

**WORLD 5**  
US NEARS CO-OP DEALS WITH  
PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS**MONEY 6**  
BANK DEPOSITS GROWTH  
TRAILS CREDIT GROWTH: REPORT**SPORT 7**  
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## NDMA issues gag order till Joshimath pic clear

ISRO subsidence images withdrawn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With media giving a wide coverage to Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) data on ground subsidence at Joshimath in Uttarakhand, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Saturday directed scientific departments and Government authorities not to share such details with the media till a conclusion is drawn.

The NDMA pointed out that the data released by Government institutions are creating confusion among residents. Uttarakhand Minister Dhan Singh Rawat said on Saturday that the ISRO images have been withdrawn. Rawat said ISRO has not issued an official statement on the basis of the images.

"I had seen the satellite images of Joshimath on ISRO's website. I spoke to ISRO's Director and asked him why he is not issuing an official statement in this regard. Now I am told the images have been withdrawn," he told reporters.

In the meantime, several teams of environment and climate scientists are carrying out inspections of the affected areas to see if there's a possi-



NDRF and SDRF teams carry out demolition of Hotel Malari Inn, which has been marked unsafe, in Chamoli on Saturday PTI

bility of more land subsidence or if the land can be restored to its original state, which scientist Dr JC Kuniyal termed a "matter of challenge for them".

This, even as huge cracks were reported to have appeared in the ropeway platform connecting Joshimath to Auli following which the service has been halted till further orders.

Satellite images taken from the Cartosat-2S satellite and released by ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre showed that Joshimath sank 5.4 cm between December 27 and January 8. The massive soil sinking occurred due to "a rapid subsidence event that was triggered on January 2, 2023".

"It is observed that various Government institutions are releasing data related to the subject matter on social media platforms and they are also interacting with the media with their own interpretation of the situation. It is creating confusion not only among affected residents but also among citizens of the country," the NDMA stated.

It said the issue was highlighted during a meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister on January 12.

It pointed out an expert group has been formed for assessment of ground subsidence at Joshimath, the NDMA requested institutions, including ISRO, to "sensitise their

organisation" about this matter and refrain from posting anything on social media platforms until the final report of the expert group is released by it.

The expert team, for its part, has found that the condition of houses where cracks have appeared is not good.

The assessment of the 4,000 buildings across nine wards in Joshimath is underway. Dr Ajay Chaurasia, Chief Engineer, CBRI, said it is also being checked if the houses were constructed in line with the set norms.

As for the ropeway, Dinesh Bhatt, the manager, was quoted by a news agency as saying that cracks surfaced on the ropeway platform from Friday.

## 60,000 died of Covid in China in just 1 month

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Saturday reported 59,938 new coronavirus deaths in hospitals across the country over the last 30 days, amid criticism from the WHO that Beijing was "heavily under-reporting" the magnitude of the pandemic.

The death toll included 59,938 Covid-19 related deaths at hospitals from December 8 to January 12, the National Health Commission said on Saturday, official media here reported.

Jiao Yahui, director of the National Health Commission's medical affairs department, said medical institutes recorded 5,503 deaths as a result of respiratory failure triggered by Covid-19 infections and 54,435 fatalities with underlying conditions, such as cancer or cardiovascular diseases, combined with Covid-19.

The average age of those who died was 80.3, and 90 per cent of the fatalities were aged 65 or over, the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported.

With this, China's official death toll climbed to 65,210 since the coronavirus first broke out in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019.

China has stopped provid-

ing daily Covid statistics since abandoning its strict zero-Covid strategy.

China also reopened its borders to international travellers on January 8 after nearly three years.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that China is "heavily underreporting" the number of Covid-19 deaths from the current wave of infections sweeping the country.

"WHO still believes that deaths are heavily underreported from China. This is in relation to the definitions that are used but also to the need for doctors and those reporting in the public health system to be encouraged to report these cases and not discouraged," Michael Ryan, executive director of WHO Health Emergencies Programme said in Geneva.



## Body in 3 parts found after terror suspects' grilling



People stand outside the house where two persons were arrested over suspicion of terror links and other crimes, at Jahangirpuri in New Delhi on Saturday PTI

### 2 grenades, 3 pistols, 22 bullets seized

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Saturday recovered a body chopped into pieces in North Delhi, based on the information provided by two persons arrested on terror charges.

According to eyewitnesses, the body had been chopped up in more than three pieces.

The Delhi Police's Special Cell had carried out a special raid on a house in North-West Delhi's Jahangirpuri where they arrested two persons for sus-

pectedly having links with terror organisations and recovered two hand grenades, three pistols and 22 rounds of bullets from the accused. Traces of human blood were also found at their residence.

The arrest was made ahead of the Republic Day celebration in Delhi. The raid was conducted on Thursday night.

The two accused have been identified as Jagjit Singh alias Jagga (29) and Naushad (56). The Delhi Police has booked them under the UAPA. During the investigation, the accused led the police team to their rented accommodation at Shradha Nand Colony, PS Bhalaswa Dairy.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Urinator on smear campaign, instead of being sorry: Victim

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Air India urination case accused Shankar Mishra claimed that the complainant urinated on herself, the latter issued a statement saying the "accused, instead of being remorseful for the utterly disgusting act committed by him, has adopted a campaign of spreading misinformation and falsities with the intent of further harassing the victim".

The complainant said the claims made by Mishra are "completely false and concocted and by their very nature are disparaging and derogatory".

Mishra's lawyer's charges have been dismissed by Kathak dancers and have enraged many exponents of classical Indian dances across the country.

In the statement issued through her lawyer Ankur Mehindro, the complainant said, "It has been brought to

our knowledge that certain scurrilous and defamatory allegations have been made on behalf of the accused during a court hearing".

"Needless to state, the allegations are completely false and concocted and by their very nature are disparaging and derogatory. The said allegations are also in complete contradiction and a complete volte-face of the statements and the pleaded case of the accused in his Bail Application," the statement added.

Mishra's counsel, while arguing against a police petition seeking revision of an order passed by a magisterial court refusing his custodial interrogation, on Friday claimed that he did not commit the offence, and that she urinated on herself due to a medical condition that is found in Kathak dancers and the elderly woman being one.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Cong MP walking in Rahul Yatra dies of heart attack

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress MP from Jalandhar Santokh Singh Chaudhary, 76, died on Saturday after suffering a cardiac arrest during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, following which the march was halted for a day.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who visited the grieving family, expressed shock over his death and described him as a hardworking leader and strong pillar of the party.

Chaudhary, a two-time MP, was taking part in the Rahul Gandhi-led march in Phillaur in Jalandhar when he fainted, according to senior party leader Partap Singh Bajwa, who was also marching with other yatrias. "We have lost a gem, his void will be difficult to fill. My heartfelt condolences to his son MLA Vikram Chaudhary, friends and family," he said.

Chaudhary was rushed to a private hospital in Phagwara where he was declared brought dead. Later, his body was shifted to his residence in Jalandhar.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi pays his last respects to party MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary in Jalandhar on Saturday PTI

He had joined the yatra at Phillaur on Saturday morning and was walking along Rahul. After some time, he felt uneasy and fainted.

"Congress MP from Tamil Nadu Jothimani told me that during the yatra, Chaudhary asked her how are you and then he suddenly collapsed," Punjab

Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring told reporters. Earlier, Chaudhary was raising slogans 'Jodo Jodo, Bharat Jodo' to welcome Rahul, said Warring. He said Chaudhary was very excited about the yatra as it was passing through his area.

*Continued on Page 2*

## 'D' goon threatens to bomb Gadkari, demands ₹100 cr

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Security was beefed up at Union Minister Nitin Gadkari's residence and office here in Maharashtra on Saturday after a man claiming to be a member of the Dawood Ibrahim gang made threatening calls and demanded ₹100 crore, police said.

The caller has been identified and a crime branch team has been sent to track him down in Karnataka, a police official said on Saturday night.

Three threat calls were received on the landline number of Gadkari's Public Relations office in Khambha area between 11.25 am and 12.30 pm, following which security was strengthened at the home and office of the Nagpur MP and BJP leader.

"The caller told the phone operator that he is a member of the D Gang and demanded ₹100 crore from Gadkari. He



Police officials investigate after the public contact office of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari received threatening calls, in Nagpur on Saturday PTI

threatened to harm the Minister with a bomb if his demand is not met," he said.

The caller also shared his mobile number and the address in Karnataka where he said the money must be sent, he said.

"Police have identified the caller who has a criminal past. His phone number has been traced to Karnataka and a crime branch team has been sent to the address shared by him," the official added.

## Shraddha was cut into 35 with saw-like object: Autopsy report

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The autopsy report of the bones of Shraddha Walkar, who was allegedly killed by her live-in partner Aaftab Poonawalla, has revealed that her body was chopped into 35 pieces with a "saw-like object".

The AIIMS medical board which conducted the autopsy on skeletal remains of Shraddha stated the bones were cut after death using a sharp object, head of forensic medicine Dr Sudhir K Gupta said on Saturday. In its report to the Delhi Police, the AIIMS board confirmed that the bones and human remains, including lower jaw, recovered from a forest area are that of a woman.

The age of the individual has been medically confirmed, from skeletal remains, to be above 20 years, Dr Gupta who supervised the medical board told PTI. The killing took place in May last year but came to light months later. Aaftab was arrested on November 12.

## CAPSULE

**1 KILLED, 20 HURT IN MAKAR MELA STAMPEDE**  
**Cuttack:** At least one person was killed and 20 others were injured, four of them seriously, in a stampede in Odisha's Cuttack district on Saturday in Makar Mela.

**CAR MOWS DOWN DELHI POLICE SI ON DUTY**

**New Delhi:** A car mowed down an on-duty Delhi Police Sub-Inspector (SI) who was scheduled to retire on January 31, an official said on Saturday. The accident occurred around 8.30 pm on Friday night on the ring road between Raj Ghat and Shanti Van.

**TEACHER HELD IN KERALA FOR MOLESTING 26**

**Kannur:** The Kerala Police has arrested a 52-year-old teacher of an aided school in the district for allegedly molesting 26 students since November 2021. The senior teacher was arrested under various provisions of the POCSO Act.

## CBI raided my office: Sisodia; agency refutes Dy CM's claims

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Saturday said the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raided his office in the Secretariat but the agency refuted his claims saying its team had only gone to collect some records and seek some clarifications regarding the excise policy. No raid or search was conducted at the office of the Deputy Chief Minister, CBI officials maintained.

Terming it a raid, Sisodia said the CBI won't find anything against him as he hasn't done anything wrong except working to provide education to students in Delhi.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Lakshadweep MP disqualified from LS after 10 yrs conviction

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha Secretariat on Saturday issued a notification disqualifying Lakshadweep MP Mohammed Faizal from the Lok Sabha following his recent conviction for 10 years in an attempt to murder case by a local trial court. Faizal was an MP of Sharad Pawar-led NCP.

As per the landmark judgment of Supreme Court in 2013, MPs and MLAs will lose their posts when convicted for more than two years with immediate effect and can't contest elections for six years after the end of conviction. The notification said Faizal stands disqualified from the membership of the LS from January 11, the date of his conviction by a sessions court in Kavaratti.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Eunuchs dancing on Raising Day rocks CRPF Paramilitary's misconduct in Kathgodam event under scrutiny

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has ordered an enquiry into eunuchs dancing on salacious Bollywood numbers on stage at the paramilitary's Kathgodam Group Centre in Uttarakhand at a function to mark the force's Raising Day ceremony in October last year.

It was passed off as a cultural event, but several videos of the dance sequences got circulated on WhatsApp. The CRPF brass has also asked its Kathgodam unit how the security of the Group Centre was secured by calling civilians to the event.

The Raising Day ceremony was held on October 13-14 last year at the CRPF facility but "neither any officer nor any jawan complained against the misdemeanour" on the CRPF



campus. Since both the officers and men were complicit in the affair, they remained silent for three months, sources said.

However, through a communication issued on January 11, the Inspector General (IG) of the Dehradun Sector of the CRPF has specifically asked the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Kathgodam Group Centre, Satish Kumar Linda, to submit a detailed report on the conduct of the

Raising Day, including cultural programme held on October 14, 2022, showing sequence of



events planned on the occasion.

Linda is also facing a separate enquiry for misconduct, officials said.

Apart from other details,

the IG has also directed his Deputy to include in the report the details of the officers present during the "cultural programme".

The report must include reasons which prompted the DIG, Group Centre of CRPF at Kathgodam, to permit members of the Binny Dance Academy to perform during a ceremonial function of the Force, the IG stated. The report will also enumerate what role the eunuchs are playing in running the dance academy.

The DIG has been further asked to clarify whether the Binny Dance Academy is a private institution or affiliated to the Uttarakhand Government.

At least four videos in possession of *The Pioneer* suggest several officers were present in the hall when the eunuchs were performing and a few of them even gyrated with the

dancers.

The dancers even posed suggestively on the stage as well as the first row of the sofas in the auditorium of the Group Centre where officials were seated during the programme.

Insiders in the CRPF said indiscipline has no place in a uniformed force, like CRPF, and such breaches also pose security threat to the paramilitary's facilities besides diluting the ethos of the institution held in high esteem by the entire nation.

They said accountability must be fixed at the earliest and the irresponsible officials and jawans must be punished quickly to check repeat of such instances in future.

Forces should not ignore such serious indiscipline in the name of taking populist measures to appease their men, they maintained.



# Response to Pak terror, aggressive China shows India can't be coerced: Jaishankar

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India's counter response to terrorism emanating from Pakistan and to aggressive cross-border skirmish with China displayed that the nation will not be coerced by anybody, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

He added that the country will do everything to ensure its security. The Balakot air strikes conducted by the Air Force in response to the Pulwama terror attack had sent the much-needed message across, he said referring to the incident in 2019.

"On the northern borders, China is today seeking to change the status quo by bringing in large forces and violating our borders. Despite



COVID-19, our counter response was strong and firm. Our troops deployed in thousands safeguarded our frontiers in extreme terrain and harsh border and (protection of borders) continues to this day,"

Jaishankar said while addressing the Tamil weekly Thuglak's 53rd anniversary here on Saturday evening.

"The national wellbeing has many facets and national security is without question the basic foundation. All countries

are tested in this regard but we perhaps had more than our fair share of problems ranging from insurgency to cross-border terrorism, especially terrorism. The Balakot air strikes sent the much-needed message," the External Affairs Minister said.

"India is a nation that will not be coerced by anybody and it will do everything to ensure its security," Jaishankar said.

At the same time, the Central government is working to create a full spectrum of relations and stronger economic linkages buttressed by closer security coordination, he added.

The Central minister asserted that India would have been the largest country in the world, not China, had the partition not taken place in

1947 that reduced the nation's stature cutting off many regions.

"You may wonder why the External Affairs Minister is talking about all these. During my travels abroad, I have heard warm words on our (COVID-19) vaccines supplied to many developed countries and interest in our technology-enabled governance. My counterparts told me that they also have some issues. But since there's only one Modi (Prime Minister), I had to tell them to find solutions through technology," Jaishankar said.

India mattered on a global perspective too, because the country is always the first to respond to regional crisis. "India also matters in global security," Jaishankar added.

