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BLINKEN CAUTIONS CHINA
OVER TAIWAN STATUS QUO**MONEY 6**
DIGITAL HEALTHCARE PROVIDER
LAYS OFF 8% OF ITS WORKFORCE**SPORT 8**
INDIA BEAT NEW ZEALAND
BY 8 WICKETS IN 2ND ODIPublished From
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YouTube, Twitter block BBC's Modi docu links

300 retired judges, bureaucrats, armed service veterans slam 'propaganda piece' by BBC
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Social media giants Twitter and YouTube on Saturday blocked multiple videos and posts sharing links to the controversial BBC documentary "India: The Modi Question", after the Centre directed them to take them down.

India has dubbed the documentary a "propaganda piece, designed to push a particular discredited narrative" with the "continuing colonial mindset blatantly visible".

The Centre told YouTube and Twitter to take down fresh links of the documentary if some people upload or tweet them again, sources said.

More than 300 retired judges, bureaucrats and armed service veterans, in the meantime, released a statement strongly condemning the BBC series which, they said, "reeks of motivated distortion that is as mind-numbingly unsubstantiated as it is nefarious".

"So, now we have the archetype of British past imperialism in India setting itself up as both judge and jury, to resurrect Hindu-Muslim tensions that were overwhelmingly the creation of the British Raj pol-



icy of divide and rule," the statement reads.

The two-part BBC documentary claims it investigated certain aspects relating to the 2002 Gujarat riots when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of the State.

The directions to the two social media majors were issued by Apurva Chandra, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, on Friday using the emergency powers under the IT Rules, 2021.

Sources said senior officials of several Ministries, including External Affairs, Home Affairs, and Information and Broadcasting, examined the documentary and found it to be an attempt to cast aspersions on the authority and credibility of the Supreme Court, sow divisions among various Indian communities, and make unsubstantiated allegations regarding actions of foreign Governments in India.

They said the documentary was found to be undermining

the sovereignty and integrity of India, and having the potential to adversely impact friendly relations with foreign States as also public order within the country.

A Supreme Court-ordered probe had found no evidence of wrongdoing by Modi during his time as the Chief Minister of Gujarat when the riots broke out in February 2002.

The Ministry of External Affairs had a couple of days ago described the BBC documentary as a "propaganda piece" that lacked objectivity and reflected a colonial mindset.

"Let me just make it very clear that we think this is a propaganda piece designed to push a particular discredited narrative. The bias, the lack of objectivity, and frankly a continuing colonial mindset, are blatantly visible," External Affairs Ministry Spokesman Arindam Bagchi said on Thursday responding to questions on the documentary.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak too has distanced

himself from the series, saying he "doesn't agree with the characterisation" of his Indian counterpart after a Pakistan-origin MP Imran Hussain raised it in the UK Parliament.

Lord Rami Ranger, a member of House of Lords of UK Parliament, slammed BBC for its biased reporting, tweeting, "@BBCNews You have caused a great deal of hurt to over a billion Indians. It insults a democratically elected @PMOIndia Indian Police & the Indian judiciary. We condemn the riots and loss of life & also condemn your biased reporting."

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien's tweet was one of those removed by Twitter. "Censorship. Twitter has taken down my tweet of the BBC documentary. It received lakhs of views. The one-hour BBC documentary exposes how PM hates minorities," O'Brien alleged.

"The UK Government's position on this has been clear and long-standing and hasn't changed, of course, we don't tolerate persecution where it appears anywhere but I am not sure I agree at all with the characterisation that the honourable gentleman has put forward to."

Both YouTube and Twitter complied with the Government after directions were reportedly issued by Secretary, Information and Broadcasting on Friday using the emergency powers under the IT Rules, 2021.

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Min suspends WFI Asst Secy, cancels matches

Wrestlers accused Vinod Tomar of taking bribe; WFI rejects allegations
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry on Saturday suspended Wrestling Federation of India's (WFI) assistant secretary Vinod Tomar, a fallout of the grapplers' allegations of sexual harassment and corruption against the sports body's chief, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

It has decided to suspend Tomar, "with immediate effect, to ensure proper functioning of WFI".

The Ministry said it has directed the WFI to suspend "all ongoing activities with immediate effect", including the Ranking Tournament in Gonda, UP, Sharan's stronghold.

This comes a day after Sports Minister Anurag Thakur announced the formation of an oversight committee to probe the charges levelled by some of the country's top wrestlers, including Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Ravi Dahiya, against Sharan and his body.

Regarding Tomar, the Ministry said in a letter, which is in possession of the PTI, that his presence will be "detrimental to the development of this high-priority discipline".

"The Ministry has taken note of the reports about the functioning of the WFI, includ-



Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur with wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Babita Phogat, Sakshi Malik and Ravi Dahiya at a press conference at his residence in New Delhi early on Saturday

PTI

ing the role of Vinod Tomar and, has the reasons to believe that his continued presence will be detrimental to the development of this high-priority discipline," the Ministry said in the letter.

The aggrieved wrestlers had alleged that Tomar took bribes from athletes and was involved in financial corruption, helping him to build property worth crores.

According to sources, the Ministry will announce the names of its oversight committee members on Sunday.

In a press release, the Ministry said it "has communicated to the Wrestling Federation of India on Saturday that in view of the Government's decision to appoint an Oversight

Committee to investigate the various allegations raised by athletes against the Federation, WFI will suspend all ongoing activities with immediate effect, unless the Oversight Committee is formally appointed and takes over the day to day functioning of WFI".

It added, "In view of the direction to suspend all activities immediately, the Sports Ministry has asked WFI to also cancel the ongoing Ranking Tournament in Gonda, UP"

In this regard, the Ministry has asked the WFI to return the entry fees charged to participants for the ongoing event.

The oversight committee of the Ministry will have the powers to take all decisions on matters concerning Indian wrestling while also overseeing

the day-to-day affairs of the federation.

Earlier in the day, the WFI had rejected all the allegations, including that of sexual harassment against its president, and claimed that the wrestlers' protest was motivated by a "hidden agenda to dislodge the current management".

The WFI denied all the charges in its response to the government's notice and asserted that "there is no scope for arbitrariness and mismanagement" in the federation.

The Ministry had sought an explanation from WFI after the country's top wrestlers sat on a dharna and alleged that the federation chief sexually harassed women wrestlers and acts like a "dictator".

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CAPSULE

21 ISLANDS TO BE NAMED AFTER PVC AWARDEES

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend a ceremony to name 21 largest unnamed islands of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands after Param Vir Chakra awardees via video conferencing on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on January 23. January 23 is observed as "Parakram Diwas".

TALIBAN DIVIDED ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

United Nations: A delegation led by the highest-ranking woman at the United Nations urged the Taliban during a four-day visit to Afghanistan that ended Friday to reverse their crackdown on women and girls. Some Taliban officials were more open to restoring women's rights. **P5**

CHRIS HIPKINS NEXT PM OF NEW ZEALAND

Wellington: Education Minister Chris Hipkins, 44, is set to become New Zealand's next prime minister after he was the only candidate to enter the contest Saturday to replace Jacinda Ardern.

2 blasts rock Jammu, 9 hurt

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the arrival of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in Jammu on January 23 and the Republic Day, two back to back powerful explosions rocked the Transport Nagar area of Narwal in which nine civilians received splinter injuries on Saturday.

The twin blasts took place within a radius of 50 metres and in a span of 15 to 20 minutes, thereby exposing the tall claims of heightened "security bandobast" in the run up to the Republic Day celebrations. Following serial blasts, the security was beefed up in and around Jammu and additional security check points were set up for random searches.

The Congress has maintained that the Bharat Jodo Yatra will not be stopped. Rahul is scheduled to hold a public rally at Satwari in Jammu on January 23. Congress MP and AICC J&K incharge Rajani Patil condemned the twin blasts.



Bomb squad members inspect the site after two blasts occurred at Narwal area in Jammu on Saturday

PTI

Additional Director General of Police Mukesh Singh rushed to the site of the blast along with other district police officers. After taking stock of the blast site, Singh told reporters, "Six people were

injured in twin blasts at Narwal on Saturday. A blast occurred in a Bolero in which five people in close vicinity were injured.

"They are all stable and were shifted to hospital. The

area was cleared of all the people but then a second blast occurred at a distance in which one more person was injured. The matter is being investigated."

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Sisi first Egyptian Prez as R-Day Chief Guest; visit to boost ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Egypt will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties, including defence and trade, during talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi here next week.

Sisi is the Chief Guest for this year's Republic Day celebrations. It is the first time an Egyptian head of State is invited as the Chief Guest for the parade.

Giving details about his visit from January 24 to 26, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday the Egyptian President will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including five Ministers and senior officials. Defence and security co-operation is expected to be a major focus area in the discussions.

Both sides are expected to ink more than six or seven pacts, including trade agriculture, cyberspace and informa-



tion technology (IT) following the talks between Modi and Sisi on January 25.

Egypt has shown interest in procuring the Indian designed and manufactured Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) and Dhruv light helicopter and Akash surface to air missile.

The MEA said Sisi will be accorded a ceremonial wel-

come at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 25 and President Droupadi Murmu will host a State banquet in his honour the same evening. "President Sisi will have a bilateral meeting and delegation-level talks with the PM on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest," the Ministry said.

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Stone pelting again on Vande Bharat in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the second such incident in recent times in Bihar, the Vande Bharat Express was pelted with stones while passing through Katihar district on Friday, affecting the operations. The latest incident was reported by a passenger of train number 22302 running from New Jalpaiguri to Howrah, senior security commissioner of Katihar railway division Kamal Singh said.

"The passenger complained to the train escort party that a stone hit the coach at 4.25 pm. The place of occurrence was between Dalkhola and Telta stations, in Balrampur police station area of the district," said the official. At Dalkhola, railway officers inspected the bogie and



The broken window of the Vande Bharat train

found cracks in a window pane. The police station concerned was subsequently informed with the request to enquire into the incident.

This is the second such incident involving the semi high-speed train to have taken place in the State in less than a month. On January 3, the train was pelted with stones in

Kishanganj district and three boys, identified with the help of CCTV footage, were caught by police and produced before the juvenile justice board.

An angry West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had threatened to sue media outlets which had wrongly reported that the stone pelting took place in her State.

Suspend Maliwal for fair probe as molester AAP member: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Saturday demanded Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena to suspend Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chief Swati Maliwal for a fair police probe into her alleged molestation charges. Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi too joined several other BJP leaders in slamming the AAP over Maliwal's molestation claims, alleging it was part of a conspiracy hatched by Delhi's ruling party to defame the national Capital.

The incident in question allegedly took place outside AIIMS on the intervening night of January 18 and 19.

In a letter to the Lt Governor, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor requested him to sus-



pend Maliwal till the completion of the police enquiry into the incident of alleged molestation with her on January 19.

Kapoor said reports indicate the man accused of molesting the DCW chief is an AAP worker. Everyone condemned the incident and it was satisfying to note that the Delhi Police acted swiftly after the incident was reported and arrested the accused within an hour, Kapoor said.

"...But social media reports

on this, as well as media reports, indicate that the eve teaser involved Harish Chandra Suryavanshi is an active worker of Delhi's ruling AAP from Sangam Vihar," the BJP spokesperson said. There are photographs of Suryavanshi campaigning with an AAP MLA, he added.

"This development revealing eve-teaser's connection with AAP has exposed Maliwal and she will try her best to influence police inquiry in the matter by using her constitutional office," Kapoor alleged.

He urged the LG to suspend Maliwal from the post of DCW chairperson till the inquiry of the alleged molestation incident is completed so that she cannot "misuse her position" to "influence" it, Kapoor wrote in his letter.

Continued on Page 2

CJI hints at using AI for translating judgments into Indian languages

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Saturday indicated the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in giving translated copies of judgments in all Indian languages as he underlined the importance of technology in removing the information barrier.

In September 2022, the apex court, under the leadership of CJI Chandrachud, started to live-stream hearings of its Constitution bench. The CJI was speaking at an event organised by the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa here.

He underlined the benefit of live-streaming and said teachers of law and students can watch and discuss live issues before the court. "Then you realise the injustice that pervades our society when you



discuss live issues," he added. "There is a meritocracy barrier. We must have live streaming... I do not have a cynical view... Yes a few people will begin theatrics, but that'll be far and few between," the CJI said.

Stressing the importance of technology, CJI Chandrachud said his mission for technology is to reach out to those who don't have access and not to create a further gap in access.

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2 cr devotees take dip in Ganga on Mauni Amavasya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As abut 2 crore devotees took a holy dip in Sangam on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, hashtag #Mauni Amavasya pushpvarsha remained a top trending topic on social media platform Twitter.

Twitter users praised the arrangements made by the Yogi Adityanath government for such a big event and the showering of flower petals by helicopter on the devotees who took the holy dip.

The hashtag reached about 14 crore people. At the same time, more than 10,000 users praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's management and showering of flowers through the hashtag. Besides, more than 19,000 people appreciated this initiative of the Yogi government through likes, replies and retweets.



Meanwhile, over 1.5 crore pilgrims took the holy dip in Sangam to attain salvation on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya during the ongoing Magh Mela in Prayagraj district of Uttar Pradesh on Saturday.

As a mark of respect, the Yogi Adityanath government

showered flower petals from a helicopter, increasing the enthusiasm among the devotees.

On the banks of Sangam, the confluence of holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythological Saraswati, more than 12 bathing ghats were

made, and the devotees were comfortably bathing to gain salvation.

In order to manage the organisation of this Magh Mela, which extends over an area of 700 hectares, as many as 194 magistrates and 98 sector officers were deployed.

Prayagraj University VC booked for ‘illegal’ religious conversion

PTI ■ FATEHPUR

A case has been registered against 10 named people, including a Vice Chancellor, and 50 others unidentified people for alleged illegal religious conversion of a man, police said on Saturday.

Police filed the case responding to a complaint filed by one Sarvendra Vikram Singh, a resident of Sultanpur district, who said he had come to Fatehpur for some work on January 25, 2021, Circle officer (City) Veer Singh said.

He later met a man named Ramchandra in Sujrahi village, who told him that that Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (SHUATS), Prayagraj, was giving money on adopting Christianity, and it will also bear the running expenses for his family.

Ramchandra took



Sarvendra to the Indian Press Church in Deviganj, where he met a priest, who told him about the money offer and also a job upon conversion.

After this, Sarvendra went with the priest to Naini in Prayagraj where underwent the conversion, the CO said.

SHUATS Vice Chancellor RB Lal is among the 10 people named in the FIR, he said.

"Sarvendra had adopted Christianity from Hinduism. Subsequently, he again converted back to Hinduism, and then lodged a police complaint, after realising his mistake," the CO said.

Remdesivir purchase scam: Lokayukta gives clean chit to BMC

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI



Dismissing allegations of corruption in the Remdesivir purchase scam made by BJP leader Kirit Somaia, the Maharashtra Lokayukta has given a clean chit to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), saying that it had not been established that there was any "corruption, irregularities or non-transparency" in the purchase of injection by them during the Covid-19 period.

"From the affidavit in reply and documents produced by the respondents, I am of the view that it has not been established and proved by the complainant that there was any corruption in the purchase of injection Remdesivir by the respondents," Lokayukta Justice V. M. Kanade noted in his 18-page ruling.

"It is also not proved that there was irregularity and non-

transparency in the purchase of this injection by them. It is abundantly clear from the documents produced by the respondents including the letter issued by the Central Government that there was a sharp variance in the purchase price of injection Remdesivir in couple of weeks after March 2021 and that was on account of the increased demand for the said injection and reduced supply by the manufacturers and dealers of the Remdesivir injection," the Lokayukta observed.

Cong leader ‘Thirutha’ to be Kerala Govt's rep in Delhi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



Though he is yet to join the CPI(M), he had made his presence felt in the party by making a cameo appearance during the party Congress held at Kannur and campaigning for the CPI(M) candidate in the by election held at Thrikkakkara.

The Congress has suspended him from the party pending probe. A senior community leader from the Latin Catholic sect, Thomas enjoys the confidence of the Church hierarchy, as well as leaders cutting across party lines.

The grapevine is that

Thomas enjoys the confidence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. "Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has executed a brilliant stroke through this appointment as Thomas has got contacts and influence in offices ranging from PMO, to the Enforcement Directorate and CBI.

Thomas would be of help to the chief minister as well as other CPI(M) leaders facing probe from the ED and the CBI," said K Jayashankar, political critic.

VD Satheeshan, Leader of the Opposition, said that Thomas would function as a wheeler-dealer between the Sangh Parivar and the CPI(M). "If one scrutinises the number of trips undertaken by Thomas to the Sangh Parivar leaders during the last two years, one can understand what is

brewing up," said Satheeshan.

But an undeterred Thomas told reporters that he would work for getting central clearances for major infrastructure projects like the High Speed Railway Line connecting Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram, Sabari Railway, AIIMS and airports in districts like Kottayam, Idukki and Pathanamthitta.

The LDF Government has already appointed two resident commissioners/officers on special duty in New Delhi to pursue the interests of Kerala.

"Thomas would be the special representative and function as first among equals," said a CPI(M) State leader.

Hailing from Kumbalangi island near Kochi, Thomas who was a physics professor in a Church-run College, made it big in New Delhi with his easy accessibility.

All Indian languages grew borrowing & lending, says Indologist Kalyanaraman

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



Indologist Dr S Kalyanaraman of Chennai claims that the decipherment of seals dating back to Indus Valley Civilization has demolished the meaninglessness of "wars" over the antiquity of Indian languages.

"The decipherment of more than 8,000 seals excavated from the sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa sites prove that terms like Dravidian, Aryan and Munda are divisive expressions. Indian languages grew lending and borrowing words and letters from other languages," the octogenarian scholar who was

conferred with D Litt by Deccan College, Pune, told The Pioneer.

For more than four decades, this Ph D holder who belonged to the elite Indian Railway Services was engaged in the study of Indus script which helped him in opening vistas to the world of River Saraswati.

His findings on River Saraswati (hitherto a mythological river) were endorsed by the Departments of Space and Atomic Energy.

Several injured as ISF workers clash with police in Kolkata; MLA among 100 arrested

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Several police personnel and Supposition Indian Secular Front (ISF) activists were injured in a clash between them as the party's protest at Esplanade area in central Kolkata turned violent, throwing traffic out of gear on Saturday afternoon.

The lone ISF MLA Nawshad Siddiqui, who was leading the protest, and around 100 supporters of the party were arrested, a senior police officer said.

