

OPINION 6
JACINDA ARDERN IS A
TRUE GANDHIANWORLD 9
FBI SEARCHES BIDEN'S WILMINGTON HOME,
FINDS MORE CLASSIFIED MATERIALSMONEY 10
'GOVT MAY NOT ANNOUNCE CAPITAL
INFUSION FOR PSU BANKS IN BUDGET'Published From
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WOMEN IN BLUE
TO FACE WEST
INDIES TODAY
12 SPORT

Judiciary, Centre row over Collegium ratchets up

Rijiju shares video of ex HC judge who says SC 'hijacked' Constitution by deciding to appoint judges itself

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The ongoing tussle between the judiciary and the Centre escalated further on Sunday with Law Minister Kiren Rijiju virtually endorsing the view of a retired Delhi High Court judge that the Supreme Court has "hijacked" the Constitution by deciding to appoint judges itself.

Rijiju shared the video of an interview of Justice RS Sodhi (Retd), a former judge of the Delhi High Court, saying it is the "voice of a judge" and that the majority of people have similar "sane views."

In the interview, Justice Sodhi said the right to frame laws lies with Parliament and not with the Supreme Court.

"...Only Parliament will amend Constitution. But here I feel the Supreme Court for the first time 'hijacked' the Constitution. After 'hijacking' they (the SC) said that we will appoint (judges) ourselves and the Government will have no role in it," Justice Sodhi said in Hindi. Backing Justice Sodhi's remarks, Rijiju tweeted: "Actually the majority of the people have similar sane views. It's only those people who disregard the provisions of the Constitution and mandate of the people think that they are above the Constitution of



India." In another tweet, the Law Minister said: "Voice of a Judge....Real beauty of Indian Democracy is its success. People rule themselves through their representatives. Elected representatives represent the interests of the people & make laws. Our Judiciary is independent and our Constitution is Supreme."

Incidentally, on December 8, the apex court had objected to adverse comments made against the judiciary by Government functionaries.

Observing that comments made on the Supreme Court Collegium by Government functionaries are "not well taken", a Bench headed by Justice SK Kaul asked Attorney-General R Venkataramani to advise the Government about it. The court had said the

Collegium system of appointment of judges is the law of the land and comments against it are "not well taken". The apex court also observed that any law declared by it is "binding" on all stakeholders and the Collegium system must be followed.

Rijiju's comments are the latest in an ongoing tussle between the Government and the Supreme Court Collegium over judicial appointments.

On January 19, the Supreme Court Collegium asserted its supremacy in appointment of judges and backed its earlier proposal to elevate five advocates to judges of High Courts. The Collegium summarily rejected the inputs provided against them by Intelligence agencies to the Centre.

Before that, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar launched a scathing attack on the judiciary on the issue of appointment of judges on January 12.

In an unprecedented attack on the judiciary by a senior constitutional functionary, the Vice-President asked the judges to refrain from "one-upmanship and public posturing" from judicial platforms and also frowned at the power allegedly usurped by the judiciary to review laws passed by Parliament.

Continued on Page 2

SC orders in mother tongue: Modi lauds CJI



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice DY Chandrachud for thinking about making Supreme Court judgments available in regional languages.

"At a recent function, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Justice DY Chandrachud spoke of the need to work towards making SC judgments available in regional languages. He also suggested the use of technology for it. This is a laudatory thought, which will help many people, particularly youngsters," said Modi in a tweet.

The Prime Minister wrote on Twitter and shared on the site the relevant clip of the CJI's speech delivered at an event organized by the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa in

Mumbai. Modi further said, "India has several languages, which add to our cultural vibrancy. The Central Government is undertaking numerous efforts to encourage Indian languages including giving the option of studying subjects like engineering and medicine in one's Matru Bhasha." Modi has, for long, been pitching for doing away with several old practices, abolishing obsolete laws, and underlining the need to "encourage the use of local languages in courts".

He holds the view that since a large section of the country's population "finds it difficult to understand the judicial process and court rulings," local languages should be used in judicial process which will make justice easily accessible to the poor.

Continued on Page 2

'No compromise in Rahul's security, Yatra to go on'



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with supporters during the party's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', in Samba on Sunday.

PTI

Despite twin blasts Gandhi to celebrate R-Day with people at Banihal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/JAMMU

A day after twin bomb blasts rocked Jammu, the Congress on Sunday said the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' will conclude in Srinagar on January 30 as per schedule and there will be no compromise on the security of Rahul Gandhi.

The party also announced that Rahul Gandhi was likely to celebrate Republic Day with the people of Jammu and Kashmir

(J&K) at Banihal – the gateway town to Kashmir along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway. After a day's break on Saturday, the yatra resumed from Hiranagar on Sunday and will reach Jammu on Monday.

Two back-to-back explosions rocked a busy locality on the outskirts of Jammu on Saturday, leaving nine people injured. Officials said IEDs were used to carry out the explosions in an SUV parked in a repair shop and in a vehicle at a nearby junkyard at the Transport Nagar area of Narwal.

"There will be no compromise on the security of Gandhi. His security is our topmost pri-

ority and we are following the guidelines of security agencies in totality," Congress chief spokesperson Jairam Ramesh said at a press conference at Chak Nanak in Samba, where the Yatra will stop at night halt.

J&K AICC in-charge Rajni Patil, J&K Congress chief Vikar Rasool Wani and party chief spokesperson Ravinder Sharma also addressed the press conference, asserting that the Yatra will conclude as per schedule.

"Rahul Gandhi is staying back in the Union Territory and is likely to hoist the Tricolour at Banihal along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway on Republic Day," Wani said.

Continued on Page 2

10 killed in California shooting

Lunar New Year revelry turns into mourning; killer on the run

AP ■ MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA

A gunman killed 10 people and wounded 10 others at a Los Angeles-area ballroom dance club following a Lunar New Year celebration, setting off a manhunt for the suspect in the fifth mass killing in the US this month. Capt Andrew Meyer of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department said on Sunday the wounded were taken to hospitals and their conditions range from stable to critical. He said the 10 people died at the scene in the city of Monterey Park.

Meyer said people were "pouring out of the location screaming" when officers



arrived at around 10:30 PM on Saturday. He said officers then went into the ballroom and found victims as firefighters treated the wounded.

Meyer gave no description of the male suspect or the weapon he used, or why police gave no information on the

shooting for hours while the shooter apparently remained on the run. He also said police were investigating another incident in the nearby city of Alhambra, where a similar business, the Lai Lai Ballroom, had police tape across its front door and an officer guarding it.

Detectives could be seen working near the open back door, where a woman wearing gloves was carefully examining the door handle as though checking for prints.

Officials gave no details on what had happened and it was unclear if this was the incident investigators were examining to see if there was a connection to the Monterey Park shooting.

Meyer said it's too early in the investigation to know if the gunman knew anyone at the ballroom or if whether it was a hate crime.

"We will look at every angle," Meyer said.

The shooting happened in the heart of downtown Monterey Park where red lanterns decorated the streets for the Lunar New Year festivities. A police car was parked near a large banner that proclaimed: "Happy Year of the Rabbit!"

The Lunar New Year celebration in Monterey Park is one of California's largest.

Continued on Page 2

Day after snub to SRK, Sarma does volte-face

CM responds to 2 AM call by Khan; assures smooth run for Pathaan

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan talked to him over the phone early on Sunday and expressed concern over a protest against his new film 'Pathaan' in the city.

Sarma assured the actor that his Government will enquire about the demonstration against the movie and ensure that "no such untoward incidents" would occur again. The development comes a day after the CM had said



"Who is Shahrurk Khan? I don't know anything about him or his film 'Pathaan'," while responding to queries by reporters about the violent protest by Bajrang Dal activists, who held a demonstration in front of a theatre at Narengi in the city on Friday, where the film is slated to be screened.

The far Right-wing group's volunteers tore down the film's posters and burnt them.

"Bollywood actor Shri @iamsrk called me and we talked today morning at 2 AM. He expressed concern about an incident in Guwahati during screening of his film. I assured him that it's the duty of the State Government to maintain law & order. We'll enquire and ensure no such untoward incidents," Sarma said on Twitter.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

NO MORE VISA OFFERS, UK MIN ON FTA

London: The India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) is expected to be clinched this year but it won't involve any boost of free movement visa offers for Indians, British trade minister in charge of the negotiations has said. Kemi Badenoch, who was in New Delhi last month to kick off the sixth round of FTA talks with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, said that former prime minister Boris Johnson's "deal by Diwali" deadline last year was not feasible and had to be changed.

SEBI DATABASE ON MUNICIPAL BONDS

New Delhi: Markets regulator Sebi has launched an information database on municipal bonds. As part of efforts to develop the bond markets, an outreach programme on municipal bonds and municipal finance was organised by Sebi in the national Capital on January 20 and 21, according to a release on Sunday.

Tale of INA's martyrs comes alive

Scholar reveals genocide of 2K POWs by British soldiers

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The heroic battle of Azad Hind Fauj (also known as the Indian National Army - INA) and its legendary leader, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, has been sung many times in history. But, some genocide of nearly 2,300 INA prisoners of war at Nilganj near Barrackpore, West Bengal on the intervening night of September 25/26, 1945 is yet to get due recognition despite the scale of atrocities by the British Indian Army.

