction workers from the funds collected under this," Lad said. Noting that these schemes cannot be extended to workers to any other unorganised sector including weaving and tailoring, he said there is a social security board for unorganised workers in the state, which is registering and issuing identity cards free of cost to 11 categories of unorganised workers including porters, housekeepers, rag pickers, tailors, mechanics, carpenters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and barbers under the 'Ambedkar Karmika Sahay Hasta Scheme'. Free registration of 379 types of

unorganised workers is also being done on the 'e-Shram' portal, he said. Highlighting that for those who are doing tailoring in the state's garment firms, a certain percentage of the employee's salary and the same amount of the firm are being contributed to the provident fund, Lad said this provident fund is allowed to be withdrawn for purposes such as resignation of employee, retirement, illness, marriage, education, purchase of land and construction of house. But there is no provident fund facility for those doing tailoring at home or in small shops, he said, adding, there are 7,28,044 tailoring workers in the unorganised sector across the state. There is 'Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana', an accident insurance scheme meant to help workers in distress. He further said under the 'Pradhan Mantri Shramayogi Mandhan Yojana', workers in the unorganised sectors who have completed 60 years can get fixed pension of Rs 3,000 per month. He then reiterated that the state government will implement special social security schemes for weavers and tailors in the future. Like the cess model followed in the construction sector, it is being considered to collect one per cent cess in various sectors including garment, vehicle manufacturing and transport, the minister said, adding that the money collected from this cess will be used for schemes for the workers involved in the respective sectors.

Congress should decide whether Rahul will fight against BJP or LDF in LS polls: Vijayan

PTI ■ THRISSUR (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Tuesday said the Congress will have to decide whether it was fighting the BJP or the LDF while fielding Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad in the Lok Sabha polls next year. He said that both Congress and the LDF were part of the opposition INDIA bloc that was formed to take on the BJP in next year's general election. If there is no need for the alliance then there will be a contest between the Congress and the LDF in Kerala, Vijayan said and made it very clear that the LDF would be fielding its candidate in Wayanad. "The Congress has to decide whether Gandhi should fight against the BJP or the LDF in Kerala. Can you say here in



Kerala that you are fighting or competing against the BJP?" he said at a press conference here. Vijayan also said the INDIA alliance will not decide where the member parties would field their candidates. His remarks came a day after the ruling

CPI(M) in Kerala criticised Rahul Gandhi's reported move to contest from Wayanad. CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan had said that the Congress MP from Wayanad should focus on combating the "fascist policies" of the BJP

rather than involving himself in intra-state political rivalries. The Gandhi scion should contest from a place where the BJP has an influence, he said and added that the saffron party is not an important force in Kerala. During his recent visit to Kerala, Gandhi had said the state and the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency felt like home to him, hinting at a potential preference to contest from the hill constituency in the upcoming polls next year. With less than six months remaining before the scheduled Lok Sabha elections, Gandhi also said that coming to Kerala and Wayanad did not feel like work. "I consider it like coming back to my family and meeting my friends. The more I come to Kerala and Wayanad, the more I feel that it is my home," he had said.

TMC moves resolution seeking consensus building on Bills to replace criminal penal laws

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The ruling Trinamool Congress on Tuesday moved a resolution in the West Bengal Assembly seeking consensus building on three bills introduced before the Parliament by the BJP-led NDA government to replace criminal-penal laws. Moving the resolution, West Bengal minister Sovande Deb Chattopadhyay said that from a study of the bills, it appears that many provisions in these are much more draconian and anti-people than the original provisions in the old codes and acts which are meant to be supplemented. The BJP-led NDA government in August introduced in Parliament the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill to replace the existing Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of

Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Indian Evidence Act respectively. Chattopadhyay claimed that the three new Bills surreptitiously want to entrench police raj in India by conferring more power in the hands of enforcement authorities than were even contemplated during the colonial era. He said that since the present Lok Sabha is almost nearing its end of term, it would be fair and appropriate that the new government and the newly elected members deliberate on these important legislations. The Lok Sabha elections are due in 2024. Participating in a discussion on the resolution, senior minister Chandrima Bhattacharya claimed that Hindi nomenclatures have been used for the new Bills, which she said is an attempt to impose a particular language on the people of the country.

Claiming that the new bills are largely copied from the old laws, she said that it is old wine in a new bottle. Minister Firhad Hakim said that the Bills, if made into laws in their existing form, will turn the country into a police state. Supporting the resolution, he claimed that the new provisions will give enormous powers to law enforcement agencies. BJP MLA Arup Kumar Das, opposing the resolution, said that the new Bills have been introduced keeping in mind the present social requirements and the nature of crime. He said that the purpose of the new Bills is to provide justice and not to punish, which he claimed was just the opposite in the existing provisions. The discussions on the resolution will continue on Wednesday before being taken up for passing, Speaker Biman Banerjee said.

Railway employees can now apply for leave through mobile app

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Railway Board has simplified the leave application process for its employees by making changes in the leave module of its mobile app, HRMS (Human Resources Management System). The leave module, which was launched on August 1, 2023, for digitising the process of leave, now offers a facility for employees to apply for leaves through this mobile application. "In order to further improve the user interface for employees, facility for applying for certain types of leaves have been provided in the Mobile App of HRMS with immediate effect," said a written communication from the Railway Board dated November 4, 2023 issued to all railway zones. It added, "It may be noted that as of now, the mobile app feature will only be available for apply-

ing the leave and process of sanction needs to be done either through the web portal 'HRMS' or through mobile browser." According to the Board, the application is currently available only in the Android version. "There are certain technical reasons due to which this facility is not functional in the IOS version but we are working on it and very soon, these glitches will be removed," a Board official said. In a separate communication to all zones, the Board has further informed the steps it has taken to streamline leave management functions and to ensure updation of leave ledger of all the employees in a dynamic manner through the HRMS app. "LAP (Leave on Average Pay), LHAP (Leave on Half Average Pay) due for the employees as on 1st January of 2024 will be tentatively proposed to be credited to the leave account of the employee subject to verification

of details of each employee by the concerned leave admins," the Board's letter said. It added, "The process of manual verification is an interim measure pending launch of related modules such as Cadre Management, D&A module etc." The Board has also expressed concern over the slow speed of leave verification by the respective leave admins in various zones and divisions. This year, it issued two communications dated August 1 and November 23 directing leave admins "to complete the verification of the initial leave balance of all employees by 31.12.2023." "It is observed that the process is still not moving at the desired pace. Keeping in view the urgency of the matter all the leave admins may kindly be instructed to complete the verification process in respect of LAP and LHAP before 24.12.2023 and for CL and RH by 19.12.2023," the Board's letter said.

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RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

As per 'World Happiness Report' (WHR) released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a global initiative of the United Nations, India stands at rank 126th in the global happiness ranking list with a Happiness score of 4.036, classifying it as one of the world's least joyful nations. Isn't it startling & unpleasant? There is no doubt in it that happiness is an aspiration of every human being, and it can also be a measure of social progress. It is the art of living, the very purpose of our existence & the true index of quality of life. Without happiness, life is dry and meaningless. With happiness, life immediately becomes fulfilling and wonderful. Being happy is not about how well you're doing in general, but rather if you're doing better than expected. For example, say you go to an ice cream parlour where the desert ice cream was the best you've ever had in your life. Now, according to the happiness equation, you would be happier if you had expected it to be just average, as opposed to assuming it would be as delicious as it was. However, it doesn't mean that having low expectations is the path to happiness. Happy people usually keep themselves happy because they know the little ways to appreciate themselves and to see the humour and magic in each moment.

Each one of us wishes to be happy all the time and we pursue this goal of ours in various ways, whether it be through leisure, careers, wealth, relationships or whatever the means, the tendency of the soul is towards being happy. However, in this quest to be happy, we end up making others unhappy and at times also make ourselves unhappy. In such a situation, we should ask ourselves, "Why do we lose our happiness?" What makes us take the wrong path and lose our inner state of buoyancy? When we pursue limited, superficial or false goals, it is very easy to lose happiness, firstly, because we are not being true to the self, and secondly, because we may build up false expectations that are not met through our goals and activities. Remember! Happiness gained through relationships and possessions has seeds of sorrow because they are sown with expectations that stem from greed, selfishness, attachment or ego. Hence before getting yourself involved in anything, we need to ask ourselves, "Will this bring me happiness?" Very few people know about the fact that human beings in their most powerful stage have a good stock of happiness. It is only when we contravene the spiritual and natural laws, we lose happiness & start making others around us unhappy. The repercussions of anger, attachment, greed, ego and desire lead us to loss of peace and happiness. The more we are driven by these forces, the more we will spend the stock of our happiness. Hence awareness and application of spiritual truths is the only way out to sustain & increase our stock of happiness. We need to go within ourselves to tap the eternal source of happiness and for that firstly we need to be true to the self, know the self and be the self.

Once we have understood the happiness that comes from within and as a result of the manner in which we conduct our lives, and ourselves then it is possible to understand how to share that happiness with others. Increasing the happiness of others brings happiness to the self, but this cannot be an escape - that is, it is not a substitute for creating internal happiness. Benefitting the self on a spiritual level will definitely bring internal happiness & resolve past karma. So what are you waiting for? let's get on the happiness train & reach our final destination of "Happy Nation".

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Revolutionising agriculture with the ‘natural produce on wheels’ project

The ‘natural produce on wheels’ project has been a resounding success in Himachal Pradesh, showcasing that natural farming can reshape agricultural practices in the region



SARITA **BRARA**

A truck arrives at the Agriculture Department of Himachal Pradesh in Baluganj, Shimla. Two women, Nirmala and Sumana Devi, members of Narishakti Mahila Krishi Samooh from Nerwa village, Tutu Block, Shimla, step out, bringing fresh seasonal vegetables. These vegetables, including tomatoes, radishes, French beans, and even fruits like guava and kiwi, have been collected on the same day from the doorsteps of local farmers, primarily by women. Representing their group, the two women, along with Lokesh Bhanot, Farmers Produce Officer (FPO) from the agriculture department, move to the vegetable market or 'subzi mandi'. Bhanot, who surveyed the market rates the

Cut out red tapism in public sector share sale



UTTAM **GUPTA**

The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape undermines the chances of the Government selling CPSU shares to willing investors

In the Budget for 2023-24, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had set a target of Rs 51,000 crore for proceeds of the sale of Union government shareholding in central public sector undertakings (CPSUs). As per available indications, the government may fall short of this target by Rs 30,000 crore. An overwhelming share of the shortfall is due to delays in the disinvestment plans of IDBI Bank (the government plans to sell 30.48 per cent of its stake as well as 30.24 per cent shareholding of LIC aggregating to a total stake sale of 60.72 per cent) and state-owned NMDC Steel. Whereas, in the case of IDBI Bank, this is due to delays in the vetting process for potential buyers by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), The sale of NMDC Steel is hamstrung due to elections in Chhattisgarh where the company's main plant is located. The shortfall in proceeds during the current fiscal year is in sync with the trend seen since 2015-16 when the Modi - government started disinvestment with a particular focus on 'strategic' sale (a sophisticated nomenclature for a share sale that reduces its holding in the CPSU to below 50 per cent or privatization). Barring two years viz. 2017-18 and 2018-19 when the actual proceeds exceeded the target, in the remaining six years, the achievement was far short. Even during 2017-18 and 2018-19, the government could achieve the target primarily because of the two big-ticket sales of its shares in one CPSU to another viz. (i) sale of its 51.11 per cent shareholding in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) during 2017-18 that yielded Rs 37,000 crore; (ii) sale of its 52.63 per cent stake in Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) during 2018-19 yielding Rs 13,000 crore. These sales can't be termed as strategic as the purchaser being another CPSU namely ONGC/PFC, the Government continues to have effective ownership over the divested entity viz. HPCL/REC. It makes no sense to fix a target for proceeds from share sales. This is because unlike tax revenue, which can be projected with a degree of certainty, the same cannot be said about proceeds from disinvestment. In this case, a lot depends on the market scenario and, in particular, the perception of investors about the company in which share-sale is contemplated. In cases where the strategic sale is mooted, the Government faces a bigger challenge as apart from a favourable market, it needs bidders with deep pockets. The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape further undermines the chances of the Government kicking the ball rolling just around the time when the strategic investors are ready to put in their bets.