The ISF was protesting at Dorina Crossing against alleged attacks on party activists by the ruling Trinamool Congress at

Bhangar in South 24 Parganas district.

The activists blocked an arterial road in the heart of the city, prompting the cops to ask them to clear Jawaharlal Nehru Road and allow traffic movement.

However, the workers of the party, which was formed before the 2021 assembly election, refused to vacate the road demanding that the perpetrators behind the attacks on its activists at Bhangar be arrested first.

As the protesters started pelting the cops with stones, the police used batons and lobbed tear gas shells to disperse them, turning Esplanade area into a battlefield.

Min suspends...

From Page 1

Before the wrestlers agreed to end their protest, the Indian Olympic Association had on Friday formed a seven-member committee of its own, headed by M C Mary Kom, to investigate the charges against Sharan.

The IOA panel was constituted even as the wrestlers' sit-in protest entered the third day.

Besides legendary boxer Mary Kom and wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt, the panel includes archer Dola Banerjee and Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLFF) president and IOA treasurer Sahdev Yadav.

The IOA committee also has two advocates -- Talish Ray and Shlok Chandra -- besides former shuttler and IOA joint secretary Alaknanda Ashok, who is its vice chairperson.

CJI hints at using AI for...

From Page 1

"The thought is that not every lawyer can afford private reporters, and through technology, the idea is to remove the barrier of access to information. The idea is to make information available to lawyers for free.

"But then the niceties of English will not help rural lawyers. So the idea is to make information accessible to everyone," he added.

The CJI said he had met with a professor of Madras who works in AI (Artificial Intelligence) "and the next step is to give translated copies of judgements in all Indian languages".

Addressing a gathering which was attended by many young lawyers, CJI Chandrachud stressed creating opportunities for junior lawyers and ensuring that those from marginalized communities get the adequate opportunity.

"We need not cover the crevices of what is wrong in the system. We must try and repair it. I will wish for you that you fly high, that you realise your dreams," the CJI told young lawyers.

He concluded his address by reciting a couplet by famous 20th century poet Allama Iqbal: "Sitaron ke aage jahaan aur bhi hai, abhi Ishq ke imtihaan aur bhi hai, tu Shaheen hai parwarz hai, kaam Tera bhi aasman hai".

Sisi first Egyptian Prez as...

From Page 1

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also call on Sisi.

"The forthcoming visit of President Sisi is expected to further strengthen and deepen the time-tested partnership between India and Egypt," the MEA said.

The Egyptian president previously visited India in October 2015 to participate in the third India-Africa Forum Summit, which was followed by his State visit in September 2016.

India is keen on further expanding its ties with Egypt, a key player in the politics of both the Arab world as well as Africa. It is also seen as a major gateway to markets in Africa and Europe.

The MEA said the multifaceted relationship between the two countries is

based on shared cultural values, commitment to foster economic growth, collaboration in the fields of defence and security and convergence on regional and global issues.

It said the two countries work closely at multilateral and international platforms. The bilateral trade has also been on an upswing in the last few years. Trade between India and Egypt achieved a "record high" of USD 7.26 billion in 2021-22, according to the MEA.

"The trade was fairly balanced, with USD 3.74 billion Indian exports to Egypt and USD 3.52 billion imports from Egypt to India," it said. More than 50 Indian companies have invested around USD 3.15 billion in diverse sectors of the Egyptian economy, including

chemicals, energy, textile, garment, agri-business and retail.

Sisi will be the first Egyptian and the fifth West Asian leader to be Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations. The invitation to the 68-year-old general-turned-politician is part of India's efforts to reset ties with Egypt, seen as a key gateway to markets in Africa and Europe.

As regards defence ties, the two sides have also enhanced training, joint exercises and ship visits, and a memorandum of understanding on cooperation was signed during defence minister Rajnath Singh's recent visit to Cairo. Egypt has also invited India to its Bright Star tri-services exercise in September.

PUBLIC NOTICE

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL THAT My clients Mohan Chand S/o Khema Nand and Ms. Uma Joshi W/o Shri Mohan Chand R/o H.No. 93, Gali No. 2, Block-C, Near Hanuman Mandir, Parvatya Anchal, Sant Nagar Buzurg, Delhi-110084, have severed relations/connections with their son Suresh Joshi and his wife Meerakshi for all purposes. They are further disintitled/dismown to claim any right/share in the movable and immovable properties owned by my clients. Any person dealing with them in any manner shall be solely doing so at his own risk and costs. My clients shall not be responsible for discharging any liability/claim in this regard.

PARDEEP KUMAR - ADVOCATE
CH. NO. 826, ROHINI COURTS, DELHI

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Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of Fullerton India Home Finance Company Ltd. that Mrs. Sudesh Kumar is claiming ownership of Property bearing No. W/84-186, New No. 192N-C, area measuring 220 Sq. Yds., situated at Village Chandrawali alias Shahdara in the abadi of Bhola Nath Nagar, Ilaga Shahdara, Delhi, vide virtue of GPA, Agreement and will dated 10.07.1985. All persons are hereby informed that above mentioned claiming owner want to sell the said property to Mr. Anshu Garg and Mr. Rishabh Garg who is taking a loan from Fullerton India Credit company Ltd. for purchase of the said property, if anybody has any objection/s upon the ownership of Mrs. Sudesh Kumar in respect of the said property its sale /Mortgage, and any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)
200, 1st Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Moti Nagar, N. Delhi-15
Ph: 011-41152738 - kumarassociatesadvocates@gmail.com

2 blasts rock Jammu, 9...

From Page 1

Soon after the blasts were reported the entire area was cordoned off and the shops in the close vicinity

of the blast site were closed down. Additional security forces and the quick reaction teams of the Indian Army were also rushed to the spot along with their dog squads to sanitise the entire area.

According to highly placed official sources the use of sticky bombs in triggering the blasts cannot be ruled out. The forensic teams have lifted the samples to determine the nature of the blasts.

According to eyewitness reports the first blast took

place around 11.00 am outside the vehicle repair shop while the second blast was reported around 15 minutes later inside one of the abandoned vehicles parked in the middle of the road, 50 metres away from the site of the first blast.

Local shopkeepers alleged that a large number of abandoned vehicles remain parked in the area outside the shops of scrap dealers and the same poses a security threat.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank
Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand/ Notice Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Dolor Remedies Pvt Ltd/ Jhuma Choudhary/ 084305000298	Plot No A Block H 198/18 C.S. Dag No 332 1st Floor Roy Purba Para Hatiara North 24 Parganas Kolkata 700157/ January 18, 2023	September 30, 2021/ Rs. 73,18,045.00	Kolkata, New Delhi, Gurgaon

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

Date : January 21, 2023
Place : Delhi/ NCR (Gurgaon)

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Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

From Page 1

"Yet again, the staple, dyed-in-the-wool negativity and unrelenting prejudice of the BBC toward India has resurfaced as a documentary, "India: The Modi Question". This production, the BBC claims, has been "rigorously researched according to the highest editorial standards", and "examines the tensions between India's Hindu majority and Muslim minority and explores the politics of India's PM Narendra Modi in relation to those tensions" and "a series of controversial policies" implemented by him," a letter

signed by the veterans said.

So now we have the archetype of British past imperialism in India setting itself up as both judge and jury, to resurrect Hindu-Muslim tensions that were overwhelmingly the creation of the British Raj policy of divide and rule. Not only is the BBC series, judging from what we have seen of it so far, based on delusional and evidently lopsided reporting, but it presumes to question the very basis of the 75-year-old edifice of India's existence as an independent, democratic nation, a nation which

functions according to the will of the people of India," the letter said.

"Glaring factual errors apart, the series — which uses the words 'allegedly' and 'reportedly' repeatedly, (not 'factually') — reeks of motivated distortion that is as m i n d - n u m b i n g l y unsubstantiated as it is nefarious," it added.

"This is demonstrated most vividly by its completely sidelining the core fact that the apex judicial institution of India, the Supreme Court of India, has unambiguously ruled out any role of Modi in the

Gujarat violence of 2002, while firmly rejecting allegations of complicity and inaction by the then Gujarat State Government headed by Chief Minister Modi," the letter said.

A group of 302 former judges, ex-bureaucrats and veterans on Saturday slammed a BBC documentary on Modi as a "motivated charge sheet against our leader, a fellow Indian and a patriot" and a reflection of its "dyed-in-the-wool negativity and unrelenting prejudice".

They claimed it is the archetype of past British imperialism in India setting

itself up as both judge and jury to resurrect Hindu-Muslim tensions that were overwhelmingly the creation of the British Raj policy of divide and rule. The two-part BBC documentary "India: The Modi Question" claims it investigated certain aspects relating to the 2002 Gujarat riots when Modi was the Chief Minister of the State. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued directions for blocking multiple YouTube videos and Twitter posts sharing links to the BBC documentary, according to sources.

LG insulting students, teachers, says Dy CM

Sisodia accuses Saxena of making ‘false allegations’ against edu dept

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the ongoing tussle between the Delhi Government and the Lieutenant Governor over a proposal to send Government school teachers for a training programme to Finland and quality of education system, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia lashed out at Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday, accusing him of making “false allegations” against the education department and “mocking” the teachers working in the national capital.

In a letter to Saxena, Sisodia said the LG’s letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday was written with a political motive, and his “false allegations” against the education department were an “insult” to the students and teachers of Delhi.



“The LG wrote the letter with a political motive and said no work has been done in the education department of Delhi. His allegations are an insult to the students and teachers of Delhi. I am requesting the LG not to mock the work of our teachers, who have done wonders in the department,” Sisodia wrote to Saxena.

Taking to social media, Kejriwal said Delhi’s teachers, students and their parents have together worked hard in the last seven years to reform the city’s

education system.” In the last seven years, efforts have been made — along with teachers, students and their parents — to improve imparting education in Delhi. LG Sahab, instead of insulting them, should encourage them,” Kejriwal tweeted while sharing Sisodia’s letter on social media.

In his letter to Kejriwal on Friday, the LG cited data to put the AAP government in dock by raising several issues related to the city’s education sector. He said the average attendance in government schools has been falling every year, dropping to 60.65 per cent in 2019-2020 from 70.73 per cent in 2012-2013. He also questioned the AAP dispensation’s claims on students migrating from private schools to government schools.

Responding to the allegation, Sisodia said the schools run by the Delhi Government

have registered a pass percentage of 99.6 and a large number of students in these schools have got good grades.

“It does not suit a person sitting in the chair of the Lieutenant Governor to write a letter mentioning false figures,” he said. The deputy Chief Minister also alleged that the figures provided by the LG were false and that he “defamed” the entire education system of the national capital with his statement.

“While the LG alleged that the number of students in government schools of Delhi decreased from 16 lakh to 15 lakh, the reality is that the number of students increased to 18 lakh. Our education department has also transformed the infrastructure of the schools.

The ‘tent wale schools’ have now turned into ‘talent wale schools,’” Sisodia’s letter to Saxena read.

Man posing as DMRC HR held for cheating people in name of job

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A 34-year-old man was arrested for allegedly cheating several people on the pretext of providing government jobs in the DMRC, police said on Saturday.

The accused has been identified as Pawan Bhardwaj, a resident of Goyala Dairy, they said.

A man had on November 7, 2022, lodged a complaint saying he was cheated of Rs 3,20,000 by a person, who introduced himself as Rohit and said he was an HR manager in the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, a senior police officer said.

According to the police, the man took money from the complainant in a piecemeal fashion, and later switched off his phone. By the end of the scam, the complainant had lost Rs 3,20,000.

During investigation, police located the accused to Goyala Dairy and nabbed him from Kutub Vihar there, the officer said.

Edu system of city has collapsed: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva hit back at Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, alleging them of politicising the education system instead of improving it.

“The Kejriwal Government compares the education system of Delhi with the education system of Finland, while the fact is that the education system of Delhi is completely collapsed today and I challenge the Government to have an open debate with BJP on Delhi’s education system,” he said.

Sachdeva has said that in the name of education reform the Kejriwal Government only does cosmetic service i.e. some old school buildings have been renovated and some shown-off has been done in the name of Mega Parents Teachers Meeting.” In fact on ground level there has been no increase in the number of schools in Delhi in the last eight years, rather the number of schools has been reduced due to school



mergers,” he said.

“Happiness class is necessary but it is more necessary to have classes of all the subjects in schools. Today, science and commerce are not being taught in 90 percent government senior secondary schools in Delhi.

Sachdeva has said that the Kejriwal Government should answer whether it is not true that 57 plots are available with the Delhi Government for school construction, but in the last eight years, the Government has not approved a single new school in Delhi.

32 buffaloes die from chemical-laced fodder in Gurugram

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Thirty-two buffaloes of a farmer died allegedly after consuming chemical-laced fodder and a case has been registered against a Rajasthan-based company in the matter, police said on Saturday.

According to the complaint filed by Khemraj, a resident of village Kadarpur, he used to keep his 41 buffaloes in a plot near the Aravalli hill which is nearby his village.

A company based in Rajasthan’s Sawai Madhopur used to supply fodder for the bovine. Recently it had supplied fodder mixed with some poisonous or chemical substance, he said.

“It was on January 17 that as soon as the buffalo ate the fodder they started falling and fainting. I informed the veterinary doctor but the buffaloes could not be saved,” Khemraj said. “Doctor told me it was due to some chemical in the fodder. By Saturday, 32 buffaloes have died. Most of them were milkers and I have lost lakhs of rupees,” he added. FIR has been registered.

DCW issues notice to traffic police on measures to curb drunk driving

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) on Saturday issued a notice to the city traffic police on the issue of drunk driving, seeking to know the steps taken by it to curb the menace. The panel has asked the police to respond to its queries by Tuesday.

The DCW notice mentioned the Kanjhawala accident in which a woman was killed after being dragged by a car for 12 kilometres and said that it was learnt that the accused were heavily drunk. It also referred to the panel’s chairperson Swati Maliwal being harassed and allegedly dragged by a car driven by a man in an inebriated state.

In the notice, the commission stated that drunk driving is not only one of the most common causes of accidents but also poses a huge threat to women’s safety.

“This menace needs to be stopped urgently. The commission also raised the issue of Delhi Police stopping usage of breath analysers for identifying drunk drivers during the



Covid-19 pandemic,” it stated. To examine the steps taken by the Delhi Police to counter drunk driving, the DCW has launched an enquiry into the issue and has sought the police’s response.

In the notice, the commission asked whether the use of breath analysers has been resumed and if not then why. The Delhi Commission for Women has also asked the police to furnish the number of functional breath analyser machines available with it.

The DCW also sought to know the number of challans issued by the Delhi Police for drunk driving since 2017 and especially the number of such challans issued on December 31, 2022, between 6 pm to 9 am.

The panel’s chief Swati

Maliwal said, “One of the major findings of my night vigil the other day was that the brazenness with which people in Delhi are drinking and driving, raising serious security concerns for women.”

“This needs to be checked urgently. I have issued a notice to Delhi Traffic Police to ascertain the steps they have taken to check this menace, especially after Anjali’s murder on the roads of Delhi by five drunk men,” she said.

Maliwal has also hit back at the BJP which alleged she staged the dragging plot to show Delhi police in bad light. Calling the allegations “dirty lies,” she posted an impassioned tweet saying the attacks won’t deter her.

“Let me tell those who think that they will scare me by telling dirty lies about me. I have done many big things in this short life, with a shroud on my head. I was attacked many a times, but that did not deter me. With every atrocity, the fire inside me grew stronger. No one can suppress my voice. I will keep fighting as long as I am alive!” she said.

AAP holds protest outside Bidhuri’s house, slams jhuggis eviction notice

Tughlakabad slum dwellers get ASI eviction notice

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AP MLAs with scores of slum dwellers on Saturday protested outside BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri’s house decrying the notice of eviction given to residents of an area in Tughlakabad. The AAP leaders, including Atishi and Madan Lal held placards that read “Shame on you BJP, stop demolishing slums.”

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had on January 11 issued a notice to remove people living in the Tughlakabad Fort area by January 26. Atishi had on Friday alleged that BJP lied to people that it will get them homes.

AAP MLA Atishi said that it is extremely concerning that BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri is denying the existence of notices to demolish small houses and slums in areas such as Kalkaji, Tughlakabad village, Mehrauli, and Badarpur. This is a clear and blatant lie, as the notices have been put and are clear to the residents and community members.



“BJP-ruled Central Government has issued notices to demolish slums and houses in Kalkaji, Badarpur, Mehrauli and Tughlakabad villages. Our demand is that the BJP, fulfilling its election promise, should give houses to these people right where their slums are and till the houses are not given, not even a single slum should be demolished. BJP seeks votes from the poor at the time of elections and post-elections bulldoze their houses that shows BJP is anti-poor,” she said.

“BJP made a false promise to the people of Delhi when it said ‘Jahan jhuggi wahan makaan’: Now people are getting demolition notices. We are standing with the people of Delhi and will not let anyone outside their houses,” she said.

Kuldeep Kumar pledged that the AAP will not let people suffer.” The people of Delhi have voted for us and we will stay with them. We will stage protests from roads to the parliament but won’t let people suffer,” he said.

Students from G-20 countries participate in ‘India’s presidency of multilateral forum’ march

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scores of international students, including those from G20 countries, on Saturday participated in a march organised here to celebrate India’s presidency of the multilateral forum. Holding tricolours and balloons, a number of school students and teachers participated in the G-20 ‘World Peace March’ on Gandhi Darshan near Rajghat to Chart Lal Goel Heritage Park at Red Fort.

Nearly 120 international students participated in the march. They were welcomed with garlands and flowers. The students were seen holding colourful flags and placards carrying messages of world peace and unity.

The event was organised by former Union minister and BJP leader Vijay Goel. Perna, who is from Mauritius and a student of SSR Medical college, was elated.

“It was good to participate and witness the amazing performance. I got the invite through SSR college. I think through the G20, a lot of issues need to be raised,” she said. Many cultural performances were also organised and students participated in these.

Julia from Russia said she enjoyed walking through Old Delhi and exploring the Indian culture.” It is fantastic and we enjoyed the event, walking through Old Delhi. I think this is the best place to host the G20.

6-month plan of action formulated to clean Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena who heads the National Green Tribunal (NGT) appointed a high-level committee to clean the Yamuna, where a six-month plan of action with quantified timelines was charted out on eight parameters including augmenting sewage treatment and laying sewer network in unauthorised colonies. The green tribunal had earlier this month requested the Delhi LG to head the committee.