Recently, researcher Tamal Sanyal, after a painstaking work of three years, has revealed all



about those unknown and unsung soldiers of INA, who were camped in Bengal, in British captivity and killed in a genocide.

Many stories have been written about INA and even some movies have also been made about its revolutionary leaders. But there is a latent chapter in the whole episode, which was hidden from public gaze, until now.

Sanyal's research has

revealed that the British Army operated three Prisoner of War (PoW) camps in undivided Bengal, immediately after the Second World War. The INA soldiers who were captured from the Indo-Burma border and North Eastern India were kept there.

These PoW camps had 'cages' in them, inside which the INA prisoners were kept under 24X7 watch of armed sentries. These three camps

were located at Barasat (in North 24 Paraganas of West Bengal), Nilganj (near Barrackpore, West Bengal) and Jhikorgachha (in district Jessore, now in Bangladesh).

Remnants of the Nilganj camp are still found and subsequently a prestigious institute of the Central government CRIJAF (Central Research Institute for Jute and Allied Fibres) has come up at that place since 1953, which allegedly could be a cover up of the genocide that took place inside that camp on a night of 1945.

Sanyal told *The Pioneer*, "The PoWs brought here in these camps were subjected to intense interrogation first, to segregate them on the basis of their loyalty to the cause of Indian independence. 'Colour coding' of the PoWs was done to mark them from the most to the least loyal.

Continued on Page 2

23 tableaux to tell India's cultural, dev story

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will showcase its development in various spheres including economic and internal and external security besides its rich cultural heritage through 23 tableaux at the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path. The tableaux include 17 from States and Union Territories and six from various Ministries and Departments, depicting the nation's rich cultural heritage, economic progress, and strong internal and external security, the Defence Ministry said here on Sunday.

The selection process involved scrutiny of tableaux proposals from various States by an expert committee and several rounds of interactions by the committee members with representatives of the States on the theme, presentation, aesthetics, and technical elements of the tableaux.

Continued on Page 2



The Central Armed Police Forces tableau during a press preview, ahead of the Republic Day Parade 2023, in New Delhi on Sunday.

PTI

Security agencies clueless about Narwal serial blasts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A day after the serial blasts rocked crowded Transport Nagar in the Narwal area of Jammu the multiple security agencies remained clueless on how the blasts were triggered and the nature of the explosives used by the perpetrators behind the blasts.

Back-to-back blasts in Narwal on the outskirts of Jammu City had left nine people injured on Saturday.

Meanwhile, a special team of the National Investigation Agency and senior army officials inspected the scene of the twin blasts here on Sunday to gather more clues. As of now the NIA team is assisting the Jammu and Kashmir police in detailed investigations in the case. The case is yet to be handed over

to the NIA.

On the other hand, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday chaired a high-level security meeting of Deputy Commissioners and Senior Superintendent of police (SSPs) and reviewed the security situation.

Top officials from J&K police, the Indian Army, Intelligence agencies and civil administration attended the meeting. More than a week ago Union Home Minister Amit Shah had also chaired a high level meeting where a comprehensive action plan was readied to strengthen the security grid across Jammu region in a time bound manner.

It is not yet clear whether improvised explosive devices fitted with a timer were used to carry out the twin explosions or some other mechanism was used to trigger the high intensity blasts in the busy Transport Nagar area.



nism was used to trigger the high intensity blasts in the busy Transport Nagar area.

In a related development, the Army's White Knight Corps said a joint intelligence and security conference was held at Rajouri district on Sunday to review the prevail-

ing internal situation based on the assessments of participating agencies.

Rajouri was rocked by a terror attack that left seven people dead and 14 injured earlier this month. The suspected terrorists behind the attack are still at large.

Drone carrying heroin consignment shot down near Indo-Pak border in Amritsar

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

A drone that was being used to smuggle drugs into the country was shot down near the India-Pakistan international border in Amritsar on Sunday in a joint operation by Border Security Force (BSF) and Punjab Police.

Five drones have been recovered in Tarn Taran and Amritsar areas since November 29.

The hexacopter was carrying five kg of heroin and was shot down in Kakkar village, Punjab Police said.

The police have rounded-up two persons from the spot when they were trying to escape, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amritsar Rural Swapan Sharma said.

Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said the hybrid drone, estimated to be worth Rs 10 lakh, was assembled



with parts manufactured in the US and China and was equipped with hi-tech features including a long-lasting battery backup and infrared-based night vision camera and GPS.

Yadav said after noticing the drone movement, police teams from Amritsar Rural district immediately shared the pin-pointed inputs with the BSF and jointly conducted an intensive search operation in Kakkar village, which is just 2 km away from the border.

Man flees from hotel with outstanding bill of ₹23L, arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Sunday remanded a man arrested for allegedly staying at a five-star hotel for about four months by posing as a functionary of the UAE royal family and fleeing with an outstanding bill of more than Rs 23 lakh in two days' police custody.

Duty Magistrate Shivangi Vyas sent Mahamed Sharif for custodial interrogation, noting that police had to recover certain articles from his residence in Delhi, which were allegedly stolen by him.

Sharif checked into The Leela Palace hotel on August 1 last year. He stayed in room number 427 for about four months and fled on November 20 with hotel valuables and without paying the bills, police told the court.

Delhi air quality deteriorates, CAQM predicts improvement

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's air quality rapidly deteriorated to the severe category on Sunday, but the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) chose not to invoke curbs under stage-III of the Graded Response Action Plan in view of a prediction of "immediate improvement".

The action plan is a set of anti-air pollution measures followed in the national capital and its vicinity according to the severity of the situation.

Delhi's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) stood at 407 on Sunday, worsening from 294 on Saturday, amid calm winds.

The stable atmospheric conditions allowed accumulation of pollutants from highly localised sources, such as a fire in central Delhi on Saturday, an official of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Hooda says contemplating filing defamation case against WFI chief

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Senior Congress leader Bhopinder Singh Hooda on Sunday said he is contemplating filing a defamation case against WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for allegedly dragging him and his son Deepender Hooda in the row over sexual harassment charges against Singh.

The former Haryana chief minister also reiterated his demand for an impartial inquiry into the allegations levelled against the head of the Wrestling Federation of India

(WFI).

Singh has been accused of sexually harassing women wrestlers and working like a 'dictator' by some of the country's top grapplers, including Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Ravi Dahiya.

Talking to reporters in Rohtak, Hooda said Singh has unnecessarily dragged his name along with that of his MP-son Deepender Singh Hooda in the matter.

He said he is contemplating to file a defamation case against the WFI chairman.

Earlier speaking to a TV

channel, the WFI head had said, "The protesting players have become a toy in the hands of the Congress and Deepender Hooda. This type of conspiracy was hatched against me by the Congress almost three decades ago. Once again the conspiracy has been done."

"I had earlier said that there was a conspiracy, and big powers are behind it. Now these forces are coming out in the open," he had said.

Hooda underlined that sportspersons are the pride of the country and they should get justice. Asked about the sexu-

al harassment case against Haryana minister Sandeep Singh, he said, "There should be a fair inquiry into the allegations levelled against him. For this, it is necessary that Sandeep Singh steps down."

Meanwhile, Hooda said his party is fully prepared for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and the Haryana Assembly election.

On the state polls due later next year, he said people have made up their minds to bring back the Congress in the state.

"This was visible in the historic support received by Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' in

Haryana," he said.

Hitting out at the BJP-JJP ruling combine in Haryana, he said, "Today there are a lot of problems before the people. The Congress will go to people on issues like corruption, unemployment, inflation, increasing crime and drug abuse."

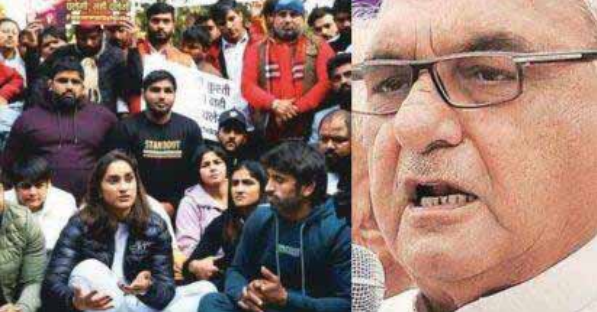
Supporting the demands of sugarcane farmers, Hooda said, "The farmers are demanding a rate of Rs 450 per quintal (as against the current Rs 362). The Haryana government should at least give the farmers the same rate as that of Punjab (Rs

380)."

Hooda added that during the previous Congress government, there was a record increase of 165 per cent in the rate of sugarcane, while during the BJP regime, it was increased by only 17 per cent.

About Congress' 'Haath Se Haath Jodo' campaign, an extension of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Leader of the Opposition in the assembly said the party will meet on January 25 to discuss about the event details.

"The Haryana Congress will leave no stone unturned to



make this programme a success. Like Bharat Jodo Yatra, it will also get a historical support," he stated.

The 'Haath Se Haath Jodo'

campaign has been planned from January 26 to March 26 to spread the message of the ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra across the country.

Tale of INA's martyrs comes...

From Page 1

"The INA soldiers most loyal to Netaji and the cause of Indian independence were marked as 'Black and had to bear most of the tortures at the hands of the British Army, while the lesser ones were coded 'Grey' (somewhat loyal) and 'White' (faintly loyal).

