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\$25.7 BILLION NET PROFIT IN 2024'

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Amit Shah dares Pakistan on PoK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah thundered categorically in Parliament on Wednesday, declaring, "PoK is ours." His statement was met with a huge round of applause from the members in the Lok Sabha. While justifying the reservation of seats from the PoK region in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, the Home Minister blamed India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for two major blunders — declaring a ceasefire without winning the entire Kashmir and taking the issue to the United Nations. These, he argued, have resulted in the sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir over seven decades. Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, Shah said if Nehru had taken the right steps, a large chunk of territory would not have been ceded and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir would have been part of India. "I support the word that was used here — Nehruvian blunder. Because of the blunder that was committed during the time of Nehru, Kashmir had to suffer. With responsibility, I want to say the two big blunders that

happened during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru, happened due to his decisions, because of which Kashmir had to suffer for years," Shah said. "Kashmir had to suffer due to Nehruvian blunders. One was that when our Army was winning and as soon as Punjab area was reached, ceasefire was declared and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was born. If the ceasefire would have been (declared) three days later, PoK would have been part of India," the Home Minister said. The ceasefire made without winning the entire Kashmir was one "blunder" and the other was taking the issue to the UN. There was an uproar by the Opposition benches over the remarks on Nehru and they staged a walkout but returned later. After their walkout, BJD leader Bhartruhari Mahtab said the Home Minister should also talk about the "Himalayan blunder", a reference to Nehru's actions leading up to the war with China in 1962. Shah quipped that his talking about two blunders had upset the Opposition benches and if he had used the phrase "Himalayan blunder", they would have resigned. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said the remarks made were not an insult to anyone and

Says Kashmir is ours



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

PTI

were only made to put things in context. In his remarks, Shah also alleged that the Kashmir matter was taken to the UN in

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

asserting that he of course believes that the issue should not have been taken to the UN in the first place. Shah also quoted Nehru as

saying later that the ceasefire was a "mistake". Shah said it was not Nehru's mistake but a blunder. "So much land of this country was lost, it was a

historic blunder," the home minister added. "Those holidaying in England will not notice any change in Jammu and Kashmir," he said, in sarcastic way, hitting former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, who was raising questions frequently. Shah said when terrorism started in Kashmir, people were targeted and they had to flee. "I have seen many leaders who shed crocodile tears and consoled well with words. But Modi is the only leader who has worked to wipe out their tears," he said. He said about 46,631 families and 1,57,967 people were displaced in their own country and were displaced in such a way that they were uprooted from their own homeland and this Bill is going to give them rights and representation. He said after the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be 43 Assembly seats in Jammu region — up from present 37 — and in Kashmir Valley it will be 47 from 46. Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, two members from the Kashmiri migrant community and one representing the displaced persons from the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) will be nominated to the legislative assembly. As many as 24 seats will be

kept for the residents of PoK. Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, Shah said it had nothing to do with going back on promise as it was a temporary article and had to go. "You did not have the courage, PM Narendra Modi showed courage and did away with it," he said, referring to the Opposition benches. Shah pointed out that the two Bills on Jammu and Kashmir seek to nominate two Kashmiri Migrant community members, including a woman, to the assembly. One seat in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will be set aside for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the Home Minister said. More than 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far, he said. Shah said the Government's focus is on ending the terror ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir. "I believe the Modi Government will return to power in 2024 and by 2026, I hope there will be no terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill were passed by the Lok Sabha after Shah's reply.

BRIEFS

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

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

PAKISTAN WOMAN ARRIVES IN INDIA TO MARRY
Chandigarh: Karachi resident Javeria Khanum crossed over into the Indian side from Attari in Amritsar district where she was welcomed by her fiancé Sameer Khan and some members of his family to the beats of 'dhol'. Khanum has been granted a 45-day visa after two previous visa rejections and the Covid pandemic stalled their plans for around five years. The couple, in a brief interaction with reporters at Attari, said the marriage will be solemnised in January. P5

Victorious BJP MPs head back home to their States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amidst the parley at the highest level of the party regarding the naming of Chief Ministers for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, Union Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar and Prahlad Singh Patel resigned from the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. The BJP has decided that all 12 of its MPs recently elected to State Assemblies will resign from Parliament to join the new Governments in the Hindi heartland. Three BJP MPs contested in the Telangana Assembly, where the Congress catapulted to power; thus, they continue to hold their Lok Sabha membership. With this the BJP's tally in the Lok Sabha has come down to 292 and in the Rajya Sabha one down with 93 members. Sources in the Government said all three Union Ministers will also be quitting the Modi Government as a procedural formality. The move has given rise to the view that the party leadership may bring in new faces at the helm in all the three States. With the Lok Sabha elections less than five months away, the party is likely to send a larger message about its social agenda with its chief ministerial choices.



Sources also did not rule out the possibility of having Deputy Chief Ministers in the States to balance social equations and enhance administrative effectiveness. The BJP swept to power in the three Hindi-speaking States, dismissing the challenge from the Congress in all of them as it raced to a two-thirds majority in Madhya Pradesh and comfortable majority the Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan in the polls where Narendra Modi and his guarantees powered its campaign. BJP president JP Nadda

accompanied 10 of them as they tendered their resignations from Parliament. Two others, Union Minister Renuka Singh and Mahant Balaknath, will also be quitting, party leaders said. Other MPs who quit are Rakesh Singh, Uday Pratap Singh and Riti Pathak from Madhya Pradesh; Kirodi Lal Meena, Diya Kumari and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore from Rajasthan and Gomati Sai and Arun Sao from Chhattisgarh. All except Meena are Lok Sabha members. Meena is a Rajya Sabha member. Patel said the 10 MPs took Modi's blessings before tendering their resignations. The BJP Parliamentary Party will hold its first meeting during Parliament's Winter Session on Thursday and is likely to felicitate Modi for leading the party to massive wins in three Assembly polls. The BJP Parliamentary Party, which includes all its Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members, generally meets every week during the session. In the meetings, its leaders, including Modi, speak on different issues germane to the agenda in Parliament and also to its organisational and political campaigns.

Distasteful remarks by DMK MP in the House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A huge political row has erupted following the 'Gaumutra Remarks' by DMK Lok Sabha MP DNV Senthil Kumar's followed by some Opposition leaders on the North-South divide remarks with the Centre taking exception to the comments by accusing the Congress of hatching a conspiracy to insult Indian culture and identity, instead of analysing the reasons for its defeat in the elections. The BJP asked if DMK Chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has asked party leaders, who had spoken against Sanatan Dharma, to also apologise after MP DNV Senthil Kumar expressed regret in Lok Sabha for referring to Hindi heartland States in a derogatory manner in the House. Others political parties from the Opposition were yet to react on the statement though the Congress has distanced itself and said they do not buy

such irresponsible comments by their southern India alliance partner. "The Congress believes in Sanatan Dharma and Gau Mata, we don't agree with DMK's statements," said Congress general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Rajiv Shukla. Union Minister Anurag Thakur questioned the silence of former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi on the issue and wondered whether the remarks on the North-South divide, reference to North India as "gaumutra States" and criticism of Sanatan Dharma had their sanction. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is spreading the message of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' but the Opposition has started using foul language and blaming the EVMs and regionalism for their loss in the Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh," the Union Minister said at a Press conference.



Jaipur burns

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Markets were closed in Jaipur and some other Rajasthan districts and protesters blocked roads and stopped trains on Wednesday after a bandh call by the Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena over the killing of its chief Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi. Governor Kalraj Mishra spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the phone and summoned the State Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, police chief and Jaipur Police Commissioner to review the law and order situation in the State. The police set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe into the killing of the Rajput leader who was shot dead by two men at his house here on Tuesday. They also killed an "accomplice" who had accompanied them to the house. On Facebook, gangster Rohit Godara — said to be linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang — has claimed responsibility and said Gogamedi was killed for "backing" his enemies. The police have identified the two alleged killers as Rohit Rathore from Jaipur and Nitin Fauji from Haryana's Mahendragarh, and announced a cash reward of ₹ 5 lakh for information leading to their arrest. Markets remained closed in Jaipur, Kota, Bundi, Ajmer, Sawai Madhopur, Chittorgarh, Jhalawar, Baran and some other districts while a mass rally was taken out in Udaipur and a demonstration was held at the collectorate circle amid heavy deployment of police.

Gujarat's Garba finds a global audience

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Garba, an all encompassing iconic dance of Gujarat performed for nine days during the Navratri festival, has now earned a place on the global cultural map. It has been included in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The inclusion has been made under the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 18th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which began in Kasane, Botswana on Tuesday. In August 2022, India had nominated garba for inclusion in the UN cultural agency's list. Soon after the announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to the social media X expressing his happiness. "Garba is a celebration of life, unity and our deep-rooted traditions. Its inscription on the Intangible Heritage List showcases to the world the beauty of Indian culture. This honour inspires us to preserve and promote our heritage for future generations.



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

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

continues to thrive as a vibrant living tradition bringing communities together," an official release from the Gujarat Government said. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel called it as a 'proud moment'. Patel wrote on social media X, "Garba's inclusion in the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage list is truly a proud moment for Gujarat and India. It is an honour given by the world to the ancient culture of U n i o n Minister of Culture G Kishan

Reddy also shared a post on the same, saying the listing is a testimony to the "tireless efforts of this government under the leadership of Modi to showcase our rich culture, traditions and heritage to the world". Meenakashi Lekhi, Minister of External Affairs, too took to the social media to express her happiness calling it 'a proud moment for Bharat as Gujarat's vibrant Garba is now inscribed as the 15th recognised element in @UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.



SAIL Chairman inaugurates Desulphurisation Units in BSL

PNS : BOKARO

SAIL Chairman Amarendu Prakash reached Bokaro late in the evening on 5th December pertaining to his official visit. On his arrival in Bokaro, Director Incharge RSP, Additional Incharge BSL Atanu Bhowmik and Executive Directors of BSL welcomed him. As part of his visit, on 6th December in the morning, the SAIL Chairman first planted trees in the Nehru Park and offered



SAIL Chairman Amarendu Prakash with DIC RSP Atanu Bhowmik during a meeting in BSL on Wednesday. PNS

prayers in the Jagannath temple. He also met the doctors and nursing staff of the hospital in the auditorium of the nursing school of BGH. During the plant tour, SAIL Chairman inaugurated Desulphurisation Unit 1 and 2 of SMS-2. Notably with this unit coming into operation, the quality of steel produced by BSL can be further improved. Prakash also inspected the sites related to the proposed brownfield expansion inside the plant premises and took informa-

tion from the officials. During the plant tour, SAIL Chairman also met the women employees of BSL and visited the hot strip mill. In the afternoon, the SAIL Chairman and Director in-charge Atanu Bhowmik paid their tribute to Dr. BR Ambedkar on the occasion of his Maha Parinirvana Divas. Thereafter, in separate meetings held at Bokaro Niwas, the Chairman discussed various aspects with the youth managers and trade union representatives

of BSL. Prakash also held a separate meeting with senior officials of BSL and reviewed production, projects and other important issues. Executive directors and chief general managers of BSL and its subordinate units also participated in this review meeting. Before leaving from Bokaro on 7th December afternoon, SAIL Chairman will meet Officers Association and SC-ST representatives and will also inspect some CSR related projects of BSL.

SAIC Motor, JSW Group join hands to accelerate growth with focus on green mobility

PNS : RANCHI

SAIC Motor, a global automobile giant, and JSW Group, a leading Indian business conglomerate, have announced a strategic joint venture to boost the growth of MG Motor in India with a focus on green mobility. The joint venture will leverage the resources and expertise of both partners to introduce a range of innovative and intelligent vehicles, including new energy vehicles (NEVs) and internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, to the Indian market. The joint venture will also enhance the local sourcing, charging infrastructure, production capacity, and customer service of MG Motor in India. JSW Group will hold 35% stake in the joint venture, while SAIC Motor will continue to support the joint venture with advanced technology and products. The joint venture aims to create a smart and sustainable automotive ecosystem in India by promoting carbon neutrality, sustainability, and green mobility.

XITE announces 50% scholarship for deserving candidates

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a groundbreaking move towards fostering inclusive education, XITE College has opened its doors for applications to its esteemed degree programs in BBA, B.Com. (H), B.A. Eng. (H), and B.A. Eco. (H) for the upcoming academic year 2024. This initiative carries a profound commitment to providing quality education to all, as XITE has designated 100 seats exclusively for tribal and underprivileged students, predominantly from Rural and Remote Areas.

