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DEFENCE TIES WITH
AUSTRALIA ARE STRONG

WORLD 8

CHINA SEEKS ROLE IN
UKRAINE PEACE PLAN

MONEY 10

'ECO GROWTH LIKELY
AT 4.6% IN DEC QUARTER'

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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WARNER OUT
OF LAST TWO
INDIA TESTS
12 SPORT

BBC docu politics by another means: EAM

Some are unable to understand words beginning with 'C', Jaishankar raps Opp for jibe at Govt over LAC row with China

PNS/AGENCY ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the BBC documentary series titled "India: The Modi Question," as "politics by another means" in an analogy to phrase "war by other means," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday questioned the timing of the BBC documentary, asserting that it was by no means "accidental".

"I mean, come on, you think timing is accidental! Let me tell you one thing — I don't know if the election season has started in India, Delhi or not, but, for sure it has started in London, New York," he said.

When asked about some western media's bias against Modi, Jaishankar added, "Do you doubt it? Look who the cheerleaders are. What is happening is, just like I told you — this drip, drip, drip — how do you shape a very extremist image of India, of the Government, of the BJP, of the Prime Minister. I mean, this has been going on for a decade."

"Actual politics" is being conducted "ostensibly as



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Vice President of Guyana Bharat Jagdeo during a meeting, in New Delhi on Tuesday PTI

media" by people who do not have the "courage to come into political field," he said in an exclusive interview to ANI.

"Sometime politics of India doesn't even originate in its borders, it comes from outside. We are not debating just a documentary or a speech that somebody gave in a European city or a newspaper edits somewhere — we are debating, actually politics, which is being conducted ostensibly as media — there is a phrase 'war by other means'. This is politics by another means — I mean you want to do a hatchet job and say this is just another quest for truth which we decided after 20 years to put at this time."

The BBC documentary caused a controversy for alluding to Modi's role in the Gujarat riots whereas disregarding the Supreme Court clean chit.

He advised to not get fooled by such agendas and challenged the propagator to come in the political field.

"This is politics at play by people who do not have the courage to come into the political field. They want to have that teflon cover saying that I am an NGO, media organisation, etc. They are playing politics," Jaishankar asserted.

"Among other things in a democracy, don't you trust the ballot box, people's verdict to be the final opinion? I do. I know there are certain people who believe that their view supersedes elections," he added.

On Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's attack on the Government over China's aggression on the LAC in eastern Ladakh, Jaishankar said the Modi Government has increased the budget by five times to ramp up border infrastructure. "If I would have to sum up this China thing, please do not buy this narrative that somewhere the government is on the defensive...somewhere we are being accommodative. I ask people if we were being accommodative who sent the Indian Army to the LAC. Rahul Gandhi did not send them. Narendra Modi sent them. We have today the largest peace-time deployment in our history on the China border."

"They must have some problem understanding words beginning with 'C'. It's not true. I think they are deliberately misrepresenting the situation...This Govt is serious about border infra," he said.

The EAM said that the motive behind planting such stories abroad is to further the anti-India agenda.

"Let's not have illusions about it..., there is an echo chamber, it will be picked outside and then they will say it is being said outside, it must be true. Then you will say it inside. There is a ding-dong going on, look this is a globalized world, people take that politics abroad," said the EAM.

He asked, "Why suddenly there is a surge of reports and attention and views? I mean, were some of these things not happening earlier. Many things happened in Delhi in 1984, why don't we see a documentary on that? If that was your concern, you suddenly feel one day, 'I am very humanistic, I must get justice for people who have been wronged.'"

UPI-PayNow link new chapter of cross-border transactions: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/SINGAPORE

As India and Singapore on Tuesday launched cross-border connectivity in digital transactions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called it a new chapter of cross-border transactions, adding, "Many experts are estimating that very soon India's digital wallet transactions are going to overtake cash transactions."

A large number of transactions via UPI demonstrate that this indigenously designed payment system is very secure, said Modi.

He also said this facility will benefit students and migrant workers. Funds can now be transferred through a mobile phone in real time. Making these observations after witnessing the launch through video conference with his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong between the UPI and PayNow of Singapore, he also said about 74 billion transactions amounting to more than ₹126 trillion, which is approximately 2 trillion Singapore dollar, was done through UPI in 2022.

Prime Minister Lee said the linkage between India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Singapore's PayNow will allow people in the two countries to undertake faster and cost-efficient digital transfers, and exuded hope that this "strong partnership" will continue to spawn innovative technology solutions.

He also said the idea of linking PayNow and UPI was first conceived in 2018 when Modi visited Singapore.

The facility was launched through token transactions by Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong witness launch of the launch of UPI-PayNow linkage (Real-time Payment Systems Linkage between the two countries) via video conferencing on Tuesday PTI

Managing Director of Monetary Authority of Singapore Ravi Menon using the UPI-PayNow linkage.

Stressing that the linkage of UPI and PayNow is a new milestone in India-Singapore relations, Modi said, this will help people of both the countries to do cross-border transactions through mobile phone in an affordable manner.

Singapore is the first country with which cross-border Person-to-Person (P2P) payment facility has been launched, he said, adding, this will help the Indian diaspora in Singapore, especially migrant workers, students and bring the benefits of digitalisation and fintech to the common man through instantaneous and low-cost transfer of money from Singapore to India and vice-versa.

Pointing out that the focus of the Government is to promote innovation and modernisation, Modi said the Digital India programme of the Government has enhanced

"Ease of Living" and "Ease of Doing Business" and digital connectivity and has pushed financial inclusion.

The Digital India programme has brought in significant reforms in governance and public service delivery.

The linkage will enable users of the two fast payment systems in either country to make convenient, safe, instant, and cost-effective cross-border fund transfers using their respective mobile apps.

Funds held in bank accounts or e-wallets can be transferred to or from India using just the UPI-id, mobile number, or Virtual Payment Address (VPA), the Reserve Bank of India said in a statement.

To begin with, the statement said State Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank, Indian Bank and ICICI Bank will facilitate both inward and outward remittances, while Axis Bank and DBS India will facilitate inward remittances.

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Why Cong let PFI off hook?: Nadda; BJP seeks vote for double engine Govt in K'taka

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

BJP national president JP Nadda on Tuesday attacked the Congress, accusing it of withdrawing cases against Popular Front of India (PFI) and appealed people to vote for a "double-engine" Government by rejecting the "appeasement politics".

Karnataka is set for election for 224-strong Assembly before May and an evenly poised battle is expected with the Congress and the JD(S) trying hard to upset the apple cart in the State.

The BJP is hoping that factional fighting for the CM face in the Congress may help it out in the polls. The BJP which replaced Lingayat strongman BS Yediyurappa with SR Bommai as the Chief Minister will go to poll backing Bommai. Besides Lingayats and Vokkaligas, Kurbas also form the influential castes in Karnataka and are wooed by the politicians across the State.

The Congress, which is making a strong comeback



BJP national president JP Nadda addresses the Professional and Thinkers meet, in Chikmagalur in Karnataka on Tuesday PTI

effort in the State, had last week inducted HD Thammaiah, a BJP Lingayat leader in Karnataka and a close confidant of the party's national general secretary CT Ravi, to the party fold.

Thammaiah resigned from the BJP to join the Congress, sparking speculation that less than three months before the Karnataka Assembly elections, the ruling party is facing discontent from leaders waiting for tickets.

Nadda landed in the State

for a three-day visit to streamline and oversee the campaign strategy for the elections.

Addressing public rallies in Beluru and Chikmagalur, the BJP president urged the people to support the saffron party to have "double engine government" in Karnataka once again, for the development of the State.

Targeting former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and the earlier Congress Government led by him, Nadda accused them of withdrawing cases against PFI, an extremist Muslim organisation, and Karnataka Forum for Dignity (KFD) activists, by following their practice of appeasement politics.

"When Congress comes, there is scatter in the society, when Congress comes there is divide and rule, it is the basic trait of Congress' politics. When Congress comes there is vote bank politics, as part of which they indulge in appealing to a particular religion or a community, Nadda said.

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Terror-drug smugglers nexus: NIA raids in 8 States find arms haul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday busted a multi-State terrorists-gangsters-drug smugglers syndicate and seized a large cache of arms and ammunition, and cash to the tune of ₹2.3 crore during multi-State searches on Tuesday.

The NIA conducted searches at 76 locations in eight States, including Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi.

"In a major crackdown on gangsters, working in tandem with terrorist groups and drug smugglers based in foreign countries, including Pakistan and Canada, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted raids at 76 locations across 8 States on Tuesday and seized a large cache of arms and ammunition and cash to tune of ₹2.3 crore," the agency said in a statement.



Haryana Police personnel during a raid by National Investigation Agency officials at the residence of gangster Kaushal at Naharpur Rupa village in Gurugram on Tuesday PTI

Three cases have been registered by the NIA since August 2022 and several people, including some kabaddi players, have been identified and booked for their alleged involvement in terror and other criminal activities, including targeted hits and extortions from leading businessmen and professionals.

Continued on P2

SC to hear Uddhav camp plea today; Shinde team gets Sena office in LS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Wednesday the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena's petition challenging the decision of the Election Commission to recognise the Eknath Shinde faction as the real Shiv Sena and ordering allotment of the party's original "bow and arrow" poll symbol to it.

Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha Secretariat on Tuesday allotted the Shiv Sena office in Parliament House to the Eknath Shinde-led faction after the Election Commission's decision to recognise the group as the real Shiv Sena. So far, both factions were using the Shiv Sena office in the Parliament House.

Earlier, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Thackeray faction, mentioned the matter before a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices Krishna Murari and PS Narasimha on Tuesday.

Continued on P2

Stray dogs maul 4-yr-old boy to death in Hyderabad

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

In a distressing incident that sent shock waves across Telangana, a four-year-old child has been mauled to death by stray dogs here, prompting strong public reactions as some even described the menace as "terror".

While a video of the child falling prey to the canines has gone viral, Telangana Minister KT Rama Rao termed the incident "unfortunate" and said he was "pained" over the episode while the city civic body assured of steps to prevent recurrence of such attacks.

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi, who also termed the incident as unfortunate, told reporters that there is no negligence on the part of GHMC, adding the civic body is taking all precautions.

Asked about the reasons for the dogs to attack the child, the Mayor said it is not exactly clear but citing preliminary information she said an elder-



Stray dogs attack a four-year-old boy in Hyderabad on Sunday. The boy was mauled to death PTI

ly woman had been regularly feeding meat to four dogs in that area.

"She (the elderly woman) was not to be seen there for the past two days. The dogs got used to (eating) meat. It was suspected that the dogs might have been hungry and apparently due to hunger or some other reason they got ferocious and attacked the boy."

Continued on Page 2

Russia steps up tension over Ukraine, suspends major nuke pact with US

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that Moscow was suspending its participation in the New START treaty — the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States — sharply upping the ante amid tensions with Washington over the fighting in Ukraine.

Speaking in his state-of-the-nation address, Putin also said Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the US does so, a move that would end a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

Detailed report on P8



Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives to give his annual state of the nation address in Moscow on Tuesday AP/PTI

Mayor poll in Delhi today after 3 failed attempts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After two months of political tussle and three failed attempts by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to hold the Mayoral polls, the national Capital is likely to get its new Mayor on Wednesday.

The elections to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and six standing committee members will be held on February 22 after Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena gave his nod to convene the municipal House last week after the Delhi Government proposed a date to him.

Continued on P2

Vagaries of weather headache for wheat farmers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the Indian Institute of Wheat & Barley Research (IIWBR) warning, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an advisory saying sudden rise in maximum and minimum temperature during flowering and maturing period may cause loss in wheat and other crops which is ready for harvest.

According to IMD, northwest, many parts of the country are already recording temperatures that are usually recorded in the first week of March.

The IMD said the maximum temperatures are likely to remain 5 to 7 degrees Celsius above normal over many parts of northwest India for the next three days. This may adversely impact the wheat crop that

is approaching the stage of reproductive growth, which is sensitive to temperature, it said. "High temperature during flowering and maturing period leads to loss in yield. There could be a similar impact on other standing crops and horticulture," IMD said.

"Farmers are advised to check if the crop appears to be under stress, light irrigation can be provided. To reduce the impact of higher temperature, add mulch material in the space between two rows of vegetable crops for conservation of soil moisture and maintaining the soil temperature," it said.

Last year, in March — the warmest recorded in India since 1901 — wheat yield had shrunk by 2.5 per cent because of the heat.

Wheat crop has reached



the maximum vegetative stage in Madhya Pradesh, parts of Punjab and Haryana, according to the Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre (MNCFC).

Whereas in eastern Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar, wheat crop is yet to reach the maximum vegetative phase due to delay in sowing, it said in its latest report.

The life cycle of a wheat plant is divided into three

main development phases, namely the vegetative phase, in which leaves and tillers are developed, the reproductive phase, and the grain fill stage.

The wheat crop normally enters the grain fill stage in March and any unusual rise in temperature could cause yield damage. Wheat is the main rabi crop, the harvesting of which will begin from end of next month.

The IIWBR that functions under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research asked farmers to also regularly inspect their wheat crops for the yellow rust disease. It said in case of a sudden rise in temperature, farmers should use light irrigation and spray potassium on the wheat plant to reduce the damage.

Continued on P2

Suar bypoll to decide Azam’s political fate

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party leader Mohammad Azam Khan, who has been facing ordeal for over the last two years, is grappling with yet another challenge — by-election to Suar Assembly constituency in Rampur district. He is likely to field someone from his family in Suar, a prestige battle for him.

The upcoming Suar Assembly bypoll will define the future of Azam Khan's politics and hold over his bastion Rampur. The Suar Assembly seat recently fell vacant following the disqualification of Azam Khan's son Abdullah Azam, following his conviction by the MP MLA court of Moradabad in a case of 2008.

Azam Khan, 74, the most prominent Muslim face of the SP who dominated the political landscape of Rampur district, is facing a major challenge



for the first time in over four decades. No member from his family is currently an MP or MLA, after his son Abdullah Azam was disqualified. As of now both Azam Khan and his son are banned from contesting any election.

The Bharatiya Janata Party made inroads in Rampur by winning both the bypolls to Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats in 2022. The bypoll to the Lok Sabha seat was caused by resignation of Azam Khan as he contested the 2022 UP assembly polls. Later he was disqualified from the assembly after his

conviction in a 2019 hate speech case.

The upcoming Suar assembly bypoll, slated to be held soon, will define the future of Azam Khan's politics.

The result of the Rampur Vidhan Sabha by-election, held after Azam Khan's conviction, in which BJP's candidate Akash Saxena defeated SP nominee Asim Raja, a close confidant of Azam Khan, by a margin of over 33,000 votes, has left the SP leader with tough lessons. "Azam Khan cannot afford a third straight defeat in Rampur, which will further dent his image and raise a question mark over his hold even within the Muslim support base in the district and its adjoining areas," said a SP leader.

In the Rampur Sadar bypoll, with about a 50 per cent Muslim electorate, BJP's Akash Saxena polled 81,432 votes while Asim Raja secured only 47,296 votes.

24 senior citizens felicitated in Varishtha Samman Utsav

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal felicitated 24 senior citizens of the city who were selected under five categories — Iconic Senior Citizens, Elderly in Art and Culture, Elderly in Sports, Elderly in Medicines and Freedom Fighters of the national Capital, as part of its inaugural Varishtha Samman Utsav on Tuesday.

The Department of Social Welfare announced Varishtha Samman Utsav to felicitate the Senior Citizens in 2020-21 to celebrate 75 Years of Independence. Applications were received from senior citizens of Delhi, and after multiple meetings, discussions and analysis, 24 applicants were selected for this esteemed award. The event was also attended by the Social Welfare Minister Raaj Kumar Anand and Speaker of Delhi Vidhan Sabha Raj Niwas Goel.

During the event, a group of children dressed up in the costumes of elderly citizens and expressed their desire to present flowers to the Chief Minister. Kejriwal then invited them onto the stage and accepted the flowers from the children and gave his blessings to them.

Speaking on the occasion, Kejriwal said, "Every senior citizen makes a valuable contribution to the society and this was just one such event organised to felicitate some of the people contributing to the society in Delhi."



He congratulated all the elderly members who were awarded at the occasion and said that it is amazing that irrespective of their age, each person here has the passion to contribute for the well-being of the society.

He elaborated that the senior citizens gathered at the event had contributed across various domains such as music, arts, public service and so on.

He added that the Delhi Government had received 133 applications for the event and hoped that the following year every senior citizen of Delhi will apply for the Varishtha Samman Utsav.

The CM also said that the Delhi Government is extremely happy at the success of this inaugural event and hoped that in the future, this event only gets bigger as the years roll on.

Trial in Shraddha murder case to start from Feb 24

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The trial in the sensational Shraddha Walkar murder case is set to begin against her live-in partner and main accused Aaftab Poonawala on February 24 as a magisterial court has remanded the judicial records to a Sessions Court. Aaftab will now have to appear before a Principal District and Sessions Judge at Saket on Friday.

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), a case pertaining to heinous offences are remanded to the jurisdictional sessions court by the concerned Metropolitan Magistrate after filing of the chargesheet.

Meanwhile, Metropolitan Magistrate (MM) Aviral Shukla asked Aaftab who was brought to the court physically by the Delhi Police, to file a fresh application before the sessions court after he orally sought permissions to carry religious



books, pen and a notepad during future proceedings.

The MM noted that the chargesheet was filed under sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence or giving false information to screen offender) of the Indian Penal Code.

"Scrutiny of documents is complete... Section 302 of the IPC is exclusively triable by a sessions court. Accordingly, the accused be produced before the principal district and sessions judge on February 24 at 2 pm," the magistrate said. "The case is now committed to the sessions court," he added.

Why Cong let PFI off hook?: Nadda; BJP seeks vote for double engine Govt in Karnataka

From Page 1

Addressing a public meeting in Beluru, he alleged that whenever the Congress comes to power corruption comes along with it.

"If there is someone who fights corruption it is BJP and Basavaraj Bommai (Chief Minister), who left no stone unturned in restoring Lokayukta in the state, and if there is someone who encourages corruption it will be Siddaramaiah (Congress leader and former CM), who rooted out Lokayukta institution from the state," he added.

Further alleging that Congress' other name is "corruption, commission", the BJP President charged Siddaramaiah with "appeasement", and disturbing law and order situation.

"PFI is a banned organisation, they had created fear in the society, and Siddaramaiah, during his tenure as the CM withdrew 175 cases against PFI and KFD, and their 1,600 activists were released from jail. They wanted to create fear in the society, divide the society, disturb law and order...Will you (public) support such people? Do you want such a government?" he asked.

"If you don't want such a Government, in the days to come (election), support Basavaraj Bommai, BJP, and make your contribution for strengthening the double engine Government in Karnataka, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Bommai, BJP state president Nalin Kumar Kateel, national general secretaries C T Ravi and Arun Singh, and Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje were among others present at the event.

Karnataka Chief Minister

SC to hear Uddhav camp's plea today..

From Page 1

"If the EC order is not stayed, then they will take over the symbol and the bank accounts. Please list it tomorrow before the Constitution bench," Sibal requested the court. The top court said it needs to go through the case files and posted the matter for hearing at 3:30 pm on Wednesday.

The plea filed by the Thackeray camp stated the points raised in the petition have a direct bearing on the issues which are being considered by the SC's constitution bench.

The petition contended the poll panel erred in holding that disqualification under the Tenth Schedule and proceedings under the Symbols Order operate in different spheres and that disqualification of MLAs is not based on cessation of membership of a political party. It also submitted that the Election Commission has erred in holding that there was a split in the Shiv Sena. In the absence

of any pleadings and evidence that there was a split in a political party, the finding of the ECI is completely erroneous on this ground, the plea said.

The petition said the Thackeray faction has an overwhelming majority in the Pratinidhi Sabha, which is the apex body representing the wishes of the primary members and other stakeholders of the party. The plea said the poll panel has acted in a "biased and unfair manner". It is submitted that the ECI has failed to discharge its duties as a neutral arbiter of disputes under para 15 of the symbols order and has acted in a manner undermining its constitutional status, the petition alleged.

The poll panel had on Friday recognised the Eknath Shinde-faction as the real Shiv Sena and ordered allotment of the bow and arrow election symbol of the undivided party founded by the late Balasaheb Thackeray to it.

In a 78-page order on the protracted battle for control of the organisation, the Commission allowed the Uddhav Thackeray faction to keep the 'flaming torch' poll symbol allotted to it till the completion of the assembly by-polls in the state.

Vagaries of weather...

From Page 1

But watering the plants should be stopped if there is strong wind, as the crop may fall otherwise, causing more damage.

In its forecast, the IMD said maximum temperatures are likely to remain three to five degrees above normal in the region as well as central and west India over the next five days. Delhi on Monday recorded the third hottest February day since 1969 with the maximum temperature at the Safdarjung observatory, the national Capital's primary weather station, soaring to 33.6 degrees Celsius.

The city had recorded an all-time high of 34.1 degrees Celsius on February 26, 2006, and a maximum temperature of 33.9 degrees on February 17, 1993. Kuldeep Srivastava, head of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) regional forecasting centre, said the lack of strong western disturbances was the primary reason for the early heat in Delhi and other parts of northwest India.

"The weather in northwest India is primarily regulated by western disturbances. Since there has been no active western disturbance in the region since January 29, the temperatures have gone up appreciably," he said. A few feeble western disturbances have led to below-normal precipitation in the hills, Srivastava added.

Mayor poll in Delhi today...

From Page 1

According to MCD officials, the agenda of the meeting will remain the same as usual. The voting is done through a secret ballot and the anti-defection law does not apply in the MCD House.

Delhi BJP leaders on Tuesday asserted that "anything can happen", hinting that the party was hopeful of springing a surprise despite AAP's majority and the Supreme Court ruling against voting by aldermen. Ahead of the Mayoral polls, the AAP issued a statement saying after the rap by the top court, MCD will soon have a Mayor and Government of AAP. Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor also claimed that the result of the mayoral election will "surprise" people, but refused to elaborate on the strategy of the party. A section of BJP leaders asserted that the chances of the BJP mayoral candidate were not "that bad", claiming "deep dissent" among the AAP councillors.