The eight parameters which includes-Enhancement of Sewage Treatment Capacity in Delhi & augmentation / rehabilitation of STPs that included construction of 40 new De-centralized STPs at different locations, progress in



rehabilitation of 03 existing STPs at Kondli, Rithala and Yamuna Vihar, design upgradation of 18 existing STPs; Tapping of Drains and Treatment of Sewage in 44 Sub-drains that fall into the Najafgarh Drain, 30 Sub-drains that fall into the supplementary Drain and 02 sub-drains that fall into the Shahdara Drain.

The parameters are extension of Sewage Network in all

the 1799 unauthorized colonies from the existing 747 and connection of drains / drainage system of 639 JJ clusters with sewerage network; upgradation of 13 CETPs for treatment and management of industrial effluent; septage (faecal sludge) management and eventually eliminating the system of septic tanks by connecting 08 lakh users to the sewage network; Regulation and rejuvenation of flood plains of the Yamuna; action plan for utilization of treated waste water and Ensuring minimum environmental flow (e-flow) in the Yamuna by the means of inter-state coordination.

Multiple reports submitted by the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry have highlighted that the river cannot become fit for bathing in the absence of a minimum environment flow.

A study conducted by the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee, had in 2019 recommended that 23 cubic metre per second (cumec) water (437 million gallons a day) be released in the river from the Hathnikund Barrage in Haryana’s Yamuna Nagar district in the lean season for sustaining downstream ecosystems.

‘100 days to beat plastic’ campaign launched

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday launched the ‘100 Days to Beat Plastic’ campaign at Baansera, Sarai Kala Khan. Lt Governor also administered an oath to the people not to use plastic in daily life. The unique campaign is initiated by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to make the MCD area “Plastic Free” with people participation. The 100 days campaign would culminate on 22 April 2023 on International Earth Day.

The Lt Governor also



unveiled the mascot of the campaign-Nivaran Dadi. He also visited the exhibition of products made from plastic waste. Delhi Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar, DDA vice chairman Shubhashish Panda, MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti, Ripudaman Delvi-“Plogman of India” and other senior officers were present on the occasion.

Nora was jealous of Jacqueline: Sukes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As Bollywood actresses Nora Fatehi and Jacqueline Fernandez have locked horns in connection with the ₹200 crore money laundering case linked with alleged conman Sukes Chandra Sekhar, Sukes has released a new letter through his lawyer and accused actress Nora Fatehi of being jealous of Jacqueline as he was in a relationship with her.

In his letter issued through his lawyers Anant Malik and AK Singh, Sukes claimed that Nora brainwashed him constantly against Jacqueline Fernandez and allegedly wanted him to leave her. He further

claimed that Nora would call him at least 10 times a day and even wanted him to date her.

The statement comes after Nora in her fresh statement said Sukes had promised her a big house and a luxurious lifestyle if she agreed to be his girlfriend. Nora used to brainwash Sukes against Jacqueline so that Sukes leaves Jacqueline and started dating Nora, the statement read.

Nora was asking Sukes’ help in setting up a music production company for a relative. She used to send Sukes photos of expensive bags and jewellery that she wanted, Sukes claimed.

“Ask her to produce one bill of Hermes bags that she



has, she can never produce as she does not have. The bags are worth more than ₹2 crore,” the statement said.

Sukes further alleged in the letter that Nora allegedly changed her statement before the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) as it was different from



her first statement given to the Enforcement Directorate.” The entire statement is changed and now stories are being made, and the same can be very well verified and compared with the chargesheet by the ED and now the EOW,” Sukes said in the letter.

Sukes further added, “Nora claims that she did not want a car, or she did not take it for herself is a very big lie, as she was after my life that her car had to be changed, as the ‘CLA’ that she had looked very cheap. So then I and she selected car that I had her, and the chats and screenshots are very well with the ED, so there is no lie at all, in fact, I wanted to give her Range rover, but as the car was not available in stock she wanted in urgent, I gave her the BMW S series, which she kept using for a long time, as she was a non-Indian, she asked me to register it on the name of her best friend’s husband Bobby’s name.

Failing to turn up on time, IAF officer makes bomb hoax call to delay train

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian Air Force officer Awas on Saturday detained for allegedly making a hoax bomb call to delay the departure of Mumbai Rajdhani Express from New Delhi Railway Station, police said.

The PCR command room informed police regarding the call at 4.48 pm, they said, adding that the train was scheduled to leave for Mumbai at 4.55 pm.

The Bomb Disposal Squad of the railways and the central district were called. The Railway Protection Force also

joined the operation, but no explosive substances were found, police said.

“The mobile number was tracked and it was found that Sunil Sangwan, a Sergeant in the Indian Air Force, made the call,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railways) Hareesh H P said.

According to police, Sangwan was scheduled to board the train to go to his place of posting at Airforce Station in Santacruz, Mumbai. He got late and drunk dialled the railways to delay the departure of the train from Delhi.

“The caller was traced from coach B-9 seat number-1. His identity was established through his Indian Air Force Id card. The mobile handset which he used to make the PCR call has also been recovered,” the DCP said.

“The caller was subjected to a medical examination which confirmed he was drunk. Legal action, as per law, is being taken against him,” he added. A similar incident took place earlier on Friday. The Railways department received a bomb threat call to the Krishna Express train from Adilabad to Tirupati.

Congress terms BJP ‘Bhrasht Jumla Party’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday released a “chargesheet” against the Narendra Modi government, terming the BJP a ‘Bhrasht Jumla Party’ and alleged that its mantra was ‘kuch ka saath, khud ka vikas, sabke saath vishwasghaat’ (for the benefit of few, development for self and betrayal of everyone).
At the AICC Press conference, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh and general secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal also unveiled the logo of the party’s follow-up programme to the Bharat jodonyatra — Haath Se Haath Jodo Abhiyan.
The logo is similar to that of the Bharat Jodo Yatra but the only difference is that it has the Congress’ hand symbol on it signifying that it would be a 100 per cent political campaign which cannot be said of the cross-country march, Ramesh said.

Venugopal said as part of the Congress’ campaign starting January 26, the party would take the ‘charge sheet’ and Rahul Gandhi’s letter with the message of the yatra to every household.
The one-page ‘charge sheet’ shared by the Congress is divided into three sections -- ‘kuch ka saath’, ‘khud ka vikas’ and ‘sabke saath vishwasghaat’.
Under the ‘kuch ka saath’ (for the benefit of few) segment of the ‘charge sheet’, the party alleged loan waivers for a few select businessmen, 10 per cent of the wealthy owning 64 per cent of India’s wealth and ports and airports being “gifted” to the prime minister’s “close friends”.
In the ‘khud ka vikas’ (development for self) segment, the Congress accused the BJP of spending crores on propaganda and indulging in nepotism.
In the third segment, the grand old party raised multiple issues such as unemployment, food security, women’s security,

the plight of farmers, hate speeches, the “toppling” of elected governments and India’s ranking in international indices in various sectors.
Venugopal said that along with this ‘charge sheet’, respective state units of the party will prepare “charge sheets” against state governments as well.
“This is a 100 per cent political campaign. That can’t be said about yatra. It is also the second phase of the yatra. We endeavour to reach 10 lakh polling booths, six lakh villages and 2.5 lakh gram panchayats,” Ramesh said.
Asked why Rahul Gandhi was not hoisting the tricolour at historic Lal Chowk in Srinagar, Ramesh said this was not being reported correctly as the state Congress office is in Lal Chowk and it is natural that the former party chief and the lead figure of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi, hoists the national flag at the party office.
Venugopal said there was a consideration of having a “per-



manent structure” for future generations to witness and therefore Congress’ own property was chosen.
He said at the time the Gandhi scion hoists the national flag, all district Congress chiefs will also hoist the tricolour in their respective offices.
Hailing the cross-country foot march, Venugopal said it was a “grand success” and had “become a great movement” in the country. He said the follow-up programme ‘Haath Se Haath Jodo Abhiyaan’ has been planned to be two-month long but may be extended.

adding that several Opposition leaders have been invited for the meeting.
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‘Union Min Rajeev peddled lies that Opp pushed for foreign Covid jabs’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday accused Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar of peddling “lies”, after he alleged that the leaders of the opposition party were pushing the case of foreign vaccines after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out.
Tagging a video of Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla’s encounter with a journalist in Davos, Chandrasekhar said on Twitter that the pharmaceutical company tried to bully the Indian government into accepting conditions of indemnity.
“And Cong trio of Rahul, Chidambaram and Jairam Ramesh kept pushing case of foreign vaccines during Covid,”



the Union minister of state for information and technology said. Hitting back at Chandrasekhar, congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh “Let not your ambition to climb the greasy pole make you more of a liar than you are.”
On Saturday, Ramesh stepped up his attack on the Union minister, saying Chandrasekhar as minister

concerned with regulating social media, has misused it atrociously to peddle lies on him and his senior party colleagues former union minister P Chidambaram.
“We won’t take it lying down, meanwhile I wanted to call you out for what you really are. Will Twitter have the guts to expose you?” the Congress leader added.

ISIS protests against PFI ban proves terror links: Sources

RAKESH K SINGH ■
NEW DELHI

Validating the allegations in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) FIRs against the banned terror group Popular Front of India (PFI), the international terrorist outfit Islamic State, through its propaganda magazine Voice of Khurasan, has opposed the ban on PFI and exhorted the Indian Muslims to target the Government and Hindu community and terrorise them.
The ISIS also revealed that many PFI supporters joined the banner of Tawheed in different parts of the world and many of them may have attained Shahadah (so-called martyrdom for Islam and terrorism in civilized parlance).

The PFI was suspected to be recruiting Indian youths for ISIS in order to carry forward the inimical agenda of the global terror group.
Through the latest exhortations, ISIS could be seeking to gain traction among other Islamist groups to make up for the ban on PFI and also targeting gullible Muslims to join its fold. In the propaganda story, the outfit talks about “motivating” fellow Muslims to carry forward its terror agenda under the banner of ISIS and pledge allegiance to its violent Khilafah movement.
The has also linked the ban on PFI to be similar to the prescription on Students Islamic Movement of India, a clear pointer to the continuum of the sinister designs of such Islamist

outfits and their international linkages.
The NIA has alleged that PFI encouraged vulnerable youths to join terrorist organisations including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh and Al-Qaida, and also conspired to establish Islamic rule in India by committing a terrorist act.
The NIA has also claimed that the documents seized during the nation-wide searches conducted at offices of PFI and its leaders contain highly incriminating materials targeting prominent leaders of a particular community.
The agency has also alleged that the radical Islamist outfit conspired to establish Islamic rule in India by committing

terrorist acts as a part of violent jihad. It said the PFI spreads “dis-affection against India by wrongful interpretation of government policies to the particular section of people” to create hatred against the state and its machineries.
“During the investigation, based on materials collected, it has been disclosed that the accused named in the FIR were actively involved in the organised crimes and unlawful activities repeatedly, to terrorise other religious sections of the society, besides creating fear in the mind of general public based on the larger conspiracy hatched among themselves and others,” according to the NIA.
In near simultaneous raids across the country, a multi-



agency operation spearheaded by the NIA on September 22 led to the arrest of 106 activists of the Popular Front of India in 11 States for allegedly supporting terror activities in the country.
“The seized documents also contain highly incriminating materials related to tar-

getting prominent leaders of a particular community.
The Hit List seized clearly shows that the PFI, which is working through its leaders, members and associates have gone far ahead in creating atrocities among the community,” the agency has alleged.

SC turns down plea seeking to enforce ‘1 car 1 person’ norm

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has junked a plea seeking to enforce the “one car one person” norm, besides demanding the imposition of environmental tax on the second vehicle of an owner.
A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha said the issues raised in the plea pertain to the policy domain.
“The issues which are raised in the petition under Article 32 of the Constitution of India in the present case pertain to the policy domain. Hence, we are not inclined to entertain the petition.
“The petitioners are at lib-



erty to pursue their grievances before the authorities in accordance with law,” the bench said.
The top court was hearing a plea filed by NGO Tsunami on Roads, seeking directions to initiate an effective national programme against air pollution in order to get special attention, priority and better coordination among the states and the Centre, with a better utilisation of the budget.

300 retired judges, bureaucrats & veterans criticise BBC’s Modi docu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 300 retired judges, former bureaucrats and retired armed services veterans released a statement on Saturday criticizing the BBC documentary critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as “delusions of British Imperial resurrection” which they said was “overwhelmingly” accountable for the “Hindu-Muslim tensions”.
“So, now we have the archetype of British past imperialism in India setting itself up as both judge and jury, to resurrect Hindu-Muslim tensions that were overwhelmingly the creation of the British Raj policy of divide and rule,” said statement signed by senior government officers, judges, and veterans.
“Not only is the BBC series, judging from what we have seen of it so far, based on delu-

sional and evidently lopsided reporting, but it presumes to question the very basis of the 75-year-old edifice of India’s existence as an independent, democratic nation, a nation which functions according to the will of the people of India,” said the statement.
The signatories further said, “yet again, the BBC’s staple, dyed-in-the-wool negativity and unrelenting prejudice towards India have resurfaced as a documentary, India: The Modi Question.” Former Rajasthan High Court chief justice Anil Deo Singh, former home secretary L C Goyal, former foreign secretary Shashank, former RAW chief Sanjeev Tripathi and former NIA director Yogesh Chander Modi are among the signatories to the letter.
BBC’s ‘India: The Modi Question’: Delusions of British Imperial Resurrection? Not this



time. Not with our leader. Not with India. Never on our watch,” they said.
“Regardless of whom you, as an individual Indian, might have voted for, the Prime Minister of India is the Prime Minister of your country, our country. We cannot allow just about anyone to run amok with their deliberate bias, their vacuous reasoning....”
This is demonstrated, it said, vividly by its completely sidelining the core fact that the Supreme Court of India has unambiguously ruled out any

role of Modi in the Gujarat riots of 2002, rejecting allegations of complicity and inaction by the then state government headed by him.
The statement alleged that the BBC series reeks of motivated distortion that is “as mind-numbingly unsubstantiated as it is nefarious”.
The signatories also lashed-out at BBC film for saying that Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was unfair to Indian Muslims though they said CAA had “nothing to do with Indian Muslims”.

Strive to help nation move forward on path of development in new ways: Rajnath to youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday urged the youth to identify new ways and strive to help the nation move forward on the path of development with faster pace. He, however, urged them to stay connected with the country’s age-old values and traditions and work in the field of their choice with humility.
Underlining these issues during his address to the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets here at their Republic Day camp, he also emphasised the need to mould oneself according to the changing times.
Rajnath also said no stone is being left unturned by the government to equip the nation to deal with challenges that may arise due to the fast-evolving global security scenario.
He also called upon the



youth to eliminate the concept of ‘Use & Throw’, pointing out that directly or indirectly society and the environment suffer the most due to this practice. Saying that destruction of environment means destruction of

life, he appealed to the youth and the nation at large to reuse goods as far as possible and work for the conservation of nature.
Rajnath also encouraged the youth to not let the ‘Use &

Throw’ concept enter their personal lives, urging them to respect the elders, family and friends. He stated that while knowledge and education are important, life values hold equal relevance.

EC prohibits use of places of worship as forum for election propaganda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of Assembly polls in Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and various byelections, the Election Commission on Saturday wrote to chief electoral officers of all States, prohibiting the use of places of worship as forum for election propaganda in any manner.
A copy of the letter has also been sent to leaders of all recognised national and state parties. Contravention of the provisions of any of these sections is punishable by imprisonment up to five years and with a fine, it pointed out.
In the letter, the EC has reminded that of its 2012 instructions on the issue which had noted that the existing provisions of the model code of conduct prohibit the use of “places of worship as a forum for election propaganda in any manner”.
“Further, Sections 3, 5 and 6 of The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988, prohibit the use of religious institutions or funds of religious institutions for the



promotion or propagation of any political ideas or political activity or for the benefit of any political party,” the letter read.
Contravention of the provisions of any of these sections is punishable by imprisonment up to five years and with a fine, it pointed out.
“The Commission desires that the provisions of the existing law may be brought to the notice of all district election officers and returning officers so as to ensure that any violation of these provisions during election is dealt with firmly and FIRs/complaints are lodged under relevant provisions in the event of any offence under the

said sections of the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act,” it said.
The EC also asked the chief electoral officers to circulate the provisions of the poll code and the law to all political parties based in their states, including state units of political parties for their information.
Assembly polls will be held in Tripura on February 16, followed by Nagaland and Meghalaya on February 27, with the counting of votes scheduled for March 2. Along with Nagaland and Meghalaya, one Lok Sabha and six assembly seats would go for bypoll on February 27.

Prompt response from Scoot regarding missing passengers in Amritsar-Singapore flight: DGCA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Saturday said there was prompt response from Scoot with regard to many passengers missing its Amritsar-Singapore flight due to rescheduling of the departure timing on January 18.
Days after the DGCA sought a report from Scoot Airlines regarding the January 18 flight – which departed from Amritsar to Singapore reportedly without taking as many as 32 passengers - the airline said the timing of the flight was changed on account of the “prevailing foggy condition” at the airport. Scoot also said all the affected passengers have been provided with several options.
Claiming that 17 passengers were affected, Scoot said “they were not informed by their travel agent about the change in time”.
In a statement, DGCA said it had sought a report from Scoot regarding the January 18 flight -- which departed from Amritsar to Singapore in which

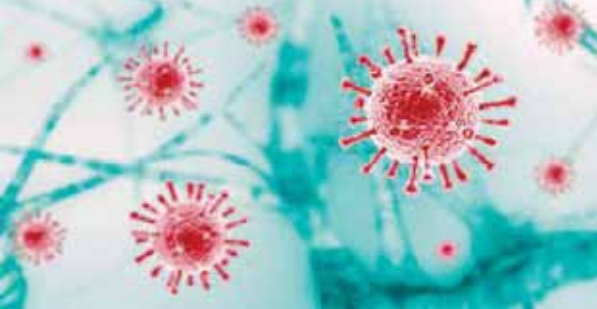


17 passengers were affected as they were not informed by their travel agent about the change in time.
Citing the options provided by the airline to the affected passengers, the watchdog said the passengers were looked after and appreciated the prompt response from the airline. The affected passengers were given the option to rebook free in another flight within 14 days, 120 per cent refund in form of vouchers or 100 per cent refund by mode of payment, the statement said. Scoot is a low-cost subsidiary of Singapore Airlines.
On January 19, Scoot apologised for the inconvenience caused to the passengers and said it was working to provide affected customers with the necessary assistance.