# BJP reviews preparations for UP Council elections

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the aim of ensuring the party's victory in the elections for the five seats of the teacher/graduate constituencies of the UP Legislative Council, a meeting was held at the Bharatiya Janata Party state headquarters where party workers were asked to ensure the victory of BJP candidates in the election.

BJP state president Bhopendra Singh Chaudhary took detailed information from the party officials and people's representatives regarding the preparations made so far for the council elections.

"To ensure the victory of the party candidates, contact every voter. The party has done the work of registering the names of a large number of new voters in the voter list by



running the Voter Jodo campaign, this will benefit the party," Chaudhary said.

He said working according to the party's plan, the workers and office-bearers had to ensure the victory of the party candidates.

The BJP state president said that everyone appreciated the work done by the Central government under the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and the state government led by Yogi Adityanath.

"The benefits of the government schemes are reaching every section of society. In such a situation, it is the responsibility of all of us to establish contact and dialogue with the voters and appeal to them to vote in favour of the party," the BJP state chief said.

# Kerala's caste leader foments trouble in Congress

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The faction-ridden Kerala unit of the Indian National Congress, which has been experiencing a season of truce is back to days of dissidence and groupism thanks to a statement made by a caste leader.

G Sukumaran Nair, general secretary of the Nair Service Society, a non-political caste outfit representing the Nairs in Kerala, described Sasi Tharoor, who is on a mission in the State to find out a safe constituency to contest in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, as "Tharavadi Nair" (Malayalam for aristocratic Nair) and termed him as the ideal Prime Minister candidate. The incident happened last week when Tharoor called on Sukumaran to pay his obeisance. Sukumaran had ridiculed Tharoor in 2009 stating that latter was a "Delhi Nair" and the community members would not endorse him. It is another thing that Tharoor won all the three Lok Sabha



elections he contested from Thiruvananthapuram without the endorsement of Sukumaran.

Prominent Nair community members like Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, K C Venugopal, V D Satheshan, Sivakumar, are all upset over the comment made by Sukumaran who always claim that only candidates promoted by him would sail through in elections in Kerala. "My upbringing does not allow me to react to this kind of statement. The people of Kerala are wise enough to choose the candidates they want to win," Radhakrishnan told The Pioneer. A sense of anguish was discernible in the former minister's face.

# G-20 delegates to get taste of UP's culture, heritage

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh has started preparations for hosting the G-20 Summit meetings as special arrangements are being made to introduce the state's culture and heritage to the delegations arriving from different countries.

The Tourism department has chalked out a programme to present the state's dance forms, classical music and other traditional entertainment to G-20 guests. According to this, veteran artistes of the state would enthrall visitors from abroad with their programmes.

The G-20 visitors will land in the state in February and stay for five days in February and August. They will also visit a number of well-known locations of cities during this period.

During the first two days of the foreign visitors' stay in Agra, cultural events will be held with Lucknow-based artiste Alka Thakur greeting tourists with a 'jugalbandi' of



sarangi and flute.

On the second day, Mathura's Sanjay Sharma will present Braj's traditional peacock dance, Gitanjali Sharma will present Kathak based on Radha Madhav and Vandana Shri will perform folk dance and Krishna Radha Raas.

In August, on the first day, a live jugalbandi of flute, tabla and santoor will be presented by Bhatkhande Sanskrit University. The second day will feature performances of Krishna Raas Leela by Mathura's Vinay Krishna Goswami and Namami Ramam by Lucknow's Kathak Kendra.

On the third day, Mumbai-based Neeraj Arya's Kabir Cafe will perform a live concert while Manoj Kumar Mishra of Lucknow will showcase Taal Vadya, and Mohini of Lalitpur will perform traditional folk dance.

During the three-day stay in Lucknow, the city of Nawabs, on the first day, Sheikh Ibrahim of Lucknow will present a live jugalbandi of the flute, tabla and santoor, while performers from Kathak Kendra will present a semi-classical dance.

# Gang operating at Delhi airport busted, stolen articles worth lakhs recovered

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police busted a suspected theft racket operating at the international airport here and arrested eight loaders working with ground handling agencies, officials said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Deepak Pal (25), Gautam Kumar (34), Moshin Khan (23), Rahul Yadav (24), Yashwinder (28), Pappi Kumar (26), Neeraj Kumar (26) and Kamal Kumar (27).

Gold and silver jewellery worth close to Rs 10 lakh, six branded watches, an Apple iPhone and Rs 1,15,000 in cash, among other articles, were recovered from the accused, the police said.

Pal was apprehended on Wednesday by a joint team of the police and the Vigilance department while he was allegedly attempting to pilfer from a registered check-in baggage, a senior police official said.

Pal disclosed that he

worked as a loader for a ground handling assistance company since 2018. As his Rs 18,000 salary was not enough, he started committing petty thefts from passengers' baggage whenever he got an opportunity.

Later, he came in contact with seven other loaders and ground handling staff of other airlines and agencies. They soon formed a gang and started committing baggage theft on a large scale, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Airport) Ravi Kumar Singh said.

During investigations, the police located the other loaders and arrested them, he said.

They allegedly stole valuables from passenger baggage and hid the stolen articles inside lockers and other places in the airport, the police said.

The accused worked in a professional manner, collecting the stolen articles in one place before disposing of them, police said.

# CBI raided my office: Sisodia...

**From Page 1**

Taking to Twitter, Sisodia claimed the agency did not find anything against him during previous raids and this time too it will be the same as he has done nothing wrong.

"The CBI has again reached my office today. They are welcome. They conducted raids at my house, searched the locker, made enquiries against me at my village. Nothing was found then and nothing will be found now because I have done nothing wrong. Have worked honestly for the education of Delhi's children," Sisodia tweeted.

Refuting his claims, CBI officials said its team may have gone to collect some records in the excise policy case or seek clarifications.

The AAP, in a statement, rejected the CBI claim that its officials were at Sisodia's office to seek some records and that the exercise was not a raid. "Were the CBI officials at Sisodia's office for tea and snacks, if not for a raid? CBI should answer what did it find in the raid," the party said.

# Body in 3 parts found after terror suspects'...

**From Page 1**

During investigation, Jagga and Naushad — revealed the location of the chopped up

body at an empty plot in the Bhalswa area. The arrest was made ahead of the Republic Day celebration in the national Capital.

Delhi Police spokesperson Suman Nalwa said the accused

were produced in court on Friday and sent to 14-day police custody. "During the investigation, in pursuance of disclosure, both the accused led the police team to their rented accommodation at Shradhanand Colony in Bhalswa Dairy area from where two hand grenades were

recovered," Nalwa said.

A team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) was roped in to collect the samples after police found blood stains on the walls of the house which was raided. Jagga is a parole jumper in a case of murder in Uttarakhand, police had said. An investigation by the Delhi Police revealed that Jagjit Singh was in contact with Khalistani terrorist Arshdeep Singh Gill alias Arsh Dalla and kept getting instructions from anti-national elements from other countries. Gill was designated a terrorist by the Government. He has been involved in targeted killings, terror financing and extortion in Punjab.

Naushad was connected to the terrorist organisation Harkat ul-Ansar and was out of jail after serving a sentence in a double murder case. Naushad has already served a full sentence for two murders and 10 years for handling explosives.

The Home Ministry had said on Monday that Gill alias Arsh Dala, who was born in Ludhiana but is currently based in Canada, is involved in the cross-border smuggling of drugs and weapons on a large scale. He is associated with the banned Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) and runs terror modules on behalf of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a designated terrorist.

# Urinator on smear campaign, instead of being sorry...

**From Page 1**

The claim by his lawyer, made for the first time since the sordid event unfolded on an Air India New York-New Delhi flight on November 26 last year, flies in the face of denunciation of the accused by some of the co-passengers and even a string of WhatsApp exchanges he had with the victim woman which suggested the unsavoury incident indeed took place.

"I (Mishra) am not the accused. There must be someone else.

It seems she herself urinated. She was suffering

from some disease related to prostate, which several 'kathak dancers' seem to suffer from. It was not him. The seating system was such that no one could go to her seat. Her seat could only be approached from behind, and in any case the urine could not reach to the seat's front area.

Also, the passenger sitting behind the complainant did not make any such complaint," senior advocate Ramesh Gupta, appearing for Mishra, told the judge.

Additional Sessions Judge Harjyot Singh Bhalla disposed

of the police application saying police can approach the magisterial court with its application afresh.

The generalisation enraged many exponents of classical Indian dances, across the country.

"It is an unfortunate case and one of the most bizarre reasons I have heard that 80 per cent of Kathak dancers have such problems," said Kathak exponent Padma Shri Shovana Narayan.

Rashmi Vaidialingam, a lawyer and a Kuchipudi dancer, said, "This is the most ridiculous thing I've heard."

विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय मध्यप्रदेश भोपाल

क्रमांक :- वि.शा./स्टोर/2023-25 (03) दिनांक 05.01.2023

निविदा सूचना का शब्दिपत्र

(Corrigendum)

विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय को निविदा सूचना क्रमांक **SB/Store/2022-25 (338) Bhopal, Dated 29.11.2022** द्वारा B.R. Jacket and B.R. Helmet के क्रय हेतु ई-निविदा सूचना जारी की गई है। उपरोक्त आमंत्रित निविदा अंतर्गत क्रय किये जाने वाले उपकरणों के तकनीकी मापदंडों (Specification) एवं समय-सारणी में किये गये "संशोधन" के संबंध में "शब्दिपत्र" (Corrigendum) जारी किया गया है जो website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicegep/app> पर तथा विभाग की वेबसाइट [www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in) पर उपलब्ध है।

हेतु- सहायक पुलिस महानिरीक्षक, विशेष शाखा ( जी ), म.प्र. भोपाल दूरभाष-0755-2443654 Email: [sec24-sb@mppolice.gov.in](mailto:sec24-sb@mppolice.gov.in)

G-21631/22

विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय, मध्यप्रदेश भोपाल

क्रमांक :- वि.शा./स्टोर/2023-25 (13) दिनांक 12.01.2023

निविदा सूचना का शब्दि पत्र

(Corrigendum)

विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय को निविदा सूचना क्रमांक **SB/Store/2022-25 (326), Bhopal, Dated 18.11.2022** द्वारा **Disaster Recovery & Information Security with Backup Solution** के क्रय हेतु ई-निविदा सूचना जारी की गई है। उपरोक्त आमंत्रित निविदा के माध्यम से क्रय किये जाने वाले उपकरण के तकनीकी मापदंडों (Specification) "आंशिक संशोधन" के संबंध में "शब्दि पत्र" (Corrigendum) जारी किया गया है जो website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicegep/app> पर तथा विभाग की वेबसाइट [www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in) पर उपलब्ध है।

सहायक पुलिस महानिरीक्षक, विशेष शाखा ( जी ), म.प्र. भोपाल दूरभाष-0755-2443654 Email: [sec24-sb@mppolice.gov.in](mailto:sec24-sb@mppolice.gov.in)

G-21643/22



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The Sr. Divisional Engineer/C, Northern Railway, DRM Office, Delhi Division, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055, for and on behalf of the President of India invites sealed open electronic-tenders for under noted work:-

S. N.	Name of work	Approximate cost of work	Earnest money to be deposited	Completion period	Date of opening
1	Track works in connection with provision of Track Machine siding facilities at DWNA, RDDE, RUG, BBDE, GRA, TRN, SHDM, SFDE, PKDE, MLDE, PHWR, KLE, UCA, TUN, MSZ, MLDA, BHAMBEVA, GHNA, JHU and provision of RGM siding at GRA, BGZ, ROK, JHL, BLZ in the section of Sr.DEN/I and Sr.DEN-IV over DLI Division (Cost is inclusive of all taxes including GST)	Rs. 3,22,99,848.03	Rs. 3,11,500/-	18 Months	07.02.2023

The e-tender is to be submit through railway website ["http://ireps.gov.in"](http://ireps.gov.in). The tenders can be submit on website up to 15:00 hrs. on 07.02.2023 and shall be opened there after.

No.: 128-W/Sr.DEN-C/NIT-9A-22-3C-WC Date:- 12.01.2023 165/2023

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गिलाई, दिनांक 11/01/2023

// ई-प्राक्प्रत्येक निविदा सूचना //

Main Protal: <https://proc.cgstate.gov.in>

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क्र	Tender	Tender Release	Tender Download, Bid Preparation & Payment	Physical Submission of Required Documents with EMD fee	EMD Opening and Short Listing
1	120148	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 10/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 31/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 03/02/2023 (05:30 PM)	From 06/02/2023 (10:30 AM)
2	120170	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 10/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 31/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 03/02/2023 (05:30 PM)	From 06/02/2023 (10:30 AM)
3	120206	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 10/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 31/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 03/02/2023 (05:30 PM)	From 06/02/2023 (10:30 AM)
4	120215	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 10/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 31/01/2023 (05:30 PM)	10/01/2023 (10:30 AM) to 03/02/2023 (05:30 PM)	From 06/02/2023 (10:30 AM)

हस्ता / कार्यपालन अधिकारी नगर पालिक निगम गिलाई



# Mercury won't dip to sub-zero, says Skymet



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Skymet weather, a private weather forecast service agency on Saturday said the national Capital's temperature will not dip to sub-zero after a weather expert predicted that temperatures in the plains of North India may dip as far as minus 4 degrees Celsius next week.

The India Meteorological Department also said that Delhi and NCR are likely witness a cold wave next week with the minimum temperature expected to settle around 3 degree Celsius.

"There are rumors going on in newspapers and TV channels about minimum of #Delhi dipping to subzero. This is a wrong prediction, probably to get some highlight. Please do not believe in such baseless rumors. Ongoing WD (Western Disturbances) is

moving away," Skymet weather tweeted. "Icy cold winds from north have already commenced over Rajasthan and Gujarat leading to a drop in minimum and maximum temperatures. Temperatures of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, and west Madhya Pradesh may fall from January 14 and 15," it added.

The agency claimed that Delhi might witness a minimum of 3-4 degrees between 16 and 18 January but there is no possibility of temperature going below the 0 degrees mark. However, isolated pockets may witness a minimum temperature of around 2 degrees.

This comes after Navdeep Dahiya, the founder of Live Weather of India, an online weather platform, made predictions on January 11 about the possibility of subzero temperatures.

# AAP protests at BJP office over 'slums demolition order'

AAP leaders politically frustrated, says BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party workers on Saturday staged a protest outside the Delhi BJP office, days after the city Government directed its Public Works Department to immediately withdraw an order to demolish slums located near Dhaula Kuan. Police used water cannons to disperse the protesters.

Reacting to the protest, the BJP alleged the AAP leaders were "politically frustrated" after the "corrupt governance of the Arvind Kejriwal dispensation" was exposed and that the party was making an issue out of nothing.

The PWD had on December 29 issued a notice asking slum dwellers in the Dhaula Kuan area to vacate the land within 15 days.

AAP MLA Atishi said that before the MCD elections, BJP had promised 'Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan' to the slum dwellers of Delhi, not even a

month passed since the elections and BJP's lies have been exposed. "BJP-ruled DDA has started putting up demolition notices on slums in different areas of Delhi. If BJP does not withdraw this notice, AAP workers and all slum dwellers of Delhi will continue this agitation," she said.