The Supreme Court had on February 17 ordered the issuance of a notice within 24 hours for convening the first meeting of the MCD to fix the date of elections for the mayor, the deputy mayor and the members of the standing committee of the civic body. The court issued the order after hearing a plea moved by the ruling AAP mayoral candidate Shelly Oberoi, who had sought an early conduct of the election. In a shot in the arm for the ruling AAP, the top court also held that the

members nominated by the L-G to MCD cannot vote to elect the mayor.

According to the DMC Act, 1957, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor are to be elected in the very first session of the House after the civic polls. However, it has been over two months since the municipal elections were held on December 4 last.

The crisis also impacted the annual Budget proceedings and the schedule of taxes for year 2023-24 was passed by the Special Officer of the MCD on February 15, since the deliberative wing has not come into place. According to the norms, the schedule of taxes has to be passed by the House before or on February 15. However, the remaining budget is expected to be passed by the House before March 31, as required, since the new deliberative wing led by a mayor will come into place on February 22. The municipal House has witnessed unprecedented developments since January 6. The AAP had emerged as a clear winner in the December 4 polls, bagging 134 wards and ending the BJP's 15-year rule in the civic body. The BJP won 104 wards to finish second, while the Congress won nine seats in the 250-member municipal House. The electoral college for the election of mayor comprises the 250 elected councillors, seven Lok Sabha and three Rajya Sabha MPs from Delhi and 14 MLAs.

The Delhi Assembly Speaker has nominated 13 AAP and one BJP member to the House. The total number of votes in the mayoral polls are 274. The numbers game favours the AAP, which has 150 votes against the BJP's 113.

Stray dogs maul 4-yr-old boy...

From Page 1

Many people took to social media and said stray dog attacks have become a menace in many cities and urged the Government to immediately put an end to the issue here.

In the video clip that has gone viral, the canines are seen suddenly attacking the boy while tailing him, following which he falls down. He was walking alone. The unrelenting pack of strays keep mauling him even as there was nobody in sight that could come to his rescue. The child was apparently carrying a packet containing some food item when the dogs pounced on him, a GHMC official said. The incident, which occurred at Amberpet locality on Sunday, was caught on a CCTV camera.

The boy's father, who works as a security guard at a car service centre, had taken him and his six-year-old daughter to his workplace located in the area. The victim suffered serious injuries in the attack and was rushed to the hospital by his father and others where he was declared brought dead, the official said.

"I took my son and daughter to my workplace. After some time my daughter came and told me that my son was attacked by street dogs. Then I rushed to the spot. I put my bleeding son on my shoulders and took him to the hospital, but no use. I wish no one faces such a situation," he said.

The boy's sister said she saw dogs surrounding her brother and nobody was there to rescue him.

A watchman told media that the boy was playing near the centre and later after some time the dogs suddenly attacked him. Reacting to the incident, Minister Rama Rao said, "It is (an) unfortunate incident... I really felt pained about (it).

THE PIONEER
CLASSIFIEDS

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PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that I, SHEELA GARG W/O LATE SHRI JAI BHAGWAN GARG R/O BT-20, 2ND FLOOR, SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI-110098 have lost her original property documents as Possession Letter, Possession Slip, Demand cum Allotment Letter, NCR issued by DDA in respect of Property Bearing No. 42/7, Block No. C, In the Layout Plan of Lawrence Road Industrial Area, Delhi, have been logged an NCR Vide LR No. 17042/3/2023 against this effect has been lodged in Crime Branch Police Station Delhi.
Any person claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents may write contact with above named person at above address phone No. 9810186592 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

UPI-PayNow link new...

From Page 1

For Singapore users, the service will be made available through DBS-Singapore and Liquid Group (a non-bank financial institution). More banks will be included in the linkage over time.

Customers of the above participating banks can undertake cross-border remittances to Singapore using the bank's mobile banking app or internet banking.

To begin with, an Indian user can remit up to Rs 60,000 in a day (equivalent to around

SGD 1,000). At the time of making the transaction, the system shall dynamically calculate and display the amount in both currencies for the convenience of the user, it said.

The UPI-PayNow linkage is the product of extensive collaboration between the RBI, Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), and Payment System Operators of both countries viz. NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) and Banking Computer Services Pte Ltd (BCS), and participating banks

/ non-bank financial institutions.

This inter linkage aligns with the G20's financial inclusion priorities of driving faster, cheaper and more transparent cross-border payments and will be a significant milestone in the development of infrastructure for cross-border payments between India and Singapore, the statement said.

The virtual launch was preceded by a phone call between the two Prime Ministers, wherein discussions

were held on areas of mutual interest. Prime Minister Modi thanked Prime Minister Lee for his partnership in taking the India-Singapore relationship forward and looked forward to working with him under India's G20 Presidency.

"The PayNow-UPI linkage will offer cheaper, faster, and safer cross-border retail payments and remittances, for businesses and individuals alike, directly between bank accounts or e-wallets," Singapore's Prime Minister's

Office said in a statement.

The move will also help the Indian diaspora in Singapore, especially migrant workers and students, through the instantaneous and low-cost transfer of money from Singapore to India and vice-versa.

"I hope this strong partnership between Singapore and India will continue to spawn innovative technology solutions and create more cross-border opportunities for our digital economies," the PMO statement said.

Police admin at district level tainted: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday said the recent Kanjhawla hit-and-drag incident and the Shraddha Walkar murder case exhibit a “glaring lacuna” in policing at the field level and urged the Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) to rectify it.

Addressing the Deputy Commissioners of Police conference at the Delhi Police headquarters on Tuesday, the LG also flagged a host of issues, including corruption, high-handedness of police and investigation loopholes especially at the district level.

The taint of corruption, Saxena complained, coloured

the personnel of the police administration “like none other” and needed to be handled not only at all levels, but more so in police districts even as there needed to be more emphasis on humane policing.

Giving a reality check to the officials, he said, “Our police administration, especially at the district level, is tainted, more than any other arm of civil administration.”

“The taint of corruption colours the personnel of police administration like none other. I would also like to emphasise that this malice can and should be handled by leaders at all levels, more so in the districts,” he said.

Various recent incidents reported from the city includ-



ing the Shraddha Walkar case in which she was murdered, chopped into multiple pieces and thrown across Delhi before coming to light months later, the Anjali Singh case in which

her body was dragged for 12 kilometres under a car on New Year’s eve when police patrolling and checkpoints are supposed to be strengthened exhibited “glaring lacuna in

policing at the field level”, Saxena said.

The DCPs, the LG said, needed to look into immediately rectifying the reasons behind incidents such as the death of ASI Shambhu Dayal Meena while preventing chain snatching and open firing at a traffic intersection during evening rush hours resulting in the death of two innocent persons among others.

The Delhi Police had received a lot of flak over the Kanjhawla incident in which 20-year-old Anjali was killed in the early hours on January 1 after her scooter was hit by a car and she got dragged for 12 kilometres. So far, seven people have been arrested in the case. Eleven police personnel,

who were on PCR and picket duty on the route were also suspended.

He also cited the National Crime Records Bureau data and said it shows that Delhi stands at third place in terms of cases of violent crime per lakh population. It is second across the country in terms of crime against women, “despite the fact that we have police strength of about 81,000 available in Delhi”, he noted.

He urged the force to “ensure proactive pre-emptive measures to ensure safety and security at all levels” in view of the forthcoming G-20 Summit. Saxena also stressed that the most effective bulwark against crime is visible policing, and advised the personnel to be

present on the roads and the streets on a 24x7x365 basis.

“While this helps prevent crime by deterring criminals on one hand, it also helps generate confidence among people and ensures their proactive participation in law enforcement.

“I must say that any laxity in this regard proves to be catastrophic as the recent unfortunate incident in Kanjhawla showed, and will not be tolerated,” he added.

The LG also flagged loopholes that lead to undue acquittals, charge sheets that lack merit and are insufficient as well as investigations that stretch for years together, saying they were a cause of great concern. “They not only weak-

en public confidence in the police but also pose a challenge to the very dictum of rule of law,” he said. He said complaints like “investigation is not happening, policemen have colluded with the other party, police did not reach the spot” are not always ‘unfounded and they need to go’. The L-G also said responsiveness and agility in terms of attending to a citizen who approaches the police should be one of the prime concerns.

He also emphasised on traditional policing, stressing that merely adding CCTV cameras, bringing in state-of-art technology and dependency on e-solutions will not help in improving the law and order situation and ensuring safety.

2 burned to death: Gau rakshaks named in FIR police informers

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Four of the five men initially named in the FIR registered after the alleged abduction and murder of two Muslim men from Rajasthan have turned out to be either informers or complainants in cases filed by the Haryana Police in the past few weeks against suspected cow smugglers.

Nasir and Junaid, both residents of Ghatmeeka village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, were allegedly abducted by cow vigilantes on February 15 and their bodies were found in a charred car in Loharu in Haryana’s Bhiwani the next day. The family members of the deceased had named five men linked to the Bajrang Dal in their complaint to the police.

In its FIR lodged on February 16, the Rajasthan Police named five accused — Anil, Shrikant, Rinku Saini, Lokesh Singla and Monu Manesar — on the basis of the complaint lodged by the victims’ family. Later, four more suspects’ names were added to the



FIR registered at Gopalgarh police station in Bharatpur.

As per the FIRs registered recently against suspected cow smugglers at Ferozepur Jhirka and Nagina police stations in Haryana’s Nuh, Rinku, Lokesh and Shrikant are described as informers while Monu Manesar, a member of Bajrang Dal, is a complainant in an FIR registered at Sector 9A police station in Gurugram. Rinku has been arrested by the Rajasthan Police.

As per the most recent FIR registered at Ferozepur Jhirka police station on February 14 hours before Junaid and Nasir were allegedly kidnapped,

‘guptchar’ (informer) and ‘gau rakshak’ (cow vigilante) Rinku informed the police that five cattle smugglers will be going towards Rajasthan in a Tata 407 carrying cows.

Another FIR registered on January 23 on the complaint of sub-inspector Balbir Singh at Ferozepur Jhirka station also mentioned the name of Rinku as “mukhbir khaas” and a member of gau raksha group. An FIR registered on January 19 at Ferozepur Jhirka police station was also based on a tip-off from ‘gau rakshak’ Lokesh.

As per the complaint of sub-inspector Kaliyan Singh, he got a tip-off from Lokesh that three men involved in cattle smuggling would be going to Rajasthan’s Ghatmeeka village. According to the January 19 FIR, the police reached the spot along with Lokesh.

Two cows were recovered from the vehicle while its three occupants managed to flee. Informer Lokesh identified the accused and they were booked under the relevant sections, stated the FIR.

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A Hindu Mahapanchayat organised in support of Monu Manesar, called for a CBI probe into the case, terming it a conspiracy against gau rakshaks. Several speakers at the panchayat issued a stern warning to the Rajasthan Police against arresting Monu, a Bajrang Dal member and face of the cow protection task force of the Haryana Government in Gurgaon.

Monu is one of the prime suspects wanted in the Bhiwani murder case. In the incident, which took place in Loharu in Bhiwani (Haryana), two youths from Bharatpur (Rajasthan) — Junaid and Nasir — were allegedly burnt alive on February 16.

Amid reports that a Rajasthan police team was conducting a raid at Monu’s residence in Manesar, several panchayat members blocked both the carriageways of Delhi-Jaipur Expressway for a few minutes before local police



and panchayat members intervened and opened the traffic. During the Mahapanchayat, it was decided that alleged cow vigilante Monu Manesar is innocent and they will not allow him to be arrested.

The Hindu groups also decided that they will not allow the police to enter the Manesar area and if Monu was arrested, they will block traffic on the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway.

On Tuesday, when the people of Mahapanchayat came to know that the Rajasthan Police have reached Monu’s house in Manesar to serve a legal notice, they also reached the house. But by then, the

police team had left the spot. The people also blocked the National Highway on Tuesday between 1:00 p.m. and 1:22 p.m. but later they were removed from the expressway.

The Mahapanchayat also urged the Haryana government to support Monu Manesar and ensure that he is not arrested. During the Mahapanchayat, it was announced that Monu Manesar is not at fault and he is being framed. Monu has been described as a cow protector as well as ‘Hindu pride’ in the Mahapanchayat. Meanwhile, Haryana as well as Rajasthan Police have not been able to

arrest Monu Manesar, the main suspect in the Bhiwani case. The Rajasthan police have registered a case against five accused including Monu Manesar. People involved in the Mahapanchayat said “Monu is a cow vigilante and due to his efforts, incidents of cow smuggling have stopped in the area. It was announced in the Mahapanchayat that Monu is innocent and he is being implicated in this case.”

Along with this, people have also come in favour of another accused in the case, Shrikant Pandit. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and other Hindu organisations took part in the Mahapanchayat.

Describing the FIR lodged against five youths, including Monu Manesar, in the ongoing Hindu Mahapanchayat in Manesar as false, demand has been made to withdraw the action. On Monday, a protest march was held in Manesar in support of Monu. A protest was also held against the Rajasthan government.

MCD seals mall’s two properties over ₹9 cr tax default

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Tuesday initiated sealing and attachment action against two properties of a mall in Raja Garden area here for “defaulting on property tax” worth nearly Rs 9 crore.

In a statement, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi said property tax department gave “ample opportunities” to the builders to “clear their outstanding tax dues pending since 2006-2007, but they failed to clear their dues.”

“The property tax department of the West Zone of the MCD today “attached two properties of TDI Mall — namely TDI Paragon Mall situated at Plot No.2 Shivaji Place, Raja Garden and TDI Mall situated at plot no.11, District Centre, Raja Garden for defaulting on property tax, amounting to approximately Rs 9 crore”, it said in the statement. The MCD said it is “fully committed to recover due property tax from property tax defaulters”.

Proposed demolition of 9 religious structures: Who passed order? LG, CM, Dy CM say didn’t direct

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Wary of the possible repercussions over the proposed demolition of nine religious structures of different communities, neither the Chief Minister or his deputy nor Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena is owning up the responsibility of having issued orders for demolishing the structures to pave the way for the construction of the Delhi-Saharanpur Highway.

The two sides are pointing fingers at each other for ordering the demolition. Saxena cleared the proposal to remove nine “unauthorised” religious structures along the upcoming

Delhi-Saharanpur Expressway after the file approving their demolition was sent to him by the Deputy Chief Minister and Chief Minister, officials at the LG Office said on Tuesday.

Clearing the file for the removal of nine unauthorised religious structures out of the 23 recommended by the National Highways Authority of India on the Delhi side of the Akshardham Junction-Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border for the expressway, sources said Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had approved this proposal for the removal of nine unauthorised religious structures (temples), in the Delhi portion of the Delhi-Shaharanpur Highway between Akshardham

Junction and Delhi-UP Border on December 9, 2022 while Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has endorsed the same on February 01, 2023, before sending it to this Secretariat on February 08, 2023.

All the nine structures (temples) are existed on Marginal Pusta road, connecting Khajuri Khas and Karawal Nagar. This comes after Sisodia on Monday appealed to the LG to stop the proposed demolition of 74 religious structures for infrastructure development projects in the capital, saying it could hurt sentiments and lead to a serious law and order situation. “Lakhs of devotees visit these religious structures and their demolition could trigger a law and order sit-

uation in the capital,” a statement quoted Sisodia said.

“Proposals like decongestion of roads and development of residential colonies that would have gone a long way in addressing the problems of people of Delhi, are being stonewalled, despite clear directions of the Supreme Court, High Court of Delhi and even after recommendations of the Religious Committee. That this is being done for petty political gains, is not only unfortunate, but amounts to blatant and willful violation of the orders of the Courts by GNCTD, apart from exhibiting sheer hypocrisy,” Lt Governor said in his noting on the proposal related to demolition of religious structures.

DU colleges’ governing bodies: Sisodia writes to VC over delay

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has written to Delhi University Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh over the delay in formation of governing bodies of 28 Government colleges, officials said on Tuesday.

Sisodia, in his letter, also expressed concern over interviews that were held for hiring professors allegedly without full-fledged governing bodies.

In the letter, the Deputy Chief Minister expressed worries that interviews for hiring professors were taking place without full-fledged governing bodies, subverting the policy of absorption of ad-hoc and tem-



porary teachers, which could lead to a crisis in the administration and governance of these colleges. “This could lead to a crisis in the administration and governance of these colleges. The experience of thousands of ad-hoc and temporary teachers is required to maintain the academic rigour and qual-

ity of the university, and any further delays could hamper the capacity of the college to make key decisions,” he said.

He requested the DU VC to expedite the formation of fully-functional governing bodies at all 28 government colleges. In the letter written today, Sisodia has stressed that full-fledged governing bodies in these 28 Delhi Govt Colleges is the need of the hour because around seventy percent of ad-hoc and temporary teachers have been reported to be displaced in the ongoing interviews across the colleges. He added that in these 28 GBs, there is a statutory provision for the participation of nominees of the Delhi Government and hence, they cannot be allowed

to abdicate their duty to protect ad hoc and temporary teachers, working in these colleges for years. The 28 colleges funded by the Government of NCT of Delhi are being operated by a truncated body that lacks any form of GNCTD representation.

This essentially means that all decisions, particularly those that may have financial implications for the Government, cannot be made by the college without the participation of a full-fledged governing body.

In the absence of the latter, the college’s capacity to make key decisions regarding promotions, appointments, and other issues relevant to the efficient operations will be severely hampered.

BJP seeks Sonia’s apology for Khera’s anti-Modi jibe

Delhi unit protests at Sonia’s house

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Tuesday staged a protest near the residence of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Janpath Road here, demanding an apology over her party spokesperson Pawan Khera’s “disgraceful” remark against the late father of PM Narendra Modi.

Several BJP party leaders and workers, including Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva, Leader of



Photo by Ranjan Dimri Pioneer

Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, MP Ramesh Bidhuri, former Delhi BJP president Vijendra Gupta, were detained by the police while they were marching

towards Gandhi’s residence. Sachdeva, who was leading the protest, said Khera’s words reflect the character of Congress. “The disgraceful words used by Khera show his

and Congress’ character. He should be removed from Congress and Sonia Gandhi should apologise for his conduct,” Sachdeva said that Mani Shankar Iyer, Digvijay Singh, Randeep Surjewala, PL Punia, Kamal Nath, Subodhkant Sahai to today’s Pawan Kheda we don’t know how many Congress leaders have spewed venom towards the Prime Minister but whenever they spoke Congress has lost its political ground.

Leader of Opposition Ramveer Singh Bidhuri said that such statement about the father of world’s most popular PM Narendra Modi is absolutely unforgivable and

BJP is not going to remain silent for this. “This Congress party is the same whose head Rahul Gandhi opposes India’s airstrike on Pakistan,” he said.

Khera recently referred to the prime minister as “Narendra Gautamdas Modi” while criticising the Central government over the row involving the business conglomerate headed by Gautam Adani. The ruling party has accused him of making fun of the prime minister and his late father. Modi’s full name is Narendra Damodardas Modi, with middle name Damodardas standing for his father’s name, a common practice in many parts of country.



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Speaker of Delhi Assembly Ram Niwas Goel and Delhi Social Welfare Minister Raaj Kumar Anand with children dressed as senior citizens during the Varisith Samman Utsav in New Delhi on Tuesday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Maximum temp soars to 31.4° C, seven notches above normal

NEW DELHI: The maximum temperature in Delhi settled seven notches above normal at 31.4 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, a day after the mercury soared to a record high.

Delhi on Monday recorded the third hottest February day since 1969 with the maximum temperature at the Safdarjung observatory, the

national Capital’s primary weather station, soaring to 33.6 degrees Celsius.

On Tuesday morning, the minimum temperature was logged at 16.1 degrees Celsius, five notches above normal. Delhi registered a low of 13.1 degrees Celsius, two notches above the season’s average, on Monday.

Drivers of pvt bike taxis face uncertain future

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Twenty-nine-year-old Anand Rai is among the many drivers plying bike taxis on the streets of national Capital who are staring at an uncertain future after the Delhi Government asked ride aggregators to stop the use of private vehicles.

These drivers have said

the Government should bring in a policy for them, rather than cracking down on them and imposing fines.

The transport department has cautioned bike taxis against plying on the roads of Delhi, warning that it was a violation of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, that would make aggregators liable for a fine of Rs 1 lakh. The use of two-wheelers

having private registration mark for commercial purposes is in violation of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. The first offence could lead to a fine of Rs 5,000 while a second offence could incur a Rs 10,000 fine and imprisonment of up to a year, the department said in a public notice. This has scared the riders, many of whom, are denying bookings coming in

from Delhi, to avoid getting penalised. Rai, who has been driving with Ola, Uber and Rapido, said that on Tuesday, he received a booking and the customer threatened to get his vehicle seized.

“I immediately shut down that app. There is a fear that has crept in regarding bookings from Delhi. I came to Delhi so that I can work with the cab

aggregators and drive a four-wheeler. Somehow, I managed to arrange money for a two-wheeler and started driving for the three aggregators,” the Azamgarh resident said.

Back home, Rai had his own business of repairing vehicles but he came here for better opportunities. The money he earns, he sends to his parents and wife. “I bought a sec-

ond-hand two wheeler for arranging money and now if this is banned, I will try and arrange money for buying a four-wheeler,” he said.

Pramod (25) started using a bike given by his father last year after he failed to secure a job. He earns around Rs 700 daily. Pramod is from Uttar Pradesh and put up with his father in Yamuna Vihar.

CBI raids 50 premises in FCI corruption case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Tuesday conducted searches under operation Kanak-II at around 50 locations at the premises of Food Corporation of India (FCI) officials, private rice millers and grain merchants in an on-going investigation of a case.

The searches were conducted at Mansa, Hoshiarpur, Mukerian, Roopnagar, Patiala, Sirhind, Fatehgarh Sahib, Mohali, Moga, Firozpur, Ludhiana and Sangrur (all in Punjab) and Union Territory of Chandigarh.