Covid linked with higher risks of cardiovascular disease, death: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Covid-19 is associated with higher risks of cardiovascular disease and death in the short- and long-term, according to a study of nearly 160,000 participants published in Cardiovascular Research, a journal of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC).
Compared to uninfected individuals, the likelihood of Covid-19 patients dying was up to 81 times higher in the first three weeks of infection and remained five times higher up to 18 months later, it said.
“Covid-19 patients were more likely to develop numerous cardiovascular conditions compared to uninfected participants, which may have contributed to their higher risks of death,” said study author Professor Ian C.K. Wong of the University of Hong Kong, China.
“The findings indicate that patients with Covid-19 should be monitored for at least a year after recovering from the acute illness to diagnose cardiovascular complications of the



infection, which form part of long Covid.”
This study compared the occurrence of cardiovascular conditions and death in infected versus uninfected individuals recruited before December 2020, when no vaccines were available in the UK.
More than 7,500 patients with Covid-19 infection diagnosed from 16 March 2020 to 30 November 2020 were identified from UK Biobank. Each patient was matched with up to 10 individuals without Covid-19 during the study period (16 March 2020 to the end of follow-up on 31 August 2021) and a historical cohort before the pandemic (16 March 2018

to 30 November 2018).
Each uninfected group had more than 70,000 participants who were similar to the Covid-19 group for age, sex, smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular and other health conditions, body mass index, ethnicity, and deprivation. In all three groups, the average age was 66 years and there were nearly equal numbers of women and men.
Professor Wong explained: “The historical control cohort was included to rule out the effect of routine healthcare services being reduced or cancelled during the pandemic, which led to worsening health and increased mortality even in uninfected people.”

Blinken cautions China over Taiwan status quo

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has cautioned China against changing the status quo on Taiwan which is vital to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Over the last few years, China has been trying to build military and economic pressure on Taiwan, Blinken said during a conversation with University of Chicago's Institute of Politics Founding Director David Axelrod on Friday.

"On Taiwan, what we have seen over the last few years is, I think, China made a decision that it was no longer comfortable with the status quo, a status quo that had prevailed for decades, that had actually been successful in terms of the relationship between our countries and managing what is a difficult situation," the secretary of state said.

"We have seen that, over the last few years... Ratchet up the pressure on Taiwan, military pressure, economic pres-



sure, trying to cut off its ties to countries around the world, to international organisations," he said.

From America's perspective, that status quo has worked and it is vital to what is important to the US, which is maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, he added.

Fifty per cent of container ships moving around the world every day go through the Taiwan Strait, 70 per cent or more of the computer chips manufactured in the world at the higher ends are manufactured in Taiwan. If this gets disrupted, the entire world economy will suffer, Blinken said.

"Every country in the world has an interest in making sure that peace and stability remain in the strait and that differences are resolved peacefully, not through pressure, not through coercion, and certainly not through the use of force," he said in response to a question.

Blinken is scheduled to travel to Beijing next month.

"We're in a competition. We have, I think, a moment in time, which we can also talk about, where we're no longer in the post-Cold War era. There's a competition to shape what comes next," he said.

"China is a leading competitor and in many ways, the vision that they have for what the world should be and where it should go is not the same as the one we have. But competition is one thing, conflict is another. It is strongly in our interest to make sure that even as we compete very, very vigorously, we avoid... Veering into conflict," he said.

Illegal border crossings surge in past month to highest of Biden's term

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A surge in Cuban and Nicaraguan arrivals at the US border with Mexico in December led to the highest number of illegal border crossings recorded during any month of Joe Biden's presidency, authorities said.

The extraordinary influx came shortly before Biden introduced measures on January 5 to deter Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans.

US authorities stopped migrants 2,51,487 times along the Mexican border in December, up 7 per cent from 2,34,896 times in November and up 40 per cent from 1,79,253 times in December 2021, Customs and Border Protection said Friday.

Cubans were stopped nearly 43,000 times in December, up 23 per cent from November and more than quintuple the same period a year earlier. Nicaraguans were stopped more than 35,000 times, up 3 per cent from November and more than double from



December 2021.

More migrants were also stopped from Ecuador and Peru.

The influx from Cuba and Nicaragua made El Paso, Texas, the busiest of the Border Patrol's nine sectors on the Mexican border for a third month in a row. The city was overwhelmed with migrants who were released to pursue their immigration cases in the US in the weeks leading up to Biden's visit on January 8, his first to the border as president.

The number of Venezuelan arrivals remained far below September highs, when the South American country was the second-highest nationality at the border after Mexicans.

German caution on Ukraine arms rooted in political culture

AP ■ BERLIN

Germany has become one of Ukraine's leading weapons suppliers in the 11 months since Russia's invasion, but Chancellor Olaf Scholz also has gained a reputation for hesitating to take each new step — generating impatience among allies.

Berlin's perceived foot-dragging, most recently on the Leopard 2 battle tanks that Kyiv has long sought, is rooted at least partly in a post-World War II political culture of military caution, along with present-day worries about a possible escalation in the war.

On Friday, Germany inched closer to a decision to deliver the tanks, ordering a review of its Leopard stocks in preparation for a possible green light. There was still no commitment, however. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius rejected the suggestion that Germany was standing in the way but said, "we have to balance all the pros and cons before we decide things like that, just like that."



It's a pattern that has been repeated over the months as Scholz first held off pledging new, heavier equipment, then eventually agreed to do so.

Most recently, Germany said in early January that it would send 40 Marder armoured personnel carriers to Ukraine — doing so in a joint announcement with the US, which pledged 50 Bradley armoured vehicles.

That decision followed months of calls for Berlin to send the Marder and stoked pressure for it to move up another step to the Leopard

Sri Lanka to hold local council election on March 9

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka will hold the local S council polls on March 9, the country's election commission announced on Saturday, ending speculation that the election may be postponed again due to the prevailing economic crisis in the country.

The election process will reportedly cost Rs 10 billion which would put additional pressure on the already lean state finances.

The ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) controls a majority of councils after having won the last election held in 2018.

However, the party is in disarray since July when its leader and former President Rajapaksa was ousted in a popular uprising. It has suffered defections with members forming other electoral alliances.

After Rajapaksa's ouster, Sri Lanka's Parliament elected then-Acting President and six-time former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as the new head of the State. He had the backing of the SLPP, the largest bloc in the 225-member parliament.



The local election was earlier postponed by six months as the country was gripped by unprecedented economic turmoil which triggered a political crisis and led to the ouster of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

The officials of the election commission announced that the local polls for the 340 councils in the island nation will take place on March 9.

The opposition parties have been pressing for the local election, saying it will give people a chance to show displeasure over the government's handling of the economic crisis.

The government, however, has delayed the local polls and said the time is not suitable to hold the election given the ongoing economic crisis in the

Pak human rights body expresses concern over amendments in blasphemy laws

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's top human rights body has expressed deep concern over amendments to the country's controversial blasphemy laws, saying they are likely to exacerbate the persecution of the beleaguered religious minorities and minority sects.

Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2023 on Tuesday, enhancing the minimum punishment for those who insult the revered personalities of Islam from three to 10 years along with a fine of Rs 1 million.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairperson Hina Jilani in a statement issued from Lahore on Friday said the enactment would further increase persecutions of the minorities.

"While the stated aim of this bill is to curb sectarianism, HRCP believes it is likely to exacerbate the persecution of Pakistan's beleaguered religious minorities and minority sects," according to her statement.

Garbage dump floating through 3 countries collects at Bosnia river

AP ■ VISEGRAD

Tons of waste dumped in poorly regulated riverside landfills or directly into the waterways that flow across three countries end up accumulating behind a trash barrier in the Drina River in eastern Bosnia during the wet weather of winter and early spring.

This week, the barrier once again became the outer edge of a massive floating waste dump crammed with plastic bottles, rusty barrels, used tires, household appliances, driftwood and other garbage picked up by the river from its tributaries.

The river fencing installed by a Bosnian hydroelectric plant, a few kilometres upstream from its dam near Visegrad, has turned the city into an unwilling regional waste site, local environmental activists complain.

Heavy rain and unseasonably warm weather over the past week have caused many rivers and streams in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro to overflow, flooding the surrounding areas and forcing scores of people from their homes. Temperatures dropped in many areas on Friday as rain



Waste floating in the Drina river near Visegrad, Bosnia on Friday

turned into snow.

"We had a lot of rainfall and torrential floods in recent days and a huge inflow of water from (the Drina's tributaries in) Montenegro which is now, fortunately, subsiding," said Dejan Furtula of the environmental group Eko Centar Visegrad.

"Unfortunately, the huge inflow of garbage has not ceased," he added.

The Drina River runs 346 kilometres (215 miles) from the mountains of northwestern Montenegro through Serbia and Bosnia. And some of its

tributaries are known for their emerald color and breathtaking scenery.

A section along the border between Bosnia and Serbia is popular with river rafters when it's not "garbage season."

Some 10,000 cubic metres (more than 353,000 cubic feet) of waste are estimated to have amassed behind the Drina River trash barrier in recent days, Furtula said.

The same amount was pulled in recent years from that area of the river. Removing the garbage takes up to six months, on average.

It would be very difficult to militarily eject Russian forces from Ukrain, says US general

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

For this year, it would be "very, very difficult" to militarily eject the Russian forces from every inch of territory that they have occupied in Ukraine, a top American general said.

That does not mean it cannot and will not happen, General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Friday.

"From a military standpoint, I still maintain that for this year it would be very difficult to militarily eject the Russian forces from every inch of Ukraine and occupied or Russian-occupied Ukraine," General Milley told reporters at a news conference in Germany.

"That doesn't mean it can't happen, doesn't mean it won't happen, but it would be very, very difficult. I think what can happen is a continued defence stabilised in the front," he said.

Depending on the delivery of US equipment and training of the Ukrainian military, it is very possible for the Ukrainians to run a significant tactical or even operational-level offensive operation to liberate as much Ukrainian



territory as possible, General Milley said.

"Then we'll see where it goes," he added.

The United States on Thursday announced another military assistance package of USD 2.5 billion for Ukraine to fight against Russian aggression, taking the total US military assistance to USD 27.5 billion.

This assistance package will provide Ukraine with hundreds of additional armoured vehicles, including Stryker armoured personnel carriers, Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, and High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled vehicles, according to an official statement.

The package also includes critical additional air defence support for Ukraine, including more Avenger air defence systems, and surface-to-air missiles.

Two sought for Hindu temple burglary in Texas

PTI ■ HOUSTON

A Hindu temple in the US state of Texas has been burgled and police are looking out for two suspects who allegedly stole a donation box and a safe worth thousands of dollars.

The incident took place on January 11, when the Hindu Society of the Brazos Valley's Shri Omkarnath Temple in Texas was raided by burglars, and thousands of dollars in cash and property were taken.

The Brazos County Sheriff's Office, which has been investigating the burglary, put up a screengrab of the suspects' video on January 20, shared by the temple, and requested people with information regarding the two individuals to inform the police.

Af soldier seeks asylum after arrest at US-Mexico border

AP ■ HOUSTON

Abdul Wasi Safi kept documents detailing his time as an Afghan soldier who worked with the US military close to him as he made the months-long, treacherous journey from Brazil to the US-Mexico border.

He fled Afghanistan fearing retribution from the Taliban following the August 2021 American withdrawal, and hoped the paperwork would secure his asylum in the US. Despite thick jungles, raging rivers and beatings, he kept those documents safe.

But after crossing the US-Mexico border near Eagle Pass, Texas, in September, Wasi Safi was arrested on a federal immi-

gration charge. He remains jailed at a detention centre in Eden, Texas, and fears his asylum claim may be denied.

Wasi Safi's brother, attorneys, military organisations and a bipartisan group of lawmakers working to free him say his case highlights how America's chaotic military withdrawal continues to harm Afghan citizens who helped the US but were left behind.

"He tried every way possible to save these certificates in the hopes that once he ... Presents his appropriate documents at the southern border ... He would receive a warm welcome and his service would be appreciated and recognized," said Sami-ullah Safi, his brother.

If sent back to Afghanistan, he could be killed by the Taliban, which since its takeover has killed more than 100 Afghan officials and security force members, according to a United Nations report.

"It's honestly just shameful that we've treated people that helped protect our country this way," said Jennifer Cervantes, one of Wasi Safi's immigration attorneys.

Wasi Safi, 27, had been an intelligence officer with the Afghan National Security Forces, providing US forces with information on terrorists, said Sami-ullah Safi, 29, who goes by Sami.

Pak court sentences 2 TTP members to 34 years in prison

PTI ■ LAHORE

A Pakistani court has handed down over 30 years of rigorous imprisonment to two members of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) group for carrying out terrorist activities in the country's Punjab province, an official said.

The TTP, also known as the Pakistan Taliban, is believed to have close links to the al-Qaeda terror group. Set up as an umbrella group of several militant outfits in 2007, its main aim is to impose its strict brand of Islam across Pakistan.

"An anti-terrorism court (ATC) of Sahiwal awarded 34 years rigorous imprisonment to two TTP terrorists," a court official told PTI.

Palestinian who allegedly tried to stab Israeli fatally shot

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A Palestinian militant allegedly tried to stab an Israeli in the occupied West Bank on Saturday and the Israeli shot and killed the settler.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified the Palestinian man as Tariq Maali and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group later claimed him as a member. The health ministry said he was shot northwest of the Palestinian city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military said the man arrived at the outpost and tried to stab an Israeli civilian. The military said he was armed with a knife and that the Israeli, a settler, shot him. The



settler wasn't injured.

Saturday's death was the latest in months of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Tensions have soared in the West Bank, where the Israeli military has been conducting near-nightly arrest raids since last spring after a wave of Palestinian attacks against Israelis killed 19 people. Another 10 Israelis were killed in a second string of attacks later last year.

Israel says the raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks.

Ex-SEAL dies in Ukraine; 6th known American killed in war

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A former US Navy SEAL was killed this week in Ukraine, American officials said Friday. They said he was not fighting in an official capacity.

Daniel W. Swift is a former member of the Navy SEALs who is listed in official records as having deserted since March 2019.

The Navy said Swift was killed Wednesday, adding, "We cannot speculate as to why the former Sailor was in Ukraine."

At least five other Americans are known to have died fighting in Ukraine, according to State Department statements and reports from individual families.

Taliban divided on appeal to restore women's rights: UN

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

A delegation led by the highest-ranking woman at the United Nations urged the Taliban during a four-day visit to Afghanistan that ended Friday to reverse their crackdown on women and girls. Some Taliban officials were more open to restoring women's rights but others were clearly opposed, a UN spokesman said.

The UN team met with the Taliban in the capital of Kabul and the southern city of Kandahar. It did not release the names of any of the Taliban officials. The meetings focused

on the restrictive measures the Taliban have imposed on women and girls since they took power in August 2021, during the final weeks of the US and NATO forces' pullout after 20 years of war.

The team, headed by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, found that some Taliban officials "have been cooperative and they've received some signs of progress," said UN deputy spokesman Farhan Haq. "The key thing is to reconcile the (Taliban) officials that they've met who've been more helpful with those who have not."

Haq stressed that "there are



many different points of authority" among the Taliban and that the UN team will try to get them to "work together to advance the goals that we want, which include most crucially, bringing women and girls back to the full enjoyment

of their rights."

Mohammed, a former Nigerian Cabinet minister and a Muslim, was joined on the trip by Sima Bahous, executive director of UN Women, which promotes gender equality and women's rights, and Assistant Secretary General for political affairs Khaled Khari.

As the Taliban did during their previous rule of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, they gradually re-imposed their harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia. Girls have been barred from school beyond the sixth grade and women are banned from most jobs, public spaces and gyms.

Powerful earthquake hits north Argentina; no damage reported

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

A powerful magnitude 6.8 earthquake shook northern Argentina but there were no immediate reports of damages.

The quake struck at 8:09 pm local time Friday with its epicentre about 15 miles (24 kilometres) southwest of the town of Campo Gallo in Santiago del Estero province. Its depth was 610 kilometres.

Local police fines Rishi Sunak over seatbelt 'error'

PTI ■ LONDON

The local police force where Rishi Sunak filmed a social media video in a moving car without a seatbelt on Friday fined the British Prime Minister for the legal breach.

Lancashire Police, which had been "looking into" the matter, confirmed it had issued a fixed penalty notice to Sunak, which involves a 100 pounds fine for not wearing a seatbelt in a moving car.

"Following the circulation



of a video on social media showing an individual failing to wear a seat belt while a passenger in a moving car in Lancashire we have today

(Friday, January 20) issued a 42-year-old man from London with a conditional offer of fixed penalty," Lancashire Police said in a statement.

On Thursday, Sunak apologised for a "brief error of judgement" in removing his seatbelt to film a video while driving in north-west England.

"That was a brief error of judgement. The PM removed his seatbelt to film a small clip. He fully accepts this was a mistake and apologises about it," Sunak's spokesperson said.

Digital healthcare provider lays off 8% of its workforce

■ NEW DELHI

MediBuddy, an end-to-end digital healthcare platform in India, has laid off 8 per cent of its workforce, around 200 people, across all departments as a restructuring exercise.

In a statement to IANS, a MediBuddy spokesperson said that in the entire process of realignment, "we had to part with 8 per cent of the workforce across all departments as a one-time restructuring exercise and eliminated any redundancy in roles and responsibilities".

"While layoffs are never easy and it is painful in the short term, this was to realign our current business goals for long-term stability and growth," said the health tech startup.

Inc42 was first to report about the layoffs at MediBuddy, which had roped in Amitabh

Bachchan as its official brand ambassador early last year.

The layoffs mostly impacted tech, product, sales, and operations teams.

The startup said that it will support the impacted employees during this transition and have implemented a variety of resources to assist them.

"This includes out-placement assistance that will actively assist impacted employees in identifying potential job opportunities, a care package designed for them that includes MediBuddy wallet continuity for their health and wellness, and extension of health insurance," said the company spokesperson. MediBuddy, an end-to-end digital healthcare platform, in February last year raised \$125 million in Series C funding from Quadria Capital and Lightrock India.

Several existing investors had also participated in the



round, like Bessemer Venture Partners, India Life Sciences Fund III, Rebright Partners, JAFCO Asia, TEAMFund LP, FinSight Ventures, InnoVen Capital, Stride Ventures and Alteria Capital.

It provides users with 24x7 access to specialist doctors via video calls, doorstep medicine delivery, at-home lab tests, mental health support, and other integrated healthcare services.

