

OPINION 6
GENDER IS A SOCIAL
CONSTRUCT**WORLD 8**
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NEEDED FOR UNITY: LANKAN PREZ**MONEY 10**
LALIT MODI NAMES SON AS
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JADEJA TO
PLAY IN RANJI
11 SPORT68 killed in Nepal
ATR plane crash4 of 5 Indians killed
in air mishap hailed
from UP; Modi, Yogi
mourn loss of livesPNS/AGENCIES ■ KATHMANDU/
LUCKNOW/ NEW DELHI

At least 68 people were killed when Nepal's Yeti Airlines' passenger plane with 72 people onboard, including five Indians, crashed into a river gorge while landing at the newly-opened airport in central Nepal's resort city of Pokhara on Sunday, officials said.

The airline, which connects different destinations in Nepal, operates only ATR 72-500s. Each 70-seater aircraft is a twin-engine turboprop powered by two Pratt & Whitney PW127 engines and are equipped with Hamilton Sundstrand composite blade propellers, according to its website.

Flight tracking website Flightradar24 said the aircraft involved in the crash on Sunday is a 15-year old ATR 72-500 with registration number 9N-ANC and serial number 754. This aircraft was equipped with an old transponder with unreliable data. "We are downloading high resolu-



tion data and verifying the data quality," it said.

Four of the five Indians killed in a plane crash in Nepal on Sunday hailed from Ghazipur district in Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

The crash saw condolences pouring in from different quarters. Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has expressed grief over the air crash and has ordered an inquiry into the

incident.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he was pained by the tragic air crash.

"Pained by the tragic air crash in Nepal in which precious lives have been lost, including Indian nationals. In this hour of grief, my thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved families," Modi said in a tweet and tagged Nepalese Prime Minister 'Prachanda'.

*Continued on Page 2*16 parties give thumbs
down to remote votingDay before meet with
ECI, Opp bloc opposes
proposal on Remote
Voting Machines

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day before the all-party meeting convened by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Remote Voting Machines (RVMs), at least 16 political parties from the Opposition bloc led by the Congress on Sunday opposed the proposal to introduce them.

The Congress on Sunday held a meeting of the Opposition parties including the Janata Dal(U), Shiv Sena, National Conference, CPI-M, JMM, RJD, PDP, VCK, and RUM.

The NCP and SP did not turn up for the meeting, however, Congress leader Digvijaya Singh claimed both

parties have conveyed a similar stand. Independent MP Kapil Sibal also joined the meeting.

"While unanimously opposing the proposal of Remote Voting Machine the parties mentioned that the proposal by the ECI is not concrete. There are huge political anomalies and problems in the proposal. The definition of migrant labour and the number of migrant labourers are all not very clear. We have unanimously made up our minds to oppose the proposal of RVM," said Singh briefing the media after the meeting.

Singh said, "We are extremely grateful to all the political parties who have responded to our requests to meet and discuss the proposal of the ECI on the remote voting machine".

"We have been asked to give our reply by January 31, so we have decided to meet again on January 25 to send our reply jointly or separately but our clear mandate and view is that we don't support RVM," he added.

Continued on Page 2

Be ready for extreme cold: IMD warns

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the western disturbance begins to retreat and frosty chilling northeasterly winds from the snow-clad mountains make their way toward the plains, Delhi-NCR witnessed a sharp decline in the minimum temperature on Sunday. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted a steep fall in temperature in coming days.

The minimum temperature in the national Capital was



recorded at 4.7 degrees Celsius on Sunday morning — a big drop from Saturday's 10.2 degrees Celsius. The cold condition could worsen until western disturbances provide some relief. The IMD has issued an orange alert and advisory urg-

ing people to be prepared for extreme weather. It further said impact on agriculture, crop, livestock, water supply, transport, and power sector at some places is expected due to the steep fall in temperature.

People were found huddled around bonfires along the roads to beat the cold wave.

The IMD said cold wave to severe cold wave conditions will prevail in parts of north India, northwest, and central India till Thursday.

*Continued on Page 2*Setback to Opp
unity as BSP to
fight all polls alone

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a setback to all efforts to unite the Opposition, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati on Sunday announced that her party would go alone in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and the forthcoming State elections this year. She also demanded the return of the ballot paper voting system. Addressing a press conference, Mayawati said the BSP would not align with any party for the forthcoming elections in various States as the ideology of her party was different from others.

She also claimed that the Congress and other parties were creating a misleading impression that the BSP was ready to join hands with them.

"I want to make it clear that our party will not have any alliance in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, and other States as well as in next year's Lok Sabha polls," Mayawati told reporters.

Continued on Page 2Moosewala's dad
joins Punjab leg
of Rahul's yatra

PNS ■ JALANDHAR

Late singer Sidhu Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh walked with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday when the party's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' resumed from the Khalsa College Ground. The yatra was suspended for 24 hours in view of the death of party MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary.

Sidhu Moosewala, was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district in May last year. He had contested the February 2022 Assembly polls on a Congress ticket but had lost the polls. Balkaur Singh has been demanding stringent punishment for his son's killers most of whom have already been arrested by the Punjab Police.

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Warring, Leader of Opposition PS Bajwa, ex-CM Charanjit Channi, MLA Pargat Singh and other party leaders also took part in the march.

India crush SL by 317 runs

Thiruvananthapuram: India thrashed Sri Lanka by a record 317 runs in the third ODI to clinch the three-match series 3-0 here on Sunday. Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill scored sublime centuries to help the hosts post an imposing 390 for five.

Pacer Mohammed Siraj (4/32) then blew away the Sri Lanka top-order as India skittled out the visitors for 73 in 22 overs. Kohli remained not out on 166 off 110 balls, while Gill struck 116 off 97 deliveries.

Opting to bat after winning the toss, opener Gill and skipper Rohit Sharma (42) put on 95 runs in 15.2 overs, before Kohli struck his 46th ODI century and 74th overall in international cricket to consolidate the Indian innings.

Kohli and Gill shared 131 runs for the second wicket.

With his 46th ODI hundred on Sunday, the talismanic batter inched closer to the legendary Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 centuries in the 50 over format. **Detailed reports on P11**

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In poll mode in J&K, BJP looks to shore up image



MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of sounding the poll bugle in Jammu and Kashmir the central leadership of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) is keen on shoring up the image of the party in the eyes of the electorate.

Growing disenchantment with local party leaders and existing factionalism is a major cause of worry for the party high command.

The top brass of the party is also

searching for the Chief Ministerial face of the party who is most likely to head the party's poll campaign during the maiden Assembly polls in the Union Territory.

After the reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 the ruling dispensation at the centre is keen on forming a majority government on its own strength.

The party has also set for itself the target of winning more than 50 seats in the house of 90 members.

In 2014, the BJP had won 25 Assembly seats. The party had later formed an alliance government with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Though the Election Commission of India is yet to take a final call over the schedule of the much awaited polls, the BJP has started gearing up its poll machinery in advance.

The top brass of the party is most likely to deliberate on the issue of party's poll preparedness during its two day long National Executive meeting in New Delhi from Monday.

Last week addressing the core committee meeting of BJP leaders in Jammu BJP national general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh made it clear 'This is the first major election campaign after the reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories hence we need to contest these elections with total companionship, in one voice, taking all together and ensuring that not even a single vote gets slipped out of our kitty'. Party insiders claimed it was a tacit warning to the section of party leaders to fall in line before reaching the point of no return.

Bharat Jodo Yatra to reach J&K on January 19, says Cong leader

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Bharat Jodo Yatra, led by Rahul Gandhi, will reach Jammu and Kashmir on January 19 and culminate in a huge rally here on January 30, Congress leader Rajani Patil said on Sunday, asserting that the Jammu and Kashmir administration has promised all support to the foot march.

The yatra will culminate in Srinagar on January 30.

Patil, the Jammu and Kashmir in-charge of the Congress, told reporters that Gandhi will arrive at Lakhampur on the Punjab-Jammu border on January 19. A flag-holding ceremony will be held there to welcome the former Congress chief, who will then walk from Lakhampur to Kathua, Samba and reach Jammu's Satwari Chowk, where a public gathering will be held.

Patil said Gandhi will reach Banihal from Jammu through Udhampur. From Jammu, he will reach Srinagar's Pantha Chowk after travelling through

Anantnag.

"A big rally will be held here after Gandhi walks in the valley for three days. We are receiving several calls from people to attend the rally. We need a huge venue to accommodate so many people," she said.

Patil said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has written to 23 leaders of various political parties across the country, inviting them to the rally.

"The leaders from Jammu and Kashmir who have accepted the invitation and will join the yatra include (NC's) Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, (PDP chief) Mehbooba Mufti, (CPI-M's) M Y Tarigami and (ANC's) Muzaffar Shah," she said.

From Maharashtra, Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut will also join the rally in Srinagar, Patil added.

Asked whether the Union Territory administration has given permission for the yatra, she said a Congress delegation



met Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who has promised every possible assistance to the march.

"He (Sinha) said the permissions will be given. He has given the responsibility to the divisional commissioners of both Jammu as well as Kashmir, and directed them to ensure that we do not face any problem," Patil said.

She said the Congress wants the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls to take place soon so that people have their own government.

"Everyone is angry over the downgrading of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood. The people here say they have been stripped of their right and the BJP will have to give an explanation for that," the Congress leader said.

Huge rush in Sabarimala even after Makaravilakku



PTI ■ PATHANAMTHITTA

There has been an uninterrupted stream of devotees walking to the hill top shrine at Sabarimala here even after the auspicious 'Makaravilakku' ritual got over, as more and more pilgrims are coming to see Lord Ayyappa clad in the holy jewels 'Thiruvabharanam'.

According to temple authorities, from Friday midnight to Saturday midnight around 46,000 devotees had reached Sannidhanam from Pampa.

On January 14, as devotees were allowed to enter

Sannidhanam only till noon, those who could not climb the hill during that period, started their trek on Saturday night and Sunday morning which caused the rush of devotees at the shrine even after the 'Makaravilakku' ritual got over, the authorities said.

A release issued by the temple on Sunday said that from January 1, 13,96,457 people booked for darshan through virtual queue and on Makaravilakku day alone there were 89,939 bookings.

There were also a large number of devotees who had arrived days before and waited

near the shrine for Makarajyothi darshan. As a result, there was a huge rush of devotees descending the hill after the Makarajyothi darshan and the subsequent Makarasamkrama puja, the release said. Special arrangements were made at Sannidhanam to control the rush, it said.

Majority of the devotees who descended the hill were those from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, it also said.

It was only after Makaravilakku that the journey from Pampa to Sannidhanam was again allowed.

Jharkhand: Protest against vandalism of Chhattisgarh church



PTI ■ RANCHI

Hundreds of people from the Christian community in Ranchi took to the streets on Sunday in protest against the alleged attack on Christians in Jharkhand and vandalism of a church in neighbouring Chhattisgarh.

Men and women, under the aegis of the Jharkhand Christian Youth Association (JCYA), took out the rally from GEL Church compound here to the Morabadi ground.

The placards had messages such as "stop the attack on churches" and "stop dividing in the name of religion".

Claiming that some people of the community were targeted during Christmas gathering preparations in Garhwa district of Jharkhand last month, the protestors urged the Jharkhand government to ensure peace in the state.

Congress MLA Shilpi Neha Tirkey and former Mandar legislator Bandhu Tirkey took part in the rally.

"Some forces in the country want to divide the nation in the name of religion. Our rally is against such forces," the Congress MLA said.

JCYA president Kuldeep Tirkey told PTI, "The rally was aimed at lodging our protest against the attack on Christians in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. We demand the governments of both states to ensure peace and provide safety to the community."

On January 2, a church was vandalised and six police personnel, including an IPS officer, were attacked and injured during a protest by tribals in connection with an alleged religious conversion in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur city.

Row over Odisha Gov's suggestion favouring entry of foreigners in Puri temple

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Governor Ganeshi Lal has stoked a controversy by suggesting that foreigners should be allowed entry into the Jagannath temple of Puri, with several traditionalists and political leaders criticising the proposal and rejecting it outright.

Former minister Bijay Mohapatra said centuries-old traditions of the temple should not be tinkered with.

"Everyone, including non-Hindus, can have a darshan of the sibling deities -- Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath -- when they step out of the temple on the occasion of Ratha Jatra every year. There should not be a dispute over such matters," the BJP leader maintained.

Several servitors in Puri echoed Mohapatra.

Senior Congress MLA Suresh Routray said "interferences in religious practices should be avoided".

Lal, while addressing a function at Utkal University on Thursday, had said, "If the foreigners are meeting the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri, servitors and the shankaracharya, there is no point in depriving them of Lord Jagannath's darshan



inside the temple. It is a suggestion."

The 12th century shrine, one of the four dhams, bars the entry of non-Hindus.

A sign board at the temple gate states, "Only Hindus are allowed."

A Puri based socio-cultural organisation, Shree Jagannath Sena, had staged a protest against the governor's remark in the temple town on Saturday.

"We have a lot of respect for the governor. But his proposal is unacceptable. He should refrain from the commenting on sensitive issues linked to faith and religion," Sena convener Priyadarshan Pattnaik said.

Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), a government body that oversees the upkeep and maintenance of the temple and its operations, is yet

to issue a statement on the matter.

The governor, who left for Ujjaini in Madhya Pradesh earlier on Sunday, could not be reached for his reaction.

A Raj Bhavan spokesperson, on being approached, said that the "governor has just made a suggestion, and nothing beyond that. He did not give any order."

Meanwhile, Odisha former minister Damodar Rout came out in support of Lal's suggestion and said there should be no restriction on the 'darshan' of the deities by anyone, as Lord Jagannath is the "master of the universe".

"Lord Jagannath is regarded as the origin of all religions. Guru Nanak came here for a darshan of the deity. Similarly, Sri Chaitanya visited Puri in 1508 and propagated Vaishnavism on his return."

Be ready for extreme cold...

BEFORE THE OFFICE OF:
Sh. Deepak Bhanwala Ld. ARBITRATOR.
Contact Nos.: 011-41000152
e mail Id. deepakbhanwala@gmail.com
At: Signus Arbitration Chambers, C-111, LGF, West Enclave, Pitampura, New Delhi-110034.
Ref. No. App. Notice/ DI/115/SC/00772
Dt.: 10.01.2023

To,
Enova Facility Management Services Pvt. Ltd., J4/1230/2nd Floor, Khirki Extn., Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017 Also at, 132B, 1st Floor, Tower-B3, Spazetech Park, Sohna Road, Sector-49, Gurugram-122018
NOTICE/SUMMON FOR APPEARANCE
Subj.: Notice / Summmon for Appearance in Arbitration Proceedings Under Section 18(3) Micro Small & Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006, in above mentioned pending MSME Petition, before MSE Facilitation Council, District South-West, Delhi AND assigned to this Office for Arbitration.

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It is informed to you that I have been appointed as an Arbitrator in the above said matter, pursuant to the Appointment Notice Dt. 05.07.2022 issued by Delhi Arbitration Centre (DAC). Copy of Appointment of Arbitrator & Initiation of Arbitration Proceedings/ Notice of DAC, has already been served upon both Petitioner and Respondent along with a copy to the undersigned Arbitrator.

It is further informed that in pursuance of said Arbitration Proceedings, today, the said matter was listed and came up on hearing before this office, under which, Petitioner was present, but despite having been clearly instructed you were not present and so you were marked as ABSENT/NOT PRESENT.

It is further informed to you that adhering the Principles of Natural Justice, no adverse Order is passed before this office, you may be proceeded ex-parte and then, the matter would be adjudicated/decided in your absence.

From Page 1
Minimum temperatures have fallen by 4-7 degrees Celsius over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, east Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh, and north-west Madhya Pradesh, the IMD said in a statement, adding there was no significant change in the remaining parts of northwest India.

The IMD said minimum temperatures are likely to fall further by about 2 degrees Celsius over many parts of northwest and central India till January 17-18 and cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are very likely over many parts of Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, and Delhi during this period.

The IMD said minimum

temperatures will gradually rise by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius from January 18 to January 20 under the influence of a western disturbance. When a weather system characterised by warm moist winds from the Middle East -- approaches a region, the wind direction changes. The chilly north-westerly winds from the mountains stop blowing, leading to an increase in temperatures.

The maximum temperature in the Capital settled at 17.8 degree celsius, two notches colder than normal for this season. Apart from this, other stations of the Capital including Lodhi Road, Palam, Ayanagar, Ridge,

Jafarpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, and (SPS) Mayur Vihar recorded the minimum temperature of 3.8 degrees Celsius, 5.1 degrees Celsius, 3 degrees Celsius, 3.2 degrees Celsius, 2.6 degrees Celsius, 4.7 degrees Celsius, 7.9 degrees Celsius, and 4.8 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Delhi saw an intense cold wave spell from January 5 to January 9, the second longest in the month in a decade, according to the IMD data.

On Monday, the minimum temperature is expected to drop to 4 degrees Celsius, while the day temperature is expected to be around 14 degrees Celsius. Dense fog is expected in the morning.

On Tuesday, the minimum temperature will dip further to 3 degrees Celsius while the maximum will be 14 degrees Celsius, the IMD forecast said. On Wednesday, the temperature is expected to be between 4 and 15 degrees Celsius. Dense fog is expected on both days.

Many parts of northwest and southeast Rajasthan recorded a minimum temperature in the range of 1 to 6 degrees Celsius. Parts of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and southwest Uttar Pradesh recorded their minimum temperature in the range of 3 to 5 degrees Celsius, it said.

Some flights scheduled to depart from the national Capital were delayed due to a low visibility in the region. According to railways, over two dozen trains are running behind schedule to dense fog.

Setback to Opp...

From Page 1
Mayawati said past experiences showed that in the case of forging alliances, the votes of other parties were not transferred to the BSP and such experiments only harmed the party.

She also targeted the Opposition and said that the BSP was being stopped from moving forward. "BSP has formed the Government four times in the State (UP), and the party has worked for the public through welfare schemes for poor and needy people.

"All opposition parties have maintained internal connivance and have come against BSP. Today, the people of all the classes are upset," the BSP leader said.

The former chief minister

of Uttar Pradesh also demanded the return of the ballot paper voting system saying there is "something wrong" with the EVMs.

"Something is wrong with EVMs, some are sabotaging it, during ballot paper time, our number of seats and percentage of votes used to increase in all polls. Polls must be conducted with ballot paper again," Mayawati demanded.

The BSP celebrated party chief Mayawati's 67th birthday on January 15 as Jankalyankari Diwas. Mayawati also released the 18th edition of her work "A Travelogue of My Struggle-ridden Life and BSP Movement" in a programme organised in the party's state unit office in Mall Avenue here.

16 parties give...

From Page 1
On the TMC's absence, Singh said we are not yet aware of the stand of the party but will discuss and update about their view.