A planned massacre took place on the intervening night of September 25 and 26, 1945, at the Nilganj camp. The PoWs were taken to a pond called 'Moslem Pukur' (Muslim Pond), situated outside the

boundary of the campus. While walking, they sang songs in praise of Mother India and Netaji. At night, the villagers heard gunshots which rang through the air, for the whole night. On daybreak, they rushed to the camp to find the reasons behind the gunshots. They discovered piles of dead bodies of INA soldiers were being transported in military trucks. The bodies were reportedly thrown into the 'Lavanyavati River' (now called Nowai canal, just adjacent to the camp) and river Ganges.

Some bodies were reportedly buried inside the campus. All the bodies were disposed of in a single day.

Searching for the records of that incident, which was just a hearsay till now, Sanyal stumbled upon one Court of Inquiry Report by a British Army Major General Stuart. He confirmed that such an incident took place on the same night, as claimed by the locals. He said in his report that 26/5 Madras Regiment was stationed to guard the Nilganj camp and was commanded by Lt. Col.

Vaughan, who was away at the Regimental Centre. The camp was commanded by Major Nambiar and the company responsible for the shootout was commanded by Capt ERR Menon. At about 10 PM at night, he ordered the inhabitants of cages to fall in for a sudden roll call, which they refused to oblige.

According to the Court of Inquiry report, he was abused in Tamil. Then he came out of the cage and sounded the alarm at Quarter Guard to alert his company, which came out of

the barracks. Then Capt Menon entered the cage again, this time with a loaded Tommy Gun. Behind him, entered his company. It is recorded that as per the statement of Capt Menon, he saw a bamboo being whirled in air and a brick was thrown at him, after exchange of some abuses inside the cage. Then someone from his company, which was behind him, shouted "our company commander is finished". Then the firing started. While Capt Menon said he had not ordered any firing, the company per-

sonnel said that they fired upon orders of Menon.

The British Army claimed that only five persons were killed in the incident and nine injured. But according to Sanyal, the Major General said in the report that it cannot be surely said how many rounds were fired, but empty cases of 103 rounds of .303 rifle were fired and the Kote commander was still short of empty cases of 116 rounds. 8 rounds of Tommy gun were also fired. It is obvious that only five people will not be killed if 219

rounds of bullets are fired inside a closed cage/camp. No mention about the disposal of bodies was mentioned in the report.

The legendary Col. GS Dhillon of Azad Hind Fauj, who was tried at the Red Fort, wrote in his diary that 2,300 personnel of Azad Hind Fauj were slaughtered in cold blood on that night, by Capt Menon of the British Army. Strangely, he named Captain Menon correctly in his diary, although he was not incarcerated in that camp or could not have known

his name.

This incident was long buried in history. Sanyal claims he is the first person to access most of the old official British Army documents on this incident.

Sanyal said he is also writing a book detailing the gruesome incident and has also been writing letters to the top Constitutional functionaries, including the Prime Minister, Home Minister as also CRIJAF to erect a memorial in memory of the fallen soldiers at Nilganj.

SC orders in mother tongue: Modi lauds...

From Page 1

The CJI on Saturday indicated that the next step for the Indian judiciary in an increasingly digitised world would be to make judgments from various courts available in all Indian languages, possibly with the help of Artificial Intelligence tools.

The CJI who was first elevated as a judge to the Bombay High Court before reaching the Supreme Court was speaking at an event organised by the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa to felicitate him.

"I met with a professor of Madras who works in AI and the next step is to have judgments in all regional languages of the country," he said.

Judiciary, Centre row over Collegium ratchets...

From Page 1

Addressing the 83rd All India Presiding Officers Conference in Jaipur, Dhankar, who is the Rajya Sabha Chairman, said, "Today this one-upmanship and public posturing from judicial platforms are not good. These institutions must know how to conduct themselves."

The Vice-President also hit out at the judiciary for scrapping the NJAC Act and maintaining the supremacy of the Collegium in appointment of judges.

Three days later, a letter written by Rijiju to the Chief Justice of India got leaked to media in which the Law Minister sought Government representation in the Collegium.

The Law Minister pointed out that the finalisation of the Memorandum of Procedure

(MoP) for appointment of judges was still 'pending', Rijiju suggested inclusion of a Government representative in the "search-cum-evaluation committee" that will provide inputs on "suitable candidates" to the appointment panel or the Collegium.

Then on January 19, the Supreme Court Collegium asserted its supremacy in appointment of judges and backed its earlier proposal to elevate five advocates to judges of High Courts. The Collegium summarily rejected the inputs provided against them by Intelligence agencies to the Centre.

The Collegium also uploaded on the SC's websites the objection raised by Intelligence agencies against the advocates picked up Collegium for elevation as judges.

Day after snub to SRK, Sarma does...

From Page 1

Opposition leaders tore into the CM's statement made on Sunday as volte face after his nonchalance a day before, with the Congress describing it as a "publicity stunt" and BJP questioning why Sarma took Shah Rukh's call at 2 AM in the night since he "doesn't even know" the actor.

Notably, the CM had on Saturday said action would be taken if law and order is violated, though Khan had not called him over the matter.

Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan and the movie 'Pathaan' are facing a backlash from far-right 'Hindutva' groups for showing Deepika Padukone in a saffron bikini in a song 'Besharam Rang'.

Many leaders, including those in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, have demanded a ban on the film.

'Pathaan', which has been directed by Siddharth Anand, will be released on January 25.

Opposition parties took a jibe at the chief minister for his "who is Shah Rukh Khan" remark, maintaining that it was a "publicity stunt".

Reacting to the CM's comment on the actor, Congress senior spokesperson Bobbeeta Sharma said, "Our chief minister is in the habit of uttering such things. Just the other day he said he didn't know our senior leader Jairam Ramesh whereas Sarma was a Congressman for decades."

"It could be a kind of publicity stunt to draw attention," said Sharma, a former chairperson of Assam State Film Finance and Development Corporation and actor.

Assam Jatiya Parishad

(AJP) general secretary and cultural activist Jagadish Bhuyan took a swipe at the CM on the microblogging site and wrote: "Who is Shah Rukh Khan??? Why was the chief minister waiting till 2 am to pick up call from a Shah Rukh Khan he doesn't even know?"

Sharma also wrote on social media that the Bollywood actor had also called the owner of Gold Cinema franchise in Guwahati. Bajrang Dal activists held the demonstration in front of one of its theatres.

"That's really nice of @iamsrk. Came to know that he called the owner of Gold Cinema, Rajib Bora too around the same time at night. That's what makes #ShahRukhKhan who he is !!", the Congress leader wrote, sharing the CM's Tweet about the call from the actor.

10 killed in California...

From Page 1

The event had attracted tens of thousands throughout the day. Most of the residents of Monterey Park, a city of about 60,000 people that sits at the eastern edge of Los Angeles, are Asian immigrants from China or first-generation Asian Americans.

Two days of festivities, which have been attended by as many as 100,000 people in past years, were planned. But officials canceled Sunday's events following the shooting. The tragedy marked not just the fifth mass killing in the

US since the start of the year but also is the deadliest since May 24, 2022 - when 21 people were killed in a school in Uvalde, Texas, according to The Associated Press/USA Today database on mass killings in the US.

The database also shows that 2022 was also one of the worst years ever in terms of mass killings, with 42 such attacks - the second-highest number since the creation of the tracker in 2006. The database defines a mass killing as four people killed not including the perpetrator.

The latest violence comes two months after five people were killed at a Colorado Springs nightclub.

The White House said that President Joe Biden was briefed on the situation by Homeland Security Adviser Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall.

"The President has been briefed by the Homeland Security Advisor on the mass shooting in Monterey Park. He directed her to make sure that the FBI is providing full support to local authorities, and to update him regularly today as more details are known."

Attorney General Merrick Garland was also briefed, Justice Department spokesperson Dana Iverson said.

The shooting occurred at Star Ballroom Dance Studio, a few blocks from city hall on Monterey Park's main thoroughfare of Garvey Avenue, which is dotted with strip malls full of small businesses whose signs are in both English and Chinese. Cantonese and Mandarin are both widely spoken, Chinese holidays are celebrated, and Chinese films are screened regularly in the city.

The business offered dance lessons from Tango to Rumba to the Fox Trot, and rented its space for events. On Saturday, its website said it was hosting an event called "Star Night" from 8 pm to 11:30 pm.

Seung Won Choi, who owns the Clam House seafood barbecue restaurant across the street from where the shooting happened, told The Los Angeles Times that three people rushed into his business and told him to lock the door.

The people said to Choi that there was a shooter with

a gun who had multiple rounds of ammunition on him.

Wong Wei, who lives nearby, told The Los Angeles Times that his friend was in a bathroom at the dance club that night when the shooting started.

When she came out, he said, she saw a gunman and three bodies.

The friend then fled to Wei's home at around 11 pm, he said, adding that his friends told him that the shooter appeared to fire indiscriminately with a long gun.



Haryana tableau artists during a press preview, ahead of the Republic Day Parade 2023, in New Delhi on Sunday; (R) Daman and Diu tableau artists during a press preview, ahead of the Republic Day Parade 2023, in New Delhi on Sunday



Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Want city Govt schools to be world’s best, says Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid tussle with the Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena over a training visit to Finland by government school teachers, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said he wants the city’s government schools the best in the world so that students from abroad should come here for education. He said that he will keep sending them abroad and they have the support of the people of Delhi and the country.