The Niti Aayog identifies companies for disinvestment which are then considered by the Core Group of Secretaries on Divestment (CGD), a long-drawn process by itself, which takes it to the Alternative Mechanism (AM) - a group of ministers, including finance, road transport & highways, administrative reforms, etc., - for approval. After AM's approval, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) moved a proposal for in-principal approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs



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THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO REMAIN IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT EVEN AFTER STRATEGIC SALE. THIS IS AMPLY REFLECTED IN A STATEMENT IN SITHARAMAN'S BUDGET SPEECH FOR FY 2019-20

(CCEA). Taking all these approvals is a time-consuming process and by the time these are in place, the market scenario could become adverse. At a fundamental level, disinvestment of the government's shareholding in a PSU is tantamount to the sale of assets. Therefore, receipts arising therefrom can only be treated as 'capital receipts' (CRs). While preparing the budget, it won't be advisable to plan for receipts from this source in the same manner as it is done for revenue receipts (RRs) which are receipts generated from the day-to-day business activities e.g. dividends on shares held by the government. The government should only provide for proceeds from share sales in CPSU on an 'actual' basis after it has happened instead of making provision at the time of presenting the budget. Having delinked from the budgetary process, it should take up disinvestment in CPSUs as an independent exercise guided by the broad principle of where it shouldn't be in. In an approach outlined in the Budget for 2021-22, the government divided CPSUs into two broad categories i.e. strategic and non-strategic. The strategic group covers atomic energy, space and defense; transport and telecommunications; power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and banking, insurance and financial services. The non-strategic category includes all other sectors such as industrial and consumer goods, hotel and tourist services, trading, and marketing. While, the government wants to sell CPSUs in the strategic sector with the caveat that at least one (and a maximum of four) will be retained in the public sector, it will privatise 'all' undertakings in non-strategic sectors. All loss-making undertakings in the latter category will be closed. Based on this template, it is working on a detailed action plan which is fine. But the process is hamstrung because of a host of legacy issues. For instance, despite the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and Niti Aayog recommending the privatisation of all nine CPSUs in the fertiliser sector (it falls in the non-strategic category) coming under the administrative control of the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, the latter has opposed it. The ministry feels that with control over fertilizer PSUs gone, the government won't be able to ensure adequate availability of this politically sensitive agri-input in every nook and corner of the country. The strategic sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) hasn't happened nearly four years after it was initially mooted in 2019-20. A prime reason is the government's intent to regulate the prices of petrol and diesel (despite the price of these fuels having been deregulated way back in 2010/2014) which it can do by asking the three oil marketing CPSUs including BPCL to do its bidding. Its ability to influence prices will be hampered if BPCL is privatised. The government wants to remain in the driver's seat even after strategic sales. This is amply reflected in

a statement in Sitharaman's budget speech for FY 2019-20. She had stated the intent was to change the existing policy from "directly" holding 51 per cent or above in a CPSU, to one whereby its total holding, "direct" plus "indirect", is maintained at 51 per cent. In yet another glaring instance, even though an order of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) issued last year prohibits participation of CPSUs in the strategic sale of other PSUs, a caveat "...unless otherwise specifically approved by the Central Government in public interest" enables the powers that be to bypass this prohibition if they so wish. Above all, the majority ownership and control by the Government for several decades has ingrained in the bureaucrat a feeling of exercising command (albeit remote) over the management of the PSU. The latter readily acquiescing has added to the sense of bureaucratic power. Although things have improved under the Modi - dispensation (courtesy of its focus on a 'policy-driven state', and increase in 'transparency'), the basic ingredients remain intact. Modi needs to play some hardballs to kill the existing mindset of the bureaucracy. The process of share sale should be de-bureaucratised by setting up a holding company (HC) where all government shares in CPSUs are placed. To be manned by eminent professionals, the HC should be fully empowered to make all decisions.

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

previous evening, displays the rates on a blackboard, and customers make on-the-spot purchases. The vehicle then heads to another selling venue at the state Secretariat complex, carrying the produce along with a cashier. Upon reaching the venue, vegetables and other products are unloaded and arranged. Several women, mostly regular customers, are already waiting to buy these fresh, chemical-free, and locally-grown products. "The vegetables are fresh, have a longer shelf life, taste better, and, importantly, they are chemical-free, not harmful to our health," says Sunita, a regular customer. Other customers echo similar sentiments, expressing a preference for naturally farmed, more nutritious produce.

Beyond fresh vegetables, products from forest areas, such as anna dana (dried pomegranate seeds), amla (Indian gooseberry), kachina, Bauhinia variegata, and wild honey, are also available. The villages, falling under forest areas, allow people to collect and sell forest produce. The farmers are paid according to the rates fixed by the FPO. Another pickup van from Basantpur Block brings vegetables from villages in that area, forming a network of women farmers participating in the 'natural produce on wheels' project. Three blocks in Shimla district, Totu, Mashobra, and Basantpur, were selected for this initiative, involving 5,000 farmers, including 8% women, practising natural farming. They are

all small and marginal farmers. Four women Self-Help Groups with 20 members are involved in this pilot that aims to procure fresh produce directly from farmers' doorsteps and sell it at the HP Secretariat & Agriculture Directorate Boileanganj, Shimla. This alleviates the need for middlemen, ensuring farmers receive fair market prices. The project operates twice a week, and its success may lead to increased frequency based on customer response. For farmers, it is a win-win situation; they receive market prices without intermediaries, transport costs are shared among them, and all produce is sold on the same day. A survey conducted a year ago identified areas and farmers engaged in natural farming.

Farmers undergo a two-day training program, and their products are certified and graded by the agriculture department. Initiated earlier this year, the 'natural produce on wheels' project addresses the challenge of lower yields in natural farming. Farmers cultivate only a portion of their land using the kitchen garden model, maximising the output on smaller plots. Natural farming, a chemical-free traditional method, relies on nature's laws, avoiding external inputs like chemical fertilisers and pesticides. The process minimises human intervention, making it distinct from organic farming. Pesticides used are prepared by farmers using cow dung, cow urine, garlic, red chilli, and buttermilk.

While organic vegetables are often costly, products from natural farming are more affordable for daily consumption. A survey indicates that natural farming reduces cultivation costs by 46% and increases profits by 22%. In comparison, organic farming relies on expensive inputs, contributing to higher market prices. The positive impact of natural farming extends to disease incidence. Scab and marssonina incidences in Natural Farming orchards are notably lower than in chemical farming, suggesting its potential to improve crop health. Most women involved in the project own small agricultural plots, not exceeding 6 to 7 bighas of land. Their husbands typically work in various professions, and two

women from each group manage the pickup of produce. "We spend half of our day in our agriculture fields or with livestock, managing sowing to harvesting on our own," shares one woman. The pickup service provided makes it feasible for them to sell their produce without the challenges of transportation. The 'natural produce on wheels' project has seen success, with products selling out quickly, and the demand continues to grow. It exemplifies a sustainable model, benefiting farmers, consumers, and the environment, showcasing the potential for natural farming to reshape agricultural practices in the region.

(The writer is an independent senior journalist, views are personal. Charkha Features)

Israel strikes in and around Gaza’s second largest city

AP ■ KHAN YOUNIS (GAZA STRIP)

Israel intensified its bombardment in and around Gaza's second largest city early Tuesday, as ambulances and private cars came racing into a local hospital carrying people wounded in a bloody new phase of the war in Gaza.

Under US pressure to prevent further mass casualties, Israel says it is being more precise as it widens its offensive into southern Gaza after obliterating much of the north. Aerial bombardment and the ground offensive have already driven three-fourths of the territory's 2.3 million people from their homes.

At the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, ambulances brought dozens of wounded people in throughout the night. At one point, a car pulled up and man emerged carrying a young boy in a bloody shirt and whose hand had been blown off. "Where is the Red Cross? ... where is the United Nations?" a woman screamed outside the emergency department. "My children, since 10 p.m., are still under the rubble."

Satellite photos taken Sunday showed tanks and troops massing outside Khan



Palestinians are treated as they lie on the floor after being wounded in an Israeli army bombardment of the Gaza Strip, in the hospital in Khan Younis, Tuesday. *AP/PTI*

Younis, the latest target of the offensive, which was home to more than 400,000 people before the war.

Israel has ordered people out of nearly two dozen neighborhoods instead of the entire region, as it did in the north. But with most of Gaza's population already packed into the south, cramming U.N. shelters and family homes, there are few places left to go. Israel has barred people who fled the north earlier in the war from returning. Palestinians say that

as Israel continues to strike across the besieged territory, there are no areas where they feel safe, and many fear that if they leave their homes they will never be allowed to return.

THE QUEST TO ELIMINATE HAMAS

Israel says it must dismantle Hamas' extensive military infrastructure and remove it from power in order to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack that ignited the war. The surprise assault through

the border fence saw Hamas and other Palestinian militants kill about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capture some 240 men, women and children.

The Israeli military says it makes every effort to spare civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields as it fights in dense residential areas, where it has a labyrinth of tunnels, bunkers, rocket launchers and sniper nests.

But the militant group is deeply rooted in Palestinian society, and its determination to end decades of open-ended Israeli military rule is shared by most Palestinians, even those opposed to its ideology and its attacks on Israeli civilians. That will complicate any effort to eliminate Hamas without causing massive casualties and displacement.

Even after weeks of unrelenting bombardment, Hamas' leaders in Gaza were able to conduct complex cease-fire negotiations and orchestrate the release of more than 100 Israeli and foreign hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners last week. Palestinian militants have also kept up their rocket fire into Israel, both before and after the truce.

The fighting has meanwhile brought unprecedented death and destruction to the coastal strip. The Health Ministry in Gaza said the death toll in the territory since Oct. 7 has surpassed 15,890 people – 70% of them women and children — with more than 42,000 wounded. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths. It says hundreds have been killed or wounded since the cease-fire's end, and many still are trapped under rubble.