On SP and NCP's absence, Singh said Akhilesh Yadav and Sharad Pawar have backed their views but they still want to get full clarity on the RVM.

CPI leader D Raja said all the parties who attended the meeting will raise the issue with the Election commission on Monday.

ECI has called the meeting to demonstrate the concept of Remote EVMs for migrant voters to the representatives of political parties.

68 killed in Nepal...

From Page 1
External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, too, condoled the deaths.

Uttar Pradesh officials have been directed to coordinate with the Ministry of External affairs to bring the mortal remains of the deceased to the State.

The four victims from Ghazipur district were identified as Sonu Jaiswal, Anil Rajbhar, Abhishek Kushwaha and Vishal Sharma. Sharma

belonged to Alawalpur Chhatti village in the Badesar area of the district, Jaiswal had houses in Chak Jainab and Alawalpur Chhatti but was currently living in Sarnath, a police spokesperson said. Rajbhar was a resident of Chak Jainab in the Badesar area and Kushwaha of Dharwa in the Nonhara area of Ghazipur, he said. Asked about the fifth Indian killed in the plane crash, who was identified as Sanjay Jaiswal, a police spokesperson said he might have his roots in Ghazipur but it could not be confirmed yet.

According to available information he was living in Kathmandu, the police spokesperson added.

Incidentally, Sonu Jaiswal was live on Facebook when the plane in which he was travelling crashed. The video of the FB Live of around 1:36 minutes also shows how the aircraft caught fire after it crashed.

Mishandling, malfunctioning of aircraft system or pilot fatigue could be among the factors that caused the deadly plane crash in Nepal that killed at least 68 people on Sunday, according to pilots

and an aircraft accident investigation expert.

They also said the exact reasons that led to the accident will be known only after a detailed investigation.

Nepal, which has witnessed quite a few aircraft accidents in recent years, on Sunday witnessed the crash of an ATR-72 aircraft, operated by Yeti Airlines, that was flying from Kathmandu to Pokhara.

Going by the video clips on social media purportedly showing the plane's trajectory seconds before it crashed, it

was a clear sky and the weather was not bad.

An aircraft accident investigator told PTI that going by one of the video clips, the nose of the aircraft slightly went up and the wings drooped to the left side before the crash happened, and there could have been a stall.

While the exact factors for the crash will be known only after completion of the detailed probe, initially, it looks like the possibility of mishandling by the pilot or malfunctioning of the plane's angle of attack system, he said on the

condition of anonymity.

The person, who was involved in multiple aircraft accident probes, was also closely associated with the investigation into the Calicut plane crash in 2020.

A senior pilot at a leading Indian carrier, who did not wish to be quoted, said that following procedures is paramount when flying to terrains like that in Nepal.

The pilot, who also flies to Nepal, said multiple factors, including pilot fatigue, could have led to the crash.

While flying an aircraft,

there is decision-making at every step and a pilot needs to have good rest. So, there could have been pilot fatigue and also the possibility of procedures not being followed, the pilot added.

A pilot with a regional carrier, who has been flying ATR planes for nearly two decades, opined that the particular aircraft could have suffered a stall or there could have been a pilot error. The factors that led to the crash will be clear only after the completion of the investigation, the pilot added.

‘2 held for terror links tasked to kill Right-wing leaders’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two persons arrested by the Delhi Police's Special Cell for suspected links with terror organisations were allegedly planning to identify and kill Right-wing leaders in the coming months.

While the identity of the person the duo claim to have killed and dismembered is yet to be ascertained, he has been identified as a Hindu because of the trishool (trident) tattoo on his arm. The duo chopped off his head, made a video of the act and sent it to their Pakistani handler to prove their loyalty.

According to sources in Delhi Police, the duo, on the behest of their Pakistan-based handler, were planning to target some Shiv Sena leaders in Punjab. Naushad received around Rs 5 lakhs from his handler in Pakistan in the last few months through contacts and hawala, said sources, adding, "Naushad also received Rs 2 lakhs after killing the man here in Delhi." Two hand grenades and three pistols were

recovered from the rented accommodation of the accused, Jagjit Singh and Naushad, who are allegedly linked to Pakistan's ISI members, they said. Police said the duo who have been booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act received funds and weapons from their handlers.

Days after the duo were arrested, the Special Cell on Saturday recovered a dismembered body from a drain in the Bhalswa Dairy area.

Addressing a press conference, Additional Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said the accused were asked "to prove their capabilities" to the terrorist organisation and they targeted a 21-year-old man and beheaded him. The victim was a Hindu but his identity is yet to be ascertained, he said.

"We found blood traces at the rented accommodation of the accused persons and were led to a chopped body near Bhalswa Dairy. The accused picked up the victim on December 15, killed him and

sent a video of the act to their handler Sohail, who is associated with terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba and linked to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)," he said. The officer said that the accused duo were tasked to identify and assassinate right-wing leaders. "They had targeted a few persons and were being instructed by the handlers and leaders based in foreign countries and were planning to execute their task in the upcoming months.

Jagjit was being handled by gangster-turned-terrorist Arshdeep Singh Gill (alias Arsh Dalla), while Naushad was being handled by cross-border suspected ISI handlers. With their arrest, we have averted a major terror strike," added Kushwah.

Police said the victim was picked up from a park and lured with alcohol. The senior police officer said the accused targeted him because he was vulnerable. They took him to their home in Bhalswa Dairy on the pretext of giving him alcohol and killed him. His body was chopped into pieces

and stored at the residence of the accused for a few days before packing it in plastic bags and disposing it in water bodies, he said. Six body parts have been recovered and more raids are being conducted to recover evidence from the spot.

According to the police, their arrest has averted a major terror attack. Jagjit Singh and Naushad first met in Haldwani jail, police said. "Jagjit has a murder case registered against him in Haldwani in 2018. He also has another case of encounter with the police. Naushad has murder and extortion cases registered against him.

"He met some terror accused and came in touch with cross-border elements. Similarly, Jagjit came in touch with the Bambiha gang and then got associated with Arsh Dalla," the officer said.

The arrest was made ahead of the Republic Day celebrations in the national capital. Three pistols and 22 live cartridges were recovered from the possession of the accused, police had said.

AAP likely to raise issue of LG's 'interference' in Government's functioning in Assembly

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid on-going constitutional tussle between the Delhi Government and the Raj Niwas, the three-day Assembly Session from Monday is expected to be a stormy with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) likely to raise the issue of the Lieutenant Governor's alleged interference in the functioning of the Government and appointment of MCD aldermen and day to day interferences in the elected Government functioning.

Though the current session has tentatively been decided to run for three days from January 16, but the session may extend it by a day or two if the need for more sessions to discuss administrative challenges and issues was felt by the government.

The issue of the Lieutenant Governor nominating aldermen in MCD and presiding officer to conduct the mayoral poll which led to tussle in the MCD, stopping Delhi government school teachers from travelling to Finland for training, CBI visit to Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's office which the AAP termed it a raid, L-G's order to recover Rs 161

crore from the AAP for advts, food truck policy, mohalla clinics and worsening law and order situation in the wake of increasing crime rate and Anjali Singh hit and drag case are likely to dominate the three days session of Delhi Assembly.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia will be laying the copies of the annual report of the Delhi Technological University for the year 2020-2021, the CAG audit report on the annual accounts of the Netaji Subhas University of Technology for the period from 2009-10 to 2017-18, along with an action-taken report, in the House.

He is also expected to introduce the Delhi Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023, according to the List of Business of the House.

Earlier stepping up his attack on Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday called him an "obstructionist functioning and interference into the elected government of Delhi".

He cited a Supreme Court ruling to point out that the LG has no independent decision-making power. Rebutting

Kejriwal's statements, a Raj Niwas official said all the statements made by him attributing to the LG were "misleading, patently false and fabricated and twisted to suit a particular agenda".

The MLAs led b Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri demanded on Saturday that the speaker extend the Assembly session to 10 days and allow the Question Hour. At a press conference, Bidhuri, termed the Assembly session starting from January 16 "illegal". "Instead of calling it the winter session, the AAP government has termed it the fourth part of the third session to avoid holding a fixed number of sittings of the House," Bidhuri said. Bidhuri said the

BJP MLAs will raise several important issues, including air pollution, the city government's failure to clean the Yamuna river and the poor public transport system in the national capital, during the Assembly session.

The AAP government, led by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, is working in a "dictatorial and unconstitutional" manner, Bidhuri alleged, while adding that the saffron party MLAs will urge the speaker to hold the session for 10 days.

"The Government is running away from answering the questions of the MLAs. That is why it is trying to completely remove the Question Hour from the Assembly session," Bidhuri alleged.



File FIRs against officers for halting Mohalla Clinic funds: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday wrote to Lt Governor VK Saxena, recommending suspension and registration of FIRs against officers who allegedly stopped funds for Mohalla Clinics ahead of the civic polls.

In his letter, Sisodia also accused Saxena of threatening the officers to take these actions -- a step that could further intensify the power tussle between the Delhi government and the Lt Governor.

Sisodia requested Saxena to identify the guilty officers and immediately suspend them. "Register an FIR against them and arrest them. Otherwise, it will be proved that you have misused the powers of the services department for electoral gains.

"It does not behove a person sitting on a constitutional post like Lt Governor to hatch such a conspiracy against the elected government for political gains.

And if some officials have conspired at their own level, then definitely you should take strict action against them and give a message that you believe in the constitution and do not tolerate any such act," the senior AAP leader said in the letter.

The minister also alleged "a conspiracy was hatched to stall the entire system of Mohalla Clinics" just before the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) elections. "Some officers posted in the Delhi government deliberately moved the files around in such a way that just two months before the MCD elections -- in the months of October and November, the doctors of the Mohalla Clinics were not paid their salaries," he said.

Sisodia claimed that doctors were not paid their salaries despite coming to the clinics while necessary tests for the treatment of people could not be done. "Not only this, the electricity bills of Mohalla Clinics were also stopped and the rents of Mohalla Clinics, which are running in rented buildings, were also not

deposited. "All this was done so that the public gets upset and angry with our government, and the doctors get upset due to non-payment of salary. So that this mess angers the public," he added.

Sisodia alleged that the officials of the Health and Finance departments kept moving the files from "here to there" by making one excuse or the other.

"...Two months before the (civic) election, the files were released without disbursements. When I talked to the officials about this, officially they kept on giving some technical reasons but in a subdued tone they also kept on saying that on behalf of the LG there were strict instructions to not make payments before the elections or else they would be suspended. "Since you have the Services department, all the officers are afraid of you," the letter read.

Meanwhile, AAP national spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday said that the Lieutenant Governor cannot "impede" the work of the Delhi government and is supposed to give his nod to subjects already approved by the cabinet.

CBI trying to falsely frame me in Excise case: Deputy CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday accused the CBI of trying to destroy "confidential files" stored in his computer and implanting edited files to falsely implicate him in the liquor policy case.

Sisodia has accused the CBI of trying to falsely implicate him in the case even though he hasn't been chargesheeted as an accused. His statement comes a day after CBI sleuths visited the premises to collect documents in what was termed "CBI raids" by the AAP.

In a statement, he said that the whole exercise was an act of malice detailing how the CBI raided his office on a second Saturday (official holiday) and gave a handwritten notice to the Secretary to seize a com-



puter from the conference room. "The probe agency trying to maliciously frame me, a seized computer without providing Hash Value. I have clear apprehension that the CBI has seized the computer to destroy the confidential documents, implant files in the CPU to falsely implicate me as my name is not in the CBI chargesheet.

In the absence of recording Hash Value during the seizure, CBI can change the record in

the seized CPU as per its convenience to maliciously frame me. Despite having no material against me, CBI is still continuing with its fishing and roving inquiry in the matter even after the chargesheet has been filed. Seizure of the electronic evidence has lost its authenticity and integrity in the eyes of law," reads the statement.

He said that on second Saturday his office was closed, when some CBI official telephonically informed his PS to come to the office and open the same.

When his PS reached the office at around 3 pm, he saw that a team of CBI officials was already present at the office. The CBI officials asked him to open the office and to take them to the conference room.

As they reached the conference room, they saw a computer installed therein, asked

the PS to switch it on, assessed the same, and, forthwith, handed over a notice under Section 91 CrPc to the Secretary with reference to the investigation.

As per the notice, the secretary was requested to produce CPU of the system installed in my conference room. Thereafter, the CPU from the conference room of my office was seized without following the due procedure laid down.

From the perusal of the said notice, it was perceived that the notice was hand-written to the secretary, and immediately the property (CPU) was seized which shows the mala-fide of the Officer. The act of the CBI officials also shows their malice whereby the Notice was given and immediately the said property was seized that too without following proper guidelines, he said.

Kejriwal Govt has not opened single new school in past 8 years, says LoP Bidhuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Sunday slammed the AAP saying that the Kejriwal Government which flaunts its world-class education model has not opened a single new school in the past eight years despite the land being allotted to build 13 new schools by the center.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that the AAP-led Delhi government is only busy in doing politics, instead of providing facilities to people of the national capital.

"Kejriwal Government always blames the central government for their own short-

comings including their failure to open new schools in the city in the last eight years. They claim that the land was not provided to them to open new schools but the truth is the central government-led Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has allotted land to the city government for opening 13 new schools in the capital," Bidhuri stated.

Informing about the locations in the city in which the land was being facilitated to the Delhi government for opening 13 new schools, Bidhuri said, "The land for building four schools was provided in Rohini and Narela respectively, where there is the shortage of educa-



tion facilities for the people living in the area." The LoP said that the Kejriwal Government only flaunts its education model but the ground reality is far opposite as they have no intention of working and providing the basic facilities to the

people. "If the AAP government had actually focused on education instead of just promoting it, then the class 10 results would not have come down to 82 percent and Delhi would not have slipped to the eighth position in the nation-

al grading," Bidhuri claimed. "The education sector is not the only sector that has been suffering from the petty politics of the Kejriwal government but there are a lot of projects that are halted in the city including the Ayushman Bharat Yojana which is not implemented in the city, 100 electric buses provided by the central government four years ago are not plying on the roads of the capital because of them (AAP)," Bidhuri underlined.

"Apart from this, the Yamuna is still not cleaned despite the Rs 2400 crore that has been sanctioned by the center for this project," Bidhuri added.

Hit-and-run case cracked in Noida, driver arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

With the arrest of a 45-year-old contractor, the Greater Noida police on Sunday claimed to have cracked the hit-and-run case in which three engineering students were left injured, one of whom continues to remain hospitalised.

The contractor was returning from a party on New Year's eve and allegedly in an inebriated state when the accident happened, a senior police official said, citing the confession of the accused. Six police teams were formed which scanned over 100 CCTV footage.



Participants ride in their vintage cars during the 56th edition of the Statesman Vintage and Classic Car Rally, in New Delhi on Sunday

Quarrel over pet dog turns violent in Uttam Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bizarre incident, a quarrel over a pet dog turned violent in Uttam Nagar in the national capital where a person attacked with an acidic substance, something that appeared to be a toilet cleaning substance.

The incident occurred when the victim's son took their pet dog for a walk in front of the home of the accused. According to Delhi police, the victim, identified as Rajeshwar, a resident of Uttam Nagar, is undergoing treatment at the All India Institute of Medical

Sciences (AIIMS) trauma centre. Two persons have been arrested in connection with the incident and the victim is stated to be stable.

Police said, "At around 10 pm, information was received in Uttam Nagar police station that the residents of a house got into a quarrel with a person. It is alleged that an acidic substance was thrown by occupants of the house at the person which injured him."

Police said the residents of a house got into a quarrel with a person who was taking his dog for a walk. They alleged that the dog dirtied the area in

front of their house. This led to a quarrel between them and the residents allegedly threw an acid-like substance at the complainant. "Prima facie, it appears that a toilet cleaner liquid was used. We have recovered the bottle from the accused home. Initial reports from the hospital suggest injuries are minor. Accused persons have been detained. Investigation underway," police said.

"A case was registered based on the medical examination report and two accused were arrested in the matter," police said.

Traffic advisory issued ahead of PM roadshow in city

New Delhi: Commuters will have to face hardship with the police imposing traffic restrictions on certain roads in view of a BJP roadshow to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders on Monday.

The two-day long national executive meeting of the BJP will begin on January 16 in the national capital which will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders of the party. The roadshow from Patel Chowk roundabout on Sansad Marg to Jai Singh Road Junction is expected to draw a large crowd. SR

BJP's 2-day nat'l exec meet begins today ahead of polls in 10 States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of Assembly elections in ten States, the BJP's two-day National Executive meeting will begin here on Monday with Prime Minister expected to give the 'victory mantra' to the party.

Besides Prime Minister Modi and BJP national president J P Nadda, Union Ministers including Home Minister Amit Shah and defense Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled States state presidents, and other senior party leaders would attend the top organizational meet.

The meeting will start with Nadda's speech on Monday and conclude on January 17 with the address of the Prime Minister at the NDMC building.

Apart from this, resolutions related to the 'achievements' made by the Modi government in various fields and the G-20 presidency given to India can also be passed in during the meeting. BJP vice president Baijayant Jay Panda will coordinate the organizational



exercise related to G20. India has planned around 200 events across 56 cities in the run-up to the G20 summit in September.

Talking to newsmen here, BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde informed that a mega exhibition based on six different themes including 'Good Governance First', 'Inclusive and Empowered India', 'Vishwa Guru Bharat' will be showcased at NDMC

Convention Centre during the two-day meet. A meeting of BJP office bearers was held on Sunday morning to give a final touch to the agenda of the National Executive he said. The National executive meeting will also be extending the presidential tenure of Nadda until Lok Sabha poll, next year.

The BJP National Executive meeting is significant in view of the upcoming and

crucial assembly elections in ten states as well as the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, barely 16 months away.

The BJP will chalk out its strategy for the poll bound states, and Prime Minister Modi "will give the mantra of victory" to the BJP leaders, according to sources. Shah, Rajnath Singh, and several other leaders of the party are likely to speak on the important

proposals in the meeting. The BJP also plans to hold a roadshow, amid cultural performances by artists from various states, to honor Modi on January 17 and kickstart the second day of the national executive meet where state units will submit their progress reports.

The meeting will be passing resolutions on economic, political, and social issues. Key organizational changes in the poll-bound states will also come up for discussion in the meeting, sources said. Party's recent victory in Gujarat assembly polls and loss in Himachal Pradesh will be scrutinized with feedback reports from the state units, said BJP leaders.

Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana and also states of Northeast-Nagaland, Tripura, and Meghalaya- would go for polls this year. The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir may also have elections this year after finalization of delimitation of constituencies in union territory

'Hypertension playing havoc with lives of women in Lahaul valley'

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Obesity, high dietary salt, and tobacco intake coupled with poor physical activity are playing havoc with the lives of women in the remote Lahaul Valley nestled in the lap of Himalayas. An increasing number of women are finding themselves in the grip of hypertension, a silent killer.