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Education Minister Manish Sisodia and AAP MLA Atishi Marlena during an interaction with the teachers who participated in the training in Finland, Cambridge and Singapore, in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

Kejriwal held an interaction with government school teachers who participated in the training programme in Finland, Cambridge and Singapore. Deput Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and MLA Atishi were also present. During the event, while taking a tacit jibe at the Centre, the Chief Minister also said that “there is no better investment” than training of teachers after the LG sought a “cost-benefit analysis” of teachers training in Finland - a proposal which has

led to a fresh standoff between the AAP government and him. “Some people consider it extravagance, but it is investment. I feel that you can construct four bridges and four roads less in number, but we should provide best exposure and training to our teachers. They are to groom the students---- who would build roads and bridges in the future,” he said. Lamenting that some people are trying to defame

don’t want to go. Other leaders visit foreign countries on monthly basis. We want you to gain global experience. Our government schools have to be better than international schools... not just the private schools,” Kejriwal said, adding that “the government aims to imbibe best practices”. “Even our critics agree that the Delhi government schools have seen a lot more improvement over the years. That’s not because of us; it’s because of the teachers.” “Earlier, they used to ask what is the whole point of sending government principals and teachers for training abroad. We broke that barrier by providing them with the best training in the world. Delhi government schools should not just compete with schools of few countries but the whole world,” CM Kejriwal asserted. “I am ready to give Manish Sisodia as a loan to other States’ parties if they want to improve their schools,” he further stated.

AAP accuses BJP leaders Adesh, Jaju of amassing disproportionate assets

Charges baseless, politically motivated, says Gupta

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday accused former Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta and its ex-national vice president Shyam Jaju of amassing properties (worth crores) disproportionate to their known sources of income when the former was the mayor of the erstwhile North Delhi civic body. The AAP leaders have asked the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to order the probe against Gupta by the Anti-Corruption Branch and CBI for misusing his position as MCD Mayor. Gupta, however, termed the allegations “false and politically motivated”. Reacting to the allegations, Gupta said he will file a defamation case against Saurabh Bhardwaj. “They have a history of making false allegations and then



rendering apology to BJP after defamation cases later on,” he said. The AAP’s chief spokesperson and MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj said the Lokayukta is conducting a probe into the allegation of disproportionate assets against Gupta. “Despite the Lokayukta issuing notices multiple times, Adesh Gupta did not declare his source of income. The company promoted by the sons of Gupta and Jaju is under scanner for allegedly using it as a vehicle to aid financial wrongdoings,” he claimed during a press conference. Bhardwaj claimed that a complaint with the Lokayukta has claimed that Gupta got the



company incorporated while he was the North Delhi MCD mayor and his earnings are disproportionate to his declared sources of income. AAP leader said that according to the report of Assistant Director Investigation, transactions worth crores have been found in the company held by sons of Gupta and Shyam Jaju. The Lt Governor should also write a letter to the Anti Corruption Branch and CBI about how these properties were bought and sold. The Centre should take up a detailed investigation of the case to prove whether it believes in the principle of ‘no corruption’ or not,” Bharadwaj said.

He said, “These transactions include but are not limited to - the purchase of a property in 33/18 West Patel Nagar, by Yash Gupta, Rajat Gupta and Anuradha Gupta - the sons and wife of Gupta. The purchase of a property in 28/160 West Patel Nagar by Gupta on 15th July 2019. The purchase of a property in 29/30 West Patel Nagar by Anuradha Gupta. The sale of a property in 33/18 West Patel Nagar by Majboot Solutions Pvt Ltd was held by the sons of Gupta and Shyam Jaju in January 2021. Then the sale of another property in 33/18 West Patel Nagar took place by Majboot Solutions, a few days later in February 2021. Then another sale at the same site by the same company materialized a few weeks later in March, and another sale in June 2021. He added, “Of the 14 transactions detailed by the complainant, 13 have been found to be related to Gupta or the company held by the sons of Gupta and Shyam Jaju.

E-bike tour drive to explore Walled City launched

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A guided tour to explore the Walled City of Delhi riding e-bikes was launched on Sunday. According to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), this will also facilitate people in travelling through the narrow lanes of old Delhi comfortably. The MCD has taken “the initiative to grant permits to conduct e-tours for public bike stands under its public bicycle sharing (PBS) and shared micro-mobility system (SMMS) policy,” the civic body said in a statement. The MCD has partnered with Yulu Bikes to offer guided e-tours to showcase the rich heritage of the city, an official said. He said a guided heritage tour of gates of Shahjahanabad (old Delhi) was launched in association with the company on Sunday. The guided heritage tour starts from Kashmir Gate and ends at the Delhi Gate, covering seven gates of old Shahjahanabad, in a three-hour ride on e-bikes, the official said. The Walled City of Shahjahanabad is enclosed by an about 10-km-long wall, the



MCD said. Citizens can ride and cherish the city’s glorious heritage and legacy on e-bikes, the official said, adding, “more heritage circuits will be covered in the future”. The heritage tour on Sunday was flagged off by MCD Additional Commissioner A A Tazir in the presence of other senior officials. The initiative will add to the G20 preparedness of providing excellent transport logistics for the tourist circuit in the city, the statement said. India is expected to host over 200 G-20 meetings and events during its year-long Presidency of the influential group which will culminate with an annual summit on September 9 and 10. Delhi is dotted with monuments that the city has been able to maintain till date. The e-bikes can be used by any person using the Yulu app.

Traffic police issues advisory over full dress R-day rehearsal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Traffic Police has issued an advisory on the arrangements and restrictions for smooth conduct of Monday’s full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day parade. The rehearsal will start at 10.30 am from Vijay Chowk and pass via Kartavya Path, C-Hexagon, roundabout statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg and Netaji Subhash Marg before concluding at Red Fort. In order to facilitate its smooth passage, no traffic movement will be allowed on Kartavya Path from Vijay Chowk to India Gate from 6 pm on Sunday till the end of the parade on Monday. There will also be no cross-traffic on Kartavya Path at Rafi Marg, Janpath and Man Singh Road from 11 pm on Sunday till the parade ends. C-Hexagon-India Gate will be closed from 9.15 am on Monday till the parade crosses Tilak Marg, the advisory stated. Traffic on both directions will not be allowed on Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar

Marg and Subhash Marg from 10.30 am. Cross-traffic will only be allowed depending on the movement of the parade, it stated. Commuters have been advised to avoid the parade route from 9.30 to 1 pm. Metro services will remain available at all stations during the dress rehearsal ceremony. However, boarding and disembarking at Kendriya Sachivalaya and Udyog Bhawan stations will not be permitted from 5 am till 12 pm, according to the advisory. Though there is no restriction on movement from north Delhi to New Delhi Railway Station or Old Delhi Railway Station.

Advisory for events at JN stadium issued

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday issued a traffic advisory for January 23 and 24 in view of the Military Tattoo and Tribal Dance programme at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. “About 50,000 people are expected to witness the programme. Keeping in view the fact that a large number of spectators, including various civil and military VVIPs/VIPs and dignitaries, apart from full capacity public audience will be

arriving at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium to watch the programme,” it said. Certain traffic restrictions are being proposed at and around the venue to ensure smooth flow of traffic and ease of movement for spectators, the advisory added. The Ministry of Defence is going to organise the Military Tattoo and Tribal Dance festival as part of the Republic Day celebrations during the 75th year of Independence at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on Monday.

AAP leaders have forgotten decency while criticising L-G: Bidhuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lambasting the AAP leaders, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Sunday said that AAP leaders have forgotten dignity and decency while criticising the Lt Governor who shown the mirror to the so-called education model of Delhi Government while Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva said there is no comparison of education system between the conditions of Finland and the conditions of Delhi. Criticising the AAP, Bidhuri lamented that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal used disrespectful and objectionable language towards the Lt. Governor in the Assembly and now MP Sanjay Singh has also forgotten all decency. “AAP leaders have crossed the line. If they don’t have courage to face criticism, they should join the politics,” Bidhuri said adding that the public is very disappointed and hurt by this derogatory language of the leaders of AAP. Bidhuri said that the reply given by Lieutenant Governor on the questions raised by Chief Minister in the assembly has put the reality of Delhi’s education model in front of the public. “The attendance of students in government schools in Delhi was more than 70 per cent in 2012-13, which has now come down to 60 per cent. There has been a sharp decrease in the number of students in Delhi schools, while the Delhi government falsely claims that the number of students has increased. The DDA allotted 13 plots to the Education Department of Delhi to build the schools, but the Delhi gov-



ernment could not give even a single new school to Delhi. Delhi slipped to the eighth position in the National Achievement Survey and this year the Class 10 results also came down to 82 per cent. Bidhuri said that Chief Minister Kejriwal and AAP leaders should make efforts to improve schools instead of spreading false propaganda but instead of this they are using misleading and derogatory language. Sachdeva said that Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia compare the education system of Delhi with the education system of Finland first of all this comparison is meaningless because there is a large difference between the conditions of Finland and the conditions of Delhi.