An Israeli army official provided a similar figure for the death toll in Gaza on Monday, after weeks in which Israeli officials had cast doubt on the ministry's count.

The official said at least 15,000 people have been killed, including 5,000 militants, without saying how the military arrived at its figures.

Putin to discuss Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin will make a one-day trip to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia focused on the Israeli-Hamas war and host the Iranian president in Moscow this week, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Putin will make working visits to both countries on Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The talks will focus on bilateral relations, the war between Israel and Hamas and other international issues,

Peskov said. Issues related to oil price caps under OPEC+ will also be on the agenda, he added. Putin's trip was first announced on Monday by his foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov, who didn't give a date for the visits when he spoke to the Russian news outlet Life.

"I hope that these will be very useful negotiations, which we consider extremely important," Ushakov was quoted as saying by Life.

Putin will make the visit at a time when Russia wants to advance its role as a power broker in the conflict in the

Middle East. Putin will host Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in the Kremlin on Thursday, Peskov added.

The Russian president visited China in October and recently made several trips to former Soviet nations.

The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

Since the warrant was issued, Putin chose not to attend a BRICS summit in South Africa because the

country would be obliged to arrest Putin upon arrival as it is a signatory to the international court's treaty.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE have signed the ICC's founding treaty.

The notice against Putin in March was the first time the global court issued a warrant against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

The ICC said in a statement that Putin is accused of the war crime of "unlawful deportation" of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia.

Top US Congressmen introduce bill to reduce Green Card backlog

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Three influential Congressmen have introduced bipartisan legislation in the US House of Representatives to reduce the Green Card backlog and end country-based discrimination for employment-based visas, a bill if passed would benefit thousands of Indian Americans.

Three influential Congressmen who introduced the legislation include Indian Americans, Raja Krishnamoorthi and Pramila Jayapal. Congressman Rich McCormick is the third lawmaker to have joined the two Indian-Americans in introducing the bill on Monday.

If passed and signed into law, it would help thousands of Indian Americans who are currently in decades-long wait for green cards or permanent residency.

HR 6542, the bipartisan Immigration Visa Efficiency and Security Act of 2023, would strengthen the US economy and boost its international competitiveness while reducing the Green Card backlog by allowing American employers to focus on hiring immigrants based on their merit, not their birthplace, a press statement said. A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent



Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently.

The bill would phase out the existing seven per cent per-country limit on employment-based immigrant visas while increasing the seven per-country limit on family-sponsored visas to 15 per cent, it said.

"As we work to build the economy of the future, we cannot allow high-skilled workers to languish in the Green Card backlog, left unable to fully establish themselves as Americans and contribute more fully to our nation," Krishnamoorthi said.

"I am proud to partner with my colleagues on our bipartisan legislation to end country-based discrimination for employment-based immigrant visas to reduce visa back-

logs while strengthening our economy and our workforce," he added.

The employment-based visa system provides permanent residence (or "green cards") to individuals whose work contributes to US economic growth and enhances our competitive advantage.

To qualify, a sponsoring employer generally must advertise and prove that they cannot find a qualified US worker to fill the position. Thus, although America's employment-based visa system starts as "merit-based," what happens next has nothing to do with merit or skills — visas are allocated based on the intended immigrant's country of birth, the statement said.

Approximately 95 per cent of employment-based immigrants currently live and work in the United States on temporary visas while waiting for a visa to become available. Some of these individuals remain in temporary status for many years, if not decades, because of the caps applied to their country of nationality, it read.

The statement said the new, phased-in system, established in the bipartisan EAGLE Act, would help ease the backlog for those who wait the longest.

Like the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act that

passed the House in July 2019, the bill phases out the seven per cent per-country cap for employment-based immigrant visas; and raises the seven per cent per-country limit on family-sponsored visas to 15 per cent.

Like the version of the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act that passed the Senate in December 2020, the bill includes a longer nine-year transition period to ensure that no countries are excluded from receiving visas while the per-country caps are phased out, it said.

The bill strengthens the H-1B temporary visa programme and provides an option for individuals who have been waiting in the immigrant visa backlog for two years to file a green card application, although the application cannot be approved until a visa becomes available, according to the statement.

The H-1B visa, the much sought-after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

Prince Harry challenges UK government’s decision to strip him of security detail

AP ■ LONDON

Prince Harry is challenging on Tuesday the British government's decision to strip him of his security detail after he gave up his status as a working member of the royal family and moved to the United States. The Duke of Sussex said he wants protection when he visits his home and claimed it's partly because an aggressive press jeopardizes his safety and that of his family.

The three-day hearing scheduled to begin in London's High Court is the latest in a string of Harry's legal cases that have kept London judges busy as he takes on the UK government and the British tabloid media. It was not clear if he would attend Tuesday's hearing.

Harry failed to persuade a different judge earlier this year that he should be able to privately pay for London's police force to guard him when he

comes to town. A judge denied that offer after a government lawyer argued that officers shouldn't be used as "private bodyguards for the wealthy."

Harry, the youngest son of King Charles III, said he did not feel safe bringing his wife, former actor Meghan Markle, and their two young children back to Britain and was concerned about his own safety after being chased by paparazzi following a London charity event.

Harry's animosity toward the press dates back to the death of his mother Princess Diana, who died in a car wreck as her driver tried to outrun aggressive photographers in Paris. Harry, whose wife is mixed-raced, cited what he said were racist attitudes and unbearable intrusions of the British media in his decision to leave the United Kingdom.

The 39-year-old prince is challenging the decision by



the Executive Committee for the Protection of Royalty and Public Figures to provide his security on a "case by case" basis after moving in 2020 to Canada and then California, where he and his family now reside.

He said the committee unfairly nixed his security request without hearing from him personally and did not dis-

close the makeup of the panel, which he later learned included royal family staff. He said Edward Young, the assistant private secretary to the late Queen Elizabeth II, should not have been on the committee because of "significant tensions" between the two men.

The Home Office has argued that any tensions between Harry and the royal household staff was irrelevant and that the committee was entitled to its decision because he had relinquished his role as a working member of the family. The case is one of five that Harry has pending in the High Court.

The four other lawsuits involve Britain's best-known tabloids, including a case that alleges the publisher of the Daily Mail libeled him when it ran a story suggesting he had tried to hide his efforts to continue receiving government-funded security.

UK police renew appeal over hate crime attack against British Sikh

London (PTI): A UK police force investigating a hate crime have renewed their appeal for information related to an incident in which a Sikh man in his late 50s sustained injuries after a group of boys attacked him in Slough, south-east England.

Thames Valley Police said the victim, named locally as Inderjit Singh, was walking through Langley Memorial Park when he was approached by a group of boys. One of the offenders tried to grab the victim's beard and then all the boys circled him, kicking him and pulling him to the ground. Singh sustained three broken ribs as well as swelling and cuts to his hand.

The police were initially investigating it as an incident of GBH (grievous bodily harm), but are now treating it as a hate crime, investigating officer Detective Constable Holly Baxter, who is based at Slough Police Station, said in a statement.

"I am appealing to anybody who was in the area around the time of the incident (at 7 pm local time on November 21), to please get in touch with Thames Valley Police," Baxter's statement said last week.

"We are currently conducting further patrols in the area and anyone with concerns should speak to a uniformed officer or contact us by calling 101 or via our website. We take all reports of hate crime seriously as we know that they have a devastating impact on individual victims and targeted communities," she said.

The police are appealing for anyone with their car dash-cam footage, doorbell video, or any other potential recordings from the day of the attack that could assist the investigation. Following the attack, the offenders – described as teenage boys around 13 to 16 years old – are said to have left in the direction of Marish School.

EU official warns of security risk in Europe over Xmas

Brussels (AP): Europe faces a "huge risk of terrorist attacks" over the Christmas holiday period due to the fallout from the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, the European Union's home affairs commissioner warned on Tuesday. The warning came as French investigators probe a fatal weekend attack near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Questions were raised about the mental health of the suspect, who swore allegiance to the extremist Islamic State group before stabbing a German-Filipino tourist to death and injuring two other people with a hammer.

"With the war between Israel and Hamas, and the polarisation it causes in our society, with the upcoming holiday season, there is a huge risk of terrorist attacks in the European Union," EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva

Johansson told reporters.

"We saw (it happening) recently in Paris, unfortunately we have seen it earlier as well," she said, as EU interior ministers gathered in Brussels. She provided no details about any information that might have led to her warning.

Her office did not immediately respond to requests for details.

Johansson, whose brief includes security and immigration, said that European Commission will provide an additional 30 million euros (\$32.5 million) to help bolster security in vulnerable areas, notably places of worship.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser sent her condolences to France over the attack, and said that it highlights "just how acute and how serious the threat posed by Islamist terrorism is currently in the EU."

‘Harvard muzzled disinfo team after USD500 mn Zuckerberg donation’

Cambridge (Massachusetts) (AP): A prominent disinformation scholar who left Harvard University in August has accused the school of muzzling her speech and stifling — then dismantling — her research team as it launched a deep dive in late 2021 into a trove of Facebook files she considers the most important documents in internet history.

The actions impacting Joan Donovan's work coincided with a USD500 million donation to Harvard by a foundation run by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan. In a whistleblower disclosure made public Monday, Donovan seeks investigations into "inap-

propriate influence" from Harvard's general counsel, the Massachusetts attorney general's office and the US Department of Education.

The CEO of Whistleblower Aid, a legal nonprofit supporting Donovan, called the alleged behavior by Harvard's Kennedy School and its dean a "shocking betrayal" of academic integrity at the elite school.

"Whether Harvard acted at the company's direction or took the initiative on their own to protect (Facebook's) interests, the outcome is the same: corporate interests are undermining research and academic freedom to the detriment of the public," CEO Libby Liu said in a press statement.

Pak EC reserves verdict on plea to bar Khan from heading party

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's election commission on Tuesday reserved its verdict on a petition seeking to remove former premier Imran Khan as the head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party due to his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case.

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

A petition was filed on October 3 with the top election body to bar him from holding any position within his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Two months later, on December 2, the former-cricketer-turned-politician decided against contesting the ECP-mandated intra-party polls for the post of party chairman due to his disqualification in the Toshakhana case.

The jailed former prime minister had instead hand-picked Barrister Gohar Ali Khan to lead the party he founded and other legal challenges earlier this month.

Barrister Gohar was officially elected as the PTI chief unopposed in the intra-party polls held on December 2. On Tuesday, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja, leading a five-member bench, presided over the hearing held at the ECP headquarters in Islamabad.

During Tuesday's hearing, PTI lawyer Shoaib Shaheen said the petition had become infructuous as the party has elected its new chairman.