The result is reflected in research conducted by Mandeep Kaur and Kuldip Kaur of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar in five highly populated villages of Lahaul Valley—Keylong, Udaipur, Jispa, Sissu and Koksar. Researchers interviewed a group of 230 women from August to November 2021.

The distribution of female respondents in different categories of BMI, systolic blood pressure (SBP) and diastolic blood pressure (DBP), and other lifestyle factors were calculated. The risk of high SBP and DBP was observed among older women participants in the present study.

With respect to BMI, the maximum number of women was found in the normal category (57.4%), followed by over-



weight (19.5%) and obesity (12.2%), said the study. A meager proportion of women participants (10.9%) were underweight. In the case of SBP, maximum number of women had normal SBP (48.3%), 36.9% were found at the prehypertension stage, 8.3% in hypertension stage I and 6.5% women were in hypertension stage II.

The study reveals that only 57.4% of women have normal BMI, while approximately 32% are overweight and obese. Half of the women participants suffered from different stages of SBP and DBP. Moreover, there was a significant relationship among BMI, excessive consumption of sodium, use of

tobacco, lack of physical activity and hypertension, the study concluded.

At present, hypertension is a major non-communicable disease in India and is particularly found among women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 60% of the deaths in India are mainly due to lifestyle diseases such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

It has been empirically established that obesity has a close linkage with hypertension. As per the WHO, an estimated 1.28 billion adults (30-79 years) from low- and middle-income countries suffer from high blood pressure.

Vande Bharat train flagged off between Secunderabad-Vizag



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ SECUNDERABAD /VISHAKAPATNAM

With an eye on both the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday rolled out the eighth Vande Bharat Express Train between Secunderabad and Vishakapatnam.

Modi described the 'Made in India' Vande Bharat Express as a symbol of an India which is heading toward self-reliance after coming out of its colonial mindset.

Interestingly, the Modi government has been fascinated with gifting indigenous trains to the poll-bound states during the last few months. "Glad to flag off Vande Bharat Express between Secunderabad and Vishakapatnam."

It will enhance 'Ease of Living', boost tourism, and benefit the economy. In this festive environment, it is a gift for the people of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh," Modi said through a virtual platform amidst chantings of Pongal ritual songs and festivities at the Secunderabad Railway Station.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, MoS Home G Kishan Reddy who represents Secunderabad in the Lok Sabha, Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, and other representatives from the Telangana and AP governments were present at the station.

On the occasion, Modi said Vande Bharat Express, in a way, will connect the shared culture and heritage of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. "Vande Bharat Express signifies that India wants the best of everything. The Vande Bharat Express is a symbol of the resolve and potential of New India."

It is a symbol of that India which wants to give better facilities to all its citizens," Modi said in his video conference address. Connectivity-related infrastructure, the Prime Minister said, not only connects two places but also connects dreams to reality. It connects manufacturing to the market and talent to the platform, he added.

Prime Minister also paid tribute to soldiers and ex-servicemen on the occasion of Army Day. Addressing the

gathering, Vaishnav said, "Vande Bharat is an outstanding train. It can travel 0-100 km in 52 seconds, whereas other trains in the world take 54 to 60 seconds."

The designs of Vande Bharat are even better than that of an aeroplane, it can provide at most comfortable travelling," He said the development of the nation and Railways is above politics.

"PM Modi is giving Telangana Rs 3,500 crore. We must use this opportunity and develop railways in Telangana in the best possible way," Vaishnav said.

"The Railway Minister also announced the Secunderabad station will be developed into a world-class station. "PM Modi has sanctioned Rs 720 crore for this station along with that 35 other stations in Telangana will be developed," added Vaishnav.

According to the Ministry of Railways, the Vande Bharat Express connecting Secunderabad with Vishakapatnam is the first one connecting the Telugu-speaking states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, covering a distance of about 700 kms.

The train has stoppages at Vishakhapatnam, Rajahmundry and Vijayawada stations in Andhra Pradesh and at Khammam, Warangal and Secunderabad stations in Telangana.

The first run of train comprising of passengers and guests from schools, railways, media and some awardees were received with heavy sloganeering in favour of Modi and Bharat Mata and the route of 700 kilometers witnessed a chain of curious onlookers along the tracks making full use of their mobile cameras to capture the fastest train crossing in their respective vicinity. "Today is a big day as due to our biggest festival and this gift from the Modi government to the people of both Telangana and Andhra. Physically the contours have been divided but the soul remains one."

We are very emotional today due to this fast and world-class connectivity and thanks to the PM's effort to virtually make efforts to unite the States," said Ravindra Raj, on board the inaugural run of Vande Bharat towards Vishakapatnam.

Def Min urges Armed forces to be future ready

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday urged the armed forces to fine-tune their strategies, tactics, and policies to meet future challenges besides lessons learned from the ongoing Ukraine conflict.

Making this assertion on the occasion of the 75th Army Day in Bengaluru, he lauded the Armed Forces for adapting to the constantly-evolving times and dealing with the challenges with poise, patience, and bravery, he exhorted them to further develop their capabilities and implement the lessons learned from the ever-evolving global security scenario, including the Ukrainian conflict.

Addressing the 'Shaurya Sandhya' to mark the Army Day, held outside the national capital for the first time, Rajnath said militaries across the world are actively engaged in modernisation and are working on new ideas, technologies and their organisational structure.

He urged the Indian Armed Forces to work on their strategies, tactics, and policies keeping future challenges in mind. "Every today becomes tomorrow's yesterday. Any military or organisation, which prepares itself only according to the present soon becomes old and ineffective. "It is imperative to work on tomorrow, the day after, and the next 25-30 years. This will ensure our security and prosperity. Let us together build a developed and secure India," the defence minister said



itary or organisation, which prepares itself only according to the present soon becomes old and ineffective. "It is imperative to work on tomorrow, the day after, and the next 25-30 years. This will ensure our security and prosperity. Let us together build a developed and secure India," the defence minister said

'Shaurya Sandhya' was also attended Chief of Defence Staff General(CDS) Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande, Vice Chief of the Army Staff Lt General BS Raju, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command Lt General Ajai Kumar Singh, other senior military personnel, families of gallantry awardees, renowned sportspersons, prominent civil personalities, personnel of paramilitary forces, police forces and other



Army Service Corps (ASC) Tornados team performs during the 75th Army Day celebrations at Govinda Swamy Parade Ground in Bengaluru, on Sunday PTI Photo

defence establishments located in Bengaluru as well as students. The defence minister began his address by wishing all the personnel on Army Day, which coincides with the occasion when General (later Field Marshal) KM Cariappa formally took over the command of Indian Army from General Sir Francis Bucher, the last British Commander-in-Chief in 1949, thus becoming the first Commander-in-Chief of Independent India. Rajnath paid glowing tributes to Field Marshal KM Cariappa, saying

that the first Commander-in-Chief of Independent India, who hailed from Karnataka, made a significant contribution in strengthening the Indian Army. He also paid rich tributes to a number of revolutionaries of the state, who sacrificed their lives to ensure the country's freedom from foreign rule.

Rajnath commended the Armed Forces for ensuring the territorial integrity of the country since independence, terming their determination in dealing with challenging situ-

ations as unwavering. He said the Government's focus has always been on developing a strong and foolproof security apparatus and it is now playing a crucial role in the progress of the nation.

He said due to the strength of its security system, India has become the fifth largest economy in the world and emerged as a preferred and reliable investment destination. In the last financial year, India recorded the highest-ever FDI inflow of \$US 83.57 billion, he said. 'Shaurya Sandhya' commenced with a standing salute to the Chief Guest and a breath-taking fly-past by Advance Light Helicopter-WSI, Army Aviation Helicopters and Microlight Aircraft of Army Adventure Wing. It was followed by a thrilling show of equestrian sports of Tent Pegging and Six Bar Jumping.

The display of adventure activities included Army Aviation Combat Demonstration and Special Team Operations by the brave-hearts of the military.

The 'North East Warriors' put on an awe-inspiring display of Martial Arts while the daredevil Para Troopers enthralled the gathering with Sky Diving.

The skillful and daredevil performance of the Army Service Corps Motorcycle Display team 'Tornadoes' was a treat to watch for the audience, while the Taekwondo team captivated one and all with their stunts.

The Para Motor display by the elite Para Troopers displayed the indomitable spirit and unflinching valour of the Armed Forces. A performance by the Military Band added to the colour of the event. After the display, the defence minister interacted with the gallantry awardees and their families and felicitated them.

Doppler weather radar network in country by 2025: Min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The entire country will be covered by high-tech Doppler Weather Radar Network by 2025 to predict extreme events more accurately, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday. He was addressing the 148th foundation day of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here. The minister said disaster-related mortality has



dropped to single digits with improvement in the forecast. He added that the Met Department's severe weather prediction accuracy improved by around 40 percent in the last

eight to nine years. "The number of doppler radars in the country has increased from 15 in 2013 to 37 in 2023."

India will add 25 more radars in the next 2-3 years, taking the number to 62," he said, adding that by 2025 the entire country will be covered by doppler radars by 2025.. Doppler radar is a specialized tracking system that uses the Doppler effect to track weather conditions and calculate information about the location

and velocity of a storm or other forms of extreme weather events. Forecasting with the help of doppler radar is more timely and accurate which can be critical during safe evacuations in the likelihood of extreme weather events.

The IMD on Sunday commissioned four doppler weather radars in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir which will bolster its weather monitoring capabilities in the western Himalayan

region. These four DWRs have been installed at Banihal Top in Jammu and Kashmir, Jot and Murari Devi in Himachal Pradesh, and Surkanada Devi in Uttarakhand. Singh also dedicated 200 agro-automatic weather stations for agriculture advisory to the nation. IMD DG Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said the department's severe weather forecast (heavy rainfall, thunderstorm, fog, heat wave, cold wave has improved by 40 to 50 per cent in the last five

years. He said the existing doppler radars will be upgraded to remove uncertainty in rainfall estimates. Ten doppler lidars will be commissioned in the Himalayan region.

The environment monitoring network will be further augmented by increasing the number of sky radiometers from 20 to 30 by 2025, he said. By 2025, the number of stations in the black carbon monitoring network will be increased from 25 to 45.

CBI arrests 7 in ₹50L bribery case, recovers ₹47L from accused

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has arrested seven accused persons, including an Additional Divisional Railway Manager posted at Guwahati in a bribery case of Rs 50 lakh and recovered Rs 47 lakh during the searches at the premises of the accused persons.

The arrested accused in the case are ADRM, Guwahati. Jitendra Pal Singh (Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE) officer of 1997-batch), Shyamal Kumar Deb (contractor, who arranged the bribe money), Hari Om (acquaintance of the accused ADRM), Yogendra Kumar Singh (Driver of Hariom), Dilawar Khan, (Cashier of the Hawala Shop), Vinod Kumar Singhal alias Mukesh (owner of Hawala shop) and Sanjeet Ray (hawala cashier).

A case was registered against an Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM), Guwahati and other private persons including contractors among others, the CBI said in a statement.

"It was alleged that the accused had entered into a conspiracy with the intention of showing undue favours to the private contractors for awarding of contract agreements, preparation of measurement book, processing of running account bills, early release of payment against pending bills and for the ongoing work of construction in North East Frontier Railway as well as for early release of security deposit and bank guarantees," the agency said.

It was further alleged that the accused ADRM was habitual of demanding and accepting undue advantage from various

contractors while being posted as Chief Engineer, Construction, New Jalpaiguri, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR). It was also alleged that a contractor was facilitating the delivery of the bribe to ADRM, Guwahati through his acquaintance from a Hawala operator in Delhi.

The CBI laid a trap and caught an acquaintance of the accused ADRM while accepting the bribe of Rs 50 lakh on behalf the said senior railway official delivered through Hawala channel. The ADRM and others were subsequently caught.

Searches were conducted at premises of ADRM and others in various locations including at Delhi, Narora, Guwahati, Siliguri and Aligarh which led to recovery of Rs 47 lakh cash, Laptops and several incriminating documents, it said.

Govt wants to capture judiciary: Sibal

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha MP and former law minister Kapil Sibal on Sunday accused the government of attempting to 'capture' the judiciary and said it was trying its best to create a situation in which the NJAC in "another avatar" may be tested in the Supreme Court once again.

Sibal, 74, asserted the basic structure doctrine as enunciated in the Kesavananda Bharati verdict was very important in current times and dared the government to openly say if that is flawed.

He claimed the government has not adjusted to the fact that it does not have the final word on appointments in higher judiciary and resents it. "They are trying their best to create a situation in which the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) in yet another avatar may be tested in the Supreme Court once again," Sibal told PTI in an interview. His remarks come days after



Vice President Jagdeep Thakkar, who is also the Rajya Sabha chairman, again criticised the scrapping of the NJAC Act by the apex court. Thakkar had also questioned the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati case verdict, saying it set a wrong precedent and that he disagrees with the Supreme Court ruling that Parliament can amend the Constitution but not its basic structure.

The NJAC Act, which sought to overturn the collegium system of appointing Supreme Court and high court judges, was struck down by the top court in 2015 which described it as unconstitutional-

al. Asked about Thakkar's remarks, Sibal said, "When a high constitutional authority and a man who is well versed in the law makes a comment of this nature one has to first ask the question - is he speaking in his personal capacity or for the government."

"So, I don't know in what capacity he is speaking.... The government has to confirm that. If the government publicly states that they agree with his views then it has a different connotation," the senior Supreme Court advocate said. Asked about the Rajya Sabha Chairman's remarks on the Kesavananda Bharati case verdict, Sibal said if it is his personal opinion, he is entitled to it.

Sibal, however, came down heavily on Law Minister Kiren Rijiju for his critical comments against the judiciary and the collegium system, saying that it was 'unfortunate' and a "matter of grave concern".

Strong defence posture being maintained at LAC, says Army chief

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Indian army is maintaining a strong defence posture along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and is ready to deal with any contingency, Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande said on Sunday. In his address at the Army Day celebrations here, which is happening for the first time outside the national Capital, he said the northern border region has been peaceful and steps have been taken to maintain peace through established protocol and existing mechanism.

Referring to the situation along the western border, the Army Chief said the ceasefire continues at LOC and there has been a substantial reduction in violations. However, the terror infrastructure still remains on other side of border. "Our

counter insurgency mechanism is effectively foiling the infiltration bid from Pakistan," he added. Pointing to the attempts to smuggle arms and drugs into Jammu and Punjab border regions using drones,

General Pande said counter drone jammers were being used against such activities. The Indian Army with other security forces is committed to foiling these attempts, he told the gathering.

"Our focuses are also on building goodwill and carry out developmental projects through which we can bring the local population into the mainstream. As part of it, the influential youth are being given opportunities to fulfill their dreams in their profession field of their choice and sports," General Pande said.

Alluding to the security

situation in the North East, he said there is improvement in the situation. The army has played a significant role in minimising violence. Many insurgent groups have entered into peace agreement with the government or dialogues in that direction are underway. According to him, there is an increase in development in these regions and the Army will continue its efforts to empower people and help them prosper in the remote areas.

On reforms in the Indian Army in light of the geo-political situation, Pande said last year, changes were visible in the global security environment.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has clearly proved the importance of disruptive and dual use technologies. "Information warfare, cyber and space war have emerged as

the new domain of warfare. The gray zone warfare too has proved that in the future war and conflict, non-kinetic warfare will be equally important as the kinetic warfare. Because of this, the battle field is becoming more complicated, fierce and dangerous," he underlined. Being an important component of the comprehensive national power, it is the responsibility of the Indian Army to be ready, General Pande said.

In line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for 'Atma-Nirbhar Bharat', the Army chief too emphasised upon indigenization. General Pande said that India is standing at the threshold of a new era where one can see the country's increasing dominance in the international forums, economic development and progress.

Accordingly, the country is

witnessing the growing aspirations of Indians and expectations of the world community. Because of this, it is essential that the Indian Army be aligned and integrated to meet the national goal and objectives, he pointed out. Averring that there should be no hurdle in the national progress in terms of security, Pande said the Indian Army has initiated a major process of transformation to promote its operational preparedness. "We are planning to convert our battle contingents into integrated battle groups, which will contribute significantly in our future wars. Old establishments and units are being disbanded or are being given new shape through appropriate transformation," he said.

According to the Chief of Army Staff, the primary focus

will be to ensure that the soldiers are completely ready and equipped to face the challenges in future. Provisions of modern weapons and equipment are the inseparable part of it, for which the army is committed for indigenous solutions, General Pande said. "Development through self-reliance will be our new Mantra," he added.

Referring to the 'Make in India' model, he said the army has complete faith in the strength and operational capabilities of 'Made In India' weapons and equipment. The indigenisation of niche technologies such as artificial intelligence, block-chain, quantum communications, unmanned systems and other directed energy weapons are being done.

"We are confident that the Indian Army will fight and win the future wars with Indian



Solutions," he added. General Pande also told the gathering that the India Army was either terminating or changing those traditions, which are losing significance in order to make its processes and systems more effective and efficient.

Army is also integrating and coordinating with the National Logistic Policies for infrastructure development for

the operational preparedness, the Chief of Army staff remarked. Terming the Agnipath scheme a 'historic' and 'progressive' step in the human resources development, General Pande said, "We have automated the recruitment process. During the recruitment, we got good response from the youth across the country."

Gujarat poll results send message that Modi will be re-elected PM in 2024: Shah

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the result of the recently-concluded Gujarat Assembly elections is important not just for the state but for the entire country as it has sent a message that Narendra Modi will be re-elected as the Prime Minister in 2024.

In a veiled reference to the opposition Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, Shah said the people of Gujarat, by helping the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) retain power with a record number of seats in the state, responded to those who tried to defame the state and Prime Minister Modi.

"The people of Gujarat have worked to end the poison of casteism and slapped those making empty, false and alluring promises. The people of Gujarat have responded to

those who tried to defame Gujarat and Narendra Modi," Shah said at a function here to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of various projects.

"This result is important not for Gujarat alone. There will be (Lok Sabha) elections in 2024, and the entire country is prepared to once more make Narendra Modi the prime minister," he said.

This message of Gujarat has reached from Kashmir to Kanyakumari (north to south in the country) and from Dwarka to Kamakhya (west to east) that "Modi Saheb will again become the prime minister in 2024," the senior BJP leader said.

Shah said there is no need to elaborate on the works done by the BJP government for the development of the state, as people respond to it in the election.

"There is not a single state where one party has ruled uninterrupted for 27 years. Gujarat is the only state where the BJP has ruled (for 27 years and more)," he said.

Shah said when the Gujarat elections were announced, the Congress claimed this time it was its chance. "People from Delhi also arrived here with the promise of giving this and that for free," he said.

Despite all this, when the result was announced, the BJP emerged the winner with a record number of 156 seats (out of the total 182 in Gujarat), he said.