Court dismisses accident claim plea, calls cop ‘ignorant of basic law’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court dismissed a motor accident claim petition and called the police officers who filed the case “ignorant of basic law” for filing an FIR against a fire tender driver at the complaint of an illegal hawker. It observed that registering an FIR against an official — in this case, the fire tender driver — going on an emergency reflected the “inefficiency of the system” where senior officers, such as the Station House Officer (SHO) and Assistant

Commissioner of Police (ACP), appeared “ignorant of basic law”. The motor accident claims tribunal was hearing the plea of Arun Kumar, a fruit vendor, who in his complaint claimed he sustained injuries at Matia Mahal Chowk in Central Delhi, when a fire tender, being driven in a rash and negligent manner, hit a cart, which in turn hit his leg on December 12, 2018. “I hereby hold that the petitioner Arun Kumar is not entitled to any compensation. The Detailed Accident Report

(DAR) which was registered as a claim petition is hereby dismissed,” Presiding Officer Kamini Lau said in a recent order. The court said that Kumar was not a licensed hawker and was squatting in the area by illegally putting his cart. As he was causing obstructions to the public way because of illegal hawking, the risks necessarily followed, the court said. On the other hand, Constable Somander, the driver of the fire tender posted at Jama Masjid fire station, had complete immunity from being

prosecuted as he was discharging his official functions, being on emergency duty, the court said. “The manner in which the FIR has been registered against the respondent no. 1 (Somander) a public servant on official emergency duty (going to attend a call) and in favour of a wrongdoer, speak volumes about the inefficiency of the system where even the senior officers of the rank of SHO and ACP appear to be ignorant of basic law,” the court said. It said the Investigating Officer (IO) of Chandni Mahal

Police Station had “seriously erred” in booking the vehicle and its driver. It is settled law that there is a yielding right of way for emergency vehicles and when such a vehicle approaches, it is to be given a free passage, the court said. It said the hawker, who was seeking compensation, was himself found to be plying his trade in contravention of not only the Indian Penal Code, but also the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act. With these observations, the court denied the sanction to prosecute Somander, ordered by a mag-

isterial court in September 2019. The court also said the manner in which Somander was dragged in the case could “demoralise” other officials of the fire department. It said the directions for registration of an FIR against the public officer engaged in discharge of official duty and protected by sovereign immunity was “per se illegal” and had caused him “immense harassment.” “Securing monetary benefit by those who do not respect and follow existing law has become a trend and cannot be

encouraged. “There can be no monetary compensation for those who violate the law and constitutional as well as legal rights of others,” the court said. It said the “conscience of the nation” would be shaken if wrongdoers, specifically those who faked a claim by wrongly booking a public servant, were rewarded through a monetary benefit. The court also observed that the fire department is protected by sovereign immunity and cannot be sued for decisions during a fire emer-

gency. “Emergency vehicles are protected from lawsuits in cases of accidents that happen en-route to a fire and fire tenders do not have to follow the standard traffic law during an emergency,” the court said. “Emergency vehicles have a right of way and if you see flashing lights, safely move towards the left side of the road or move out of the lane (and if)the fire tender is moving; slow down, pull over and stay out of the way till the emergency vehicle passes,” the court added.

R-Day: ‘Ops Alert’ along Indo-Pak border

Exercise which began on Saturday will conclude on Jan 27

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) has started a week-long exercise "Ops Alert" all along the Indo-Pak international border from Sir Creek to Rann of Kutch in Gujarat and Barmer district of Rajasthan in order to tighten security ahead of the Republic Day.

"Ops Alert exercise is being carried out to thwart any ill designs of anti-national elements during the upcoming Republic day celebrations. During this exercise special operations in forward and depth areas as well as Creeks and Harami Nalla would be carried out," the BSF said in a statement. Besides, validating various operational procedures, public outreach programmes have also been planned during the exercise, it said.

The exercise which began on Saturday will conclude on January 27. The Indo-Pak border along Kutch in Gujarat is



Border Security Force (BSF) personnel conduct 'Ops Alert' exercise along the India-Pakistan border ahead of the Republic Day celebrations
PTI photo

sensitive in view of a number of Pakistani nationals having been apprehended in the past after entering the Indian waters while moving on boats in the garb of fishing.

In 2022, the BSF apprehended 22 Pakistani fishermen, seized 79 fishing boats and heroin worth Rs 250 crore and charas worth Rs 2.49 crore from this region of Gujarat, according to official data.

Permanent vertical bunkers of concrete are being constructed for the first time to station BSF troops right at the strategically significant Sir Creek and Harami Nalla marshy area to strengthen security, officials said.

The Union Home Ministry has sanctioned Rs 50-crore for the construction of eight multi-storied bunkers-cum-observation posts in this area along the Bhuj sector to counter intermittent infiltration of Pakistani fishermen and fishing boats in the area, officials added.

Modi Govt burying country’s generations in debt: Cong

‘Debt per Indian increased from ₹43K to ₹109K since 2014’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that the Modi Government is burying the country's future generations in debt as per capita debt has multiplied during the last years.

Congress spokesperson Gaurav Vallabh on Sunday said debt per Indian increased from ₹43,124 to ₹109,373 since 2014.

"The total outstanding debt of the Government of India, which was 55.87 Lakh Crores as on March 31, 2014, would be estimated to go up to ₹155.31 Lakh Crores by March 31, 2023. By the end of the financial year 2023, each Indian will owe ₹109,373/- a loan they have never taken. From 1947 till March 31, 2014, debt per Indian was ₹43,124. But in the last nine years, debt per Indian has become 2.53 times what it was in 2014. In absolute terms, debt per Indian increased by ₹66,249 in the last nine years," Vallabh said at the Press conference.

He mentioned, as per IMF, for 2022, India debt to GDP was 83%, far above our peers, emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs), which have average Debt of 64.5%.

"As per Oxfam report, the wealthiest 5% in India now own more than 60% of the country's



total wealth, while the bottom half of the population (50%) together share just 3% of the wealth. On the other side, 64% of the total ₹14.83 lakh crore in Goods and Services Tax (GST) came from the bottom 50% of the population, with only 3% of GST coming from the top 10%," Vallabh who is Professor in economics said.

"So, the borrowing is just helping in the K-shaped recovery, with some sectors doing well but not others. The pandemic hit the middle- and low-income groups and small and medium industries harder. As a result, growth in consumption (PFCE*) fell from 25.9% in Q1 of FY23 to 9.7% in Q2," Vallabh added.

K'taka BJP MLA promises to pay ₹6,000 per voter

Ramesh Jarkiholi vows each voter double money to defeat Congress candidate

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Controversies are becoming part of the high-pitched Karnataka Assembly poll campaign with BJP MLA and former Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, announcing in a public meeting that he would provide ₹6,000 to each voter before the Assembly elections.

Addressing a convention in Sulebhavi village in Karnataka, Jarkiholi reportedly offered "double money" to voters to defeat the Congress candidate.

Speaking in support of Nagesh Mannolkar, a candidate for the BJP ticket and a supporter of Ramesh Jarkiholi, the BJP leader on Friday sought people to defeat Laxmi Hebbalkar, a Congress candidate, representing the area.



"I want that worm must go. During the last elections, I campaigned for her, being in the Congress party and got her elected. This time, we must change that anti-social element at any cost. In the past five years, she just developed herself. You can see how many clubs and wine shops have been opened along the road-

sides in the past few years," he reportedly said speaking about Hebbalkar.

Jarkiholi, a former minister, was in Congress before he joined the BJP.

"Our opponent candidate is giving tiffin boxes costing ₹70 in the wholesale market and pressure cooker of ₹700. She may give even more. Altogether she may give gifts of ₹3,000.

However, we are not giving any gifts now. Just testing the mood of voters. But, looking the today's crowd, we are confident and can give double than her. You don't vote BJP candidate if ₹6,000 is not sent to you," said Jarkiholi.

Congress has sought BJP to tell whether it agrees with his party leader.

NIA files charge sheet in Maoist cadres funding case



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a charge sheet against two accused in a case related to funding to the banned CPI (Maoist) and the revival of the Magadh Zone.

The NIA said the charge sheet was filed before the NIA Special Court, Ranchi, Jharkhand on Friday.

The case relates to a conspiracy hatched by the mem-

bers of CPI (Maoist) for its revival in the Magadh Zone and to raise funds for the organization.

"During investigations, it has been established that huge funds were extorted from contractors and were routed through various channels," the NIA said in a statement.

The case was suo-moto registered by the NIA on December 30, 2021.

Investigations have revealed that a prominent

Communist Party of India (Maoist) cadre Pradyuman Sharma, alongwith FIR named accused Abhinav alias Gaurav Kumar and others were conspiring to revive the CPI (Maoist) organization in the Magadh Zone.

"In furtherance of this sinister motive, they conspired to raise funds for procurement of arms and ammunition and imparting training to Maoist cadres in the fabrication of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and to liaise with incarcerated Naxals and Over Ground Workers (OGWs) in various jails for the commission of terrorist acts and activities," the agency added.

Accused Pradyuman Sharma and son Tarun Kumar, both residents of village Rustampur under Hulasganj police station in Jehanabad district of Bihar have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

‘Work for affordable therapeutics for genetic disorders’



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With over 95 per cent of patients suffering from inherited rare diseases having no treatment options or those available being unaffordable to many, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has sought proposal from interested scientists to work towards affordable therapeutics for genetic rare disorders.