Finance ministry releases ₹17.4 bn for general polls

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan government said on Tuesday that it has released Rs 17.4 billion to the election commission for the upcoming general elections, a day after the poll body raised concerns over the non-provision of funds. Cash-strapped Pakistan, which is facing both political and economic instability, is going to the polls on February 8.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Finance Division said it has released Rs 17.4 billion to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in addition to Rs 10 billion released in July 2023 for the conduct of general elections in the country. "This brings the total released

amount to Rs 27.4 billion for holding general elections. The Finance Division remains committed to the provision of funds as and when required by the Election Commission of Pakistan," it added. The development comes a day after the electoral body raised concern over the delay in the release of the urgently needed amount for the conduct of polls.

Addressing the ECP's concerns, caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi had said that the government would meet the financial needs of the ECP ahead of the February 8 general election.

"There is no crisis in meeting the financial needs of the ECP," Solangi said in a post on X. "Whatever budgeted

amount is needed by the ECP will be released as per its needs accordingly," he said. Solangi's statement followed media reports that the ECP summoned the finance secretary on Monday for the ministry's failure to provide the funds allocated for the election.

The minister said the Cabinet already approved Rs 42 billion for the ECP's needs and Rs 10 billion had been released so far. "We firmly stand behind the ECP in holding free and fair elections as mandated by Article 218(3) of the Constitution," he added. Last week, the electoral body rejected as "baseless and misleading" the media reports about a delay in the upcoming general elections.

Seven injured in blast in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PTI ■ LONDON

Four minor children were among seven people who were injured on Tuesday when an improvised explosive device exploded near a school here in the capital of Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to the police, the blast occurred around 9:10 am on the congested Warsak road near a school and a private bank in Peshawar. At least four kilograms of explosives, planted in a "cemented block" on the side of the road, were used in the blast, Geo News reported. According to a Michni Gate Police Station official, seven people were injured in the blast. Four children between the ages of seven and ten were also injured, Lady Reading Hospital authorities said. Police and rescue teams were sent to the site as soon as the blast was reported, Warsak Superintendent of Police Arshad Khan was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

Those injured were moved to a private hospital, where the condition of two children was critical, spokesperson of the Peshawar Lady Reading Hospital Asim Khan said. He added that none of the children were wearing a school uniform. Khan said that the police launched a search operation in the surrounding areas. "The element of extortion is also being considered," he was quoted as saying. "It would be premature to say who was the target," he added.

According to The Express Tribune newspaper, No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorist activities orchestrated by various terror outfits.

3 die in mishaps caused by freezing rain in Germany Munich airport suspends flights

AP ■ BERLIN

Freezing rain and cold weather buffeting Germany were blamed for traffic accidents that left three dead on Tuesday while Munich Airport temporarily suspended flights.

One student was killed in a crash involving a school bus in the Erzgebirge mountains in the eastern German state of Saxony, police said. At least 10 other schoolchildren were taken to a hospital. Two adults, including the bus driver, were seriously injured.

The bus skidded into the side of a winter road maintenance vehicle in Sehmatal county near the Czech border, German news agency dpa reported. It then crashed head-on into a tree and the impact was so strong that it completely destroyed the front of the vehicle.

In Munich, all flights were either cancelled or postponed between 6 a.m. and noon (0500-1100 GMT), with the airport warning that many flights scheduled for later in the day might also be affected by the severe weather conditions.

The airport, Germany's second-biggest, announced the temporary shutdown on Monday night as a result of weather forecasts for Tuesday. "The operating areas will be deactivated in the first half of the day. The plan is to allow air traffic to resume from midday," the airport said on its website. "However, it can be assumed that the majority of flights will also have to be cancelled dur-



A plane is cleared of ice in Munich Airport, Germany, on Tuesday

AP/PTI

ing the rest of the day for safety reasons."

Tuesday's cancellations came after all flights at Munich Airport were grounded on Saturday following heavy snowfall in the city and in Germany's southern state of Bavaria. Two people died in a collision between a car and a tractor-trailer on the A8 highway in Upper Bavaria. According to the police, their car skidded under the rear of a truck, which had come to a stop across the highway overnight from Monday to Tuesday due to frozen rain on the highway's surface, dpa reported.

The A99 near Munich was shutdown in both direction after 13 vehicles were involved in a mass accident, dpa reported. There was no immediate information about possible injuries. Train operator Deutsche Bahn said traffic in

the Munich region would be affected for several days.

"At present, access to Munich's main station is severely restricted. Only a few long-distance trains are therefore running to and from Munich," it said on its website on Tuesday. Rail services to the Austrian cities of Salzburg and Innsbruck, as well as Zurich in Switzerland, remained suspended. Deutsche Bahn said that there could also be train cancellations and delays in other parts of southern Germany. Passengers were asked to postpone non-essential journeys to Wednesday.

Southern Germany as well as neighbouring Austria and Switzerland have been experiencing heavy snowfall which has affected public transport all over the region and led to alarm about possible avalanches.

Dawoodi Bohra community head conferred with 'Nishan-e-Pakistan'

Islamabad (PTI): Dr Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, head of the Dawoodi Bohra sect of Islam, was on Tuesday conferred with 'Nishan-e-Pakistan', the highest civilian award of Pakistan.

"President Dr Arif Alvi conferred the award of Nishan-e-Pakistan upon Dr Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, Head of the Dawoodi Bohra community, at a special investiture ceremony, held at Aiwan-e-Sadr," the president's office said in a post on X. Dr Saifuddin, the head of the Mumbai-headquartered Dawoodi Bohra community spread across over 40 countries, including a sizeable congregation in Pakistan, is the 53rd Dai al-Mutlaq of the order. The Dawoodi Bohras carry out developmental works to benefit the underprivileged in all these countries.

Nishan-e-Pakistan is the highest civilian honour awarded for services of the highest distinction to the national interest of Pakistan. The award, conferred at a special investiture ceremony, recognises 77-year-old Saifuddin's services to Pakistan in the field of spiritual guidance and social services, Geo News reported.

The Bohra community head holds a special regard for Pakistan and is an advocate of peace, harmony and goodwill, read the citation read out before the conferment of the award. Recounting his services in the education sector, it was said that he had contributed to the building of the School of Law at the University of Karachi and launched a university project. Multiple healthcare institutions are operating in the name of the Bohra community head providing affordable healthcare to people.

Separately, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar met the Dawoodi Bohra community head and lauded the community's services for the progress of the country. The premier felicitated Dr Saifuddin on being awarded the country's highest civil award and expressed confidence that the Bohra community would continue to play their role in the progress and development of the country.

Each year, the announcement of awards is made on August 14, Pakistan's Independence Day, and the awards are conferred next year on Pakistan National Day, observed on March 23. But in special cases, these dates are not followed and the investiture can be arranged anytime.

China recognises Taliban govt in Afghanistan

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has become the first country to confer diplomatic status to a Taliban-nominated official as Afghanistan's Ambassador to Beijing, thereby formally recognising the Taliban-run administration as a legitimate government in Kabul.

"As a long-standing friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China believes that Afghanistan should not be excluded from the international community," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing on Tuesday when asked whether China recognised the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Earlier reports from Kabul said China has given Bilal Karimi, a Taliban

nominee the status of Ambassador and he has submitted his credentials to the foreign ministry here.

China along with Pakistan and Russia maintained its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021 following the withdrawal of American troops from the war-ravaged country. While maintaining close contact with the Taliban interim administration, Beijing withheld recognition, especially over global criticism of the Taliban's treatment of women and girls, excluding them from educational institutions. No other country has formally recognised the Taliban government, which has been criticised over human rights violations and crushing women's rights.

Defending China's move, Wang said, "We hope Afghanistan will further respond to the expectations of the international community, build an open and inclusive political structure, adopt moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies, firmly combat all forms of terrorist forces, develop friendly relations with other countries, especially with its neighbours, and integrate itself into the world community."

"We believe that diplomatic recognition of the Afghan government will come naturally as the concerns of various parties are effectively addressed," Wang said.

China, which shares borders with Afghanistan, also has serious concerns over the regrouping of East Turkistan

Islamic Movement (ETIM), a banned outfit comprising Uighur militants from the volatile Xinjiang province, and pressing the Taliban administration to crack down on the outfit. Significantly, China's diplomatic recognition comes at a time when Pakistan, Beijing's all-weather ally, is having serious problems with the Taliban which it once nurtured. Pakistan is now blaming the Taliban government for recurring terrorist attacks in the country and criticised it for not cracking down hard on Pakistan Islamic militant groups, especially the Pakistani Taliban, operating from Afghanistan. In retaliation, Islamabad has ordered forceful evacuation of thousands of Afghan refugees living in the country for decades.

14 killed in western Thailand bus crash

AP ■ BANGKOK



In this photo provided by Sawang Rungrueang Rescue22 Foundation, rescue workers and volunteers work at the site of a bus accident on Tuesday

AP/PTI

A bus crashed in western Thailand early on Tuesday, killing 14 people and injuring more than 30 others, officials said. The accident occurred in Prachuap Khiri Khan province as the bus was travelling from the capital, Bangkok, to Songkhla province in the deep south. It was carrying 49 people when it ran off the road and hit a tree near Hat Wanakorn National Park, a local police official said. Prachuap Khiri Khan province is located on a coastal stretch between the Gulf of

Thailand and Myanmar. "We presume the driver might have fallen asleep," said Pol. Col. Weerapat Ketesa, the superintendent of the Huay Yang Police Station, adding that officials were waiting for the result of a blood test on the driver, who survived the accident. Police were still investigating what caused the crash, he added. Most victims were Thai and a few were Burmese, Weerapat said. Some 35 people were being treated for injuries at local hospitals, according to the Sawang Rungrueang Rescue Foundation.

Nod to bill in France to ban disposable e-cigs

Paris (AP): France's National Assembly unanimously approved a bill to ban single-use, disposable electronic cigarettes, in an attempt to protect young people drawn to their flavours and mitigate the environmental impacts of the disposable products known as "puffs."

Lawmakers adopted the bill in a late-night vote on Monday by 104 in favour, zero against. The bill, supported by the government, will then move to the Senate where it is expected to be adopted as well. It could go into effect by September 2024. Disposable e-cigarettes — which cost about 10 euros (nearly USD 11) each — are small, battery-powered devices that are especially popular among teenagers for their

sweet flavours. While they do not contain tobacco, many include nicotine, a dangerous chemical known for its addictive properties. They differ from reusable vaping devices in that they are not designed to be refilled or recharged. Their small, non-rechargeable lithium batteries often end up in landfills. This bill is part of a broader trend. The UK, Ireland, and Germany are considering similar measures. New Zealand and Australia have already implemented restrictions, with the former mandating lower nicotine levels and restrictions on vape shop locations near schools. Three years ago, the US Food and Drug Administration cracked down on kid-friendly flavoured reusable e-cigarettes like Juul.

Indian-origin filmmaker re-launches Mandela documentary

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Internationally-renowned South African filmmaker of Indian origin, Anant Singh, has re-released on an OTT platform his special documentary on the life of the late Nelson Mandela as the country marked his 10th death anniversary on Tuesday.