AAP MLA Somnath Bharti asserted that his party won't let anybody's house get demolished. "What is wrong with the BJP? Why are they acting against the people of Delhi?" "BJP's Delhi Police not only showered water on the slum



dwellers in the bitter cold for raising their voice, but also tried to arrest ten-year-old girls," he said.

AAP leader Aadil Ahmad said the party's agitation against

the demolition order will be taken to the streets near Parliament as well. "It was in the BJP's manifesto that all slum dwellers will be given a house at the same place where

slums are. But now, they are sending notices to demolish slums," he said. The Delhi government, in its notice directing the PWD to withdraw the demolition order, said it was "inhuman" to do so at the peak of winter and without making an alternate arrangement for the residents.

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, had earlier this week tweeted, "PWD officials have been ordered to immediately withdraw the order to demolish slums located near Dhaula Kuan."

## Hold House Session for at least 10 days: BJP to Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Saturday lashed out at the AAP Government saying the Kejriwal Government has taken away the right of the members to ask questions in the Assembly.

The three-day session of Delhi Assembly is beginning from Monday. The BJP leaders demanded that the session should be held at least 10 days including "question hours" so that they could raise the aam aadmi problems.

"The AAP Government has taken away the right of the assembly members to ask questions in assembly. A three-day session of Delhi Legislative Assembly is being convened from January 16.

## Former AVP of bank held for transferring clients' ₹19 crore into his account

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A former assistant vice-president of a bank was arrested for allegedly transferring more than ₹19 crore from the clients' accounts into his own, police said on Saturday.

The accused has been identified as Nagendra Kumar, they said. The vigilance department of the bank filed a complaint stating that Kumar was their employee and posted at the Barakhamba Road branch, a senior police officer said.

On August 7, 2020, two account holders disputed some debit transactions from their accounts through cash management portal of the bank, the officer said. The bank later came to know that Kumar transferred ₹19.80 crore from these accounts to his accounts in different banks.

## MCD receives ₹55.37 crore property tax till Jan 11

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Saturday said the total of 29,954 property owners have paid the property tax to date under the "Samridhhi Scheme" launched by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena.

According to a senior MCD official, the corporation's Samridhhi scheme is getting immense support from the citizens.

So far 29,954 citizens have taken advantage of this scheme and have settled their property tax related cases, out of which four cases were those which were pending in the courts. Property tax of Rs 55.37 crore has been received till January 11, 2023, under the Samridhhi scheme.

## Man dragged on bonnet; video viral, driver arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The police have registered a case against the driver of a vehicle after a video of a man clinging to the bonnet of the moving car was widely circulated on social media. The accused, identified as Ishant Sapolia, has been arrested. In the video, a person is seen on the bonnet of the white coloured car.

Police found that a car had brushed passed another four-wheeler at Ring Road in Rajouri Garden following which there were a quarrel between two people — Jaiprakash and Ishant Sapolia, a senior police officer said.

Sapolia along with another person named Harvinder Kohli who was with Jaiprakash and was seen clinging onto the bonnet of the car, received minor injuries during the scuffle. Both were sent to GGS hospital for medical examination, Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Ghanshyam Bansal said. According to witnesses, the incident, which took place in the Rajouri Garden area, was sparked by road rage. Harvinder Kohli, the victim, clung to the car's windshield wipers as he was dragged on the hood of the accused's vehicle.

According to a senior police officer, on Thursday, a police control room (PCR) call regarding a quarrel at Ring Road was received at Rajouri Garden police station following which a police team was dispatched for the spot.

During the analysis of CCTV footage, police found that Kohli is a property dealer and was clinging onto the bonnet of the car after the scuffle, the DCP said.

## New Jan Rasoi opened, to provide meal at ₹1

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to facilitate nutritious food to the needy at a symbolic price of Rs 1 per meal, BJP MP Gautam Gambhir on Saturday inaugurated the new 'Jan Rasoi', in the national Capital.

On the occasion, Gambhir said that the canteen is set up by redoing an abandoned dump store of the municipal corporation at Kishan Kunj. "The canteen will serve food to around 1,000 people every day in the afternoon," he said.

BJP MP said that the similar canteens situated in Vinod Nagar and Shakarpur were closed since the MCD elections are again made operational on January 2.



# Indian Army's unmatched tactical weapon BRAHMOS

As one of the world's largest ground forces, Indian Army has fortified its strength and stature by deploying a wide range of modern combat assets, including precision strike BRAHMOS. Being the only land force in the world to deploy the fastest and deadliest cruise missile system, the Army has bolstered its artillery firepower manifold.

State-of-the-art BRAHMOS land-attack cruise missile (LACM) system operational in the Indian Army since 2007 has validated its capability to quickly engage and destroy strategic ground-based targets from widely varied, most difficult land terrains of India. The cruise missile can precisely strike down enemy positions and installations in divergent operational modes including 'top attack', 'target discrimination' and 'deep penetration'.

The "fire & forget", "quick-reaction" weapon can also be swiftly deployed in conflict zones at a very short notice and can be activated without delay, thus ensuring the Army's battle readiness in a hostile situation.

The Indian Army has raised several BRAHMOS LACM regiments till date to carry out intense, highly complex land warfare operations in challenging security environments of modern times.

Over the years, BrahMos Aerospace - the India-Russia JV company involving DRDO and NPOM - has successfully designed, developed, test-



ed and delivered the multi-role, multi-platform BRAHMOS Weapon Systems to the Indian Armed Forces having both anti-ship and land-attack capability.

The land-attack cruise missile (LACM) system has been developed in different configurations to

meet the Army's requisite to operate from divergent combat environments. The advanced Block I, Block II and Block III configurations of BRAHMOS LACM have emboldened the Army's prowess to carry out combat operations from various land terrains in different battle-spaces.

The BRAHMOS Land-based Weapon Complex comprises of Mobile Autonomous Launcher (MAL), Mobile Command Post and a Mobile Replenishment Vehicle. Each MAL can carry three BRAHMOS missiles capable of being fired at different targets or a combination of targets in different trajectories near simultaneously.

BrahMos Aerospace, in close coordination with DRDO, has significantly increased the indigenous content in the BRAHMOS weapon system. During a series of test firings conducted over the years, various indigenous technologies and systems including seeker, air-frame and propulsion system, have been validated, thus providing a major fillip to the flag-ship 'Make-In-India' programme fostering defence indigenisation.

More advanced features are also being incorporated in the weapon system to further enhance its operational and functional efficacy.

The universal BRAHMOS operational in all three services of Indian Armed Forces has become a force multiplier asset for "joint, integrated" battlefield operations.

By making BRAHMOS the mainstay of its artillery firepower, Indian Army has not only reinforced its combat potential, but also strengthened India's defence preparedness in the backdrop of rapidly evolving security environment.

BrahMos Aerospace greets the Indian Army on the occasion of 75th Army Day.



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# China’s sea drone to unsettle naval balance of power in Indian Ocean

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

China’s announcement on Friday of the delivery of the first autonomous seaborne drone carrier Zhu Hai Yun will unsettle the naval balance of power in the Indian Ocean Region.

“The unmanned carrier can be controlled remotely and navigate autonomously in open water. It will undertake marine scientific research and other observations,” the *Global Times* reported. Assessments here suggest the drone carrier will revolutionise the PLA Navy capabilities multifold including long range strikes on forces beyond the ranges of conventional weapons.

The Chinese official daily reported that the autonomous drone carrier is capable of operating on its own. The unmanned carrier can be controlled remotely and navigate autonomously in open water. It will undertake marine scientific research and other observations.

The carrier, officially put into use after a year and a half of construction, is the world’s first unmanned system and scientific research ship with autonomous navigation and remote-control functions, and has been awarded the first intelligent ship certificate by the China Classification Society (CCS).

Its power systems, propulsion systems, intelligent systems, power positioning systems and investigation support systems have been independently developed by Chinese



research teams, the report claimed.

“This is the first professional sea trial of the Zhu Hai Yun, which aims to test its autonomous navigation performance and the launching of the unmanned craft,” the report quoted Chen Dake, a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and director of the Southern Marine Science and Engineering Guangdong Laboratory, as saying.

The ship can carry out comprehensive marine survey tasks such as ocean surveying and mapping, ocean observation, sea patrol and partial survey and sampling, the report claimed.

The primary assessments by Indian experts suggest this drone carrier may be operated

remotely and utilised for a variety of tasks, including environmental monitoring, oceanography, maritime security, search and rescue, and more.

Geopolitical analyst Dr Rituraj Mate told *The Pioneer*, “The carrier enables the remote operator to send and receive data. There are many different payloads installed, such as cameras, sensors, and sampling tools. They can also break through ice and work in bad weather. It may be used for long-term monitoring and research projects in addition to short-term missions like search and rescue operations combined with other nautical vessels, such ships or submarines, to expand their range and capabilities. The carrier is like-

ly to induce more confrontations in the countries in the South China Sea region.”

“Such remotely operated drone carriers will bring more confidentiality to the Navies and also decrease human involvement and expenditure enabling that nation to use the same resources in other areas. The chances of the accidents will also decrease,” Dr Mate said.

Introduction of the drone carrier will enhance the PLA Navy’s capacity and capability in a variety of ways, including through increased battlefield awareness, detailed and real-time view of the battlefield with the help of modern sensors and cameras, he added.

This is likely to enhance naval electronic warfare gadgets by regional navies.

Trainee defence analyst at security research firm Kawach, Sai Priya Arukonda said the latest addition to the Chinese PLA Navy will give a straightforward edge in combat and it can restrict access to enemy soldiers, discover and track submarines as well as being able to quickly recognize and track enemy forces.

“The drone carrier will improve the situational awareness for the PLA Navy in the region, allowing them to gather and transmit real-time information about Indian Navy forces and the surrounding areas in IOR. The launch of the drone carrier will propel the Chinese navy to attempt and create anti-access and anti-denial zones for the regional navies,” Arukonda added.

# BJP’s efforts to end rebellion in Karnataka come a cropper

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP’s extensive efforts to mitigate internal differences in its Karnataka unit ahead of Assembly polls this year are failing to yield desired results.

Differences have again come out in the open in the Karnataka BJP with a senior party leader attacking a state minister on the Lingayat reservation issue.

In an indirect swipe at state Cabinet Minister and a Lingayat leader Murugesh Nirani, Karnataka BJP MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal has said he does not need to follow cheap tricks to get a ticket to contest the next state election.

“One pimp minister did a press conference against me in Bijapur that Basangouda will not get a ticket. I want to tell him watch your seat first. Unlike you, I haven’t done cheap tricks. I didn’t blackmail seers. I didn’t pay seers,” Yatnal



said on Friday.

Yatnal is leading an agitation by the Panchamasali Lingayats community for higher reservation in government jobs and educational institutions. Nirani who was also projecting himself as CM candidate had allegedly asked the government not to grant the reservation demanded by the community. Nirani also belongs to the Panchamasali Lingayats community. Panchamasali Lingayats, a sub-sect of the dominant Veerashaiva-Lingayat community, wants to be included in

category 2A (15 per cent) of OBC reservation. They are currently included under 3B (5 per cent).

The top guns of BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J P Nadda have recently visited Karnataka to give momentum to the saffron campaign in the Southern state.

Shah had even given a green signal to state Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai for cabinet reshuffle to include ‘disgruntled’ leaders including K S Eshwarappa.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, along with his wife, flies a kite celebrating Makar Sankranti, in Ahmedabad on Saturday PTI

# Don’t shoot messenger, Congress tells Govt on Joshimath ‘gag order’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday slammed the Government advisory that asked ISRO and several other State-run organisations and institutes not to interact with the media or share information on social media on the situation in Joshimath without prior approval.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also shared a letter written by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to Indian Space Research Organisation in this regard. “After Joshimath, now reports of cracks in the walls of houses in Karnprayag and Tehri Garhwal are also coming. “Instead of solving the crisis and finding solutions to the problems of people, Government agencies are putting a ban on ISRO report and stopping its officials from interacting with the media. Narendra Modi ji, ‘Do Not Shoot the Messenger,’” Kharge tweeted.

Concerns over land subsidence in Joshimath mounted on Friday as satellite images released by ISRO showed the Himalayan town sank 5.4 cm in 12 days.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh also said, “They make one Constitutional institution attack another. Now, National Disaster Management



Authority tells ISRO to shut up.” “But how can satellite images lie? This is New India where only one man knows everything, and will decide who will speak on anything,” he said in a veiled attack at the prime minister.

The NDMA and the Uttarakhand government have asked over a dozen state-run organisations and institutes and their experts not to make any unauthorised comment or statement on the situation in Joshimath.

In its communication to the heads of these organisations and institutes, the NDMA said people associated with the ground subsidence in Joshimath, where cracks have developed in buildings and other infrastructure.

Official sources said the purpose of the advisory is not to deny information to the media but to avoid confusion because so many institutions are involved in the process and they are giving their own interpretation of the situation.

# Tributes to ex-servicemen on Armed Forces Veterans Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and several other politicians on Saturday paid tributes to ex-servicemen on the occasion of the seventh Armed Forces Veterans’ Day and assured all possible help and facilities to them.

The Day was celebrated at nine different locations across the country including the national capital with Rajnath presiding over the main function in Dehradun. The Veteran’ Day is celebrated on January 14 every year, as on this day in 1953, the First Indian Commander-in-Chief of Indian Army Field Marshal KM Cariappa, who led the Indian forces to victory in the 1947 war, formally retired from the Service.

The day is dedicated to the esteemed veterans of the country. The Veterans’ Day is being commemorated since 2017 to reaffirm the camaraderie between the retired, the serving and the nation and remember and honour the heroes who made the supreme sacrifice and selflessly served the nation.

Addressing a huge rally of veterans as part of the event, Rajnath expressed gratitude to the soldiers who have protected the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country with unmatched courage and sacrifice and paid rich tributes to those who laid down their



lives in the line of duty. He commended the serving as well as retired Armed Forces personnel who ensure the country’s national security.

Rajnath made special mention of the freedom fighters, soldiers and veterans of Uttarakhand, who have displayed indomitable courage and dedication to safeguard national interests.

Rajnath was of the view that pension, medical and other facilities being provided to the veterans are just a small token of the country’s respect towards the sacrifices and commitment they have made, assuring them of the Government’s full support to their welfare. “Every soldier of today is a respected veteran of tomorrow. It is our duty to ensure their well-being

and satisfaction,” he said.

Reiterating the Government’s commitment to ensure the welfare of the ex-servicemen, the defence minister shed light on the launch of a Defence Pension Grievance Redressal portal for speedy resolution of complaints of the ex-servicemen.

He also mentioned the ‘Maa Bharati ke Sapoot’ website, launched in October last year, stating that people can contribute to the Armed Forces Battle Casualties Welfare Fund through the portal. He termed it as an important medium to connect the citizens with the welfare efforts of ex-servicemen. He concluded his address by thanking all veterans and serving Armed Forces personnel

for their dedication and valour.

Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Pushkar Singh Dhami and Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) General Anil Chauhan also attended the rally. Also present were GOC-in-C, Central Command Lt Gen Yogendra Dimri; GOC, Uttar Bharat Area Lt Gen JP Mathew; GOC, Uttarakhand Sub Area, Maj Gen Sanjeev Khatri; President, Uttarakhand Ex-Servicemen League Maj Gen Mohan Lal Aswal (Retd) and Uttarakhand Sainik Kalyan Mantri Shri Ganesh Joshi and a number of veterans.