An official of XITE College, expressed the institution's dedication to breaking down barriers to education. He stated, "At XITE, we believe in the transformative power of education. By earmarking seats for Tribal and Underprivileged students, we

aim to bridge the gap and provide equal opportunities for academic growth."

What elevates this initiative to new heights of commendability is the provision of a 50% scholarship for deserving candidates from these communities. This move is poised to make higher education not only accessible but also empowering for those who have traditionally faced barriers to pursuing advanced studies.

The online application form is now live, and prospective students can access it through various channels, including XITE's social media handles, official email (admissions@xite.ac.in), and mobile number (+917761045412). This step ensures a seamless and user-friendly application process for aspirants.

With a limited overall



intake of 300 seats, XITE stands tall as a beacon of academic excellence in the Kolhan Region. The institution boasts a NAAC accreditation with a B grade, underscoring its unwavering commitment to delivering top-notch education. Recognized by the UGC as a 2(F) college, XITE solidifies its standing in the realm of higher education, ensuring that its programs meet and

exceed the established standards.

An official of Admissions at XITE, emphasized the institution's vision, saying, "We envision XITE as a transformative journey for every student. Our commitment to inclusive education is not just a statement; it's a lived reality."

This initiative is a timely and commendable extension of XLRI and a unit of

Xavier Colleges, adding another layer of significance to the legacy of these esteemed institutions. Unlock the door to your academic journey at XITE, where education is not merely a pursuit but a transformative experience for every student.

XITE College is a timely initiative of XLRI with unflinching support of the Jamshedpur Jesuit Society. The main objective of the College is to groom students both in knowledge and skill, and prepare them towards nation building and good citizenship. The College is accredited by NAAC with Grade 'B' in the 1st Cycle in 2019 and it is affiliated to Kolhan University. Currently the College offers various Degree Programmes and is recognized by the UGC.

ESL Steel Ltd, partner NGO members visit Manav Seva Ashram

PNS : BOKARO

ESL Steel Limited, a Vedanta Group Company, is a leading integrated steel producer of India. In line with commitment to the community present in, ESL Steel Limited's CSR department and its partner implementing NGOs came together and decided to meet and spend time, on the occasion of the International Volunteers' Day, with the differently abled children at Manav Seva Ashram and share some happiness with them.

Manav Seva Ashram is an NGO situated in Sector 5, Bokaro, which helps in education and rehabilitation of differently abled and orphan children. They have looked after these special children in terms of their schooling, hostel and medical treatment for the last 20 years. The partner implementing NGOs which took part in this drive included AAS Vidyalaya, SEEDS



Impact, Citizens Foundation, Dristee Foundation, Sarthak Sustainable Development Foundation and American India Foundation. Apart from meeting the children, the organisations together donated various items of need to them, including Dry Ration, Hygiene & Sanitation products, Eatables, Stationaries, Toiletries and other products of need to the students and residents for more than a couple of months' usage. Ashish Ranjan, Head, CSR,

ER & PR, ESL Steel Limited says, "ESL Steel Limited and its partner NGOs have always shown unwavering commitment to seek out and uplift the underprivileged and marginalized individuals and ensure their inclusion in the mainstream. Through our dedicated efforts, we strive to empower each individual, fostering a sense of belonging and enabling them to play an essential role in the collective growth and prosperity of our community."

Celebrating Inclusivity at SBPS



PNS : RANCHI

To observe International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPD), Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi organised an Indoor Tournament with the students of Deepsikhia, an Institute for Child Development and Mental Health. It was a friendly sporting event in which SBPS students teamed up with the students of the visiting school and played the Young athletes games in which Hurdles, crawling the Circles, jump on the number sequence, umbrella game, cricket etc.

were included. Mr. Harbhajan Singh, an International Basketball player, Olympian 1980 Moscow, Retd. HOD Sports Tata Steel and President of Jharkhand Basketball Association graced the occasion with his dignified presence. Arun Datta, Retd. Tata Steel Qualified Table Tennis Coach and other qualified Athletes officials were also present for the event.

On the same occasion, an Orientation programme on Special Olympics was also hosted at SBPS Ranchi where Satbir Singh Sahota was the guest speaker. He is a retired

Tata Steel Qualified Cycling coach and an international cyclist who had represented our country five times at the National Cycling championship. He sensitised the students about the people with intellectual disabilities. He also informed them about the objective of Special Olympics which is to empower the people with intellectual disabilities so that they can discover new strengths and abilities, skills and success.

School Head Personnel & Admin., Dr. Pradip Varma, appreciated the efforts of the school in conducting such events.

Principal, Paramjit Kaur, joined the students in their friendly matches. She said that every individual has a special ability and God has created all with a purpose to fulfil. Keeping this in mind we should embark on the journey of life with "Heart within and God O'er head!". She added that the event is an initiative undertaken by the school as a stepping stone towards fulfilment of sustainable development goal on inclusive and equitable quality education.

DPS Bokaro sets a New Benchmark with Aero-Innovation Lab



R SHARMA : BOKARO

In an evolving move towards holistic development, DPS Bokaro, inaugurated the Rakesh Sharma Aero-Innovation Lab today. This is a first of its kind Aero lab in Jharkhand and will empower students to gain expertise in technical fields like aeronautics, aviation and space technology. The lab was inaugurated by Principal, Dr. A. S. Gangwar emphasized in the evolving landscape of education, diversification is crucial. The Aero-Innovation Lab sets a new benchmark in educational innovation, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of diverse technical fields, fostering a

passion for learning and exploration.

It is noteworthy that Lab pays tribute to the country's first space travellers, Rakesh Sharma and Kalpana Chawla. This state-of-the-art lab introduces students to avant-garde advancements in aeronautics, including pollution-free 3D printing, CNC laser cutting, mechanical tools, meteorology, wind tunnels, drone technology, rocket science, satellites, Mars rovers, hydraulic excavators, transistor-based airship operations, and sensor-based aircraft control. Practical insights into conational engineering and technologically artistic construction are also shared through interactive models.

Bokaro DC-DDC eat mid-day meal with children

Children looked excited to see the officials with them

R SHARMA : PNS BOKARO

On Wednesday, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kuldeep Chaudhary, Deputy Development Commissioner (DDC) . Kirtishree G., Sub-Divisional Officer Chas Dilip Pratap Singh Shekhawat, who reached Sonabad of Chas block exemplifying grass root level fair administration entire team of district officials sat with the children of Upgraded Basic High School Sonabad and ate Mid Day Meal (MDM). Notably Administration had come to Sonabad Panchayat of Chas block to attend the camp



organized under the Aapki Yojana Aapki Sarkar Aapke Dwar program. It is noteworthy

that DC-DDC and other officials were inspecting the school building and while the

same completed during the same time, seeing the children eating MDM, the officials

expressed their intention to eat MDM with the children. After this, all the officials including DC-DDC sat with the children and ate MDM. The children looked very excited to see the officials with them and same on sure will boost morale of students including alertness towards quality of MDM getting served since any approach is not feasible unless administration is not having penetration towards ground level activity and Bokaro district top administration gave virtual message to all the downstream towards Quality working.

SURESH NIKHAR : BERMO

The process of workers from Giridih, Hazaribagh and Bokaro districts of Jharkhand getting trapped abroad has not stopped, but is still continuing. These labourers, who had gone to other countries for livelihood, are looking forward to returning to their country.

Actually, 45 laborers from Jharkhand are stuck in Saudi Arabia and after making them work, the company has not paid them wages for five months, due to which a food crisis has arisen. The workers shared their pain by sharing videos on social media and

they appealed to the government to return to their homeland.

Sikandar Ali, who has been helping the migrant laborers and continuously working for their welfare, has appealed for help from India and the state government. He said that due to lack of employment, such cases keep coming up in Jharkhand every day. But, the conditions there are not suitable for them and in such a situation, workers are not able to return to their country. He told the government about the need to make employment arrangements to stop the migration of workers. Arjun Mahato,

Minority Commission member Waris Qureshi reaches Lohardaga

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

Jharkhand State Minority Commission member Waris Qureshi met the Lohardaga District Welfare Officer on Wednesday. He discussed the ongoing minority welfare schemes in the district. Qureshi also took detailed information about how much loan is being provided to minorities under the Chief Minister Employment Generation Scheme. Also, two blocks of this district, Kudu and Kisko, have been selected under MSDP.

There are many works in these two blocks which are incomplete due to lack of funds and have not been completed yet. Shri Qureshi directed the District Welfare Officer to provide



funds for the schemes and complete them immediately. He also directed to accelerate minority development schemes. Whatever schemes have been made for minorities under MSDP, they should be sent to the state government as soon as possible, so that the schemes for the welfare of minorities can be implemented on time.

Cyclone Michaung causes incessant light showers in Daltonganj

PNS : DALTONGANJ

It's been drizzling since early morning in Daltonganj and in the remaining parts of Palamu. The light shower is the aftermath of cyclone Micahung. Agricultural scientist Permode Kumar of the Birsra Agriculture university at Chiyanki here said these light showers are a big loss to the harvested paddy crops lying in the open in the field.

It's already 6 percent sowing of paddy in Palamu and now this unseasonal rain is set to further doom the prospects of the paddy and rice. Farmers who have

stored paddy in the barns may not suffer the way paddy lying in the open in the field.

However Permode Kumar said this rain is beneficial to Rabi crops like gram, wheat, pulse etc. On being asked if there is any prospect of Rabi crops here in Palamu which had a very miserable Kharif crop to which this agriculture scientist said "There is no spectacular prospect of the Rabi crop. Rabi is as down as Kharif crop was. It's again because of the scanty rains this rainy season." Fruit bearing trees like orange, guava, papaya, pears etc will have no adverse effect of this rain on them, the scientist.



Shri Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena supporters raise slogans during a protest over the killing of their leader Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi, in Ranchi on Wednesday. Pix by Ratan Lal

CM unveils schemes worth Rs 370 Cr in Seraikela-Kharsawan

Challenges opposition in the field of development

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a grand event at Seraikela-Kharsawan's Govindpur Maidan, Kharsawan, Chief Minister Hemant Soren announced schemes worth Rs 370 crore under the banner of "Aapki Yojna, Aapki Sarkar, Apke Dwar." While presenting these initiatives, the Chief Minister expressed confidence in the government's commitment to transparent and inclusive development.

Addressing the gathering, Soren stated, "Our policy and intentions are crystal clear. We deliver what we promise to the public. Through schemes like 'Aapki Yojna Aapki Sarkar, Apke Dwar,' we aim to benefit tribals, Dalits, backward classes, minorities, women, youth, farmers, labourers, and every section of society. This is a step towards ensuring that government schemes and services reach every citizen."

The event, held at Gondapur Maidan Kharsawan



Chief Minister Hemant Soren along with Ministers Champai Soren, Satyanand Bhokta, Kharsawan MLA Dashrath Gagrai, Ichagarh MLA Sabita Mahato and others during the third phase of 'Aapki Yojana, Aapki Sarkar, Apke Dwar' at Gondpur ground in Simla Panchayat of Seraikela Kharsawan district on Wednesday. PNS

in Seraikela Kharsawan, saw a large turnout of people eager to witness the unveiling of developmental schemes. Chief Minister Hemant Soren highlighted the importance of saving water, forests, and land, emphasizing their significance in preserving tribal communities.

"This is an opportunity for the government to come among the people continuous-

ly for the last 3 years. We have adopted a development model that the previous government couldn't muster the courage to implement for 20 years," said Soren, reflecting on the government's proactive approach to development.

He further remarked, "In the first phase of 'Aapki Yojna, Aapki Sarkar, Apke Dwar' in 2021, we received 35 lakh applications, and in

2022, 55 lakh applications. This clearly shows that the previous government only pretended; no significant work happened on the ground."

Amidst applause, the Chief Minister addressed the Opposition's criticism, stating, "We fought for 40 years to get a separate state and joined the government after fighting for 20 years. Despite our blue-



Chief Minister Hemant Soren distribute assets among the beneficiaries in the program organized under the third phase of "Aapki Yojana - Aapki Sarkar - Apke Dwar" at Gondpur ground in Simla Panchayat of Seraikela Kharsawan district on Wednesday. Ministers Champai Soren, Satyanand Bhokta, Kharsawan MLA Dashrath Gagrai, Ichagarh MLA Sabita Mahato and others are also seen in the picture. PNS

print for development, the opposition cannot see it because they view everything through tinted glasses."