Inherited rare diseases are infrequently occurring disorders and have been defined by countries in terms of prevalence in their own population. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), rare diseases are often debilitating lifelong disorders with a prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 population.

Only 5% of inherited rare disorders have treatment among which most of the treatments are highly priced and often not available worldwide. Availability and access to medicines are important to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with rare diseases.

"Therefore, there is a need for research and development in intervention, technology transfer and indigenously manufactured therapeutics for rare diseases which could be achieved by collaborative efforts," said an official from the ICMR giving reason for seeking such proposals.

"Also, the goal for seeking proposal is to support research and development research proposals towards developing

intervention strategies on various aspects of inherited rare diseases including discovery of newer therapeutic agents and approaches, development of therapeutics including repurpose drugs, biologics, genetic error corrective measures and management to improve quality of life of patients with rare diseases such as orthopedic/surgical approaches, innovative management protocols etc," he added.

The ICMR has sought intervention for diseases like storage disorders, small molecule inborn errors of metabolism, primary immunodeficiency disorders (PID), neuromuscular disorders (NMD), hematological disorders (excluding Sickle cell diseases and Thalassemia) and skeletal dysplasia.

Approaches may include development of resources such as cellular and animal models, vector for genetic error corrective measures, and mechanistic aspects that are required for drug development as a part of the project, explained the officer.

To save the lives of the patients suffering from rare diseases, the Government in March, 2021 formulated the National Policy for Rare Diseases As per the amendment to this policy in May 2022, all groups of rare disease patients were assured financial assistance of ₹50 lakh for treatment.

However, accessibility and availability of medicine continue to plague the sector.



Indian Air Force and Japan Air Self Defence Force personnel during the joint air exercise 'Veer Guardian 2023', in Japan
PTI photo

Researchers suggest link between dietary exposure to nitrites, risk of type 2 diabetes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Food additives used to maintain flavour or enhance taste, appearance, or other sensory properties, are associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, according to a study.

The study, which is published in the journal PLOS Medicine, says that nitrites and nitrates are chemical compounds used as food additives to increase shelf life. However, researchers suggest a link between dietary exposure to nitrites and the risk of type 2 diabetes.

To investigate the relationship between dietary exposure to nitrites/nitrates type 2 diabetes risk, researchers accessed data collected from 1,04,168 participants in the prospective cohort NutriNet-

Sante. The researchers analyzed self-reported diet information with health outcomes using detailed nitrite/nitrate exposure derived from multiple databases and sources.

Individuals with the highest intakes of nitrites from food additives (top third) had a 53% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes during a median follow-up of 7 years compared to those with the lowest intake of this food additive after controlling for intake of sugars, red and processed meats, heme iron, salt, and saturated fatty acids. Consumption of nitrates from food additives was not associated with risk of type 2 diabetes.

The researchers discovered that participants in the NutriNet-Sante cohort who reported a higher intake of nitrites overall, and specifically

from food additives and non-additive sources, had a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. "This is the first large-scale cohort study to suggest a direct association between additives-originated nitrites and type-2 diabetes risk. It also corroborates previously suggested associations between total dietary nitrites and T2D risk," said the study authors.

The cohort included a greater number of younger individuals, more often women, who exhibited healthier behavior. "These results provide a new piece of evidence in the context of current discussions regarding the need for a reduction of nitrite additives' use in processed meats by the food industry, and could support the need for better regulation of soil contamination by fertilizers," the authors added.

NDRF to station permanent teams in hills for high-altitude rescue operations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is mulling to permanently station specialised mountaineering teams in the higher reaches of the Himalayas so that they are ready and acclimatised to launch swift rescue operations during snow avalanches, land slides and glacial lake outburst floods among others, officials said.

The federal contingency force has initiated a slew of measures to prepare its saviours for tackling natural and man-made catastrophes in these fragile mountain ranges on India's north which, according to experts, may see a rise in accidents due to a variety of reasons, including climate change and human development.

The force, that draws its complete manpower on deputation from paramilitary forces, proposes to keep multiple small

teams of four-five mountaineering trained personnel at the border posts of various Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) like the ITBP.

Apart from the China LAC guarding Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the Sashastra Seema Bal and the Border Security Force too have posts at high-altitude as part of their mandate to guard the Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan borders.

NDRF director general (DG) Atul Karwal said the force is taking a number of steps to tackle disasters in the mountains as there is an "aggravated" threat of such incidents occurring in the future.

He was speaking about the new initiatives being undertaken by them in this domain during a recent session on 'disaster response in mountains', held to mark the 18th Raising Day of the force on January 19 here.

"The Himalayas are a young mountain range...The

forces that made them are still at work and hence these ranges are not settled and stable...Something is changing here and the reasons attributed to these by the experts are many like climate change, uncontrolled development and breach of load bearing capacity of these regions," Karwal said.

He recounted the 2013 flash floods in Uttarakhand, the February, 2021 glacial lake outburst floods in the border town of Chamoli and the latest incident of land subsidence in Joshimath and nearby areas, as some of the disasters that took place in the mountainous areas in the recent past.

"There is full possibility of such disasters occurring much more than before and in an aggravated manner and hence the NDRF has to be prepared to meet these challenges...," the DG said.

"The mountain rescue skills and capabilities will not only help us in the hilly terrain



of the north but also elsewhere. These skills are useful everywhere as traversing through ropes is an expertise required for many other operations including high-rise rescue," he said.

Karwal said it is being thought and planned that specialised mountain rescue trained teams of the NDRF, with a strength of four-five personnel each, will be stationed for three-four months in rota-

tion at high-altitude (above 10,000 feet) posts of CAPFs.

This will help us in launching quick rescue operations in case of any disaster that strikes in the mountains as our teams will already be acclimatised for the heights as they are living there, he said.

"If our personnel are not acclimatised they cannot respond to a mountain incident effectively...In fact we may suffer losses," he said.

The NDRF chief was underlining the cardinal principle of getting physically accustomed to the environment in the mountains, before undertaking any task, as they have different climatic conditions from the plains like thin oxygen levels and sub-zero temperatures.

The DG informed that the force has recently got about 125 personnel trained from specialist mountaineering insti-

tutes and it proposes to have such teams in each of its 16 battalions, especially the four responsible for mountainous regions.

The 12th NDRF battalion is based in Arunachal Pradesh with a jurisdiction to cover all hill regions on the eastern flank of the country, the 13th is located in Punjab's Ludhiana but its area of responsibility is entire Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh region while 14th and 15th battalions are located in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand respectively with their area of operations in each of the two states.

Recently, the force had rushed a team to Joshimath from its regional response centre (RRC) located in state capital Dehradun, about 300 km from the border town.

"We have also prepared a new authorisation for the mountaineering gear we will use in the future...The specifications are being prepared currently with the help of domain

experts," he said.

The specialised mountain rescue teams of the NDRF will have special equipments even as we are soon going to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an expert institution which also helps the army for its mountaineering tasks, he said.

The force, according to the DG, will make it a "regular feature" to undertake expeditions to various peaks in the country, beginning this year.

"If we undertake regular mountain expeditions we will be better prepared during operations in the hills...We may not be very skilled in this domain at present but we will surely be as good as the best," he told his personnel during the event.

The force, raised in 2006, has a total of 16 battalions and 28 RRCs, comprising around 18,000 personnel in total, located at various places across the length and breadth of the country at present.

Centre has imposed undeclared Emergency in country: Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Congress party on Sunday alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government at the Centre has imposed an 'undeclared' emergency in the country.

Addressing a press conference in Samba after Bharat Jodo Yatra was halted for the day after completing 21km, the Congress general secretary and in-charge communication Jairam Ramesh alleged, "the BJP has ended the spirit of democracy in the country. Though elections are taking place but that does not mean we are democratic".

"An undeclared emergency is more dangerous than a declared emergency", he added.

Asked about the party's stand on now abrogated Article 370 of the constitution, the Congress leader said, "It is a

serious issue, but what is more serious right now is the restoration of democratic activities in Jammu and Kashmir."

"J&K has become an attached office of the Ministry of Home Affairs. There are real issues like when the assembly elections will be held in the Union territory and how will it get back to full statehood," he added. When quizzed Ramesh said, "We will talk about Article 370 and alliance with PAGD separately. Bharat Jodo Yatra is to unite the country against communal polarisation, political dictatorship, and undeclared emergency."

Ramesh said they are pleased with the response to the yatra and a large number of people are joining it, though police tried to stop some from joining. Referring to the prevailing situation in and around Jammu in the aftermath of twin blasts in Narwal the



Congress leader said "There will be no compromise on the security of Gandhi. His security is our topmost priority and we are following the guidelines of security agencies in totality".

He said the party's stand is clear on terrorism and that there is no compromise in dealing with either the perpetrators or sponsors of terrorism.

Referring to the recent comments made by the Chairman of Democratic Azad Party on Bharat Jodo Yatra, Jairam Ramesh said, "Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, Aam Aadmi Party and Ghulam Nabi Azad's Democratic Azad Party are three B-teams of BJP in the country". Ghulam Nabi Azad is hassled. His party has not been registered. All his party members have returned to Congress after their leave of absence finished. He is restricted to Doda (district). It has become the Doda Azad party".