The Veterans’ Day event at Chennai was presided over by Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt. He interacted with a number of veterans present on the occasion.

# 4 JMB ultras get 7-yr jail for terror activities



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operatives, hailing from West Bengal, were sentenced to seven-year rigorous imprisonment and slapped with fine by a special court in Karnataka for terror activities, a spokesperson of the NIA said on Saturday.

Kador Kazi alias “Mijanur Rahaman”, Mustafizur Rahman alias “Tuhin”, Adil Sheikh alias “Asadullah” and Abdul Karim alias “Korim Sk” were convicted under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Arms Act, the spokesperson said.

The case is related to the seizure of huge quantities of electrical and electronic items, tools, chemical apparatus and containers used for fabrication of bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from a JMB hideout in Bengaluru.

It was initially registered by Karnataka Police at Soladevanahalli police station on July 7, 2019 and was re-registered by the National

Investigation Agency (NIA) on July 29 the same year, the spokesperson said.

Further, four cases related to dacoities committed by them in 2018 under the jurisdiction of Atibele police station were re-registered by the NIA on April 1, 2020.

After completion of investigations, a consolidated charge sheet was filed in all these dacoity cases. For trial, these four cases were clubbed into one, the NIA said.

“Investigations have established that the accused had raised funds by committing dacoities at various places in Bengaluru with the intention of furthering the activities of JMB in India and had also collected explosive materials and test-fired a rocket launcher for commission of terror acts.

“The proceeds of crime - dacoity - in the form of gold was sold by the accused for raising funds for carrying out terror activities,” the spokesperson said. He said a total of 11 accused have been arrested and charge-sheeted so far and three of them had been convicted in the case earlier.

# ‘Household chemicals raise risk of vitiligo’

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you are baffled at the sudden eruption of the white patches, also known as vitiligo, on parts of your body then chances are that they may be due to exposure to chemicals in an occupational or household setting, with exposure to phenols and catechols raising the risk by four times.

So far, anxiety, sunburn, hormones, and cytotoxic chemical factors have been said to be the contributing reasons for vitiligo, an autoimmune disorder that leads to the loss of skin pigmentation.

A team of researchers has said that the widespread application of phenols as an ingredient in commercial products for households such as tooth-

paste, hair dye, and others, can be a contributor. They added that oxidative stress may also contribute.

The study’s investigators cite previous evidence indicating that melanocytotoxic chemicals, such as catechol and phenolic derivatives, may lead to vitiligo. Therefore, they identified a need to explore the association further.

The study, led by Nehla Rmadi, from the Occupational Department and Health Disease Hedi Chaker University Hospital at the University of Sfax in Tunisia, is published in the Libyan Journal of Medicine.

“To our knowledge, few epidemiological studies are available on vitiligo induction factors and particularly on the



role of exposure to chemicals in the onset of the disease has been found,” Rmadi and colleagues said. “Therefore, there is a need to investigate the rela-

tionship between vitiligo and chemical exposures in order to understand this mysterious disease.”

The investigators used a case-control study of patients with diagnoses of vitiligo from July to December 2019.

Those participants in the control arm were matched by age, gender, and professional status to those in the vitiligo arm.

The participants’ data collected by the investigators included environmental chemical exposure including a residence with a nearby polluted area, having a household chemical history, colored toothpaste usage, hair dye usage, cosmetics, deodorants, scented oils.

Medical information such as family vitiligo history and

repeated antibiotic use and information on occupational chemical exposure prior to vitiligo such as positions with exposure occupied for over half a year, and exposure to chemicals like MonoBenzyl Ether of Hydroquinone (MBEH), phenol or catechol derivatives, disinfectants, detergents, and insecticides or pesticides were studied.

The results indicated that household chemical use, colored toothpaste and a residence close to pollution were risk factors for vitiligo.

The researchers also added that patients with a repeated history of antibiotic use showed a 5.1 fold increase in vitiligo risk and that occupational chemical exposures to phenol/catechol derivatives were

found to be significantly associated.

“Our results suggest that chemical factors play a key role in the occurrence of vitiligo,” they said, adding that, “Therefore, prevention of this dermatosis requires the identification of exposure to the incriminated chemicals in any patient followed for vitiligo.”

Somewhere between half a percent and 2 per cent of people worldwide have vitiligo, which is now understood to be an autoimmune disorder, where the immune system attacks the cells in the skin that provide pigment. The condition can be particularly distressing for people with naturally dark skin because the light blotches stand out even more.

# CSC plans credit card for poor

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Common Services Centres (CSC), under the Ministry of Electronics & IT, has partnered with Patanjali and Punjab National Bank (PNB) to market a unique credit card offering for low-income groups across the country.

Two variants of the Patanjali PNB Rupay Credit Card — Platinum and Select — would be available to individuals with a monthly income as low as Rs 20,000 or self-employed with an ITR of Rs 2.50 lakh. The Platinum card has a limit of Rs. 25,000 to 5 lakh, while the Select card has a limit of Rs. 50,000 to 10

lakh.

A unique feature of this indigenous Rupay credit card is the low rate of interest on EMI conversion and that too after 30-45 days of card usage. Usually, credit card companies charge a heavy interest for outstanding payments, which is approximately 36 percent. Here it is only 12 percent.

Apart from these benefits, users of this card can also avail discount on Patanjali medicines and wellness products at 5 percent. Insurance coverage of Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. 10 lakh is available on both the cards. Moreover, there is no joining fee for Platinum card while Rs 500 is charged for the Select card.



# US nears cooperation deals with Pacific Island nations



AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is nearing deals with two Pacific Island nations to extend ties that are considered critical

to maintaining balance in the U.S.-China rivalry for influence in a region where the Chinese are rapidly expanding their economic, diplomatic and military clout. This week, the U.S.

signed memorandums of understanding with the Marshall Islands and Palau that administration officials hope will pave the way for the quick completion of broader

agreements that will govern the islands' relations with Washington for the next two decades. Those ties grant the U.S. unique military and other security rights on the islands in return for substantial aid.

The administration believes that extending those so-called "Compacts of Free Association" agreements will be key to efforts to retain American power and blunt Chinese assertiveness throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The memorandums signed this week lay out the amounts of money that the federal government will provide to the Marshall Islands and Palau if their compacts are successfully renegotiated. Negotiations on a similar memorandum with a third compact country, Micronesia, are ongoing.

The current 20-year compacts with the Marshall Islands and Micronesia expire this

year; the current compact with Palau expires in 2024 but administration officials said they believe all three can be renewed and signed by mid- to late-spring.

Officials would not discuss specifics of the amounts of money involved because the deals aren't yet legally binding and must still be reviewed and approved by Congress as part of the budget process.

A Micronesian news outlet, Marianas Variety, reported Thursday that the Marshall Islands will receive \$700 million over four years under the memorandum that it signed. But that amount would cover only one-fifth of a 20-year compact extension and does not include the amount Palau would receive.

Joe Yun, Biden's special presidential envoy for compact negotiations, said the amounts will be far greater than what the

U.S. had provided in the past. Islanders have long complained that the previous compacts they signed did not adequately address their needs or long-term environmental and health issues caused by U.S. nuclear testing in the 1950s and '60s. Lawmakers had expressed concern dating back to 2021 that the administration was not giving enough attention to the matter.

Yun, who signed the memorandums with representatives of the Marshalls and Palau on Tuesday and Wednesday in Los Angeles, said the Marshall Islands, in particular, would be compensated for such damage and would be given control over how that money is spent.

Yun said it would pay "nuclear-affected communities" health, welfare and development" and also noted that the U.S. had committed to building a new hospital as well as a

museum in the Marshalls to preserve the memory and legacy of their role, notably in the Pacific theater during WWII.

This week's signings clear the way for individual federal agencies - including the Postal Service, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Weather Service - to negotiate their own agreements with the Marshalls and Palau, which will then become part of the broader compacts.

Along with the federal money, those agencies provide their services to the islands. In return, the U.S. is given unique military and national security basing rights and privileges in an area where China is increasingly flexing its muscles. Yun said China did not come up specifically in the negotiations but it was a major element in all sides' discussions. "The threat

from China is unstated but there is no question that China is a factor," Yun said. Not only does China have a large and growing economic presence in the region, but the Marshall Islands and Palau both recognize Taiwan diplomatically. "They are coming under Chinese pressure," he said.

China has steadily poached allies from Taiwan in the Pacific, including Kiribati and the Solomon Islands in 2019. The U.S. announced plans last year to reopen an embassy in the Solomon Islands, which has signed a security agreement with China.

Since World War II, the U.S. has treated the Marshall Islands, along with Micronesia and Palau, much like territories. On the Marshall Islands, the U.S. has developed military, intelligence and aerospace facilities in a region where China is particularly active.

## Brazil's Supreme Court agrees to probe Bolsonaro for vandalism

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

A Brazilian Supreme Court justice on Friday authorized including former president Jair Bolsonaro in its investigation of who incited the Jan. 8 riot in the nation's capital, as part of a broader crackdown to hold responsible parties to account.

According to the text of his ruling, Justice Alexandre de Moraes granted the request from the prosecutor-general's office, which cited a video Bolsonaro posted on Facebook two days after the riot.

The video claimed Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva wasn't voted into office, but rather was chosen by the Supreme Court and Brazil's electoral authority.

Prosecutors in the recently formed group to combat anti-democratic acts argued earlier Friday that, although Bolsonaro posted the video after the riot, its content was sufficient to justify investigating his conduct beforehand. Bolsonaro deleted it the morning after he first posted it.

Otherwise, Bolsonaro has refrained from commenting on the election since his Oct.

30 defeat. He repeatedly stoked doubt about the reliability of the electronic voting system in the run-up to the vote, filed a request afterward to annul millions of ballots cast using the machines and never conceded.

He has taken up residence in an Orlando suburb since leaving Brazil in late December and skipping the Jan. 1 swearing-in of his leftist successor, and some Democratic lawmakers have urged President Joe Biden to cancel his visa.

Following the justice's decision late Friday, Bolsonaro's lawyer Frederick Wassef said in a statement that the former president "vehemently repudiates the acts of vandalism and destruction" from Jan. 8, but blamed supposed "infiltrators" of the protest — something his far-right backers have also claimed.

The statement also said Bolsonaro "never had any relationship or participation with these spontaneous social movements." Brazilian authorities are investigating who enabled Bolsonaro's radical



Protesters, supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro, clash with police during a protest outside the Planalto Palace building in Brasília, Brazil. Other demonstrators stormed congress and the Supreme Court

AP Photo

supporters to storm the Supreme Court, Congress and presidential palace in an attempt to overturn results of the October election. Targets include those who summoned rioters to the capital or paid to transport them, and local security personnel who may have stood aside to let the mayhem occur.

Much of the attention thus far has focused on Anderson Torres, Bolsonaro's former justice minister, who became



the federal district's security chief on Jan. 2, and was in the U.S. On the day of the riot. De Moraes ordered Torres' arrest this week and has opened an investigation into his actions, which he characterised as "neglect and collusion." In his decision, which was made public Friday, de Moraes said that Torres fired subordinates and left the country before the riot, an indication that he was deliberately laying the groundwork for the unrest.

## UK to supply tanks to Ukraine as Russian missiles rock Kyiv

AP ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday promised to provide tanks and artillery systems to Ukraine, amid renewed missile attacks by Moscow targeting the Ukrainian capital and other cities.

Sunak's Downing Street office said in a statement that he made the pledge to provide Challenger 2 tanks and other artillery systems after speaking to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday.

It did not say when the tanks were to be delivered or how many. British media has reported that four British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks will be sent to eastern Europe immediately, with eight more to follow shortly after, without citing sources.

Zelenskyy in a tweet Saturday thanked Sunak "for the decisions that will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal to other partners." Ukraine has for months sought to be supplied with heavier tanks, including the U.S. Abrams and the



German Leopard 2 tanks, but Western leaders have been treading carefully. The Czech Republic and Poland have provided Soviet-era T-72 tanks to Ukrainian forces.

Poland has also expressed readiness to provide a company of Leopard tanks, but President Andrzej Duda stressed during his recent visit to the Ukrainian city of Lviv that the move would be possible only as an element in a larger international coalition of tank aid to Kyiv. Earlier this month, France pledged to supply its AMX-10 RC armored

combat vehicles - designated as "light tanks" in French - to Ukraine as well. Sunak's announcement came several hours after a series of explosions rocked Kyiv on Saturday morning.

An infrastructure target was hit in what Ukrainian officials said was a missile attack. Explosions were heard in the Dniprovskiy district, a residential area on the left bank of the Dnieper River, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Klitschko also said that fragments of a missile fell on a non-residential area in the



Holosiivskiy district on the right bank, and a fire briefly broke out in a building there. No casualties have been reported so far. It wasn't immediately clear whether several facilities in Kyiv were targeted or just the one that was reported hit.

## Iran hangs former defence ministry official over spy claim

AP ■ DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Iran said Saturday it executed a former high-ranking defense ministry official and dual Iranian-British national, despite international warnings not to carry out the death sentence. The execution further escalated tensions with the West amid the nationwide anti-government protests shaking the Islamic Republic.

The hanging of Ali Reza Akbari, a close ally of top security official Ali Shamkhani, suggests an ongoing power struggle within Iran's theocracy as it tries to contain the demonstrations over the September death of Mahsa Amini. It also harkened back to the mass purges of the military that immediately followed Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Akbari's hanging drew immediate anger from London, which along with the U.S. and others has sanctioned Iran over the protests and its supplying Russia with the bomb-carrying drones now targeting Ukraine.

"This was a callous and cowardly act, carried out by a barbaric regime with no respect for the human rights of their own people," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly summoned Iran's chargé d'affaires in the United Kingdom and separately warned: "This will not stand unchallenged." Iran similarly summoned the British ambassador after the execution.

Iran's Mizan news agency, associated with the country's judiciary, announced Akbari's hanging without saying when it happened.



In this picture released on Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2008, by Islamic Republic News Agency, IRINA, Ali Reza Akbari speaks in a meeting to unveil the book "National Nuclear Movement" in Tehran, Iran. It had executed Akbari, a dual Iranian-British national who once held a high-ranking position in the country's defense ministry, despite international warnings to halt his death sentence, further escalating tensions with the West amid the nationwide protests now shaking the Islamic Republic (Davoud Hosseini, IRINA via AP)

However, there were rumors he had been executed days earlier. Iran has alleged, without providing evidence, that Akbari served as a source for Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, known popularly as MI6. A lengthy statement issued by Iran's judiciary claimed Akbari received large sums of money, his British citizenship and other help in London for providing information to the intelligence service.

## Taliban ban on female aid workers poses big dilemma for US

AP ■ WASHINGTON

For an idled worker at a Kabul-based aid group, Abaad, that helps abused Afghan women, frightened and often tearful calls are coming in, not only from her clients but also from her female colleagues.

A Dec. 24 order from the Taliban barring aid groups from employing women is paralyzing deliveries that help keep millions of Afghans alive, and threatening humanitarian services countrywide. As another result of the ban, thou-

sands of women who work for such organizations across the war-battered country are facing the loss of income they desperately need to feed their own families.