Under the Chief Minister Pashudhan Yojana, the gov-

ernment has fixed the insurance rate of animals and the MSP for forest produce. The Chief Minister assured farmers of prosperity through the strengthening and improve-

ment of the Livestock scheme. Now, buffalo will also be available under this scheme, contributing to economic progress and the elimination of malnutrition.

In his address, the Chief Minister outlined the government's efforts to support farmers and enhance wealth production. The formation of the Sidhu-Kanhu Forest Produce Federation aims to provide minimum support prices (MSP) for forest produce, protecting farmers from market middlemen and brokers.

Furthermore, the government plans to establish new rice mills and provide land for aspiring entrepreneurs in this sector. Addressing the issue of unemployment, Chief Minister Hemant Soren announced the government's plan to make 50 thousand new appointments, reinforcing the commitment to generating employment opportunities.

Speaking about self-employment, Hemant Soren

declared, "Banks may hesitate to provide loans for self-employment, but the government will offer loans without guarantees for self-employment." He reassured the audience that the government is actively working towards enriching the employment generation scheme to benefit less educated individuals.

The event also featured addresses by Labour Minister Satyanand Bhokta and Minister Champai Soren, who enumerated the government's achievements. The inclusive nature of the gathering was evident, with MLA Savita Mahato and MLA Dashrath Gagrai addressing a diverse audience, including women, men, youth, and children.

The "Aapki Yojna Aapki Sarkar, Apke Dwar" program continues to symbolize the government's commitment to accessible and transparent governance, empowering diverse communities in Jharkhand.

IT survey at Cong MP Dhiraj Sahu's premises



Police personnel seen as the Income Tax officials conduct a survey at the residence of Congress MP Dheraj Sahu in connection with the disproportionate asset case, in Ranchi on Wednesday. Pix by Ratan Lal

PNS : RANCHI

Income Tax Department teams today conducted raids at five locations of Congress' Rajya Sabha mem-

ber Dheeraj Prasad Sahu in Ranchi, Lohardaga and Odisha. The IT sleuths scrutinized several documents and investment documents etc. The MP has ancestral resi-

Naushad Alam skips ED summons

PNS : RANCHI

Sahibganj SP Naushad Alam is on the radar of ED for making arrangements to send Vijay Hansda to Delhi. He was called to Ranchi for questioning again by ED. It was said that he should reach the office in Ranchi on 6th December. But he did not come. Naushad Alam has written a letter to ED asking for time. In his letter, he has asked for time citing law and order. Now ED can summon Naushad Alam for the third time. Earlier, ED

had interrogated Naushad Alam. On November 28, ED had interrogated SP Naushad Alam in the matter of influencing Vijay Hansda, the main witness in the case of illegal mining worth Rs 1000 crore in Sahibganj. But ED officials were not satisfied with Naushad Alam's answers and he was called again for the second time on 6 December. During interrogation for the first time, Naushad Alam kept giving roundabout answers. After which he was called again.

dence is in Lohardaga, while his family has a bungalow in Radium Road, Ranchi. Income tax teams along with security forces reached both these places on Wednesday morning. Apart from this, survey is also going on at the places related to them in Sundergarh, Odisha.

When the employees working at the residence of MP Dheeraj Prasad Sahu arrived for work in the morning, they were not allowed inside. The people of the house have also not been allowed to come out at present. On December 12, 2019 also, the Income Tax

Department team had reached Dheeraj Sahu's house. In 2019, while going from Ranchi to Delhi, Rs 38.5 lakh was found from Congress Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand, Dheeraj Prasad Sahu, during luggage scanning at Ranchi Airport. At this time the Income Tax Department team had reached the residence at Lohardaga. At that time, due to paucity of time, the money could not be counted at Ranchi Airport. CISF had informed this to Income Tax.

CISF jawans and women personnel are also included along with the IT team. The house is completely sealed and investigation is being done inside. There is a ban on entry of anyone inside the residence and no one can go in or out of the residence. Media personnel have also been kept away. It is being told that the Income Tax Department team has reached from Odisha to conduct surveys in Ranchi and Lohardaga also.

State delegation participates in CoP-28 in Dubai

PNS : RANCHI

The efforts of the rural community in the State of Jharkhand towards adaptation to climate change and thereby minimizing the adverse impacts of climate change have received wide attention at the global platform. The 28th Conference of Parties (CoP-28) under the aegis of United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was organized on 30th November to 2nd December, 2023 in Dubai. This global conference is discussing the measures to be taken to reduce the emission of GreenHouse Gases (GHGs) and to effectively address the impacts of climate change.

Dr. Sanjay Srivastava, PCCF Jharkhand and Dr. D.K.Saxena, Additional PCCF participated in the COP-28 as the delegation of Jharkhand State from the Department of



Forest, Environment and Climate Change.

The delegation made a detailed presentation on Localizing Climate Resilience in the state of Jharkhand highlighting the efforts of the rural communities in 48 villages under Ramgarh and Jamtara districts towards making adaptation to climate change and thereby minimizing its adverse impacts. Further, climate mitigation action including interventions of State Forest

Department in plantation works and soil and moisture conservation measures, initiatives of State of Jharkhand towards establishment of India's first hydrogen engine plant to reduce GreenHouse Gases (GHGs), progress in proposed sustainable transition from coal, and alternative sources of energy were also presented in detail. The presentation of the State of Jharkhand got wide appreciation and accolades in this international conference.

IWCS honours transgenders

Members of IWC of Swarnrekha Ranchi firmly believe in Gender Equality. Keeping this in mind they honoured the Transgenders by inviting them for lunch at President Mala Shrivastava's residence. The Transgenders relished the home-made sumptuous cuisines. IWCS gifted them 11 Woollen shawls, 11 pairs of Woollen Socks, Sweatshirts, Cosmetics and Free Blood Pressure check-up was also done. IWC Swarnrekha



Ranchi succeeded in bringing moments of joy in the lives of transgenders

State Govt not cooperating in Rly projects in J'khand: Vaishnav

PNS : RANCHI

Union Railway Minister Ashwani Vaishnav on Wednesday said that due lack of cooperation from the state government, railway projects in state is getting delayed. Vaishnav, was replying to the query raised by Ranchi MP Sanjay Seth in Lok Sabha. Seth had asked in the Lok Sabha about number of underpasses or railway over bridges being constructed by the Railways in Ranchi. The MP also sought details in Parliament about the places where underpass and railway overbridges are being constructed and the state government positivity about the projects.



A TV grab of Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav in the parliament. (File)

Ranchi, but it has not been finalized yet by the state government. Apart from this, the construction of railway over bridge near the railway gate at Nayasarai near Ranchi-Piska has to be completed. Here the Railways has completed its share of work. The remaining work has to be done by the state government, which is not being done yet. The construction of an under bridge in MECON Colony of Ranchi has been completed by the Railways. The remaining work is to be done by the state government. This too has not been completed yet. DPR of Silli-Ilu bypass rail line ready.

The Union Minister also told the MP in the House that the final location determination survey for the construction of 5.9 km long Silli-Ilu bypass rail line near Muri Junction has been completed.

Its DPR has also been prepared. The MP was informed in the House that during the last one year, Railways has received revenue of Rs 45 crore 25 lakh 44543 from Ranchi Railway Station and Rs 30 crore 64 lakh 29738 from Hatia Railway Station. This revenue is derived from many other operations including passenger service and freight transportation. The Union Minister also told the Parliament that at present 104 and 52 trains are available from Ranchi and Hatia railway stations respectively. Apart from this, in the year 2023, trains like Ranchi Patna Vande Bharat Express, Ranchi Howrah Vande Bharat Express and Ranchi New Giridih Express are included. Introduction of new trains is a process of Railways, its availability will also be ensured as per requirement.

L Khiantge becomes new Chief Secretary of State

Sukhdev Singh transferred to SKIPA as DG

PNS : RANCHI

The State Government on Wednesday made L Khiantge, a 1988 batch IAS officer as the new Chief Secretary of Jharkhand. Khiantge will replace Sukhdev Singh, a 1987 batch IAS officer of Jharkhand Cadre, who has remained the longest serving chief secretary of the State in 23 years.

Sukhdev Singh has been made new Director General of the Sri Krishna Institute of Public Administration, an administrative training institute of the State primarily for state administrative service



officers. Khiantge was the DG of SKIPA before being appointed as the new chief secretary.

Khiantge is due to retire in September 2025, while Singh is due to retire in March 2024.

Deepak Prakash raises issue of migration from Jharkhand

PNS : RANCHI

BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Deepak Prakash today raised the issue of migration from Jharkhand during the Zero Hour of Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. He said that Jharkhand state is rich in iron, copper, gold, mica, bauxite, uranium and many other mineral resources. Many industries can be set up here on this basis, but there are obstacles due to the policies of the state government.

He said that despite fulfilling all the criteria of the Central Government, the mines of Jharkhand are closed today due to the wrong intentions of the State



Government. The lease of mines is being allotted by the Central Government, but due to the wrong policy and intentions of the State Government, land is not being acquired for the industrialists.

Employment is created by setting up industries, but due

to the flaws in the policy and intentions of the present state government, today industries and industrialists are migrating from there. He said that due to lack of industries, the youth of Jharkhand are facing the brunt of unemployment and also joining criminal organizations.

Deepak Prakash said that the reason behind Jharkhand's mines not opening is that a gang of organized criminals and brokers are working under the protection of the government. Illegal mining is taking place through these criminals and brokers. The revenue of the state and central government is decreasing.



BJP State President Babulal Marandi during 'Adivasi Adhikar' rally in Pakur on Wednesday. PNS

Guv nod to Winter Session of Assembly from Dec 15

PNS : RANCHI

The winter session of Jharkhand Assembly has been approved by Governor CP Radhakrishnan. It will start from December 15. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Alamgir Alam said that the Cabinet decision was sent by the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry to the Raj Bhavan for approval. The Governor has given approval to call the session. He said that now the proposal will be brought in the cabinet meeting held on December 7. After getting approval there, the final schedule will be released. The winter session of Jharkhand Assembly will start from December 15 and continue till December 22. There will be a total of 6



working days. The coalition government will present the second supplementary budget of the financial year. Many old bills will be introduced again in the House.

Notably, Governor CP Radhakrishnan has returned the Local Policy Bill for the second time. Hemant Soren led government can bring it back to the House. OBC Reservation Bill has also not received the

approval of Raj Bhavan. The government can also introduce it again. Interestingly, after the formation of Hemant Soren government, this will be the first session of the Assembly in which the Leader of Opposition will also be present. In October this year, BJP made Amar Bauri the leader of the legislature party. Then he was approved as the Leader of Opposition by Speaker Rabinranath Mahato. This winter session of Jharkhand Assembly will also be turbulent. Actually, now less than 1 year is left for the state assembly elections. Only a few months are left for the Lok Sabha elections. BJP will try to corner the government on the issues of employment, law and order and corruption.



Girls used umbrellas during rain owing to Cyclone Michaung, in Ranchi on Wednesday. Pix by Ratan Lal

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

Centre informs Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



quota issue. The Supreme Court has said that the reservation cannot be increased beyond 50 per cent without empirical data. About women's reservation in local bodies, Patil said the Centre has made several efforts to empower elected women panchayat leaders, including providing them six months of training. There has been a rise in the participation of women in the governance process, he said.

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

P Wilson and NCP leader Vandana Chavan.

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

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

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

Modi to launch global investors summit in Dehradun

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

The summit will be attended by thousands of investors and



delegates from across the world.

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Kharge said the state govern-

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

a question that has to be asked to Mr Baalu and (M K) Stalin.

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

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

He alleged that the opposition



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

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

“People of the country will

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

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

BJP leaders had decried his remarks as “hate speech” and

said the voters will “wipe out” the INDIA bloc from southern India as well in the next elections. Facing flak, the DMK MP had later apologised.

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

The group called out international tobacco and vaping firms for deliberately targeting children to establish a consumer base for their addictive and harmful products including all kinds of new-age gateway devices such as e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn electronic devices.

Stressing on the critical need for increased awareness, the body has repeatedly highlighted on the urgency of educating the public about such intentions of these companies.

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

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

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

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

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

This predatory targeting of children has also been highlighted by experts globally, and most recently it was raised in discussions in the Scottish Parliament.

Epidemiologist Professor Emily Banks underscored to the Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSPs the concerning and immoral intentions of vaping and tobacco giants to create ‘lifelong customers’ in children and teenagers. Her remarks aligned with growing expert support for a complete ban on disposable e-cigarettes in Scotland.