None can beat BJP till Modi magic there: Mithun

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The BJP would continue to sell as a brand till Prime Minister Narendra Modi is its ambassador cine star-turned-saffron leader said even as his party on Sunday started the campaign for the upcoming panchayat elections.

Asking people to "give BJP once chance" and see good days usher in Chakrabarty said there was no chance of BJP losing power in India till the Prime Minister was at the helm and hence it would be sensible to vote for BJP at all levels.

"This is an appeal to all the people irrespective of their political affiliations... how can you tolerate so much of corruption, oppression and mismanagement in Bengal... so days have come when you should really consider throwing out this (Trinamool Congress) government out of



power and replace it with the BJP because BJP is invincible till Modi ji is the Prime Minister... till there is Modi magic no one can defeat BJP," Chakrabarty a former TMC Rajya Sabha MP who later joined the saffron party said.

The Mumbai actor was holding a meeting in Hooghly district. "I am requesting you for that one chance... you do not have to go as far as the parliamentary elections. Vote for us in panchayat elections and

Adhir accuses Didi of striking deal with Modi to weaken Cong

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Congress Lok Sabha Leader Adhir Chowdhury has accused Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of striking a deal with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to weaken the Congress. The Behrampur MP who is also the Bengal Pradesh Congress president said how the Chief Minister was sending her party TMC to all those States where the Congress was in direct fight with the BJP. He would however not mention Goa or Meghalaya.

Taking a jibe both at Modi and Mamata he said both were serving each other's interest. "While Modi is going soft on the TMC leaders by restraining the central investigating agencies after she has bowed before him the TMC is helping the BJP in some States by dividing the Congress votes and helping the BJP win," he said.

VHP activists tear 'Pathaan' posters at cinema hall in Surat

PTI ■ SURAT

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists barged into a movie theatre in Surat city in Gujarat and tore posters of Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Pathaan", police said on Sunday. Five activists have been arrested on the charge of rioting, an officer said.

'Pathaan' is facing backlash for showing Deepika Padukone in a saffron bikini in the song 'Besharam Rang'. Many leaders, including from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, have demanded a ban on the film, scheduled for January 25 release.

The incident occurred at Rupali cinema located in Rander locality of Surat on Saturday evening.

"We received information regarding a group of people tearing posters of the movie 'Pathaan' at Rupali cinema. We arrested five of them and booked them for rioting. They belong to VHP," police inspector AS Sonara said.

A case was registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections pertaining to unlawful assembly, intentional insult, and criminal intimidation among others, he said.

Recently, multiplex owners in Gujarat met Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi who assured providing police protection to theatres against anti-social elements.

In a letter to MoS Sanghavi, the Multiplex Association of Gujarat said, "the right forum



for anybody having reservation or objection about the movie would be either official authorities or the Government of India or courts because the movie has been given clearance by the Censor Board".

There are many groups which are "illegally targeting cinema exhibitors based on their own understanding and agendas," it said.

No change in Kolkata's warmth in 24 years, says Che's daughter Aleida

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Legendary Cuban revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara's daughter Aleida has said the warmth of Kolkata has remained the same as it was during her earlier visit 24 years ago.

She expressed happiness at the love and passion of the city for her father.

Aleida was greeted by hundreds of young and not-so-young men and women at the city's iconic College Street, where a choir sang Bengali translations of Cuban songs such as 'Guantanamera'.

She also visited the Indian Statistical Institute here on








Saturday, and spoke of Che's meeting with eminent statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, the founder of the institution, in 1959.

Aleida, a physician and human rights activist, and her daughter Estefania Machin, an economist, came to Kolkata on a two-day visit till Saturday.

She said that the island nation's doctors would love to work with their counterparts in India for the needy.

She asserted that Cuban medical professionals, despite the economic constraints of the country, have led the world in medical treatments and cures for various ailments.







January 23, 2023

Parakram Diwas

Nation Remembers
Netaji
Subhash Chandra Bose
on the Occasion of his
Birth Anniversary

“Our Netaji is also a model of India's valour and inspiration. Now, when the country is moving ahead with the resolution of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Netaji's life, his every work, his every decision is a great inspiration for all of us.”
-Narendra Modi



“याद रखिये सबसे बड़ा अपराध
अन्याय सहना और
गलत के साथ समझौता करना है।”

Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture Department, Haryana
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Respect judiciary

If the Government wants BBC to respect our Supreme Court, it should also do the same

Law Minister Kiren Rijiju now talks about the authority of the Supreme Court. Calling the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) two-part documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 'India: The Modi Question,' Rijiju tweeted on Saturday, "Some people in India still haven't gotten over the colonial intoxication. They consider the BBC above the Supreme Court of India and lower the country's dignity and image to any extent to please their moral masters." Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs had slammed the documentary, which made uncharitable remarks about the Prime Minister. MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi called it a "propaganda piece." Later, more than 300 eminent citizens, including retired judges, bureaucrats, armed forces veterans, and senior cops, condemned the BBC documentary. Rijiju has a point: Modi was cleared of all charges of involvement in the 2002 riots by all courts, so blaming him again for the riots is tantamount to questioning the impartiality and wisdom of the highest court of the land. Further, Modi was cleared of the charges way back in 2012. At that time, not only he or the Bharatiya Janata Party was not in power at the Centre but the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance in New Delhi was also hostile to him. In such a milieu, it was extremely difficult for him or anyone else to get a favourable verdict. And yet, the BBC documentary hauls him over the coals for the riots in which around a thousand people died.

But there is also a ring of irony surrounding Rijiju's remarks: he is leaning on an institution that he and other Government partisans have been badgering for months. The Government wants to have a say in the appointment of judges, for which it had devised the National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC). The judiciary, favouring the current collegium system, invalidated the NJAC in 2015. The Government didn't like that; its impatience reached a crescendo, with Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar recently not just asserting parliamentary sovereignty but also questioning the validity of the basic structure doctrine. This was unprecedented, for nobody ever questioned it. This was not surprising, because changing the basic structure of the Constitution would entail changing the ideas and principles as mentioned in the Preamble. The towering BJP leader and former prime minister LK Advani has upheld the doctrine. Even the Congress finds it inviolable. And now the judiciary, having decided to take on the Government over the issue of collegium, has come out fully in support of the doctrine. Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud praised the basic structure doctrine on Friday. He said, "The basic structure of our Constitution, like the north star, guides and gives certain direction to the interpreters and implementers of the Constitution when the path ahead is convoluted." If Rijiju wants the BBC to respect our Supreme Court, he should also do the same.



Jumping the gun

Some governors play to the tune of their political masters while others do their duty diligently

The type of treatment which a government gives to its intellectuals, to its most talented people, is a good index of the government's own caliber," Nani A Palkhivala, the legendary Constitutional expert, had written in an essay. Palkhivala had referred to emperors and kings of yore who used to travel hundreds of miles to sit at the feet of rishis and monks, the then intellectuals to seek their counsel on issues of governance. "But the modern-day intellectuals are those who know which side of the bread is buttered," the legal wizard had said. There are persons who work sincerely to resolve burning issues faced by the country. Some among them reach the pinnacle of glory as the Government of the day appoints them to Constitutional positions. Persons like R N Ravi and Arif Mohammed Khan, the governors of Tamil Nadu and Kerala belong to this genre. The only 'blot' on them is that they were appointed by the BJP-led Government at the Centre. These two gentlemen are resisting the move by the State governments in committing constitutional impropriety. While the DMK, which had supported the National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) for selecting students for medical schools till 2014 (while they were in power at the Centre as part of the UPA), they made a volte-face and demanded that Tamil Nadu be freed from the shackles of NEET. The DMK leaders failed to see that the all-India examination and rank list would rob them of the moolah as most medical colleges in the State were owned by them. The kind of language used by the Dravidian leaders to defame the Governor was reprehensible. As an IPS officer, Ravi had commanded all round respect and he reached Raj Bhavan only because of his spotless service to the nation. T P Senkumar, who retired from IPS in 2017 had mentioned in his memoirs that he badly wanted to work under Ravi, a Kerala cadre IPS officer.

Khan questioned the CPI(M) move to appoint party members and their relations as vice chancellors and faculty members. He stands vindicated as the Supreme Court itself ordered the dismissal of the vice chancellor appointed by the CPI (M) government. Well, there are BJP leaders like Sreedharan Pillai, the Goa Governor, who refuse to come out of their saffron costumes. Time we learned to separate the wheat from the chaff. Persons like Ravi and Khan are national assets.

Jacinda Ardern is a true Gandhian

Jacinda Ardern New Zealand's outgoing PM stands tall among the leaders of her ilk who stood for human values & renounced power voluntarily

In a world full of unhinged politicians, reckless ambitions, and amoral short-sightedness, New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern stood out like a colossus. For a distant and tiny country with relatively low impact – Jacinda Ardern had become a global byword for 'empathy' and radiant sincerity in leadership. Only she could have sought a legacy, "as someone who always tried to be kind". It wasn't easy to be always so, especially as the nation of 5 million was struck by its worst-ever terror attack (Christchurch in 2019, which killed 51), deadly natural disaster (volcanic eruption on White Island, killing 20), and of course the crippling Covid pandemic, back-to-back. It was Jacinda's acute sense of solidarity personified by her famous 'they are us' in a different scarf, which exemplified and differentiated her dignified humanity from the thundering, divisive, and vainglorious world of 'strongmen' across global capitals. A rare Gandhian of her time – even as the Mahatma is sought to be diminished and politically out-of-favor, even in his own homeland.