"Incriminating documents and digital devices have so far been recovered during searches. The operation was launched to break the nexus of channelized corruption in FCI involving officials of FCI, private rice millers and grain merchants," the CBI said in a statement. Further investigation, including the scrutiny of documents,



interrogation of arrested accused, statement of witnesses, examination of persons acquainted with facts of the case and analysis of technical data had allegedly revealed that FCI officials, private rice millers and grain merchants were part of a well-organized syndicate and the recipients of huge bribe amounts collected during the process of procurement in FCI, the agency said.

Operation Kanak-II is also a part of the effort to ascertain the quantum and scale of ongoing corruption in FCI and to unearth the sequence of large-scale conspiracy amongst the

inter-connected participants, it said. A case was earlier registered on January 10 against 74 accused including serving and retired officials of FCI, private persons and other entities.

It was alleged that a huge amount of bribe was paid to FCI officials for extending favours to the private operators. It was further alleged that private rice millers and grain merchants were paying bribes to FCI officials for getting favours in accommodating procurement of low quality food grains, malpractices in day-to-day operations in unloading of food grains, managing enquiries against various malpractices.

It was also alleged that the officials in conspiracy with rice millers cover up the shortages in stocks and accept low quality food grains which are transported to other parts of the country. The rice millers in turn allegedly pay a huge amount of bribe to the officials

of FCI including Technical Assistants, DGM, AGM, and even Executive Director, as part of channelized corruption, it said.

Earlier, a massive operation under the name of 'Operation Kanak' was conducted in January, 2023 against the unholy nexus of channelized corruption adopted by FCI officials, private rice millers and grain merchants by way of paying undue gratification to certain officials of FCI for getting undue favours, it said.

CBI earlier arrested DGM (Quality Control/Personnel) RO, Chandigarh; a Proprietor of a firm based at Kharar (Punjab) and a Manager (Lab), FCI, DO, Chandigarh.

During searches at around 99 locations, Rs. 1.03 crore, fixed deposit receipts FDRs to the extent of over Rs 3 crore, documents related to various properties, incriminating documents and digital devices were recovered.

Diabetes is leading cause of blindness in South Asia: WHO

Half of the global vision impairment could have been prevented: Doc

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Diabetes is becoming a leading reason for blindness in the South East Asia Region including India with WHO on Tuesday pointing out that in 2019, of 87.6 million people with diabetes, 30.6 million had diabetic retinopathy (eye disease caused by high blood sugar), and 9.6 million had sight-threatening retinopathy (blindness caused by untreated diabetic retinopathy).

Addressing a high-level meeting of member countries on 'Integrated People-Centred Eye Care' in Hyderabad, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, said, "This huge burden is unacceptable as nearly half the global vision



impairment could have been prevented or are yet to be addressed."

She was speaking at the three-day high-level meeting, being attended by health ministers and programme managers from across member countries to deliberate on urgent measures to roll out 'Action Plan for Integrated People-Centred Eye Care in South-East Asia 2022-2030'.

The regional action plan aims at enabling countries achieve 40 per cent increase in effective coverage of refractive

errors, 30 per cent increase in effective coverage of cataract surgery, at least 80 per cent people with diabetes are screened regularly for retinopathy, and at least 80 per cent of those identified with sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy are treated by 2030.

Young children and older people are most vulnerable, while women, rural populations and ethnic minority groups are more likely to have vision impairment and less likely to access care, she said.

The increased prevalence

of vision impairment and blindness in the region among people of all socio-economic groups also tracks with the rising tide of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes.

The 'Action Plan for Integrated People-Centred Eye Care in South-East Asia 2022-2030' also outlines measures that countries can take to eliminate trachoma in the region by 2025.

Two countries in the region —Nepal and Myanmar — have eliminated trachoma which is caused by infection with the bacterium Chlamydia trachomatis. It is a public health problem in 42 countries, and is responsible for blindness or visual impairment of about 1.9 million people. Blindness from trachoma is irreversible.

Management of common eye health issues should be mainstreamed into routine health services and current care models must be reoriented to prioritise primary health care and community-based services, Dr Khetrapal added.

Ties can't be normal with Pak as perpetrators of Mumbai terror attack roaming freely: Akhtar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noted writer and lyricist Javed Akhtar has slammed Pakistan and said ties with India cannot be normal as perpetrators of 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks were still roaming free there. He also said while India warmly welcomed famous Pakistani writers, it never hosted Lata Mangeskar.

Making these scathing comments in an event in Lahore recently in the memory of renowned Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed, Akhtar said while the masterminds of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks were roaming freely in Pakistan and to expect any Indian not to



Veteran screenwriter, lyricist and poet Javed Akhtar with host Adil Hashmi at the Faiz Festival 2023, in Lahore. PTI Photo

have any complaints about this would be unfair. Responding to a person who asked Akhtar to take with him a message of peace, and to tell Indians that Pakistan is 'a positive, friendly and loving country', the writer said there is a 'communication

blockade' between the two nations. "You have visited Pakistan many times...When you go back do you tell your people that these are good people, they aren't just bombing us but also greeting us with garlands and love?" a person

asked of him. In reply, the noted writer said "Let us not blame each other. That won't solve the issues. We saw how Mumbai was attacked. They (terrorists) came neither from Norway nor from Egypt. They are still roaming freely in your country. Indians have complained against it."

He also reminded the gathering that even though Pakistani artists such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Mehdi Hasan have been welcomed with open arms in India, Pakistan has never hosted a Lata Mangeskar show.

"Mehdi Hassan was a cult figure in India. When he visited India, Shabana (Azmi) hosted it, I wrote for the event

which was graced by the likes of Lata Mangeskar and Asha Bhosle.

"When Faiz sahab visited, it seemed like an authority was visiting...it was broadcast all over. Have you ever seen Sahir (Ludhianvi), Kaifi (Azmi) or (Ali) Sardar Jafri's interviews on PTV? It was shown in India, it happened there... So the communication blockade is from both sides and perhaps more from your side," he said.

Meanwhile, a video showed Akhtar enjoying a musical performance by Pakistani singer-actor Ali Zafar during his visit to Lahore. Honouring the legacy of Faiz, Akhtar said "His works had some magic.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The entry of the 152-member three National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescue teams and six canines into the disaster zone in quake-hit Turkiye was swift but their exit after completion of the mission was "moving and emotional".

The NDRF rescuers returned to India after the difficult mission last week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi felicitated them on Monday at his official residence here.

The NDRF that began its operation on February 7, rescued two young girls alive and retrieved 85 bodies from the debris before their return. The personnel who undertook the rescue operations in Turkiye said they developed a bond with people they helped during their most vulnerable times. Moved by professionalism and humanitarian assistance of NDRF personnel, shed tears of thanks and gratitude to their 'Hindustani' friends and 'Biradars' who came in as saviours.

Over 44,000 people have been killed in the massive 7.8-magnitude earthquake and series of strong aftershocks that struck parts of Turkiye and neighbouring Syria on February 6 flattening thousands of buildings and homes. Constable Sushma Yadav (32) was among the five women rescuers who were sent for a foreign disaster rescue operation for first time. She had to leave her 18-month-

old twins behind to join the mission. However, she did not give second thoughts to join call of duty. "Because if we do not do it, who will?," she said. Sub-Inspector Shivani Agarwal said while going for the operation was not a problem with her parents, but the longing for a chat to know about their well-being was difficult.

"There is a time lag of about 2.5 hours between India and Turkiye. So by the time I got free and called them up it was 11:30 in the night. They picked the call on the first ring as if they were literally holding on to the phone," Agarwal said.

Sharing his experiences, Deputy Commandant Deepak said a Turkiye national there by the name Ahmed somehow got to know that he is a vegetarian. "For days, he kept following my place of deployment anywhere I was working in Nurdagi and secretly handed over anything vegetarian he had like an apple or a tomato. He peppered it with salt or local spices to make it tasty," Deepak said, recalling his experience. "He hugged me and called me Biradar."

This is something I will never forget," he added. Second-in-command-rank officer V N Parashar, who led his team on the ground, showed multiple military patches that are carried on police and army uniforms that were handed over to him as a token of gratitude.

PM, Army chief laud rescue team for excellent work

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lauding the role of its medical team for their services in the earthquake ravaged Turkiye recently, Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Tuesday said here the force is proud of the team. He also said the mobilisation of a field hospital in short time indicates the team's excellent operational preparedness.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday praised the teams saying, "You have done great service to humanity and made India proud." He also said in the last few years India has strengthened its identity not just as a self-sufficient but selfless country. "We consider the world as one family and see it our duty to quickly help any member in crisis," Modi told the relief teams.

At event here at the Army Base Hospital, Pande said "We are proud of our medical team for rendering humanitarian assistance to quake-hit people in Turkiye." "Within short period of time, the Indian Army medical team established 30-bed field hospital at Iskenderun region. The timely decision and excellent inter-agency coordination among all stakeholders made them among the first few medical teams to reach Turkiye," he said.

India, UK review Def, strategic cooperation

New Delhi: India and the United Kingdom on Tuesday reviewed the entire spectrum of their Defence and strategic ties and situation in Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China flexing its muscle there during telephonic conversation between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his British counterpart Ben Wallace. The former also urged the UK industries to jointly design and manufacture

weapons systems with India here. Giving details of the talks, defence ministry officials said here later the parleys were cordial, positive and focused on future growth of the bilateral defence relationship. Both Ministers discussed a wide range of defence and security issues, including regional developments and the Indo-Pacific.

The Ministers briefly reviewed their ongoing defence

cooperation and expressed satisfaction at their bilateral military-to-military engagements. They also discussed ways to enhance defence industrial cooperation and identified a few potential areas of cooperation. Rajnath suggested that the UK companies should become part of India's growth story and participate in co-development and co-production in India. PNS

Strong ties between India, US are must for democracy: Schumer

Close India-US ties would also be key to responding to China's authoritarianism, says US Senator

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Strong ties between India and the US are a must for democracy, advancement in technology and a robust world economy besides close bilateral ties will be a crucial counterweight to outcompete China, senior US Senator Chuck Schumer has said. He is leading a Congressional delegation of senators to India and met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Monday.

Describing India as one of the "leading powers" of the world, Senator Schumer said close India-US ties would also be key to responding to China's authoritarianism. The Senate Majority Leader is leading a high-powered Congressional

delegation of senators to India. In their interaction with the Prime Minister in New Delhi, they discussed new opportunities for consolidating the India-US ties in critical technologies, clean energy transition, joint development and production, and trusted and resilient supply chains.

The prime minister welcomed the Congressional delegation to India and appreciated the consistent and bipartisan support of the US Congress for deepening India-US bilateral ties, his office said in a statement. "We need nations such as India, the world's largest democracy, to work with us to strengthen democracies in Asia and around the globe," Shumer said in a statement issued in Washington late Monday following his hour-long meeting with Modi.

"In our meeting with Prime Minister Modi, we stressed that close ties between our two countries would be a crucial counterweight to outcompete China and respond to its authoritarianism," he said.

13 MPs nominated for Sansad Ratna Awards 2023

New Delhi: Thirteen MPs, including Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, RJD's Manoj Jha and CPI-M's John Brittas, have been nominated for the Sansad Ratna Awards 2023.

The 13 MPs include eight from the Lok Sabha and five from the Rajya Sabha, including three retired members, Prime Point Foundation, which has instituted the award, said in a statement. A jury committee chaired by Union Minister of State Arjun Ram Meghwal and

co chaired by former Chief Election Commissioner of India S Krishnamurthy also nominated two departmentally related standing committees and a distinguished leader under the special awards category.

The committee comprises eminent parliamentarians and civil society members. Among those nominated are Bidyt Baran Mahato (BJP, Jharkhand), Dr Sukanta Majumdar (BJP, West Bengal), Kuldeep Rai Sharma (INC, Andaman Nicobar Islands), Dr Heena

Vijayakumar Gavit (BJP, Maharashtra), Gopal Chinayya Shetty (BJP, Maharashtra), Sudhir Gupta (BJP, Madhya Pradesh) and Dr Amol Ramsing Kolhe (NCP, Maharashtra) for their performance in the 17th Lok Sabha under various categories.

The nominations are based on the cumulative performance in Questions, private members bills and initiated debates of members from the beginning of the 17th Lok Sabha until the end of Winter Session 2022. PNS

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank
Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, AJC Bose Road, Kolkata- 700020. CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Laxman Haldar/ Rahul Haldar/ Sapna Haldar/ Dhoaba Samudragarh Samudragarh Kaina West Bengal Kalna - 713519/ LBDGR00005120579/ LBDGR00005296886	R.S. and L.R. Dag No.1329, R.S. and L.R. Dag No.2132, L.R. Khatian No.2085, J.L. No.43, Mouza- Nandai, Thana and A.D.S.R. Office-kalna, District- Burdwan, West Bengal (admeasuring an Area of Total Land 21.08 Satak Along With 25 Years Old Pucca One Stried Building Measuring 1403 Sqft./ Date of Symbolic 16.02.2023	September 20, 2022 Rs. 60,49,243/-	Kalna/ Delhi

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : February 22, 2023
Place : Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE
ICICI Bank
Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Office Number 201- B, 2nd Floor, Road No. 1 Plot No-B3 , Wifit It Park, Wagle Industrial Estate Thane (West) 40060

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset / Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Samir Kishore Majithia/ Needhi Samir Majithia/ (LBUM00001810453) & 602, 6th Floor, Vithal Kunj 1, V.P Road, Dena Bank Lane, Opp. Mumbai Mercantile Bank, Andheri West, Mumbai- 400058	Fiat No. 1938, 19th Floor, Osimo Mahgun, Moderne, Sector 78, Plot No. Gh-02, Noida- 201301	January 24, 2022 Rs. 57,22,075/-	08/08/ 2022
2.	Samir Kishore Majithia/ Needhi Samir Majithia/ (LBUM00001844501) & 602, 6th Floor, Vithal Kunj 1, V.P Road, Dena Bank Lane, Opp. Mumbai Mercantile Bank, Andheri West, Mumbai- 400058	Fiat No. 504, 5th Floor, B-wing, Acme Enclave-II, Chinchavali, Malad West, CTS No. 1212 & 1195, Survey No. 422, Hissa No. 1, Mumbai 400104	January 24, 2022 Rs. 1,88,147,00/-	08/08/ 2022

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : February 22, 2023
Place : Noida

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

One of the days when the Parliamentarians fought for a stoppage of Express trains including Rajdhani, Shatabdi enroute their constituencies. They are now seeking the newly introduced versatile semi high speed trains running as Vande Bharat currently on 10 routes across the country.

As of now 60 MPs including 14 MPs from non-NDA parties, have petitioned the ministry of railways to begin the operation of the state-of-the-art trains connecting their constituencies. All 'Vande Bharat' trains are currently running at almost full capaci-



ty on 10 routes and has almost become a sort of tourist attraction. While most of the petitions have come from BJP MPs, including senior leader Devendra Fadnavis who asked for a train between Solapur and Mumbai and is now running. Union Parliamentary Affairs

Minister Pralhad Joshi has requested for a Vande Bharat train from Dharwad to Bangaluru and Civil Aviation minister Jyotiraditya M Scindia for a train to Gwalior, both the states, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, are polls bound. Among the opposition parties,

one MP each from the NCP, DMK, SP, AAP and the JD(U) have demanded such trains for their constituencies, while three Congress MPs, two each from the CPI(M) and YSRCP have demanded the same. Other party MPs -- one each from the Apna Dal and the Shiv Sena have also asked for the indigenous trains.

Out of the 10 Vande Bharat trains currently in operation, the Bilaspur-Nagpur Vande Bharat Express had the lowest occupancy till January this fiscal, while the Mumbai-Gandhinagar route recorded the highest, official data showed. The Bilaspur-Nagpur Vande Bharat Express had a 55 per cent occupancy rate, while

the train running between Mumbai and Gandhinagar recorded 126 per cent occupancy rate, the data showed.

"The Vande Bharat Express train offers better ride for passengers. The train has automatic plug doors, touch-free sliding doors, revolving seats in executive class, 32 inches passenger information and infotainment system in every coach, among others.

Apart from this, the train has many security features as well like the introduction of KAVACH, CCTVs, and better fire safety measures. It takes just 129 seconds to reach the speed of 160 km/hour with these trains," explained a senior railway official.

‘Puppet agencies’ fear can’t gag India’s voice’

Cong protests against ED near its Raipur office

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

Lashing out at the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raids on premises linked to its leaders in Chhattisgarh days before the scheduled plenary session, the Congress on Tuesday said that the country's voice cannot be suppressed by spreading the fear of "puppet agencies". The party also received support from Opposition leaders like the Shiv Sena (UBT) who asked why the ED and investigating agencies are not raiding offices of the Adani Group against whom a recent controversy of alleged financial irregularities has been claimed by an international agency.

A large number of Congress leaders and workers held a protest in front of the central agency's office in Raipur and accused it of taking action at the behest of the BJP. The protesters, led by Congress MLA Dhanendra Sahu and former Rajya Sabha member Chhaya Verma, held a sit-in at the ED's office building in Pachpedi Naka area.

There was also a minor scuffle when slogan-shouting Congress members tried to enter the premises but were stopped by security personnel. The party, which is in power in Chhattisgarh, said it is ready to fight it out and will fearlessly raise people's issues.

"It is clearly political vendetta. It was expected. We were expecting (raids) as the Congress' plenary session is going to be held and there is an election... we are not scared of anything," All India Congress Committee general secretary KC Venugopal said.

Venugopal was in Raipur to review the final preparation for the party's 85th plenary session scheduled to be held from



February 24 to 26. Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh are due this year-end.

"We are law-abiding citizens. Don't think that the Congress is going to be scared by the BJP or (Prime Minister) Modi. We will fight it out certainly according to the law. You can see, just before the plenary session of a national party, they are doing this type of drama..." Venugopal told reporters at the Swami Vivekananda Airport.

Shive Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi questioned that motivated raids on Opposition parties and their Governments and also questioned as why not the ED is raiding Adani's. "In past these agencies have raided and conducted searches and investigations on several privates industries and businessmen but why not Adani," Chaturvedi sought to a reply from the government.

The ED on Monday conducted raids at more than a dozen locations in Chhattisgarh including at premises linked to state Congress leaders as part of an ongoing probe into the alleged coal levy scam.

Hitting out at the Centre, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "Prime Minister's friend

Gautam Adani has been accused of embezzlement through shell companies and many other serious allegations have been levelled against him. But did you see any agency investigating this?"

"But, for creating hurdles for the Congress' plenary session, and against the voices talking about the nexus between Modi ji and his friend, an agency has been deployed," she said in a tweet in Hindi. The Congress will continue to fearlessly raise its voice on issues of the country, Priyanka Gandhi asserted.

"We will take a pledge at the Congress' plenary session to raise our voice against inflation, unemployment and corruption. You cannot suppress the voice of the country by scaring us through puppet agencies," she said.

Congress and state Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel cried foul over the raids calling it "vendetta politics" by the Centre, a charge rejected by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Congress also raised questions over the timing of the raids. Baghel had said the raids were an attempt to divert attention ahead of the party's plenary session and would not be able to break the spirit of its leaders engaged in preparations for the session.

Cong will lead Opp to power in 2024: Kharge

PTI ■ DIMAPUR

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced on Tuesday that the Congress is in talks with other Opposition parties and will lead the Opposition alliance "that will come to power at the Centre in 2024". The statement comes days after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who leads an alliance Government of which the Congress is a part, asked it to take a lead in affecting Opposition unity. Kumar later lined up a Mahagathbandhan meeting in Bihar on February 25, at the same time that the Congress is holding its plenary meeting in Raipur.

"This country will not be ruled by an autocrat that dictates people. In 2024 (Parliamentary elections), the Congress will lead the alliance Government at the Centre. We are talking with others and the Congress will take the lead on how to win 2024. Therefore, the BJP will lose their majority and we will get majority and we will



follow the Constitution. Let 100 Modis come," said Congress president Kharge, while addressing a crowd at the Diphuhar Village Public Ground in Nagaland.

Accusing the BJP-led central government of cheating the people of Nagaland on the Naga political problem, the Congress on Tuesday asserted that given a chance, it will fulfil the aspirations of the citizens of the northeastern state.

Solving the decades-old Naga issue is one of the top-most commitments in the Congress' manifesto, party president Mallikarjun Kharge said at an election rally here.

"The Narendra Modi government does not have the political will to put into effect the agreed solutions to the Naga political issue and has cheated the people of Nagaland and the country as well," he said.

Hope Naga talks bring peace: Shah

PTI ■ TUENSANG (NAGALAND)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asserted that Naga peace talks are underway and hoped that they would bring lasting peace in the northeastern State.

Addressing an election rally in Tuensang, Shah said there are some issues related to development and rights of eastern Nagaland and those will be addressed after the Assembly elections.

"There was insurgency in Nagaland before 2014... We started the peace process. I am hopeful that the initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will bear fruit in bringing lasting peace in the State with the preservation of Naga culture, language and tradition," he said. Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO), the apex tribal body in the region, had called for a boycott of the Assembly elections over their 'Frontier Nagaland' separate statehood demand.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has held discussions with ENPO and an



'agreed agreement' has been reached. But we could not materialise it due to the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct.

"I promise you all that after the elections, the agreement will be implemented through which all issues of eastern Nagaland will be addressed. There will be massive development in the region and you will get your rights," he said.

Rly begins laying tracks on Chenab bridge

Engineering marvel to bring Valley closer to rest of nation

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Indian Railways on Tuesday came one more step closer to connect Kashmir Valley with the rest of the country by starting track laying work on the 'Chenab bridge' in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). An Indian



engineering marvel, the 1,315-metre-long bridge forms a crucial link in the 111-km stretch from Katra to Banihal, which is part of the Rs 21,653 crore Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla section of the Kashmir railway project. The Chenab bridge

holds the distinction of being the highest railway bridge in the world at 359 metres above the river bed level.

For reference, it is 35 metres higher than the Eiffel Tower in France. Union Railway Minister Ashwini

Vaishnaw had earlier promised that the rail link with the Kashmir Valley would be opened to the public before 2024.

"Another milestone in the USBRL Project! Track laying work begins on Chenab Bridge. Once completed, this bridge will open up new possibilities for the remote regions of Jammu and Kashmir," the Ministry of Railways tweeted early on Tuesday morning.