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almora fault is a high angle west-northwest-east-southeast trending tectonic plane that separates the Garhwal group of inner lesser Himalaya in the north from Jaunsar and Dudatoli Groups of outer lesser Himalayas in the south. Rijiju said the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published the Seismic Zoning Map of India, ranging from Zone II to V and offers guidelines for implementing the essential engineering codes and practices to construct earthquake-resistant buildings.

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

“Earlier age at [first menstr-



al cycle] may be one of early life indicators of the cardiometabolic disease trajectory in women,” they suggested in their study.

The women included in the study came from the nationally representative cross-sectional National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2018. The women had specified the age at which they had their first menstrual cycle.

Of the women studied, about

10 per cent, or 1773, reported a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. Further, 11.5 per cent of these, or 203, reported some type of cardiovascular disease, the researchers found.

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

They also found that menstru-

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

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

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

The researchers said that these

findings supported the possibility that age of getting the first period may be incorporated into early-life strategies for preventing diabetes and progression of diabetes complications.

“These findings add another dimension to the potentially less well understood determinants of cardiometabolic risk, particularly in women who have been relatively underrepresented in this area of research,” said Sumantra Ray, Executive Director of the NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition & Health, which co-owns BMJ Nutrition Prevention & Health.

“And they provide a clear steer on the need to design interventional studies looking at the prevention of cardiometabolic disease in ethnically diverse groups of women who start menstruating at a young age,” he said.

Saudia taking measures for more fulfilling journey for Hajj

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saudi Arabia has rolled out a series of “transformative” measures like improving visa processing, accessibility and logistical support to ensure a more enriching experience for Indian pilgrims undertaking the journey to Mecca, Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfig bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah said on Wednesday.

In an interview to PTI, Al-Rabiah said the initiatives are specifically designed to provide Indian pilgrims with enhanced flexibility throughout their journey, particularly benefiting women embarking on independent Umrah trips.

The new steps like extension of the Umrah visa to 90 days and introduction of a four-day transit visa are tailored to accommodate the growing influx of Indian pilgrims.

“By promoting gender equality and cultivating a safer, more embracing environment, these changes collectively aim to ensure a more fulfilling and secure pilgrimage experience for all travellers,” he said.

Al-Rabiah, currently on a visit to India, held talks with Union Ministry Affairs Minister Smriti Irani and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday.

The influential minister said the aim of the new initiatives was to ensure “warmth and convenience” to the overall experience of the pilgrims.

1st nationwide CPR awareness event held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

For the first time in the country, a nationwide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) awareness programme was launched in the country with over 20 lakh participants including students, professionals and paramedical staff being given training in a single sitting online.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya after launching the much-needed programme stressed the need for raising awareness among people and about the importance of training to provide immediate help in case of cardiac arrest and save lives. The move follows shocking reports from across the country of healthy young people succumbing to cardiac arrests during routine daily activities when they had almost no prior health issues, much less cardiac problems..

The programme was prepared by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences on CPR training along with Ministers of State for Health Bharati Pravin

Pawar and SP Singh Baghel.

“It should be our effort to keep our heart healthy by taking a balanced diet and doing exercise regularly. However, in the proximity of someone suffering from cardiac arrest, if one is trained in CPR technique, it will enable them to save lives,” Mandaviya said.

“It is imperative that a patient is administered treatment immediately upon suffering a cardiac arrest. Hence awareness and adequate training in CPR is paramount,” he added while lauding the initiative of the NBEMC.

Mandaviya said, “It (CPR) is of critical importance as the victim of cardiac arrest needs help administered urgently. In light of this, it is crucial that there is heightened awareness amongst the public with adequate knowledge and training so that we can save someone's life.”

Praising people's participation in the training, Mandaviya said, “Anyone can suffer from cardiac arrest at any given point in time and enhanced knowledge and training will aid in administering the right procedures and save a life.”

2 days 16th MCSG meeting held: Ministry



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The 16th edition of the India-Germany Military Cooperation Sub Group (MCSG) meeting was conducted for two days starting Tuesday here, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

The meeting was co-chaired from the Indian side by Brigadier Vivek Narang, Deputy Assistant Chief of Integrated Staff IDC (A), HQ IDS, and Col (GS) Christian Schmidt, Director, Department International Cooperation Armed Forces Office from the German side.

The meeting was conducted in a friendly, warm, and cordial atmosphere. Discussions focused on new initiatives under the ambit of existing bilateral defence cooperation mechanisms and further strengthening ongoing defence engagements.

India-Germany Military Cooperation Sub Group (MCSG) is a forum established to boost defence cooperation between both nations through regular talks at the strategic and operational levels between the Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff, and the Department of International Cooperation Armed Forces.

CDS Chauhan presides over 1st session of combined leadership conclave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan presided over the first session of Combined Leadership Conclave and interacted with the senior leadership of the Armed Forces here on Wednesday. The CDS provided an insight into modern warfare and national security.

The three-day conclave is focussing on geo-strategic issues, national security and defence, contemporary and emerging security challenges and integration and jointness for capability enhancement as well as ‘Aatmanirbharta’ in defence.

Eminent personalities with renowned experience in respective fields will also interact with participants enlightening them about issues of national importance, defence ministry said.

The conclave aims to serve as a development programme for senior officers of the three services, focused on regional and national security issues with a view to enhance synergy, both at operational and strategic levels within the Armed Forces.

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) Lt Gen JP Mathew and other senior officers of HQ, Integrated Defence Staff were also present during the event.

Parts of Chennai suffer from inundation

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Residents grappled with stagnant water and power disruption in parts of the city and its suburbs on Wednesday, two days after Cyclone Michaung wreaked havoc in the metropolis and neighbouring districts, even as civic agency personnel stepped up relief and rehabilitation efforts.

The government said power was kept suspended in some areas as a “preventive measure” since the power cables were under water, while asserting all efforts were being taken to restore normalcy.

Another day’s holiday was declared for schools and colleges in Chennai on December 7.

The cyclone-triggered heavy rainfall had led to inundation in localities including Velachery and Tambaram. On Wednesday too, people were seen leaving their homes in the areas surrounded with water to safer zones, carrying their children and wading through the stag-

nant water. They called for help, including pressing more boats to ferry people to higher ground. Chief Minister M K Stalin visited some of the affected areas and distributed food and essential commodities to people put up at a relief centre in the city. He inspected activities undertaken by the city civic body to drain water.

He also wrote to the Centre seeking an interim flood relief of Rs 5,060 crore to tide over the situation.

Many users on social media site ‘X’ shared videos of residential localities still being surrounded by stagnant water, claiming many residents were stuck inside. The hashtag #Velachery was trending on the microblogging site.

A user lamented that her relatives were stuck in their home for the last three days without power, drinking water and milk. There were complaints of delay in supply of milk in many affected parts including Velachery and Tambaram and residents alleged it was being sold for extra price.

CYCLONE MICHAUNG



A drone visual shows an area that is flooded after the landfall of Cyclone Michaung, in Chennai, on Wednesday

PTI

Power supply had not resumed in parts of the city including Kilpauk and Kattupakkam. The state government said relief activities were on in full swing

and that people in many of the affected areas were being rescued through inflatable boats even during midnight. Senior officials of the Greater

Chennai Corporation were overseeing the rescue and relief activities, the civic agency said. The Greater Chennai Police also announced helpline num-

bers for citizens to contact them for rescue and relief activities. An update from the city police on Wednesday said six rain-related deaths were reported while many persons in need were rescued by the cops in different parts of the city. Among the rescued were aged persons and a number of pregnant women, and a woman and her newborn, an official release said.

Further, 11 subways in the metro remained closed for vehicular movement due to water-logging. There were no disruptions in operations at the airport while the Southern Railway announced cancelling a number of services and diversion of many others.

However, it announced resumption of the suburban services on the Chennai Egmore-Chengalpatt and Chennai Beach-Arakkonam routes with frequency of 30 and 45 minutes, respectively. Services on the Tiruvottiyur-Sullurpeta line will be operated in a hourly frequency, it said in an update.

Cyclone damages infrastructure in Andhra

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

The severe cyclonic storm Michaung, which crossed the Andhra Pradesh coast close to Bapatla on Tuesday and subsequently weakened into a cyclonic storm, left a trail of destruction in its wake. Michaung is expected to subside into a deep depression over the next six hours, said an official.

The storm damaged 770-kilometre roads, uprooted 35 trees and killed three livestock, among others.

According to data shared by the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO), nearly 40 lakh people from 194 villages and two towns were affected by Michaung’s impact, including the inundation of 25 villages. Though there was no loss of

human life on Tuesday, Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority Director BR Ambedkar told PTI that a four-year-old boy died after a hut wall collapsed on him in Tirupati district on Monday. While another person died in Bapatla district, Superintendent of Police Vakul Jindal told PTI that the cause of death was not related to the cyclone. “The lone deceased person was found in a drunken state on a road by his motorcycle, which was not submerged under water, in the Inkollu village,” Jindal said. Across the state, 204 relief camps are accommodating 15,173 evacuees. As part of relief efforts, 18,073 food packets and more than 1 lakh water packets were distributed. Eighty health camps were also organised.



INDIA Bloc must act swiftly to finalise future strategies, says Nitish

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday sought to downplay BJP’s victory in three states in the Hindi heartland, stating that there is “no need to discuss much” on such wins of the saffron party, and said the opposition INDIA alliance must act swiftly to finalise its future strategies. Kumar said he is now focusing on the next meeting of the INDIA coalition, which is scheduled in the third week of December.

“The Congress has performed well in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. These things happen in electoral politics. Earlier, there were Congress governments in these states...Now BJP has won. There is no need to discuss much on such issues. The Congress has won Telangana this time,” the JD(U) leader told reporters here while responding to queries about the BJP’s win in three states.

The meeting of the INDIA coalition, which was scheduled to be held on December 6, has been deferred as some senior leaders were unable to attend the same due to their preoccupations, Kumar said.

“I want the INDIA coalition to act swiftly to finalise its future strategies, including the seat-sharing issue, in the next meeting, which is scheduled to be held in the third week of December,” he said.

RJD president Lalu Prasad had on Tuesday claimed that top leaders of the INDIA bloc would meet on December 17 in Delhi to chalk out the strategy for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

“I am also not in a position to attend today’s meeting as I am not well. But, I will attend the next meeting of the INDIA coalition,” said Kumar, who played an instrumental role in bringing together different parties opposed to the BJP. He said the opposition leaders will discuss issues related to seat sharing and also finalise several other strategies.

“My only wish is to unite the maximum number of parties before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Everything should be finalised at the earliest. I have no desire for myself,” Kumar said.

The 26-party opposition alliance, which has been formed to jointly take on the ruling BJP at the Centre in next year’s elections, have already held meetings in Patna, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Asked about Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s proposed visit to Bihar, Kumar said, “Yes, he is coming to chair the Eastern Zonal Council (EZC) meeting in Patna on December 10. We all will be there.” The meeting is expected to be joined by the CMs of other member states Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.

He claimed that the grand alliance government in Bihar is working for the overall development of the state.

“This is the reason that we raised the quota for deprived castes in state government jobs and educational institutions, based on our caste survey report. We want that the Centre should also conduct caste-based census in the country and accord special status to Bihar for its growth,” Kumar added.

Female foeticide ring busted in Karnataka

PTI ■ MANDYA (K’TAKA)

Health officials on Wednesday launched a crackdown on medical scanning centres after a large-scale female foeticide ring was exposed carrying out medical termination of female foetuses at a makeshift surgical facility set up at a jaggery factory in a remote village of Mandya district.

The raids were carried out by the Mandya District Family Welfare Officer Venkataswamy and Pandavapura Sub-division Assistant Commissioner Nandish. They sealed scanning centres that did not comply with government guidelines and keep their records up to date.

The police recently arrested 10 people including doctors, nurses and agents, who had allegedly carried out over 900 female foeticides.

The gang used to contact pregnant women and persuade them to get a sex determination test done, for which they charged between Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000, according to police. They used to conduct the tests in the jaggery factory where all the required equipment was



kept, police said “If the tests showed a female child, they would ask those women whether they wanted to abort it.

Once the women agreed, the team would charge about Rs 50,000 to do the work. At least 900 female foeticides were carried out by the gang,” a senior police official said. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah noted that a CID probe has been ordered into the female foeticide case. Based on the report, stringent action will be taken against the culprits, he told reporters in the district headquarters town of Belagavi.

CHHATTISGARH 72 newly elected MLAs crorepatis

PTI ■ RAIPUR

As many as 72 out of 90 MLAs in the newly-elected Chhattisgarh legislative assembly are crorepatis, four more compared to the previous Vidhan Sabha.