The prohibition is posing one of the biggest policy challenges over Afghanistan for the United States and other countries since the U.S. Military withdrawal in August 2021 opened the door for the Taliban takeover. Those nations face the difficult task of crafting an international response that neither further worsens the plight of millions of aid-dependent



Afghans nor caves in to the Taliban's crackdown on women. The United Nations estimates that 85% of non-governmental aid organizations in Afghanistan have partially or fully shut down operations because of ban, which is the Taliban's latest step to drive women from public life.



A Taliban fighter stands guard as people wait to receive food rations distributed by a South Korean humanitarian aid group, in Kabul, Afghanistan

AP Photo

## Violence soars in Mali in year after Russians arrive

**Dakar:** Alou Diallo says he was drinking tea with his family one morning last month when groups of "white soldiers" invaded his village in central Mali, setting fire to houses and gunning down people suspected of being Islamic extremists. He scrambled to safety in the bush, but his son was shot and wounded while fleeing, then was finished off as he lay on the ground. "I watched my

16-year-old son die," Diallo told The Associated Press in Mali's capital, Bamako, where he lives in a makeshift camp for displaced people.

As he recounted that awful Saturday in his village of Bamguel, the 47-year-old former cattle breeder made no attempt to hide anger toward troops, which he believed to be Russian mercenaries, who turned his world upside down.

## Egypt says ancient royal tomb unearthed in Luxor

**Cairo:** Archaeologists unearthed an ancient tomb in the southern Egyptian city of Luxor, known for its treasures dating back to the Pharaohs, authorities said Saturday.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said an Egyptian-British mission found the royal tomb in an ancient site on the west bank of the Nile



River in Luxor, 650 kilometers (400 miles) south of the capital of Cairo. He said initial

examinations show that the tomb apparently belongs to the 18th Dynasty of Pharaonic Egypt, which spanned from 1550 B.C. To 1292 B.C. The tomb is latest in a series of ancient discoveries Egypt has touted in recent years in hopes of attracting more tourists. Egypt has been trying to revive its tourism sector, a major source of foreign currency. **AP**

## Pak parliament bans entry of some social media influencers

**Islamabad:** Pakistan's parliament banned the entry of social media influencers after in an incident when some youtubers allegedly misbehaved with the lawmakers.

According to a statement issued by the National Assembly Secretariat on Friday, it "has banned entry of unauthorised social media influencers, Youtubers, Tiktokers in the precincts of Parliament House." This decision was taken in the context of an incident of misbehavior with par-

liamentarians by some unauthorised youtubers/social media influencers at Gate No.1 of the Parliament House on December 23 last year.

These youtubers entered in the precincts of the Parliament House without authorised entry, according to the statement. The same incident was also conveyed to the President Press Reporters' Association (PRA) to seek its stance and it formally conveyed that it is only responsible for its members. **PTI**

## Thousands protest in Germany against coal mine expansion

AP ■ ERKELENZ (GERMANY)

Thousands of people demonstrated in persistent rain on Saturday to protest the clearance and demolition of a village in western Germany that is due to make way for the expansion of a coal mine.

Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg joined the demonstrators as they protested the clearance of Luetzerath, walking through the nearby village of Keyenberg and past muddy fields. Protesters chanted "Every vil-



lage stays" and "You are not alone." On the sidelines of the protest, police said people broke through their barriers and some got into the Garzweiler coal mine. As the demonstration took place, the clearance of Luetzerath was well advanced.

The operation to evict climate activists holed up in the village kicked off on Wednesday morning. In the first three days of the operation, police said that about 470 people had left the site, 320 of them voluntarily. They said on

Friday afternoon that there were no longer any activists in the remaining buildings or on their roofs.

German news agency dpa reported that they said Saturday they still had to tackle 15 "structures" such as tree houses and were trying to get into a tunnel in which two people were believed to be holed up.

Work to demolish buildings was already underway. Luetzerath has become a cause celebre for critics of Germany's climate efforts.

Environmentalists say bulldozing the village to expand the Garzweiler mine would result in huge amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. The government and utility company RWE argue the coal is needed to ensure Germany's energy security.

The regional and national governments, both of which include the environmentalist Green party, reached a deal with RWE last year allowing it to destroy the abandoned village in return for ending coal use by 2030, rather than 2038.



# Bank deposits growth trails credit growth, says report

PIANS ■ CHENNAI

The growth in deposits in Indian banks is in single digits and trails the credit growth, states a report by BNP Paribas Securities.

In a research report, BNP Paribas said that the deposits are generally weak and CASA (current account, savings account) weaker.

"With system deposit growth in high single digits y-y, materially trailing credit growth, we expect most deposit growth within our coverage universe to have come from term deposits rather than CASA," BNP Paribas said.

According to the report, the banks with high-CASA took material term deposit

rate hikes in the previous quarter -- although trailing less prominent names materially -- and should see greater mobilisation of term deposits in 3QFY23.

"We expect a small quarter-on-quarter (q-q) rise in margins for most banks as loan repricing and asset mix shift more than offset the cost of fund increases," the report said.

BNP Paribas expects the stellar performance on credit costs to continue for the sector as asset quality seems to be sustaining, as per management commentary of most banks.

As to the credit trends, BNP Paribas said in the early part of FY23, growth was led by strength in low-touch, urban, data-rich, white collar retail product segments such as



mortgages, personal loans, credit cards and prime corporate loans.

By 2QFY23, a shift was visible as higher-touch segments such as commercial vehicles, small medium enterprises and rural started to report a growth pickup.

"We expect this trend to have gathered more steam in 3QFY23 as banks' confidence in these product segments increased due to encouraging macroeconomic data despite reasonably tight monetary and liquidity conditions," the report notes.

# First revision in performance bank guarantee upon grant of coal mine opening permission: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The coal ministry has decided that the first revision in Performance Bank Guarantee (PBG) would be done upon grant of mine opening permission for respective coal mines, a move that is expected to reduce financial burden on the bidders.

A bank guarantee is a kind of guarantee from a lending organisation.

As per the provisions of the tender document, PBG to be submitted for each successfully auctioned coal mine is to be revised annually based on the National Coal Index (NCI) for the month of April in the beginning of the year, the coal ministry said in a statement.

Since NCI has become double since the launch of first commercial coal mine auc-

tions in 2020, several representations were received from the industry for relaxation in PBG revision provisions.

It was requested that unprecedented increase in NCI has led to significant financial burden on successful bidders, whose mines are in the pre-operationalisation stage, impacting fund availability for mine operationalisation activities.

The move is expected to reduce financial burden on the bidders during the process of operationalisation of coal mines and is likely to increase participation from the bidders in the sale of commercial coal blocks.

In lieu of the same and to effectuate this amendment in the ongoing round of auction, the coal ministry has extended the auction bid due date to January 30 from the earlier



January 13.

The government launched the sixth round of commercial

coal mines auction in November and has put on block 141 mines.

# 'Wheat output to increase by 5 mn tonnes this yr'

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The country's wheat output is expected to be 112 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year, almost five million tonnes more than last year's rabi harvesting season, with rise in area under high-yielding varieties contributing to this, said Gyanendra Singh, Director of Karnal-based ICAR-Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR).

Singh ascribed expected increase in wheat production to favourable weather conditions, increase in acreage and rise in area under high-yielding crop varieties.

"We are having a good winter. Planting has been done timely. Everything as of now is very good," said Singh when asked about wheat crop sown.

On area under wheat cultivation in the country, Singh said area under the winter crop this season was around 33 million hectares, which was expected to be up by 1.5 mil-

lion hectares over last year.

Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan are among key growing areas for the wheat crop in the country.

"I am expecting 112 million tonnes of wheat crop. It will be 5 million tonne more than last year. There are three reasons for expected increase in wheat output. The area has increased slightly, favourable weather and thirdly, the area under new varieties has increased," he said.

The high-yielding varieties include DBW 187, DBW 303, DBW 222 and HD 3226, he said, adding that these varieties are sown mostly in Haryana, Punjab, west UP and Rajasthan.

"These varieties are also recommended for eastern UP, Bihar and two of them are also recommended for Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. DBW 187 and 303 are kind of pan-India varieties and they are recommended for larger areas," he said further.



Farmers were made aware to go for newer varieties and for which seed was also made available. So, the area under newer varieties has increased this time, he added.

"As a result, the older, susceptible varieties, their area goes down," he said.

When asked how much effect on yield these new varieties have, the director of IIWBR said the yield increases by over ten quintals per

hectare with new varieties.

"If farmers are growing old varieties and if they grow new varieties, 10-15 quintals advantage is always there. Because they (new varieties) are climate resilient and they will have the least effect of changing weather," he noted.

Singh said the weather conditions at present are favourable. "Our expectation is that there should be some rain, which is always good at this stage.

"The cold weather conditions help in crop tillering and increase in yield," he said.

He also said that the wheat crop is good in Punjab and Haryana and there has been no incident of yellow rust - a fungal disease.

Fog is also favourable for the crop, Singh said.

The northern region of the country has been witnessing dense fog at many places in the past few days.

# USFDA pulls up Sun Pharma for lapses in Halol plant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The US health regulator has pulled up drug major Sun Pharma for manufacturing lapses, including failure to follow appropriate written procedures designed to prevent microbiological contamination of drug products, at its Gujarat-based plant.

In a warning letter, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) pointed out various lapses at the Halol plant which produces finished pharmaceutical products.

"This warning letter summarises significant violations of Current Good Manufacturing Practice (CGMP) regulations for finished pharmaceuticals... Because your methods, facilities, or controls for manufacturing, processing, packing, or holding do not conform to CGMP, your drug products are adulterated," the USFDA stated.



The health regulator inspected the manufacturing facility from April 26 to May 9, 2022.

A warning letter is issued when the US health regulator finds that a manufacturer has significantly violated its regulations. In the letter to Mumbai-based company, the USFDA pointed out drug firm's failure to establish and follow appropriate written procedures that are designed to prevent microbiological contamination of drug products purporting to be

sterile, and that include validation of all aseptic and sterilisation processes.

"Your firm failed to perform operations within specifically defined areas of adequate size and to have separate or defined areas or such other control systems necessary to prevent contamination or mix-ups in aseptic processing areas," it said.

It further said: "Your ISO 5 cleanroom areas used for aseptic compounding and filling were poorly designed and lacked adequate protection."

# MFIs to play leading role in India's economic growth: Study

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Microfinance institutions, which have acted as a financial support system to low-income households by offering credit access to six crore borrowers in the last few years, will play a leading role in the growth process of India, according to a study.

From February 2017 to June 2022, the MFI sector underwent several transformations in terms of inclusivity and expansion, said the joint study conducted by consultancy major PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the Association of Microfinance Institutions of India.

According to the report, the global market size of the

MFI industry is expected to grow by USD122.46 billion from 2021 to 2026 at a compound annual growth rate of 11.61 per cent.

Moreover, global development agencies and several governments have made concerted efforts to alleviate poverty through micro-credits, it said.

From 2017 onwards, the Indian MFI industry embraced the digital route by using online delivery channels, mobile banking and e-wallets, paving the way for the sector to adopt digitisation at a large scale.

The future course of the industry will be determined by the ability of MFIs to forge partnerships, develop new products and investment channels and leverage technology.

The challenges that the



MFI sector will face are the diverse nature of customer segments such as small farmers, vendors and labourers.

"The consumer behaviour and loan requirements for different customers may require varied levels of services with financial products and digital literacy," the study said.

It also said the dependence

on physical modes of interaction poses a challenge for MFIs to reach last-mile borrowers, which has been evident during the pandemic when group gatherings could not be held.

Only technological integration will be able to assist MFIs in providing services as well as repayment collection processes.

# RattanIndia Enterprises acquires EV maker Revolt Motors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

RattanIndia Enterprises Ltd on Saturday said it has completed the acquisition of Revolt Motors which is into manufacturing of electric vehicles.

Now Revolt Motors has become a 100 per cent subsidiary of RattanIndia Enterprises Ltd, the company said in a statement.

"RattanIndia Enterprises Limited has completed acquisition of 100 per cent shareholding in the electric motorcycles market leader Revolt Motors," the statement said.

Revolt Motors is the highest selling electric bike in the country with its manufacturing facility in Manesar, Haryana.



The EV maker has expanded its footprint pan-India with 30 dealerships spread across the country.

Its flagship model RV400 has been witnessing a robust demand and is by far the most technologically advanced bike in the world, and RattanIndia Enterprises seeks to significantly scale up Revolt's growth and make it the largest EV two wheeler company in the country, RattanIndia Enterprises said.

# Startup VilCart raises USD 18 mn from investors to expand operations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

VilCart, the rural economy-focused technology startup, has raised USD 18 million (Rs 144 crore) from investors to expand operations.

The company raised this amount in a Series A funding round led by Asia Impact SA. Nabventures Fund and Texterity Pvt Ltd also participated in the round, VilCart said in a statement.

With the use of this fund, VilCart aims to expand its operations to the entire South India by 2024.

VilCart, which was established in 2018 by Prasanna Kumar and Amith S Mali, seeks to revolutionise the rural unorganised retail industry



with technology by providing quality products at a competitive price to every rural household with modern supply chain and logistic facilities.

The startup has established numerous private labels to utilise the established supply chain network and provide quality products to the rural population.

Currently, VilCart has reached 85,000 kirana stores in 30,000 villages, covering 29 districts in Karnataka and one each in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

# Customs dept closely monitoring toy imports: CBIC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC on Saturday said the customs department is closely monitoring import of toys and continuously tackling newer modus operandi adopted to circumvent the quality control and safety norms.

The government earlier this week said 18,600 toys have been seized in the last one month from major retail stores, including those of Hamleys and Archies, at airports and malls across India for lack of BIS quality mark and use of fake licences.

In a tweet, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said the customs department is engaged with both BIS and the DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade) to thwart attempts of circumventing the quality control and safety checks.

It said newer modus operandi adopted to circumvent the BIS restrictions by way of imports of parts of toys, staggered import of such parts through different ports, and misdeclaration of toys and their



parts as entirely different items is being "continuously tackled".

"Indian Customs has been closely monitoring and addressing the problem of import of toys which do not meet BIS standards," the CBIC tweeted.

CBIC's comment was in response to a tweet by an individual who questioned how customs clearance was obtained during import of toys which did not have BIS quality mark.

Since January 1, 2021, the government has made it mandatory for toys to conform with safety norms specified by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), a national standard setting body.

The over 18,500 seized toys

over the last one month were both locally manufactured as well as imported. Some of the toys did not have mandatory BIS quality mark, some had fake BIS licence number and some toys had 'origin of other countries'.

The raids were conducted in major retail stores, including those of Hamleys, Archies, WH Smith, Kids Zone and Cococart, located at major airports and malls across the country.

Toys have also been seized from the Archies store at Ghaziabad's Pacific Mall, WH Smith stores at Hyderabad and Delhi airports, Cococart stores at Mumbai and Gujarat airports, and Tiara Toys Zone at Chennai airport, it said.

# Indian Bank expands digital offerings under 'Project WAVE' initiative



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Public sector Indian Bank has stepped up its offerings on its digital transformation initiative 'Project WAVE' with the launch of Kisan Credit Card loans to farmers, the bank said on Saturday.

The city-headquartered bank has rolled out online facility to avail Kisan Credit Card loans upto Rs 1.60 lakh and renew agri-jewel loan upto Rs 4 lakh with a repledging system.

The bank in a statement said it has partnered with auto-major Maruti Suzuki India Ltd to provide digital auto financing lead generation to customers.