The digital healthcare plat-

form also launched several other initiatives such as at-home sample pickup of blood tests, RT-PCR tests, Covid vaccination, tracking availability of hospital beds for Covid patients, a 24x7 Covid helpline number, and mental health counselling.

MediBuddy said it will "continue investments in all growth levers in the coming months to continue to serve our existing customers better".

Wipro lays off over 400 freshers for poor performance

■ BENGALURU

IT giant Wipro has laid off more than 400 fresher employees for poor performance in internal assessment tests.

The company has issued termination letters to all the affected employees and stated that despite adequate training, they have failed to perform.

Sources explained the termination letter maintained that the employees were liable to pay Rs 75,000 of the training cost which company has spent on them. But, the amount is being waived off.

"We wish to inform you that the training cost of Rs 75,000 which you are liable to pay, will be waived off," the letter reads.

Commenting on the development, the IT giant clarified that it takes pride in holding



itself to the highest standards.

"From every entry level employee it is expected to have a certain level of proficiency in their designated area of work. The evaluation process includes to align employees with the requirements of clients and the business objectives of the organisation."

"This evaluation process, systematic and comprehensive, is followed by a series of actions such as mentoring, retraining and separation of employees from the company," it says.

Tea Board forms separate core committee to address issues of small tea gardens



■ KOLKATA

With an aim to address the issues related to smaller tea gardens, the Tea Board India has decided to set up a separate core committee that will work for the protection and development of the sector.

Following this decision of the Tea Board, the long-standing demand of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Associations (CISTA), an umbrella body of small tea growers in the country, gets fulfilled.

The committee will be headed by the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of Tea Board India, Saurav Pahari. The president of CISTA, Bijay Gopal Chakraborty, will also be part of the core committee.

Admitting that the development has fulfilled the long-standing demand of the small tea growers on this count, Chakraborty said that the separate core committee should have been set up much before.

"No decision in the tea sector will yield desired results unless the interests of the small tea growers are served, considering that small tea growers will contribute for around 50 per cent of the total tea production in the country. This new committee will frame policies for

tea gardens which do not cover an area of over 10 hectares," he added.

Welcoming the move, the Director (operations and plantations) of Chamong Tea, Indranil Ghosh, said that this was a long-standing demand of CISTA which has been finally fulfilled.

"Surely, the interests of the small tea growers needed a separate forum for addressing the issues related to the sector. The new committee is also expected to look into the matter of minimum wages for the labourers employed by the small tea growers," he said.

Speaking to IANS, tea sector observer Nandini Goswami said that it is too early to comment as to whether this new committee will in reality address the interests of the small tea growers or small tea garden owners.

"Apparently, it looks like a welcome move. The problem with the small tea growers is that often they do not have a proper platform for branding and marketing of the tea they produce. The products of some smaller tea gardens are really of very high quality. So, I am sure that this new committee will address that issue besides ensuring the payment of minimum wages to the labourers of small tea gardens," she said.

Record high margin takes Kotak Bank Q3 net 31%

■ MUMBAI

Robust margins, which rose to a multi-year high of 5.47 per cent, and improved asset quality helped Kotak Mahindra Bank book a 31 per cent growth in net income at Rs 2,792 crore in the December 2022 quarter.

The management sees further uptick on the margins front in the fourth quarter as more loans get re-priced.

On a consolidated basis, net profit rose 17 per cent to Rs 3,995 crore, as barring life insurance and microfinance arms almost all the subsidiaries booked lower profits in the reporting quarter.

Total advances, led by unsecured retail loans and home loans, jumped 24 per cent to Rs 3,39,313 crore, leading to a 30 per

cent increase in the core net interest income -- money earned on advances after paying for the liabilities/deposits -- to Rs 5,653 crore. The management led by deputy managing director Deepka Gupta and chief financial officer Jaimin Bhatt told the press on Saturday that the bank's net interest margin jumped to a near record 5.47 per cent in the reporting quarter from 5.17 per cent on-year.

As more and more existing loans get re-priced in a rising interest rate regime, the management sees more room for further uptick in the margins in the March quarter as a lot of advances are on floating rates. About 63 per cent of loans are linked to the external benchmark rates, which automatically help



the bank re-price assets when interest rates move up. Having said so, of course, this will not sustain in the loan run as interest rates will cool off and when the bank will be forced to offer more to depositors, they said.

Higher fees from distribution, syndication and services

boosted the fee income to Rs 1,847 crore, a growth of 23 per cent, helping the bottom-line grow bigger.

On the bank's continuing dependence on retail book -- of the total loan book of Rs 3,39,313 crore, as much as Rs 3,10,734 crore are retail, most of which is

unsecured.

Its corporate book inched by a low 2 per cent in the quarter to Rs 28,000 crore and the bank sees this side of the assets growth to remain muted even going forward.

Of the total retail book, home loans and loans against property constitute around Rs 90,000 crore, personal loan book is Rs 49,000 crore, credit card outstanding is Rs 9,000 crore and the unsecured commercial loans in the retail book is around Rs 27,000 crore and till recently crunched MFI book has more than doubled to Rs 5,000 crore now.

Both Gupta and Bhatt ruled out any stress on the retail front saying given the robust customer/credit data availability

and also analytics help a lender make far better credit risk assessment today. Also, the bank doesn't see any reason for not lending again to those people who serviced their loans during the pandemic.

"So are we going overboard with retail loan? Our view is that we are not yet because of these reasons coupled with the fact that the retail loans as percentage of total credit is still very low in our country," Gupta said.

The bank continued to report better numbers on the assets quality front with gross NPAs coming down to 1.90 per cent from 2.71 per cent a year ago and the net NPAs also nearly halving to 0.43 per cent from 0.79 per cent in December 2021, Bhatt said.

Public Notice

I Sidharth Mutreja S/o Late Surinder Kumar Mutreja R/o 901, Tower-1, The Close North, Nirvana Country, Sector-50, Gurgaon have purchased a property bearing No Unit no 1201, Tower D, Supertech Araville, Sector 79, Gurgaon. Project-Supertech Araville, address- 1201, Tower D, Supertech Araville, Sector-79, Gurgaon, I have lost the original allotment letter of the above said property, I have requested M/s SUPERTECH LIMITED, to issue the duplicate allotment letter of the said property, if anybody or financial Institutions have objection, he/she may contact to M/s Supertech limited office Plot no- C-2, Sector 96, Noida 201303 UP, Within Fifteen Day of this public notice.

Japan offers huge business opportunities for Indian apparel exporters: AEPC

■ NEW DELHI

Japan offers huge business opportunities for Indian

apparel exporters and the industry should explore that market, AEPC said on Saturday.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) said it is organising the first edition of Upnext India 2023, starting with a Reverse Buyer Seller Meet with Japan.

The fair will be held in Gurugram during February 10-11.

Over 50 Japanese buyers and traders have confirmed their participation, it added.

Naren Goenka, Chairman, AEPC, said in light of the fact that Japan is the fourth largest garment importer in the world, with its apparel imports being stable even during pandemic times and Indian apparel having duty-free access under the



Indo-Japan trade agreement as against 9 per cent for Turkey and 9.5 per cent for China, it makes business sense for Indian readymade garment manufacturers and exporters to participate in this opportunity.

With total garment imports of Japan of USD 23 billion, against India's exports of USD 0.22 billion, a strong

Indian garment industry with its unique offerings has a huge scope for Japanese trading companies to source from India, it added.

Goenka further said Japanese companies have two competitive advantages as apparel sourcing base -- sourcing cost and flexibility and agility.

Lupin recalls over 16k bottles of generic tuberculosis drug in US

■ NEW DELHI

Drug maker Lupin is recalling 16,056 bottles of Rifampin Capsules, used in the treatment of all forms of tuberculosis, in the US market due to a manufacturing issue, according to the US Food and Drug Administration.

As per the latest Enforcement Report by the US health regulator, Lupin Pharmaceuticals Inc, a US-based arm of the Mumbai-based drug major, is recalling the affected lot due to "Failed Impurities/Degradation Specifications: Failure observed in related substance testing during long term stability study."

The affected lot has been



produced at Lupin's Aurangabad plant and marketed in the US by Baltimore-based Lupin Pharmaceuticals. The company initiated Class II nationwide (US) recall of the affected lot on December 12 last year.

As per the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), a class II recall is initiated in a situation in which

use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

The US generic drug market was estimated to be around USD 115.2 billion in 2019. It is the largest market for pharmaceutical products.

UJJAIN SMART CITY LIMITED
Mela Office, Kothi Road, Ujjain (M.P.) 456001 Ph. 0734-2525856

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

No. USCL/234 Tender ID: 2023_UAD_246427_1 Date: 20.01.2023

Ujjain Smart City Limited Invites Interested parties for "Supply and Application of Protective Coatings on Stone Art-works and Murals at Mahakal Lok, Ujjain- Third Call". Interested bidders may purchase and submit their proposals online at www.mptenders.gov.in.

Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 96,000/-
Cost of Document	Rs. 10000/-
Probable Amount of Contract	96,00,000/-
Pre bid Meeting Date	25.01.2023 Time 15:00 hrs,
Last date for submission of Technical and Financial Bid (Online)	03.02.2023 up to 17:00 hrs

For more details, please visit <https://www.mptenders.gov.in>. Any Corrigendum or amendments shall be published on this website only.

For, Ujjain Smart City Limited



उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान
सेन नं.-1, तरुण विहार, मोहोवाला रोड, देहरादून-248001
Phone/Fax No: 0135-2671940, E-mail - eemdujs@rediffmail.com



फाक: 4735/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक: 20.01.2023

ई-निविदा संशोधन

इस कार्यलय पत्रांक सं. - 4726 / ई - निविदा सूचना / 2022 - 23 दिनांक 19.01.2023 से जल जीवन मिशन कार्यक्रम के अन्तर्गत पेयजल योजनाओं के कार्यों हेतु ई-निविदा, टू-बिड सिस्टम (तकनीकी बिड एवं आर्थिक/वित्त बिड) से आमंत्रित ई-निविदाओं में निम्न पेयजल योजना की निविदा सिंगल बिड पर आमंत्रित करने का संशोधन किया जाता है।

क्र.सं.	विकास खण्ड	कार्य विवरण	घनराशि (च.मी.)	निविदा का मूल्य (रु.में)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि
1	सहस्रपुर	अब्दुल्लापुर पेयजल योजना में उत्तर जलाशय परम्परा, नलकूप विकास, पाइप लाइन बिछाने एवं पम्पिंग प्लांट सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तलमन्थी कार्य।	217800.00	₹4000 +GST	10 माह

शेष नियम एवं शर्तें निविदा के अनुसार यथावत रहेंगे।

"जल संयंत्र-जीवन संयंत्र"

अधिशाली अभियन्ता

PARIJAT PAPER MILLS LTD.				
CIN: L21012UP1989PLC010589				
Regd. Office: Vill: Jat Muihera 10.6 km Stone Bhopa Road, Muzaffarnagar - 251308 (U.P.)				
Website: www.parijatpapermills.com , Email: parijatpapermills@yahoo.com				
EXTRACT OF STANDALONE AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2022				
(Rs. in Lakhs)				
S. No.	PARTICULARS	Current/Quarter year ending	Year to Date ending figures 9 months ended	Corresponding 3 months ended in the previous year
		31.12.2022 (Unaudited)	31.12.2022 (Unaudited)	31.12.2021 (Unaudited)
1.	Total Income from operations	3181.26	10112.42	3363.79
2.	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period (before Tax, exceptional and/or extraordinary item)	122.79	173.28	264.73
3.	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period before Tax, (after exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	122.79	173.28	264.73
4.	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period after Tax, (after exceptional and/or extra ordinary items)	103.63	146.25	235.69
5.	Total comprehensive income for the period [Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after Tax)]	103.63	146.25	235.69
6.	Equity share capital (Face value Rs. 10/- each)	329.00	329.00	329.00
7.	[Reserves (excluding revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance sheet of the previous year	817.47	817.47	756.22
8.	Earnings per share (of Rs 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)	3.15	4.45	7.16
1. Basic 2. Diluted				
Notes:				
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly/annual financial results filed with the stock exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and other disclosure requirements) Regulation, 2015. The full format of the quarterly & year to date Financial results are available on the Stock Exchange website www.mseil.in and the company's website (www.parijatpapermills.com)				
2. The impact on net profit/loss, total comprehensive income or any other relevant financial item(s) due to change(s) in accounting policies shall be disclosed by means of a footnote.				
3. The financial results have been prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting Standards ("Ind AS") prescribed under section 133 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with relevant rules thereunder and in terms of regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure requirements) Regulations, 2015 (as amended) and SEBI circular dated 5th July, 2016				
4. The above results have been reviewed and recommended to the Board of Directors by the Audit Committee and subsequently approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting held on 21st January 2023. These results have been subjected to limited review by statutory auditors who have expressed an unqualified opinion.				
For and on behalf of Parijat Paper Mills Limited Sd/- Parul Mittal (Director) DIN 01357063				
Place: Muzaffarnagar Date: 21.01.2023				

ICICI Bank Q3 profit jumps 34% to ₹8,312 cr

■ NEW DELHI

Private sector lender ICICI Bank on Saturday reported a 34 per cent jump in its standalone profit at Rs 8,312 crore for the quarter ended in December 2022, helped by healthy growth in net interest income.

The bank had posted a net profit of Rs 6,194 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The bank's total income increased to Rs 33,529 crore in the latest December quarter from Rs 27,069 crore in the year-ago period, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

Net interest income (NII) increased by 34.6 per cent to Rs 16,465 crore from Rs 12,236 crore in the third quarter a year ago.

Net Interest Margin (NIM) too improved to 4.65 per cent as compared to 3.96 per cent in the same period a year ago.

Yes Bk Q3 net falls 79% on provision hit; will appeal AT-1 ruling in SC



■ MUMBAI

Yes Bank reported a 79 per cent dip in its consolidated

December quarter net at Rs 375 crore on Saturday as provisions on legacy bad assets made it set aside higher amounts as provisions.

The private sector lender also announced that it will appeal against the Bombay High Court's order in the Rs 8,400-crore AT-1 bonds case of 2020, saying it has strong legal grounds to do the same.

It reported an 11.7 per cent jump in the core net interest income at Rs 1,971 crore on the back of a 10 per cent advances growth and a 0.10 per cent expansion in the net interest margin at 2.5 per cent.

Its non-interest income jumped 55.8 per cent to Rs 1,143 crore and was largely

helped by a Rs 100 crore sale of corporate bonds received as part of a dud loan resolution.

The overall provisions shot up to Rs 845 crore from the Rs 375 crore in the year-ago period, which the bank's chief executive and managing director Prashant Kumar explained as ageing of legacy bad assets-related.

If one were to add the net non-performing assets and security receipts, there is still an outstanding of Rs 5,746 crore which the bank is carrying that may require more ageing-related provisions in the future, he said.

The transfer of a bulk of its bad assets to J C Flowers asset reconstruction company resulted in the gross non-performing assets ratio dropping to 2 per cent from the over 13 per cent level in the quarter-ago period.

IDFC First Bank Q3 profit doubles to ₹605 crore



■ NEW DELHI

IDFC First Bank on Saturday reported a two-fold jump in its net profit to Rs 605 crore for the quarter ending December 2022, driven by growth in operating income.

The private sector bank had reported a profit of Rs 281 crore for the October-December period of 2021-22.

The bank's total income increased to Rs 7,064.30 crore in the third quarter this fiscal from Rs 5,197.79 crore in the corresponding quarter of 2021-22, IDFC First Bank said in a stock exchange filing.

The bank further said customer deposits increased by 44 per cent from Rs 85,818 crore as of December 31, 2021, to Rs 1,23,578 crore at end-December 31, 2022.

CASA deposits grew by 39 per cent year-on-year from Rs 47,859 crore as of December 2021 to Rs 66,498 crore as of December 2022.

DJOKER MAKES MELBOURNE LAST 16

AP ■ MELBOURNE

An ailing Novak Djokovic said Saturday every moment counted now that he was in the "last stage" of his career, after battling past Grigor Dimitrov and into the Australian Open last 16.

The Serb came through a titanic 77-minute first set before taming the Bulgarian 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena, needing treatment twice on his troublesome hamstring.

He will face home hope Alex de Minaur for a place in the quarter-finals after the 22nd seed equalled his best result at the tournament by defeating Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in three sets.

Djokovic's gutsy win inched him nearer to a 10th Australian Open title and record-tying 22 Grand Slam crowns.

Winning once again in Melbourne would also return him to world number one for the first time since June.

Now 35, Djokovic said he was savouring each tournament more.

"Every season counts I guess now, when you come to the last stage, the last quarter, of your career," he said.

"Obviously you start appreciating and valuing each tournament more because you might not have a lot left in the tank.

"I've been truly fortunate to do what I love, I love the sport, I love competing. It's been almost 20 years now of professional sport. I can't be more grateful than I am."

Victory put Djokovic into the last 16 for a 15th time but he was made to work for it, especially with his left hamstring troubling him.

"Every point, every game mattered," he said.

"Obviously I didn't know how I'm going to feel physical-



ly, it was going up and down," he said.

"It was an incredible battle, three sets over three hours."

Djokovic aggravated his hamstring during his run to a 92nd title at the Adelaide International this month and has been struggling with it since.

'READY FOR THE BATTLE'

Djokovic came into the match without his usual off-day practice session to give his leg as much time as possible to recover.

With his left thigh heavily strapped, the Serb broke immediately and consolidated to take an early grip on the first set.

He was cruising but appeared to feel the injury when moving for a shot at 5-3. He managed to earn three set points, which were saved, but was then broken when serving for the set at 5-4.

Agitated, he complained to the umpire about being given a time violation and was then forced to save two set points, before an epic tiebreak.

He eventually got over the line on his fifth set point after some intense tennis.

Djokovic took a medical timeout at the changeover and returned to dial up the pressure and take a break before comfortably seeing out the second set.

With Dimitrov flagging, he turned the screws further by breaking twice early in set three.

Despite a mid-set wobble when the Bulgarian clawed back and then more treatment on his leg, Djokovic battled to the finish line.

De Minaur, who is aiming for a first quarter-final at Melbourne Park, now awaits Djokovic after a 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-1 victory.

"These are the matches you want to be playing," said the Australian.

Murray's heroic run over in 3rd round

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Andy Murray's 4:05 am finish eventually caught up with him at the Australian Open as the Briton bowed out in typically defiant style to Roberto Bautista Agut in round three on Saturday.