The BJP, which won a landslide victory in the recently-held elections, tops this list with 43 crorepati MLAs, followed by Congress. Out of 90 seats, the BJP has won 54 and Congress 35.

A total of 72 newly-elected MLAs (80 per cent of the House strength) are crorepatis. The BJP tops the list with 43 (80 %) of 54 MLAs each having declared assets valued at more than Rs 1 crore.

At 29, 83% of 35 MLAs of Congress are crorepatis, as per the analysis done by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and the Chhattisgarh Election Watch.

The average of assets per winning candidate in the state assembly elections held this time is Rs 5.25 crore compared to Rs 11.63 crore in the 2018 assembly polls.

With assets worth Rs 33.86 crore, BJP’s first-time MLA Bhawan Bohra (Pandariya seat) tops the crorepati club, followed by the outgoing chief minister and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel (Patan constituency) with assets worth Rs 33.38 crore. BJP’s Amar Agrawal (Bilaspur seat) stands at a third position with assets valued over Rs 27 crore. Congress MLA from Chandrapur, Ramkumar Yadav, and his BJP counterparts Ramkumar Toppo and Gomati Sai, the



incumbent MP who contested the assembly elections, are at the bottom of the list of MLAs with the lowest assets.

Yadav has declared assets worth Rs 10 lakh, the lowest among all MLAs, Toppo Rs 13.12 lakh, and Sai Rs 15.47 lakh, as per the analysis.

The report also states that 33 out of 90 MLAs (37 per cent) have declared their educational qualification as having passed class 5 to class 12. At 54, a maximum of 60 per cent of the total MLAs hold graduate

degrees or higher qualifications. Two others hold diplomas while an MLA has declared himself as just “literate”.

A total of 44 winning candidates (49 per cent) have declared their age between 25 and 50 years while 46 others (51 per cent) are between 51 and 80 years.

BJP’s Domanlal Korsewada (75), elected from the Ahiwara (SC) seat is the oldest MLA in the newly-elected assembly while Congress’ Bilaigarh (SC) legislator Kavita Pran Lahrey (30) is the youngest of all.

Will meet Shah, Jaishankar over refugees issue: Lalduhoma

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Lalduhoma, chief minister-designate of Mizoram, on Wednesday said he will soon meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to discuss the issue of refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and internally displaced people from Manipur.

Around 44,000 people from the two neighbouring countries and state have taken shelter in Mizoram due to several problems including ethnic strife. Lalduhoma, the Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) leader, called on Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati at Raj Bhavan and staked claim to form the new government following his party’s victory in the assembly polls. His government is likely to take oath on Friday.

“I have telephonic conversations with the Home Minister

and External Affairs Minister on Tuesday. I will soon meet them in Delhi to discuss how the Centre and the state government can work together to look after the refugees and displaced people,” Lalduhoma told reporters after meeting the governor.

The 73-year ZPM leader said his government will continue to provide shelter to the refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh and displaced people from Manipur on humanitarian grounds. He said that his government will also see if it can provide better relief to them compared to that by the outgoing MNF government.

The ZPM dethroned Zoramthanga-led Mizo National Front (MNF) on Monday, bagging 27 of the total 40 assembly seats. Lalduhoma, an ex-IPS officer who had served as the security in charge of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, said



that he would discuss the country’s policy towards refugees from Myanmar with Jaishankar, who is his civil service batchmate. He expressed hope that the Centre will extend help to the state government to look after the Myanmar refugees as it is a humanitarian issue.

More than 31,300 Myanmar nationals and over 1,100 Bangladeshi nationals are currently in Mizoram, according to the state home department. These Myanmar nationals

belonging to the Chin community, who share ethnic ties with Mizos, have taken shelter since February 2021 following a military coup in the neighbouring country. The Bawm or Mizo community from Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts, who fled gunfights between the Bangladesh army and an ethnic insurgent group, fled to the northeastern state from November last year.

Besides, nearly 12,000 internally displaced people from Manipur have taken refuge in different parts of Mizoram since May this year due to ethnic clashes.

The outgoing MNF government had in May urged the Centre to provide financial assistance to the tune of Rs 10 crore for the internally displaced people from Manipur. In September, the Centre told the state government that it would assist it in kind.

Vasundhara Raje heads to Delhi amid Rajasthan CM suspense

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Amid a suspense over the BJP’s chief ministerial pick for Rajasthan, senior party leader and former CM Vasundhara Raje was headed to New Delhi Wednesday night.

She was scheduled to take a flight to Delhi. Sources in the Raje camp said she would be meeting the party high command on Thursday. The development came after nearly 60 of the newly elected BJP MLAs met her at her Civil Lines residence on Monday and Tuesday. The party sources said the name of the chief minister will be decided by the party’s parliamentary board and before that,

a BJP legislature party meeting will be called.

However, the party has not yet made any announcement regarding the legislature party meeting.

Raje, a two-time chief minister, is among the frontrunners for the post of chief minister.

In the assembly election results declared on Sunday, the BJP got 115 seats while the Congress secured 69 seats. Elections on 199 out of 200 seats in the state were held on November 25.

Polling in Karanpur, where the election was adjourned due to the demise of the Congress candidate, will be held on January 5 and results will be declared on January 8.



Pakistan woman arrives in India to marry Kolkata man

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Pakistan woman arrives in India to marry Kolkata resident Karachi resident Javeria Khanum crossed over into the Indian side from Attari in Amritsar district where she was welcomed by her fiancé Sameer Khan and some members of his family to the beats of dhol.

Khanum has been granted a 45-day visa after two previous visa rejections and the Covid pandemic stalled their plans for around five years.

The couple, in a brief interaction with reporters at Attari, said the marriage will be solemnised in January next year.

“I have been granted a 45-day visa. I am very happy to be here. Just on arrival, I am already getting so much love here. In the first week of January the marriage will be solemnised,” she said. She had tried to get a visa on two occasions, but got lucky the third time. “It is a happy ending and a happy beginning,” she said, expressing her happiness at being able to travel to India

to get married. “Everyone back home was very happy. I can’t believe I have got the visa after five years,” she added.

Sharing how the couple got in touch, Khan said he expressed interest in marrying Khanum after seeing her photo on his mother’s phone.

“This started in May 2018. I had come home from Germany where I was studying. I saw her photo on my mother’s phone and expressed my interest. I told my mother that I want to get married to Javeria,” he said.

Earlier, the visa was rejected twice and in between there was the Covid pandemic, Khan said, adding that he was thankful to the Indian Government for the visa.

“My mother is very happy now that we will be getting married in January next year,” he said. Khan said his friends from his time in Germany – from Africa, Spain, the United States and other countries – are likely to attend his wedding. The couple then left to catch a flight from Amritsar to Kolkata.

‘Illegal Bangladeshi immigrants changing demography in Jharkhand, Bihar, WB’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey Wednesday claimed the demography in many parts of Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal was changing because of a rise in infiltrations by illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and demanded the Centre implement National Register of Citizens (NRC) in these states. During the Zero Hour in Lok Sabha, the MP from Jharkhand’s Godda said, “I am raising this issue for the 100th time in 15 years as MP.”

“We talk about Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes. My state Jharkhand was separated from



Bihar as a tribal majority state. In 1951, the population of tribals was 36 per cent in Jharkhand. Today it is only 24 per cent.

He claimed that in Jharkhand the tribal population has gone down.

“The result is such that there is delimitation in the whole country but Jharkhand is a state where delimitation could not be done in 2008 because it will reduce one tribal seat in Lok Sabha and three tribal seats in the assembly,” Dubey said.

“Today the situation is that Bangladeshi infiltrators come and marry tribals. The Muslim population, especially in districts like Godda, Pakur, Sahibganj, Deoghar, and Jamtara, is increasing. This is not a Hindu-Muslim issue,” he said.

The BJP MP claimed that a sim-

ilar situation was being witnessed in neighbouring Bihar and West Bengal.

“When Mamata Banerjee was MP she had said the demography of Bengal was changing because of Bangladeshis. Since she became chief minister, Malda, Murshidabad and Kaliachak, is full of Bangladeshi infiltrators. Same is the situation in Katihar, Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, and Bhagalpur (of Bihar). Demography is changing because of Bangladeshis,” he said.

“The Government of India should bring the NRC and send away all Bangladesh infiltrators,” the MP said.

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

FIRST COLUMN

DISCIPLINE YOUR SENSES

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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



Let us go to our eyes next. It used to be okay till multiple channels came and now smartphones. There is so much to see, especially now one can watch with no one watching. Unfortunately, we are being watched all the time because ‘karmaphalas’ are being made by our acts. Wise people restrict themselves to what is useful and at worst, what is harmless like a sports programme.

The pleasure of speaking occupies a very high place in modern man’s desires. Everyone is an expert on everything with Google playing its role. Doctors get frustrated when patients begin telling them what they should know. One doesn’t want to consider that if one was so wise why should he or she be in so much trouble?

The fourth sense, which is also very active is our ears. What do we want to hear most? Our appreciation, which is how good we are compared to everyone around us. Again, like question begs an answer: why aren’t we satisfied with our lives then?

Our skin occupies an important position in how we think. We place comfort in all considerations. Air conditioners, heaters, etc are all fine, but how about a little sweating it out with walks, yoga exercises, etc? What does a modern person value the most? Muscles of course to show off. People spend hours in gyms to build what is not needed which gives them trouble as they age.

I have saved the next sense for the last, which gives us the maximum trouble. Yes, you have guessed it right. The sex pleasure is considered the topmost pleasure of all by almost everyone. Our thinking is normally defined by it. Lord Krishna has warned us about it in verse # 18.39, when He cautioned about ‘pramad’.

The conclusion is obvious. We have senses and they would always seek contact with their objects. This is normal, but what is not normal is not restricting oneself to what is allowable. God would not have made such a system if it was not workable. It is very much so; only we have to be highly disciplined in thinking and acting, and we can live a satisfactory life.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Is India losing sheen for investors?



AS MITTAL

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



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

”

India's GDP grew by 7.6% in the second quarter (July-September) of the year, a positive sign of economic growth. However, the steepest declines in foreign direct investment (FDI) are a matter of concern, especially considering India's recent emergence as a promising investment destination and a viable alternative to China. This decline is particularly worrying as it is happening despite positive projections of India's growth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank.

According to the latest report by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), FDI inflows have slowed down drastically. The decline in FDI inflows has been steep, and the situation has only worsened, with a further decline of -24% in April-September 2023. The current FDI inflows stand at \$20.48 billion, down from \$26.91 billion over the same period last year. Even the overall FDI inflows in 2022-23 witnessed a 16% decline, standing at \$71.3 billion from \$84.8 billion in 2021-22.

The steepest declines in FDI have been in crucial sectors such as computer software and hardware, automobile, infrastructure construction activities, and metallurgical industries. For instance, inflows in computer software and hardware fell from \$14.4 billion in 2021-22 to \$9.3 billion in 2022-23, in the automobile industry from \$6.9 billion to \$1.9 billion, in infrastructure construction activities from \$3.2 billion to \$1.7 billion, and in metallurgical industries from \$2.2 billion to \$219 million.

The slowdown in foreign direct investment (FDI) in India is a cause for concern, as multinational corporations (MNCs) are finding Vietnam, Indonesia, and other competitors more attractive. This is a clear indication that the "China plus one" strategy of MNCs is not working for India. During January-September of this year, FDI in Vietnam increased by approximately 8% compared to the same period last year, reaching about \$18 billion. In the case of Indonesia, FDI flows stood at around \$10 billion during January-September of this year, similar to the levels seen last year.

The factors that influence capital flows into countries include the global and domestic macroeconomic environment, the domestic policy and regulatory environment, and political stability. Since India is expected to benefit greatly from the "China plus one" strategy, policymakers must pay closer attention to these FDI trends.

It is well known that FDI flows are more likely to gravitate towards countries with broader and deeper trade agreements. Lower tariffs and other benefits negotiated through free trade agreements (FTAs) incentivise foreign investment. Therefore, the decline in FDI flows to India may reflect this. A deeper assessment of the country's prospects is needed to address this issue.

India is genuinely the alternative to China for companies looking to diversify if it is the "one" in China plus one strategy if the Government's PLI scheme is a powerful enough incentive to draw in investments, and if the solid foundations of India's growth forecasts are taken into account, then MNC investor should be long on India. Any concerns regarding an uncertain business environment, an uneven playing field, or the fear of arbitrary changes to the rules of the game must not deter investors from investing in India.