Customers applying for foreign remittances can do so through the dedicated portal 'IND Trade NXT'. "The inward foreign remittances will be credited directly into accounts on same day on uploading required documents by the customer," the bank said.

# CAI lowers cotton crop estimate to 330.50 lakh bales for 2022-23 season

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Cotton Association of India (CAI) on Saturday lowered the cotton crop output estimate by 9.25 lakh bales for the 2022-23 season to 330.50 lakh bales as production is expected to decline in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

The total cotton production in the last season is estimated at 307.05 lakh bales, the CAI said in a statement.

The cotton production in the current season that started on October 1, 2022, is expected to decline by 2 lakh bales each in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to 82.50 lakh bales, 13 lakh bales and 22 lakh bales, respectively.

Except for Gujarat, where the output is likely to remain flat, the cotton growing states are expected to witness a decline in production, the CAI added.

The total cotton supply in October-December 2022 is estimated at 116.27 lakh bales, which consists of the arrivals of



80.13 lakh bales, imports of 4.25 lakh bales and the estimated opening stock of 31.89 lakh bales.

The CAI has estimated cotton consumption for October-December 2022 at 65 lakh bales while the export shipments up to December 31, 2022, are estimated at 2 lakh bales.

Stock at the end of December 2022 is estimated at 49.27 lakh bales including 35 lakh bales with textile mills and the remaining 14.27 lakh bales with the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), Maharashtra Federation and others (MNCs, traders, ginners, MCX among others, including cotton sold but not delivered), the CAI

statement added.

The cotton supply till end of the cotton season 2022-23, up to September 30, 2023, is estimated at 374.39 lakh bales.

The total cotton supply consists of the opening stock of 31.89 lakh bales at the beginning of the cotton season on October 1, 2022, crop for the season estimated at 330.50 lakh bales and the imports for the season estimated at 12 lakh bales.

The import estimated by the CAI for the corresponding year 2021-22 was at 14 lakh bales.

The domestic consumption for the season is estimated at 300 lakh bales, while the exports at 30 lakh bales.



# SPAIN CONQUERED, ENGLAND TEST AWAITS INDIA IN MEN’S HOCKEY WC

PTI ■ ROURKELA

A perfect start to their campaign with a dominant win over Spain, notwithstanding, India will face a stern test when they take on an equally impressive England in their second pool match of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup here on Sunday.

India outclassed Spain 2-0 with a near flawless show in their opening Pool D match on Friday at the brand new Birs Munda stadium but England is an equally tough side, if not more.

The home team cannot drop the intensity and quality it showed against Spain as England too are on a high after a 5-0 thrashing of Wales in their opening match.

Egged on by a packed crowd at the 21,000 capacity Birs Munda stadium, India showcased superb attacking hockey in the first two quarters and scored through local hero Amit Rohidas from a penalty corner before Hardik Singh doubled the lead with a brilliant solo effort.

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh and his deputy Rohidas then produced a defensive masterclass — which impressed head

coach Graham Reid.

Harmanpreet and Co. Would look to dish out another strong defensive show against England, who scored at least one goal each in all the four quarters.

"It is good to get the first game. What was pleasing was the defensive effort and we handled the ball very well. There weren't too many people who did not play well. That is what you need to win a World Cup. We need to continue it in the next game," Reid said.

"The boys were able to take the ball out of the goal. We also got in front a lot and that was very important. We were first with the ball and that makes a lot of difference in this sort of game."

Veteran PR Sreejesh and Krishan Bahadur Pathak were also in their elements in front of the Indian goal but their English counterpart Oliver Payne was no less as he thwarted some determined efforts from the Welshmen, especially in the final quarter.

The only weakness of the Indians was penalty corners as they could not directly convert any of the five they secured against Spain.



Harmanpreet, the best player and top scorer of the team in almost every tournament in recent years, had an off day by his high standards, as he missed a penalty stroke besides failing to find the target from penalty corners. He admitted his below-par show after the match, and will be looking to make amends against England.

Not being able to convert penalty corners can cost India dear against a team like England. The Indian players will also

have to be cautious about getting into the referee's book as they had to play the major part of the final quarter without Abhishek, who got a yellow card for a foul.

A win against England is important as that will take India one step closer to the quarterfinals. The hosts will fancy their chances against Wales, the lowest ranked side in the group at 15th, to top the pool, considered a group of death.

England are one rung above India at fifth in world rankings

and there is not much to differentiate between the two sides in the past year and historically also. Last year, the two sides played three matches against each other with their last game, played at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, ending in a 4-4 draw. They played out a 3-3 draw in the first leg of FIH Pro League before India won 4-3 in the second, both games played in April.

Nick Bandurak, who was the top scorer in the 2002 CWG

with 11 goals, was on target against Wales, as was Phil Roper who was another prolific player in Birmingham. England scored three field goals, the third from Nicholas Park while Liam Ansell struck twice from penalty corners. Historically, India had won 10 matches as against seven by England while four games ended in draws.

Spain will play Wales in another Pool D match here on Sunday.

**THE SQUADS (FROM):**

**INDIA:** Abhishek, Surender Kumar, Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Jarnmanpreet Singh, Man-deep Singh, Harmanpreet Singh (captain), Lalit Upadhyay, Krishan Pathak, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, PR Sreejesh, Nilakanta Sharma, Shamsher Singh, Varun Kumar, Akashdeep Singh, Amit Rohidas (vice-captain), Vivek Sagar Prasad, Sukhjeet Singh

**ENGLAND:** David Ames (captain), James Albery, Liam Ansell, Nick Bandurak, Will Calnan, David Condon, David Goodfield, Harry Martin, James Mazarello, Nick Park, Ollie Payne, Phil Roper, Scott Rushmere, Liam Sanford, Tom Sorsby, Zach Wallace, Jack Waller, Sam Ward.



## Indian women's hockey team to clash with South Africa

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Indian women's hockey team will travel to South Africa for a seven-match exposure tour, that will also include three games against world number one the Netherlands, from January 16.

The Savita Punia-led side will play four matches against hosts South Africa in Cape Town before locking horns with the Dutch side in three matches from January 23.

"We are grateful to Hockey India for planning good amount of exposure matches for us in the annual calendar, particularly in a year where we are focused on preparing well for the Asian Games and earning direct qualification for the Paris Olympics,"

Savita said.

The Indian captain feels the tour will help the side identify the grey areas and work upon those ahead of this year's Asian Games

"These matches against South Africa and the world no.1 side Netherlands will help us raise the level of our game and also at the same time identify the areas we are lacking in. We are well-prepared for this tour following a good two-week camp in Bangalore.

"The players are high on confidence after a good year of hockey in 2022 and we are looking forward to start the season on a good note," said Savita, who led the team to a historic bronze medal at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games.



## Netherlands, New Zealand make winning start in Pool C

PTI ■ ROURKELA

Three-time champions Netherlands began their campaign in style, outplaying Malaysia 4-0 while New Zealand defeated Chile 3-1 in Pool C matches of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup here on Saturday.

In the opening match of the day, Sam Hiha (11th, 18th minutes) scored two field goals in the opening two quarters, while Sam Lane opened the account for the Black Sticks with another field strike in the ninth minute.

Chile's lone goal came from the stick of Ignacio Contardo in the 49th minute.

In the other match of Pool C, Thijs van Dam scored a field goal in the 19th minute to hand world no.3 Netherlands, who won the title in 1973, 1990 and 1998, the lead before Jip Janssen converted a penalty stroke four minutes later.

Teun Beins (46th) made it 3-0 for the Netherlands by converting a penalty corner a minute into the fourth and final quarter, while Jorrit Croon scored the final goal a minute

before the final hooter.

The Dutchman are atop Pool C on account of better goal difference than New Zealand, who also have three points from the win.

While Netherlands and New Zealand will lock horns in their next pool match on Monday, Malaysia will take on Chile on the same day.

Later in the day, reigning world champions Belgium will be up against Korea, while world no.4 Germany will take on Japan in Pool B matches in Bhubaneswar.

## Belgium thrash Korea 5-0, Germany blank Japan 3-0



PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Holders Belgium thrashed a plucky Korea 5-0 to begin the defence of their World Cup title in style while two-time champions Germany beat reigning Asian Games champions Japan 3-0, here on Saturday.

The Koreans did not allow Belgium to open the scoring till the half time but the World and Olympic champion European side struck two and three goals in the third and fourth quarters respectively to eventually notch

up a convincing win in a Pool B match at the Kalinga stadium.

Five different players scored for world number two Belgium with three strikes from open play. Hendrickx Alexander opened account for Belgium in the first minute of the third quarter before Cosyns Tanguy struck a field goal in the 42nd minute. The Korean resistance broke down after that and Belgium were rampaging in the final quarter with goals from Van Aubel Florent (49th, penalty corner), Dockier Sebastien

(51st, field goal) and De Sloover Arthur (57th, field goal).

In the second Pool B match played at Kalinga stadium, no goal was scored till the half time. Grambusch Mats gave the lead to world number four Germans in the 35th minute through a penalty corner conversion before Ruhr Christopher struck a field goal five minutes later.

Prinz Thies (48th minute) then sealed the issue with a field effort in the final quarter as world number 16 Japan failed to score a goal.



## Satwik-Chirag loses in Malaysia Open semifinals

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Commonwealth Games Champion Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's impressive run ended with a semifinal finish after they went down in three games to China's Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang in the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament here on Saturday. The world number 5 Indian pair put up a brave effort but Liang and Wang, ranked 17th, showed better nerves in the closing stages to register a 21-16 11-21 21-15 win in an hour and four minutes match to reach their maiden super 1000 finals.

For the seventh seeded Indians, it was their third semifinal finish in a Super 1000 tournament. The match expectedly was a close affair as the two pairs looked to outwit each other in the fast-paced rallies. Satwik and Chirag managed to eke out a 11-9 lead at the break after an initial duel.

However, the Chinese duo didn't allow the Indian pair to play their attacking game, using drives and blocks. Soon it was

14-14, before Liang and Wang moved ahead to earn the bragging rights. After the change of ends, the Indians gathered themselves and turned it around as they broke off from 4-4. Satwik and Chirag won 7 of the last 8 points to grab a six-point advantage at the interval. On resumption, the Indians were more alert and made better judgement and picked the right shots to quickly move to 14-5.

Eventually a powerful smash from Satwik got them 12 game points and they sealed it on their fourth attempt to take the match to the decider after Liang went to net. The third game saw the two engage in some fabulous rallies with Chirag taking command of the front court initially.

However, Liang and Wang, the Japan Open champions, soon staged a recovery to lead 8-6. Two booming smashes from Chirag brought India back on level terms but it was the Chinese combination, who had a two-point cushion at the break after Wang produced a superb flick serve.

# Nadal in rut, Djokovic on roll as Australian Open approaches

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic own the two largest collections of Grand Slam trophies in the history of men's tennis. They are their sport's two most prominent active figures; no one else is even close. Both are in their mid-30s; no one knows how much longer they'll be at the top of the game.

For all that the long-time rivals have in common, Nadal and Djokovic could hardly be entering this Australian Open, which begins on Monday (Sunday EST), under more contrasting circumstances.

Nadal, of course, is the defending champion at Melbourne Park — thanks to a comeback from two sets down in last year's final, which he called "one of the most emotional victories of my tennis career" - but he also is mired in about as bad a stretch as he's ever experienced: 0-2 so far in 2023 and having won just one of his past seven matches dating to the end of last season.

Djokovic, of course, is making his return to Australia after being banished a year ago because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19, but he also began this trip with a tuneup title in Adelaide and has won 30 of his past 31 tournament contests dating to the end of last season.

"He's still got it," said Stefanos Tsitsipas, the runner-up to Djokovic at the 2021 French Open and seeded No. 3 in Melbourne. "He can still play."

Asked at a pre-tournament news conference on Saturday whether he

feels vulnerable, Nadal did not try to hide a thing.

"Yeah. Without a doubt," replied the 36-year-old from Spain, whose 2022 was littered with health concerns that included chronic pain in his left foot, damaged rib cartilage and a torn abdominal muscle. "I have been losing more than usual. ... I need to live with it and just fight for the victories."

Looking ahead to his upcoming encounter in Rod Laver Arena against Jack Draper, a fellow left-hander who is a 21-year-old from England ranked 40th, Nadal said: "I think I'm prepared to play well. We'll see Monday if I'm prepared to win."

As for his assessment of Djokovic's form, Nadal offered this: "He ended last year well, and he started this year well."

Sure did. None of which matters to Djokovic as much as another Grand Slam title would. Win what would be a 10th Australian Open championship in two weeks' time, and the 35-year-old from Serbia would increase his haul to 22 majors and pull even with Nadal (both surpassed the 20 for the now-retired Roger Federer).

"I mean, that's why I keep on playing professional tennis, (competitive) tennis, because I want to be the best. I want to win the biggest tournaments in the world. There is no secret about it," Djokovic said three days before he'll open with a matchup in Rod Laver Arena on Tuesday night against the 75th-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena, whose resume contains exactly one match win in Melbourne.

"It doesn't get bigger than this. You



have four Slams that historically have been the biggest events in our sport," Djokovic said.

"It's also one of the biggest reasons why I was really looking forward to come back to Australia: because of my record here."

He's been pleased by the greetings he's received from spectators in Adelaide and Melbourne, where he played an exhibition match at Rod Laver Arena on Friday with Nick Kyrgios - the man Djokovic beat in the Wimbledon final last July.

"I didn't know how that's going to go like, after the events of last year," Djokovic said.

"I'm very grateful for the kind of energy and reception, love and support I got last night."

As for the way other players have greeted him, Djokovic said: "Well, I have not really been asking around: What do you guys think of me coming back here? The ones I spoke to have been really supportive. No one has yet been negative on my return."

Since arriving in Australia, Djokovic has frequently mentioned that he doesn't hold a grudge over being kicked out of the country in 2022 for failing to follow its coronavirus rules - which have since been relaxed - and said Saturday: "Probably, if I'm not able to move on, I wouldn't be here."

He is, though. And while he's been dealing with a tweaked hamstring he picked up in Adelaide, Djokovic looked just fine physically against Kyrgios.



# INDIA MIGHT LOOK AT BOWLING OPTIONS IN DEAD RUBBER

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A series clean sweep in sight, Indian team is unlikely to tinker with its batting line-up but skipper Rohit Sharma could be tempted to look at some of his bowling options during the final ODI against Sri Lanka on Sunday.

Having already sealed the series with contrasting wins — a comfortable one while defending in Guwahati and a hard-fought one while chasing in Kolkata — Rohit's men wouldn't mind a bit more clinical effort against the island nation in last match of the tour.

A 3-0 series win before taking on a better-quality opposition in New Zealand in less than 72 hours time will keep the team in good stead.

Workload management has been the buzz word in Indian cricket over the past couple of years and while it has advantages, there has been distinct pitfalls with players not finding rhythm after being given periodic rests.

That could precisely be the reason why the Indian skipper might just not play Ishan Kishan at the top or Suryakumar Yadav in the middle order in the final game.

All the top five batters, including all-rounder Hardik Pandya will

not mind some more batting time against a decent Sri Lankan attack at the Greenfields Stadium which is known to assist bowlers.

Hence the possible changes could happen in bowling line-up.