The bridge is the key link in providing direct connectivity to Kashmir Valley. The design life of the bridge is at least 120 years. Besides the highest railway bridge, the USBRL project has many firsts like the longest railway tunnel

having an overall length of 12.75 km, first cable-stayed bridge which when completed will be an engineering marvel of the 21st century.

Out of the total 272-km USBRL project, the 161-km was commissioned in phases, with the first phase 118-km Qazigund-Baramulla section commissioned in October 2009 followed by 18-km Banihal-Qazigund in June 2013 and 25-km Udhampur-Katra in July 2014. The under-construction 111-km Katra-Banihal section has a total of 37 bridges (26 major and 11 minor), 35 tunnels with a length of 164 kms (main 27 with 97.64 km and eight escape tunnels with 66.40 km).

Senior officer of UP tourism dept jumps to death in Mumbai

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an act triggered apparently by some "work-related stress", a senior officer working with the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department committed suicide by jumping from a building where he lived, at Tilak Nagar in north-east Mumbai.

Identifying the deceased as Vimlesh Kumar Banarsidas Auditya (59), a Mumbai-based Deputy Director of the UP Tourism Department, the police said that Auditya jumped from the second floor of Tara Gagan Housing 95-B building at Tilak Nagar at around 8.15 AM. Auditya, who sustained serious injuries, was rushed to the nearby Star-run Rajawadi Hospital, where he was declared brought dead.

Quoting the wife of the deceased Rama Auditya, the police said Auditya, who was working with the head office of the UP Tourism Department in Lucknow till some months ago, had resigned from his job due to some work-related stress. However, he had been asked by his department heads to continue in service till March 31.

Shinde's son has given supari to bump me off, says Raut

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Two days after he created a sensation in the State political circles by alleging that a "Rs 2,000 crore deal" had been done to "purchase" the Shiv Sena party's name and symbol, Shiv Sena leader and MP Sanjay Raut on Tuesday alleged that he faced a threat to his life, as Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son and MP Shrikant Shinde had given a "supari" (contract) to a goon from Thane to attack him.

In a letter written to Mumbai Police Commission Vivek Phansalkar — copy of which he marked to Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis — Raut alleged that he had received reliable information that Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son and MP Shrikant Shinde had given "supari" (contract) to a goon-da from Thane, Raja Thakur, who was preparing to attack him.

In his letter to Fadnavis and the Mumbai police chief, Raut said: "After the new Government headed by Eknath Shinde came to power in the State, my security cover was



withdrawn completely. In the recent past, I have been receiving threats from rival party legislators or goondas hired by them. I have often spoken about the threats received by me".

"Today, some one gave very reliable information that Shrikant Shinde had given supari to Raja Thakur, a known goonda from Thane, to attack me. I have been given to understand that Thakur is making preparations to attack me. I am an MP, and the editor of the Marathi newspaper

'Saamana', a Shiv Sena leader and a responsible citizen.

"That's why I am informing you about the threat received by me," Raut stated in his letter to the Mumbai police chief. Apart from Fadnavis who holds the State Home portfolio, Raut has also marked a copy of his letter to Thane Police Commissioner Jai Jeet Singh.

Thakur, who was handed life imprisonment by a Thane court for murdering one Deepak Patil in January, had come out of the prison on bail in 2019. However, he was arrested again in an extortion case. He was later released on bail. He has since then managed to stay out of prison due his proximity to a Shiv Sena leader who is a confidant of Eknath Shinde.

It may be recalled that on Sunday, Raut had alleged on Sunday that as "per the preliminary information I have, Rs 2,000 crore was exchanged over the past six months to get the Shiv Sena name and the bow and arrow symbol. It was purely a commercial deal, not on merit; a business in which huge money was paid."

Told cops to examine Chavan's surveillance plaint: Maha CM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said here on Tuesday that he had asked the State Director-General of Police to look into a complaint submitted by former Chief Minister Ashok Chavan that he was under the 'surveillance' by some elements in Mumbai and Nanded. Talking to media persons, Shinde said: "After having spoken to Chavan, I have directed the DGP to carry out a detailed investigation into the complaint made by the former Chief Minister".

Chavan had earlier made sensational claim that he was under the "watch" of some persons and that someone had forged his letterhead as a former PWD Minister of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Government.

Chavan said that someone had written letter dated May 5, 2022 to then Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray seeking to create a false impression that he was working against the Maratha community.

"I have been under the watch of a few people who are following me everywhere... where I go, whom I meet and are warning that I would meet the same fate as the late Vinayak Mete," Chavan had said in his interactions with the media at Nanded and Pune in the past two days.

Maratha leader and Shiv Sangram chief Mete was killed in a road accident on Aug. 14, 2022 on the Mumbai Pune Expressway. After his family raised suspicions over his death, Shinde had ordered a CID probe into the incident.

Chavan said that he had lodged a complaint with the police on the forged letter with the Nanded Additional Superintendent of Police Abinash Kumar pointing out how the text of an earlier letter was replaced without touching the letterhead and signature to convey a misleading narrative. Reacting to this Congress president Nana Patole demanded to know if the Government was conspiring to eliminate Opposition party leaders.

Sonu, crew roughed up by MLA's son over selfie

Mumbai: Noted playback singer Sonu Nigam and his two colleagues were pushed allegedly by the son of an MLA during a scuffle over taking a selfie with the singer at a musical event in Mumbai, police said on Tuesday.

After the incident on Monday night, Nigam filed a complaint based on which the Chembur police registered an FIR against Swapnil Phaterpekar, the son of local Shiv Sena MLA Prakash Phaterpekar, under Indian Penal Code Sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 341 (wrongful restraint), and 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others), an official said.

The Padma Shri awardee whose memorable chartbusters include 'Yeh Dil Deewana', 'Kal Ho Na Ho', 'Saathiya', and 'Abhi Mujh Mein Kahin', later told reporters that he filed a police complaint to bring to light such unfortunate incidents, which can turn tragic, and to raise awareness about what happens when someone is coerced into taking a picture. A colleague of Nigam was



injured in the incident which took place at Chembur Gymkhana after the singer's live performance at Chembur Festival, an official said.

A short video clip of the incident went viral on social media platforms in which Nigam and his colleagues were seen leaving the stage after the performance when a man (identified as Swapnil Phaterpekar) came from behind and caught hold of the singer, apparently to take a selfie with him. "Hari Prakash came to save me, but he was also pushed due to which he fell. I fell on the stairs as did Rabbani Khan who was pushed after he came to my aid," the singer said. PTI

Chhattisgarh to turn cow dung into carbon credits with Godhan scheme

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Chhattisgarh Government is eyeing to earn carbon credits through its two-year-old Godhan Nyay Yojana under which cow dung is being purchased at a nominal rate from cattle rearing villagers and converted into biodegradable products such as vermicompost.

The Government feels that by converting cattle dung into organic compost through a community involvement approach, the scheme qualifies to be a potential project in the global carbon market as it also helps reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs).

"This has created opportunities for the scheme to enter the voluntary carbon market and withdraw the financial



gains, which could further be used for the advancement of Gothans and support the SHG women associated with them in the State," said an official from the State Government.

"We recently floated an EoI to select the consultant in this regard and are taking steps to work in this direction, He said.

Under the Godhan Nyay Yojna, the Government purchases dung at the rate of Rs 2

per kg from the cattle rearing villagers from 8408 villages across the State. The communities then convert conventionally available cattle dung into organic compost products such as vermicompost, organic manure and bio-enriched organic manure. Launched in July, 2020, total cattle dung quantity converted into organic compost till November 15, 2022 is 5961034.42 quintals while total organic compost production during the period is 2470000.64 quintals. At least 12827 SHGs have been actively involved with the scheme.

Under the scheme, Godhan Samiti procures the dung from cattle rearers and leverages the locally available Self-Help Groups (SHG) for converting it into different organic compost products.

ED raids in Ranchi, Delhi in PMLA case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday launched multiple searches in connection with a money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the rural development department of the Jharkhand Government.

About two dozen locations, including State capital Ranchi, Jamshedpur and Delhi, are being searched by the agency under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), officials said.

The money laundering case stems from a State Vigilance Bureau complaint into some alleged commission being paid in lieu of grant of Government work, they said, adding, the searches are aimed at gathering more evidence.



Braj artists perform at the Taj Mahotsav, in Agra.

PTI

No time for war

Joe Biden visits Kyiv, but peace may need greater involvement of PM Modi and intervention of G20

US President Joe Biden's surprise visit to Kyiv is indeed an exercise in courage. Flying into a war-torn country is a testimony to his commitment to the cause of freedom. Of course, it was a well-kept secret by his administration; only a couple of journalists had accompanied him, and they were informed about the US President's presence in the entourage quite late. Yet, his courage cannot be downplayed. But the big question is: would it result in a ceasefire of a war that will soon complete a year? The war has killed thousands of people, crippled supply chains all over the world, and severely dented the post-pandemic recovery. Nobody knows what the back channels are working on, but there is no let-up in Russian President Vladimir Putin's belligerent rhetoric. In his 105-minute speech to the members of both houses of Parliament and to military commanders and soldiers, he said, "I have already said many times that the people of Ukraine have become the hostage of the Kyiv regime and its Western overlords, who have effectively occupied this country in the political, military and economic sense... Today's Ukrainian regime essentially serves not the national interests but those of third countries." This may impress some warmongers in his country, but his assertions are contrary to facts. In fact, all his claims to justify the attack on Ukraine are fictitious, the biggest one being that Ukraine was perpetrating genocide. Of course, he never provided even a shred of evidence to substantiate his allegation. Putin had earlier said that he stood for the "demilitarisation and de-Nazification" of Ukraine. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is a Jew.

Putin thought that Russian conquest of Ukraine would be easy, but the Ukrainians under Zelensky have given him a bloody nose. Accusing the Western elites of intending to transform "a local conflict into a phase of global confrontation," Putin seems to be tilting towards a rabid form of ethno-religious nationalism. Western elites "distort historical facts, constantly attack our culture, the Russian Orthodox Church, and other traditional religions of our country. Look at what they do with their own peoples: the destruction of the family, cultural and national identity, perversion, and the abuse of children are declared the norm... Anglican Church plans to consider the idea of a gender-neutral God... Millions of people in the West understand they are being led to a real spiritual catastrophe." While some of his criticism of Western decadence is not untrue, it still doesn't justify the attack on Ukraine. With no dip in Putin's anti-West rhetoric, it would be too sanguine to expect a meaningful breakthrough by the leader of the Western world. Western nations would be well-advised to involve India-headed G20 for a greater role. The fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has good relations with Putin will surely help move towards a ceasefire.

PICTALK



Tourists of MV Ganga Vilas visit the Kamakhya Temple, in Guwahati

PTI

Time to regulate crypto

The Government must take immediate steps to regulate investments in crypto-currencies

While the potential gains from investing in cryptocurrencies may be tempting, the risks associated with it far outweigh the benefits. The finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has rightly cautioned the youth from investing in the cryptos as it could lead to wiping off their savings. Cryptocurrencies have gained a lot of attention in recent years as an alternative investment option. However, investing in cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum, may not be safe. One of the major concerns is the lack of regulation. In India, there is no clear legal framework for dealing with it. This means that there is no regulatory authority to oversee the functioning of crypto exchanges. Investors who invest in cryptocurrencies are not protected by any regulatory body, which makes it a risky investment option.

The value of cryptocurrencies is highly volatile, and it is not uncommon to see large swings in their prices in a short period. This makes investing in cryptocurrencies a highly risky proposition. In fact, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has warned investors about the risks associated with investing in cryptocurrencies. Despite the growing popularity of cryptocurrencies, they are not widely accepted in India. Unlike traditional currencies, cryptocurrencies are not yet recognized as legal tender by the Indian government. This means that they cannot be used to purchase goods and services in the country. The lack of acceptance limits the liquidity of cryptocurrencies, making it difficult for investors to convert their holdings into cash. Investing in cryptocurrencies comes with its own set of security risks.

Cryptocurrency exchanges and wallets have been the target of many cyber-attacks, resulting in huge losses for investors. In fact, in India, there have been instances where exchanges have been hacked, and investors have lost their investments. Many investors may not fully understand the technology and the underlying concepts of cryptocurrencies. This lack of understanding can lead to wrong investment decisions, resulting in losses. Besides, there are concerns over the actions of large Bitcoin holders, known as "whales." Who often manipulate the market by indulging in "pump and dump" to dupe the small investors. The Government would do well to come up with the crypto bill that has been postponed twice to regulate this very exciting yet risky investment option for the people, especially the younger generation.

Defence ties with Australia are strong

India-Australia military cooperation is focused on the maritime domain in support of an open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific region

Wandering through Australia, I'm discovering that our own great Sikhs came in shiploads during the 19th century to fight under Australian officers in World War I. The Brits brought camels from India with Sikh cameleers whom the Australians mistook as Afghans. More Sikhs arrived to set up a base between Brisbane and Sydney establishing banana plantations. Surprisingly they haven't reached the moon yet.

Fast forward to 1998 to India's nuclear tests. Australia then was so paranoid about nuclear proliferation that the Sikh Defence Attaché was asked to leave Australia within 24 hours. In a surprising turn of policy two years ago Canberra decided to export uranium to India. On 15 February Defence Secretary, Greg Moriarty announced its 'don't ask don't tell' nuclear policy. Australia no longer asks strategic bombers whether they are carrying nuclear weapons. US B52 stealth B2 bombers operate from Australian bases to maintain 'Operation Unpredictability' dispersing the nuclear triad. The stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited under its South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty but the US has traditionally neither confirmed nor denied carriage of nuclear weapons, a policy endorsed by Foreign Minister Penny Wong at a Senate hearing last week where the Greens Senator objected to breach of SPNFZT. Under the highly controversial Australia UK and US (AUKUS) arrangement, Canberra's nuclear-powered submarine fleet — which canceled the agreement with France to buy its Barracuda design — two already built UK Astute class submarines will be fitted with American subsystems. Australia could have 12 such submarines by 2050. It will become the only non-nuclear state to get US nuclear technology for its submarine fleet. This has generated a big debate on 'do we need AUKUS' or whether Australia is rubber-stamping US policy. Australia is already



ASHOK K MEHTA

part of the US India Japan QUAD and its Navy has already been part of the Malabar Naval exercises. With the new Albanese government calling up to China and India sitting on the fence, QUAD and Malabar as serious deterrents to China are questionable.

Australia's new Defence Security Review, authored by former Defence Minister Stephen Smith and former CDS Air Marshal Angus Houston was released last week. Previously defence policy focused on defence of Australia and later, forward defence to the present when the China challenge of uncertainties and ambiguities has covered Australia. A defence expert told me in Sydney that the Chinese tried to strangle Australia and its economic coercion failed miserably. Distance and sea frontiers have made Australia safe and secure. There's not been a single terrorist attack that makes Australia an attractive destination for trade and investment. However, fears of illegal immigrants have magnified. Last Saturday Foreign Minister S Jaishankar was in Sydney transiting from a visit to Fiji. India-Australia relations are on a high. Canberra considers New Delhi one of

LAST SATURDAY FOREIGN MINISTER S JAISHANKAR WAS IN SYDNEY TRANSITING FROM A VISIT TO FIJI. INDIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS ARE ON A HIGH. CANBERRA CONSIDERS NEW DELHI ONE OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT PARTNERS IN THE INDO PACIFIC.

its most important partners in the Indo-Pacific. Prime Ministers Morrison and Modi signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2020, the Economic Strategy Update in 2022, and Australia India Economic Cooperation Agreement in 2022. The Australian government is setting up the Centre for Australia-India Relations like the Australia India Council set up 30 years ago.

Today 50,000 Indian students are helping the Australian higher education sector rebound after the pandemic. India-Australia defence cooperation traces its origins in the trenches of Gallipoli in World War I. Two agreements underpin defence ties — the 2006 Memorandum of Defence Cooperation; and the 2009 Joint Declaration in Security Cooperation. A joint working group on joint research and military cooperation has been set up. Joint exercises are regularly held between the three services. In 2015, the first formal bilateral naval exercise was held off the coast of Visakhapatnam and these are held every two years. In addition, the Milan fleet review has the Australian Navy participating. A maritime partnership exercise off Perth last year involved several ships and

helicopters. IAF Su30 and C17 aircraft participated in Exercise Pitch Black. This was followed by another international Exercise Kakadu 2022. The Australian Navy participated in RIMPAC, an Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2022 Exercise.

The focus of India-Australia military cooperation is in the maritime domain in support of an open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific as stated by Defence Minister Richard Marles. Australian High Commissioner in India, Barry O'Farrell has said that joint defence activities had experienced a nearly fourfold increase since 2014. The upgrade of ties was reflected in the recent 2+2 dialogue between Finance and Defence Ministers. The Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement entered into force on 29 December 2022 will allow tariff-free trade of 85 to 90 percent of the goods. India-Australia defence ties have come a long way since the expulsion of the Defence Advisor.

(The writer, a retired Lt Gen, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, & founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LIMIT POLL CANDIDATE ATTEMPTS

Sir — In the US, a candidate is eligible to contest for the Presidential election for two terms of four years only at a stretch. An early draft of the US Constitution provided for one seven-year term, which means no one was to be beyond seven years continuously as President. Later, the draft was changed to its current form. An unfettered freedom for continuance in power for any number of times (as in India) enables the people at helm to thrive on misuse of power and position. Misuse of power and position is aimed at amassing wealth.

The number of times allowed for a candidate to be a Prime Minister or Chief Minister must be restricted to two times only, for which necessary amendments must be made in the Constitution. Restrictions have to be placed on the Assembly and legislative council candidates. With this, the number of ex-MLAs and ex-MPs will proliferate, which must be taken into consideration and some remedy found. A one-time lump sum payment may be made to the MLAs or MPs completing one or more terms. A debate must be kickstarted and the issue brought to its logical end.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

LYNCING OF 'COW SMUGGLERS'

Sir — Recently two men were killed by right-wing Hindus who alleged that they were involved in acts of cow smuggling. Many Muslims have been often assaulted in recent years by *gau rakshaks* who have accused them of transporting beef. Now, Naser and Junaid were allegedly abducted by cow vigilantes and later found dead. The main culprit, Monu Manesur, a Bajrang Dal member, is said to be behind this gruesome murder and reportedly enjoys the patronage of politicians and policemen. He hasn't yet been arrested. Even the Supreme Court has denounced recent instances of lynching Dalits and members of minority community.

However, no genuine work or implementation of laws was carried out by our Government against killing of innocent people by these cow vigilantes. How long

Will they, won't they?



Rahul Gandhi. Simultaneously, efforts for a viable alternative to the formidable BJP have gained momentum since three Northeastern States go to polls this year. Then, there are a number of other State polls lined up, including in several politically significant States.

Politicians like Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao and TN Chief Minister MK Stalin are bringing together non-BJP parties ahead of next year's Lok Sabha polls. Ironically, consensus over the Congress' inclusion in the group still eludes given that Nitish wants the Congress in the proposed united alliance while KCR is averse to it. The Congress' crucial three-day plenary session is going to commence on February 24 in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur and speculation is ripe that the party high command would take the final call there on whether or not it will join the new alliance. That the Congress sheds its egoistic stance to create room for others or sticks to its guns, is yet to be seen.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

will these groups target a particular community and indulge in high-handedness by these *gau rakshaks*? Earlier, our PM Narendra Modi strongly condemned the cow vigilantes' action by saying that most of them were anti-social elements camouflaged as cow vigilantes. He made it clear that killing in the name of *gau bhakti* is not acceptable but now our PM is maintaining a stoic silence on the recent killing of Naser and Junaid.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipect

WOMEN'S WINNING SPREE

Sir — The pendulum is swinging comfortably in India's way in the world of cricket. After a good show by the men's team abroad and now at home during the ongoing Test series against Australia, Indian women's cricket team has also clinched a semi-final spot in the Women's T-20 by defeating Ireland by D/L method to show their inherent talent. Harmanpreet Kaur's team won a spot reaching the last

four stage despite being beaten by an English professional side. It was a must win match for Team India and the rain gods came pattering down to our rescue and helped Indian eves achieve a narrow win.

Thus we came out with flying colours despite all odds. It is notable and laudable that the Junior Under 19 team recently won the coveted World Cup in a convincing way. The senior women's team also caught a remunerative break when player auctions were recently held for organising the Women's Premier League (WPL), on the lines of the men's IPL. Now it is the turn of the seniors to establish their winning ways and upstage the juniors in the knockout stage of the Championship. The fight will be on for the supremacy of the World Champion.

Akhila Gopalan | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Hinduhriday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray's Shiv Sena was surrendered at the feet of Sharad Pawar.

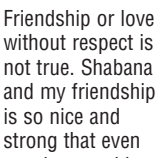


Union Home Minister — Amit Shah



Putin Thought Ukraine Was Weak, Dead Wrong...I will announce another delivery of critical equipment to help protect the Ukrainian people from aerial bombardments.

US President — Joe Biden



Friendship or love without respect is not true. Shabana and my friendship is so nice and strong that even marriage could not break it

Writer — Javed Akhtar



I think I was enjoying my bowling. I knew they'd play reverse sweeps, so my idea was just to keep it simple and straight. Don't think a sweep is a good option on this kind of wicket.

Cricketer — Ravindra Jadeja

Investigative agencies do their homework and only when they have the necessary prima facie material in their hand... only then do they go. It can't be done overnight by instinct.



Union Finance Minister — Nirmala Sitharaman

FIRST COLUMN

SMALL TOWNS BENEFIT FROM UDAN SCHEME

UDAN has improved air connectivity despite some failures



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

Just a few days ago, the Centre claimed that 100 airports would be developed by 2024 under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) UDAN infrastructure scheme. This is in addition to the modernisation and upgrade work being undertaken at Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Guwahati, Ahmedabad, and Mangaluru airports to make them more contemporary.

In fact, modernisation is a continuous process, which depends on factors like the availability of land, commercial viability, socio-economic considerations, traffic demand from the people of that region, and then willingness of the airlines to operate to and from such airports.