The 35-year-old Murray was clearly feeling the effects of his epic five-setter in round two, which started on Thursday but ended in the early hours of Friday.

The 24th-seeded Spaniard Bautista won 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-4 and faces unseeded Tommy Paul of the United States in the last 16.

Former world number one Murray, who has a metal hip following career-saving

surgery four years ago, was 3-0 down in a flash in the first set.

But the three-time Grand Slam champion had Margaret Court Arena firmly in his corner and a huge cheer went up when he finally got on the board, holding serve for 3-1.

It was to be only a temporary reprieve as the Spaniard raced away with the first set in a lopsided 29 minutes.

Murray held serve to start the second set but he appeared sluggish, having been forced to five sets in both his previous matches.

The epic five-setter in round two against Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis lasted a gruelling five hours and 45 minutes -- the longest match



of Murray's storied career.

He committed a double fault to go 2-1 behind in the second set to Bautista, Murray letting out a howl of frustration.

Five-time Australian Open runner-up Murray has made a career of dramatic

comebacks and he threatened one again as he broke back for 4-4, to the delight of the crowd.

Murray does not know when to quit.

His opponent then had two set points in the second-set tie break, only for Murray to roar back to win 9-7 and claim the set.

Bautista got the break to claim the third set, but Murray would not go away in the fourth, even as the match stretched past three hours on court.

Then came the killer blow as the 34-year-old Bautista broke Murray for a 5-4 lead, then sealed the deal on his first match point when the Briton fired a return into the net.

'Nothing changes' for Allegri despite Juve points deduction



AP ■ TURIN

Massimiliano Allegri said on Saturday that nothing had changed for his Juventus team despite the Serie A club being hit with a massive points deduction for using transfers to artificially boost their balance sheet.

Juve were docked 15 points by the Italian Football Federation on Friday evening, pushing them down from third to 10th in Serie A and greatly compromising their chances of making next season's Champions League.

Allegri's team face Atalanta on Sunday night 12 points from the top four as the season reaches its halfway point, and the coach tried to deflect ques-

tions on the impact Friday's ruling would have on their campaign, and players.

"We need to close the first half of the season in the best way possible, after yesterday we need to stay tight as a group, keep our heads down and work... we can only think about what happens on the pitch," Allegri told reporters.

"Nothing changes, we need to get points, tomorrow will be difficult because Atalanta are playing well and in good shape... We need to take it one step at a time."

Juventus said they would appeal the decision of the FIGC court to not just deduct points but also hand out a swathe of bans to the club's previous leadership and current sporting

director Federico Cherubini.

Cherubini was suspended for 16 months while former chairman Andrea Agnelli and ex-CEO Maurizio Arrivabene were both banned for two years while a 30-month suspension was given to former sporting director Fabio Paratici, now at Tottenham Hotspur.

The club's legal team branded the ruling, in which all eight other clubs accused in the trial were acquitted, "a clear injustice".

Juve have one shot at overturning the FIGC's decision, at the country's highest sporting court at the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI).

Within the next two months the CONI court will either uphold or throw out the sanctions handed down by the FIGC, and Allegri wants his team to keep going just in case that ruling goes in Juve's favour.

"We had 37 points before yesterday's ruling, a point from second place with a chance for a place in the Champions League and maybe a shot at the title," added Allegri.

"So we need to keep doing what we need to do because the final ruling will be within the next two months.

"We don't want to be two months down the line and regret not doing what we were supposed to do."

Balaji-Jeevan stun fifth seeds, move to AO 2nd round

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The Indian men's doubles pair of N Sriram Balaji and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan continued their good run by stunning fifth seeds Ivan Dodig and Austin Krajicek in the opening round of the Australian Open here on Saturday.

Balaji and Nedunchezhiyan, who came into the tournament as an alternate team, took two hours 20 minutes to win the first round fixture 7-6 (6), 2-6, 6-4 against Croatian Dodig and American Krajicek.

In the mixed doubles event, veterans Sania Mirza and Rohan



Xavi in 'state of shock' over Alves accusations

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez on Saturday said that he is in "a state of shock" after Dani Alves's arrest on sexual assault allegations.

The 39-year-old defender, sacked by his Mexican club Pumas after his arrest, is being held in custody without bail in Barcelona.

The charge of sexual assault in Spain can mean anything from unsolicited and unwanted sexual groping to rape.

While police declined to give details on the case, a source close to the investigation said



that Alves is accused by the woman of rape.

She reiterated her accusation before the judge on Friday, the source added.

Alves, who played for Barcelona for eight seasons between 2008-2016, rejoined the Catalans for a short spell last season under his former team-

mate Xavi.

"It is hard to speak about a situation like this, first of all," Xavi told a news conference on Saturday, the day before his team's clash with Getafe in La Liga.

"I think like everybody, I am surprised, taken aback, I am in a state of shock, knowing Dani. "That's the first thing that comes to mind. And after that, because it's a matter for the law, and the law will run its course, we cannot get into it.

"Regarding Dani, I feel bad for him, I am surprised, given how Dani is, and how he has been when he was here with us.

Garcia fights back to avoid shock



AP ■ MELBOURNE

Caroline Garcia fought back after a disastrous first set to reach the last 16 at the Australian Open on Saturday and avoid a massive upset against world number 158 Laura Siegemund.

France's Garcia won 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 in 2hr 10min to reach the fourth round at the

Australian Open for the first time since 2018.

"She played a great match, she was able to read me very well," said a relieved Garcia, the fourth seed.

"I was getting more stressed and at the beginning I was super nervous."

Garcia will play either 19th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia or Magda Linette of Poland, the world number 45, next.

It was a rollercoaster ride on Kia Arena, one of the smaller stadium courts at Melbourne Park, in front of a loud but well-behaved night session crowd.

"I got a lot of support and that means a lot, and thank you so much," Garcia said of the rocking atmosphere. "It was great. I didn't know what to expect when I came here."

Sabalenka reach Aus Open quarters

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Hard-hitting Aryna Sabalenka burnished her Australian Open title credentials on Saturday as she barreled into the last 16 along with several other women's seeds.

The Belarusian fifth seed blew away 26th-seeded Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-3 to set up a clash with Olympic champion Belinda Bencic.

Thirtieth seed Karolina Pliskova and 23rd seed Zhang Shuai also went through in straight sets on day six at Melbourne Park, and will clash in the fourth round.

Sabalenka is building a head of steam in her pursuit of a first Grand Slam title.

The Minsk-born 24-year-old teased the Margaret Court Arena crowd for supporting Belgium's Mertens over her, but said she was enjoying



the ride into the second week.

Sabalenka is trying not to get carried away.

"About the favourite, that I am on that favourite list... I mean, it's really good that I'm there," said the Belarusian, who is yet to drop a set.

"But I better focus on myself, on my game, make sure that my dream will happen."

Bencic has also not dropped a set in Melbourne. The Swiss 12th seed eased past unseeded Italian Camila Giorgi 6-2, 7-5.

Drab draw leaves Liverpool, Chelsea still mired in mid-table

AP ■ TURIN

Liverpool and Chelsea's poor seasons were summed up in a dismal 0-0 draw at Anfield on Saturday that did little to aid their chances of climbing into the Premier League's top four.

A point apiece leaves both clubs nine points adrift of the Champions League places and there was little to suggest either can quickly rekindle their former glories to make a charge up the table.

Chelsea had a goal scored by Kai Havertz ruled out for offside early on and there were promising flashes from new 100 million euro (\$108 million) signing Mykhailo Mudryk off the bench.

But the Blues remain in 10th without an away league win since October.

Liverpool edge up to eighth, above Brentford on goal difference.

Jurgen Klopp described Liverpool's 3-0 defeat to Brighton last weekend as the worst performance of his eight years at Anfield and, in the 1,000th game of his managerial career, made sweeping changes with Fabinho, Jordan Henderson and Trent Alexander-Arnold among those left on the bench.

The change in personnel did little to ignite a drastically improved performance as the Reds were penned back in the first 45 minutes by a similarly out of sorts Chelsea.

Graham Potter's men had the ball in the net after just three min-



utes when Havertz slotted in after Thiago Silva hit the post from a corner.

However, the German was ruled offside after a VAR review.

Cody Gakpo twice blazed over with Liverpool's two best sights of goal before the break, but it was the visitors who came closest to breaking the deadlock when Benoit Badiashile's header was well saved by Alisson Becker from another dangerous set-piece.

Klopp's half-time team talk had the desired impact as the home side came out on the front foot early in the second period.

Yet they failed to create a clear-cut chance as Gakpo and Naby Keita saw shots blocked inside the area.

Mudryk was made to wait for his debut, but the Ukrainian's introduction 10 minutes into the second half sparked Chelsea into life as he fired into the side-netting after some quick footwork.

Darwin Nunez's arrival off the bench had a similar impact on the Liverpool attack, but the Uruguayan also failed to find a way through.

After a rampaging run, Nunez's shot lacked the power to beat Kepa Arrizabalaga before he teed up Alexander-Arnold to slice Liverpool's best chance of the game wide.

After stalemates in both last season's League and FA Cup finals, which Liverpool won on penalties, a third consecutive meeting between the sides ended goalless.



Bayern held at RB Leipzig

AP ■ LEIPZIG

A second-half equaliser from RB Leipzig defender Marcel Halstenberg helped RB Leipzig hold Bayern Munich to a 1-1 home draw on Friday in the first Bundesliga match since the winter break.

Bayern looked on course for their seventh straight Bundesliga win after striker Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting scored in the 37th minute, but Halstenberg levelled in the 52nd minute.

Veteran Bayern forward Thomas Mueller had a chance to win the match in injury time with a shot from point blank range, but dragged his effort just wide. Bayern manager Julian Nagelsmann lamented his side's concession of a "totally unnecessary goal" but said a point was "worth a little bit more" to his side than to Leipzig, considering the teams' relative positions in the table.

"Leipzig played a strong

game and both teams played a little bit wildly, but at the end of the day we can live with the draw." Leipzig manager Marco Rose, who picked up a yellow card for remonstrating with the referee late in the game, said he could live with the decision.

"At first I saw it differently - I thought he (Szoboszlai) was through," said Rose.

"(But) I spoke with the referee and I can see his argument - a yellow card is totally OK."

Halstenberg said "it was an exchanging of blows and it could have gone in either direction - it's a pity but we can start (the season) with a point."

Red Bull-owned Leipzig have now only managed to beat the Bavarians once in 16 competitive appearances since their promotion to the Bundesliga for the 2016-17 season.

With less than half of the season's fixtures played, Leipzig sit six points behind Bayern in third.

PACERS GIVE INDIA UNASSAILABLE SERIES LEAD

PTI ■ RAIPUR

India's relentless pace attack Iran through a fragile New Zealand batting line-up as the hosts cantered to an eight-wicket win in the second ODI to seal the three-match series here on Saturday.

The Mohammed Shami-led attack produced an incisive effort to bowl out New Zealand for a meagre 108 before India knocked off the runs in 20.1 overs. Rohit Sharma hit a sublime 50 off 51 balls while Shubman Gill remained unbeaten on 40 off 53 deliveries.

It was an emphatic win but the sea of fans that had flocked the remotely located Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh Stadium for Raipur's first international game was left wanting for more due to the early finish.

Shami (3/18) and Mohammed Siraj (1/10) made life tough for the batters with their high-quality seam bowling reducing New Zealand to a dismal 15 for five after Rohit opted to bowl. The odd ball stopping made the New Zealand batters' job tougher though the Indian openers made batting look easy in the evening.

The third and final ODI will be played in Indore on Tuesday.

New Zealand opener Finn Allen was the first to depart after missing a full ball that came back in late to clip the pads and shatter the stumps. Siraj then got one to seam away from good length inducing an outside edge from number three Henry Nicholls with Gill doing the rest in the slips.

Two brilliant return catches



from Shami and Hardik Pandya (2/16) put New Zealand in further trouble. Shami got one to shape away and Daryl Mitchell, in his attempt to flick it on the outside, ended up mistiming it back to the bowler.

Hardik's one-handed catch to get rid of Devon Conway in the 10th over was sensational. Shardul Thakur (1/26) got himself into the wicket column in the following over by drawing a thick edge from Tom Latham's bat. It was a loose shot from the New Zealand skipper, ending with an easy catch to Gill in the slips.

New Zealand were in dire straits but all hope was not lost with last match's centurion Michael Bracewell (22) and the equally dangerous Glenn Phillips (36) in the middle.

Bracewell made his intent clear by stepping out to whack Shami over cover. After getting hit for consecutive fours in the 19th over, Shami bowled a sharp bouncer and Bracewell went for the pull only to edge it back to the keeper.

Mitchell Santner (27), who scored a fifty in Hyderabad, joined Phillips and the duo took the team past 100 with a 47-run

stand for the seventh wicket. However, both were dismissed in a space of six balls to end New Zealand's hopes of a recovery.

While Santner played a well-disguised slower ball from Hardik on to the stumps, Phillips gave a regulation catch to Suryakumar Yadav at deep midwicket off a long hop from Washington Sundar (2/7).

Kuldeep Yadav (1/29) trapped number 11 Blair Tuckner in front to end the New Zealand innings in 34.3 overs.

India were clinical in the run chase with Rohit enthraling the crowd with his trademark pull

shots. One of them went for a six, the first maximum of the game, as he hooked Lockie Ferguson over fine-leg.

Fresh from a double hundred in Hyderabad, Gill too came up with some exquisite strokes, including a cracking cover drive off Ferguson.

The New Zealand pacers failed to get as much seam movement as their Indian counterparts, making the task easier for the batters.

Rohit completed his fifty with a single in the 13th over before Shipley had him leg before wicket with a ball that kept low.

I'm happy with how I am going: Rohit

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Indian captain Rohit Sharma is not worried about the lack of big hundreds in recent times, saying he is quite content with his batting.

The scorer of three double centuries in ODIs, Rohit last made a hundred in the format way back in January 2020 as his conversation rate from fifty to a century dipped drastically.

However, in the second ODI against New Zealand here on Saturday the opener struck a sublime 51 off 50 balls, with seven fours and two sixes, to power India to a series-clinching eight-wicket victory.

"I'm trying to change my game a bit now, have been trying to take the bowlers on and I think that's important, to try to put the pressure back. I know the big scores haven't come, but I'm not too worried about it," Rohit said at the presentation ceremony.

"I am happy with my batting. I have kept my approach quite similar. I am happy with how I am going. I know a big score is around the corner."

With the 50-over World Cup slated later this year at home, he said the team wants to do all sorts of things (experimentation) before entering the marquee event.

The Mohammed Shami-led attack produced an incisive effort to bowl out New Zealand for a meagre 108 before India knocked off the runs in 20.1 overs.

Shami (3/18) was well supported by Mohammed Siraj (1/10) and Hardik Pandya (2/16).

Shami and Siraj made life tough for the batters with their high-quality seam

bowling, reducing New Zealand to a dismal 15 for five after Rohit opted to bowl.

"I thought these last five games, the bowlers have really stepped up. Whatever we have asked of them, they have delivered. Especially doing this in India. You can expect these performances away from India, but they have real skills."

"When we trained here yesterday in the night, it moved around, there was good carry. Which is why we wanted that challenge: 250 would have been quite challenging."

"Shami and Siraj did want to go on for longer spells, but I told them a big Test series coming up (against Australia), so we need to take care of ourselves as well."

New Zealand skipper Tom Latham said the failure to build partnerships hurt his team.

"Batting up top wasn't our finest day. India bowled right areas for a long time and pretty much gave us nothing. Not idea but full credit to India. The surface did a little bit, a bit of tennis-ball bounce, some came through, some didn't."

"Unfortunately we were unable to build a partnership. Every time you want to put in a great performance but unfortunately we were unable to adapt quickly enough," Latham said.

Player of the Match Shami said he always focuses on maintaining the right line and length.

"I always start trying to bowl good rhythm and line and length. The seam release is all about repetitions. I get irritated if the seam is not perfect. I love it when you can see the seam in the air. So I just keep trying to do that," Shami said.



ICC recommends six-team T20 events for 2028 Olympics, final decision in October

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The International Cricket Council is still hopeful of the sport's inclusion in Los Angeles 2028 Olympics and has "recommended" six-team T20 events for both men and women to the Games' organising committee.

A final decision on the inclusion of cricket will be taken by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) around October after the organisers finalise the list of new sports by March, stated a report in ESPNcricinfo.

These will then be ratified at the IOC's session in Mumbai, which is expected to take place around October this year, it added.

In a strategic move, BCCI secretary Jay Shah has been added to the ICC's Olympics working group headed by ICC

chairman Greg Barclay, and which also includes Indra Nooyi (independent director) and Paraag Marathe (former USA Cricket president).

Shah was included "keeping in mind India's ambition" to host the Olympics in 2036.

"And the ICC believes Shah's involvement could lend an important and potentially influential push in its negotiations with the IOC for cricket to be included at sport's biggest global event," the report said.

The proposal for a six-team event was made to ensure a more cost efficient Olympics which is part of their Olympic Agenda, it added.

Cricket along with eight other sports -- baseball/softball, flag football, lacrosse, break dancing, karate, kickboxing, squash and motorsport -- are competing to make the LA 28 roster.

India seek better show from strikers against NZ

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

A below-par show against debutants Wales denying them a direct quarterfinal berth, hosts India would look to address their attacking woes against a plucky New Zealand for a place in the last-eight stage of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup here on Sunday.

India needed to beat Wales -- eight places below them in world rankings -- by a margin of eight goals to top Pool D and qualify directly for the quarterfinals but the home side could only notch up a 4-2 win on Thursday, as the forwards lacked in finishing.

India are now up against New Zealand in the must-win crossover match. The Black Sticks finished third in Pool C with a win and two losses.

Currently ranked 12th in the world as against India's sixth position, New Zealand -- who have never reached the semifinals -- have also not done anything extraordinary in the tournament and the home side definitely would start as favourites in front of an expected jampacked Kalinga Stadium.

India's key midfielder Hardik Singh has been ruled out of the remainder of the tournament after he failed to recover from his hamstring injury sustained in the match against England on January 15.

Hardik's absence will be a big setback for India as they have been struggling in the attacking department, and considering the fact that they are expected to run into defending champions Belgium in the quarterfinals if they beat New Zealand.



Hardik, who scored a brilliant solo goal in India's 2-0 win over Spain in the opening match, will be replaced by alternate player Raj Kumar Pal. He did not play against Wales.