More states should be in the ambit of FDI: The scope of FDI must be expanded to more Indian states. FDI has been concentrated in only a few states due to their location and favourable business environment. Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat have together attracted a staggering 69% of the FDI inflows into the country, with Maharashtra being the top recipient. However, it is disappointing to note that Punjab ranks a lowly 12th in attracting FDI, with a cumulative investment of a meagre Rs. 7693 crore in the past four years, which is a paltry 0.49% of the total inflows of Rs. 15.08 lakh crore from October 2019 to September 2023.

In contrast, the neighbouring state of Haryana has been more successful, ranking sixth with FDI equity inflows of Rs. 67,502 crore, accounting for a substantial 4.17% of the total inflows during the same period. Punjab's successive governments have been striving to attract investments, particularly from foreign investors, but they have been facing major hurdles such as location disadvantage, poor connectivity, and frequent protests.

The existing industry in Punjab has also been complaining about disruptions in their operations and movements due to the aforementioned issues. Haryana is way ahead in this regard with a significant advantage due to its proximity to Delhi NCR and superior connectivity.

It is high time that Punjab takes firm steps to improve its position in attracting FDI, as its highest ranking was only ninth in 2020-21, when it attracted FDI equity investment of Rs. 4,719.45 crore, primarily in food processing, auto components, engineering goods, and textiles. The declining trend in FDI inflows to Punjab since then is a cause for concern. Therefore, the state must create a more conducive environment for businesses and investors, and promote its potential in various sectors, to attract more FDI and boost its economy.

Disadvantage: Despite signing and negotiating bilateral free trade agreements, India has failed to secure a trade agreement with the European Union or become part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) countries including China, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea for free trade agreements. The trade agreement between the 10 member states of ASEAN and their free trade agreement partners - Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea - has deepened economic integration between these countries, which are at the heart of manufacturing supply chains. As a result, India's exclusion from such agreements and the supply chains that run through these regions puts it at a significant disadvantage in this manufacturing ecosystem.

The Way Forward: Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) have a far greater potential to facilitate the growth of the Indian economy than Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI). However, India needs to take swift and assertive action to speed up structural reforms, root out corruption, and reduce red tape in bureaucracy to strengthen its position as the most attractive investment destination for FDI. India has adopted a negative list approach in its FDI policy, which outlines only those sectors and activities where foreign investment is regulated. Sectors not mentioned in the document are open to obtaining 100% FDI under the automatic method.

The liberal and attractive policy regime for investors, combined with a favourable business climate and reduced regulatory framework, have resulted in higher FDI inflows. But this alone is not enough. India needs to complement this with a sound trade policy that boosts exports, encourages inclusive development, and incentivises R&D to make our manufacturing ecosystem globally competitive, thereby fetching FDI at a large scale.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are strictly personal)

Artificial Intelligence is transforming the steel industry

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



ALOK SAHAY

Technology is ever-evolving. While it becomes difficult to keep pace with rapid technological advancements in all expanses of life, it is equally difficult to discount them because these are highly value-accretive. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one such technology. The manufacturing sector, in general, and the steel sector, in particular, are integrating AI into their daily operations to improve productivity, health and safety, reduce operational costs and reap countless other operational and functional benefits. Survival will be at stake for those who will not. In a developing nation or the Global South, cheaper availability of steel is a prequel to ensure sustainable development. Since raw materials for making steel are unlikely to be economical in the foreseeable future, adaptation of modern disruptive technologies and processes is the only way out. Estimates suggest that the proper adaptation of AI in the entire value chain of steelmaking can save between \$60 and \$100 per tonne. Apart from this, a key takeaway from the recently concluded ISA Steel InfraBuild Summit in Lucknow was that the use of AI in architecture will enable engineers and architects to design, plan, and build steel structures more efficiently, resulting in proper economics and savings in infrastructure and real estate.

In the steel sector, AI can be adopted from R&D and innovation to procurement, manufacturing and back-office process digitalisation to supply-chain inventory, marketing, and whatnot. All these can lead to a 60% growth in EBDITA in three years. Greenhouse gas emissions can also be reduced by 5-10%. Maintenance is, as always, a difficult task. Each manufacturing unit has its maintenance plan tailored to its particularities. Proper implementation and use of AI can help predict the exact timing of maintenance, thereby reducing shutdown time, cutting maintenance costs, and enhancing the lifespan of the machinery. The Indian steel industry has been the early adopter of AI. Adaptation of AI has the highest impact on steel manufacturing in the entire value chain. In the coke oven plant, sinter plant, blast furnaces, continuous caster and rolling, among others, the implementation of AI has multiple benefits ranging from 1-2% yield improvement to a 50-80% reduction in quality losses. Energy consumption also improved by roughly 10%. Autonomous or semi-autonomous data or content examination also makes predictions and recommendations easier. Integration of sales and production data improves revenue management and customer satisfaction.

With precise data, AI's ability to predict market data and price fluctuations helps manufacturers adjust production, manage inventories, and respond swiftly to changing market conditions. Enhancing safety is also another essential aspect. No wonder steel manufacturers worldwide are embracing AI to ensure faster delivery of business requirements. This is the age of intelligent manufacturing. Far from having a steel-producing smart factory, intelligent manufacturing encompasses all of it - sourcing raw materials to production to marketing products through an integrated intelligent supply chain.

Steel consumption mirrors the health of an economy. Aspiring to be in the league of a developed nation, India has miles to go to catch up with the global steel consumption average. The building, construction and infrastructure sector consumes nearly 70% of all steel in India. The growth of the steel sector will largely depend on the demand emanating from the infrastructure sector. While AI adaptation will benefit the steel sector, implementing AI in the infrastructure sector will help assess the sector's specific needs - such as identifying cost-effective high-strength steel structure-based designs and offering tailor-made products.

Adaptation, both in the steel and the infrastructure sector, is a challenging task. A mindset of experimentation and a determination to bring about positive changes are required. With AI, the ultimate goal is to implement an automated and unsupervised process linked with software and processes to improve performance over time. However, there is no substitute for human capital, and once integrated with AI, it will do wonders if used for the benefit of mankind and planet Earth. The apprehension that AI will displace jobs is unfounded. However, the dynamics of the job will change, requiring manpower with digital skills. It also warrants upskilling existing employees. A step-by-step approach is the best to implement AI. Building on the following line from the learnings of the first will yield the best results. Scores of AI models are in use in different steel manufacturing units in the country. The use of transformative technology will only go up in the days ahead. We need to be ready to adapt to the changes and implement it.

(The writer is the Secretary General of, the Indian Steel Association (ISA), views are personal)

Heavy fighting across Gaza halts aid delivery

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

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

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

PUSHED TO THE EDGE

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

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



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

AP/PTI

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

Gaza has been without electricity since the first week of the war, and Israel has severely limited fuel imports, forcing several hospitals to shut down because they cannot operate emergency generators. Thousands of people have fled to the Rafah since Israel resumed its offensive after the cease-fire, including many from the north who have been displaced multiple times.

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

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

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

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

HUNDREDS KILLED SINCE CEASE-FIRE

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

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

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

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

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

NO END IN SIGHT

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

Hamas raping Israeli hostages appalling: Biden

AP ■ BOSTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gaza.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ BOSTON

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

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

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

Trump on Tuesday was asked by Fox News Channel’s Sean Hannity to promise he “would never abuse power as retribution against anybody.” “Except for day one,” Trump responded. “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

“The tragedy is that we were operating on a fallacious, inductive logic about previous reasonable worst case scenarios, and this one and this was the one where I am afraid the worst predictions turned out to be correct,” he told the inquiry. “I think we were doing the best we could at the time, given what we knew, given the information we had at the time, I think we were doing our level best. Were there things that we should have done differently? Unquestionably,” he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COP28 secures USD 83 bn in climate pledges

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

developed nations during preliminary negotiations, sources said.

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

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

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

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

Contributions of USD 133.6 million to the Adaptation

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

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

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

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

Bodies of 6 crew lost in Osprey crash recovered

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

LOST CREW MEMBERS WERE:

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

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

Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

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

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

US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake M. Turnage, 25, of Kennesaw, Georgia, was a flight engineer assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan.

US Air Force Senior Airman Brian K. Johnson, 32, of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, was a flight engineer assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan. US Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob “Jake” M. Galliher, 24, was a native of Pittsfield, Mass. His remains were the first to be found. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent a message

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

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

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

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

Putin visits Saudi & UAE as Ukraine war grinds on

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas war remains a major

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Court rejects Imran's plea to withdraw appeal against disqualification

TOSHAKHANA CORRUPTION CASE

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

more time.

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

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

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

Mount Marapi eruption: More bodies found, raising toll to 23

AP ■ BATU PALANO

Rescuers searching the hazardous slopes of Indonesia's Mount Marapi volcano found the last body of climbers who were caught by a surprise weekend eruption, raising the number of confirmed dead to 23, officials said Wednesday. About 75 climbers started their way up the nearly 2,900-metre mountain in Agam district of West Sumatra province on Saturday and became stranded.

Some 52 climbers were rescued after the initial eruption Sunday, and 11 others were initially confirmed dead. New eruptions on Monday and Tuesday spewed more hot ash as high as 800 metres into the air, reducing visibility and temporarily halting search and recovery operations, said Abdul Malik, chief of the Padang Search and Rescue Agency.

The bodies of two climbers

were located on Monday and nine more on Tuesday, the National Search and Rescue Agency said.

West Sumatra's Police Chief Suharyono said the body of the last climber was found early Wednesday, just a few metres from the eruption site, bringing the death toll rise to 23.

The rescuers contended with bad weather and difficult terrain, along with winds that brought heat from the eruptions, while distraught relatives gathered at a relief post command in Batu Palano on the mountain slope, hoping for news of missing family members. Twenty bodies had been taken to a hospital for identification by Wednesday morning, as more than 300 rescuers, including police and soldiers, struggled to bring the others down the mountain and search for the missing climber, said Suharyono who goes by a single name like many Indonesians.

Marapi has stayed at the third highest of four alert levels since 2011, indicating above-normal volcanic activity under which climbers and villagers must stay more than 3 kilometres from the peak, according to Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

Officially, climbers were only allowed below the danger zone and had to register at two command posts or online. However, local officials acknowledge that many people may have climbed higher than permitted.

Marapi spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 metres in Sunday's eruption and hot ash clouds spread for several kilometers. Nearby villages and towns were blanketed by tons of volcanic debris that blocked sunlight, and authorities recommended that people wear masks to protect themselves from the ash.

Malala calls for making 'gender apartheid' crime against humanity

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iran sends capsule capable of carrying animals into orbit

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

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

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

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



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

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

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

"The Taliban are causing irreversible damage to the Afghan education system for boys as well as girls," said Sahar Fetrat, who wrote the report. "By harming the whole school system in the country, they risk creating a lost generation deprived of a quality education."

Students told Human Rights Watch that there are

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

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

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

ECP to hold contempt case proceedings against ex-Pak PM

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

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

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

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

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

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Markets scale fresh lifetime highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied for the seventh straight session to hit fresh life-time highs on Wednesday, driven by gains in index majors Reliance Industries, ITC and L&T amid persistent foreign fund inflows. Besides, receding crude oil prices in international markets also boosted sentiment, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 357.59 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at a new record of 69,653.73. The barometer rose to 69,744.62 during intra-day. The broader index Nifty also climbed 82.60 points, or 0.40 per cent, to hit its fresh peak of 20,937.70. "Post-state elections, market optimism thrives, confirming policy continuity and meeting investor expectations. A robust FII reversal is fuelled by receding inflation and dropping yields in US and Indian

markets. The allure of Indian market gains post-China credit rating downgrade and decline in oil prices was followed by ease in geopolitical tensions," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. As many as 20 shares of the BSE benchmark index closed the session with gains, while 30 stocks in the Nifty ended in positive territory. Among major Sensex movers, Wipro closed with the maximum gain of 3.85 per cent, followed by ITC -- 2.51 per cent higher. L&T and TCS gained 2.31 per cent and 2.13 per cent, respectively. Tata Motors, Nestle India, Infosys and Bajaj Finance were other gainers. On the other hand, NTPC, Axis Bank, UltraTech Cement and ICICI Bank ended the session with a loss of up to 1.58 per cent. In the broader market, the BSE large-cap index rose 0.61 per cent, the mid-cap gauge gained 0.19 per cent, and smallcap advanced by 0.18 per cent.