Without doubt, the focus of the Government on infrastructure deserves to be appreciated. Budget 2023 has also laid a lot of emphasis on it, with the capital expenditure outlay being increased significantly for 2023-24 to whopping Rs 10 lakh crore over Rs 7.28 lakh crore in 2022-23, which will further act as a driver of growth and jobs. The Airports Authority of India and other airport operators have targeted capital outlay of approximately Rs 98,000 crore in the sector across the country by 2025 for construction of greenfield airports and new terminals, expansion and modernisation of existing terminals and strengthening of runways among other activities.



Continuous efforts of the Government have paid rich dividends, and the domestic air traffic has almost reached the pre-Covid level. It is the thumping success of the RCS UDAN, launched in 2016 to stimulate regional air connectivity and make air travel affordable for the masses, that has made the Ministry of Civil Aviation even more ambitious to connect the country through airways.

However, unlike its much publicised plan to provide connectivity to un-served and underserved airports of the country through revival of the existing airstrips and airports, it is yet to make substantial progress with regard to a number of such airports in some very prospective regions like Purnia in Bihar. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar laments the delay in the construction of a civil enclave at the airport in the city, which was supposed to have been made much before Darbhanga. Here, the blame-game intensifies with Kumar putting the blame on the Union Government and vice-versa.

While Sanjay Jha, a close confidante of Kumar and Cabinet Minister in the state, said the state Government has given its commitment for linking the road from the proposed civil enclave to national highway even though work has not been started, senior leader of the BJP and former deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi accused the state Government of not cooperating, adding that the AAI had sought 52.1 acres of land from the northern side of the runway, which has not been met, while the land was acquired from the southern side for the purpose.

The state Government also assured to build a road to link the acquired land to the nearest national highway. It is also interesting to note here that the runway at the Indian Air Force airport in Purnia is 11,000X150 feet, which is almost similar to that of a few top cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad. Flight services had also started in 2012 between Purnia and Patna and Purnia and Kolkata, but were discontinued the very next year.

Similar is the case with a number of other un-served and under-served airports in various parts of the country. Despite such fights, bitter word wars in some cases, and a few failures on some fronts, the UDAN scheme has been successful to a great extent. The selection of routes and airlines is fair. The scheme has also been able to provide a fair amount of air connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities at affordable airfares and has transformed the way travelling was done earlier.

(The author is a senior journalist)

Hindenburg fallout won't crush banks

Banks are gaining traction and becoming increasingly robust and resilient, but we need to be cautious

Recently, the strong framework and resilience of the Indian banking system came on the radar after a series of reports expressing concerns and apprehensions about banks' exposure to a particular business house came into question after the Hindenburg report.

The banking regulator, the Reserve Bank of India, quickly intervened and stated that the size and resilience of the Indian banking system are too large and strong to be affected by an individual incident. The regulator issued a statement, saying that the banking sector remains stable and that the various parameters of banks relating to capital adequacy, asset quality, liquidity, provision coverage, and profitability are healthy.

RBI Governor Shaktikant Das also said that the banks lend to a company on the basis of its fundamentals and not on its market capitalisation.

LIMITED EXPOSURE

The country's largest lender, the State Bank of India, said that its total outstanding exposure to the Adani Group is Rs 27,000 crore, which is 0.9 per cent of its total loan book size of Rs 31.33 lakh crore. Axis Bank's exposure was 0.94 per cent as of December 2022. Another state-run lender, Punjab National Bank, has an exposure of Rs 7,000-odd crore. So, the exposure is not significant across all the banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

Most recently, Bank of Baroda chief executive Sanjiv Chadha said that the bank is willing to consider lending additional money to the Adani group, and its exposure is about a quarter of what is permitted under the Reserve Bank of India framework.

What is the exposure limit? A bank can lend up to 20 per cent of its net worth or Tier-1 capital to an individual entity and 25 per cent to a group. This is in accordance with the global norms. Earlier, it was a bit higher, and for the infrastructure sector, there were special norms entitling them to a higher limit. The current exposure limits also include connected lending. For instance, if an automaker buys parts from a supplier to the extent of more than half of what the supplier produces, a bank's exposure to the automaker is combined with that of the auto parts supplier.

The 250-year-old modern Indian banking system has weathered many storms. The credit portfolio of the banking system is over Rs 130 trillion rupees. So, the exposure of the Indian banks to the group is less than even 0.5 per cent and hence insignificant by any standard. But the story does not end here. During the last 75 years, Indian banks have embarked on a rather tumultuous path. There have been occasions when leading banks have faced liquidity crises.

Following the Lehman Brothers melt-



CORPORATIONS WILL DO WELL TO MOBILISE THEIR INITIAL FUNDING REQUIREMENTS THROUGH THE BOND AND/OR EQUITY ROUTES. THEY MAY ALSO TAKE RECOURSE TO EXTERNAL COMMERCIAL BORROWINGS. FOR THAT, WE NEED A DEVELOPED A BOND MARKET

(The author is a senior advisor with the Indian Bankers Association. Views expressed are personal)



down and the subsequent asset quality deterioration crisis seven to eight years ago, the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework led to the huge capitalisation of public sector banks (PSBs). During the last five-seven years, PSBs have been adequately recapitalised. The memories are fresh in mind.

BOLD POLICY INITIATIVES

The last five or seven years saw some bold policy initiatives on the part of the Government:

1. The enactment of strong recovery laws, the insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC), and the setting up of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), all in 2016
2. Massive amalgamation of PSBs in 2017-18 and in 2019-20. This has resulted in reducing the number of PSBs from 27 six years ago to 12 now.
3. Policy relating to the setting up of the National Assets Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL), the India Debt Resolution Company Limited (IDRCL), and the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NAB-FID)

Budget 2021-22 has also envisaged the privatisation of a couple of PSBs.

All these measures and a massive recapitalisation of PSBs to the extent of about Rs 5 trillion during the period of reference have had a positive bearing on the functioning of the banking sector

in general and PSBs in particular. Notwithstanding the pandemic and geopolitical woes, the banking sector has been consistently delivering better numbers in each successive quarter and financial year during the last three years. As of the end of December 2022, the net profit of PSBs was approximately Rs 95,000 crore and their net NPA was 1.37 per cent, one of their best performances in the last decade.

Does that mean we need not be concerned about the recent developments in the capital market post-Hindenburg? The answer is perhaps "no." The fallout from the Harshad Mehta-led crisis in the early 1990s or the Lehman Brothers-related issues 15 years ago cost the industry dearly in terms of results and reputation. Banks, in general, should move away from high-risk infrastructure finance for the simple reason that the assets at their disposal, although huge, are of short to medium-term maturity.

Corporations will do well to mobilise their initial funding requirements through the bond and/or equity routes. They may also take recourse to external commercial borrowings. For that, we need to develop a bond market. The present size of our bond market is Rs 40 trillion, which is less than one third of scheduled commercial banks' outstanding credit. The Indian companies' outstanding debt overseas is to the tune of approximately \$12 trillion

at the current exchange rate.

Globally, for infrastructure projects, the setup and construction risk is borne by the bond market. Banks do extend their helping hands, but at a later stage when there is cash flow, be that in the form of working capital and/or ancillary works. The deterioration of asset quality in 2015 was largely on account of the huge exposure Indian banks had to infrastructure and real assets.

NEED TO SHIFT FOCUS

Banks will do well to focus on retail, agriculture, and micro, small and medium enterprises or MSMEs. We do need infrastructure—more roads, railways, ports, and airports—to become a \$5-trillion developed economy at the earliest, but our corporations should mobilise their initial requirements more through the bond, equity, and external routes. Banks will be there to meet their working capital needs at a later stage.

Some individual banks in India have failed in the past, but the regulator and the Government have always come to the rescue of the depositors. We could withstand the partition of banks at the time of Independence, the subprime crisis in the West, the asset quality crisis, and the pandemic and geopolitical crises. Banks are gaining traction and becoming increasingly robust and resilient. The saga will continue, but we need to be cautious and focus on core sectors.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THIS ISN'T AMRIT KAAL BUT AN UNDECLARED EMERGENCY. THESE RAIDS HAVE INCREASED OUR DETERMINATION...TO BE EVEN MORE AGGRESSIVE.

— CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

JAIRAM RAMESH



THE CONGRESS SHOULDN'T SPEAK ON CORRUPTION AS IT LOST POWER ON THE ISSUE. IT'S NOW INDULGING IN SPIT-AND-RUN TACTICS.

— UNION FINANCE MINISTER

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN

Is artificial intelligence a curse for the common man?

AI is an intelligent entity created by man, and though human needs get fulfilled by material comforts, they aren't sufficient

The world is changing increasingly with innovations. Undoubtedly, technology has made our lives more comfortable. Human beings have added much more to it so that today we are completely dependent on technology and even if we want to shift ourselves, we might miss the boat.

Today we are all surrounded by artificial intelligence (AI) in some or the other way. From the moment, we wake up to check our smartphone to directly asking Alexa to turn on the lights and update wit news; from watching movies on a large screen in theatres to watching it on OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Disney Hotstar; from searching for on time bus arrival and three-wheeler in



SAKSHI SETHI

(The author is an educator)

scorching summer day to booking cabs through Ola or Uber with a click of a button, while sitting at workplace, from waiting in queues in front of favourite restaurants to ordering food through Zomato, Swiggy and the list goes on and on, Artificial Intelligence has made its way quickly into our lives. We are totally dependent on it now for our personal benefits.

But what is AI? In simple terms, AI is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially the computer systems. The biggest advantage of AI is that if the machines are programmed properly the results would be accurate and precise without any bias.

Also, they survive in many risk-taking activities, be it

exploring the deepest parts of oceans or even disposing of a bomb. Today, hundreds of technologies are converging together and are creating altogether a new set of opportunities such as Virtual Reality, robotics, drones and many more. One of the famous examples being the concept of self-driving cars, wherein the availability of sensors will help perceive the surroundings followed by smooth driving.

Based on the model of the car, the navigation paths will be self-identified, and strategies will be made to manage traffic controls. It is just the beginning and as when the technology matures, such autonomous vehicles will surely impact the entire automobile industry followed by the insurance, traffic control, health and

other numerous sectors associated with it.

As we are moving towards AI, we are already witnessing AI taking over jobs. According to Ray Kurzweil, director of engineering at Google states that by 2030, AI will for the first time in human history achieve human levels of intelligence; 15 years later, he believes that we will have reached the singularity. This means the capabilities and intelligence of AI will surpass the intelligence of humans, and machines will become smarter than human beings. But does that mean it will eat up jobs?

AI may create new jobs in innovation and bring new goods and services to the market and even adoption of such technology may even increase

the organisational performance, but at the same time it can lead to loss of jobs, leading to a loss of employee engagement. Also, the benefits associated with AI may not reach most firms and workers in developing countries. Employee engagement affects the trust of the organisation. Higher the employee engagement, the more is the trust in the organisation and such kind of engagement is important for self-actualisation.

According to the data collected by UNCTAD, low-income countries are at a disadvantage given their low share of skilled workers and relatively slow download speed. Adoption of AI is not an easy affair. It needs plenty of time and resources which involve lots of money. Also, the

hardware and the software on which it will operate also involves 24x7 technical know-how which makes it a costly affair.

AI may be on the verge of replacing most jobs, but its adoption will definitely lead to decrease in job satisfaction. AI cannot think outside the box. It can only work with the pre-fed data. No doubt bots can write applications or mails or even respond to customer queries, but they work only on the basis of pre-fed data.

It's important for the companies to take into consideration both the needs of humans and business when adopting AI. No doubt implementation of AI will result in sophisticated innovations, followed by a positive impact on company returns but at the same time

the need of humans will be much more required as the AI cannot be creative or empathetic. Companies and other organisations must not adopt AI monocausal with a view to finances only, rather it should investigate the ethical, cultural and organisational aspects too.

Being highly dependent on AI does not guarantee success in the development of any organisation. It is only its most important resource that is the workforce which can guarantee success in the process. At the end of the day, AI is nothing but an intelligent entity created by man. Human needs get fulfilled by material comforts, but they aren't sufficient. What satisfies is something deeper—human affection and not machines.

Putin chides West, defends Ukraine invasion

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Western countries Tuesday of igniting and sustaining the war in Ukraine, dismissing any blame for Moscow almost a year after the Kremlin's unprovoked invasion of its neighbour that has killed tens of thousands of people.

In his long-delayed state-of-the-nation address, Putin cast Russia — and Ukraine — as victims of Western double-dealing and said Russia, not Ukraine, was the one fighting for its very existence. “We aren't fighting the Ukrainian people,” Putin said in a speech days before the war's first anniversary on Friday. Ukraine “has become hostage of the Kyiv regime and its Western masters, which have effectively occupied the country.”

The speech reiterated a litany of grievances that the Russian leader has frequently offered as justification for the widely condemned war and ignored international demands to pull back from occupied areas in Ukraine.

Observers are expected to scour it for signs of how Putin sees the conflict, which has become bogged down, and what tone he might set for the year ahead. The Russian leader vowed no military let-up in Ukrainian territories he has illegally annexed, apparently rejecting any peace overtures in a conflict that has reawakened fears of a new Cold War.

Instead, he offered his personalized version of recent history, which discounted arguments by the Ukrainian government that it needed Western help to thwart a Russian military takeover.

“Western elites aren't trying to conceal their goals, to inflict a strategic defeat to Russia,” Putin said in the speech broadcast by all state TV channels. “They intend to transform the local conflict into a global confrontation.”

He added that Russia is prepared to respond to that as “it will be a matter of our country's existence.”

While the Constitution mandates that the president deliver the speech annually, Putin never gave one in 2022, as his troops rolled into



Ukraine and suffered repeated setbacks.

Before the speech, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the Russian leader would focus on the “special military operation” in Ukraine, as Moscow calls it, and Russia's economy and social issues.

Many observers predicted it would also address Moscow's fallout with the West — and Putin began with strong words for those countries. “It's they who have started the

war. And we are using force to end it,” Putin said before an audience of lawmakers, state officials and soldiers who have fought in Ukraine.

Putin accused the west of the West of launching “aggressive information attacks” and taking aim at Russian culture, religion and values because it is aware that “it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield.”

He also accused Western nations of waging an attack on Russia's economy with sanctions — but declared but they hadn't “achieved anything and will not achieve anything.”

Underscoring the anticipation ahead of time, some state TV channels put out a countdown for the event starting Monday, and Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti on Tuesday morning said the address may be “historic.”

The Kremlin this year has barred media from “unfriendly” countries, the list of which includes the US, the UK and those in the EU. Peskov said journalists from those nations will be able to cover the speech by watching the broadcast. Peskov told reporters

that the speech's delay had to do with Putin's “work schedule,” but Russian media reports linked it to the multiple setbacks Russian forces have suffered on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The Russian president had postponed the state-of-the-nation address before: In 2017, the speech was rescheduled for early 2018.

Last year the Kremlin has also canceled two other big annual events — Putin's press conference and a highly scripted phone-in marathon where people ask the president questions.

Analysts expected Putin's speech would be tough in the wake of US President Joe Biden's visit to Kyiv on Monday. Biden plans to give his own speech later Tuesday in Poland, where he's expected to highlight the commitment of the central European country and other allies to Ukraine over the past year.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that Biden's address would not be “some kind of head to head” with Putin's.

“This is not a rhetorical contest with anyone else,” he said.

China seeks role in Ukraine peace plan

AP ■ BEIJING

The foreign minister of China, which has provided strong political backing for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine, said Tuesday his country wants to play a role in ending the conflict.

Qin Gang told participants at a security conference in Beijing that China was concerned the almost year-long war could escalate further and spin “out of control.”

China would continue to urge peace talks and provide “Chinese wisdom” to bring about a political settlement, he said. “At the same time, we urge relevant countries to immediately stop adding fuel to the fire, stop shifting blames to China, and stop hyping up the discourse of Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow,” Qin said in an apparent reference to military support provided to Ukraine by the United States and its allies, as well as concerns that China is preparing to make good on its threats to use force to assert its claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, a self-governing island democracy.

China has refused to condemn Russia's invasion or atrocities against Ukrainian civilians and strongly criticized Western economic sanctions against Moscow. In deference to Moscow, it has yet to describe the conflict as an invasion.

China and Russia have aligned their foreign policies to oppose the US and, weeks before the Ukraine invasion,

their leaders declared a partnership with “no limits.” China also says Russia was provoked into using military force by NATO's eastward expansion.

Despite that, Qin reiterated China's claim that it has “always taken an objective and impartial stance based on the merits of the issue.”

“China is deeply worried about the escalation of the situation and even the possibility of it going out of control,” Qin said. He said Chinese President Xi Jinping had put forward proposals that have “played a responsible and constructive role in easing the situation and de-escalating the crisis,” without offering any details or evidence.

“We will continue to promote peace talks, provide Chinese wisdom for the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, and work with the international community to promote dialogue and consultation to address the concerns of all parties and seek common security,” Qin said.

China has opposed criticism of Russia at the United Nations, while insisting that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations be respected, a position that underpins its claim to Taiwan, which separated from the mainland amid civil war more than 70 years ago.

Russian President Vladimir Putin could meet with the Chinese Communist Party's foreign policy chief Wang Yi in Moscow, the Kremlin said Monday.

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that Moscow was suspending its participation in the New START treaty — the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States — sharply upping the ante amid tensions with Washington over the fighting in Ukraine.

Speaking in his state-of-the-nation address, Putin also said that Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the US does so, a move that would end a

Moscow puts new START on hold

global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

Explaining his decision to suspend Russia's obligations under New START, Putin accused the US and its NATO allies of openly declaring the goal of Russia's defeat in Ukraine.

“They want to inflict a strategic defeat on us and try to get to our nuclear facilities



resumption of inspections of Russian nuclear facilities under the treaty, NATO allies had helped Ukraine mount drone attacks on Russian air bases hosting nuclear-capable strategic bombers. “The drones used for it were equipped and modernized with NATO's expert assistance,” Putin said. “And now they want to

inspect our defense facilities? In the conditions of today's confrontation, it sounds like sheer nonsense.”

Putin emphasised that Russia is suspending its involvement in New START and not entirely withdrawing from the pact yet.

The New START treaty, signed in 2010 by US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers.

The agreement envisages

sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.

Just days before the treaty was due to expire in February 2021, Russia and the United States agreed to extend it for another five years.

Russia and the US have suspended mutual inspections under New START since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Moscow last fall refused to allow their resumption, raising uncertainty about the pact's future.

Russia also indefinitely postponed a planned round of consultations under the treaty.

2,400 India Young Professionals Scheme visas on offer in first UK ballot

PTI ■ LONDON

There are 2,400 visas available to eligible Indians under the UK-India Young Professional Scheme in the first ballot to open at the end of this month, the UK government announced on Tuesday.

The scheme, formally launched last month, allows Indian citizens between 18 and 30 years old to live and work in the UK for up to two years.

“This is an excellent opportunity for India's brightest young people between the ages of 18-30 to experience the best of the UK,” said the British High Commission in New Delhi as it released the detailed eligibility criteria for the new scheme.

Under the reciprocal arrangement signed off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his

UK counterpart, Rishi Sunak, at the G20 summit in Indonesia last November, British nationals would also be offered similar visas to live and work in India.

“You must be selected in the India Young Professionals Scheme ballot before you can apply for this visa. To enter the ballot you must declare that you're eligible for the visa – check if you're eligible before you enter,” the British government announcement reads.

The first ballot, which is free to enter, opens on February 28 afternoon and closes on March 2.

Successful candidates in the ballot need to apply for their visa by the deadline given in a subsequent invitation to apply, which is usually within 30 days. The successful candidate must travel to the UK within 6

months of applying for your visa. The application fee charges have been set at GBP 259 and additional costs involved is a GBP 940 healthcare surcharge and proof that the applicant has GBP 2,530 in personal savings. “You'll be given a visa to live and work in the UK for up to 24 months. You can enter the UK at any time while your visa is valid, and leave and come back at any time during your stay,” the eligibility criteria states.

Unsuccessful candidates can apply for future ballots, with the next tentatively scheduled for July. The High Commission of India in London will be handling the ballots and visas on the UK end of the scheme, for British citizens keen to access the new route to apply for a two-year Indian visa.

The launch of the UK-India

Young Professionals Scheme was dubbed a “significant moment” for the bilateral relationship and the UK's wider commitment to forging stronger links with the Indo-Pacific region to strengthen both Indian and British economies. It was also seen as an effort to propel the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations, which are now set to enter the eighth round of talks next month.

“I know first-hand the incredible value of the deep cultural and historic ties we have with India. I am pleased that even more of India's brightest young people will now have the opportunity to experience all that life in the UK has to offer – and vice-versa – making our economies and societies richer,” said Sunak, as he green-lit the scheme in November last year.

Moscow opening new trade routes: Putin

PTI ■ MOSCOW

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday said Russia is developing the ambitious North-South Transport Corridor, which will open up new routes for business cooperation with India, Iran and Pakistan, as well as West Asian countries.

In his one hour and 45 minutes State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin also said that Russia will expand promising international economic connections, as well as build new supply corridors, as the US-led West has imposed crippling sanctions for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine nearly one year ago.

“We will develop the ports of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, we will particularly focus on the North-South International Corridor,” Putin

said, noting that it will open up new routes for business cooperation with India, Iran, Pakistan as well as West Asian countries.

“We will continue developing this corridor,” Putin was quoted as saying by the state-run Tass news agency.

“What areas should the state, regions, and local businesses focus their partnership work on? First, we will expand promising international economic connections and build new supply corridors,” he said in the speech days before the Ukraine war's first anniversary on Friday.

He said a decision has already been taken to extend the Moscow-Kazan highway to Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk and Tyumen, and in the future — to Irkutsk and Vladivostok, and potentially — to Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China, which will par-

ticularly expand Russia's economic ties with the markets of Southeast Asia.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

The INSTC is India's vision and initiative to reduce the time taken for EXIM shipments to reach Russia and Europe, and enter the Central Asian markets.

During a visit to Yerevan in Armenia in October 2021, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar proposed that the strategic Chabahar Port in Iran be included in the North-South Transport Corridor that has the potential to bridge connectivity barriers.

The Chabahar port in the

Sistan-Balochistan province in the energy-rich nation's southern coast is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port located at a distance of around 80 km from Chabahar.