Against a Wales team whom England and Spain had beaten 5-0 and 5-1, the Indians struggled to find goals as the forwards put up a poor show.

The Indians simply failed to get their strategy right against Wales, who defended in numbers inside their own circle.

The Indian defence, which had a clean sheet till then, conceded two goals against Wales, who are ranked 14th in the world.

Captain Harmanpreet Singh scored his and the team's first goal from penalty corners, while the experienced Akashdeep Singh saved India by scoring twice after Wales made it 2-2 at the end of the third quarter.

In the absence of Hardik, the performance of senior players like Mandeep Singh and Akashdeep will be key for the hosts.

India, no doubt, would start as favourites against New Zealand, but the Black Sticks will not be an easy side to beat.

India had beaten them twice (4-3 and 7-4) in October-November last year during the FIH Pro League at the

same stadium here but New Zealand are no pushovers in world hockey.

"It will not be an easy match against New Zealand. It was a very tough match in the first game (in FIH Pro League) though the second one was a bit easier. We have to play our best," Reid had said.

Historically, the two sides had played 44 matches against each other and India had won 24 of them while losing 15. Five games were drawn. The last time New Zealand beat India was a 2-1 win in 2019.

New Zealand would be smarting after their 2-3 loss to Malaysia in their final Pool C match on Thursday.

Smith would love to have Dhoni in SA20

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Graeme Smith would love to have the talismanic Mahendra Singh Dhoni in the SA20 league once he is done playing in the IPL and, at the slightest of opportunities, will be reaching out to the World Cup-winning captain.

South Africa's most successful skipper Smith is the commissioner of the inaugural SA20 in which the IPL franchisees are owners of all six teams.

Dhoni, 41, only plays in the IPL since retiring from international cricket in 2020. With his involvement in the IPL, he is not eligible to play in overseas leagues at the moment.

No Indian is taking part in the league's first edition.

"It will be amazing to have a guy like MS here. We respect the BCCI's decision. We have created a good working relationship with them and we talk to them regularly, learn and bounce ideas off. They are hugely experienced in organising these type of big events," Smith said in a media interaction.

"From our perspective, we looked at one or two opportunities (retired Indian players). We wanted to build vibrant young and up and coming competitive cricketing league. Someone like MS would add a lot of value to our league to it. If there was an opportunity, I will be reaching out to him."

With teams using IPL like jerseys and logos in South Africa, the tournament looks like an extension of the world's biggest T20 league.

BCCI has expressed its concerns over the way teams are promoting themselves in South Africa but Smith said nothing has been raised from the Indian board on that front.

"We have a close relationship with the BCCI and nothing of that sort has been raised," Smith asserted.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rashwin feels India have requality in their rank to adapt to the home conditions during the ODI World later this year, even as the premier off-spinner urged the ICC to take corrective steps for a "dew-free" tournament.

The cricket showpiece is slated in October-November this year, when dew becomes a big factor towards the evening and for the first time it will be staged completely in India across different venues.

"There's no point in heading in a direction and going loggerheads with conditions, because conditions cannot be challenged. You need to learn the conditions and adapt. India team has enough in their arsenal to be able to do that," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"However, on a given day if these conditions of dew,

boundary sizes, things going here and there cannot be controlled, and that's the only thing I believe India need to be wary of going into this World Cup... For India, in this regard, are going to be a bit short-changed because of the number of venues we play these games in.

"If they get the right conditions of cricket being competed with skill to kill, this is a team that will be very tough to beat. I certainly believe ICC should give it a thought to have a dew-free 2023 ODI World Cup," Ashwin said, reiterating his call for an early 11.30am start.

Last week, Ashwin had

mooted the idea of an early start, advancing the match by two hours to nullify the dew factor.

He had cited the example of the first ODI against Sri Lanka where India struggled in the death overs while defending a massive 374.

Sri Lanka used the conditions fully to give India a run for their money despite being 206 for 8 and went on to post 306 for 8.

Giving his logic, Ashwin said the boundaries have become shorter by about 10-12 metres to accommodate the LED advertising boards which has now replaced the vinyl sheets.



"Hyderabad can be a big venue but it isn't because of the sponsorship LED boards. It cuts across all other venues in India, especially the older ones which were not built keeping in mind the T20 era," he said.

"So, a 70-metre boundary in Hyderabad goes down to 58m depending on whims and fancies of that particular day."

"India's innate strength is their quality spinners. The quality of spin might not necessarily have deteriorated. But the innate strength can sometimes get lost with the way spin is being played, and how conditions dictate the way

spin is being bowled," Ashwin said.

"I certainly believe the game has come a long way since 2011 when Dhoni lifted the World Cup in India. There has been a lot more exposure for all the foreign cricketers be it English, Australian, South African and New Zealanders. Everybody has come and played IPL and a lot of bilateral series. Their understanding of Indian conditions has definitely grown by leaps and bounds."

He, however, said he has no doubt that India would start as firm favourites in the World Cup.

"Yes, I certainly believe

that India's chance of defending the 2011 home World Cup is really high," he said, giving stats that they have won 14 matches out of 18 in the format since the 2019 World Cup.

"India's ODI home record ever since the 2019 World Cup finished is extremely impressive. India have won against every team that has travelled to India in this space, which are West Indies, Australia, England, South Africa, Sri Lanka," Ashwin said.

"It's a 78 to 80 per cent win record in India. All of these 18 ODIs have happened in different venues every single time (14 venues). If you have to compare the same spree with Australia or England, the venues are pretty stock standard. They play all their Test matches at 4-5 venues, the ODIs are played in 2-3 venues and so they know their venues are the back of their hands."

"I would like my
celebrity to serve
charity purposes,
and to help people
less well off"
—Kylian Mbappe



FINALLY, JUSTICE FOR CAPF

The Acts passed by the parliament for the creation of paramilitary forces do not leave any scope for not considering them Armed Forces of the Union of India as the Supreme Court has itself settled the matter describing them as such, writes RAKESH K SINGH

The recent Delhi High Court judgment granting pension benefits to the Central Armed Police Forces has to be a wake-up call for the government. The authorities could have dealt with the situation with a little more sensitivity. After all, the CAPF personnel guard our internal security.

The members of the paramilitary forces had filed as many as 82 petitions in the High Court seeking entitlement under the Old Pension Benefit to the Forces' personnel who joined after January 1, 2004.

The Acts under which the CAPFs such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) were created clearly categorize them as "Armed Force of the Union" under the Union Home Ministry. But the top leadership of these Forces from the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers parachuted from the State police sought to deny the benefits of the pension by contending that these Forces were not the armed force of the Central government.

On January 11, 2023, a division bench of the Delhi High Court comprising Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Neena Bansal Krishna delivered a landmark judgment allowing a clutch of petitions filed by officers and men, mostly from the CRPF and BSF seeking entitlement under the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).

The petitioners had sought pension benefits under the OPS which continued in these Forces for the employees who were inducted on or before December 31, 2003.

However, the old pension scheme continued uninterrupted in the case of the 'Armed Forces' under the Ministry of Defence which are collectively called defense forces or military--- Army, Navy, and Air Force.

The Notification issued by the Ministry of Finance (Department of Economic Affairs, Notification No. 5/7/2003-ECB & PR dated December 22, 2003, through which the government discontinued the old pension scheme for Government employees clearly stated that the New Pension Scheme (NPS) would apply to

all except for the personnel in the Armed Forces.

Delivering the judgment, the division bench of Delhi High Court reaffirmed what was very explicitly mentioned in the respective Acts of Parliament through which the CRPF, BSF, ITBP, SSB, and CISF were created as Armed Forces of Union of India to meet the internal security challenges and for the internal defence of the country.

The other Armed Forces created and maintained under the Ministry of Defence were tasked exclusively for the defence of the country from external threats and challenges. The court pointed out that these provisions are enshrined in Entry 2, List I of the Seventh Schedule under Article 246 of the Constitution of India. On this basis, the High Court concluded that the CRPF (and other such Forces) are armed forces of the Union and hence their members are entitled to the Old Pension Scheme.

The Court also trashed dubious bureaucratic arguments that the CRPF is a reserve force and hence cannot be termed as an armed force of the Union. The argument was farcical as the reserve component of the CRPF is virtually nil due to stretched deployments across various theatres.

Security experts feel that given the dynamic nature of the threats posed by a variety of inimical elements and technological progressions as also ever-evolving patterns of crimes and terror, the armed forces must be fully equipped, including pension entitlements to keep them operationally effective to mitigate the challenges of modern times interspersed with all types of disruptions.

Relying on the CPFR Act, the Supreme Court in its order in the Akhilesh Prasad versus Union Territory of Mizoram (1981) sought answers to both the questions---Is the CRPF a Force? And is the CRPF an Armed Force?

"In our opinion, the answer to both the questions must be given in the affirmative because of the provisions of sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the CRPF Act....That sub-section reads thus: "There shall continue to be an

THE OTHER ARMED FORCES CREATED AND MAINTAINED UNDER THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WERE TASKED EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY FROM EXTERNAL THREATS AND CHALLENGES. THE COURT POINTED OUT THAT THESE PROVISIONS ARE ENSHRINED IN ENTRY 2, LIST I OF THE SEVENTH SCHEDULE UNDER ARTICLE 246 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA. ON THIS BASIS, THE HIGH COURT CONCLUDED THAT THE CRPF (AND OTHER SUCH FORCES) ARE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNION AND HENCE THEIR MEMBERS ARE ENTITLED TO THE OLD PENSION SCHEME

armed force maintained by the Central Government and called the Central Reserve Police Force," the apex court had said in its order.

The sub-section itself declares in no uncertain terms that the CRPF is an armed force of the Central Government which is the same thing as saying that it is a part of the Armed Forces of the Union, it noted.

"We may make it clear, however, that even if the provisions just above extracted were not available our answer to the two questions would still be in the affirmative," the Supreme Court ruled.

"We hold that the CRPF squarely falls within the expression "Armed Forces of the Union" as used in sub-section(2) of Section 167 of the CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code)," the SC had held.

In a circular dated August 6, 2004, the Union Home Ministry also clarified that the Central Forces under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs have been declared as Armed Forces of the Union.

The CRPF Act came into being in 1949 even before the Constitution of India was formally adopted on January 26, 1950.

To augment the additional financial burden, if any, arising due to the implementation of the Old Pension Scheme, there is a need to tweak the New Pension Scheme. The government may make policies to do away with pension benefits if a member of such forces leaves prematurely.

The Acts passed by the parliament for the creation of the respective paramilitary forces by the Parliament of India do not leave any scope for not interpreting them as Armed Forces of the Union of India as the Supreme Court has itself settled the matter describing them as such.

The CRPF Act which was passed by the Parliament on December 28, 1949 (and based on which all other forces such as BSF ITBP CISF SSB, etc. were raised) categorized CRPF as an Armed Force and mentions that it should continue as an Armed force of the Union of India.

Drawing powers under these provisions, CRPF has played a

tremendous role along with the Indian Army under the then Union Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in the unification of the Indian states post the independence.

Given this scenario, the stand taken by the CRPF headquarters in an affidavit filed in the Delhi High Court as the key respondent in the Old Pension Scheme case is shocking. The CRPF bosses told the court the old pension scheme should not be allowed to their own ranks and files for the appointments made on or after January 1, 2004, because CRPF is not an Armed Force but a Police organization.

Such a contention by the CRPF top echelons is astonishing. It seeks to underplay the critical role performed by their men and officers in maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of the country in different operational theatres. How can anyone overlook the role of the CRPF in meeting the enormous challenges in Jammu and Kashmir and Leh? How can anyone forget the supreme sacrifice their men keep making while tackling the Naxalite problem in the so-called Red Corridor? Similarly, their role in keeping the security scenario under control in North East is also commendable.

However, the contents of the affidavits indicated that the CRPF top leadership is in perpetual ignorance about its own constitutional status and mandate.

The response of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the parent ministry under which the CRPF, BSF and all other such forces function, was also disconcerting.

It is important to understand that since a major chunk of the defence forces, more particularly the Indian Army and the Central paramilitary forces, constitute of men drawn from the rural and the semi-urban environment, the pension benefits will have positive ramifications on the ground where it matters the most.

Given the security situation and the internal security scenario over the past 50 to 60 years, it can be fairly seen that

Incidentally, the working conditions of these forces whether in Kashmir or in the Naxal theatre or in

North East or in all the bordering areas and inhospitable terrain is very challenging. In these places, a modern Western-type state-of-the-art infrastructure and living condition for the troops is still beyond imagination or comprehension or practically impossible for a considerable time in the future.

Given such a situation, certain monetary benefits in the form of the old pension scheme will not only serve as a morale booster but also help in strengthening the recruitment of more motivated and qualified candidates in the future.

The old pension scheme system is not only essentially beneficial for drawing the youths from the rural and semi-urban backgrounds into these forces in large numbers but also it will tremendously add to their retention possibilities in these forces for a considerably longer period as the pension mandates at least 20 to 30 years of continuous service for the entitlement of pensionary benefits.

The Government, in the larger interest of these very important forces, can resolve this issue amicably in the overall interest of around 10 lakhs serving personnel of these Forces (approximately half of which have been kept out of the ambit of OPS post joining on or after January 1, 2004).

The number of government employees is just 2 to 3 percent of the total population or the workforce in India. The percentage of Armed Forces personnel under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and MHA is considerably fewer numbers than the total figures of Government employees.

Several State governments ruled by the Opposition have already taken the lead in adopting the Old Pension Scheme in their respective jurisdictions.

The Delhi High Court directing the central government to give pensionary benefits to all the Paramilitary personnel could serve as a great opportunity for the Government to address the concerns of those guarding our nation against both external enemies and internal troublemakers.

(The writer is special correspondent of The Pioneer)

BUDGET FOR YOUR HEALTH

The Parliamentary session of the Union Budget is likely to start on January 31, 2023 followed by the presentation of the Union Budget 2023-24 on February 1 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Just like every other sector in the country, the healthcare sector also has big expectations from this year's budget. The HEALTH PIONEER reports



It is imperative to build infrastructural capabilities so that people have greater access to quality and critical healthcare services. Viability gap funding by the Government is essential to set up hospitals in tier-1 and tier-2 cities, encouraging increased investment in the healthcare infrastructure. Uniform adoption of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission is another imperative which calls for clearly defined delivery models for innovative modules developed by private players.

As we prepare for the post-pandemic era, stable policy frameworks and incentives to help the healthcare sector remain viable- investment via FDI, expanding reach, investing in technology and innovation, reinforcing patient safety and adding to the skilled professionals of India.

—Dr Shravan Subramanyam,
President, NATHEALTH

Healthcare is under-served and under-consumed. India requires a plan to build a robust and resilient healthcare system, which can only be done by increasing investment (both public and private).

Turning to preventive care is the need of the hour. Despite the fact that it can significantly lower medical costs and detect life-threatening health conditions early, it is undervalued. Therefore, improving testing facilities or diagnostic services in Rural Bharat need to be of the utmost importance.

Additionally, the GST for the healthcare industry needs to be rationalised so that the businesses in the sector may attract more investment and provide services to customers at affordable rates.

Furthermore, healthcare services in tier II and tier III cities need to be strengthened, especially when it comes to hospital facilities, which might be explored using a PPP model.

Additionally, the budget should include a strategy for increasing the availability of healthcare professionals, particularly in Tier 2/3 & 4 towns.

The forthcoming budget should also focus on healthcare digitization because it is a fundamental precondition for providing value-based care throughout India's healthcare continuum. In India's Tier II and III

cities in particular, adopting intelligent solutions can help decrease barriers between hospitals and patients, improving access to care and raising overall patient satisfaction.

Furthermore, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission should be implemented in all hospitals, especially those located in rural areas. In addition, the implementation of consolidated medical records and digital health ID cards must be emphasised for seamless access to patient data in one location

—Dheeraj Jain
Founder & MD, Redcliffe Labs

Post-Covid, there is a clear focus on investing in the healthcare infrastructure of India. To achieve scale, it is clear that the digital part of healthcare needs direction and a boost. We hope the government allocates more funds to health tech, enabling a large population to be covered with minimal cost.

Especially on mental health, we are seeing mental health issues rising year over year. But last year, we saw a significant and welcome push by the government with the launch

of a national tele-mental health program to provide 24x7 free counselling and care to people. On the insurance side, we also had a significant push to cover mental health diseases by IRDA. However, insurers in India seldom offer policies that cover non-hospitalization treatments or OPD reimbursements. It means that unless mentally ailing patients get hospitalized, they won't be eligible for coverage. Insurance covers, thus, naturally exclude therapy and psychiatric counselling coverages. IRDA should push for OPD reimbursements for psychology therapy and counselling.

— Krishna Veer Singh
Co-Founder and CEO, Lissun.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fragmented nature of the healthcare industry. In the budget for 2022–2023, it was evident that necessary steps had been taken towards improving healthcare infrastructure. With this, we are slowly moving towards creating a better healthcare ecosystem; however, to strengthen it further, technological adoption, especially in rural areas,

should be the focus of this year's budget.

The current burden on rural healthcare infrastructure can be significantly reduced with technology adoption and policies that allow current players and neo-healthcare start-ups to invest in Bharat, rural India where more than 60% of the population lives. Additionally, the budget for 2023–24 should focus on human capital in rural healthcare, by having more number of healthcare professionals in tier II, tier III & IV towns, and also creating policies to have a steady flow of this capital by having more medical & nursing colleges in rural India.

The budget for 2023–24 should also focus not only on spending in order to maintain the current healthcare infrastructure but also invest in increasing the number of healthcare units, such as doubling the number of PHCs, so as to decrease the load on secondary and tertiary healthcare units.

—Vidyasagar Diyavath
Sales Head, Carin Life Sciences

The Government has operationalized over 1.5 lakh health and wellness centers under Ayushman Bharat Mission at the end of 2022. On similar lines, it would be great if the 2023 budget provisions for incentives to expedite the adoption of Ayushman Bharat tech stack. We believe that it will be a transformational move for the Indian healthcare ecosystem, enabling high-quality health outcomes for everyone

We also expect the budget to focus on making access to healthcare easy and affordable. It can be done by encouraging the digital delivery of healthcare. So, we hope to see specific provisions for building digital infrastructure. It demands investment in improved connectivity, power supply, and other healthcare infrastructure.

From an affordability perspective, OPD insurance is an area that needs greater attention. Making OPDs cashless will ensure more people consider preventive healthcare as a priority. It will encourage people to consult providers earlier to avoid health complications. Provisions towards the same are something we are looking forward to.