After serving 27 years in prison under the minority white apartheid government, the globally celebrated leader became President of South Africa in 1994. Mandela died on December 5, 2013. Singh's documentary feature 'Viva Madiba: A Hero for All Seasons' will be seen globally on Netflix and will be available to audiences of the streaming service throughout Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands for the first time.

Initially produced as a tribute to Mandela, the documen-

tary is a celebration of Mandela's epic life and his status as an international icon. The film takes one on a journey behind the headlines and away from the public eye and looks at Madiba through different lenses - as a loyal friend, a faithful comrade, a trusted confidant, a respected mentor, and a man who has touched and transformed countless lives globally.

Mandela's life of struggle, humanity, destiny, and greatness is recalled and celebrated by those who knew him best and who worked with him and "the film takes us beyond the political and into the personal realm and features exclusive interviews with politicians, close friends and comrades," Singh said. These include Archbishop Desmond Tutu; former ANC leader Oliver Tambo; George Bizos, the lawyer who defended



Mandela and his co-accused at the infamous Rivonia Trial that sent them to prison; long-time fellow prisoner and confidant Ahmed Kathrada, and his former jailer, Christo Brand. Also featured in the documentary is current President Cyril Ramaphosa, the country's fourth after Mandela stepped down fol-

lowing just one term in office.

Singh recalled how he had been at the Royal Premiere of his movie 'Long Walk to Freedom' in London when he received news of 95-year-old Mandela's passing after a long illness. Just 15 minutes before the end of the film 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom', based on the autobiography of the same name, Singh got the news that Mandela had died. What was expected to be a standing ovation for Singh and the cast of the film from the celebrity audience, including Prince William and his wife Kate, turned into shocked disbelief as he waited for the end of the film to give the audience the tragic news and called for a minute's silence to honour the global icon.

"Even though we had all expected it to happen one day, it was such a shock to hear it

while sitting in the theatre watching the movie exactly as it happened," he said. A planned after-party was also cancelled as cast members left in tears. Singh had spent almost two decades planning the multi-million-rand film, which won accolades all over the world.

Earlier he explained how he had told Mandela after first reading the manuscript for the book that it had to be made into a film. "It is amazing how quickly 10 years have passed — it feels like it was yesterday that we got the dreaded news of Madiba's passing," Singh said, referring to Mandela's clan name. "Whilst the world is poorer without Nelson Mandela, despite his passing 10 years ago, the gravitas of Madiba is still respected and acknowledged not only in South Africa but around the world," Singh concluded.

Stock markets hit new record highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

SENSEX BREACHES 69K-MARK, NIFTY EYES 21K LEVEL

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty settled at new peaks on Tuesday, rallying for the sixth straight session amid massive buying in power and utility sector shares. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 431.02 points, or 0.63 per cent, to close at a new record high of 69,296.14. The broader index Nifty also climbed 168.50 points, or 0.81 per cent to hit its lifetime high of 20,855.30.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged by more than Rs 2.5 lakh crore to cross Rs 350 lakh crore on Tuesday. Analysts said the positive sentiment was fuelled by unabated inflow of foreign funds on the back of robust sentiment built up over favourable macroeconomic data in the previous week and the results of assembly polls of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh that raised expectations of longer political stability in the country. Also, investors



are expecting the Reserve Bank to maintain the status quo on the interest rate in its bi-monthly monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday, they said. Among major Sensex movers, Power Grid rose the most by 4.46 per cent, NTPC by 3.89 per cent, SBI by 2.31 per cent and ICICI Bank by 2.28 per cent.

Other gainers included Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan and Maruti. On the other hand, Hindustan Unilever, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finance remained laggards with losses of up to 1.49 per cent. As many as 20 stocks of the 30-share benchmark closed with gains, while among Nifty firms,



32 shares registered gains. Foreign institutional investors purchased shares worth Rs 2,073.21 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. "The domestic market extended the gains and hit fresh highs despite cautiousness among global peers ahead of key US job data this week. The aura of the

state election results and other positive factors like above-expected earnings and GDP growth data are supporting the return of FII flows to the Indian market," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. "The RBI's monetary policy meeting is expected to be status quo. However, the com-

mentary on economic growth, foodgrain prices and inflation trajectory will be closely watched," he added. Meanwhile, in Asian markets, Hang Seng and Nikkei 225 were trading lower by 2.07 per cent and 1.37 per cent, respectively, while China's Shanghai Composite was trading 1.67 per cent lower. European markets were mixed. Germany's DAX gained 1.51 per cent and France's CAC 40 by 0.69 per cent. London's FTSE 100 declined 0.22 per cent. The US markets ended on a mixed note with S&P 500 registering a loss of 0.54 per cent on Monday. Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude advanced 1 per cent to USD 78.81 a barrel. On Monday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,383.93 points, or 2.05 per cent, to close at a lifetime high of 68,865.12. The barometer logged its biggest single-day jump since May 20, 2022. Nifty also climbed 418.90 points, or 2.07 per cent, to hit 20,686.80.

Indian Chamber of Commerce unveils first overseas office in Italy

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Marking a milestone in its international expansion strategy, the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has inaugurated its first overseas office in Italy. The ICC said this strategic move underscores its commitment to fostering robust trade relations between India and Italy and expanding opportunities for Indian businesses in the European market. ICC has appointed Vas Shenoy, a businessman and seasoned geopolitical strategist and analyst, as Chief Representative for Italy who will play a major role in driving the chamber's engagement with the Italian business community and government entities. ICC President Ameya Prabhu said, "The opening of our first overseas office in Italy marks a pivotal step in ICC's

global expansion strategy." ICC Italy's primary focus will be on promoting India as an attractive investment destination for Italian companies and facilitating the entry of Indian businesses into the Italian market. The establishment of ICC Italy aligns with the recent strengthening of diplomatic ties between India and Italy. The two countries have upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership and signed defence cooperation and manpower mobility agreements in 2023. The growing economic ties between India and Italy are evident in the surge in bilateral trade, which reached Euro 14.88 billion in 2022. India's exports to Italy have also witnessed a substantial increase, highlighting the deepening economic relationship between the two nations.

Banks write off ₹10.57 lakh crore in 5 years



'Make NPA recovery worth ₹7.17 lakh cr'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Banks have written off Rs 10.57 lakh crore during the last five financial years, of which Rs 5.52 lakh crore was in respect of loans pertaining to large industries, the government informed the Parliament on Tuesday. "As per RBI data, scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) have written off an aggregate loan amount of Rs 10.57 lakh crore during the last five financial years," Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad said in reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha. The scheduled commercial banks have also recovered Rs 7.15 lakh crore of non-performing assets (NPAs) during the five-year period. "Comprehensive steps have been taken to recover NPAs, enabled by which, SCBs have made an aggregate recovery of Rs 7.15,507 crore (RBI provisional data for FY 2022-23) in NPA accounts, including written-off loans, during the last five financial years," he said.

In reply to a separate question, Karad said: "Scheduled commercial banks have written off an aggregate amount of Rs 5.52 lakh crore in respect of loans pertaining to large industries and services during the last five financial years (FYs), i.e. From FY 2018-19 to FY 2022-23." He also said that this includes Rs 93,874 crore written off by all the banks on account of fraud during the five-year period. Karad said banks regularly evaluate the impact of write-offs as part of the exercise to clean up their balance sheet, avail tax benefit and optimise capital, in accordance with the said guidelines and policies of the respective boards. "Such write-off does not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers to repay and therefore, write-off does not benefit the borrowers. The borrowers of written-off loans continue to be liable for repayment and banks continue to pursue recovery actions initiated in written-off accounts through various recovery mechanisms available to them..." Karad said.

COP28: Adani pitches for balanced approach to energy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As world leaders dwell on the language of the final outcome of climate talks, billionaire Gautam Adani on Tuesday made a pitch for adopting a balanced approach that takes into account energy costs and availability while continuing to accelerate on green ambitions. At the 28th UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, called COP28, 118 governments pledged to triple the world's renewable energy capacity by 2030 but have not been able to arrive at the language to be used in the outcome document for cutting the share of fossil fuels in the world's energy production. "In the midst of initial encouraging signs from COP 28, it is relevant to remember that while in sum total (given our 1.4 bil-

lion population) we are the world's third largest primary energy consumer, our per capita electricity consumption @ 1250 kWh is still less than one-third of the global average and less than one-seventh of the developed world," Adani said in a post on X. India, he said, is also the only large nation ahead of its target in meeting its UNFCCC commitment to reduce its emissions intensity by 45 per cent from the 2005 level by 2030. "The fastest growing economy must balance its energy cost, energy availability and green energy objectives while continuing to accelerate its massive green ambitions," he added. On his post, the coal-to-edible oil conglomerate he heads commented: "With a pledge of investing USD 75 billion by 2030, Adani group is playing a



pivotal role in accomplishing this" task of reducing emission intensity. To keep global warming from rising no more than 1.5 Celcius by 2050, fossil fuel use needs to be greatly reduced

and unabated coal use needs to be completely phased out, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has argued. But India is not agreeable to phasing out of coal as 73 per cent of

its current electricity is produced from burning the fossil fuel. The share of coal-fired electricity generation in India's power mix is slated to rise to 77 per

Solar power potential 75,000 GW by 2050 possible with long-duration storage: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Solar power generation capacity can go up to 75,000 gigawatts by 2050 globally with long-duration storage capacity, a report by the International Solar Association (ISA) and LDES Council, said. The report released on Tuesday by ISA and the Long Duration Energy Storage (LDES) Council unveils a bold vision for the future of renewable energy, showcasing the pivotal role of Long Duration Energy Storage in realizing ambitious solar targets. The report, presented at COP28 in Dubai, emphasized the transformative potential of combining solar energy with LDES to ensure continuous, reliable, and affordable renewable energy, a statement said. The report emphasized the necessity of LDES to fully real-



ize the potential of solar installations for complete decarbonization and achieving a solar capacity of 75,000 GW by 2050. It presented a case study of isolated island utilities in the US, demonstrating the financial viability of LDES in areas with limited interconnectivity and high local fuel costs. The combination of solar, wind, and LDES emerges as the most

cost-effective solution for achieving 100 per cent renewable energy. The LDES Council estimates that LDES will become a USD 4 trillion industry by 2040, with an installed capacity potential of 8 TW, the statement said. This growth is essential for enabling solar energy to meet global electricity demands affordably and reliably.

The report also identified barriers to the widespread adoption of solar and LDES, including regulatory challenges, financing issues, and technical limitations, and proposed solutions to overcome these hurdles. "Solar, already the most economical source of new electricity globally, will further strengthen its competitive advantage. Combined with Long Duration Energy Storage, solar becomes a continuous, reliable 24/7 energy source," stated Dr. Ajay Mathur, Director General ISA. "Developing long-duration energy storage is the best pathway to full decarbonization for economies worldwide. LDES provides the scaffolding for reliable, resilient, around-the-clock renewable energy for industry and the electric grid," asserted Julia Souder, Chief Executive Office, LDES Council.