Every single worker of the BJP in the state is indebted to the people for their support and feels proud of this fact, the Union minister said.

The party won 34 out of the 40 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste candidates in the state, he



said.

Prime Minister Modi worked not just to provide basic facilities at the village level, but also did many works to make Gujarat number one in the world, by way of construction of the world's tallest Statue of Unity (in Narmada district), the biggest stadium named after Narendra Modi (Ahmedabad) and Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (Gandhinagar), Shah said.

Talking about the virtues of cleanliness, Shah said unless people work together, no government can make a village or a city clean.

"Cleanliness is the first condition for good health. PM Modi is going to make a big health centre. It is easy to make a health centre... But it is better not to fall ill and not require to visit a health centre. For that, we will have to keep our villages clean," he said.

Gadkari threat probe: Caller inmate of Belagavi jail serving death sentence in murder case

PTI ■ NAGPUR

The caller who made threatening calls to the Nagpur office of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and demanded Rs 100 crore is an inmate of a jail in Belagavi city of Karnataka who was sentenced to death by a court in a murder case in the past, police said on Sunday.

The caller, who had claimed he was a member of the Dawood Ibrahim gang, has been identified as Jayesh Pujari. Prime facie, he made the call using a mobile phone from the jail, a senior officer said.

A crime branch team of Nagpur Police led by an assistant inspector reached Belagavi late Saturday night. The team is likely to request the jail administration to allow them to question Pujari on Monday, he said.

At least three threat calls were received on the landline number of Gadkari's Public



Relations office in Khamla area in Nagpur between 11.25 am to 12.30 pm on Saturday, following which security was strengthened at the home and office of the Nagpur MP who belongs to the BJP.

"Pujari was sentenced to death by a court in a murder case. He is a dreaded goon who managed to escape from jail in 2016. Later, he was arrested by the Karnataka police," the police officer said.

He said Pujari had made

threatening calls to some senior officials in the past.

"The caller had told the phone operator at Gadkari's office that he is a member of the D gang and demanded Rs 100 crore from the minister. He threatened to harm the minister with a bomb if his demand is not met," police had said earlier.

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

Makar Sankranti celebrates harmony with nature: Yogi

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister and Gorakshpeethadhiswar Yogi Adityanath on Sunday congratulated the people of the state on the occasion of Makar Sankranti/Khichdi festival and wished them happiness.

The Chief Minister said that Makar Sankranti was a festival that celebrated harmony with nature while worshipping the father of the world "Sun" and nature.

Yogi said that the festival of Makar Sankranti was celebrated in different names and forms throughout the country. "Makar Sankranti is also celebrated as Khichdi festival in North India. On this auspicious occasion, lakhs of kalpavasi stay in Prayagraj for a month, meditating and performing rituals. People have started taking the holy bath in Prayagraj and



other places of pilgrimage in the state with great enthusiasm on the occasion of Makar Sankranti while lakhs of devotees have come to Gorakhpur to offer holy pot of faith to Lord Shiva incarnate Gorakhnath," Chief Minister Yogi added.

Wishing the people of the state an auspicious life, the chief minister said that the Uttarayan of Suryadev on this festival was considered an auspicious date for starting new works.

"Lakhs of devotees are celebrating the festival in Prayagraj and Gorakhpur and other pilgrimage centres like Garhmukteshwar in Hapur, Kachla Ghat in Budaun, Shuk Teerth in Muzaffarnagar, Kashi etc," the chief minister remarked, pointing out that people were taking bath in rivers and lakes and also making donations, which has a special importance in Sanatan culture.

TMC elated after Sen's 'Mamata PM material' remark

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

At a time when scams are aburstring on her Government's face almost in regular intervals the ruling Trinamool Congress has lapped up Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's assertions acknowledging Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's capability to become India's next Prime Minister.

Even the Chief Minister has accepted Sen's views as a "command." When asked to comment on what she thought about the leading economist's observations, Banerjee said, "he is a great visionary ... a vastly experienced and learned person ... his views are like a command to me."

Ever since her party's thumping win in the 2021 Assembly elections Banerjee has maintained a cautious stand on her Prime Ministerial ambitions saying she was just a political artisan and presently would like to play the cata-

lyst in stitching together a grand alliance against the BJP.

"At present the goal is to remove the BJP from power by defeating it in the elections ... when the question of leadership would arise there would be no dearth of leaders," Banerjee had said though her party mouthpiece Jago Bangla made no bones about her being the next Prime Minister of India.

On Sunday senior leaders of her party including Kunal Ghosh said, "when world visionaries like Amartya Sen make a statement then it definitely bears wait ... His statements are and have to be the reflection of people's desires ... scholars like him do not say out of turn or without research."

Another TMC leader said that the voters would "definitely compare between Mamata Banerjee's pro-people decisions --- like Kanya Shree, Swasthya Saathi, Laxmir Bhandar, Yuva Shree, Duare Sarkar which has brought Bengal Government

the national and international laurels --- and the BJP Government's anti-people decisions ... Amartya Sen must have taken note of this public view before making his remark."

The Left parties however, differed from TMC's interpretation saying "they have only partly read Dr Sen's views." Senior CPI(M) leader Chayan Mukherjee said "Dr Sen had said that Mamata Banerjee has the capability to become the Prime Minister but expressed doubts whether she will be able to unite the opposition forces ... a person who cannot unite one's followers will be miserable as a Prime Minister."

Speaking on the performance and chances of the BJP coming to power and Mamata Banerjee's chances of becoming the Prime Minister Sen had earlier told a news agency that "It's not that she does not have the ability to do it. She clearly has the ability. On the other



hand, it's yet not established that Mamata can pull the forces of public dismay against the BJP in an integrated way to make it possible for her to have the leadership to put an end to the fractionalisation in India."

In the same interview Sen had also said that all the regional outfits including Samajwadis, DMK and for that matter the TMC too would play a big role in the next year's elections dismissing the idea that the BJP was undefeatable.

He said "it would be a mistake to take the dismissive

view that there is no other party that can take the place of BJP since it has established itself as a party with a vision that is inclined in the direction of Hindus over the rest of the country.

"I think a number of regional parties are clearly important. I think the DMK is an important party, the TMC (Trinamool Congress) is certainly important and the Samajwadi Party has some standing but whether that could be extended I do not know," he further said.

Man attacked for not chanting Jai Shree Ram

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident, a man was allegedly brutally thrashed and stripped naked by two men for not chanting 'Jai Shri Ram'.

Police identified the victim as Asim Hussain (46), a native of Moradabad. The incident reportedly occurred on Friday evening, while Hussain was returning home from New Delhi by Padmavat Express.

According to the victim, the accused pulled his beard and forced him to chant a religious slogan. However, after police conducted a preliminary probe, they found that the allegation was false.

A video of Hussain allegedly being beaten with a belt surfaced on social media, and a police team arrived at the compartment. The police apprehended two people and they were identified as Satish Kumar and Suraj Kumar. The arrests were made on the basis of information gathered from other passengers.

Satish (23) from Rae Bareilly and Suraj (25) from Pratapgarh are both labourers. "Since an FIR has not yet been lodged in the case, both were initially charged with breach of peace. They were brought before a magistrate and released on bail," said circle officer of Moradabad (Railway), Devi Dayal.

Superintendent of Police, Railway (Moradabad), Aparna Gupta said that an FIR was registered at the Government Railway



Police station in Moradabad on Saturday, nearly 24 hours after the alleged incident, when Hussain approached them.

Hussain claims that the attackers pulled his beard and forced him to chant a religious slogan before another passenger assisted them in exiting the train when it came to a stop near Moradabad railway station. He also claimed that the suspects robbed him of Rs 2,200.

"During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that Hussain's claims that assailants pulled his beard and forced him to chant a religious slogan were false," Gupta said.

Eyeing 2024, Akhilesh gears up for political mobilisation

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party is gearing up for hitting the ground across the State for political mobilisation with the objective of winning maximum number of seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The party is working out a strategy to take an aggressive stand against the Bharatiya Janata Party on every issue.

Sources in the SP said the victory in the Mainpuri Lok Sabha and Khatauli assembly by-elections had given the much needed shot in the arm to the party. They said the SP intends to maintain this momentum till the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

During the mobilisation campaign, the SP will fight the perception created by its political opponents that party president Akhilesh Yadav is a reluctant politician, a leader who prefers comfortable life instead of facing the heat and dust of electoral politics and works only on social media platforms like Twitter.



"The party is working on a strategy to give Akhilesh Yadav a new image makeover of a leader who is connected with the people at the grass-roots level," said a SP leader.

He added: "Akhilesh worked hard at the grass-roots level during the recent Mainpuri Lok Sabha election. Therefore, the SP won this seat by a huge margin of votes."

Due to the victory in the Mainpuri Lok Sabha election, the hard work of the SP workers paid off and since then the strategists of the party have decided that Akhilesh Yadav

will visit every district in Uttar Pradesh till the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Apart from this, the party will be seen protesting on the streets against the policies of the BJP government for which a committee has been constituted which will keep an eye on every small issue.

According to SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary, the party has been fighting for the people since the day of its inception in 1992 but the BJP diverts the attention from the issues related to the people on the basis of communal lines.

Reshuffle likely in BJP UP after n'tl executive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A reshuffle in the state organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party is likely after the two-day meeting of the national executive of the party in Delhi from January 16.

Sources in the BJP said some leaders were likely to find a berth in the team of party president Jagat Prakash Nadda, who is all set to get a second term as party president. Reshuffle is also likely to be made in the Narendra Modi led Union Council of Ministers, where some MPs from UP may be inducted and some may be dropped.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, state BJP president Bhopendra Singh Chaudhary, general secretary (organisation) Dharmpal Singh, two deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak and Jal Shakti minister Swatantra Dev Singh will participate in the meeting.

Meanwhile, the BJP state president has set the task of ensuring the victory of the

party candidates in the UP Legislative Council election. Bhopendra Singh Chaudhary said the BJP already enjoyed two-third majority in the legislative council, the Upper House of the UP legislature, and the victory of the BJP candidates in all five seats would send a powerful message ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP has decided to launch an intensive campaign to contact and communicate with voters for the victory of party candidates in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council election from three graduate and two teachers' constituencies to be held on January 30. The party will also launch a campaign in the 14 parliamentary constituencies in the state that it lost in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda will lead the campaign by addressing public meetings in the Lok Sabha constituencies won by the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Deadly spurt

China admits that almost 60,000 people died of Covid between December 8, 2022, and January 12

Everything about China is an approximation, and that includes economic data. Beijing's statements and figures on the novel coronavirus are even vaguer. As per the data of the World Health Organization, which has been under China's baleful influence, a few days back the total fatalities in the most populous nation in the world were below 34,000. China's claim was that in the two-year period between April 21, 2000, and April 16, 2002, there were only six Covid deaths in the country. In this period, the rest of the world, including India, suffered from a severe Delta wave, killing millions of people. In our country alone, over 5.31 lakh people died, most fatalities happening in the second wave. No one knows for sure how true is China's claim that it was able to control the coronavirus using the most ruthless form of coercion and surveillance. While the CCP excelled in suppression coercion, it didn't in immunizing the citizenry. One reason was that its indigenous vaccines were far less effective than the ones used in other parts of the world, including India. Typically, in that period, Beijing tried to portray its supposed 'success' in containing the deadly virus as a triumph of communist totalitarianism over democracy. It also bragged about having supplied vaccines and protective gear to poor countries. "Judging from how this pandemic is being handled by different leaderships and [political] systems around the world, [we can] clearly see who has done



better," Chinese President Xi Jinping said in early 2021 at the Central Party School in Beijing.

That was then. A few months later—just after he arrogated all powers to himself, placed his followers in important offices, and sidelined critics—he faced widespread protests against the harsh lockdowns that he had imposed on over a billion of his fellow citizens. Just when Xi thought that he was the most powerful man in the country, whose authority could not be questioned, the simmering discontent and pent-up anger spilled onto the streets. In a matter of days, his regime started looking less solid and strong than he wanted it to appear. It was forced to lift the restrictions which had practically enslaved people. The easing of restrictions has proved to be as sudden and devastating as their imposition was brutal. China had 59,938 Covid-related deaths between December 8, 2022, and January 12, Jiao Yahui, head of the Bureau of Medical Administration under the National Health Commission, told a press conference. The actual figure is reported to be higher, for the number Jiao figure refers to is about the fatalities at medical facilities. Earlier, Beijing had changed the methodology for categorising Covid deaths, counting only those who die specifically of respiratory failure caused by the virus. One hopes that the situation improves in China, but its Government has to stop lying.

PICTALK



People participate in Mumbai Marathon 2023, in Mumbai

PTI

From India with love

UPI can become one of the smartest innovations in transacting money across the world

India of late has emerged as one of the leading software service providers in the world where most of the backoffice work of giant multinational is done. However, there are no digital products on the shelf that come from India. The critics asks when Facebook, Google, or Twitter would come from India. The sad part is that this criticism is true as we have remained just service providers with little focus on innovation and creating products that could have worldwide appeal. But with UPI that could change. UPI is a big-ticket Indian innovation that could take the world by storm. UPI or unified payment interface has changed the way Indians transact their business and handle money. Launched in 2016, UPI though with Initial hiccups has become one of the most reliable conduits of money exchange and that too in an economy where most people are not tech-savvy and semi-literate. To be precise it is one field where India has beaten the US and Europe in their game of innovations with cutting-edge technology.



In November 2019, Google wrote to the US Federal Reserves, asking the central bank to design its upcoming instant payments system FedNow on the lines of India's UPI. In 2021, UPI processed around 3940 billion transactions worth more than \$940 billion. This is equivalent to 31% of India's GDP. Many foreign institutions and banks have shown interest in it and are open to using it. National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which rolled out UPI has entered into a partnership with European payment services facilitatory Worldline to allow Indian travelers to pay through UPI on the latter's Point-of-Sale machines across Europe. UPI is a first-of-a-kind application that allows QR code scanning to transfer funds, a first in the world. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The interface facilitates inter-bank peer-to-peer (P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions. It is used on mobile devices to instantly transfer funds between two bank accounts and is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Digital transactions worth Rs. 8.31 lakh crore were made via the platform in January 2022 alone. In 2021–22, the value of transactions done by UPI crossed \$1 trillion. So the robustness of the UPI has already been established and it works like charm. Now is the time to take it to the world and show that India is not only the best service provider, but also a great inventor.

Gender is a social construct

Disparity between males and females on the basis of their sex is not only unjust, but also unscientific. It's time we de-hyphenated jobs from gender

If a poll were to be conducted asking individuals if they had ever experienced some form of discrimination because of their biological sex or gender identity, then chances are a good number of respondents will answer in the affirmative. Whether it is one's emotional intelligence, ability to do a task, leadership qualities, career options or behavioral aspects like compassion, there are entrenched stereotypes with respect to what males are good at and what females are good at. It's time we questioned all these prevalent notions.

After all, despite extensive research, scientists haven't been able to clearly establish a relationship between genes of Y chromosomes with behavior patterns of human beings. The Y chromosome is the smallest of the chromosomes with barely 340 odd genes, whereas the X chromosome has more than 1500 genes, clearly indicating that genetically there is little difference between the sexes. The bearing of these differences on psychological aspects of males and females has not been clearly and scientifically established. Furthermore, whatever slight difference, if at all there is, can be easily offset by environmental factors and the milieu a person inhabits. Thus, disparity between males and females on the basis of their sex is not only unjust, but also unscientific. It is then safe to say that gender is a social construct.

Right from childhood, we are told to view people in the binary of male and female. Society has associated certain traits and acts as manly and others as more feminine. The stereotyping of how different genders must conduct themselves is so prevalent and ingrained in our minds that any aberration from it is mocked at. Simple adjectives like ambitious, strong, fragile, gutsy, meek, coward, pragmatic, caring, brash, aggressive, bold and others are associated more with a particular sex. For instance, it is okay to call a woman meek, but the same adjective given to a man is likely to be viewed as an affront. If a woman calls herself ambi-



tious, it invariably manages to raise some eyebrows. If a man cries in public, a question is raised on his manhood. If a woman leaves her child home to work, she is labeled as irresponsible and selfish. And if a man helps in house chores, he is viewed as less of a man. There are many other systemic issues also like pay disparity, unequal cerebral opportunities, discrimination at workplace when it comes to promotion and responsibility assigned - all of these stem from the existing stereotypes.

For the sake of validation and to be accepted by society, some of us even curb our self expression. To explain this, there are many among us who are male by birth and feel like dressing up in a blouse and a saree. There are women who like to sport a boy cut hairstyle. The question is are these people able to express themselves the way they want without fearing judgment? It is clear that all stereotypes revolving around gendered roles and expressions are undoubtedly doing a great disservice to so many individuals who probably without even realizing it are struggling with the feeling of incompleteness and confusion in their heart and mind. According to WHO, Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, inter-

REGARDLESS OF ONE'S SEX, AN INDIVIDUAL SHOULD HAVE A CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN FEEL SAFE IN EXPRESSING THEMSELVES THE WAY THEY WANT

nal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth. Gender is a social construct. Similarly according to a Harvard study, People typically begin developing a gender identity in early childhood, around the age of 2 or 3. Gender identity develops within multiple social contexts: a person's family, their larger community, and the society and historical time in which they live.

However, there are some positive changes that are happening in many spheres. It's indeed a welcome step that jobs in the armed forces have been made sex neutral. We just witnessed a gender neutral fashion fest at Golden Globes 2023.

It's time we de-hyphenated jobs, opportunities and preferences of individuals from their sex. What we also need to understand is that different individuals emote in a different way, and this is where the science gets interesting. We are prone to viewing compassion through a feminine lens. This explains why some of us may completely miss noticing the ways in which males try to alleviate suffering. In fact, if you were to ask a neuroscientist to distinguish a male from a

female brain, they would have a difficult time doing so.

Regardless of one's sex, an individual should have a conducive environment where they can feel safe in expressing themselves the way they want. The prevailing stereotypes revolving around men and women should be abolished so that nothing inhibits their growth and creative expressions.

One can say that indeed no matter how educated, progressive and egalitarian one is, the first and foremost quality one needs to inculcate or have is the sensitivity and the willingness to question one's existing beliefs. Social conditioning is such a thing that can rob our consciousness of the ability to question the status quo and make us immune to alternate viewpoints, rendering them bogus without paying any heed to them. It's time to change that and become a more inclusive society. That is only possible when we embrace and respect individuals for who they are and let them come into their own and find their expression.

(The author keenly follows news pertaining to women's rights & writes to shape opinion on social and environmental issues. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEMONETIZATION WAS WORTH IT. SERIOUSLY?