With India playing six 50-over games in a space of 14 days — three against Sri Lanka and as many against New Zealand, Mohammed Shami's workload will be of primary concern for the Indian team management.

In the absence of Jasprit Bumrah, Shami is expected to shoulder the responsibility of leading the Indian attack during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Tests, so his workload would need the maximum monitoring.

He is expected to bowl close to 125 to 130 overs across the four Tests, fitness permitting.

Arshdeep Singh, the left-arm seamer, could be tried out for variations as he also needs some game time after getting the rough end of the stick against the Lankans in one of the T20 games.

If the wicket is conducive, Arshdeep could be more than a handful for the Lankan batters with his ability to get ball back into the right handers or straighten it on middle stump channel.

Kuldeep Yadav had once again



got a Player of the match award and while he replaced an injured Yuzvendra Chahal (shoulder niggle), it would be interesting to see what Rohit and head coach Rahul Dravid would do if the right-arm wrist spinner gets fit.

Kuldeep has endured the misfortune of being left out after winning the 'Player of the Match' award in Chattogram Test and in case Chahal is fit, he is still considered as the first choice wrist spinner.

Axar Patel, who has been team's 'go to' man across formats, will be taking a break for a personal commitment during the New Zealand series.

If the team wants to check out Washington Sundar before the series against Black Caps, the third ODI is an ideal platform.

In the batting department, Shubman Gill, who looked the most comfortable on a tricky Eden Gardens pitch before throwing it away, wouldn't like to let his guard down, knowing that Ishan Kishan is presenting himself as a strong contender for the opener's role.

As far as the Sri Lankan team is concerned, the biggest takeaway from 50-over series would be unearthing a quality talent in opener Nuwanidu Fernando, who hit a fifty on debut.



## U19 Indian women's team crush SA to begin on positive note

PTI ■ BENONI

Opener Shweta Sehrawat smashed an unbeaten 92 after skipper Shafali Verma blazed away to a 16-ball 45 as India crushed South Africa by seven wickets to begin their campaign in the inaugural Women's U-19 T20 World Cup on a rousing note here on Saturday.

Set a challenging target of 167 after South Africa opted to bat first, India were off to a blazing start with the opening duo of Shafali and Sehrawat adding 77 runs in just seven overs at Willowmoore Park.

Shafali, who has already played 51 T20Is, 21 ODIs and two Test matches for the senior team at the international level, looked in excellent touch as she toyed with the South African bowlers and put her side on course for a big win.

While Shafali went after the bowlers from the word go, Sehrawat too maintained a very good strike rate throughout her innings, which came off 57 balls and included as many as 20 boundaries.

However, having smashed nine fours and a six in an entertaining stay, Shafali was dismissed by off-spinner Miane Smit at the start of the eighth over. Her strike rate was an incredible 281.25 when she got out.

This was after the Indian captain also shone with the ball, picking up two wickets to put the brakes on the South African scoring rate. Shafali bowled her full quota of four overs and returned with impressive figures of 2/31.

Unperturbed by the departure of Shafali, Sehrawat carried on in same vein and helped her team cross the line with 21 balls to spare. Sehrawat's previous

best was 40 against the same opponents.

Earlier, the South Africans got a flying start with Simone Lourens (61 off 44 balls) and Elandri Janse van Rensburg (23 off 13) putting on 56 runs in only 4 overs.

Left-arm spinner Sonam Yadav gave India their first breakthrough when she had Rensburg caught behind by Richa Ghosh, who is also a senior Indian player.

Shafali, then, got into the act by dismissing her counterpart Oluhle Siyo for duck.

Madison Landsman chipped in with 32 off 17 balls, while Karabo Meso and Miane Smit made brisk 19 and 16, respectively.

However, the home team was pegged back after top-scorer Lourens was run out in the 17th over, a crucial juncture, as they settled for 166 for five.

## Kohli was desperate for captaincy in 2016, reveals Sridhar's new book



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli was desperate for ODI captaincy in 2016 before then head coach Ravi Shastri asked him to respect MS Dhoni's judgement and wait for the mantle to be passed on to him, former fielding coach R Sridhar revealed in his new book.

In his book 'Coaching Beyond: My Days With Indian Cricket Team', co-authored by veteran journalist R Kaushik, Sridhar spoke extensively about communication which he felt was the hallmark of the coaching staff during his time with the Indian team.

"As far as the coaching group is concerned, one of the non-negotiables is being honest about developing a culture where you can look each player in the eye and tell him the truth, no matter how bitter or unpalatable that might be," Sridhar wrote in his book.

On page 42 of the chapter 'Cracking The Communication Code', Sridhar recollected an incident from former Kohli's early days when he was already leading the Test squad but was

captain-in-waiting as far as white ball squad was concerned.

"There was a time in 2016 when Virat was very eager to be the captain of the white-ball team too. He said a few things that showed he was looking for the captaincy," Sridhar narrated.

"One evening, Ravi called him and said, 'Look, Virat, MS gave it (the captaincy) to you in red-ball cricket. You have to respect him. He will give it to you in limited-overs cricket, too, when the time is right. Unless you respect him now, tomorrow when you are the captain, you won't get the respect from your team'," Sridhar said.

According to Sridhar, Shastri in no uncertain terms told Kohli to wait till Dhoni hands it over to him in limited overs cricket.

"Respect him (Dhoni) now, irrespective of what is going on. It will come to you, you don't have to run behind it," Shastri told Kohli.

"To his credit, Virat took the advice on board. Eventually, in a year's time, he got the white-ball captaincy too." Terming Shastri as a "fabulous communicator who talks straight and doesn't mince words," Sridhar also wrote that the former head coach did the proverbial dirty job of informing players when they were dropped.

"He is (was) the one who passes on the tough messages-calls pertaining to being dropped from the XI to the players concerned." The book was published by Rupa.



## Zampa mulling on taking call on red ball career after India tour omission

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A disappointed Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa feels that he might need to look beyond revival of his red ball career after being ignored for the four-Test series in India starting next month.

For next month's India tour, national selection chairman George Bailey and coach Andrew McDonald opted for Queensland leg-spinner Mitch Swepson as their only option.

The other spinners in the side are Ashton Agar, uncapped Todd Murphy and veteran Nathan Lyon. "I'm very disappointed, I would loved to have been on it. I thought with the

way that I've been going in international cricket in particular that this was going to be my opportunity (to play Test cricket)," Zampa was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.au.

"And that was the messaging I got six weeks ago as well that this was going to be very good chance I could potentially be on it but now that I'm not, I'm very flat about it and it's time to just move on from it.

"I was really excited to potentially be on this tour ... and the messaging was that my style of bowling might have been handy over there. But I think potentially last minute that was a change of mind," he added. Zampa said he is yet to

take a call on his Test career as his priority right now is the ODI World Cup in India later this year and next year's T20 World Cup in the US and Caribbean islands.

"I'm not going to close the door completely to red-ball cricket," the 30-year-old said.

"But life is always about balance and I've got a family and these white-ball tours and World Cups that are coming up. So I've got to try and think about what's best for my body and myself and my family.

"It's two years until the next subcontinent tour, that's a long way away and I've got two white-ball World Cups to concentrate on before that."

# Surya, Ishan called for Test series against Australia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Suryakumar Yadav has been added to India's Test team for the upcoming Border-Gavaskar series against Australia with wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan getting his maiden call-up in the longer version.

Prithvi Shaw, who struck a career-best 379 in a Ranji Trophy match against Assam, has been rewarded with a call-up for the T20 International series against New Zealand while KS Bharath replaced KL Rahul in the ODI set-up for the New Zealand tour.

Ravindra Jadeja, who is recuperating from knee surgery, has been included in the Test squad subject to fitness. Jasprit Bumrah hasn't been selected on expected lines as he is far from being match-fit, which is required to play five-day cricket.

Rahul and Axar Patel have been given a break of two weeks during the New Zealand series for "family commitments".

### SURYA'S FORM COULDN'T BE IGNORED

The Chetan Sharma-led new selection committee could not ignore Surya's current form as he got his second call-up in a Test squad. He had earlier been a cover in 2021 at Kanpur during a Test series against New Zealand.

Whether he will get a chance or not in the playing XI can't be predicted but his technique



against spinners on Indian tracks is exemplary. With no Rishabh Pant in the mix, India are missing that X-factor in the middle-order, who can take the game away in one session.

Hence Surya's addition is a welcome move in the 17-member squad for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Surya recently played two Ranji matches for Mumbai, scor-

ing 90 vs Hyderabad and 95 vs Saurashtra in quick time. He has already played 79 first-class games with 5549 runs at an average of nearly 45.

As far as Ishan's selection is concerned, it was more or less a straight forward one as he is a like for like replacement of Pant being a left-hander.

The Indian top-order only has right-handers and even though

Jadeja is now as good as a No. 6 in Test matches, his bowling fitness is yet to be judged.

"KS Bharath is a better keeper but he is nowhere close to Ishan the batter. So it won't be an easy choice against Australia as one needs to play fearless cricket. With Ishan, there won't be any half measures," a senior BCCI source privy to selection matters told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

### WILL SENIORS PLAY A ROUND OF RANJI TROPHY OR DO SIMULATION AT NCA?

The T20 International squad against New Zealand makes it amply clear that Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and KL Rahul are no longer part of the shortest format scheme of things.

It is there to be seen whether Rohit, Virat along with Mohammed Shami, R Ashwin and Jadeja play a round of Ranji Trophy during the two-week period before Australia series or assemble for a camp at the National Cricket Academy doing simulation training.

"Someone like Jadeja, in order to prove his match fitness might need to add overs to show that he can bowl 30-35 overs in an innings. They were playing Bumrah without a domestic game. Hope they don't do that with Jaddu. The policy of playing at least one domestic game should remain mandatory like it was few years back," the source said.

As it was mentioned by PTI, there wouldn't be any official announcement but a gradual phasing out of senior stars. Prithvi was one cricketer, who couldn't be ignored and his game in T20Is is something that the Indian team desperately needs at the top order.

Shubman Gill, for all his talent and consistency, hasn't showed a lot of intent in powerplays during the Sri Lanka series, something for

which his predecessors got a lot of flak. With New Zealand ODIs, it is expected that Ishan will be back in the playing XI as Rahul will be away for his marriage.

Ditto for left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed, who is expected to get some game time in Axar Patel's absence. The Gujarat all-rounder is also supposed to get hitched.

**Squad for the first two Tests vs Australia:** Rohit Sharma (captain), KL Rahul (vice-captain), Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KS Bharat (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), R. Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohd. Shami, Mohd. Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Jaydev Unadkat, Suryakumar Yadav.

**ODI squad vs New Zealand:** Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Ishan Kishan (wk), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, KS Bharat (wk), Hardik Pandya (vice-captain), Washington Sundar, Shahbaz Ahmed, Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Shami, Mohd. Siraj, Umran Malik.

**T20I squad vs New Zealand:** Hardik Pandya (captain), Surya-kumar Yadav (vice-captain), Ishan Kishan (wk), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shubman Gill, Deepak Hooda, Rahul Tripathi, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Umran Malik, Shivam Mavi, Prithvi Shaw, Mukesh Kumar.

## Ishan and Surya understand that they will have to wait: Rathour

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The in-form Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav "understand" that they will have to wait for their chances in the ODI format, India's batting coach Vikram Rathour said on Saturday. Despite their exploits in T20Is in recent times, both the players were not considered for the first two ODIs against Sri Lanka in the ongoing three-match series, leaving the fans and few former players surprised.

"They are not forced (to sit out), I mean, the others are doing good as well. As players they do understand that, and they need to wait for their opportunity, and they are preparing for that, they train hard and whenever that opportunity comes, they do well and hold on to their places," Rathour said.

While Surya is the world's number one batter in T20 batter and enjoying a prolific run in the shortest format, Ishan came into the Sri Lanka series on the back of his ODI double hundred in Bangladesh.

Asked if Ishan can be asked to bat in the middle order, Rathour said, "At the moment, he has been picked as an opener but as a batting unit we are flexible and if there is a need to try somebody like Ishan in the middle order, we might have to. At the moment though, he is being looked at as an opener."

When the discussion turned to Surya, the batting coach said, "He has great potential, he has been in great form, it is great to have him in the reserve, and hopefully, when the time comes, he will take that opportunity and do well for the team. It is great to have such versatile player in the team."



Be happy with being you.  
Love your flaws. Own your  
quirks. And know that you  
are just as perfect as  
anyone else, exactly as  
you are  
— Ariana Grande



# JOSHIMATH THE WAGE OF SIN

The Joshimath town, nestled at an altitude of 1890 metres, has slowly turned into a ghost city after cracks appeared in over 700 houses due to land subsidence, forcing the administration to shift people to safer places and stop all construction work going around the region with immediate effect, writes BISWAJEET BANERJEE

It was May last year when Meera Rawat, a resident of the Lower Bazaar ward of the Joshimath while working in the kitchen suddenly heard a sound as if water was flowing underneath the floor of the house. Startled, Meera called her neighbours. They too confirmed the gurgling sound of flowing water. “That day I had a premonition that something bad would happen in our town of Joshimath. In September, I witnessed a small crack in the floor of the house. In December the crack widened and on December 27 last year we vacated the house,” Meera said.

The fear in her voice was still palpable. She, along with her husband and three children have shifted to her brother’s house in Ukhimath. “It seems to be a cursed town. Badrivishalji is angry with us. Hamein paap ki saza mili hai (we have been punished for our sins),” she told this reporter.

Many other residents of the locality have vacated their houses and shifted to relief camps set up in government buildings. Baby Devi has shifted her two children to her relatives’ house and the couple is staying in a school compound.

“We used our savings to build our house and now we have to stay here ... in a camp. There are no cracks in our house, but there is a threat to our house from a multi-story hotel in our neighborhood that has tilted to one side because of a landslide. Officials say that this hotel building might collapse on our house and so we have been asked to move to this camp,” she said.

There is a sense of despondency in the city, which was the gateway to famous of pilgrimage sites Badrinath and Hemkund Sahib. This is also the entry point to the Valley of Flowers and is home to Auli – the ropeway destination of skiers who come from across the globe to participate in the skiing competition. Many popular Himalayan treks, too, start from the town.

The Joshimath town, nestled at an altitude of 1890 metres, has slowly turned into a ghost city after

cracks appeared in over 700 houses due to land subsidence, forcing the administration to shift people to safer places and stop all construction work going around the region with immediate effect. Last week, a temple collapsed in Singhdhar, triggering panic among the residents. No injury was reported as the temple area was vacated a day earlier.

District Magistrate Himanshu Khurana has sent a detailed report of the Joshimath landslide to the chief minister’s secretary. “A total of 608 buildings in the city have developed cracks. The residents of these buildings have been shifted to the safer areas,” Khurana said.

The government will pay Rs 4,000 per month for six months to those rendered homeless due to the Joshimath landslide.

The official said land subsidence had been going on for more than a year but the problem aggravated over the past fortnight.

Land subsidence refers to the vertical sinking of land in a region. It consists of the earth’s surface moving downwards vertically and involves little or no movement horizontally. Reasons can be both human and natural.

Secretary, Department of Disaster Management, Uttarakhand, Ranjit Sinha, said that the cause of the landslide in Joshimath town was being investigated. “Cracks in houses are a matter of concern. Primarily it seems that because of the faulty drainage system, water has seeped in under the base of the houses which has led to the sinking of houses,” he said.