"A strong rebound in IT, driven by reduced US recession risks and in anticipation of robust summer demand, fuels the momentum in the power sector," Nair said. However, he cautioned that short-term profit booking may occur due to domestic premium valuation concerns.

"Further, lingering El Nino risks, a drop in reservoir levels, and reduced sowing may hold RBI to profound upgrade H2 FY24 growth and reduce future inflation estimates." Among sectoral indices, utilities surged 3 per cent, followed by power (2.41 per cent). While oil & gas jumped 1.96 per cent, the IT index

went up 1.48 per cent, capital goods advanced by 1.25 per cent, and tech rose by 1.18 per cent. In contrast, healthcare declined by 0.64 per cent, telecommunications slipped 0.58 per cent and bankex fell 0.50 per cent. Analysts said the sustained equity buying by foreign institutional

investors was attributed to declining US bond yields, while the domestic players were betting big on favourable macroeconomic data and expectations of longer political stability in the country. Besides, investors are also expecting the Reserve Bank to maintain the status quo on the interest rate in its bi-monthly monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday, they added. Foreign institutional investors purchased shares worth Rs 5,223.51 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, in Asian markets, Hang Seng and Nikkei 225 finished with gains of 0.90 per cent and 2.04 per cent, respectively, while China's Shanghai Composite lost 0.11 per cent. European markets were broadly higher, led by France's CAC 40, rising 1.08 per cent. London's FTSE 100 gained 0.29 per cent, and Germany's

DAX was 0.7 per cent higher. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 registering a marginal loss of 0.06 per cent. On Wednesday, global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.31 per cent lower to USD 76.96 a barrel. "The bearish formation around the crucial resistance of 21,000 (Nifty) amplifies the bearish sentiment. The support lies at 20,850, below which the market may witness a healthy correction in the short term. On the other hand, a move above 21,000 might trigger a resumption of the bullish trend," Rupak De, Senior Technical analyst at LKP Securities, said. On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 431.02 points, or 0.63 per cent, to close at a record high of 69,296.14. Nifty also climbed 168.50 points, or 0.81 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 20,855.30.

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI's high-powered rate setting panel on Wednesday began its 3-day brainstorming on the next set of bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectation of continued pause on the short-term key lending rate as GDP growth is gaining momentum, and inflation manageable. RBI left the benchmark policy rate (repo) unchanged in its past four bi-monthly monetary policies. It had last increased the repo rate in February to 6.5 per cent, thus ending the interest rate hike cycle which began in May 2022 in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disruptions in the global supply chain resulting in high inflation in the country. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das would unveil the decision of the six-member MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) on December 8.

On expectations from the MPC, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA said with the GDP data for the second quarter of 2023-24 appreciably higher than the MPC's last forecast, and continuing concerns on various aspects of food inflation, "we expect the MPC to pause in its December 2023 review, amidst a fairly hawkish tone of the policy document". According to Deutsche Bank Research, RBI will likely increase 2023-24 GDP forecast to 6.8 per cent year-on-year, from 6.5 per cent earlier, while holding the CPI forecast unchanged at 5.4 per cent. "RBI will likely keep repo rate and stance unchanged, persist with tight liquidity and ensure that short-term rates remain around 6.85-6.90 per cent, resulting in an 'effective rate hike'," it said. India retained the tag of the world's fastest-growing major



economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in the September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing. Director of Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) Sanjay Bhutani, said the central bank's recent MPC meetings have kept the policy rate unchanged, aligning with mar-

ket expectations. "We anticipate a similar outcome for this upcoming meeting. However, with inflation on a downward trend, an easing of interest rates could be on the cards, potentially occurring as early as February-March 2024," he said, and added this would be a positive development for all sectors, particularly capital and research-intensive industries like the medical technology sector. The government has mandated the central government to ensure that the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stays at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. Retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, mainly due to cooling prices of food items. The Reserve Bank's MPC, in its October meeting, projected CPI inflation at 5.4 per cent for 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. H S Bhatia, Managing Director of Kelwon Electronics and Appliances, manufacturing partner for Daewoo India, said RBI's monetary policy decisions will have a significant impact on the consumer durable industry. "The industry is hoping that RBI will keep interest rates stable or even reduce them slightly in the upcoming review so that con-

sumers get enough purchasing power," he said. Parijat Agrawal, Head - Fixed Income, Union Asset Management Company said the US 10-year bond has corrected meaningfully from the peak in line with the incoming data and the central bank narrative, and concerns around oil prices too have reduced. "Although MPC will emphasise on bringing inflation to the 4 per cent target, we expect MPC to remain on pause on rates and stance," Agrawal said. The MPC comprises three external members and three officials of RBI. The external members on the panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma. Besides Governor Das, the other RBI officials in MPC are Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor).



1,14,902 entities as startups recognised

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on October 31, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. These eligible firms are allowed to seek fiscal incentives under the Startup India Action Plan, which was launched in January 2016, and that includes income tax exemption for three years. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said the action plan includes 19 items spanning across areas such as simplification and handholding, funding support and incentives and industry-academia partnership and incubation. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) "has recognised 1,14,902 entities as startups as on 31st October 2023," he said. Replying to a separate question, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said subdued demand in major export destinations such as the US, Hong Kong, the Middle East and China and availability of raw materials at competitive rates were some of the challenges faced by the gems and jewellery export industry. Export of gem and jewellery during 2022-23 was at USD 38.11 billion, a decline of 2.95 per cent compared to the previous year's export of USD 39.27 billion, she informed. The sector constituted 8.45 per cent in the total merchandise exports during 2022-23 and the industry employs around 5 mil-

lion skilled and semi-skilled workforce. In another reply, she said that to ensure goods imported are not of substandard quality, the customs authority follows a risk-based framework to intelligently prevent entry of non-compliant goods at the borders. "A task force has also been constituted in CBIC (Central Board Of Indirect Taxes and Customs) for enforcing national standards," Patel said. She added that as far as imported goods such as TVs and tyre, are concerned, the trade data indicates that there are several categories of import of such products where there has been considerable reduction in imports. Citing certain examples, she provided data that showed imports of different size of TV sets, liquid crystal display television set, and different kinds of tyres declined during April-October this fiscal. Imports of television sets of screen size exceeding 54 cm but not exceeding 68 cm dipped to USD 0.02 million during April-October this fiscal from USD 0.25 million in 2021-22. Similarly, imports of radial tyres used in buses/lorries declined to USD 1.01 million during the seven-month period of this fiscal as against USD 16.92 million in 2021-22. "The Department of Commerce has been regularly monitoring and sensitizing line ministries and other stakeholders from time to time and at various levels on the issue of imports," she said.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Central tax officers have sent around 33,000 GST notices to businesses for discrepancies in returns filed and short payment of taxes in 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years, a CBIC official said on Wednesday. The National Co-ordination Committee of the State and Central GST officers, chaired by the Revenue Secretary, is likely to be held by the end of this month or early January, which among other things would also sensitise tax officers regarding issuance of notices, the official said. Speaking at the Assocham National Conference on GST, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Member-GST Shashank Priya said the notices sent for 2017-18 and 2018-19 were a "small percentage" of the total returns filed for the two fiscal years. He said the bunching up of demand notices was also on account of extension in the deadline given to taxpayers for filing annual returns for the two years. Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out on July 1, 2017. The last date for filing annual returns for 2017-18 fiscal was extended till February 7, 2020, while for 2018-19 it was till December 2020. Under the GST law, every registered person is liable to file annual return for every financial year on or before December 31 of the next financial year. Accordingly, the last date of filing annual return for 2022-23 fiscal is December 31, 2023. "At the request of the taxpayers the time for return filing was postponed. So returns also were filed at a late juncture and officers have come under a lot of pressure (to scrutinise the returns). So this has led to this unfortunate situation. One hopes that as we progress for-

ward this situation gets addressed and we will not have all the proposed notices pending at the same time. For 2017-18, it has happened like that and we will see how best to deal with it," Priya said. The Central GST officers have sent around 30,000-33,000 notices to GST registered businesses for short-payment of taxes, he said. "In our interaction with the field formations, we will try to sensitise them that they should put their officers on alert, they should do a critical scrutiny of details, documents, facts given by the registrants before coming to a conclusion and passing an order. I'm sure, we will take up this issue in the National Coordination Committee meeting so that all tax administrations are sensitised," Priya said. These disputes, he said, if are resolved out at the level of adjudicating authority, instead of approaching the GST appellate tribunal, would be a relief both for the tax administration as well as taxpayers. "We are working on automated scrutiny module that would give certainty on how scrutiny is to be done and what kind of issues will be looked into return scrutiny," Priya said. Further, the officer said the GST appellate tribunal would be put in place in the next 4-5 months and efforts are also being made to identify infrastructure, following which selection process of members will start. With regard to curbing fake registration under GST, Priya said in many tax administration, about 25-28 per cent of the businesses registered were found to be fake. "We are looking at how we further tighten the registration. We are also looking at how we make it less and less open for changing the GSTR-3B (monthly GST payment form)," he said.

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

PTI ■ GENEVA

The airline industry is projected to register a net profit of USD 25.7 billion in 2024 as more normal growth is expected in both passenger and cargo segments, global grouping IATA said on Wednesday. For 2023, the net profit is estimated at USD 23.3 billion, significantly higher than the USD 9.8 billion projected by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in June this year. IATA has more than 300 airlines as members. The airline industry's operating profit is expected to touch USD 49.3 billion in 2024 from USD 40.7 billion this year. In 2024, the total revenue is estimated to grow 7.6 per cent to USD 964 billion compared to 2023. "Some 4.7 billion people are expected to travel in 2024, a his-



toric high that exceeds the pre-pandemic level of 4.5 billion recorded in 2019," IATA said. Industry passenger load factor is nearing its 2019 level, which is supporting the financial recovery of the airlines, IATA Director Policy and Economics Andrew Matters said. "The airline industry net profit is expected to reach USD 25.7 billion in 2024 (2.7 per cent net profit margin). That will be a slight improvement over 2023, which is expected to show a

USD 23.3 billion net profit (2.6 per cent net profit margin)," IATA said, while releasing its review of 2023 and outlook for 2024 here. The cargo volume is expected to be higher at 61 million tonnes next year compared to 58 million tonnes in 2023. "From 2024, the outlook indicates that we can expect more normal growth patterns for both passenger and cargo... While the recovery is impressive, a net profit margin of 2.7 per cent is

far below what investors in almost any other industry would accept," IATA Director General Willie Walsh said. According to him, the airlines will always compete ferociously for their customers but they remain far too burdened by onerous regulation, fragmentation, high infrastructure costs and a supply chain populated with oligopolies. About the Asia Pacific market, IATA said while some of the region's main domestic markets -- China, Australia and India -- recovered quickly from the pandemic, international travel to/from the region was subdued as China only eliminated the last of its international travel restrictions in mid-2023. The Asia Pacific region is expected to report a net loss of USD 0.1 billion in 2023 and have a net profit of USD 1.1 billion in 2024.

Rupee rises 5 paise to close at 83.32 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 5 paise to close at 83.32 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, helped by a bullish trend in domestic equities and sustained foreign fund inflows. Forex traders said elevated American currency in the overseas markets and dollar buying by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) capped sharp gains for the local unit. The rupee consolidated in a narrow range as investors remained on the sidelines ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision later this week. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.35 against the greenback. The rupee oscillated between an intra-day low of 83.37 and a high of 83.29 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.32 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 5 paise from its previous close, even as domestic benchmark indices touched new life-time peaks. On Tuesday, the rupee settled at 83.37 against the dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on positive tone in the US Dollar and fresh foreign inflows. A weak tone in crude oil prices and positive domestic markets may also support the rupee. "However, the RBI intervention



may cap the sharp upside. Traders may take cues from US ADP Trade balance and non-farm employment change data. Investors may remain cautious ahead of RBI's monetary policy decision on Friday," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain the status quo on the short-term interest rate in its monetary policy review. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled to begin its three-day deliberations on December 6. Das will unveil the decision of the six-member MPC on December 8. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent lower at 103.97.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

ed through Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL). AGEL has emerged as the second-largest global solar PV developer in the US-based Mercom Capital Group's latest annual global report. "The company's outstanding performance and contribution to the renewable energy landscape have earned it the prestigious second rank among the world's foremost solar PV developers," the statement said.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

PNB Housing Finance on Wednesday said its affordable housing segment Roshni has achieved a Rs 1,000 crore loan book in less than a year of its launch. This achievement represents the company's steadfast focus on financial inclusion by offering low ticket-size loans of Rs 5-35 lakh for home buying, plot purchases, construction and renovation, it added. Roshni Home Loans offers loans to individuals, focusing

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

of housing units beyond the metro cities. We are aligned with the government's mission of housing for all and are committed to fulfilling the homeownership dreams of individuals from all walks of life," said Girish Kousgi, MD and CEO, PNB Housing Finance. PNB Housing Finance recently inaugurated its 100th Roshni branch, also its first-ever all-women branch, cementing its position as a leader in the affordable housing category, the lender said in a release.