Sir — This is in response to Mr Uttam Gupta's article titled "Stop demonising demonetisation" (January 14). It was ridiculous to claim that a mere ban on notes would permanently vanish the ills of black money, counterfeit notes, child trafficking, and terrorism from the soil of the country! And thanks to the overnight decision, hundreds had to collapse to death in inhuman queues, and several million people lost their jobs or business with fatal effects on the economy of the country. And far from achieving the advertised goals with zealous stories of "notes turning into a scrap" assaulting the eardrums constantly; 99.3% of the banned notes also gallantly returned to the banks! Demonetisation was nothing but an inhuman farce "gifted" to the country.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY WEEK 2023

Sir — It is a historical step that the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India is observing the Road Safety Week from 11th to 17th January 2023, under "Swachhata Pakhwada", to propagate the cause of safer roads for all. It will surely arrest the rising graph of accidents and bring down fatalities if the proposed rules are implemented strictly with improved policing. Last year there was a sharp rise in the number of deaths. Last year in the country there were 1,55,62 deaths across India last year.

Government should not only limit the rules to heavy fines but go some steps further, by taking up other tough measures, like making the driving licensing regime tougher, strict driving tests, good driving schools to train new drivers, National Highways Authority of India/state authorities should go for a road safety audit of accident-spots and take appropriate measures by increasing better-designed crossings, installing more road signs, proper lighting on roads and better accident and trauma services.

Above all improving the 108

Waging a proxy war



It seems that the Vice President and law minister are waging a proxy war on behalf of the Central government. The Supreme Court Collegium happens to be just a prop and the real target is the Constitution, which the ruling party considers a hindrance to the pursuit of its isolationist agendas. While it began as potshots on the judiciary, the fight has transformed into a full-fledged war, with Vice President lately taking direct aim at the Constitution. The Rajya Sabha chairman had in his maiden speech to

the house described the Supreme Court's action in striking down the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act in 2015 as a severe compromise of parliamentary sovereignty and disregard for the people. There is no doubt that the will of the people is supreme. But the will that Vice President has in mind is a fractured will that is valid for only five years for which the people have elected a government. People can change that 'will' after five years and there is no permanency to it as the Vice President and the loyal bhakts seem to believe. The will that adopted the Constitution is much larger than the will given expression through an election. The basic structure of the Constitution has been given to us by the Constituent Assembly, which was not a partisan body and cannot be overridden by a fractured will mandated through an election.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Emergency ambulance service by stationing them at strategic locations and connecting them with the police control room so that whenever 108 Ambulance moves, the police control room can inform the traffic police personnel to clear the way for the Ambulance enabling the accident victim reaches the trauma center in the first golden hour.

Ramesh G Jethani | Bengaluru

FREE ELECTRICITY

Sir — Frustrated by too many electoral defeats, Congress has promised 200 units of free electricity to the households if voted to power in the election-bound Karnataka. In doing so, Congress seems to emulate the example of AAP which succeeded in riding to the seat of power through the promise and implementation of many freebies including electricity. The cost of one unit of electricity in Delhi is said to be around Rs. 8 in respect of domestic consumers and Rs. 14 in respect of commercial consumers. Compared to the free electricity to be given to households if Congress is voted to power, a total number of

employees working in the electricity companies is negligible. If the electricity companies cannot afford to bear the financial burden on account of free electricity enjoyed by the employees, how can it meet the demand of households that are huge in number? The only recourse the government has to take is to place the burden arising from the distribution of free electricity on the shoulders of non-domestic consumers like commercial and industrial consumers. When the additional financial burden is placed on the shoulders of commercial and industrial consumers, the cost of products shoots up and it will eventually fuel inflation. Tasted by the electoral success on account of freebies given, every party may start competing with each other in announcing freebies. Pakistan has been experiencing a damaged economy. Political parties are interested in their vote banks. The interest of the nation hardly matters.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Sharad Yadav ji was a person of humble nature along with being a leader of socialism. I have learned a lot from him. I express my deepest condolences to his bereaved family members. His contribution to the country will always be remembered.



Congress leader — Rahul Gandhi

Scriptures of the Hindu religion do not offer any moral teaching — all the religious scriptures are porn scripts.

Co-convenor Bangladesh Gono Odhikar Parishad — Tarique Rehman

He (Ashutosh Rana) is a Gyaani (intellectual) and Antaryaami (one who knows from within) apart from being a very very fine actor.



Actor — Shah Rukh Khan

Happy Birthday to the most humble Person, Sir Rahul Dravid. I learned a lesson "Humility is key to success."

Pakistan cricketer — Shahnawaz Dahani

I am assuring the citizens of Jammu that whatever may be the intention of the terrorist organizations, but our security agencies will be ready to protect Jammu.



Union Home Minister — Amit Shah

FIRST COLUMN

GOA IS MORE THAN ITS SNACKS AND BARS

Goa has many enthralling experiences to offer than sunbathes



NIHARIKA NIGAM

Your Goa diaries can go far beyond wine glasses and shacks! The party destination of India is more than shining beaches and sparkling nightlife. Have you ever thought about what more popular destination holds? Have you tried to explore the hidden corners here?

In this article we will help you add some more 'Goa goals' to your bucket list. And while you are in the city, do not miss checking the local markets for the coolest tribal stuff to take back as souvenirs. There are a lot of offbeat things to unravel other than the most crowded beaches in Goa.

Bungy jumping
Yes, you heard that right. Thanks to the solid efforts put in by the Goa Tourism Development Corporation, Bungy jumping is now in Goa on the lines of similar facilities in Rishikesh, which are most sought after by the lovers of the adventure sports. With trained personnel to help the enthusiasts, the infrastructure has excellent credibility, with the guides having a total of 12 years of expertise and an enviable record of having operated over 1.5 lakh jumps in Rishikesh with safety standards at par with the best globally.



The guides work under the supervision of ex-Army officers to ensure that safety is given the topmost priority. Bungy jumping is that bucket list experience that you can now enjoy amidst the paradise that is Goa! Set over Mayem Lake in North Goa, this is one 'Got Guts?' moment you do not want to miss. It is about a 45 minute drive from the very popular Baga Beach.

Bungy jumping will not only spike the adrenaline in you but also leave you with a once-in-a-lifetime memory to take home. Considered as one of the most extreme adventure sports in the world, Bungy jumping is an adventure to be had.

Caving
While partying and shacks are common here, can you imagine the place has attractive caves taking you through flatlands and rocky patches for an entirely unique experience? Cupa Sea Cave, Canacona, Kaurati's Caves, Harvalem Caves and many more are located in different parts of Goa. Many of them might make you trek a bit but the others are closer to the beach. You certainly should not miss this unraveled part of the emerald city.

Air ballooning
Floating up the skies, enjoying a mesmerizing view of Goa with your loved ones is once in a lifetime experience to go for. Head to Chandor, South Goa to watch the gushing sea and lush green land from the top. And if you are planning to propose to your beloved nothing is better than kneeling in the air soaking between breathtaking views.

Underwater sea walk
Ready for a little mermaid moment? Goa has a soul soothing underwater walking experience at the Biana beach. Think about this- you with your loved ones are walking on a soft sand bed underwater, feeding fishes and spotting weeds. Magical, isn't it? Why not include the activity to your next Goa vacation? There will be a boat taking you to the spot and then right in the middle of an enchanting beauty full of wonders. You must be at least above 12 years of age to do this activity and swimming is a compulsion.

(The author is Director, Business Development, Jumpin Heights)

India needs to expand quality manpower

Our demographic dividend presents an opportunity that can be leveraged to create a skilled workforce



DINESH SOOD

Managing an ever burgeoning population is a herculean task. It can also be an opportunity, but it all depends upon how we prepare ourselves to treat the population. According to the World Population Prospects-2022, India's population will reach 1.428 billion on July 1, 2023. It will marginally be higher than the 1.426 billion figure for China at the time.

So, we are all poised to replace China as the most populous country in the world, but we have a distinction of 65 per cent of the total population being below the age of 35 years. This demographic dividend presents an opportunity that can be leveraged to create a high-quality skilled workforce for the rest of the world.

Every year over 12 million young people reach employable age in India, but we are unable to absorb them, as even many who are armed with higher degrees but are not equipped with employable skills. The India Skills Report (ISR) 2022 states that only 46.2 per cent of those coming out of higher educational institutions are employable.

It is high time for India to provide 'Ready to Hire' young workforce talent, as all the major developed countries like the US, Europe, Japan, Germany and China are reeling with an aged population. Some of the economists and social scientists link the problems like hunger, malnutrition and unemployment to India's vast population.

It was utter failure that even after 75 years of Independence and currently having the world's youngest population, we have not been able to export quality skilled manpower to the world's leading and expanding economies. We have the young people but without the potential of skills which make them more employable. Unfortunately our journey so far on the road to skilling has not been so satisfying.

As per the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (NPSDE) 2015, the target was to impart various types of skills to 40 crore people by 2022. However, around four crore people have been trained. The NPSDE estimates that only 5.4 per cent of the workforce in our country has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68 per cent in the UK, 75 per cent in Germany and 96 per cent in South Korea.

Given the fact that 83 per cent of the workforce is engaged in the unorganized sector with limited training facilities, upgrading of skills, both in manufacturing and services sectors remains a challenge. The major challenges to skill development, as also pointed out by the NITI Aayog, involve mapping skill requirements sector-wise and geographically; making vocational training in school education as an aspirational choice; engaging industry for improved quality and relevance – scaling up the apprenticeship programme;



EVERY YEAR OVER 12 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE REACH EMPLOYABLE AGE IN INDIA, BUT WE ARE UNABLE TO ABSORB THEM, AS EVEN MANY WHO ARE ARMED WITH HIGHER DEGREES BUT ARE NOT EQUIPPED WITH EMPLOYABLE SKILLS

(The author is Training Partner with National Skill Development Corporation)



integrating the informal sector into the skill development ecosystem; putting in place an effective, internationally recognized assessment and certification system.

Poorly skilled people means below the average output irrespective of the increase in the worker population ratio (WPR), which has increased to 52.6 per cent in 2020-21, as Union Minister of State for PMO, Dr Jitendra Singh, informed the Rajya Sabha in a written reply on December 14, 2022. He said that WPR has shown a continuous upward trend in the last four years, while the Unemployment Rate (UR) has witnessed a continuous declining trend since 2017-18 onward. If we are improving on the front of WPR and UT, that is just fine.

We need to focus on sustainable utilisation of human capital by arming them with skills. Let us not forget the fact that inculcating skills in our young children means encouraging them towards entrepreneurship as well.

How should we move forward so far as employable skill development is concerned? Mapping skill requirements for a demand driven skill development ecosystem is of paramount importance. We need to know what the areas are where the demand for skilled workforce is likely to pick up at home and abroad. Skill development plans and strategies should be developed by geography and sector by mapping the availability of infrastructure and on the basis of assessing skill require-

ments both at the national and state levels.

At present, we do talk of one district, one product, but none of us talk of skills required for the specific products of a district. The district administration needs to be galvanised not only to provide the information required for such mapping but also skill-specific demand projections.

Similarly, industry stakeholders must be incentivized to provide data on their skill requirements on an ongoing basis, which could be used as input for the skill requirement assessment made at different levels. Regular labour market studies should be conducted and published by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in collaboration with the sector skill councils (SSCs). These studies should capture changes in industry requirements to assess the skill sets required and introduce changes in training curricula.

We should have vocational training innovation centres for systematic research and conducting longitudinal studies on improving vocational education. It is disappointing but a fact that today we don't have enough skilled people to teach skills to our students. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) have their own limitations. There is no mechanism to skill our youngsters to be good plumbers, carpenters and masons so that they can look for jobs even abroad. It is all about getting trained on the job. They start as assistants or daily

wagers with trained people and in due course of time pick up skills to earn their livelihoods, which is a meagre amount.

Capacities of teacher training institutes need to be upgraded to ensure the availability of qualified trainers. It is also important to provide for cross learning by teachers and industry experts through industry-institute linkages.

Niti Aayog has rightly recommended that a single regulatory body with branches in all states should be set up to lay down minimum standards for all players in the skilling system like training providers and assessors, and to issue National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to be globally aligned certificates. To address the requirement of skilled workers in the unorganized sector, scaling up Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), is required under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), using bridge training, apprenticeship, dual training, work-based learning and advanced global courses.

In addition to scaling RPL, there should be a focus on the identification of transferable skills. This can be done by developing a skills or trade matrix; and highlighting the overlap of skills across different trades, such as information and communication technology (ICT), knowledge of multi-languages, etc. The most common transferable skills across the board should be made part of the employable skill development curriculum.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

"RAMCHARITMANAS" COMPOSED BY 16TH-CENTURY POET TULSIDAS, PROPAGATES SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION.
— RJD LEADER CHANDRASHEKHAR



WHAT HE HAS DONE IS A DISGRACE TO THE ENTIRE STATE. RAM HAS BEEN THE BINDING FORCE IN SOCIETY. HOW CAN ONE CALL HIM DIVISIVE?
— BIHAR BJP MLA SAMRAT CHOUDHARY

CoWIN to U-win: A journey well begun for India

We should leverage the learning from our Covid vaccination drive, and build on the innovations for higher immunization targets

January 16, 2023, marks the successful two years journey of one of the biggest vaccination drives in the world and most satisfying years of my career as public servant and also as an in-charge of this initiative. India's Covid-19 vaccination drive has become a textbook example of dealing with a public health emergency unprecedented and unanticipated in nature.

It has become an illustration of India's best qualities, grit and determination of its frontline and health workers as well as active participation of citizens in dealing with a crisis. This is a story of innovations and improvisation in policy and regulations; in logistics and supply chain management; in social mobilization; in governance and in strategic



MANOHAR AGNANI

(The author, a former Additional Secretary (Health), is a public health expert)

interventions.

Adequate and timely availability of safe and efficacious vaccines was ensured through various simultaneous measures such as providing a conducive environment for research and development, parallel testing of vaccines, expedited Emergency Use Listing (EUL) process without compromising the regulatory requirements, technology transfer, financial grants and advance payments in full to the manufacturers.

Efforts which equally deserve mention are the assessment and significant augmentation of the country's capacity of vaccine storage (cold chains), extensive capacity building using a hybrid model of both virtual platforms and physical trainings, monitoring

the quality of training of nearly 75,000 programme officers and medical doctors, 890,000 health workers and 300 national and state adverse events following immunization (AEFI) committee members using certain pre-fixed key indicators.

Leveraging digital capabilities, CoWIN (Winning over Covid) platform played a crucial role as it was based on the five core principles: inclusivity, accessibility, equity, transparency and scalability. It monitored and reported real-time vaccination numbers on its dashboard, ensuring transparency throughout and enabled seamless vaccine delivery across 29,000 cold chain points. Each vaccination centre was allotted a CVC ID and no vaccine was provided

to any vaccination centre without creating a vaccination session on CoWIN, while each beneficiary was provided with a unique beneficiary ID and no beneficiary was vaccinated without being registered on Co-WIN.

The precept of the communication strategy generated the spirit of people's participation (Jan Bhagidari). Campaigns such as 'Har Ghar Dastak' Teekakaran Abhiyaan and COVID-19 Vaccination Amrit Mahotsava expedited the identification and vaccination of missed/due beneficiaries. 'Har Ghar Dastak' drive was amplified by the involvement of local leaders and Gram Panchayats to motivate the beneficiaries for vaccine uptake and timely completion of dose schedule. Extensive

involvement of CSOs/NGOs yielded widespread factual messaging and mass mobilization of beneficiaries, especially the migratory population.

Free precaution doses were administered to eligible beneficiaries under COVID-19 Vaccination Amrit Mahotsava through a camp-based strategy wherein special vaccination sessions were organized at various places such as public and private offices, schools, colleges, routes of religious yatras, industrial establishments, etc.

The most critical component for the success of the programme was its continued supply chain mechanism which was sustained throughout by increasing the frequency of vaccine supplies with reduced quantity of vaccines in

each tranche to minimize vaccine stock in the pipeline. Vaccine wastage was minimized through regular review with cross-learnings between States/UTs ensuring efficient utilization of each dose of vaccine. A time-series of coverage of both the doses of covid-19 vaccine clearly illustrated that the gap closure was achieved between the first and second dose administered. India's Covid-19 vaccination drive has maintained a healthy pace from the very beginning, thereby positioning our nation as the fastest in the world to vaccinate one crore beneficiaries. With the administration of more than 220 crore Covid vaccine doses across the country, India displayed its capability to consistently achieve high levels of

vaccination coverage for a sustained period of time. India has successfully covered more than 90 per cent of the eligible population aged ≥12 years with both the doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

To conclude, I feel that we should leverage the learning from our Covid vaccination drive, and adapt and build on the innovations towards ensuring 100 per cent coverage of giving vaccines to children and pregnant women under the Universal Immunisation Programme. The planning of which has already started under U-Win and I am fully confident that Team Health India will show to the global world the strategy and implementation process of achieving universal immunisation and saving lives.

Deaths from strike on Ukraine apartment building rise to 25

AP ■ DNIPRO (UKRAINE)

The death toll from a Russian missile strike on an apartment building in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro rose to 25 on Sunday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reported as rescue workers scrambled to pull survivors from the rubble.

Emergency crews worked through the frigid night at the wrecked multi-story residential building, the site of the worst casualties from a widespread Russian barrage Saturday.

The attacks, which also targeted the capital, Kyiv, and the northeastern city of Kharkiv, ended a two-week lull in the airstrikes Russia has launched against Ukraine's power infrastructure and urban centres almost weekly since October.

Russia fired 33 cruise missiles on Saturday, of which 21 were shot down, according to Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces.

The missile that hit the apartment building was a Kh-22 launched from Russia's Kursk region, according to the military's air force command, adding that Ukraine does not have a system capable of intercepting that type of weapon.

In Dnipro, workers used a crane as they tried to rescue people trapped on upper floors of the apartment tower where about 1,700 were living. Some residents signalled for help with lights on their mobile phones.

Zelenskyy reported that at least 73 people were wounded and 39 people had been rescued as of Sunday afternoon. The city government in Dnipro said 43 people were reported missing.



"Search and rescue operations and the dismantling of dangerous structural elements continues. Around the clock. We continue to fight for every life," the Ukrainian leader said.

Ivan Garnuk was in his apartment when the building was hit and said he felt lucky to have survived. He described his shock that the Russians would strike a residential building with no strategic value.

"There are no military facilities here. There is nothing here," he said. "There is no air defence, there are no military bases here. It just hit civilians, innocent people."

Dnipro residents joined rescue workers at the scene to help clear the rubble. Others brought food and warm clothes for those who had lost their homes.

"This is clearly terrorism and all this is simply not human," one local, Artem Myzychenko, said as he cleared rubble.

Claiming responsibility for the missile strikes across Ukraine, Russia's Defence Ministry said Sunday that it achieved its goal.

"All designated targets have been hit. The goal of the attack has been achieved," a ministry statement posted

on Telegram said. It said missiles were fired "on the military command and control system of Ukraine and related energy facilities," and did not mention the attack on the Dnipro residential building.