21,791 fake GST registrations

Suspected tax evasion of ₹24,000 cr detected in special drive: FM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said GST officers have detected 21,791 fake GST registrations and over Rs 24,000 crore of suspected tax evasion during a two-month-long special drive. In a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha, the minister said to safeguard the interest of honest taxpayers and avoid extreme hardship to taxpayers, instructions have been issued from time to time, directing officers to exercise due caution and care in the exercise of powers such as summons, provisional attachment of property, blocking of tax credit etc. "A total of 21,791 entities (11,392 entities pertaining to state tax jurisdiction and 10,399 entities pertaining to CBIC jurisdiction) having GST registration were discovered to be non-existent. An amount of Rs 24,010 crore (state - Rs 8,805 crore + Centre - Rs 15,205 crore) of suspected tax evasion was detected during the special drive," Sitharaman said. The minister was replying to a question on the number of entities identified as having fake registrations, and the total amount of evasion detected during the special drive against fake GST registrations conducted by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) from May 16 to July 15, 2023. To a query on whether the government has considered the challenges faced by e-commerce enterprises in obtaining GST

registrations, especially operating in virtual spaces, Sitharaman said that considering the special nature of e-commerce operators, a simplified procedure for registration of e-commerce operators has already been notified. It provides that when an e-commerce operator applies for registration in a particular state or Union Territory where he/she does not have a physical presence, he/she can apply for registration by giving details of the principal place of business located in another state or Union Territory. Further, amendments have been made in GST Rules to strengthen the registration process, including biometric-based Aadhaar authentication, for high-risk registrants, along with the verification of the original copy of the documents. A pilot project for this was launched in Gujarat. In July, the pilot project was extended to Puducherry and in November to Andhra Pradesh. Also, details of bank account, name and PAN of the registered person are required to be furnished within 30 days of the grant of registration or before filing of the statement of outward supply, whichever is earlier. Entities who do not furnish the details of valid bank accounts within the time period prescribed will be suspended automatically by the system. However, upon compliance with this provision subsequently, by the registered persons such system-based suspension would be automatically revoked by the system.

BUSINESS BRIEF

POWERGRID LAB GETS INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION



(UCA)ug) accreditation, to perform IEC 61850 Conformance Testing of Intelligent Electronic Devices (IEDs).

INTERNATIONAL HARDWARE FAIR 2023

New Delhi: Over 200 international exhibitors and 7000 trade buyers created a vibrant platform for cutting edge hardware products and solutions at the International Hardware Fair 2023 in national Capital last week.

RISE IN GLOBAL PRICES OF DAP FERTILISERS

New Delhi: Fertiliser industry body (FAI) pointed out that global prices of Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) have risen in the last few months and said there will be a need to increase either the government subsidy or retail prices if the rates remain high in the international market.

DIGITAL INVESTMENT PLATFORM EXPANDING

New Delhi: Digital investment platform Vested on Tuesday said it is expanding its alternative investment portfolio by offering of Peer-to-Peer (P2P) lending via Vested Edge, and INR (Indian Rupee) bonds and solar projects via Vested Solar. With its solar offering, Vested is looking to give individuals the opportunity to earn while helping India transition to clean energy, a company statement said. Through Vested Solar, investors can own solar panels in rooftop projects and earn 10-13 per cent rate of return from the electricity generated over the panel's lifetime. The INR bonds offer another alternate fixed income investment opportunity to Vested customers. Vested offers a curated selection of listed corporate and government bonds, with corporate bonds rated A and above, and government bonds backed by the Indian Government.

Rapido forays into cab services segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ride hailing firm Rapido on Tuesday announced its foray into the cab services segment, where it will compete with established unicorns Ola and Uber. The company has started the service in Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad and Bengaluru with around 1.2 lakh cabs and plans to scale it to around 35 cities by September 2024, Rapido Co-founder Pavan Guntupalli said. "Over the course of 10 years not more than 25 per cent are participating in app based services. Our motive is to bring all these guys online and increase the market. "With a zero commission model, we will maximise their revenues in a way that it is not a burden on users," Guntupalli said. The captains or the driver partners will get direct payment from customers without any commission cut by Rapido. However, they will have to pay a subscription fee after crossing a certain level of earnings. While the company claimed that it will provide the lowest price in the market, a random



check on the app showed that the fare of Rapido cab was higher compared to the prices offered by the established online players. Guntupalli said that the service has just been launched and the company will work with cab partners to get the cheapest fare across 80 per cent of the route in the city where it operates. Software-as-a-service-based Rapido will invest in adding electric vehicles to its fleet but it will operate rest of cab services at break-even level, he said. The company plans to expand the services to Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai in January-March 2024 and cover a total of 35 cities by September 2024, Guntupalli said.



Gold nosedives ₹1,050 to ₹63,250 per 10 gram

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold nosedived Rs 1,050 to Rs 63,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, retreating from its all-time high due to weak trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal settled at Rs 64,300 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also tumbled Rs 1,700 to Rs 78,500 per kilogram. "Gold prices plunged on Tuesday in the Delhi markets trading at Rs 63,250/10 grams, down by Rs 1,050, following a bearish trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at

HDFC Securities, said. In the futures trade, February contract of gold climbed Rs 46 to Rs 62,415 per 10 grams on the MCX. However, silver's March contract declined Rs 389 to Rs 75,779 per kilogram on the bourse. In the international markets, gold and silver were quoting lower at USD 2,037 per ounce and USD 24.50 per ounce, respectively. Gold retreated from its record high as the dollar and US Treasury yields advanced amid signs that traders' believe aggressive monetary policy of Federal Reserve rate cuts may have gone too far, Gandhi said.

JUNIOR HOCKEY WORLD CUP

Araijeet scores hat trick in India 4-2 win

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Araijeet Singh Hundal struck a hat-trick as India dished out a dominant display to beat Korea 4-2 in their opening pool match of the FIH junior men's hockey World Cup here on Tuesday.

Hundal scored in the 11th, 16th and 41st minutes while Amandeep found the target for India in the 30th minute in the Pool C match. Dohyun Lim (38th) and Minkwon Kim (45th) were the goal scorers for Korea.

India, who had lost to France in the bronze-medal match in the last edition in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, made a strong start with Hundal scoring in the first quarter off a penalty corner.

The Indians continued their domination by pumping in two goals in the second quarter through Hundal and Amandeep — both field goals — as they were 3-0 up at the half time.

Korea pulled one back though Dohyun midway in the third quarter but India replied soon after with Hundal completing his hat-trick with another field goal.

With a 4-1 lead in the match, the Indians appeared to have slowed down a bit. The Koreans pressed for goals and they were able to reduce the margin with Minkwon finding the target.

India next play against Spain in their second pool match. Canada is the other country in the four-team Pool C.

India have won the tournament twice (2001 and 2016) and finished runners-up once (1997).



JUNIOR WORLD BOXING CHAMPIONSHIPS



Payal, Nisha and Akansha strike gold

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Young pugilists Payal, Nisha and Akansha won a gold medal each after dominating performances as India ended their impressive campaign at the IBA Junior World Boxing Championships in Yerevan, Armenia with 17 medals on Tuesday.

The Indian contingent secured three gold, nine silver and five bronze medals from the championships. The Indian women's team finished joint second in the event. Payal handed India its first

gold when she outclassed local favourite Petrosyan Heghine of Armenia by unanimous decision in the girls 48kg final.

Later, Asian youth champions Nisha and Akansha lived up to the expectations as they extended their dream runs to clinch gold medals in style.

Nisha (52kg) and Akansha (70kg) thrashed Abdullaeva Farinaz of Tajikistan and Taimazova Elizaveta of Russia respectively with identical 5-0 margins.

Three other Indian women in action on the final day, Vini

(57kg), Shrushti (63kg) and Megha (80kg) signed off with silver medals after suffering defeats in their respective final bouts.

In the men's section, Sahil (75kg) and Hemant (80+kg) added silver medals to the Indian tally after going down 0-5 in their respective finals.

Jatin (54kg) also put up a strong fight against Tulebek Nurassyl of Kazakhstan before losing 1-4 in a thrilling match.

Overall, 12 Indians had entered the finals, which was more than any other country in this edition.



Changing club manager: Sheffield United owner

AP ■ SHEFFIELD

The Saudi prince who owns Sheffield United said Tuesday he has changed the club's manager after the team dropped into last place in the Premier League.

Prince Abdullah Bin Mosaad Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud told British radio station talkSport that a decision has been made to part ways with Paul Heckingbottom after his two years in charge and bring back Chris Wilder, who managed Sheffield United when it was last in England's top division.

Wilder, a former player at the club, has coached at second-division teams Middlesbrough and Watford since leaving Sheffield United in March 2021.

Heckingbottom becomes the first Premier League manager to lose his job this season. His final game in charge was the 5-0 loss at Burnley on Saturday, which dropped Sheffield United to last place — where Burnley was at the start of the match — and four points from safety.

The team has just one win from 14 games.

The club hasn't officially confirmed the decision to change managers.

Heckingbottom took over in November 2021 and led the team into the Premier League this year, but has been hamstrung this season by the sale of key players such as Sander Berge and Iliman NDIaye before the start of the campaign.

Heckingbottom appeared to reference that after the Burnley match when saying the club had "been making financial decisions rather than football decisions."

AP ■ TOKYO

The bid-rigging trial around the Tokyo Olympics played out Tuesday in a Japanese courtroom — more than two years after the Games closed — with advertising giant Dentsu and five other companies facing criminal charges.

Seven individuals are also facing charges from Tokyo district prosecutors in the cases, including Koji Henmi, who oversaw the sports division at Dentsu at the time.

Executives or management-level officials at each of the accused companies, and Tokyo Olympic organizing committee official Yasuo Mori, have been charged with violating anti-monopoly laws.

Among the companies facing charges are Dentsu Group, Hakuhodo, Tokyu Agency and event organizer Cerespo. All deal with event organizing, sports promotion or marketing.

Dentsu has a long history of lining up sponsorships and advertising with bodies like World

Tokyo Olympics sullied by bid rigging

Athletics, headed by Sebastian Coe, and the Switzerland-based International Olympic Committee, led by Thomas Bach.

Genta Yoshino, the lawyer for Henmi, did not deny the bid-rigging took place. Speaking in Tokyo district court, he said no bid process was ever decided upon or set up by the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee.

"Even if what happened gets categorized as bid-rigging, all my client did was abide by the organizing committee's intentions, following their instructions," Yoshino told the court, presided over by a panel of three judges.

Yoshino said his client merely did his best to make the Olympics a success. Henmi was under pressure from the IOC, which repeatedly expressed doubts about the ability of the Tokyo organizers, Yoshino added.



The organizing committee was headed at the time by Yoshiro Mori, a former Japanese prime minister who was eventually forced to resign as the head of Tokyo 2020. The CEO was Toshiro Muto, a former deputy director of the Bank of Japan.

The maximum penalty for a

company convicted of bid-rigging is a fine of up to 500 million yen (\$3.3 million). An individual, if found guilty, faces up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 5 million yen (\$33,000). Trials take months in Japan, sometimes years. The next session in the trial was scheduled

for Jan. 15, 2024. It's unclear when a verdict may come.