The first phase of the Chabahar port was inaugurated in December 2017 by then-Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, opening a new strategic route connecting Iran, India and Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan.

The Chabahar port is being considered a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran and Afghanistan with Central Asian countries, besides ramping up trade among the three countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi.

Iran foundation rewards Salman Rushdie attacker

Dubai: An Iranian foundation has praised the man who attacked novelist Salman Rushdie last year, leaving him severely injured, and said it will reward him with 1,000 square metres of agricultural land, state TV reported on Tuesday through its Telegram channel.

Rushdie, 75, lost an eye and the use of one hand following the assault by a 24-year-old Shi'ite Muslim American from New Jersey on the stage of a literary event held near Lake Erie in western New York in August.

“We sincerely thank the brave action of the young American who made Muslims happy by blinding one of Rushdie's eyes and disabling one of his hands,” said Mohammad Esmail Zarei, secretary of the Foundation to Implement Imam Khomeini's Fatwas.

“Rushdie is now no more than living dead and to honour this brave action, about 1,000 square metres of agricultural land will be donated to the person or any of his legal representatives,” Zarei added.

The attack came 33 years after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then Iran's supreme leader, issued a fatwa, or religious edict, calling on Muslims to assassinate Rushdie a few months after *The Satanic Verses* was published. Some Muslims saw passages in the novel about the Prophet Muhammad as blasphemous.

Rushdie, who was born in India to a Muslim Kashmiri family, has lived with a bounty on his head, and spent nine years in hiding under British police protection. *Agencies*

Fresh tremblor loss in Turkiye, Syria

AP ■ Istanbul

Survivors of the earthquake that jolted Turkiye and Syria 15 days ago, killing tens of thousands of people and leaving hundreds of thousands of others homeless, dealt with more trauma and loss Tuesday after another deadly quake and aftershocks rocked the region.

The 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Monday evening had its epicenter in the Defne district of Turkiye's Hatay province, which was of the area's worst affected by the Feb. 6 magnitude 7.8 quake that killed nearly 46,000 people in the two countries.

Turkiye's disaster management authority, AFAD, said the new quake killed six people and injured 294 others, including 18 who were in critical condition. In Syria, a woman and a girl

died as a result of panic during the earthquake in the provinces of Hama and Tartus, pro-government media said.

Monday's quake was felt in Jordan, Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt. A magnitude 5.8 quake followed, along with dozens of aftershocks. The White Helmets, northwest Syria's civil defense organization, said about 190 people suffered injuries in rebel-held areas and that several flimsy buildings collapsed but there were no reports of anyone trapped under the debris.

In Turkiye, teacher Zuher Capar, 42, said he was mourning the loss of relatives in the original earthquake and having a meal with his aunt and uncle near the Hatay town of Samandag when they felt Monday's tremor.

“It shook a little, then it

grew strong,” he said. “The electricity went and there were screams everywhere. There were small children in the house. They were screaming, my aunt was crying.”

On Feb. 6, Capar rushed to try to help his cousin, the cousin's wife and the couple's small children out of the rubble of their collapsed home, but they did not survive.

“We had barely overcome the sadness (from the first earthquake),” he said.

While his large family's home withstood the quake earlier in the month, it was damaged on Monday. Capar said they are too frightened to sleep there and plan to stay in a large tent and cars.

“We are trying to stay strong but it is a terrifying process. The cities we knew, the memories we had, have been

destroyed,” he said. “When we go in the streets, there is only rubble and heavy machinery. It's like a horror movie scene.”

Turkish officials warned residents not to go into the remains of their homes, but people have done so to retrieve what they can. Three of the people killed Monday were inside a damaged four-story building when the new quake hit. Aftershocks and the instability of the structure complicated the rescue effort, and it took several hours for search crews to find the bodies, Turkish news agency DHA said.

Dr. Tahsin Cinar, an anesthesiologist using vacation time to help provide medical care in Hatay as a representative of the Turkish Medical Association, said earthquake survivors need serious help with their mental health.



dishes, we are trying to show our Chinese customers that millets can be tasty in a main course like parathas and desserts,” he told PTI.

“In some of these dishes, we have innovated with a mix

of spices and included them in the main course and surprisingly they are being received well by our Chinese customers,” he said.

Another popular Indian restaurant ‘Dastan’ hosted a

Millet Festival 2023 with 25 dishes on February 17 which saw the participation of the Indian Ambassador, Pradeep Kumar Rawat.

“In that event, we served 25 exclusive millet dishes which are widely appreciated by the Chinese, international and Indian guests,” Rabiul, an Indian chef who last year started a new Indian restaurant called Dastaan told PTI.

A host of exclusive millet dishes were served at the Millet Festival, 2023 held by his restaurant on February 17.

The dishes included ragi paneer vegetable samosa, jowar moong dal ki khichdi, ragi poori, keema bajra ka kofta, saamai thakkali rasam, spicy millet crusted baked fish, gula-

bo millet and kheer.

On Monday, Dr. N Nandakumar, the Consul General of India in Shanghai held a press conference with Chinese and Beijing-based Indian media to highlight the events planned by his mission to popularise Indian millets.

The mission plans to organise the celebration of the International Year of millets on February 23 in which the China representative of the FAO will take part.

The event aims to create greater awareness about millets, their health and nutritional benefits and to demonstrate the diverse range of food items that can be easily made using millets and millets-based products, Nandakumar said.

Besides serving Indian and international cuisines with millets at the event, the Consulate will also hold a small exhibition to provide information on how millets can be a win-win for all and the initiatives taken by the Indian government in promoting millets.

Nandakumar said India is a major producer and consumer of millets in the world and recognising it can play a vital role in food and nutritional security, the Government of India has notified millets as ‘nutri cereals’ in the year 2018.

Subsequently, the year 2018 was proclaimed the National Year of Millets in India. Millets were also brought under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), he said.

Millet cuisines of India make waves in China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Millets, the cereal providing staple food dating back to prehistoric times, made a rousing comeback in Indian restaurants across China as Indian diplomatic missions in this country celebrated the International Year of Millets 2023.

The year 2023 has been designated as the ‘International Year of Millets’ after a proposal for the same was brought forward by the Government of India and endorsed by members of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) Governing Bodies, as well as by the 75th session of the UN General Assembly.

The proposal was backed

by over 70 countries.

The Indian Embassy here and the Consulates in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong have announced programmes to popularise this initiative.

The Indian Embassy in Beijing has lined up several events for this event, which includes a round table discussion on IYOM 2023 with the participation of the Food and Agriculture Organisation Representative to China.

The Embassy will also launch a ‘Millet's recipe book and organise a ‘Millets cooking Challenge’ and ‘Millets selfie competition’.

Indian restaurants in Beijing, Shanghai, and several other Chinese cities have come

up with several exclusive millet dishes to popularise them among their Chinese guests.

They have also kept a variety of Indian millets on display in special enclosures to highlight their importance for nutrition and food security. Beijing's oldest Indian restaurant, Taj Pavilion, has come up with an exclusive new millet menu that includes, Millet Dhokla, Goti Pokodi, Tomato Ragi Omelette, Chicken Bhuna Sargam, Barlie Barlie Mutton pulao.

“Chinese are well versed with millets. They have ‘Conjee’, a porridge with a mix of total millets and total grains every day,” the Taj Pavilion owner M H Pastakia said.

“With exclusive millet

IMF bailout only option: Lanka Prez

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Tuesday emphasised that seeking the IMF bailout package was the only option available to the debt-ridden country to overcome the ongoing economic crisis.

“When a country goes bankrupt, it has to go to the International Monetary Fund. Apart from that, there is no other organisation in the world that provides aid when a country goes bankrupt,” Wickremesinghe said.

Addressing a gathering in the central town of Kandy, he said that each nation that experienced an economic catastrophe recovered after engaging in talks with the IMF and cited the example of Greece which took 13 years to recover from the collapsed economy.

“I have no hope of being President for 13 years,” Wickremesinghe said, amidst opposition to his hard economic reforms which had triggered utility rate hikes and increased personal taxes.

“There is only one way to rebuild this collapsed economy. That is the International Monetary Fund. Different political parties are presenting different stories. I suggested to them to let me know if there is another way to resurrect the collapsed economy.

“The IMF indicates that

our tax revenue should be 15 per cent of the GDP as it was in 2019. So far it has gone down to 09 per cent,” he added.

He said the IMF had assigned Sri Lanka 15 tasks to complete.

“The IMF gave us until December 31 to implement it. But we couldn’t do it on that particular day. Then we made plans to get time until January 31. Even at that time, we were unable to complete those 15 points. Finally, the deadline was pushed back to February 15... All 15 tasks assigned to us have been completed. Now it is up to the IMF,” he added.

Wickremesinghe acknowledged that delays over Chinese willingness to restructure Sri Lanka debt had caused problems.

“This is being discussed further. The IMF also suggested that everyone should get on one platform and discuss. However as China is a world power, their procedure is different,” he said.

He said he would meet the Chinese finance minister on February 23 in Bengaluru at the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting this week.

“There, I hope to discuss the debt restructuring method of Sri Lanka with the Chinese Finance Minister,” he added.

Wickremesinghe said if the IMF did not provide assistance, the island nation would

have to return to its last year situation of unavailability of fuel and 12-hour power cuts.

Sri Lanka was hit by an unprecedented financial crisis in 2022, the worst since its independence from Britain in 1948, due to a severe paucity of foreign exchange reserves, sparking political turmoil in the country which led to the ouster of the all-powerful Rajapaksa family.

The IMF in September last year approved Sri Lanka a 2.9 billion dollar bailout package over 4 years pending Sri Lanka’s ability to restructure its debt

Pak passes bill to meet IMF demands for loan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s National Assembly on Tuesday unanimously passed a money bill aimed at raising tax revenues to fulfil the demands set by the IMF for seeking a USD 1.1 billion loan facility to avoid an economic meltdown.

The Finance

Friday that Pakistan must take steps to ensure that its high earners pay taxes and only the poor get the subsidies if it wants to function as a country.

The bill increases sales tax from 17 to 25 per cent on luxury items. The general sales tax has been raised from 17 per cent to 18 per cent.

People will also have to pay more for business-class air travel, wedding halls, mobile phones, and sunglasses, Geo News reported.

“The prime minister will also unveil (further) austerity measures in the next few days,” Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said as the bill was passed with minor amendments, adding: “We will have to take difficult decisions”.

The government introduced the bill last week with the aim to get it passed by the weekend but it could not after it faced criticism from its allies.

Finance Minister Dar, in his speech, held the mismanagement in the power sector and poor economic policies of the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government responsible for the current financial crisis.



New York: Karthik Subramaniam, an Indian-origin software engineer in the US and a hobbyist photographer, has won the prestigious National Geographic’s ‘Pictures of The Year’ award with his photograph titled “Dance of the Eagles”. Selected from nearly 5,000 entries, Subramaniam’s picture won the grand prize on Friday, earning him a feature in the magazine’s May issue alongside Nat Geo’s leading photographers.

The award-winning photograph captured a bald eagle intimidating its peers to claim a prime log while salmon hunting in the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve in Alaska.

“Every year in November, hundreds of bald eagles gather at Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve near Haines, Alaska, to feast on salmon. I visited there last two November to photograph them,” Subramaniam was quoted as saying in the statement.

Camped in the preserve, waiting for the perfect click, Subramaniam’s motto was, “Wherever there’s salmon there’s going to be

chaos.”

The California-based software engineer started experimenting with wildlife photography only after being grounded by the pandemic in 2020, before which he used to capture landscapes and his travels.

The prize-winning picture was captured on the final day of his week-long photography trip to Alaska, in Eagle Preserve, where he watched bald eagles catch salmon from the water.

“They (the eagles) also seemed to have some favourite spots to hang out, and usually, commotion ensues when an eagle wants an already occupied spot. This photo was taken during one such commotion,” Subramaniam was quoted as saying in the statement.

“Hours of observing their patterns and behaviour helped me capture moments like these,” he added.

According to the statement, he titled the photograph “Dance of the Eagles” as a homage to a fictional dragon war in George R.R. Martin’s novel ‘A Dance with Dragons’. PTI

Iran sentences detained US-based opposition figure to death

AP ■ DUBAI

A senior member of a US-based Iranian opposition group held by Iran and accused of orchestrating a deadly 2008 mosque bombing has been sentenced to death, authorities said Tuesday.

Iran says Jamshid Sharmahd, a 67-year-old Iranian-German national and U.S. Resident, is the leader of the armed wing of a group advocating the restoration of the monarchy that was overthrown in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

His family has said he was merely the spokesman for the opposition group and denied he was involved in any attacks.

They accuse Iranian intelligence of abducting him from Dubai in 2020.

His hometown is

Glendora, California.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the death sentence is “absolutely unacceptable” and that there would be a “clear reaction,” without elaborating.

She said Sharmahd did not have “even the beginning of a fair trial” and that consular access and access to the trial had been “repeatedly denied.”

She also said he had been arrested “under highly questionable circumstances,” without elaborating.

The death sentence — which can be appealed — comes against the backdrop of months of anti-government protests in Iran and a fierce crackdown on dissent.

Monarchists based outside Iran support the protests, as do other groups and individuals with different ideologies.

The official website of Iran’s judiciary said Sharmahd was convicted of plotting terrorist activities.

He was tried in a Revolutionary Court, where proceedings are held behind closed doors and where rights groups say defendants are unable to choose their lawyers or see the evidence against them.

Iranian authorities have accused him of planning a series of attacks, including the 2008 bombing of the Hosseiniyeh Seyed al-Shohada Mosque in Shiraz, in which 14 people were killed and more than 200 were wounded.

He has also been accused of working with U.S. Intelligence and spying on Iran’s ballistic missile programme.

State TV has said his group

was also behind a 2010 bombing at Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s mausoleum in Tehran that wounded several people.

Iran says Sharmahd is the leader of Tondar, the militant wing of the opposition group known as the Kingdom Assembly of Iran. He had been previously targeted in an apparent Iranian assassination plot on U.S. Soil in 2009.

His family says he was passing through Dubai on his way to India for a business deal in July 2020 when he abruptly stopped responding to calls or messages from them.

Location data showed his phone leaving a hotel near the airport and traveling south, across the border into neighbouring Oman and to the port of Sohar, where the signal stopped.

Australia faces threat of espionage, foreign interference: Intel boss

AP ■ CANBERRA

Australia faces an unprecedented threat of espionage and foreign interference with more Australians being targeted by agents than ever before, the head of the nation’s main domestic spy agency said on Tuesday.

Multiple nations were using espionage and foreign interference to advance their interests and undermine Australia’s, Mike Burgess, secretary-general of security at the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, said in his 21-page assessment speech.

“They are using espionage to covertly understand Australia’s politics and decision-making, our alliances and partnerships, and our economic and policy priorities,” Burgess said.

“Based on what ASIO is seeing, more Australians are being targeted for espionage and foreign interference than at any time in Australia’s history — more hostile foreign intelligence services, more spies, more targeting, more harm, more ASIO investigations, more ASIO disruptions.”

He added, “From where I sit, it feels like hand-to-hand combat.”

His comments were released to the media before the speech at ASIO headquarters in the Australian capital

Canberra.

He said his agency had noticed an uptick in online targeting of people working in Australia’s defence industry since September 2021, when US President Joe Biden, then-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and then-Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a three-way agreement known as AUKUS to provide Australia with a fleet of submarines powered by US nuclear technology.

“As we progress AUKUS, it’s critical our allies know we can keep our secrets and keep their secrets,” Burgess said.

Australians being targeted by foreign governments include judges, media commentators and journalists, Burgess said, adding that a small number of “judicial figures” has been subjected to “suspicious approaches.”

Spies were seeking to use litigation as an “intelligence collection toll,” Burgess said.

Australian, British and Canadian defence officials have voiced concerns in recent months that China is attempting to poach military expertise such as fighter jet pilots. The United States is attempting to extradite from Sydney former US pilot Daniel Duggan on an indictment that he conspired with others to provide training to Chinese pilots in 2010 and 2012.

Anti-graft watchdog chief in Pak quits

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The chief of Pakistan’s anti-corruption watchdog has resigned after he was asked to do “certain things” by the federal government that were “unacceptable to him,” media reports said on Tuesday.

Aftab Sultan, the chairman of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), was appointed in July last year for a tenure of three years following the retirement of his predecessor Javed Iqbal.

A statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office confirmed that Sultan submitted his resignation citing “personal reasons.”

In an interview with Geo TV, Sultan said he stepped down a few days ago because he asked to do “certain things that were unacceptable to me”.

It was immediately not clear what orders he refused to accept from the government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

According to sources, he was apparently asked by federal government officials to arrest



Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, including its chief Imran Khan.

Reacting to Sultan’s resignation, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said it was a big step towards the collapse of a “fascist system.”

A law graduate from Punjab University, Sultan pursued LL.M from the University of Cambridge.

Sultan also completed MSc in legal studies from the University of Edinburgh.

He then served in the police service and earned the reputation of being an honest officer.

In 2018, he was appointed as the chief of the Intelligence Bureau.

US court takes first look at law that shields internet firms

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court is taking up its first case about a federal law that is credited with helping create the modern internet by shielding Google, Twitter, Facebook and other companies from lawsuits over content posted on their sites by others.

The justices are hearing arguments Tuesday about whether the family of an American college student killed in a terrorist attack in Paris can sue Google for helping extremists spread their message and attract new recruits.

The case is the court’s first look at Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, adopted early in the internet age, in 1996, to protect companies from being sued

over information their users post online.

Lower courts have broadly interpreted the law to protect the industry, which the companies and their allies say has fuelled the meteoric growth of the internet and encouraged the removal of harmful content.

But critics argue that the companies have not done nearly enough and that the law should not block lawsuits over the recommendations, generated by computer algorithms, that point viewers to more material that interests them and keeps them online longer.

Any narrowing of their immunity could have dramatic consequences that could affect every corner of the internet because websites use algorithms to sort and filter a mountain of data.

“Recommendation algorithms are what make it possible to find the needles in humanity’s largest haystack,” Google’s lawyers wrote in their main Supreme Court brief.

In response, the lawyers for the victim’s family questioned the prediction of dire consequences.

“There is, on the other hand, no denying that the materials being promoted on social media sites have in fact caused serious harm,” the lawyers wrote.

The lawsuit was filed by the family of Nohemi Gonzalez, a 23-year-old senior at Cal State Long Beach who was spending a semester in Paris studying industrial design. She was killed by Islamic State gunmen in a series of attacks that left 130 people dead in November

2015.

The Gonzalez family alleges that Google-owned YouTube aided and abetted the Islamic State group by recommending its videos to viewers most likely to be interested in them, in violation of the federal Anti-Terrorism Act.

Lower courts sided with Google.

A related case, set for arguments Wednesday, involves a terrorist attack at a nightclub in Istanbul in 2017 that killed 39 people and prompted a lawsuit against Twitter, Facebook and Google.

Separate challenges to social media laws enacted by Republicans in Florida and Texas are pending before the high court, but they will not be argued before the fall and decisions probably won’t come until the first half of 2024.

Israel president urges consensus after judicial changes pass

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel’s president on Tuesday called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition to seek dialogue and compromise after it pushed ahead with controversial judicial overhaul in a turbulent parliamentary session overnight.

Isaac Herzog said it was a “difficult morning” following the late night parliamentary vote that saw two contentious pieces of legislation — part of sweeping changes that have prompted vocal criticism in Israel and abroad — pass a preliminary hurdle.

Critics say the judicial overhaul underway will concentrate power in the hands of the ruling coalition in Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, and erode the democratic system of checks and balances. Netanyahu and his allies insist the changes will better curb an overly powerful Supreme Court.

“Many citizens across Israel society, many people who voted for the coalition, are fearful for national unity,” Herzog said at a conference organised by the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper. He urged Netanyahu and his allies to enable dialogue to reach a consensus on judiciary

reform.

Herzog’s remarks came the morning after tens of thousands of Israelis protested outside the parliament ahead of the vote, the second mass demonstration in Jerusalem in recent weeks.

After a more than seven hours of debate that dragged on after midnight, Netanyahu and his allies passed two clauses in the package of proposed changes that seek to weaken the country’s Supreme Court and further empower ruling parliamentary coalitions.

With a 63-47 vote, the Knesset approved measures that give the governing coalition

control over judicial appointments and curtail the Supreme Court’s ability to review “Basic Laws” that have a quasi-constitutional role in Israel, which doesn’t have a formal constitution. The bills still require two additional readings in parliament to pass into law.

Also planned are proposals that would give the parliament the power to overturn Supreme Court rulings and control the appointment of government legal advisers. The advisers currently are professional civil servants, and critics say the new system would politicise government ministries.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public is hereby informed that Mr. Rajib Singh S/o Mr. Hukam Singh was the owner of the property Residential Plot of area measuring 50 Sq. Yds., i.e., 41.885 Sq. Mtrs., out of Kharsa No. 1172, Situated at Narech Vihar, Khoda Colony Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghazabad, by virtue of Sale Deed dated 01.01.1990, regd. at doc. No. 3789, and the same is to be financed & mortgaged with my client i.e. Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd and the legal heirs of Late Rajib Singh namely Mrs. Brahmaty, Mr. Satish Kumar, First shall have no objection regarding mortgage of aforesaid property by Mrs. Anshu Singh.
If any person(s) have any objection(s) or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 7 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.
Raghav Tiwari, Advocate
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi - 110021
Mob.: +91 98761188328

Public Notice
NOTICE is hereby given that Mr. Jaspreet Singh Bhalla is owner of the Entire Second floor, without roof rights (the said floor), built-up Property bearing No. 1/6734, area measuring 92 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No. 322 situated in the abadi of Gali No.4, Shankar Block, East Rohitash Nagar, in the area of Village-Sikarpur, Shahdara, Delhi 110032 vide Gift Deed dated 22.02.2022 (Doc. No. 875). Now, Mr. Jaspreet Singh Bhalla is availing a loan on this property from Bajaj Housing Finance Ltd. by mortgaging the said property. In case anyone has any objection regarding mortgage of the said property, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Mr. Muneesh Dhawan/ Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Law Veritas North, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, GD-ITL Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9086707172/ 9818228638 (M).