On Sunday, Russian forces attacked a residential area in the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson, regional Gov. Yaroslav Yanushevych said in a Telegram post.

According to preliminary information, two people were wounded.

Russia's renewed air attacks came as fierce fighting raged in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province, where the

Russian military has claimed it has control of the small salt-mining town of Soledar but Ukraine asserts that its troops are still fighting.

If the Russian forces win full control of Soledar it would allow them to inch closer to the bigger city of Bakhmut.

The battle for Bakhmut has raged for months, causing substantial casualties on both sides. With the grinding war nearing the 11-month mark, Britain announced it would deliver tanks to Ukraine, its first donation of such heavy-duty weaponry.

Although the pledge of 14 Challenger 2 tanks appeared modest, Ukrainian officials expect it will encourage other Western nations to supply more tanks.

"Sending Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine is the start of a gear change in the UK's support," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office said in a statement late on Saturday.

"A squadron of 14 tanks will go into the country in the coming weeks after the prime minister told President Zelenskyy that the UK would provide additional support to aid Ukraine's land war. Around 30 AS90s, which are large, self-propelled guns, operated by five gunners, are expected to follow."

Sunak is hoping other Western allies follow suit as part of a coordinated international effort to boost support for Ukraine in the lead-up to the 1-year anniversary of the invasion next month, according to officials.

The UK defence secretary plans to travel to Estonia and Germany this week to work with NATO allies, and the foreign secretary is scheduled to visit the US and Canada to discuss closer coordination.

Moldova: Controlled detonations carried out on rocket debris



AP ■ CHISINAU (MOLDOVA)

Authorities in Moldova said on Sunday that specialist teams have carried out "controlled detonations" of explosives that were discovered in parts of rocket debris that border officials found in a northern village near the country's border with Ukraine.

Moldova's Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement that an on-site investigation turned up about 80 kilograms of explosives in the remains of the rocket discovered Saturday in the Briceni district village of Larga.

Bomb squads from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence later performed the controlled explosions, and authorities extended the security zone around the debris, the interior ministry said.

Photographs posted on the ministry's Facebook page on Sunday show what appears to be a large cylindrical object loaded with white powder.

The ministry has not said

when the rocket was fired or who fired it but said it originated "from Russia's air attacks on Ukraine" and that Ukrainian authorities were informed.

"All the evidence accumulated as part of the on-site investigation will be transferred, as agreed, to the specialised prosecutors," the interior ministry said.

Moldovan Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilata reacted to the incident on Saturday by condemning Russia's latest attacks on Ukraine and expressed her "indignation for the disrespect of the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova" after its "airspace was overrun again today".

It is the third such incident to have raised alarm in Moldova. In late October, a Russian missile landed in the border town of Naslavcea, and last month missile debris was found in an orchard in another town close to the border with Ukraine.

In late June, Moldova was made a candidate for European Union membership on the same day as Ukraine.

A loving dad and his injured son pay war's costs in Ukraine

AP ■ CHERNIHIV, UKRAINE

In a Ukrainian hospital ward for wounded soldiers, where daylight barely penetrates, a father talks to his injured son for hours. Serhii Shumei, 64, never scolded Vitalii for choosing to go to war. Even now, despite the damage done to his son's brain by an exploding artillery shell, Serhii feels pride, not pity.

"I've been constantly with him in the last five months, beside him, beside him, beside him," says Serhii, a retired former soldier himself. "I'm not going anywhere. ... except for a smoke."

Vitalii, a 34-year-old long-range anti-aircraft missile commander, was wounded in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine that has become synonymous with horrific losses in ongoing fighting for both Ukraine and Russia. Quite how deadly isn't known — because neither side is saying. From the stream of wounded soldiers that are coming off frontlines to hospitals like the one where Vitalii lies, it's evident the costs are severe.

Both sides have poured troops and resources to capture or defend Donbas strongholds, fighting over months of grinding, attritional combat to what has largely become a bloody stalemate. After setbacks elsewhere in Ukraine for President Vladimir Putin's nearly 11-



month invasion, Russia is looking for some sort of localized success in the Donbas, even if that just means taking control of a town or two pounded into rubble. Ukraine wants to make Russia's advances as costly as possible.

The Donbas towns of Bakhmut and Soledar have been turned into hellscape as a result. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described them as "completely destroyed," strewn with corpses and craters, and with "almost no life left."

"This is what madness looks like," Zelenskyy says.

Vitalii was wounded Aug.

25 on another section of the Donbas frontline, in Advivka, about 70 kilometers (45 miles) south of Bakhmut. The shell that struck his dugout set off other explosives. The blast tore a crater in Vitalii's skull that is as deep and broad as half a melon. His brain injuries were so severe that doctors doubted he'd show signs of consciousness again.

Now, Vitalii sometimes seems aware of his surroundings. He blinks. He can swallow. But he's largely immobile.

Serhii refuses to give up on him.

"We are seeing some progress, getting back on our

feet. This is my opinion," he says.

He spends hours at Vitalii's bedside, sharing news from the battlefields, reciting from books, and reading out messages of support.

They're sent by grateful Ukrainians who urge Vitalii to "Hold on to life! We really need you!" and say "You are strong! You will manage!"

Serhii says tears roll down Vitalii's cheeks when he reads them to him. Other signs of improvement appeared in late December, when Vitalii started wiggling his toes, Serhii says. Vitalii also has started to frown, which Serhii interprets as mean-

ing that his son is interested in what he's reading to him.

And recently, Serhii says, another breakthrough: audible responses from Vitalii.

"I've started asking him 'Do you know who I am?' And he answered 'Dad'."

Another of Vitalii's frequent visitors is Iryna Timofeyeva, a volunteer whose brainchild it was to collect messages of support.

"The love of the family, the attention of other people, very often helps the positive dynamics of the patient," she says. "It is very important for the wounded that he is not alone. That is how he understands that he has to fight."

Vitalii is, for now, alone in his ward, after other patients were transferred for rehabilitation elsewhere. But the beds around him are unlikely to stay empty for long, given the ferocity of the fighting in the Donbas. Vitalii's hospital in Chernihiv, north of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, is among those where soldiers get long-term follow-up care after their wounds have been stabilized closer to the fronts.

Serhii feels that caring for his son is his contribution to the war effort.

"I will put him back on his feet. This is my dream," he says.

Inclining to his son's ear, he asks: "Ukraine will win, we will win, right?"

The answer is silence.

Full implementation of 13A needed for unity: Lankan Prez

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Sunday said his government is hoping to fully implement the 13th Amendment to its Constitution as mooted by India to facilitate unity among all the communities so that they could live as one.

India has been pressing Sri Lanka to implement the 13th Amendment which was brought in after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1987. The 13A provides for the devolution of power to the Tamil community.

President Wickremesinghe while addressing the national Thai Pongal festival-- a ceremony unique to the country's Tamil minority, in Jaffna, said a Social Justice Commission would be established to address grievances of all communities to create a Sri Lankan identity without discrimination.

His comments came days ahead of the visit to Colombo by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. The minister is expected to raise the grievances of the minority Tamil community during his high-level talks here.

The statement from Wickremesinghe also assumes significance as last week the main Tamil party expressed frustration over the lack of progress from the government on the talks held since mid-December.

The Tamils said they were skipping two days of talks to give



the government an ultimatum of January 17 to come up with solutions to immediate issues. Wickremesinghe said he would be making a statement on steps to be taken to achieve national reconciliation on February 4, which is Sri Lanka's 75th anniversary of independence celebrations.

A political party leaders' meeting would be convened next week to discuss the views of all parties on reconciliation.

He said the Tamil concerns on the disappearance of their kith and kin and a mechanism to grant relief to them would be announced.

Sri Lanka has had a long history of failed negotiations to end the Tamil claim of discrimination by allowing some form of political autonomy.

An Indian effort in 1987 that created the system of a joint provincial council for the Tamil-

dominated north and east faltered as the Tamils claimed it fell short of full autonomy.

Tamils say that not enough power had been devolved to the provincial councils to make them meaningful.

Wickremesinghe himself tried an aborted constitutional effort between 2015-19 which too came to be scuttled by the hardline majority politicians. The Tamils put forward their demand for autonomy since gaining independence from Britain in 1948 which from the mid-70s turned into a bloody armed conflict.

Over the years, the Sri Lankan government has been aggressive against Tamilian groups following its war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The LTTE ran a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

According to Sri Lankan government figures, over 20,000 people are missing due to various conflicts including the three-decade brutal war with Lankan Tamils in the north and east which claimed at least 100,000 lives.

International rights groups claim at least 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed in the final stages of the war, but the Sri Lankan government has disputed the figures.

GOP action on mail ballot timelines angers military families

AP ■ COLUMBUS, OHIO

Ohio's restrictive new election law significantly shortens the window for mailed ballots to be received — despite no evidence that the extended timeline has led to fraud or any other problems — and that change is angering active-duty members of the military and their families because of its potential to disenfranchise them.

The pace of ballot counting after Election Day has become a target of conservatives egged on by former President Donald Trump. He has promoted a false narrative since losing the 2020 election that fluctuating results as late-arriving mail-in ballots are tallied is a sign of fraud.

Republican lawmakers said during debate on the Ohio legislation that even if Trump's claims aren't true, the skepticism they have caused among conservatives about the accuracy of election results justifies impos-



ing new limits.

The new law reduces the number of days for county election boards to include mailed ballots in their tallies from 10 days after Election Day to four. Critics say that could lead more ballots from Ohio's military voters to miss the deadline and get tossed.

This issue isn't confined to Ohio.

Three other states narrowed their post-election windows for accepting mail ballots last session, according to data from the

nonpartisan Voting Rights Lab. Similar moves pushed by Republican lawmakers are being proposed or discussed this year in Wisconsin, New Jersey, California and other states.

Ohio's tightened window for receiving mailed ballots is likely to affect just several hundred of the thousands of military and overseas ballots received in any election. Critics say any number is too great.

"What kind of society do we call ourselves if we are disenfranchising people from the rights that they are over there protecting?" said Willis Gordon, a Navy veteran and veterans affairs chair of the Ohio NAACP's executive committee.

Republican state Sen. Theresa Gavarone, who championed the tightened ballot deadline, said Ohio's previous window was "an extreme outlier" nationally. She said Ohio's military and overseas voters still have ample time under the new law.

Police: Ex-Afghan female lawmaker, guard shot dead at home

AP ■ KABUL

A former Afghan female lawmaker and her bodyguard have been shot dead by unknown assailants at her home in the capital, Kabul, police said Sunday.

Mursal Nabizada was among the few female parliamentarians who stayed in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021. It is the first time a lawmaker from the previous administration has been killed in the city since the takeover.

Local police chief Molvi Hamidullah Khalid said Nabizada and her guard were shot dead around 3 a.m. Saturday in the same room.

He said her brother and a second security guard were injured. A third security guard

fled the scene with money and jewellery.

She died on the first floor of her home, which she used as her office. Khalid said investigations are under way. He did not answer questions about possible motives. Abdullah Abdullah, who was a top official in Afghanistan's former Western-backed government, said he was saddened by Nabizada's death and hoped the perpetrators would be punished. He described her as a "representative and servant of the people."

A former Kandahar parliamentarian, Malalai Ishaqzai, also offered her condolences.

Nabizada was elected in 2019 to represent Kabul and stayed in office until the Taliban takeover.



Rounding off Africa tour, China's top diplomat visits Egypt

AP ■ CAIRO

China's chief diplomat was in Cairo Sunday for talks with Egyptian and Arab League officials, marking his last stop in a multi-leg trip to Africa that aims to consolidate Beijing's footprint across the resource-rich continent.

Foreign Minister Qin Gang met separately with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit.

He also met with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry.

In a joint news conference, Foreign Minister Shoukry said the talks addressed Sino-Egyptian relations and increasing Chinese tourism to the Middle Eastern country, which has for years struggled to revive its vital tourism sector.



Both ministers said they also discussed regional issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Tensions have risen after the return to office last month of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is heading Israel's most right-wing and religiously conservative government.

Responding to a Chinese reporter's question, Qin urged Israel to "stop incitements and provocations, and to refrain from taking unilateral actions that could worsen the situation."

He also called for "maintaining the status quo" at

Jerusalem's most important holy site, after an ultranationalist Israeli Cabinet minister visited it earlier this year.

That visit drew fierce condemnation from across the Muslim world and a strong rebuke from the United States.

In his meeting with el-Sissi, the Chinese foreign minister said Beijing would continue to develop its investment in Egypt's infrastructure projects including those with links to China's Belt and Road initiative.

China has invested billions of dollars in Egyptian state-led projects such as the Suez Canal Economic Zone and the new administrative capital, which is being built east of Cairo.

Qin arrived in Cairo Saturday afternoon. His week-long trip included Ethiopia, where the African Union headquarters is located, as well as Gabon, Angola and Benin.

It was Qin's first overseas trip since his appointment in December.

Biden to touch on voting rights in sermon celebrating MLK

AP ■ WILMINGTON (US)

President Joe Biden is set to mark what would have been the 94th birthday of the late Martin Luther King Jr. With a sermon Sunday at Atlanta's historic Ebenezer Baptist Church that aims to celebrate the civil rights leader's legacy while reviving the Biden administration's call for sweeping voting rights legislation. Biden's failure to win passage of a measure that would have bolstered voting right protections, a central campaign pledge, is one of his biggest disappointments of his first two years in office. The task is even steeper now that Republicans control the House.

In advance of Biden's visit to the church where King once preached, White House officials said he was committed to advocating for meaningful voting

rights action.

"The president will speak on a number of issues at the church, including how important it is that we have access to our democracy," senior adviser Keisha Lance Bottoms said. Bottoms, who was Atlanta's mayor from 2018 to 2022, said "you can't come to Atlanta and not acknowledge the role that the civil rights movement and Dr. King played in where we are in the history of our country."

The Democrats' voting rights bill, named after John Lewis, the late civil rights leader and Georgia congressman, included provisions that would have made Election Day a national holiday, ensured access to early voting and mail-in ballots and enabled the Justice Department to intervene in states with a history of voter interference, among other changes. The legislation collapsed



last year when two senators — Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat then and now an independent — refused to join Democratic colleagues in changing Senate rules to overcome a Republican filibuster. Sinema last month announced that she was changing her party affiliation, but she continues to caucus with Democrats.

Biden was invited to Ebenezer, where King served as co-pastor from 1960 until he was

assassinated in 1968, by Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock, the senior pastor. Warnock, like many battleground state Democrats who won reelection in 2022, kept his distance during the campaign from Biden as the president's approval rating lagged and the inflation rate climbed.

But with Biden beginning to turn his attention toward an expected 2024 reelection effort, Georgia is going to get plenty of his attention.

In 2020, Biden managed to win Georgia as well as closely contested Michigan and Pennsylvania, where Black votes made up a disproportionate of the Democratic electorate. Turning out Black voters in those states will be essential to Biden's 2024 hopes.

The White House has tried to promote Biden's agenda in minority communities. The

White House has cited efforts to encourage states to take equity into account for public works projects as they spend money from the administration's USD 1 trillion infrastructure bill. The administration also has acted to end sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses, scrapping a policy widely seen as racist.

The administration also highlights Biden's work to diversify the federal judiciary, including his appointment of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court and the confirmation of 11 Black women judges to federal appeals courts — more than those installed to those powerful courts under all previous presidents combined.

The visit to Ebenezer also comes at a delicate moment for Biden after Attorney General Merrick Garland on Thursday

announced the appointment of a special counsel to investigate how the president handled classified documents after leaving the vice presidency in 2017. The White House on Saturday revealed that additional classified records were found at Biden's home near Wilmington, Delaware.

In Atlanta, Biden will the first sitting president ever to speak at a Sunday service at Ebenezer, Bottoms said.

King, who was assassinated in 1968 after he fuelled passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, would have celebrated his 94th birthday on Sunday. Members of King's family are expected to be in attendance for Biden's visit.

The president plans to be in Washington on Monday to speak at the National Action Network's annual breakfast on the King holiday.

As tornadoes hit, survivors hid in tubs, shipping container

AP ■ MARBURY (US)

An Alabama engine mechanic took refuge in a shipping container as a tornado from a violent storm decimated his shop and killed two of his neighbours along its destructive path across Alabama and Georgia.



The harrowing stories of David Hollon and other survivors of Thursday's storm are emerging as residents comb through the wreckage wrought by tornadoes and blistering winds that have led to the deaths of at least nine people.

In Alabama's rural Autauga County, where at least seven people have died, Hollon and his workers saw a massive tornado churning toward them. They needed to get to shelter — immediately.

Hollon said they ran into a metal shipping container near the back of his garage because the container had been anchored to the floor with concrete. Once inside, Hollon began frantically dialling his neighbour on the phone. But as they heard the garage being ripped apart by the storm, the call kept going to voicemail.

The storm passed and they emerged, only to find the body of his neighbour in the street, he said. Another neighbor up the road had also died, a family member said.

"I guess we did a lot better than most. We got damage, but we're still here," Hollon, 52, said in an interview Saturday as he walked amidst the remains of his garage, stepping through a field littered with battered cars, shattered glass, snapped tree branches, splintered wood and other debris.

Leighea Johnson, a 54-year-old cafeteria worker who also lives in Autauga County, stood among the strewn remains of her trailer home.

She pointed to a tall pile of rubble that she identified as her bedroom, bathroom and kitchen.

A swing set she had in her backyard was now across the street, mangled among some trees. Her outdoor trampoline had been wrapped around another set of trees in a neighbour's front yard.

"The trailer should be here, and now it's not," Johnson said, pointing to a slab covered in debris, "And it is all over the place now."

The storm brought powerful twisters and winds to Alabama and Georgia that uprooted trees, sent mobile homes airborne, derailed a freight train, flipped cars, cracked utility poles and downed power lines, leaving thousands without electricity.

Suspected tornado damage was reported in at least 14 counties in Alabama and 14 counties in Georgia, according to the National Weather Service.

Early Sunday, President Joe Biden declared a major disaster in Alabama and ordered federal aid to supplement recovery efforts in affected areas.

Autauga County officials said the tornado had winds of at least 136 mph (218 kph) and levelled damage consistent with an EF3, two steps below the most powerful category of twister.

County authorities have said at least a dozen people were hospitalized and about 40 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, including mobile homes that were launched into the air. Residents described chaotic scenes as the storm spun toward them. People rushed into shelters, bathtubs and sheds as the winds bore down. In one case, a search crew found five people, trapped but unharmed, inside a storm shelter after a wall from a nearby house fell onto it.

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South Korean Prez travels to UAE, seeks arms sales

AP ■ ABU DHABI

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol received an honor guard welcome Sunday on a trip to the United Arab Emirates as he hopes to expand its military sales here.

Yoon's visit comes as South Korea conducts business deals worth billions of dollars and stations special forces troops to defend the UAE, an arrangement that drew criticism under his liberal predecessor.