Dentsu was a key force in landing the Olympics for Tokyo in 2013. French prosecutors have looked into allegations that IOC members may have been bribed to vote for Tokyo.

Once the Olympics landed in Tokyo, Dentsu became the chief marketing arm of the Games and raised a record \$3.3 billion in local sponsorship. Dentsu received a commission on the sales - sales that were at least twice as large as any previous Olympics.

The reports of corruption surrounding Dentsu also forced the resignation in 2019 of Tsunekazu Takeda, the head of the Japanese Olympic Committee and an IOC member who headed Olympic marketing.

Tokyo organizers say they spent \$13 billion to organize the 2020 Olympics, which were delayed a

year by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a government audit suggests the expenditure might have been twice that. At least 60% was public money.

The Tokyo scandal ruined the chances of the northern city of Sapporo of landing the 2030 Winter Olympics. It had been a strong favorite but was forced to withdraw. The IOC last week said it favored a French Alps bid for the 2030 Games with Salt Lake City the preferred choice for 2034.

Earlier this year French police searched the headquarters of the 2024 Paris Olympics in an investigation over contracts linked to the Games.

In the wake of the scandal, Dentsu has been restricted from bidding on contracts for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and by the city of Osaka and the local prefecture, which is hosting the 2025 World

Exposition.

Tokyo prosecutors have also been investigating a separate bribery scandal centered around Haruyuki Takahashi, a former Dentsu executive. Takahashi was a member of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee and wielded powerful influence over the Olympic business.

Takahashi's trial opens Dec. 14. He has not publicly acknowledged guilt, or made any statement, and speculation is rife he will fight the charges.

The scandal involving Takahashi involves bribery allegations over Olympic sponsorships that were won by companies such as Aoki Holdings, a clothing company that dressed Japan's Olympic team, and Sun Arrow, which produced the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic mascots.

Some company officials have already been convicted, but did not receive jail time. Almost all criminal trials in Japan result in guilty verdicts. The defense, including Henmi's, is trying to salvage the client's reputation and minimize any fines.

Lyon returns to Marseille

AP ■ LYON (FRANCE)

Lyon will return to Marseille amid heightened security measures Wednesday to play a game that was postponed after the team's bus was attacked by fans throwing rocks in October.

The rescheduled match comes just four days after the death of a fan ahead of a French league game that marked a new low in a season marred by violence.

The match between Marseille and Lyon was initially scheduled on Oct. 29 but was postponed after fans threw rocks and other projectiles at the Lyon bus and then-coach Fabio Grosso needed stitches in his forehead after being hit by broken glass.

Lyon fans have not been allowed to travel to the rescheduled game, which takes place in the wake of the incident in the western city of Nantes, where a fan was killed during a fight close to the stadium before a game between Nantes and Nice.

The match in Marseille will be under close scrutiny, with local authorities under pressure to deliver an effective security plan.

On Monday, French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera called for "a global and extraordinarily determined response" to an upsurge of violence in French soccer that culminated with the



fan's death.

"It's just not possible that police forces are so overstretched, that private property is destroyed, that buses are stoned and people injured," Oudea-Castera said. "And now, a death. That's enough."

Back in October in Marseille, the Lyon team bus was hit on the way to Stade Velodrome, shattering some windows. Grosso was injured by falling shards of glass and needed medical treatment with his face bleeding heavily. Lyon assistant coach Raffaele Longo was also injured.

Supporters were also targeted, five police

officers were injured, and nine people placed in custody. Grosso suffered a deep cut above his left eye that required stitches and a large bandage wrapped around his head.

Following a string of disappointing results, Grosso was fired last week and replaced by interim coach Pierre Sage.

"We're waiting for transport to be secured so that the players can tackle the match in the best possible way," Sage said.

According to local Lyon newspaper Le Progres, players and staff will leave for Marseille on Wednesday morning and will stay in a hotel that has been booked

in consultation with local Marseille authorities, further away from the Stade Velodrome than the one picked by Lyon in October.

Once in Marseille, the team won't be using its usual bus bearing the club's colors. Lyon will instead use an unmarked bus belonging to a local transport company, fitted with reinforced windows. The team will then be heavily escorted to the stadium.

Because the October incidents took place outside the Stade Velodrome, Marseille has escaped disciplinary sanctions from the French league.

"The situation is a bit delicate," said Lyon right-back Clinton Mata. "We didn't think we'd have to play this match again as if nothing had happened. It's a strange feeling, but we're professional players. After what happened, we're a bit worried."

In addition to the attack on the bus, racist incidents also took place before the match between Marseille and Lyon. As fans from both teams remained in the stadium and exchanged insults as they waited for the game to kick off, some fans from Lyon were filmed making Nazi gestures and mimicking monkeys.

Both Marseille and Lyon, two traditionally successful French clubs, have failed to meet expectations this season. Marseille sits ninth in the standings, 16 points behind league leader Paris Saint-Germain. The situation is even worse for Lyon, which is bottom of the league with just one win in 13 matches.



WFI election date to be announced after December 8

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The notification to hold the stalled Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) elections could be issued on or after December 8, the date set for inclusion of any changes in the electoral college published earlier this year.

The Supreme Court recently set aside the stay imposed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court, paving the way for the process to elect the new WFI governing body.

An IOA-constituted ad-hoc panel, led by Wushu Association of India chief Bhupender Singh Bajwa, is currently managing the day-to-day activities of the WFI after the sports ministry suspended the federation headed by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh over allegations of sexual harassment levelled by top Indian grapplers.

Several wrestlers, including Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, sat in protest at the Jantar Mantar here for more than two months to protest alleged sexual harassment of female grapplers by Brij Bhushan.

The election process, which was set in motion in July, has been delayed because of court cases. This has further led to the suspension of the WFI by the international federation, United

World Wrestling, for failing to conduct fresh polls in the time stipulated by them.

Indian wrestlers continue to participate in international competitions under the UWW flag because of the suspension of the national body.

But with the Supreme Court clearing the path for the elections, the returning officer, Justice (ret'd) MM Kumar, held a meeting on November 30 and asked Bajwa if there is any change in the electoral college notified on July 25, 2023 for the polls, initially scheduled on August 12.

"The way is paved for holding elections of WFI which were stayed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on August 11, just a day before the date fixed for holding elections," said a statement from the office of the returning officer.

"Returning officer asked Mr Bajwa to inform if there is any change in the electoral college already notified on 25.07.2023... He was asked to provide this information at the earliest. Mr Bajwa sought one week time. Let complete information be furnished within 5 days i.e. On or before 8th December so that final notification for holding elections be issued," said the statement issued by assistant returning officer Tapas Bhattacharya.

US players excited about fresh start under new coach

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Although Emma Hayes hasn't yet assumed her new role as coach of the U.S. Women's national team, she's been involved behind the scenes as the team wraps up a turbulent year and looks forward to an eventful 2024.

Hayes is currently coaching Chelsea in the Women's Super League and won't join the United States until May, a short time before the Americans play in the Paris Olympics.

She visited the team last week as they prepared for a pair of exhibition matches against China. The U.S. Defeated the Steel Roses 3-0 in the first match on Saturday in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The second match is set for Tuesday in Frisco, Texas.

Hayes' fresh perspective is welcomed, especially after the

United States was eliminated from the Women's World Cup this summer by Sweden. The Round of 16 exit was the earliest ever for the four-time World Cup champions.

"I think we'll learn a lot from her and she'll learn a lot from us," defender Emily Fox said.

Hayes consulted with interim coach Twila Kilgore and U.S. Soccer Sporting Director Matt Crocker on the team's roster for the final two games of the year. The U.S. Left veterans Alex Morgan, Crystal Dunn, Becky Sauerbrunn and Alyssa Naeher off the squad in favor of taking a look at younger players.

"This camp is - honestly, we've been saying it's kind of starting fresh because of the World Cup and everything. Emma, being able to meet her, and obviously having new faces in camp, younger faces," forward Trinity



Rodman said after Saturday's game. "I think it's just building an understanding, creating an identity and executing a game plan."

Defender Naomi Girma echoed the sentiment that Hayes' arrival

is something of a fresh start. "We feel like we have our direction. We know what we're building towards now, and it's all very clear. I think overall we're just excited to hit the ground running with her," Girma said.

After the lackluster performance by the Americans at the Women's World Cup, U.S. Soccer parted ways with coach Vlatko Andonovski. Kilgore, one of his assistants, was named interim coach. Hayes was appointed last month.

Kilgore's role will continue a bit longer than expected because of Hayes' obligation to Chelsea. But Kilgore will continue on as an assistant under Hayes.

"There's definitely a sense of belonging where the group is really excited to get back together and integrate some of the new players; and also a lot of excitement and a really new feeling just having Emma around," Kilgore said. "She has been focused on player relationships and starting to get to know them and I've been focused on the day-to-day and it's been a good mix."

Following the matches against China, the U.S. Players will get a break before the first women's CONCACAF Gold Cup. Then it's on to the Olympics in July. The United States has qualified for both tournaments. The desire is to put 2023 in the past.

"There's so much talent in the team and I don't think the world has seen enough of it yet, because we need to go out and show it, we need to be able to mesh together and show everything that we have and what we're all about, and how we can really collaborate and play together and be more of a team and be a powerhouse again," captain Lindsey Horan said. "So it's gonna be exciting for us to have (Hayes) and see what she can do with this team and how she can help us improve moving forward."

INDIA TO PLAY FEARLESS CRICKET

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India women team's new head coach Amol Muzumdar wants his players to play 'fearless cricket' while also making it clear that there would be no compromise on fitness and fielding, ahead of the three-match T20I series against England beginning here on Wednesday.

"We need to play a certain brand of cricket, which we have been known for so far. Fearless cricket is something which I have always advocated. We would be playing that brand of cricket," Muzumdar told reporters on Tuesday ahead of the team's training session at the Wankhede Stadium.

"Shafali (Verma) and Jemimah (Rodrigues) are both very important cog in the wheel. I would like them to continue what they have been doing."

Muzumdar said that every step taken from here-on will be important as the team has embarked on its preparations for next year's T20 World Cup (September-October 2024 in Bangladesh).

"We are moving towards the World Cup. Every series and match will have its own importance. The series against England and Australia will count a lot," said Muzumdar who is starting his coaching stint with the women's national team during the three-match T20I series against England.

"We had a chat about it with the team and they (players) are all raring to go. Every step that we take (hereon) is (about) moving towards the World Cup.

"England and Australia will be a superb series to start the preparations (for the World Cup). (Both) will be tough series (and) will give us an indication of where we are. Going forward, the tougher the opposition, the better it is," he said.

After the contest against England, India face

NO COMPROMISE ON FITNESS AND FIELDING: WOMEN'S TEAM COACH MUZUMDAR



Australia in another home series.

Muzumdar said there will not be any compromise on fielding and fitness standards, as parameters have been set and are being followed already.

"Fielding and fitness are of highest priority. There is no compromise on fielding or fitness. There will be a lot of camps post this series - a lot of cricket will be played - at NCA or some other place," he said.