NORTHERN RAILWAY
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Name of work and its location : 30-Elect-52-T-R1-22-23-E3
Electrical work regarding improvements/strengthening of power supply, lighting, cabling etc. in DUK section
Approx cost of the works : Rs. 42.56 lacs
Address of the office : Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Bid Security : Rs. 85,100.00
Date & time of submission of tender : 16.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender : 16.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & notice board : www.irops.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
567/2023
Serving Customers with a Smile

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.
(Regd. Office PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala)
Corporate Identification No. U40109PB2010SGC033813
website: www.pspcl.in (Contact number 9646117606)
Tender Enquiry No.: 137/MM-UMAMC-262/O&M/GHTP/2023
Tdy. Chief Engineer, Mechanical Mtc. Circle-I/GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat invites E-tender for the work of Round the clock operation, maintenance & overhauling of various 3x115 TR & 4x90 TR Chilled water type A.C. Plants, 2x50 TR DX type A.C. Plant, Package A.C. units. Water Cooled Ventilation system and maintenance & overhauling of Window/Split AC's, Water Coolers/ROs of GHTP Stage-I & II and mtc. work of AC's/ROs systems etc. GNDPT, Bathinda on lump sum basis for a period of one year. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in** from **20-02-2023 from 16:00 PM** onwards.
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in**
76155/12/1439/2022/21446 **GHTP-11/23**

UJVN Limited
(An Uttarakhand Govt. Enterprises)
H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, G.M.S. Road, Dohradun-248006
Telephone: 0135-2763508, Fax: 0135-2763507
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866
Website: www.ujvn.com
R.O. No.: 172 **e-Tender Notice** **Date: 21.02.2023**
Office of the General Manager (SHP), UJVN Ltd., Maneri Bhali Colony Rishikesh, invites online tenders from interested parties. Detail of tenders is given below.
T. No. 01/GM(SHP)/UJVNL/2022-23
Name of work/supply/ services etc. :-Hiring of one number Light diesel vehicle with AC (Scorpio/Creta or equivalent) with driver for one year on rent basis for GM (SHP) UJVN Limited, Maneri Bhali colony, Rishikesh.
Estimated cost: Rs. 576000/- GST Extra
Date of availability of bid document on website: 21/02/2023
Last date for submission of tender: 18/03/2023 up to 16.00 Hrs.
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal "http://uktenders.gov.in". **EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (A)SHP Rishikesh**
"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

G20 **SPECIAL TRAINS-2023** **75th Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav**
In order to clear extra rush of passengers, Railways have decided to run the following Special Train in view of celebration of Santh Seval Maharaj Jayanti (Birth Anniversary) as per details given below:-

07301/07302 SSS Hubballi Jn. - H. Nizamuddin - SSS Hubballi Jn. Special Train					
TRAIN NO. 07301		STATIONS		TRAIN NO. 07302	
ARR.	DEP.			ARR.	DEP.
---	14:30	SSS Hubballi Jn.	▲	22:45	---
20:20	---	H. Nizamuddin	▲	---	15:45

Days of Run : 07301 Ex. SSS Hubballi Jn. on 23.02.23 (Thursday) and 07302 Ex. H. Nizamuddin on 28.02.23 (Tuesday)
Accommodation : AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & General.
Stoppages : Gadag Jn, Koppal, Hosapete Jn, Ballari Jn, Guntakal Jn, Dhone, Kurnool City, Gadwal, Mahbubnagar, Shadnagar, Kacheguda, Secunderabad Jn, Lingampalli, Vikarabad Jn, Tandur, Sedam, Wadi, Kalaburagi, Solapur Jn, Manmad Jn, Bhusaval Jn, Khandwa, Itarsi Jn, Rani Kamalapati, Bina Jn, Virangana Lakshmibai, Agra Cantt and Mathura Jn stations.
RailMadad Helpline No. 139 Visit RailMadad website: www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
Download Railmadad App
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NORTHERN RAILWAY Your Convenience - Our Concern Visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

‘Eco growth likely at 4.6% in Dec quarter’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Economists at the State Bank of India (SBI) have projected a GDP growth of 4.6 per cent for the December quarter, citing that as many as 30 high frequency indicators are not as robust as they were in the previous quarters.

However, the projection is higher than the Reserve Bank of India's forecast of 4.4 per cent for the third quarter of this fiscal.

The lower forecast also stems from poor corporate results, ex-BFSI, which have shown that operating profits grew at a much slower 9 per cent in the third quarter, which is just half of 18 per cent recorded in the year-ago period.

Also, despite a 15 per cent in net sales, the bottom line was down by around 16 per cent, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, the group chief economic adviser at SBI, said in a report on Tuesday.

Ghosh said he expects an upward revision in growth to 7 per cent for the full fiscal, up from 6.8 per cent projected earlier.

This is because the government is anticipated to revise



the GDP numbers for FY20, FY21 and FY22 on February 28.

Additionally, there will be revisions in quarterly numbers of FY20, FY21, FY22 and even for the Q1 and Q2 of FY23, he added. As per the report, corporate margin seems to be under pressure as reflected in results of around 3,000 listed companies, excluding financial services companies, due to higher input costs with decreasing margins.

Margins declined from 15.3 per cent in Q3FY22 to 11.9 per cent in Q3FY23, and this

could pull down manufacturing growth in Q3, he added.

Meanwhile, India Ratings in a report said it expects GDP to grow 5.9 per cent in FY24, lower than most other forecasts.

Although there are a few positives for growth such as sustained government capex, deleveraged corporates, low NPAs, production-linked incentive scheme and likely coiling in global commodity prices, they are still not sufficient to take the GDP growth beyond 6 per cent in FY24, it added.

Indians spending over \$1 billion every month on foreign travel: Data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indians are spending nearly USD 1 billion every month on foreign travel which is significantly more than the pre-Covid levels, reveals Reserve Bank data on outward remittances. During the April-December period of 2022-23, the outward remittances under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) for resident individuals towards 'travel' was \$ 9.95 billion.

The corresponding spending on travel during 2021-22 was \$ 4.16 billion, and USD 5.4 billion in the pre-Covid year 2019-20, according to the RBI data. The outward remittances towards travel were \$7 billion in the entire 2021-22 financial year.

"Indians are roaming across the world with their families or friends. Vietnam, Thailand, Europe, and Bali are some major destinations that Indians prefer," said Sapan Gupta, Partner, We3Online.

Europe, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Dubai are some of the major destinations

that Indians prefer.

Akash Dahiya, Co-founder, SanKash said that with the rise of affordable travel and technological advancements, the travel industry is experiencing a massive boom in international destinations.

"Seventy-five per cent of our portfolio is now opting for international travel. We are witnessing a surge in demand for places such as Europe, Bali, Vietnam, and Dubai among Indians," he said.

Dahiya further said travellers have become accustomed to the concept of "travel-now-pay-later" which allows them to make booking closer to the date and pick up a destination that otherwise is out of their pocket.

"Thus, paying for a travel experience in a monthly payment plan makes the holiday bite-size. Thus, a person looking for Goa can now go to Thailand, and a person planning for Thailand can opt for the far east and likewise," he added.



'Banks' improving financial show supports intrinsic credit worthiness'



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A sustained improvement in the financial performance of Indian banks bodes well for the sector's intrinsic risk profiles, according to global rating agency Fitch.

The pace of asset quality and profitability improvement has exceeded expectations, while capital buffers are broadly in line with the projections, it said in a statement.

The sector's impaired-loan ratio declined to 4.5 per cent in the first nine months of financial year ended March 2023 (9MFY23), from 6 per cent at FY'22, it said, adding, this was nearly 60 basis points below Fitch's FY23 estimate.

Increased write-offs have been a key factor, but higher loan growth, supported by lower slippages and improved recoveries, have also played a role, it said.

Sensex, Nifty edge lower in choppy trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty closed marginally down in choppy trade on Tuesday, extending losses for a third straight day as investors remained cautious ahead of the release of minutes of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting.

The BSE Sensex edged down 18.82 points or 0.03 per cent to settle at 60,672.72 as 17 of its constituents declined while 13 advanced. During the day, it hit a low of 60,583.72 and a high of 60,976.59.

The NSE Nifty slipped 17.90 points or 0.1 per cent to end at 17,826.70 with 30 of its scrips ending in the red.

Sensex has declined over 1 per cent or 646 points while Nifty retreated by 1.36 per cent or 209 points in three sessions to Tuesday.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Infosys and



IndusInd Bank were the major laggards.

NTPC, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, HDFC and HDFC Bank were the major winners.

"Despite opening gains, negative cues from global peers cast a shadow over investor sentiments. Underpinned by inflationary concerns, the market is keenly eyeing the US fed meeting minutes, scheduled to be released on Wednesday, for hints on further monetary policy tightening," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Goods & services exports may reach \$1 tn each by 2030, says Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's goods and services exports are growing at a healthy rate and are expected to be around USD 1 trillion each by 2030, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday.

The country's merchandise and services exports touched an all-time high of \$422 billion and \$254 billion, respectively, in 2021-22.

"My own estimates seem to suggest that we will converge (goods and services exports) by 2030...Seven years from now at about USD 1 trillion of goods and USD 1 trillion of services (exports)."

"That is the trajectory I can see which will mean merchandise doing 8-9.5 per cent and services doing anywhere between 16-17 per cent, Goyal said here at an event.

The services sector, driven



by the IT industry, has created a potential not only in terms of jobs, giving value to talent, but also providing India with an opportunity to showcase to the world its strengths, he added. He also said that every country wants to invest in India because of its startup ecosystem.

"The world wants to engage with our Startups because of their integrity and transparency," the ministry said. During April-January this fiscal, goods exports rose by 8.5 per cent to \$369.25 billion and services exports are estimated to touch \$272 billion this fiscal.

Govt's paddy procurement crosses 700L-tonne mark

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government's paddy procurement has crossed the 700 lakh tonne mark in the ongoing 2022-23 kharif marketing season so far, according to the Food Ministry.

The government aims to procure 765.43 lakh tonnes of paddy in the 2022-23 kharif marketing season (October-September). The actual procurement stood at a record 749 lakh tonnes in the previous kharif marketing season.

The paddy procurement is undertaken by both state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) and private agencies. The paddy is procured at the minimum support price (MSP) directly from the farmers and is utilised for meeting the demand under several welfare schemes.

According to the ministry, "Paddy procurement... Is progressing smoothly with purchase of over 702 lakh tonne up

to February 20."

Over 96 lakh farmers have already benefitted from the procurement operations as MSP outflow of Rs 1,45,845 crore has been transferred directly into farmers' bank accounts, it said.

So far, 218 lakh tonnes of rice against the procured paddy is in the central pool.

"Adequate rice stock is currently available in the central pool for meeting the requirements of the country," the ministry added.

The estimated paddy procurement from the rabi crop of this year will be finalised in the forthcoming Food Secretaries' meeting to be held on March 1.

With the inclusion of the rabi paddy crop, it is expected that around 900 lakh tonne paddy may be procured during the entire 2022-23 kharif marketing season, it added.

Paddy is grown in both kharif (summer) and rabi (winter) seasons.

Telcos' body bats for more 5G spectrum



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body COAI on Tuesday made a strong pitch for setting aside mid band 6GHz spectrum for mobile operators, saying it is critical for proliferation of 5G services, and delicensing it to "use for all" will impact quality and cost of next generation services.

Radiowaves in 6GHz is a sweet spot for telecom service providers as current spectrum in the mid band is "woefully short of requirement of telcos".

Also, 6GHz, with its propagation qualities, will be ideal for densely populated areas, specially urban locations.

Rupee falls 3 paise to 82.76 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 3 paise to 82.76 against the US dollar in early trade on Tuesday, weighed down by a strong American currency.

Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as a positive trend in domestic equities and easing crude oil prices supported the local unit and restricted the fall.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened weak at 82.76 against the dollar, registering a decline of 3 paise over its last close.

In the previous session on Monday, the rupee settled at 82.73 against the dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.19 per cent to 104.05.



Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 1.11 per cent to \$83.14 per barrel.

Lack of triggers is keeping volumes subdued, forex traders said, adding that over this week, focus will be on European flash PMIs and the US Fed minutes.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex was trading 104.11 points or 0.17 per cent higher at 60,795.65. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 14.25 points or 0.08 per cent to 17,858.85.

Gold declines ₹371; silver plunges ₹230

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price declined ₹371 to ₹56,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹56,471 per 10 grams.

Silver also plunged ₹230 to ₹65,742 per kg.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at ₹56,100 per 10 grams, down ₹371 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, both gold and silver were quoting lower at \$1,833 per ounce and \$21.68 per ounce, respectively. COMEX gold prices fell slightly, while dollar index remained elevated in the Asian trading hours on Tuesday in anticipation of another increase in the interest rate, Senior Research Analyst said.

Centre to sell 20L tonnes of wheat in open market

From buffer stock to cool prices of atta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday announced sale of an additional 20 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market to further bring down the retail prices of wheat and wheat flour (atta) and asked flour millers to cut rates with softening in wholesale price of grain.

On January 25, the Centre had announced sale of 30 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market from its buffer stock to check rise in prices of wheat and wheat flour (atta).

According to an official statement, the government has decided that state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) will offload an additional quan-



tity of 20 lakh tonnes of wheat in open market under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS). The stocks will be sold through e-auction to flour mills/private traders/bulk buyers/manufactures of wheat products.

The proposal to sell stocks in the open market was taken by a group of ministers, sources

said.

"So far, 50 lakh tonnes (30+20 lakh tonnes) of wheat have been decided to be offloaded under the OMSS. The reduction in reserve price along with additional offloading of 20 lakh tonnes of wheat will collectively help in reducing market price of wheat and wheat products for consumers," the statement said.

Union Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra held a video conference meeting with Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the representatives of flour millers/associations/ federations/atta, suji product manufacturers on to review the lifting of stocks in the second round of e-auction held recently.

Flour millers were advised to bring down the prices of atta and other products in line with the reduction in market prices of wheat, the statement said.

HSBC India pre-tax profit jumps 15% to \$1.277 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Foreign lender HSBC on Tuesday reported a 15.04 per cent jump in its pre-tax profit from operations in India at \$1.277 billion for 2022.

The bank had reported a pre-tax profit of \$1.11 billion from its operations in India, which continues to be fourth largest contributor for group profits, in 2021.

It has added 1,000 people to its India headcount in 2022, to take the total employee strength to 39,000, its biggest in any market. The bank, like many peers in the foreign lenders space, has huge back office operations in India.

In a statement, the bank said it has become the largest foreign lender in the country by both advances and deposits as



of March 2022. It also handles 9 per cent of traded forex and 15 per cent of foreign investor custody assets.

Among its business lines, the largest segment of global banking and markets saw an uptick in profit before tax at \$622 million in 2022 up from \$593 million, while the commercial banking segment delivered profit before tax of USD 304 million as against USD 265 million.

NTPC Green Energy to raise up to ₹9,000 cr term loan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

NTPC arm NTPC Green Energy Ltd (NGEL) has invited bids for rupee denominated term loan of up to ₹9,000 crore.

The bid document showed that NGEL intends to raise fresh debt and repay outstanding liability of ₹8,200 crore towards NTPC by March 31, 2023 along with applicable interest cost.

Also, additional funds to the tune of ₹800 crore would be required for additional debt liability and for balance capex payments of projects which are yet to achieve full commercial operations, it stated.

Thus, NGEL has invited offer for rupee term loan of up to ₹9,000 crore, it said.

SpiceJet board to consider fund raising options on Feb 24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SpiceJet on Tuesday said its board will meet on Friday to consider options to raise funds as well as to convert certain outstanding liabilities into equity shares of the company.

The no-frills airline, which has been grappling with multiple headwinds, including legal woes, is looking to raise fresh capital through issuance of eligible securities to qualified institutional buyers.

Besides, the carrier plans to issue equity shares on preferential basis consequent upon conversion of outstanding liabilities into equity shares of the company, subject to applicable regulatory approvals, according to a filing to the BSE.

Both plans will be taken up by the board of directors dur-



ing its meeting scheduled for February 24.

Specific details about the proposals could not be immediately ascertained.

In December last year, SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh told shareholders that the company is engaged with investment bankers to raise up to \$200 million in order to achieve its future plans.

Usha Int'l looks to close FY23 with ₹3,800 crore revenue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer durable product maker Usha International is looking to close the current financial year with a revenue of around ₹3,800 crore, said its CEO Dinesh Chhabra.

As part of its strategy, the company is pursuing "profitable growth" across its segments with quality and not chasing the market shares, he said.

"We would attempt to close to ₹3,700 crore to ₹3,800 crore in FY23," Chhabra told



PTI.

Usha International operates in the consumer durable space with a product portfolio, including fans, sewing machines, home appliances and power products.

Wipro cuts salary offers to freshers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wipro's move to cut salary offers to freshers awaiting onboarding by almost 50 per cent under one programme has been termed "unjust" and "unacceptable" by employees union NITES, which demanded that the IT company should reconsider its decision.

Wipro's decision reflects the global macro economic uncertainties and the challenges in the demand.

‘Angel Tax provisions in Fin Bill will not impact startups’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The 'angel tax' provision in the Finance Bill will not impact startups in India, a senior government official said on Tuesday. Startups which are registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade do not come under the purview, Anurag Jain, the secretary in the department said while speaking at the IBVCA Conclave here.

"Let me put one thing very clearly. It doesn't affect startups

in the least," he said, addressing the audience at the event organized by the venture capital industry lobby grouping.

He said there is a "clear provision" which says that startups which are recognized by DPIIT are out of the proposal's purview, and added that the startup recognition process is also very simple where any applicant gets it automatically.

Startups were rattled because of the proposed changes in regulations in the Finance Bill.

IT Secy: Manufacturing of Semiconductor soon

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Electronics and IT secretary Alkesh Kumar Sharma on Tuesday said that the production of semiconductors in the country will start very soon.

He was responding to a query around plan of action of the Ministry of Electronics and IT after state-owned company Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) raised the issue of shortage of electronic chip and printed circuit board (PCB or motherboard)

hindering domestic production of electric meters.

"India will be one of those top 6-7 partners which will have semiconductor manufacturing. It will happen very soon," Sharma said.

Speaking at a conference on technology transfer by C-DAC, Thiruvananthapuram for local manufacturing of smart meters and electric chargers, Sharma said Meity has taken lead in technology development, be it electronic or automotive sector, artificial intelligence.

ICOMM inks ties with UAE firm

New Delhi: ICOMM, a group company of Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL), signed a partnership and licensing agreement with UAE-based EDGE entity CARACAL for the first-ever Transfer of Technology (ToT) in defence articles. ICOMM will locally manufacture CARACAL's complete line of small arms for the Indian market under the 'Make in India' and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.

The signing took place at the ongoing IDEX 2023 in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

TENNIS IS VERY IMPORTANT BUT NOT EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE: SANIA

PTI ■ DUBAI

Tennis is and will remain a significant aspect of Sania Mirza's life but the legendary player says that not treating the sport as the be-all and end-all gave her the freedom to unleash her aggressive game every time she stepped on court.

Sania, who is bidding adieu to the game, says she never had the fear of losing in her heart because it makes a player defensive. The 36-year-old conjured up wins against one the best players of her era — then US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova, Swiss legend Martina Hingis, Nadia Petrova, and Flavia Penneta.

Although she lost her singles matches to the legends of the game — Serena Williams and Venus Williams — she put up a decent fight when she was pitted against the American sisters.

"What made me that aggressive and that mindset was of actually not having the fear of losing," Sania said.

"For me, tennis was always and is always going to be a very, very large and big and important part of my life, but it is not my entire life. And that is the mindset I went with, even as a young girl and as a professional athlete. The worst that can happen is that you can lose a tennis match and then come back and try again.

"So, the fear of losing was not there. And I think a lot of people become defensive because they have the fear of losing. They think 'oh if we push the ball or put the ball inside the court, maybe we won't lose'. But, in the long run, that doesn't work to become a top athlete."

IT'S JUST LOSING A TENNIS MATCH

As an athlete you work to get as many wins under your belt as possible and such a risky style would not let you do that.

Since she was always pre-

pared to lose matches, did the defeats affect Sania? "No, they affected me. But I knew I could try again next week. They affected me in the moment, some defeats more than the others. But I always knew that was not the end of the world. It was just losing a tennis match."

THE GIFT OF FOREHAND

The Indian ripped forehands from impossible-looking angles, a game style that brought much success in her almost two-decade long career in which she won three women's doubles Grand Slam trophies and as many mixed doubles titles. So did it come naturally or she had to work to develop such a shot?

"I think it was a bit of both. I think I was gifted with the timing. I was gifted with the way I struck the ball. But I think there was a lot of work that went into my grip. There was a lot of effort that went in to bringing variation into the shot.

"That was just repetition, there was a lot of work that went into making the shot deceptive, where people are not able to read it. I think it was a mix of both. Repetitions, I think that is what I can tell you and working different angles of the court.

...RESULTED IN INJURY

Sania began with a western grip but, on the advise of coaches, she modified it to a semi-western grip. It was the 'Indian' wrist that allowed her to create those tough angles. But was it also a reason for her getting a career-threatening wrist injury which later forced her to quit singles?

"I actually don't know. I mean the thing is I have a very hyper-mobile joint structure. So, I don't know if the injury would have happened with the western grip also, if it would not have happened with the continental grip.

"I can't really get into a hypothetical situation. I mean I



had a wrist injury and that was it. So, you had to just deal with it."

But there is also a view that she chose the easy route by quitting singles.

"I don't react to it, I don't really care what people say."

I DON'T CARE...

The doubles format is considered by many a side show as against the singles, which tests all aspects of your game -- fitness, movement, ground-strokes, stamina and mental fortitude.

In the fast-paced doubles, the reflexes and reactions become much more important as you cover just half the court.

Sania said her singles success gets overshadowed because of her doubles exploits.

"I got a lot of respect (because of doubles). I am very grateful for that. I had a great singles career.

"I was not number one but I was top-30 which has not happened from our side of the world in a very long time. Never happened for women and even for men, the last person was Vijay (Amritraj) or Ramesh (Krishnan), it was a long haul, we had someone playing as top-30 singles player and I had good success.