Now, however, it appears the conservative leader wants to double down on those military links even as tensions with neighbouring Iran have already seen Tehran seize a South Korean oil tanker in 2021.

"I think that the situation in the Middle East is changing very rapidly when it comes to geopolitics," said June Park, a fellow with the International Strategy Forum at Schmidt Futures.

"So Korea wants to make sure some of the strategic partnerships and the components ... With the UAE."

Yoon arrived at Qasr Al Watan palace in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. He was greeted by Emirati leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who took office in May after serving as the country's de facto ruler for years.

An honour guard of traditionally dressed Emiratis greeted Yoon and his wife, Kim Keon Hee.

They twirled model Lee-Enfield rifles alongside troops on camelback and horseback. Inside, a military band played the South Korean and Emirati national anthems.

After the ceremony, Yonhap quoted Sheikh Mohammed as saying the UAE planned to invest USD 30 billion in South Korea. "We decided to make the investment with confidence in the Republic of Korea that keeps its promises under all circumstances," he said.

The report did not elaborate.

While energy-hungry South Korea does rely on the Emirates for just under 10 per cent of its crude oil supply, Seoul has struck a series of deals far beyond oil with this nation of seven sheikhdoms that closely tie the nation to Abu Dhabi.

South Korea's trade with the UAE is into the billions of dollars worth of cars, material and other goods.

Netanyahu moving ahead on legal overhaul despite outcry

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday his government plans to charge ahead with an overhaul of the country's judicial system, despite fierce criticism from top legal officials and protests against the changes that drew tens of thousands of people.

Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, has made the legal changes the centrepiece of his new government's agenda and the surging opposition to them is presenting an early challenge for the Israeli leader.



The overhaul would weaken the power of the Supreme Court, granting legislators the ability to pass laws the court has struck down with a simple majority, as well as give the government greater power over the appointment of judges and limit the independence of government legal advisers.

The proposed changes have sparked an outcry from the Supreme Court's top justice, who in rare criticism called the overhaul an "unbridled attack on the justice system."

The country's attorney general has also spoken out against the plan, as have many of her predecessors, and tens of thousands protested the proposed changes in Tel Aviv on Saturday.

Despite the opposition, Netanyahu told a meeting of his Cabinet that voters cast their ballots in November elections in support of his campaign promise to overhaul the justice system.

"We will complete legisla-

ing the reforms in a way that will correct what needs correcting, will totally protect individual rights and will restore the public's faith in the justice system that so much requires this reform," Netanyahu said.

There have been calls in the past to reform Israel's justice system, which was given greater clout in the 1990s and has been seen since by critics as being too interventionist in the process of lawmaking. But the sweeping changes sought by Netanyahu's justice minister have raised an alarm among opponents who see them as a death knell to Israel's system of checks and balances and in turn, its democratic fundamentals.

Netanyahu and his allies see the changes as a way to ease the process of governance and recalibrate what they say is an imbalance between the country's executive and judicial branches.

The proposed changes,

tabled weeks after the government was sworn in, have exposed how deeply polarised Israeli society is, torn between preserving the country's liberal and democratic ideals or shifting away from them. They have also shown how quickly the country's government, its most right-wing ever, is intent on advancing its policies, many of which have sparked criticism, including from unexpected quarters.

Netanyahu heads a government of ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox parties who at times in the past have seen their agendas thwarted by Supreme Court decisions or unfavourable counsel by government legal advisers. That prompted them to make sure the legal changes were a top priority during negotiations to form the government.

Netanyahu, eager to return to power under the shadow of his corruption trial, appeared to be generous to his partners in the talks.



'They are on run': Somalia leads fight against al-Shabab

AP ■ MOGADISHU

Enough was enough. For 13 years, extremists with al-Qaida's East Africa affiliate had controlled Mohamud Adow's village in central Somalia, imposing harsh ideology and arresting local teachers and traditional leaders.

Then, word came that Somali forces in a surprising national offensive had expelled the fighters from nearby villages. A small group of residents sneaked out one night in August to meet with Somali troop commanders and invited them into their village of Rage-El. The 80-year-old Adow was among those taking up arms, joining a local militia fighting alongside Somali forces in rural battles with battered guns.

"The people were living in agony," said Adow, one of several witnesses interviewed by The Associated Press.

In what is being called "total war" by the government

of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's that was elected in May, Adow and others across the Horn of Africa nation are being encouraged to stand up to the al-Shabab extremists who have long embedded in Somali society, exploiting clan divisions and extorting millions of dollars a year from businesses and farmers in their quest to impose an Islamic caliphate.

On Thursday, Somalia's government announced a "people's uprising" as it seeks to pressure al-Shabab from all angles, including financial ones.

It's being described as the most significant offensive against the al-Shabab extremist group in more than a decade. And this time, Somali fighters are in the lead, backed by US and African Union forces. Al-Shabab's thousands of fighters have held back the nation's recovery from decades of conflict by carrying out brazen attacks in the capital, Mogadishu, and elsewhere.

WHO appeals to China to release more Covid info

AP ■ BEIJING

The World Health Organisation has appealed to China to keep releasing information about its wave of COVID-19 infections after the government announced nearly 60,000 deaths since early December following weeks of complaints it was failing to tell the world what was happening.

The announcement Saturday was the first official death toll since the ruling Communist Party abruptly dropped anti-virus restrictions in December despite a surge in infections that flooded hospitals. That left the WHO and other governments appealing for information, while the United States, South Korea and others imposed controls on visitors from China.

The government said 5,503 people died of respiratory failure caused by COVID-19 and there were 54,435 fatalities from cancer, heart disease and other ailments combined with COVID-

19 between December 8 and January 12.

The announcement "allows for a better understanding of the epidemiological situation," said a WHO statement. It said the WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, talked by phone with Health Minister Ma Xiaowei.

"WHO requested that this type of detailed information continued to be shared with us and the public," the agency said.

The National Health Commission said only deaths in hospitals were counted, which means anyone who died at home wouldn't be included. It gave no indication when or whether it might release updated numbers.

A health official said the "national emergency peak has passed" based on an 83 per cent decline in the daily number of people going to fever clinics from a December 23 high.

The report would more than dou-



ble China's official COVID-19 death toll to 10,775 since the disease was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019. China has counted only deaths from pneumonia or respiratory failure in its official toll, which

excludes many fatalities that might be attributed to the virus in other countries.

Meanwhile, high-speed train service resumed Sunday between China's mainland and Hong Kong under restrictions that allow 5,000 passengers from each side to make the trip daily and require a negative virus test within the previous 48 hours.

The two sides are reopening travel links that were suspended under Beijing's "zero-COVID" strategy, which aimed to keep the virus out of China. Hong Kong imposed different but similarly severe restrictions that blocked most international travel.

Candice Zhong, a resident of the neighbouring mainland city of Shenzhen who arrived in Hong Kong, said she planned to visit the city's two major theme parks. "I want to come to Hong Kong to see what it's like now," Zhong said at the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway terminal.

N Korean nuclear test inevitable, China unwilling and unable to help: Victor Cha

FIANS ■ WASHINGTON



A North Korean nuclear test might be inevitable while China, despite its perceived influence in Pyongyang, may be unwilling to help prevent such a test from taking place, former US nuclear negotiator Victor Cha said.

Cha also insisted that Beijing may not have the means to prevent North Korea from conducting a nuclear test even if it wanted to in a recent interview with Yonhap News Agency.

"I think it's inevitable. I think it's seventh nuclear test is inevitable and I think another Hwasong-17 (intercontinental ballistic missile) test using a solid fuel propeller, I think

that's inevitable because in the New Year speech, they said that," said Cha, currently a senior vice president and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

North Korea test-fired its largest Hwasong-17 ICBM in November, as part of its record 69 ballistic missile launches in 2022 alone. Its previous annu-

al record of ballistic missile launches was 25. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has said his country will work to secure an "exponential" growth of its nuclear arsenal this year.

"North Korea is a very opaque country, but they seem to be very transparent about their intentions with regard to nuclear weapons because they state them in every new year speech and they have basically done everything they talked about in the new year speeches," said Cha.

Seoul and Washington have traditionally looked to Beijing to use its widely believed leverage over North Korea to stop Pyongyang from taking any provocative actions.

The former US negotiator in the six-party talks, which included China, Russia, Japan and both Koreas, argued Beijing may not have as much influence in Pyongyang as it wants others to believe, adding that North Korea's three-year voluntary lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that.

"But I think the COVID lockdown has shown that China ... can't really do much because even if you sanction them, it doesn't really do anything."

They (North Korea) have basically had trade cut off with them (China) for three years and it hasn't made them more willing to come to the negotiating table," Cha said.

Japan to increase job of people with disabilities

FIANS ■ TOKYO

Japan will raise its mandatory employment rate of people with disabilities to 2.7 per cent from 2.3 per cent.

This marked the largest increase since the current system was introduced, local media has reported.

The government plans to increase the rate in two stages, first to 2.5 per cent in April next year and then to 2.7 per cent by the end of fiscal 2026, according to the Mainichi Shimbun on Saturday, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Prefectural education boards are required to increase the ratio to 2.9 per cent, while national and local governments, whose current employ-

ment rate of individuals with disabilities is higher than that of the private sector, will raise the percentage to 3 percent.

Companies with 43.5 or more employees are currently required under the Act to Facilitate the Employment of Persons with Disabilities to have an employment rate of at least 2.3 per cent for individuals with disabilities, amid efforts to give such people more work opportunities.

About 614,000 people with disabilities have been employed by businesses as of June 1, 2022, setting a record for 19 years in a row. Only 48.3 per cent of businesses overall, however, have met the legally required employment rate.

Amendments to competition law likely in Budget session

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is expected to propose amendments to the competition law after taking into consideration various suggestions of a Parliamentary panel, in the upcoming Budget session of Parliament, according to a senior official.

Besides, discussions are going on with respect to amendments to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) as well as the Companies Act, 2013.

The official also said that the corporate affairs ministry is examining a Parliamentary panel's suggestions on having a new digital competition law.

The ministry is implementing the Competition Act, IBC and the Companies Act, and amendments to these laws are expected this year.

A bill to amend the competition law was introduced in Parliament on August 5 last year and was later referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance. The panel tabled its report on December 13 last year and the ministry will now be coming



up with an amendment bill after taking into consideration various recommendations of the committee.

The senior official said the bill to amend the competition law is expected in the Budget session of Parliament.

The introduction of a 'Settlement and Commitment framework to reduce litigations' and incentivising parties in an ongoing cartel investigation in terms of lesser penalty to disclose information regarding other cartels were among the proposals in the bill that was introduced in August last year.

In its report, the

Parliamentary panel recommended various changes to the bill to amend the competition law, including bringing cartels under the scope of settlements as a 'pragmatic recourse'.

The Budget session of Parliament will commence from January 31 with President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

The session will have 27 sittings and will continue till April 6 with a month-long recess to examine the budget papers. The first part of the session will conclude on February 14 and after a break, reconvene on March 12.

IT biggies post 14-20% topline growth in Q3 as caution; optimism marks mixed earnings' commentary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's IT services heavyweights delivered between 14-20 per cent on-year growth in topline for December quarter, as they raised guard on global uncertainties and choppy verticals, but remained hopeful that costs as well as business considerations will drive tech demand.

The tech earnings season began with large IT companies -- Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro and HCL Technologies -- declaring their Q3 report card this week, amid analysts' gloomy prognosis around slowdown in advanced economies and fear of geopolitical flare-ups.

The industry leaders said they are keeping a close watch on the global economy and cues.

Overall, the revenue growth band of the top-tier IT players was pegged at between 14-20 per cent for Q3FY23, compared to the year ago period. Seen sequentially, the topline growth for the large IT pack ranged between three per cent and eight per cent versus previous September quarter.

Meanwhile, December-quarter net profit of the top IT deck rose between three per cent (Wipro) to 19 per cent (HCL Tech) year-on-year; and about 4 per cent (TCS) to 17 per cent (HCL Tech) when computed on a sequential basis.

TCS' overall revenue rose 19.1 per cent to Rs 58,229 crore for the reporting quarter. The chief executive and managing director of India's largest IT services company Rajesh Gopinathan said the firm is more confident about the North American and British operations, which account for two-thirds of its revenues, but there are short-term uncertainties, and it is Europe, which needs closer monitoring as geopolitical tensions restrict clients from making IT spends.

TCS management talked of "slow" decision making in Europe, and said it is "fairly constructive" when it comes to markets like the US, although it is keeping a close watch on how things play out over next couple of quarters.

The conversations with customers are much more balanced ones, "where they are equally positive as well as cau-



tious" yielding opportunities of "a mix of both cost and transformation deals".

Chief operating officer N Ganapathy Subramaniam said the deal momentum and pipeline are looking good, and the overall situation on technology spending seems to be intact even in this environment.

Infosys posted a 20.2 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated revenue for December quarter at Rs 38,318 crore, and surprised many by hiking full year revenue guidance to 16-16.5 per cent.

Infosys' consolidated net profit rose to Rs 6,586 crore

during October-December 2022 as against Rs 5,809 crore a year back, translating into 13.4 per cent increase. Sequentially, the net profit was 9.4 per cent higher than September quarter.

The company raised its annual sales forecast on a strong deal pipeline, but in the same breath, it warned of "constraints" in certain verticals amid slowing global economy.

Infosys called out mortgage, investment banking, telecom and hi-tech, saying these segments were "more impacted, leading to delays in decision making and uncertainty in

spending."

The company was, however, quick to add that sectors like energy, utilities and manufacturing continue to see traction.

Moreover, the concerns are more pronounced in Europe than the US, the Bengaluru-based IT bellwether said.

"We see in the European markets, more concerns on what's going on with the economy... And the US market is also there, but relatively less so in the US with respect to Europe. We will see how this plays out," Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said during the Q3 results conference.

CII Business Confidence Index rebounds sharply to 2-year high in Oct-Dec

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The latest CII Business Confidence Index for the October-December quarter rebounded to its highest reading in almost two years of 67.6 from 62.2 in the previous quarter, reflecting optimism around India being in a 'sweet spot' despite the rising global uncertainties, the industry body said on Sunday.

The sharp improvement in the value of the index was buttressed by subsiding of concerns around the impending recession and its impact on the Indian economy, CII stated.

The Index is based on the findings of a survey of over 120 firms of varying sizes and across all industry sectors and regions of the country.

However, a majority (70 per cent) of the survey respondents feel that the Indian economy will expand in a range of 6.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent in the current financial year ending March from 8.7 per cent in the last fiscal.

"Growth is expected to moderate further in the next year on global headwinds. Hence, to support growth, it is critical that RBI refrains from raising the interest rates

any further," Confederation of Indian Industry stated.

The latest first advance estimates of GDP for the current fiscal put the GDP print at 7 per cent.

Nearly half of the respondents (47 per cent) have indicated that they have already started feeling the impact of the policy rate hikes by the RBI on the overall economic activity, revealed the survey.

High interest rates have impinged on private investment levels too. Currently most of the heavy lifting to support growth is being done by public capex, with private capex playing a supporting role, said CII.

Even as global economic growth is witnessing headwinds due to the tightening financial conditions and geopolitical tensions, an overwhelming 73 per cent of the survey respondents expect only a moderate impact on the Indian economy. The confidence among respondents stems from the fact that 86 per cent believe the government's focus on infrastructure is the biggest positive for the Indian economy, followed by improvement in tax collections and good consumption recovery, said CII.



In addition to high borrowing costs, the prevailing heightened uncertainty has prevented firms from furthering their investment plans.

The survey results, however, present an encouraging prognosis with 90 per cent feeling that their company's investment cycle will recover during the next fiscal.

Around 52 per cent expect recovery during the first half of the next fiscal while about 37 per cent of them foreseeing a pickup in investments by the second half of the year. Nearly half of the survey respondents feel that the capacity

utilisation levels in their companies would range between 75-100 per cent during the Oct-Dec quarter.

It is encouraging to note that given its bearing on the overall economy, a recovery in the rural demand is eagerly awaited and about 60 per cent of the respondents feel that a pick-up in rural consumption will take place in the next fiscal, said CII.

With a resumption of business activity, expectations for the Oct-Dec quarter have improved as majority of the respondents anticipate an increase in sales (60 per cent)

and count of new orders (55 per cent).

Consequently, the profit outlook for the quarter has strengthened as nearly half of the respondents (47 per cent) foresee an increase in profit margins, despite the majority of them indicating high input costs. Nonetheless, input price pressures, though still elevated, have moderated from the previous fiscal, with 51 per cent of the respondents expecting raw material costs to remain elevated during the Oct-Dec quarter as compared to 59 per cent in the previous quarter, CII said.

Lalit Modi names son as successor in the KK Modi Family Trust

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former IPL Chairman Lalit Modi on Sunday announced his son Ruchir Modi as his successor beneficiary from his family's side in the KK Modi Family Trust with immediate effect.

In a social media post, Modi who has been involved in a legal tussle against his mother Bina Modi and sister Charu over a property dispute in the family, also announced his son as the head of his branch of the family.

"The present litigation with my mother and sister, is tedious, strenuous and has gone on for long, and even though there have been several rounds of discussions for settlement, there is no end in sight. It has caused and continues to cause me immense distress," he said in a statement shared on Instagram.

Modi, who had earlier shared about his health condition due to COVID-19 infection and pneumonia, requiring external oxygen support in London having been flown from Mexico City, said he had discussed the matter of appointing his son as his successor with



daughter Aliya.

"I have discussed this with my daughter and she and I are of the opinion that I should hand over the control of affairs of the LKM (Lalit Kumar Modi) family and its beneficial interest in the Trust to my son Ruchir Modi," the statement said.

Citing a clause in the KK Modi Family Trust (KKMFT) deed, he said, "I hereby nominate my son Ruchir Modi, a beneficiary of the KKMFT under LKM Branch to be my successor as the next head of the LKM Branch of KKMFT and this shall vest in him immediately."

In his resignation as head of branch (LKM) and beneficiary

of KK Modi Family Trust, he said after discussing with his son and daughter, he is foregoing his beneficial interest, vested at present as well as any that may vest in the future in favour of his son Ruchir.

Subsequently, Modi said he would cease to have any interest, present and future in any of the assets, properties or incomes of the KKMFT.

However, he clarified that "this does not affect my status as a Trustee of the KKMFT, nor would it affect my rights as a member of the KKM family and any claim made for the family expenses under clause 6.1.5 of the KKMFT shall remain unaffected by my gifting my beneficial interest in favour of my son."

Industry participants flag lack of quorum at CCI amid pending deal approvals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With various mergers and acquisitions awaiting CCI approval, industry participants have sought measures to address the issue of lack of quorum at the competition watchdog which does not have a chairperson for more than two months now.