He said all construction activities related to mega projects like the Chardham all-weather road, Auli ropeways, and the NTPC’s hydel project had been stopped till further orders.

**WHY IT HAPPENED**

Joshimath’s attraction for pilgrims and tourists led to unregulated expansion of the city. According to a study by Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA), the town is located in an

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area prone to landslides and the first instance of subsidence in it was reported way back in the 1976 Mishra Commission report. The commission warned that construction by removing boulders and blasting the hillside would lead to severe environmental damage in the region.

The USDMA study said that the perennial streams, appreciable snow in the upper reaches, and highly weathered gneissic rocks with low cohesive characteristics made the area prone to landslides.

Piyush Rautela, Executive Director of USDMA, said that the area was highly vulnerable to sinking because the town rested on a silty-sandy matrix and schistose rocks were embedded in it. This makes the region susceptible to rain and flooding.

He said folds of June 2013 followed by one in 2021 had an adverse impact on this region. The landslide zone was further weakened when Joshimath recorded 190 mm of rainfall in 24 hours on October 17, 2021.

Hemant Dhyani, environmentalist and member of the Supreme Court-appointed high-powered committee on the Chardham Project, said the government had sanctioned many hydropower projects despite knowing the vulnerability of the region. These projects must be stopped immediately, he said.

**MAN-MADE DISASTER**

Subsidence was reported in Joshimath for the first time in 1975 when it was a small town with a population of around 400 families and around 30 shops – the majority of them kutcha structures built across the main highway connecting the town with the Badrinath. A commission was set up by the then government under the chairmanship of Commissioner of Garhwal MC Mishra to probe the matter. In his report in 1976, Mishra highlighted a serious issue that might endanger life and property. He clarified in his report that Joshimath is situated on the site of an ancient landslide.

The Mishra Committee report highlighted that the town’s geography is the main factor contributing to

Joshimath’s sinking. His report said that the landslide debris, on which the city was built, had a low bearing capacity and could not support a high rate of construction. The report even highlighted that no big construction should be allowed in the area “without any scientific study”.

This report was thrown into the lumber room and the government allowed the construction of hydroelectric projects and the widening of the National Highway, making the slopes more unstable.

The second warning was in 2009 when two villages – Jugju and the Juagwad– started sinking. The villagers complained that this was because of the 171 MW Lata-Tapovan hydroelectric power project. The villagers in December 2013 started protests against the National Thermal Power Corporation project. They said the tunnel of the NTPC passed under the mountain on which the Jugju and the Juagwad villages were situated. The locals complained that their villages were sinking owing to the work on the tunnel and the regular blasts exacerbated the condition.

The villagers then also objected to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report – prepared for getting clearance for the project – saying that it was based on false data.

The construction of the Tapovan-Vishnugad project started in 2006 and today the residents blame this project for the sinking of Joshimath. A tunnel was dug for the hydropower plant under Joshimath town. They say a private company was preferred by the NTPC over the Geological Survey of India, for undertaking geological investigations related to the project. “These investigations failed to take cognizance of the earlier geological investigations carried out in the area and did nothing to establish the depth of overburden all through the tunnel alignment”, a geologist, MPS Bisht, said.

The NTPC has, however, refuted the claim saying the tunnel is being carved using a tunnel boring machine (TRM) and that its construction involves no underground blasting.

On January 5, the company issued a statement: “NTPC is being held responsible for the land subsidence problem in Joshimath. In this regard, it is clarified that the tunnel built by NTPC doesn’t pass under Joshimath. The tunnel is dug by a tunnel boring machine and no blasting is being carried out presently.”

The NTPC project was scheduled to be commissioned in 2012-2013 but was delayed by a decade.

Then there is the Helang bypass, the highway whose construction is underway at the town’s foothill around 13 km away from Joshimath. This bypass is meant to shorten the distance to Badrinath by 30 km. Heavy machines are used to carve out four-lane highways.

Experts advise that all construction and hydroelectric projects in the area be stopped immediately. One of the most important aspects that require investigation and development, is drainage planning. As more and more waste seeps into the soil, loosening it from within, the city is suffering from poor drainage and sewer management. The state government has requested that the Irrigation Department look into the situation and develop a new plan for the drainage system.

As people suffer they have taken to social media to express their anguish. “I see the death of my town. Even God is not happy with us, disaster is waiting to happen,” Sudhakar Sauti, a resident of the region, wrote in his Facebook page.

Sanjay Chauhan wrote an emotional note in Hindi on his FB page titled: “I am Joshimath”.

He wrote: “Today, I am in tears. Landslides have taken away the happiness of my city. A strange emptiness engulfs the city as my people are crying. After spending their lifetime’s hard-earned money in the construction of their homes, today they are living in relief camps. The residents of my city are now apprehensive about their future. I pray to Lord Badrivishal to save this city of mine.”

(The writer of Chief of Bureau of The Pioneer, Lucknow)



### About the authors

ARUN TIWARI is the celebrated pupil of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam and the co-author of his autobiography *Wings of Fire*. He is also the author of *APJ Abdul Kalam: A Life after Dr. Kalam's death*, which is considered the most authentic account of India's advancement in technology.

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# How to manage China's rise: A poser for US

The biggest and the most tantalising feature of the contemporary context after the solution to the Ukraine crisis is how to manage the so-called peaceful rise of China. This happens to be a pertinent poser. Intertwined in the larger matrix of events is the context of the China-led conflict in the treacherous South China Sea and the border dispute with India.

To serve as a topping happens to be the Chinese-American trade war along with the all ranking question of the KMT Regime in Taiwan. The American and Chinese relationship hangs through a thin thread of trade and business traditions which was turned upside down with the policies of President Donald Trump who initiated the much followed paradigm of decoupling the Chinese political, diplomatic and economic juggernaut.

The US-China trade war has become a cold war which is charged by the proud palaver of ideologies which are politically regulated both in Washington and Beijing.

The US commercial entities have clamoured for easing off trade policy with the People's Republic of China but despite promises made by President Joe Biden, the trail of the cold war mentality is writ large over the decoupling initiatives ushered in by former President Donald Trump.

A Carnegie Endowment for Peace report contends, "If the United States wants to preserve its technological and moral authority, it must first deal with economic and political weaknesses at home. Bemoaning China's unfair policies and its authoritarian regime will not solve this problem. Instead, the United States should focus on strengthening its own economic competitiveness, forging internal political cohesion, and working with European and Asian partners to build enduring international institutions."

Thus, the United States of America needs to do a rejig with its own domesticity along with its alliance orientations if a deft management of the peaceful rise of China has to be



Visiting Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, right, walks with Chinese President Xi Jinping after reviewing an honor guard during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Jan 4, 2023. Marcos expressed willingness to revive failed negotiations for joint oil exploration with China in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart

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initiated. President Barack Obama largely realised this flip side to the Mount Sinai nationalism argument of the American Dreamers and initiated a rethink on arriving at mechanics and instrumentalities of managing a Chinese geopolitical and geo-economic ascent. As has been observed, decoupling ethics have not been very successful, though nations such as India too attempted to counter the hegemonic and expansionist designs and legerdemain of the Chinese surreptitious ascent.

When we set about the task of looking into and delving inside the casket of the Sino-US rivalry and cut-throat competition, the theme of how Europe deals with the entire gamut of the Chinese invest-

ments and trade corpus can serve as a beacon in the right direction with an astute focus.

The Europeans are much more closely intertwined with the Chinese economics and have only a healthy rivalry to look into as a concurrent development which is more premised upon the nuances of mutual benefit unlike the raw nature of the testy and great power politics dominated tryst and transactions between Beijing and Washington.

Thus, the relationships and transactions which China has with Europe are much more manageable in nature sans a clash of ideologies with a lesser intrigue fanned by great power politics. On the other hand, the Chinese and the American relationship are marred by an ideological clash

and with the Ukrainian crisis unleashing its fangs on the larger screen of world politics, the Western and the American standpoint changes.

With Putin's special defence operations unleashing fire and brimstone, the inexorable annihilation in the context of collateral damage in the Ukrainian heartland poses a new poser. As China and the Kremlin have been allied to each other over a litany of issues and the energy theme serving as an adhesive between the two nations, the Chinese have stopped short of publicly decrying the Russian military operations in Ukraine.

Beijing contends that it's on the size of peace in the Ukraine war and China has, Politico reports, "After initially stating it supported Moscow's 'sover-

eignty and security' last June, China President Xi Jinping recently warned his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin not to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine during an exchange with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, then on a state visit to China." Xi also asked Germany and Europe to play an important part in calling for peace and facilitating negotiations.

In September, Putin himself acknowledged that Beijing had expressed "questions" and "concerns" over the war in Ukraine following his meeting with Xi during a multilateral summit in Uzbekistan. Thus, Beijing has raised moral scruples over the nuclear sabre rattling by Putin but its reservations about Russia crossing the Rubicon of the United Nations Charter and its atten-

dant principles and purposes have been aired bilaterally and not publicly as done by some of the nations in the larger rigmarole of the international system.

No one can see away the suspicions serenading over the Chinese standpoint over Ukraine, but New Delhi did come up with a surprise wherein, the Indians charted out a deft tightrope walk with both the Kremlin and White House when they refused to side with the Russians and the propagandised threat of the rise of NATO but instead continued to import energy supplies from Kremlin's oil and natural gas pumps despite the American and European sanctions.

Thus, India played smarter than China but China too had its diplomatic hands full when

they seemingly sided with the Kremlin interspersed with inane and weak grunts about the massive carnage being delivered in the heart of Ukraine.

If an NDTV report has to be believed in all its entirety, "From China blaming NATO's expansion for Russia's invasion of Ukraine to blaming Ukraine's desire to join NATO for endangering Russian security or even condemning anti-Russia sanctions imposed upon the outbreak of the war, Beijing's intentions are only to threaten the US amid the ongoing power conflict."

Thus, Beijing has arrived at a new instrument of attrition and propaganda with which to beat the West and the White House with. The expansionism of a US inspired NATO expansion along with the alleged brittle nature of liberal democracy once again harping over staid ideological positioning has become a pet peeve as far as the Chinese foreign policy is concerned vis-a-vis Ukraine and Russia, is concerned.

The USA buoyed up with the buttressing of the American Dream is pitted against the Chinese novae might, influence and pelf. Still, what needs to be underlined and emphasised upon, is, the larger idiom that the Chinese surge is an old story and an amalgam of Chinese containment and sustainability of an alert relationship should be what the Doctor ordered for the day.

The US has realised that the signboards of "Beware China" are the order of the day, but, the management of China is a more significant diplomatic exercise. One may disdainfully acquiesce to the hard ball reality that the Chinese, are, here to stay but the world system, including the US can take heart from the fact that the pandemic induced strife in China along with the excesses of a scheming Xi Jinping, can, act as utilisable factors which can help the comity of liberal democratic states, unravel the labyrinth of Beijing.

(The writer teaches at International Relations and International Organisations, IIPA, New Delhi)



MANAN DWIVEDI

## PERSPECTIVE

# Classified records at home dent Biden's image

**Biden seemingly ignored or forgot about a cardinal rule in politics: Check your closet for skeletons before you complain about someone else's. His public criticisms about Trump's "irresponsible" handling of classified documents, however different the circumstances, are now coming back to haunt him.**

US President Joe Biden offered himself to Americans as a president they wouldn't have to think about after the tumult of his predecessor. But an excruciating week of awkward disclosures and the appointment of a special counsel to investigate classified records found at his Delaware home and a former office dating to his time as vice president is beginning to strain his claim to competence.

The surprise revelations that on three different occasions, Biden's lawyers found improperly stored classified documents and official records evoked the turmoil surrounding Donald Trump's presidency, a four-year ruckus from which Biden has tried to move the country past.

It's an embarrassment to Biden, and the selection of a special counsel to investigate potential criminal wrongdoing in the matter exposes the president to a new, self-inflicted risk.

Further, it complicates the Justice Department's calculus about whether to bring charges against Trump over his handling of classified material, hands fresh ammunition to newly empowered House Republicans eager to launch investigations and undercuts a central plank of Biden's pitch to voters just as he looks to launch a reelection bid in the coming months.

"It just won't be so exhausting," former President Barack Obama had promised about a Biden presidency in the closing

days of the 2020 campaign, adding that voters are "not going to have to think about the crazy things ... and that is worth a lot."

The Biden case is markedly different from Trump's mishandling of classified documents and official records - not least because Biden's team voluntarily turned them over to federal officials when they were discovered. Still, it has caused private frustration among Biden allies and some advisers because the president and his team, as billed, were supposed to be better than this.

The current White House explanation, offered by lawyer Richard Sauber, is that the special counsel's enquiry "will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced" - a "mistake" with the nation's secrets.

Biden seemingly ignored or forgot about a cardinal rule in politics: Check your closet for skeletons before you complain about someone else's. His public criticisms about Trump's "irresponsible" handling of classified documents, however different the circumstances, are now coming back to haunt him.

Biden allies say the packing up of his vice presidential office happened swiftly. Biden aimed to run through the tape on his eight years alongside Obama even as aides worked to close down his office before Trump's inauguration at noon on January 20, 2017.

But that explanation, said Richard Painter, the top ethics



official in the George W Bush administration, suggests behaviour that was "incredibly careless and really quite shocking."

Painter said that while Biden probably would avoid the criminal issues looming over Trump because there is so far no sense that Biden intentionally mishandled classified records, it still merited investigation.

"You never just pack stuff up and cart it out of there,"

Painter said. He said aides and lawyers are supposed to carefully sift through what are official records that are property of the National Archives and personal records that may be removed. "To say nothing of classified documents which have these distinctive markings on them," Painter said. "It's still very worrisome. It's a serious national security breach."

Beyond all that, the piecemeal way that word of the dis-

coveries became public - more than two months after the first batch of classified documents had been found at the Penn Biden Center in Washington - has drawn bewilderment from crisis management experts.

"The White House can't let itself be seen as hiding information or be bled to death by investigators' or others' leaks," said Adam Goldberg, who served as special associate counsel to President Bill

Clinton from 1996-1999.

It wasn't until Monday that the White House confirmed that classified documents had been found at Biden's former office on November 2, days before the midterm elections. Even then, that acknowledgement came only in response to news inquiries.

Not until Thursday did Biden lawyers acknowledge the December 20 discovery of documents in the garage of

Biden's house in Wilmington, Delaware, and inform the Justice Department that another classified record had been found the night before in Biden's home library.

"If there's any further bad news out there, they better be the ones to put it out and put it out all at once," Goldberg said.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday that Americans can "assume" there are no more classified documents or government records improperly stored after Biden's personal lawyers conducted a final search that concluded on Wednesday evening.

She repeatedly deflected questions about the White House's public disclosures, insisting the president's team was handling the matter the "right way" by deferring to the Justice Department.

If Biden's White House needs to get its messaging back on track after a week of missteps and unforced errors, Trump's issues go well beyond mere competence.

"On the political front, assuming the White House gets its communications right, I'm not worried about any political fallout," said Goldberg. "With Trump, competency hasn't been the issue, intentional misconduct has been. While Republicans will try to muddy this up, there's just such a big difference between Biden discovering and disclosing these on his own and Trump's obstruction and lying."

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