"Then I moved on to the doubles because my body was not able to take it after three surgeries and it was a right call. Being number one in the world at whatever you do is amazing.

"It does not really matter what people say. It (success) looks much more in doubles because I was number one in doubles. In the fraternity there is lot of respect for each other."

THE MOST VULNERABLE, WEAKEST AND THE STRONGEST

She is combative by nature but there would be moments, like in any athlete's life, where you feel vulnerable. When did Sania feel

the strongest?

"The weakest I felt was when I had a really bad wrist injury during the 2008 Olympics. I would say that probably was the time when I went through a lot of mental health issues, when I had depression.

"Being at the peak of my career not knowing if I would be able to play again or if I would be able to comb my hair. I would say I had where I felt very weak.

"And where I felt the strongest, I would say there were many times where I felt very strong, but probably the most invincible was during the middle of 2014-end till the middle of 2016. Those almost two years of my playing life were incredible.

"There are not many athletes who get to go on the court and feel like you are not going to lose a tennis match, or any match.

"You feel like you are stepping on the court and you've almost half won the match just by stepping on the court. That was the feeling that used to happen when Martina (Hingis) and I were stepping on the court for that period of time."

They won the Wimbledon (2015), US Open (2015) and the Australian Open (2016) in an incredible run.

THE MISSED OLYMPIC MEDAL

Sania has medals from many multi-sport big-ticket events like the CWG and the Asian Games but an Olympic medal eluded her. She came closest in 2016, when she and Rohan Bopanna competed in the bronze play-off, but lost to the Czech pair of Radek Stepanek and Lucie Hradecka.

"I am very content with what I have achieved. To represent India in four Olympics has been so so amazing. If I could have one moment back it would be that bronze medal match, or the match before that, when we played the semifinals."



Thiem loses at Rio Open, falling to 1-2 in 2023

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Dominic Thiem is once again fighting through his matches and enjoying himself, but confidence is admittedly still lacking for the 29-year-old.

Thiem lost in the first round of the Rio Open on Monday, falling to Thiago Monteiro 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (2).

The former world No. 3 and 2020 US Open champion, who came in ranked at No. 96 after battling right wrist and abdominal injuries, fell to 1-2 on the year. He missed the Australian Open and got his first win last week at Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"I was not convinced enough. It is a so-so leg of confidence. A leg of one match this year," Thiem said. "Today was a little bit better than I did in Buenos Aires. But still when I step in it is too many mistakes. I need to find the right timing again, find myself closer at the baseline again."

Thiem, who won the Rio

Open in 2017, dropped the first set against the 83rd-ranked Monteiro in 27 minutes, with the Austrian making a series of unforced errors.

Thiem righted himself in the second set, relying on his forehand and his patience on the baseline. After a back-and-forth third set, the Brazilian won the tiebreaker comfortably to close out the 2-hour, 46-minute match.

"I was never injured before. I didn't know how long it would take. It is taking as long as it takes. I am not stressing out," Thiem said. "I have the feeling I was defining myself way too long with results. It is very unhealthy, especially mentally, if I define myself only with results."

Monteiro will next face either second-seeded Cameron Norrie or Juan Manuel Cerundolo in the clay-court tournament.

Defending champion and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz faces Mateus Alves in the first round on Tuesday.

Liverpool owner Henry denies club is for sale

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool owner John Henry has denied the English giants are up for sale despite seeking fresh investment in the club.

Henry's Fenway Sports Group (FSG) said in November it would "consider new shareholders if it was in the best interests of Liverpool as a club."

That sparked speculation that the 19-time English champions were on the market alongside rivals Manchester United.

"I know there has been a lot of conversation and quotes about LFC (Liverpool Football Club), but I keep to the facts," Henry told the Boston Sports Journal in an interview published online on Monday.

"We merely formalized an ongoing process. Will we be in England forever? No. Are we selling LFC? No. Are we talking with investors about LFC? Yes.

"Will something happen there? I believe so, but it won't be a sale. Have we sold anything in the past 20-plus years?"

FSG — who also own baseball giants the Boston Red Sox — paid £300 million (\$361 million) for Liverpool 13 years ago, after fellow Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillett left the club on the brink of administration.

Under their ownership, Liverpool have been restored to the top of the English and European game — winning the 2019



Champions League and lifting the club's first Premier League crown for 30 years in 2020.

Forbes now values Liverpool at around \$4.45 billion.

However, FSG have been criticised by fans for a lack of investment in new players this season.

Liverpool sit eighth in the Premier League, 19 points adrift of leaders Arsenal, and are already out of both domestic cup competitions.

Despite that slump in form, manager Jurgen Klopp has publicly backed the club's owners.

"We are here in a good position. I know that sounds strange because we didn't play our best football but in general we are in good hands," said Klopp last month.

"So we don't get crazy or whatever. We really know about the responsibility we have and we really try absolutely everything to try to bring us back on track and not worry too much."

Manchester United are expected to fetch a world record price for a football club should a sale of the Red Devils be completed in the coming months.

British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe and Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani have publicly revealed their interest in United with bids expected to reach around \$6 billion.

Dani Alves must remain in custody — court

AP ■ BARCELONA

Former Barcelona and Brazil star Dani Alves will remain in custody pending his trial for allegedly raping a woman as he is considered a high flight risk, the Provincial Court of Barcelona decided on Tuesday.

"There is an elevated risk of absconding, linked on the one hand to the high sentence that could be imposed because of the present case, the serious evidence of criminality against him and large financial resources that would allow him to leave Spain at any time," the court said in a statement.

The court believe taking the 39-year-old's passport would not prevent him from leaving Spain "by air or sea or even by land without documentation."

If he were to return to Brazil, his homeland, the court believe he would not be handed over to Spain as the South American country does not usually extradite its citizens. The public prosecutor's office opposed his release.

On January 2, a young woman alleged that Alves had raped her in the bathroom of a nightclub in Barcelona at the end of December. The player, who initially denied knowing her, changed his story several times but later said they had consensual relations, according to sources close to the case. Alves is on trial for the alleged crime of sexual assault — which in the Spanish penal code includes rape.

Gabriel recalled for his first WI ODIs since 2019

AP ■ ST JOHN'S

Fast bowler Shannon Gabriel could play his first ODIs for the West Indies since the 2019 Cricket World Cup.

He was picked on Monday for three ODIs in South Africa next month. He's already in the republic for the two-Test series starting next week.

Gabriel earned the ODI recall for his performances for Trinidad and Tobago in the domestic Super50 Cup, where he took 15 wickets in seven matches at an average of 14.2.

He has a chance to make an early claim on making the squad for the World Cup at the end of the year in India.

West Indies' pool of pacemen was low, as Jayden Seales remained unavailable after knee surgery and Anderson Phillip was back training but not yet match-fit. Obed McCoy was in the T20 squad subject to a medical clearance.

The ODIs from March 16-21 and the T20s from March 25-28 will mark the first series for new white-ball captains Shai Hope and Rovman Powell.



West Indies (ODI): Shai Hope (captain), Shamarr Brooks, Yannic Cariah, Keacy Carty, Roston Chase, Shannon Gabriel, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Kyle Mayers, Nicholas Pooran, Rovman Powell, Romario Shepherd, Odean Smith.

West Indies (T20): Rovman Powell (captain), Shamarr Brooks, Yannic Cariah, Johnson Charles, Sheldon Cottrell, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Kyle Mayers, Obed McCoy, Nicholas Pooran, Raymon Reifer, Romario Shepherd, Odean Smith.

India to play two friendlies vs Qatar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will play two friendly matches against Qatar on February 27 and 28 as part of their preparations for the AFC U-17 Asian Cup.

The Bibiano Fernandes-coached Indian colts qualified for the AFC U-17 Asian Cup last year and have been training in Goa since November.

The Blue Colts also played friendly matches with UAE U-20 and Uzbekistan U-17 last month.

THE SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Sahil, Julfikar Gazi, Tajamul Islam.

Defenders: Ricky Meetei Haobam, Surajkumar Singh Ngangbam, Manjot Singh Dhami, Mukul Panwar, Malemngamba Singh Thokchom, Pramveer.

Midfielders: Vanlalpeka Guite, Danny Meitei Laishram, Gurnaj Singh Grewal, Ashish, Korou Singh Thingujam, Lalpekhluia, Huzafah Ahmad Dar, Faizan Waheed, Akash Tirkey, Prachit Gaonkar.

Forwards: Aman, Thanglalsoun Gangte, Shashwat Panwar, Gogocha Chungkham.



Dmitry Dmitruk appointed foreign coach of Indian boxing team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Tuesday roped in renowned coach Dmitry Dmitruk as the team's foreign coach for the next two years.

Dmitruk, who served as the high performance coach of the Irish Athletic Boxing Association as well as the Irish National Junior and Youth Teams for the last 12 years, will be leading Indian boxing's men's and women's teams for the upcoming elite competitions, including the World Championships.

"India has emerged as a boxing powerhouse in recent times and I am extremely delighted to get the opportunity of coaching this talented group of pugilists.

"With the experience I have garnered in my career, I am confident that we will

continue to achieve similar glory in prestigious tournaments together," Dmitruk was quoted as saying in a media release.

The 47-year-old has played a key role in elevating Ireland's performances and nurturing young talent over the course of his 12-year stint in the country.

He has coached notable boxers such as Joe Ward to multiple World Championships silver medals in 2015 and 2017 and Grainne Walsh to a bronze at the 2019 European Games.

As part of the Irish boxing team's coaching staff, he contributed significantly to the qualification of the country's boxers for the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Speaking on the appointment, BFI President Ajay Singh said: "Dmitruk has proven coaching credentials while working with the Irish Athletic



Boxing Association.

"We have full faith in his abilities to mentor the talented boxers of our country. His appointment will certainly bolster our ambition to maximise India's medal prospects at the Paris Olympics 2024."

He takes charge of both men's and women's teams. India has produced scintillating displays in recent times at the World Championships, Commonwealth Games as well as the Asian Games, clinching numerous medals to establish the country's name as a prominent unit among the top teams.

Dmitruk's training has not only yielded success for the senior professional boxers but also the youth teams which is a testament to his wide array of skillset that will promote the development of Indian boxing.

‘You’ve got to play safe in India’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Batting coach Michael Di Venuto on Tuesday said Australia committed a blunder by trying to push the scoring rate in the second Test, which the visitors lost to India by six wickets.

Di Venuto said Australia's batting plans were working well till a dramatic collapse saw them lose eight wickets for 28 runs.

Steve Smith's dismissal to the sweep shot triggered the collapse as Australia were all out for 113 in 31.1 overs, giving India just 115 runs to win the Test, which the home side did in 26.4 overs to go 2-0 up and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"Plans certainly weren't wrong. Our plans are good, but if people go away from their plans they're going to get in trouble, as we saw," Di Venuto said here on Tuesday.

"We were almost ahead of the game, and the feeling just looking at it was 'gee, if we just get another 50 runs real quick' which you can't do in this country. We've spoken about that, so it's not like it's something new.

"But pressure does strange things and we saw a lot of people go out and try and sweep their way to a score. It's not all doom and gloom, but the 90 minutes of batting certainly wasn't anything special."

Many Australian batters perished while trying to sweep and Di Venuto admitted that the shot carried a high percentage of risk for players who aren't adept at playing it.

Di Venuto said most of the Australian batters erred in using the shot as a method of trying to get off strike rather than trusting their defence to survive.

"It was pretty obvious where we went wrong. With batting, it's a pretty similar analogy - you've got to swim between the flags (play safe) in this country (India).

"If you go outside the flags in your game plan, you're going to get in trouble.

He also cited the skill with



Cummins had a lot to worry: Border

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The legendary Allan Border feels Pat Cummins had a lot to worry about as the series against India was his "first real test as captain" and in the process under-bowled himself in the second Test in Delhi.

Australia conceded the four-match series for the

Border Gavaskar Trophy after losing the opening two Tests in Nagpur and Delhi.

Cummins, who had faced just one defeat as captain before coming to India, was the sole quick in the Australian playing XI in the six-wicket loss in Delhi.

He bowled just 13 overs in the first innings and didn't bowl at all in India's second

essay.

"To me, the fast bowler, it's always fraught with danger," Border told SEN Radio.

"I thought Pat grossly under-bowled himself in that Test match.

"There were opportunities when things were starting to go stray, particularly in the Indian first innings when we had them on the ropes and they formed a

good partnership, a couple of blasts from him running in and bowling some short stuff for two or three overs..."

Australia had reduced India to 139 for 7 before Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin shared a 114-run stand to take India to just one run short of the visiting team's first innings total.

"There are other guys out on the field I suppose who could go to the captain and say, 'mate, why don't you have a bowl?'" Border said.

"But I just thought this is Pat's first real test as a captain, the rest has been plain sailing, you go to the sub-continent and all of a sudden you get tested out in all sorts of areas.



Richa Ghosh jumps 16 places in T20I rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh on Tuesday jumped 16 places to move into the top 20 of the latest ICC Women's T20I rankings for the first time after some good scores in the ongoing shortest format World Cup in South Africa.

Ghosh's unbeaten knocks of 41 against the West Indies and 47 against England in the Women's T20 World Cup over the past week took her to a career-best 20th position.

She became the fifth Indian in the top 20 with Smriti Mandhana (third), Shafali Verma (10th), Jemimah Rodrigues (12th) and Harmanpreet Kaur (13th) ahead of her in the list.

New Zealand all-

rounder Amelia Kerr and Muneeba Ali of Pakistan are other batters to achieve career-best rankings.

Kerr's match-winning 66 against Sri Lanka at Paarl has helped her to a career-best 16th position while Pakistan's left-handed opener Muneeba has risen 10 places to a career-best 64th after becoming the first woman from her country to score a T20I century.

Kerr has also gained three places to reach 13th place among bowlers.

Australia captain Meg Lanning, who scored 48 not out versus Bangladesh, is up one place to fourth while former New Zealand captain Suzie Bates has moved up two places to sixth after scores of 81 not out against Bangladesh and 56 against Sri Lanka.

Hayden ready to help solve Aussies batting woes against Indian spinners

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Batting great Matthew Hayden is ready to help Australia solve their batting woes in the ongoing Test series if asked after the visiting side was bamboozled by the Indian spinners in the first two matches, according to a report.

Australia suffered heavy losses in Nagpur and New Delhi with Indian spinners, led by Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, scalping 32 of the total 40 wickets in the two Tests.

Hayden, commentating on the series for host broadcaster Star Sports, said he would happily put his hand up to help Australia's debacle against Indian spinners and he would do it for nothing.

"One hundred per cent, at any time of the day or night, it is a given that myself -- and I'm sure I speak for anyone else that I represent that would have that kind of influence -- would 100 per cent be in," Hayden was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

"Any time I have been asked to do anything I've always said yes at any time of day," said the 51-year-old left-handed batter.

Former captain Michael Clarke has called for the visiting team management to use the expertise of Hayden, who had averaged 110 in the



epic 2001 tour under Steve Waugh and was also part of the triumphant Adam Gilchrist-led team in 2004 -- the only Australia side to win a Test series in India since 1969.

Hayden said he would "definitely not" charge Cricket Australia for his time with the Australian team but wanted the governing body to give current players access to the previous generation.

"You can't alienate them

(former players). If you want the creme de la creme, the very least you can do is respect them. There should be a system if you're in the CA role, how do we get the intellectual property in our players? That's the key," he said.

He pointed out India batter Shreyas Iyer's close relationship with Ricky Ponting during their time together at IPL franchise Delhi Capitals, and Matthew Mott's role in England's T20 World Cup tri-

umph to highlight how other countries are using the best of Australia's coaching talent.

Hayden, who scored 8625 runs from 103 Tests between 1994 and 2009 at an average of 50.73, said he sympathises with coach Andrew McDonald, as teams no longer have the time for extensive preparation for tours.

"It's not possible because a week before we came over here everyone was screaming bloody murder about their superstars not playing the Big Bash League -- and yet they've got a Test match nine days later," Hayden said.

"This is where I really don't envy the role of Andrew McDonald. He has to work out what is the priority in terms of his playing group of which he has zero per cent control over a two-month period because of IPL.

"Part of that tenure would be, 'what do we want to win fellas? Because if it's India we know what it takes to win there.'"

McDonald has said he would be open to Hayden coming into the fold if players wanted to use him on top of their existing coaching staff.

"If Matthew can add value to individual players, I'm sure those individual players would definitely engage in a conversation with him," the coach said.

Warner ruled out of last 2 Tests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Struggling Australia opening batter David Warner was on Tuesday ruled out of the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy due to an elbow fracture, dealing further blow to the visiting team.

Warner will head home to Sydney to recover but is expected to return to India for the three-match ODI series after the four-match Test series. The ODI series begins on March 17 in Mumbai.

"David Warner has been ruled out of the Qantas test tour of India and will return home," CA said in a statement.

"Warner was struck on the elbow in the second Test in Delhi and sustained a hairline fracture. After further assessment, he will require a period of rehabilitation which will preclude any further involvement in the remainder of the Test series.

"It is currently anticipated that he will return to India for the three One-Day Internationals which follow the Test Series."

Warner was substituted by Matthew Renshaw in the second innings in the second Test here with delayed concussion symptoms after being struck on the grille of his protective batting hel-



met by India fast bowler Mohammad Siraj in Australia's first innings.

That blow came shortly after Warner had been struck on the arm by another rising delivery, with x-rays subsequently confirming the left-hander had also sustained a hairline fracture of the elbow.

The 36-year-old had struggled for form across the first two Tests, which Australia lost heavily to trail 0-2 in the series, returning 26 runs from his three completed innings.

Traavid Head, who came out to bat in Australia's second innings in place of Warner in New Delhi, is expected to open along with Usman Khawaja in the third Test in Indore beginning on March 1.

which opener Usman Khawaja swept his way to a series average of 150-plus in Pakistan last year and almost 50 on the subsequent Test campaign in Sri Lanka.

"Uz (Khawaja) played beautifully in the first innings (at Delhi), and has through Pakistan and the sub-continent. It (sweeping) is part of his game, but he also picks the balls to do it," Di Venuto said.

"It's smart, he's not using it as a form of defence and I think that's what happened towards the back end (of Australia's second innings). People weren't trusting their defence so started trying to sweep, which is

the wrong way to go about it."

Di Venuto said these things sometimes happened under pressure and when players pressed the panick button.

"When you're under pressure and you panic, and you're not trusting your defence, sometimes it is 'I've just got to get up the other end' and how do you do that? The sweep shot the other day seemed to be the way they were trying to do it, which is not the ideal way on a spinning wicket with variable bounce.

"It's common sense, but that's pressure.

High dot balls already worrying us: Harmanpreet

PTI ■ GOEBERHA

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur has conceded that India's inability to rotate strike is a "worrying" sign, adding that the team has been discussing how to address its long-standing dot-ball issue ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup semifinals.

India qualified for the semifinals of the marquee event after a five-run win over Ireland via the Duckworth-Lewis method on Monday.

However, rotation of strike remains a huge issue for the Indian team. The 'Women in Blue' struggled with strike rotation in the series against Australia in December and even in the Tri-series that ended earlier this month.

The problem has persisted as India consumed 51 and 41 dot balls in the Group 2 games

against England and Ireland respectively.

"Dot balls are something which (are) already worrying us," Kaur said at the post-match press conference.

"In the next game, we would love to see some improvement in that area also. Against England, we played too many dot balls. Things like that we have already been discussing in team meetings.

"But sometimes, when the other team is bowling too well, at the end of the day, these wickets are something when you score 150, that's a par score for you."

Against Ireland, the Indian batters struggled to get the runs flowing. India were going at less than seven runs per over before Smriti Mandhana, who was dropped as many as four times, found her groove in the latter half of the innings.

"World Cup games are always something where both the teams are always under pressure. I think these matches, if 150 is on the board, you always (have) the upper hand. "We are not putting too much pressure on ourselves. We are just going there and understanding what conditions are there and just playing according to the situation," Kaur said.

Playing her 150th T20 International, Kaur promoted herself to number three but was not able to strike the ball, eventually departing for 13.

"Initially I tried a few shots, but unfortunately I wasn't able to convert those shots into the boundary.

Sometimes a player is having a good day and then everybody was dropping her catches and she just wanted to express herself." She (Mandhana) told me, 'better to give me singles than you taking risks' and initially, that's what we did. After 15 overs, then you have to take a risk from both sides, and then that's what we decided to do."

India are likely to face five-time winners and favourites Australia in the semifinals.



Chahar says he is fully fit and preparing for IPL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After struggling with two "big" injuries last year, India pacer Deepak Chahar says he is fully fit and set to make his comeback with the Indian Premier League beginning March 31.

The 30-year-old injury-prone fast bowler had a tough time recovering from a stress fracture and more recently a quad grade 3 tear. He last played for India in the second ODI in Bangladesh.

In the whole of 2022, Chahar could only feature in 15 games for India and was also ruled out of the T20 World Cup due to injury.

Having done an extensive rehab at the National Cricket Academy, Chahar is preparing for the IPL where he will represent the Chennai Super Kings.

"I working hard for the past two three months on my fitness, I am fully fit and preparing well for the IPL," Chahar said.

"I had two big injuries. One was stress fracture and one was quad grade 3 tear. They are both are very big injuries. You are out for months. Anyone who comes back after the injury it takes time, especially for the fast bowlers.

"If I was a batter I would be playing way back long but as a fast

bowler, when you have a stress fracture, it is very tough to get back on track. You can see other bowlers struggling with the back as well."

The Rajasthan pacer made a return to competitive cricket with a first-class game against Services last month but that was his only appearance in Ranji Trophy.

Multiple injuries have pushed him down in the pecking order but he hopes to be part of the Indian team for the ODI World Cup at home later this year.

"I have lived by one rule all my life. If I am fully bowling the way I want, if I am batting the way I want, there is no stopping me. That

was the basic rule with which I started my career.

"I don't care who is playing, who is not playing, my motive is to get fully fit and perform with the ball and bat 100 per cent. If I do that, I will get my chances," said Chahar who has also proved his value with the bat in his international career that began in 2018.

Since making his India debut in July 2018, he has managed to play in 13 ODIs and 24 T20s.