"That means more exposure. All the fringe and new players will also get an opportunity."

India's record of only seven wins in 27 matches against England in T20Is (home and away) does not bother the new coach who has urged his team to leave the past behind.

"As a team, we have decided to leave the statistics and whatever has happened behind us. We are looking forward to a fresh start," said the domestic batting stalwart.

"The numbers are there to be seen, but these girls and the team are looking forward to the season ahead. We are not going to go back in history — of course it is important — but at the same time, it is also important to look forward to the season ahead. They are all raring to go."

Muzumdar informed that Troy Cooley has been named the bowling coach for the series against England (three T20Is, one Test) and Australia (one Test, three T20Is and three ODIs).

He said women's cricket in India is on 'cusp of something big' with the inaugural Women's Premier League garnering a lot of response from the fans.

"It was a fantastic advertisement for women's cricket last year. We all saw how many people turned up for the game. We all are on the cusp of getting it big in women's cricket. The crowd turning up for the game is absolutely a boost for everyone," he said.



Bangladesh looking to secure first test series win over NZ

AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha wants his players to guard against complacency as it tries to secure a first series win against New Zealand in the second and final test.

Bangladesh won the first test in Sylhet by 150 runs to close in on a landmark series victory. The only top-level teams that Bangladesh has ever beaten in a two-match test series are Zimbabwe and West Indies.

"I can't see complacency in the team. If I see any action of complacency, I will have one to one chat," Hathurusingha said ahead of Wednesday's opening day.

"We had a good chat inside the dressing room yesterday. Strong and experienced leaders like Mushy (Mushfiqur Rahim) and Mominul (Haque) spoke very emotionally. They spoke in Bengali. I can see there's no tall poppies in the dressing room."

The Sylhet test victory was only Bangladesh's second against New Zealand in 18 meetings, and it came courtesy of captain Najmul Hossain Shanto's second-innings century. In doing so, Shanto became the first Bangladeshi cricketer to hit a century on his debut as captain.

"Captaincy and leadership are two things," Hathurusingha said. "(Shanto's) captaincy was excellent. He was tactically on the mark. He was step ahead of the game most of the time. Very impressive field placings as well. Sometimes unorthodox, but very effective.

"(His) leadership was excellent. He led from the front with his performance. He was commanding respect, and demanding the standard. I think he has

a long future ahead."

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who took 10-184 in the first test, will be a Bangladesh's most crucial weapon in Mirpur, which traditionally has a slow wicket with unven bounce.

"He goes under the radar because he plays second fiddle to Shakib (Al Hasan) in most of the games," Hathurusingha said of Islam. "His record is phenomenal. He has nearly 200 wickets. He is very consistent."

New Zealand skipper Tim Southee said the team's spinners need to show more consistency if they are to avoid a first series defeat against Bangladesh.

"We're expecting obviously spin-friendly conditions, but we spoke about it after the last game about being more consistent for longer as a bowling group," Southee said. "And then, obviously, partnerships as a batting unit. We've had a great couple of days of training. So, we're looking forward to getting into another test match."

While Bangladesh's spinners claimed 18 wickets at an economic rate of 2.48, New Zealand's spinners took 14 wickets at a rate of 3.73 runs.

New Zealand's frontline spinners Ajaz Patel and Ish Sodhi also had a limited impact in the match, and the team could include Rachin Ravindra and Mitchell Santner in the squad for the second test.

"They're (Ravindra and Santner) obviously capable spinners. But we went with what we thought was the best side to win that first test match," Southee said. "It's just a tough one to try and get your 15 great players to fit into an 11. So, it's about picking a side that you think is going to do the job for the five days ahead of you.

This tour is going to be valuable: Heather

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The T20 series in India gain significance as it will show how the young visiting players excel in conditions which will be similar to what the team will experience in Bangladesh during next year's T20 World Cup, said England women's skipper Heather Knight.

India and England are set to face off in a three-match T20 series, starting here on Wednesday.

"I learned a lot about my game playing in Indian conditions, it really tests you as a cricketer, your skill level and how you do with the noise and the heat," Knight told reporters ahead of England's training session here on Tuesday.

"It is a really good place to accelerate development, to see how our young players cope with it. We have got a T20 World Cup in Bangladesh later on in the year (2024) so this tour is going to be valuable in terms of having similar conditions."

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be hosted by Bangladesh between September and October in 2024.

A lot of members of the England's T20I squad arrived in

India two days before the start of the series which will be played at the Wankhede Stadium on Dec 6, 9 and 10.

Knight said it will be challenging for her team to silence the Indian crowd as despite their dominant record against the hosts, presence of "world-class" players make India a "brilliant" team.

"We have had some really good T20 games against them. They have got some world-class players in and in home conditions they are going to be tough (to face)," Knight said.

After winning the ODI World Cup beating India in the final, Australia captain Pat Cummins had said that he took delight in silencing the Indian fans.

Knight said passionate crowds in India can be imposing on the visiting sides and her team will look to keep its focus amid all the noise.

"Sometimes you can feel like things are accelerating; rushed actually, when there is crowd and the game is happening quite quickly. We have talked a lot about trying to get our own pace, maintain our concentration in the moment," the England captain said.



"Trying to silence the crowd will be tougher - watching the men's World Cup it is all you see and the support and the passion that Indian fans have and having experienced that, it is a hard thing to do to silence the crowd and even if there is not many of them they are usually very

loud.

"We have to have quick turnaround, adapting to conditions has to be accelerated a bit. How we do that, how we communicate, how we are going to take 10 wickets, how we are going to score runs?" Knight said the past experience

of playing in India, including the Women's Premier League (WPL) earlier this year should hold her side in good stead.

"We have got some good experience of players playing in India as well which will be valuable. It will be a brilliant series between two best teams," she

said.

Having played in the WPL for Royal Challengers Bangalore wherein Knight shared the dressing room with some Indian players like Smriti Mandhana, Shreyanka Patil and Kanika Ahuja, the England captain said knowledge-sharing works two-ways.

"It is brilliant that some of the RCB girls have got the chance to play for India on the back of what they did in the WPL. It works both ways, obviously I know those players better and they also know my game better," Knight said.

England have seven wins in nine T20Is against India in their backyard and overall 20 wins from 27 matches, but Knight said it does not feel like they have a comforting factor as far as knowledge of conditions is concerned.

"It feels like a long time actually since we have been to India, before that 2019 series we had a lot of tours here," she said.

"It is how the Future Tours Programme pans out, and obviously, playing another WPL here in the calendar, there is going to be a lot of cricket here which is brilliant."

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Defending champion Manu Gandas, PGTI Ranking leader Om Prakash Chouhan and Rashid Khan will be seen in action in the second edition of the SSP Chawrasia Invitational Golf tournament beginning here on Thursday.

The 124-member field of the Rs 1-crore prize purse event will also see tournament host and local favourite SSP Chawrasia, along with the likes of Rahul Gangjee, Khalin Joshi, Chikkarangappa, Veer Ahlawat, Karan Pratap Singh, Udayan Mane and Aman Raj.

The leading names from abroad include Sri Lankans N Thangaraja, Anura Rohana and K Prabakaran, Bangladesh's Badal Hossain, Md Akbar

Gandas, Chouhan headline SSP Chawrasia Invitational Golf

Hossain and Md Dulal Hossain, American Varun Chopra, Nepal's Sukra Bahadur Rai, Canada's Sukhraj Singh Gill and Andorra's Kevin Esteve Rigall.

The other prominent local players are Shankar Das, Divyanshu Bajaj, Mohammad Sanju, Arjun Puri and Raju Ali Mollah.

Two-time Indian Open champion Chawrasia is the second Indian professional golfer after Jeev Milkha Singh to have a PGTI event named in his honour.

A six-time winner on the Asian



Tour, Chawrasia also has represented India at the Rio Olympics and the World Cup of Golf in 2016.

He also represented Team Asia at the EurAsia Cup in 2016 and 2018. SSP, a winner of 17 professional titles, was honoured with the Arjuna Award in 2017.

"With a strong field, we can expect a week of exciting golf. I'm also very motivated to performing well at my home course. I wish the players all the best," tournament host Chawrasia said.

Rajeshwari, Vivaan win season's first trap shooting national trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paris Olympics quota winner Rajeshwari Kumari on Tuesday won the national selection trial 1 in women's trap, while Vivaan Kapoor triumphed in the men's category on a day when both the finals went into shoot-offs.

India's No. 1 woman trap shooter Rajeshwari had topped the qualification round held at the Karni Singh ranges over three days, with a score of 118.

Teenager Bhavya Tripathi of Delhi, who won silver, shot 114 to grab one of the six qualifying spots, but improved upon her fifth position to end tied at 43 hits with Rajeshwari in the final.



Bhavya then missed the first shoot-off shot as Rajeshwari made no mistake to win the match. Shreyasi Singh was third.

Vivaan's path to winning the trial was a bit different as he shot 121 in qualification to finish second to Shardul Vihaan, who shot a table-topping 122.

The Rajasthan trap shooter then hit 44 targets in the final and found himself tied with Zoravar Singh Sandhu after the regulation 50 targets.

It was the second time Vivaan faced Zoravar in a shoot-off on the day.

At the end of the qualification, Vivaan had piped Zoravar 1-0 to take the higher bib number going into the final.

In the final, Zoravar put up a better fight, but missed his third shoot-off target as Vivaan blasted all three. Former world champion Manavjit Sandhu came third.



Ebenyo, Yehualaw star attraction in Kolkata 25K run on Dec 17

PTI ■ KOLKATA

World championships 10,000m silver medallist Daniel Simiyu Ebenyo of Kenya and Ethiopian 10K world record holder Yalemzerf Yehualaw will be the star attractions in the men's and women's sections respectively in the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K run on December 17.

Ebenyo won a silver medal in 10,000m in Budapest world championships in August and then finished second in half marathon in Riga at the inaugural World Road Running Championships, before easily winning the Delhi Half Marathon in October.

Two other Kenyans, Roncer Kipkorir Konga and Bernard Biwott, with sub 60-minute personal best in half marathon (21.0975 km), are expected to challenge Ebenyo for the top

podium position.

Yehualaw, who set the 10k world record of 29:14 in 2022, will participate in the event for the first time. She also sits second on the world all-time list in half marathon with a time of 1:03:51 (clocked in 2021).

Another Ethiopian, Anchinalu Dessie and Kenya's Betty Chepkemai Kibet will be the main challengers for Yehualaw.

ELITE FIELD: Men: Daniel Ebenyo, Eric Kiptanui, Roncer Konga, Bernard Biwott, Victor Kipruto Togom, Jackson Kipleting (all from Kenya); Hiskel Twelwele, Afewerki Berhane (both from Eritrea), Abe Gashahun, Mulugeta Debasu (both from Ethiopia).

Women: Yalemzerf Yehualaw, Anchinalu Dessie, Sutume Asefa Kebede (Ethiopia); Betty Chepkemai Kibet, Nelly Leptoo (both from Kenya); Mercylene Chelangat (Uganda).