Mergers and acquisitions beyond a certain threshold require the approval of Competition Commission of India (CCI) under the Competition Act, 2022. Section 5 and 6 of the Act relate to regulation of combinations in the country.

For approval of combinations, the regulator needs to have a quorum of three members. However, since the retirement of Chairperson Ashok Kumar Gupta on October 25, 2022, there are only two members, resulting in lack of quorum at CCI.

Against this backdrop, various industry players have sought measures to address the current situation till a new chairperson is appointed, saying the lack of quorum is causing delays in clearances for combinations that have been notified to the regulator.

The concerns have been flagged to the corporate affairs ministry, which is the administrative ministry for CCI.

Leading law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas' Partner (Head - Competition Law) Avaantika Kakkar has written to the ministry regarding lack of quorum at CCI.

"As on date, a total of 15 combinations (transactions



notified to the CCI) are pending CCI's review, including multiple global transactions and transactions under the ambit of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

"The lack of quorum at CCI and its consequent inability to pass any valid orders approving such notified combinations is affecting multiple stakeholders negatively, including acquirers, financial investors, creditors/ lenders, shareholders, employees of relevant parties etc," she said in a letter, dated January 11, to the ministry.

Section 31 of the Competition Act provides for orders of CCI on certain combinations, including on approving the combination wherein the regulator's opinion, the combination does not, or is not likely to have an appreciable adverse effect on competition.

Section 33 of the Act provides the regulator powers to issue interim orders in certain situations.

"... We humbly request the central government to consider passing an ordinance for an interim arrangement of 6 (six) months suspending the quorum requirement under

Section 22(3) of the Act for the operation of CCI's functions only under Sections 31 and 33 of the Act.

"This is an imminent requirement considering that CCI is inoperative and the necessity for non-contentious and urgent issues (including notified combinations/merger matters) to be dealt with appropriately by CCI (often on an urgent basis)," the letter said. Section 22 relates to meetings of CCI.

According to an industry participant, who requested anonymity, the authorities can look at broadening the scope of transactions that would qualify for the green channel route for a short period of time as that could help in clearing more combinations till the time quorum is restored at the regulator. Green channel mechanism allows for automatic approval of certain deals.

Temporary appointment of a member to ensure quorum till a new chairperson is appointed, as well as exempting certain classes of enterprises could be given exemption in the context of combination approvals, as per the industry participant.

'IIFCL gives wings to aviation sector; extends ₹6,630 cr loans for development of airports'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To support the massive growth in the aviation sector, the India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL) has extended a credit of Rs 6,630 crore for the development of six major airports in the country and looks forward to increasing its exposure in the coming years, said its managing director P R Jaishankar.

Bullish on the growth of the aviation sector in the country, he said, the IIFCL also given in-principle approval of Rs 638 crore for the development of a greenfield airport in Andhra Pradesh.

Over the past few years, India has seen massive growth in the airport sector, with increasing investments from both government and private sector, thanks to a rising proportion of middle-income households, infrastructure build-up at leading airports and supportive policy framework.

"With an aim to finance development of world class airport infrastructure in India, IIFCL has, till date, sanctioned Rs 6,630 crore to six major airports in India in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Navi Mumbai, Noida (Jewar) and the newly developed Manohar International Airport in Goa," Jaishankar told PTI.

IIFCL is present in almost all major airports of the country, he said.

"These airports are of national importance and have been facilitating and improving connectivity across the



nation. We are committed to supporting the government in its mission to improve connectivity for the masses and lower down the logistics cost to benefit the economy at large," he said.

He further said, IIFCL will continue to extend its support to develop world class airport infrastructure in India and exploring opportunities in funding the greenfield airport projects, as well as Maintenance, Repairs and Overhaul (MRO) facilities under PPP mode by way of term loan, subscription to bonds, refinancing, or credit enhancement etc.

Highlighting the importance of the airport sector, Jaishankar said it holds the potential to provide a huge positive impact on the economy, with an economic multiplier of 3.1 and employment multiplier of 6.

To meet the growing demand for air travel in India, he said, it has become imperative to increase the capacity of airport infrastructure.

According to reports, investments worth over Rs 85,000 crore are in the pipeline for airport infrastructure in India during FY23 - FY27.

Davos gears up for world leaders' biggest post-pandemic gathering; Indian presence significant



PTI ■ DAVOS

The biggest congregation of global leaders will return Monday to the usual snow-laden setting of this Swiss ski resort town with thousands of participants including about a hundred from India set to discuss 'cooperation in a fragmented world'.

The World Economic Forum had to host its last annual meeting in 2022 in May as the summit could not take place in the usual month of January due to the COVID pandemic-related restrictions. Before that, the 2021 meeting could take place online only.

Though the pandemic is yet to be declared totally over, restrictions are far a few and the war in Ukraine and the economic fallout of geopolitical as well as health crises have made the Davos meeting, often described as the biggest congregation of the global elite, very interesting.

Nearly 50 heads of government or state are expected over the next five days for the meeting beginning Monday, while four union ministers --

Mansukh Mandaviya, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Smriti Irani and R K Singh, as also Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, along with a number of officials and business leaders would be present from India.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Karnataka's B S Bommai were also earlier listed, but they are unlikely to attend the summit. AAP leader Raghav Chadha is also here, so are Telangana minister K T Rama Rao and Tamil Nadu minister Thangam Thennarasu.

Among business leaders, Gautam Adani, Sanjiv Bajaj, Kumar Mangalam Birla, N Chandrasekaran, Nadir Godrej, Ajit Gulabchand, Sajjan Jindal, Sunil Mittal, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, Nandan Nilekani, Adar Poonawalla, Rishad Premji and Sumant Sinha are likely to be present.

The meeting will call on leaders from across the globe to address immediate economic, energy and food crises while laying the groundwork for a more sustainable and resilient world.

‘SIRAJ’S FORM IS GOOD SIGN FOR INDIA’



PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Senior players Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma feel pacer Mohammed Siraj’s outstanding run of form in 50-over cricket augers well for the Indian team heading into the ODI World Cup later this year.

In the absence of Jasprit Bumrah, who has been on the sidelines due to a lower back stress fracture, Siraj has emerged as India’s most successful bowler in ODIs in the past year.

“(Mohammed) Shami has always

been there for us but the way Siraj has come in and done with the new ball has been outstanding,” Kohli said at the post-match presentation after India’s 317-run win over Sri Lanka in the the third and final ODI here.

“He has taken the maximum number of wickets in the powerplay, which was an issue for us early. He is always making the batters think, which is a great sign for us going into the World Cup.”

Siraj, who rocked the Sri Lankan

top-order, missed out on a fifer and returned with impressive figures of 4/32.

“Good to see how he (Siraj) was bowling and he deserved all those slips. He is a rare talent, the way he has come up over the last few years is good to see,” skipper Rohit said.

“He has come from strength to strength and that’s really good for Indian cricket.

“We tried all sort of things (to get his fifer) but it didn’t happen unfortunately. But the four wickets are all

his and fifers will come. He has a few tricks up his sleeves which he is working on and it’s there to see.”

India completed a 3-0 clean sweep of Sri Lanka in the ODI series.

“It was a great series for us. Lots of positives. We bowled well, got wickets when we needed and the batters throughout the series piling on the runs was good to watch.”

India are scheduled to play three ODIs and as many T20Is with New Zealand, starting Wednesday.

“We’ll get to the drawing board

quickly (for the next series) and see how the pitch is, then decide how the combinations will be.

“They (NZ) are coming off a series win in Pakistan, so it won’t be an easy task at all,” Rohit added.

Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka was disappointed by his side’s performance. “It’s disappointing. Not a game we wanted. It happens. We need to learn how to manage the start. Bowlers should learn how to take wickets on these decks and the batters should learn to score.

“Playing positive cricket is the more important thing. If the boys show intent, the bowling would have been different. Congratulations to Indian team for this performance.”

I don’t have desperation to get to a milestone: Kohli

With his 46th ODI hundred on Sunday, the talismanic batter inched closer to the legendary Sachin Tendulkar’s record of 49 centuries in the 50 over format.

“Ever since I came back from the break, I am feeling good and I don’t

have desperation to get to a milestone. I want to continue doing that,” he said after his unbeaten 166.

Kohli, who endured an extended rough patch until the Asia Cup last year, smashed his third century in four innings.

“I was happy to be batting out there and in that space I end up playing good cricket. I am in a nice space right now, just be organic,” he added.

“It is the by-product of the intent I have,” Kohli said of the player of the series trophy.

Ashwin backs Shami, asks why so many taboos for Mankading

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said it’s surprising to see so many ‘taboos’ regarding the ‘Mankad’ form of dismissal and asked why bowlers are always subjected to different ‘treatments’.

Veteran India pacer Mohammed Shami had tried to run out Dasun Shanaka at non-striker’s end when the batter left the crease while backing up during the opening ODI in Guwahati on January 10.

However, Indian skipper Rohit Sharma intervened and withdrew the appeal by Shami as Shanaka, then on 98, went on to complete his century.

Ashwin, who is a vocal supporter of the form of dismissal, on Saturday backed Shami, saying it’s the umpire duty to declare the batter out.

“Of course, Shami’s run out... When Shanaka was on 98, Shami ran him out in the non-striker’s end, and he appealed too. Rohit withdrew that appeal. So many people tweeted about that immediately,” Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

“I am going to keep repeating only one thing, guys. The game situation is immaterial. That is a legitimate form of dismissal.”

During the post-match presentation, Rohit had said that he withdrew the appeal against Shanaka as the Lankan skipper was on 98.

Shanaka eventually ended his innings at 108 not out even



as Sri Lanka lost the match by 67 runs.

“If you ask for an LBW appeal or a caught-behind appeal, nobody will check with the captain on whether they are sure about the appeal,” Ashwin said.

“They will give him out if the bowler appeals, and that is the end of it. See, even if one fielder appeals, it is the duty of the umpire to declare a player out if he is out.

“So, I find it very surprising to have so many taboos surrounding this mode of dismissal. But the entire dismissal is regarding what the bowler does, right?

“The right of making that dismissal or making that appeal or making that decision lies with the bowler, right,” he said.

Drawing an analogy with a batter walking out, Ashwin said: “In so many games, a batter has nicked and walked without waiting for the umpire’s decision.

“At that time, the batting team captain won’t come and ask, ‘With whose permission did you walk like that? Did you forget the team’s cause? Go back and continue playing.’”

“These different treatments for bowlers and batters have been taking place for so many years now,” he added.



Jadeja set for Ranji comeback to prove fitness

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Premier India allrounder Ravindra Jadeja, who withdrew from the Asia Cup last September to undergo a right knee surgery, is set to make a comeback in Saurashtra’s final round of Ranji Trophy fixture against Tamil Nadu in Chennai beginning January 24.

The 34-year-old, who is currently doing rehab at the National Cricket Academy, has been picked in a 17-member squad for the first two Tests in the highly-anticipated four-match series against Australia slated to begin in Nagpur from February 9.

However, his availability is subject to fitness as a call on Jadeja is likely to be taken during the course of the four-day game. “It will be good if he plays for Saurashtra. Probably he will, but I don’t have any further details,” Saurashtra Cricket Association president Jaydev Shah said.

Jadeja has not played any competitive cricket since the T20I against Hong Kong in the Asia Cup on August 31 and his previous first-class match was the rescheduled one-off Test at Edgbaston against England last July.

Jadeja reportedly has started to bowl and bat from earlier this week as he’s winding up his rehab at the NCA. The left-handed batter is seen as a vital cog in India’s line-up, especially in absence of Rishabh Pant at No 5 or 6 in the middle-order.

His leftarm spin could also come handy alongwith ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in the four-match series that will determine India’s fate to make a successive World Test Championship final appearance.

In their 2016-17 series against Australia, Jadeja had played a key role to be adjudged the Player-of-the-Series with 25 wickets and 127 runs as India came from behind to seal a memorable 2-1 win.

India series will be acid test for Cummins: Border

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian great Allan Border is mighty impressed with Pat Cummins’ captaincy but said the upcoming four-Test series against India will be his real “acid test and the final frontier”.

Australia will begin the marquee Test series at Jamtha from February 9 as they eye their first series win in India in 19 years.

“That is going to be the acid test for him and the team,” Border was quoted saying by ABC Sport.

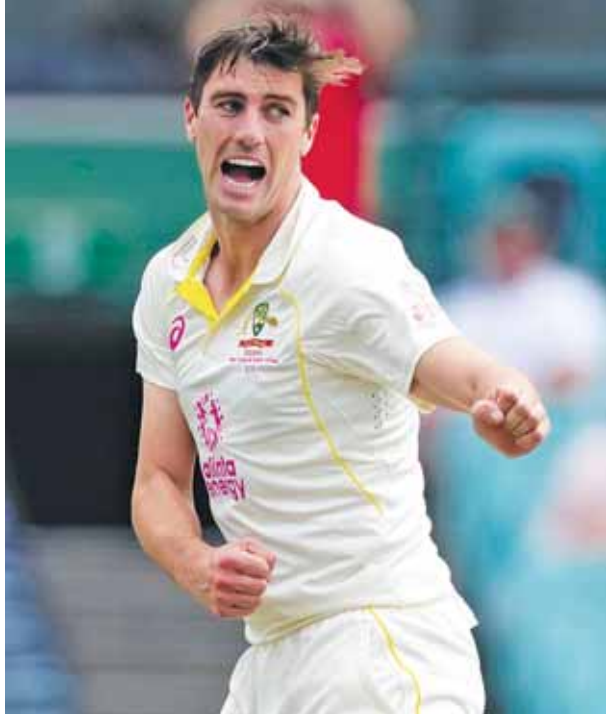
Having been elevated to the hot seat after Tim Paine’s sudden resignation ahead of the Ashes 2021, the Aussie pace spearhead has had a golden run.

Cummins began his captaincy stint winning the Ashes 4-0, then won against Pakistan, West Indies and South Africa. Australia also drew 1-1 with Sri Lanka away from home last year.

The results meant Australia are favourites to make their maiden World Test Championships final. The India series will be the last series in the WTC calendar before they take on England in the Ashes with an eye to win on opposition soil for the first time since 2001.

“The next 12 months is the real test for that side and Pat’s captaincy in particular because India is just about the last frontier for the Australian cricket team.

“We haven’t won there very often. It’s a hard place to play and



a hard place to win and England is the same,” the 67-year-old said.

The former Australian skipper said initially he was apprehensive about Cummins leading the Test side but he has ensured that it didn’t affect his bowling.

“I was not as keen to see a fast bowler (appointed captain), not necessarily the individual but more just the fact that he’s our number-one fast bowler. But he’s proved so many people wrong and he’s handled that so well,” Border said.

“Maybe the make-up of the

team has helped, where he’s got quite a few senior players that he can bounce things off and they can sort of take over to a certain degree when he’s got the ball in his hand when he’s bowling.

“I take my hat off to him. He’s done fantastically well. They look like a happy side. They’re playing very good cricket and that’s all you can do as captain.”

Australia will play four Tests in Nagpur (February 9-13), New Delhi (February 17-21), Dharamsala (March 1-5) and Ahmedabad (March 9-13).

SA mulls split-coaching; Conard, Walter likely options

PTI ■ DURBAN

Struggling South Africa are likely to rope in Shukri Conrad and Rob Walter in a split coaching set up in a bid to revive their fortunes in International cricket.

Conrad recently was at the helm of South Africa’s Under-19 side, while Walter was the head coach of Central Districts in New Zealand.

The duo are expected to be unveiled as South Africa’s new coaches on Monday, reported ESPNcricinfo.

Lance Klusener was the ‘frontrunner’ to coach the white ball side but following his withdrawal on Monday, the duo would be “preferred” to current interim coach Malibongwe Maketa, former West Indies director of cricket Richard Pybus and former national assistant coach Adi Birrel (who applied for the red-ball job only).

One of the two will be put in charge of the white-ball format as he will have to take charge immediately ahead of South Africa’s



three World Cup Super League matches against England from January 27 to February 1. South Africa had crashed out of the T20 World Cup after shocking loss to the Netherlands in last November and also face the challenge of qualifying for the ODI World Cup slated in India in October and November.

They also endured two crushing defeats to Australia recently to jolt their World Test

Championships final hopes. They face the West Indies in two Tests at home from February 28-March 12.

More than a decade ago, while Gary Kirsten was the head coach of Test and ODI side, his deputy Russell Domingo was put in charge of their T20 side.

Domingo went on to succeed Kirsten six months later as their coach in all formats.

Conrad has rich experience in South Africa’s domestic cricket and won four franchise titles with the Lions and Cobras.

He coached South Africa at the 2022 under-19 World Cup in West Indies in January and February, when his team finished seventh out of 16.

Walter has been South Africa’s strength and conditioning expert from 2009 to 2013. He then became Titans head coach and guided them to three trophies in as many seasons.

He then moved to New Zealand in 2016 to coach the Otago Volts and relocated to the Central Stags before the 2020-21 season.

Ishan is strong contender for Test spot in Pant’s absence: Azhar

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Former India skipper Mohammad Azharuddin believes Ishan Kishan would be a strong option as a wicket-keeper batter in the absence of Rishabh Pant for next month’s four-match Test series against Australia.

Ishan was handed a maiden call-up in India’s Test squad for the Border-Gavaskar trophy beginning at Nagpur on February 9. Azhar, who is doing commentary in the International League T20 in UAE, said what happened to Pant is very unfortunate but Ishan’s aggressive style of batting makes him a strong contender for the wicketkeeper-batter’s slot.

Pant was severely injured in a car accident in the last week of December while he was travelling from Delhi to Roorkee. He will be sidelined for most of the 2023 season as he recovers from

multiple injuries.

“Ishan Kishan has been selected in the Indian Test team on his recent form I think he will be a stronger contender for wicket-keeper batsman option. He is a left handed batsman,” Azhar told PTI in an interview.

However, it will not be easy for Ishan to make it to the playing XI of the Test team due to the presence of KS Bharat.

Bharat has been with the team for almost a year now and has scored three half-centuries in the last four first-class matches. It also included an innings of 77 runs while representing India A against Bangladesh A.

Kishan was unable to retain his place in the ODI team despite scoring a double century against Bangladesh.

Azhar lauded the decision to pick Ishan and Suryakumar Yadav in the Test squad but was not pleased with the fact that the



two were not picked for the first two ODIs against Sri Lanka.

“When the player is in form, it’s not right to have them on the bench. Suryakumar Yadav has the potential to play for the Indian team in all three formats. He has also done well in his last Ranji match,” Azhar said.

“As much as I have seen Suryakumar’s batting, I can say that like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, he too can also play in all three formats. After a long time, India has got such a batsman who can play in all formats.

“It is very difficult to make a place in the team and both these players will have to prove themselves, if they find a place in the team.”

The former India batter player, who led the Indian team in 99 Tests and 334 ODIs, also advocated separate captaincy for each format in international cricket.



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