While Ayushman Bharat could make all of it possible, the execution requires greater/improved private-public partnership (PPP). We look forward to announcements in Budget 2023 towards making this a reality.

— Sanjay Vinayak
Founder and CEO, Connect and Heal

The new lease of life for the hopeless after undergoing the kind maneuvering of surgeons' knives.

The Health Pioneer lists out a few cases.

Paras Hospitals neurosurgeons reshape skull of 9-month-old baby

Doctors at Paras Hospitals, Gurugram were able to reconstruct the skull of a 9-month-old patient born with a rare Apert Syndrome. It is a rare congenital disorder that happens to 1 in 65,000 to 200,000 births across the globe. It occurs when the baby is still in the womb, affecting the skull, face, and at times even toes and fingers.

Dr. Sumit Sinha, Director of Spine and Neurosurgery along with his team were able to remodel the skull with the help of absorbable polymer plates, although the patient will need plastic surgery to reconstruct his face at 5 or 6 years of age.

Dr Sinha said: "After assessing the rare condition of the kid, our team of neurosurgeons decided to first illustrate the remodeling and then proceed for the surgery ahead. The patient was admitted on 27th November 2022 (visit date) and the surgery was conducted on November 29, 2022. When in the womb, the bones in his skull were fused with one another and that restricted the growth of his brain. He had a visibly small skull because of this, his brain did not develop other affecting him mentally and

physically. The situation is rare, but what is rarer is the association of other things in the patient's body like fused fingers, all five fingers were fused in the child there are facial abnormalities like protrusion of the jaw protrusion of the eyeballs increased distance between the eyeballs and regression of the maxilla."

Post-surgery, the child has a normal-looking skull now and is currently recovering gradually to get along with routine activities that were affected due to limited brain growth. His next surgery will be to separate the fingers of both hands after 1-2 years and to reconstruct his face when he turns 5-6 years of age according to the doctor.

Dr Sinha recommended prenatal tests to every parent to understand if there are any complications to the baby. 1st prenatal test has to be done before 20 weeks of pregnancy and 2nd after the 28th week. If the condition is detected, termination of pregnancy can save a lot of issues in the future, if done in time. Mothers should take care of their diet during pregnancy. The inclusion of foods with folic acid and essential vitamins is a must, he said.

Sir Ganga Ram Hosp doctors give new face to accident victim

A team of doctors from Department of Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital received a 20 years old patient Sameer from Delhi. He had suffered a major road traffic accident while driving a bike.

According to Dr. Bheem Singh Nanda, Senior Consultant, Department of Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery, "When we received the patient, he was in a bad shape. He had suffered severe head and maxio-facial injury. There were around 16 major facial bones and skull fractures with dislocation of Temporomandibular Joint of the jaw."

Seeing the complexity of the case a joint team of 10 doctors consisting of Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery and Neuro Surgeons was formed. The patient was immediately resuscitated and airway was rescued as a life saving measure.

According to Dr. Shrey Jain, Consultant, Department of Neurosurgery "After stabilization of the patient, urgent multiple scans were done to diagnose the extent of injuries. Our team assessed the head and skull injuries and medicines were started

accordingly." The patient had severe soft tissue injuries on face and multiple fractures to the extent that the facial bones were crushed and converted to small pieces.

Dr. Nanda added, "It was a very challenging and complicated case. It required a lot of pre-operative planning to give good functional and aesthetic results."

The patient was taken up for the surgery and most of the fractures were exposed through an internal approach without giving any extra cut on the facial skin (to decrease scarring). Then all the fractures and joints were reduced to the anatomical positions. After this systematically one by one all fractures were fixed using pure titanium mini plates & screws. Almost 36 plates and two dozen screws were used in the process. Then his tongue and all the other soft tissue injuries including lower and upper lip, nose and eyelids were repaired.

The whole surgery took 8 hours and involved a team of 12 doctors and paramedical staff. After the surgery the patient is stable now with a good functional and aesthetic outcome.

Hip ball replacement surgery just in 15 minutes 35 seconds! Doctors at Fortis Escorts Hospital, Okhla breaks own record

An 86-year-old female patient, who slipped in the washroom and suffered a fracture of the left hip (neck of femur) was admitted to the emergency at Fortis Escorts Hospital, Okhla (Delhi) three days after the injury. At the time of admission, she complained of chest pain, following which an echocardiogram and other investigations were conducted which revealed an acute cardiac event along with old scarring and slow movement of part of the walls of the heart.

The heart was pumping blood at 30 per cent of the full capacity (Ejection fraction 30 per cent). She underwent angiography before surgery and heparin were added to her blood thinners. All these comorbidities made the patient's condition highly complicated. The patient needed urgent surgery.

The team led by Dr. Kaushal Kant Mishra, Director - Orthopaedics and Joint Replacement, Fortis Escorts, Okhla, New Delhi performed a hip ball replacement surgery in 15 minutes 35 seconds, which they claim is the shortest duration for such surgery

known so far globally.

This is three minutes less than the previous world record set by Dr. Mishra and his team two years ago.

"Treatment for such a fracture is challenging as the patient, in this case, was suffering from multiple comorbidities. Timely surgery is the key to managing and saving a life; it prevents complications of prolonged immobilization. The advanced age of the patient, who was on dual antiplatelet drugs, heparin used for angiography two hours before the surgery, posed a major risk to the surgery. Her ejection fraction was only 30 per cent (normal is 60 per cent)", said Dr. Mishra.

He further added, "Spinal Anesthesia, which is considered safe in lower limb surgeries, was not feasible in this case, and general anesthesia was the only choice which in itself carries many deleterious side-effects considering age and diminished heart function. Anesthesia challenges included generalized weakness, increased risk of postoperative memory loss, and other neurological complications."

Winter Care: Tips to Stay Healthy

As the winter is getting harsher, it is making people a little lethargic. But carelessness may be risky in this season, cautions Dr. RP Parasher, Chief Medical Officer (Ayurveda), Municipal Corporation of Delhi

The spell of cold waves has become lengthy this winter season. Short term appearance of the sun these days has proved to be a sigh of relief, but carelessness may prove risky, even fatal for elders and those suffering from asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases.

Not only children, elders and patients, but the youngsters too are prone to cold and infections due to unexpected weather conditions. People deprived of direct sun due to the location of their houses are at more risk because temperature in their houses remains much lower than the outside temperature.

Patients with cough, cold flu, pneumonia, COPD, heart attack, brain stroke, etc. have increased significantly during the past one month. Temperature between 3:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. remains minimum in winter, leading to constriction of blood capillaries and high blood pressure which causes heart



attacks and brain strokes.

People suffering from diabetes, arthritis, hypertension and heart diseases need extra care. Apart from the lower level of mercury, pollution is at a dangerous level in Delhi NCR making the conditions worse, especially for patients suffering from respiratory and

cardiovascular diseases. It is advisable not to go for a morning walk these days and it is better to go for a walk during noon only.

Elders and patients should keep their rooms warm as heart attacks occur mainly during early morning hours due to constriction of blood

capillaries. Such people should dip their feet in warm water for ten to fifteen minutes before going to bed at night and the temperature of water should be between 42 degree to 48 degree Celsius.

It will avert constriction of blood vessels and rising blood pressure.



In this season, avoid food items of cold nature like rice, curd, buttermilk, ice cream, cauliflower, refrigerated items, ladyfinger, bitter gourd, peas, pigeon pea (arhar daal), etc.

It is advised to consume garlic, spinach, chenopodium or white goose foot (bathua), mustard (sarson), Fenugreek (methi), red lentils (masoor daal), etc. these days. Tulsi, ginger, clove, black pepper, piper longum (small pip-pali), cinnamon bark, etc. should be taken twice or thrice daily and boiled in

milk or tea.

Turmeric, dates and raisins boiled in milk help keep the body warm. Hot vegetable soups will provide nutrition as well as warmth. Drinking warm water provides warmth, treats inflammation of the throat and regulates the digestive system. Herbs like giloy, mulethi, vasa, amla, joofa, kantkari, etc. should be used with honey, if caught by cough and cold.

Ayurvedic medicines like Chyavanprash, Vasa avleha, Agastya Haritki, etc are helpful in averting as well as treating the complications of cough and cold. Sudershan ghan vati, laxmivilas ras, karkatu ras, mrityunjay ras, sanjeevan vati, trilokya chintyamani ras, etc. are drugs of choice for pneumonia and other respiratory diseases. Daily bath with warm water and massage with sesame oil or mustard oil improves the blood circulation. Room heating may be done with caution keeping in view ventilation and hydration of the body.

Agri entrepreneurship can be game changer

India is generally referred to as a country with “Agriculture Economy — Krishi Pradhan Desh”. Around 70 per cent of the population depend on agriculture and allied sectors and contribute to about 18 per cent of the GDP in the country.

However, there are not many significant numbers of agricultural entrepreneurs in the country. The total number of MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) registered in agriculture and allied sectors are less than a few lakhs as compared to about 650 million MSME in the country.

Why has there not been much development and growth of agricultural entrepreneurs in India? Is this due to policy level intervention or on account of less interest by the Indian enterprising youth?

Traditionally most of the activities relating to agriculture have been undertaken by the Government and its agencies namely supply of inputs (seeds and fertilisers), extension services (introduction of new varieties, technology), procurement of farm produce (FCI, Mandis and NCCF). The farmer gets support from the Government and its agencies for most of the activities, including the financial support (PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, Kisan Credit card, Fasal Bima Yojna). The village-level worker (VLW), veterinary assistant, cooperative societies (PACS/LAMPS), Krishi Vikash Kendra (KVK) have extended the services to farmers at the village level.

Even organisations like IFFCO, KRIBHCO have mainly dealt in supply of fertilisers and other input to farmers through co-operatives. Such traditional service delivery structure has not been conducive for growth of agricultural entrepreneurs in India.

NABARD has supported entrepreneurs through financial support largely in agricultural allied sectors (dairy, poultry, etc) but their contribution is not significant. Similarly



SFAC, whose mandate is to promote agricultural entrepreneurs, has recently been supporting the Government in promoting “farmer producer organisation” and the focus on individual entrepreneur’s development has not been much encouraged. The focus so far has been to support cooperatives, FPO, SHG and other such societies in delivery of various services to farmers and address the requirement of the farm sector in India.

Schemes like IDEA (Initiative for development of Entrepreneurs in Agriculture), ASPIRE (Scheme for promotion of innovation, entrepreneurship and agro industry), and agricultural clinics (for agriculture graduates only) have not worked as catalysts for

large-scale promotion and development of agricultural entrepreneurs in India.

Traditionally at the village level, the agriculture entrepreneurs, one come across, are “AADTHI or Aarthi” (one associated in purchase of farm produce) cooperatives (supplying fertilisers and seeds etc) and agencies for supply of tractors and other agricultural equipment.

There were also entrepreneurs at village level who supplied goods, consumables based on barter trade. With the Government’s vision of doubling farm income, establishing Gram Swaraj and Atma Nirbahr Bharat, it is essential to promote large-scale, sustainable agricultural entrepreneurs, one in each of 6.5 lakh villages.

These local-level entrepreneurs can redefine the service delivery framework to farmers and support employment opportunities for more than 2 million people in Rural India. Of course this will require relooking at existing rules and regulations.

First the licensing requirement for selling seeds and fertilisers need to be dispensed with. As the entrepreneur will only sell seeds and fertilisers to large companies who are otherwise being regulated by the Government, there is no justification for licence requirements for these entrepreneurs. Second, the requirement of “only agriculture graduate” for agricultural entrepreneurs and agencies to sell seeds and fertilisers is not justified. Thirdly

the procurement of farmer produce only by Mandis needs to be made optional. The local entrepreneur shall be permitted to procure, store and transport farm produce without any restriction or requirement of licence for the same.

Fourthly, the financial institutions need to make each of these entrepreneurs “business facilitators” so as to enable farmers to obtain credit and lastly the local entrepreneurs should be allowed to support and help deliver the benefits of various government schemes and programmes.

Each village-level agricultural entrepreneur can be allowed and helped to set up a seedling nursery to support farmers in getting good quality seedlings and various vari-

eties, including cash crops. Each agricultural entrepreneur with facility to sell seeds, fertilisers, other inputs, help in spraying of the fertilisers especially the nano urea and DAP, use of drones, hiring station for farm equipment, procurement and storage faculty, transport facility for farm produce, extension of all Government schemes and support in getting credit shall be able to build a sustainable business enterprise.

The agricultural entrepreneur can help and support the Government in advocacy of Government schemes and programmes. Many large private enterprises such as big basket, Reliance Mart, and start up as Agri 10 X, Dehaat can utilise the local agricultural entrepreneurs in accessing the local

community for various products and services.

The agricultural entrepreneurs can help the Government conduct the animal survey, soil health survey, groundwater survey and other survey works, including census.

This will not only provide a source of income but also support the Government in getting latest data and thus design appropriate policies for intervention.

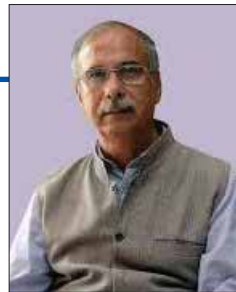
Agricultural entrepreneurs at every village can transform agricultural productivity in India thus fulfilling the Government’s vision of doubling the farmer’s income. It is true that Indians, especially rural youths, are inherently enterprising and with little support and operational freedom they can build large-scale sustainable enterprises. The Government needs to rethink traditional service delivery mode to farmers and promote local entrepreneurs in addressing all their concerns.

The offices of VLW, veterinary assistant, KVK and other functionaries need to be relooked at and trust imposed on the local entrepreneurs to deliver all such services and support farmers. These agricultural entrepreneurs can also make and regularly update the village/farm data as soil map, water level map, etc, and involve community participation to address the related concern.

It is true that these agricultural entrepreneurs — one in every village — can transform the agriculture sector and help in exploring its true potential. Farmers will be more actively involved through the local agricultural entrepreneur model in adoption of new technology, change in cropping pattern, adapt to cash crops and engage in growth in allied sectors.

(The writer is a former IAS officer and former Managing Director & CEO of Common Service Centre, Ministry of Information Technology)

With the Government’s vision of doubling farm income, establishing Gram Swaraj and Atma Nirbahr Bharat, it is essential to boost sustainable agricultural entrepreneurs, one in each of 6.5 lakh villages



DINESH TYAGI

PERSPECTIVE

Himalayan environment at tipping point

In this globalised era, along with the changing needs, humans’ greed and untrammelled use of resources have a debilitating impact on nature.

And the case in point is Joshimath, which is sinking. There are lessons to be learnt for the government as well as humans on how to save national treasure troves before they become history.

Joshimath, a historical place dating back to ages with importance in the Hindu religion, is facing an unprecedented survival battle; residents living there for years are being shifted to safer places as cracked buildings are being dismantled.

Though the exact reasons for subsidence of Joshimath, also known as Jyotirmath — a city and a municipal board in Chamoli District in Uttarakhand and a gateway to several Himalayan mountain climbing expeditions, trekking trails and pilgrim centres like Badrinath — are yet to be established, some experts pointed a finger towards untrammelled construction with hotels coming up for tourists/pilgrims causing disbalance to the mountainous region.

Local communities have been giving voice to their opposition to the building of a massive infrastructure project known as the Char Dham road project, which is currently under construction.

The structure of this road is inherently unscientific, which may have devastating effects on the ecosystem of the mountains.

It has been noted that the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydro project tunnel, which is situated on an old glacial deposit and passes just below Joshimath — located at a height of 6,150 feet — could be a factor that is contributing to the current disaster.

Last year, 58,000 people walked the Char Dham route daily. A wake-up call was the 2013 Kedarnath flood.



NDRF and SDRF personnel demolish the Malari Inn hotel, which has been marked unsafe, in the land subsidence affected area in Joshimath on Saturday

PTI

The unregulated rise in tourism led to a construction boom in dangerous areas like river valleys, flood-plains, and slopes prone to landslides, which intensified the disaster.

Subsurface structures destroyed the environment. In long-distance tunnels, traffic exhaust pollution in a micro-environment with no sunlight and limited dispersion causes groundwater levels to drop irre-

versibly.

Erratic rainfall and ecological degradation from land use change for infrastructure development are already affecting mountain aquifer systems.

Since the Himalayan States lack large, contiguous aquifers, groundwater use differs from that in the plains.

Aquifer compaction and ground

settling must have resulted from sediment pore-pressure depletion. The mountain slope is unstable due to train vibrations and can slide anytime. Landslides have doubled since highways and railways were built.

The Himalayas’ natural resources — forest, water, biodiversity, and ecotourism — should have a development strategy that protects the environment.

Traditional knowledge, agriculture, construction, and culture should be used for human well-being. Due to steep gradients, climate and biodiversity are dynamically heterogeneous in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.

Recent disasters, exacerbated by unsustainable human interference in natural systems, demonstrate this. Therefore, sustainable, not mass,

tourism is needed in the Himalayas.

The Joshimath episode warns that the Himalayan environment is at a tipping point and may not be able to withstand another push from intrusive anthropogenic activities like massive construction projects of townships, highways, tunnels, railway tracks, and dams - an ecosystem already struggling with global warming - and that devotees must lead the charge to save the “Abode of the Gods”.

Many things can also cause subsidence, but some of the most common are earthquakes, soil erosion, and soil compaction.

Joshimath is located in Zone V of the Seismic Zonation Map in the Chamoli district. This region has experienced several earthquakes with a magnitude lower than 5 on the Richter scale. As a result, the town of Joshimath is perilously close to the tectonic fault line known as the Vaikrita Thrust (VT).

Additionally, the town is located near two of the most important geological fault lines: the Main Central Thrust (MCT) and the Pandukeshwar Thrust (PT). The Main Central Traverse (MCT) passes below Helang, located a little south of Joshimath Town, and juxtaposes with the rocks of the Garhwal Group (Joshimath Formation).

This places the town within the impact zone of any tectonic activity on the MCT.

According to Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA) study, the town is prone to landslides, and the first subsidence was reported in the 1976 Mishra Commission report. Landslides are common due to perennial streams, upper-elevation snow, and highly weathered gneissic rocks with low cohesiveness.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor in the University of Delhi. Views are personal)

The Joshimath disaster portends that the Himalayan environment may not be able to withstand another push from intrusive anthropogenic activities like massive construction projects of townships, highways, tunnels, railway tracks, and dams



PRASHANT BARTH WAL