Junior Hockey World Cup

India needs to guard against complacency against Spain

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



two. We need to be more cautious."

India are striving to secure their fourth podium finish in the event after having won the tournament twice in 2001 (Hobart) and Lucknow (2016). The country had clinched a silver medal way back in 1997 in Milton Keynes, England.

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

play-off match.

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

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

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

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

as Belgium, Netherlands, New Zealand and Pakistan will be vying for a quarterfinal berth. The top two teams from each pool will qualify for the quarterfinals.

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

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

2024 Australian Open

Former champion Wozniacki awarded one of first wild cards

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sinclair ends her 23 years career

AP ■ VANCOUVER

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

Sinclair, 40, ended her 23-year national team career with a 1-0 victory against Australia on Tuesday at Vancouver's BC Place - renamed Christine Sinclair Place for the occasion.

Sinclair has scored 190 goals since she made her national team debut in 2000. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the game's top scorer among men, has 128 international goals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Botafogo squanders 13-point lead to lose national league title

AP ■ SAO PAULO

There's an old saying in Brazilian soccer: some things only happen to Botafogo. The reference to the club's historic lack of luck has never rung more true than this year.

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

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

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

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

Flamengo has a slim title chance, but that depends on an even more unlikely combination of results involving other



teams.

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

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

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

their team of little known players such as goalkeeper Lucas Perri, defender Adryelson, midfielder Eduardo and striker Segovinha.

But then ... It was some-things-only-happen-to-Botafogo time. Botafogo failed to win its 10 latest matches in the competition.

Last week, the team scored an apparent winner from the spot against relegated Coritiba in the 90th minute, only to see their opponents equalize 49 seconds later.

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

"The dead body can no longer feel anything."

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

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

Viknesh appeal challenging two years ban rejected

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kerala footballer M Viknesh's appeal challenging a two-year ban, imposed on him by disciplinary committee of the NADA for failing a dope test, has been rejected by the appeal panel in a rare doping case relating to the 'beautiful game' in the country.

Viknesh was handed a two-year ban by the NADA Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel starting from November 12, 2022 after his dope sample collected during the National Games in Gujarat in September-October 2022 was found to contain banned

"Terbutaline", a common substance found in cough syrup.

In an order passed on December 2, the appeal panel of the NADA upheld the disciplinary committee's decision but changed the date of its operation.

The appeal panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) held that Viknesh's two-year ban will start from April 5, 2023, the date of decision of the disciplinary committee as the Kerala footballer was not provisionally suspended after he failed the dope test.

Very few footballers have been handed bans by the NADA panels for failing dope tests in



the history of the sport in the country.

East Bengal defender Arun Malhotra was found positive

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Viknesh also relied upon the case of Subrata Paul but the

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

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

Arsenal slew of late winners highlights resilience

AP ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring late goals - a trait demonstrating resilience and character - has become the

norm for Arsenal. Dare it be said, it's a sign of a champion team.

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

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

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

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

The most memorable was Reiss Nelson's winning goal against



Bournemouth that sent Arsenal fans wild at Emirates Stadium.

That was in the 97th minute and gave Arsenal a five-point lead in the league, just like Declan Rice did with his winner against Luton.

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

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

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

Could this season be different? Arsenal has a few things going in its favor.

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

There's better strength in depth across the squad, in terms of numbers and experience.

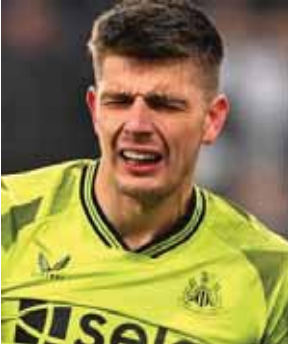
Arteta's approach also appears to be different this season, going for more control than chaos - before the Luton game, anyway - to help the team better last the distance in a grueling campaign that also includes playing in the Champions League.

In this respect, Arteta seems to be using the playbook of City manager Pep Guardiola from last season.

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

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

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



Goalkeeper Nick will be out for four months

AP ■ NEWCASTLE (ENGLAND)

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

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

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

Howe said Pope will require surgery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ICC RANKINGS

Ravi becomes world number 1 T20I bowler



PTI ■ DUBAI

Young Indian leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi on Wednesday rose to the top spot in the ICC T20I bowling chart on the back of his recent performance against Australia.

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

Rashid Khan (692) from the top slot. Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and England's Adil Rashid, who both have 679 points, are in joint third. Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana (677) completes the top

five. Bishnoi is the only Indian bowler in the top 10 in the shortest format even as Axar Patel climbed nine spots to be 18th. Meanwhile, the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav, who captained India during their 4-1 T20I series win against Australia,

held on to the top spot among batters, while opener Ruturaj Gaikwad dropped a place to be seventh. Hardik Pandya retained the third spot in the all-rounders' list, despite missing the series against Australia due to injury.



Mushfiquer becomes first Bangladesh batter to be out for obstructing field

PTI ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rahim was Bangladesh's top-scorer with his 35 off 83 balls as the hosts were bundled out for 172 inside 67 overs. Bangladesh won the first Test in Sylhet by 150 runs.

ACC U-19 ASIA CUP

India opens campaign against Afghanistan

Faces Pakistan on Sunday

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Will play IPL until I cannot walk anymore: Maxwell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Star Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has vowed to play in the world's biggest cricket league, the IPL "until he can't walk anymore". The 35-year-old, who played a massive role in Australia's ODI World Cup-winning campaign in India recently, will once again don the colours of Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL next year.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Bangladesh takes control of 2nd test



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

AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)

Bangladesh took full control of the final test against New Zealand after 15 wickets fell on an eventful day one Wednesday as the hosts pursue a first ever test series win against the Kiwis. The home side was all out for 172 but hit back strongly to reduce New Zealand to 55-5 in 12.4 overs before bad light forced stumps.

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

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

Mushfiquer Rahim made a team-high 35 before becoming the first Bangladeshi batter to be dismissed for handling the ball. While defending a delivery from fast bowler Kyle Jamieson, the

team's most experienced batter used his right hand to push the ball away even though it wasn't close to the off-stump. After New Zealand appealed for the out, the third umpire checked and then gave him out for obstructing the field. Bangladesh's first boundary came in the eighth over when Zakir Hasan drove Patel through cover for four. The pressure eventually got the better of Zakir (8) when he played a rash shot against Santner and chipped it straight to mid-on. In the next over, Patel dismissed Mahmudul Hasan (14) after he was beaten by the drift to give a catch at short-leg.

Mominul Haque (5) was the next to go when he was caught behind off Patel's bowling. But the biggest blow for Bangladesh followed in the next over when captain Najmul Hossain Shanto (9), who hit a century in the previous test, attempted a reverse sweep against Santner. The on-field Umpires turned down the appeal but New Zealand reviewed it successfully to leave Bangladesh 47-4.

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

triggered another collapse, which began with Shahadat (31) being caught down the leg-side off the bowling of Phillips. The onus was on Mehidy Hasan to lead a fightback with the lower order but Santer came back to dismiss him as New Zealand bowled Bangladesh out shortly after tea.

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

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

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

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

Just a ball later, Mehidy fired another quicker one that kept extremely low to trap Tom Blundell leg-before for a duck. Daryl Mitchell (12) and Glenn Phillips (5) were batting when play came to an end because of bad light.

Du Plessis hints at return to international cricket

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has hinted at a comeback to international cricket ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup, saying that he has been in discussion with the Portea's white-ball coach Rob Walter for the past couple of years.

Du Plessis last featured in a T20I three years ago in 2020. While his last match for South Africa was a Test against Pakistan in February 2021. "I believe that I can return to international cricket," du Plessis told the broadcaster of Abu Dhabi T10 league.

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

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

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

The 39-year-old led South Africa in the 2014 and 2016 T20 World Cups but wasn't considered for the last two editions of the



tournament, despite never officially retiring from white-ball cricket.

On Monday, South Africa white-ball coach Walter had said the likes of du Plessis, Quinton de Kock and Rilee Rossouw will be considered for the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be played in June next year in the West Indies and the USA.

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

Too much cricket is affecting development of all-rounders: Kallis

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jacques Kallis, one of the last multi-skilled legends, says quality all-rounders have become a scarcity in modern-day cricket, especially in Test cricket, because of "too much cricket across formats".

While Sir Garfield Sobers (8032 runs and 235 wickets) is considered 'greatest of 'em all' across generations, Kallis (25,000-plus runs and nearly 600 wickets in three formats) is inarguably one of the legendary all-rounders the modern era has seen. In the 1980s, there were four great all-rounders in Imran Khan, Richard Hadlee, Ian Botham and Kapil Dev while the new millennium saw emergence of Kallis and Andrew Flintoff.

But with advent of T20 cricket and mushrooming leagues across the globe with new rules have actually discouraged development of multi-skilled cricketers.

"It is a tough question to answer, all-rounders don't come around every day. There aren't many

throughout the history. Lot of things, amount of cricket that is played certainly plays a role," Kallis told PTI during an exclusive interview. The former Proteas captain is in India to play the Legends League Cricket.

While he didn't name Indian Premier League but the former KKR coach isn't a great fan of 'Impact Player' rule where a team can change one player during its batting or bowling innings as per need. "A few T20 competitions have substitutes (IPL) and I am not a big fan of that as it takes away the all-rounder out of your team. The teams that do not have good all-rounders are now playing with 12 men. I am not a huge fan of that.

"There are lot of little things that add up on to why there aren't too many all-rounders at the moment, as it is surprising as they add so much value to the game. But it's a whole lot of little things coming together," Kallis said.

CENTURION WILL BE TOUGH FOR INDIA: The Indian team would be embark-



ing on a tough away tour of South Africa, the only major Test playing nation where it hasn't won a single Test series in 31 years.

The focus will be on the two Test matches, which is a part of World Test Championship (WTC) cycle even as ODIs and T20s are part of the full tour. The stars from both sides (Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Kagiso Rabada) will only be playing the traditional format during the series.

"This is a good Indian team but South Africa is tough to beat in South Africa. Centurion will probably suit South Africa and Newlands will probably suit India. It will be a good series and it will come down to one or two sessions that one team might

play better than the other. It would be a closely-fought contest," said Kallis.

TRANSITIONS ARE TOUGH, GET YOUNGSTERS READY: The Indian team's average age is in mid-30s. Skipper Rohit is 36 and main batter Virat Kohli is 35.

Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are 37 and 35 respectively while Mohammed Shami 33. There would be a transition sooner or later in another couple of years and Kallis feels that if talented youngsters are groomed by keeping them with senior team, the handing of baton becomes easier.

"Older players obviously have got the knowledge and you would combine that with younger players. That's the job of coaches and selectors to make sure so that even if younger players might not be playing, they are in that environment where they can learn from the older players," said Kallis, who scored 45 Test hundreds in his illustrious 18-year career in which he played 166 Tests.

It is imperative that youngsters are travelling to unfamiliar territories and soaking in all knowledge available watching those who have been there and done that. "(They should) travel to these parts of the world that they are probably not used to and learn from sitting on the side, try to pick up as much knowledge as possible and play those warm-up games where big players are resting for. Picking up knowledge helps a lot and transition when a few players are retiring, it becomes little bit easier," he elaborated.

Having started his career in mid-90s just when players like Kepler Wessels, Peter Kirsten, Andrew Hudson had all retired or were on verge of retirement, Kallis felt that back in the day, Proteas had a good system of changeover in place. "Certainly, when I started, South Africa were very good at transitioning younger players into good international players and that obviously needs to be done when senior players retire."

AFFIDAVIT

I, Basanti Bhagat, husband- Somra Bhagat, address- village- Kaimo, Patra Toli, Post + Police Station, Lohardaga. My name is registered as Basanti Orain in my Aadhar card. Which is correct. My name is mentioned in SBI branch collectorate as Basanti Orain, which is correct. Through affidavit number- 26096, dated- 09.11.2023, I declare that both name Basanti Orain and Basanti Bhagat are the same i.e my self.



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