Jacinda had once confessed, "I had first heard of the Mahatma when I was a schoolgirl" and added, "Gandhi himself understood the inner truths of all faiths of dignity and humanity that bind all people and all religion. Like Gandhi, we should not be afraid to stand up and transform our society for the better". Like the Mahatma and his intrinsic belief in non-violence, honesty, and inclusivity – Jacinda had posited her own empathetic style of leadership not as a measure of weakness, but as tremendous strength. Clearly, ahead of her times and often accused of 'woke' sensibilities, Jacinda had reneged on her Mormon upbringing on account of its regressive stance on homosexuality, she like Gandhi, always put humanity over puritanical religiosity.

Even on the now increasingly dissed issue of political dissent, she invoked Gandhi on non-violent opposition, "It is critical to resolving tensions in a peaceful manner. I believe that Gandhi's legacy is as relevant as it was



before". For one who is arguably amongst the most progressive leaders of the twenty-first century, Mahatma's teachings are not irrelevant or signs of enfeeblement as she noted, "We look forward to Gandhi's principles to address the pressing problems. There are three aspects of Gandhi's message that carry particular weight: tolerance, equality, and sanctity of non-violence and peace". Like Gandhi, she shunned tags of extraordinariness like 'super woman' and infallibility – she did infamously fall victim to a hot microphone when was picked up calling the opposition leader, "such an arrogant prick"! Ardern had apologized, as she should have.

Today, the refreshing note of integrity and honesty in leaving the highest office of her land owing to what she calls "nothing left in the tank" is in stark contrast to leaders who peddle everything in their wares to retain their positions. It is true that her personal and political brand was fading and with the looming elections, she was not guaranteed success – yet she had time on her side and no pressures to throw in the towel immediately, and certainly not at the age of 42! But that's exactly what she did and reconfirmed

JACINDA HAD ONCE CONFESSED, "I HAD FIRST HEARD OF THE MAHATMA WHEN I WAS A SCHOOLGIRL" AND ADDED, "GANDHI HIMSELF UNDERSTOOD THE INNER TRUTHS OF ALL FAITHS OF DIGNITY AND HUMANITY THAT BIND ALL PEOPLE AND ALL RELIGION

what the Harvard Political Review had identified as the 'authentic, empathetic and bold' style of Jacinda's leadership. Perhaps this authenticity is borne out of her Gandhian beliefs, as she invoked the Mahatma's timeless values by insisting, "these are values that we should always keep in the forefronts of our minds not just in good times but especially when faced with difficult choices". Jacinda faced her own difficult choices and the truth about her incapability to lead any further with her mantra, 'you can be your own kind of leader – one who knows when it's time to go', and she ultimately left with minimum fuss or fanfare.

Importantly, while there is much talk about her dipping ratings owing to unfulfilled promises, inflationary pressures, mortgage rates, housing crisis et al – yet she had remained statistically more popular than her rivals, and still decided to pull the plug, on her own terms. Like her arrival on the political scene championing the rights of the proverbial 'others' in terms of minorities and the already disenfranchised on account of gender, ethnicity, orientation, or faith, she talked about a country for all citizens and not just certain groups whose support, she



naturally courted. While kindness as a state policy was her leitmotif, her political honesty disallowed reckless populism that is thriving in the post-truth era of today – she perhaps paid a price for that too, as it invariably happens in participative democracies. Politics in democracies do not have to reflect majorities, it can also create them – politicians can if they wish to construct majorities out of vivid diversity by embracing even those that they usually choose not to include, within. Earlier Mahatma Gandhi taught us that one could be morally strong and kind simultaneously, today a young Jacinda Ardern reconfirms the relevance and necessity to 'Be Strong, Be Kind'. Oddly enough, even in her unprompted exit, she has defied many stereotypes and enhanced her respectful politics and personal brand of liberal and ultra-democratic leadership, to aspirational levels. As Mahatma Gandhi profoundly said, 'In a gentle way, you can shake the world', Jacinda Ardern certainly did, even in her exit.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUNAK FINED

Sir — As per the report United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who has been tasked with solving the economic crisis of the country, ended up on the wrong side of the law when a fine was imposed on him during the filming of his social media campaign video. UK PM Rishi Sunk was traveling in the back of a sedan car when he was fined by the Lancashire Police on Friday. The UK police fined their prime minister for not wearing a seat-belt in a moving car while filming a social media video. The Lancashire Police fined a 42-year-old man for not wearing a seatbelt as he sat on the passenger seat of a moving car. It was later revealed that the man was none other than their own prime minister. In a statement, the police said, "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 a fixed penalty.

"Lancashire Police, which had been "looking into" the matter, confirmed it had issued a fixed penalty notice to Sunak, which involves a 100-pound fine for not wearing a seatbelt in a moving car. As per the rules, the UK PM has 28 days to pay off the fine. Rishi Sunak later acknowledged his mistake and issued an apology for the brief "error of judgment" where he removed his seatbelt to film his social media campaign video. UK PM Rishi Sunak's spokesperson said, "That was a brief error of judgment. The PM removed his seatbelt to film a small clip. He fully accepts this was a mistake and apologizes for it. The prime minister believes that everyone should wear a seatbelt." It is likely that Rishi Sunak was fined 100 pounds for not wearing a seatbelt, while the fine can have an increased value if the matter is taken to court. Exemptions include having a doctor's certificate for a medical reason or being in a vehicle used for police, fire, or other rescue services.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

A good neighbour



Nothing better than helping a troubled neighbour in their hours of need. India's decision to go firstly for the aid of Financial assurance to the Sri Lankan government vis-a-vis IMF \$ 2.9 Million Loan clearance, without waiting for the counter actions from China and Japan is a clear sign of true friendship. India steps forward to help Sri Lanka in their need.

Since India became the G-20 President, particular remarks had been raised for the unity of South-Asian Countries. It is not only Sri Lanka, but that is also in a state of economic crisis. In fact, we had Pakistan, Nepal, and Myanmar too with their specific economic and political challenges in South Asia. India, the biggest country in South Asia, had to be a strategic and reliable partner to move South-Asian cooperation in particular by trying her best to overcome the challenges of the neighborhood with the combined approach. Since we had propelled. Neighborhood First' turned out to be our commitment to ensure working for the prosperity and development of South-Asian Countries together. By helping Sri Lanka, India paved a welcoming step towards combined growth and trust

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

RIGHT CALL BY KERALA GOVERNOR

Sir — Before finally agreeing to reinstate former Minister Saji Cherian into the Cabinet, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan had left everyone guessing when he decided to seek legal advice before arriving at the decision. It is a requirement under Article 163 of the Constitution that there shall be a Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions.

The Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor, who shall also appoint the other Ministers on the advice of the Chief Minister. All Ministers shall hold office at the pleasure of the Governor (Article 164). Citing this, Mr. Khan had earlier threatened to drop the Ministers who had allegedly insulted him in public. Later on, it was pointed out that such a step cannot be taken, and the "pleasure doctrine" cannot be stretched too far.

CK Ramanathan | Ghaziabad

BILLIONAIRES MARRY BILLIONAIRES

Sir — I wonder all the time why people from the family of billionaires and mil-

lionaires always marry in the same circle. Don't they fall in love with poor or normal people? As it is generally depicted in movies and novels. Maybe such cases are exceptions. The case we are talking about is not an exception. Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's youngest son Anant Ambani got engaged to Radhika Merchant, daughter of Viren Merchant who is the CEO of Encore Healthcare.

It was a traditional ceremony that included rituals such as 'Gol Dhana' and "Chunri Vidhi". Goldhana is a Gujarati pre-wedding traditional ceremony that is similar to modern engagement. Gold means jaggery and Dhana means coriander seeds. These are distributed at the groom's place where the event takes place. The bride's family arrives at the groom's residence with gifts and sweets and the couple exchanges rings and seeks the blessings of elders.

Aaditya Chouhan | Ujjain

SOUND BITE

Can you imagine the deep sense of agitation and hurt, that – Oh my God, she defeated Rahul Gandhi. Can we just find one tweet, one photo to whack her I say bring it on.



BJP leader — Smriti Irani



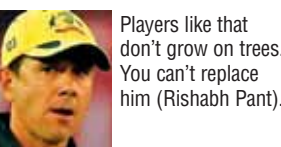
I'm feeling really fortunate to be working with such an amazing group of people who have a real commitment to the service of the people of New Zealand.

New Zealand's Education Minister — Chris Hipkins



The UK has always believed in the ideology of dividing people. Bharat, in uniting people. Since they are again at it,

Filmmaker — Vivek Agnihotri



Players like that don't grow on trees. You can't replace him (Rishabh Pant).

Former Australian cricketer — Ricky Ponting



Let me tell those who think that they will scare me by telling dirty lies about me. I was attacked many times but I did not stop. No one can suppress my voice. I will keep fighting as long as I am alive!

Chairperson DWC — Swati Malwal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

FREEBIES MUST BE AVOIDED


States can't pile up debt to fund extravaganza of politicians



SHSHANK SAURAV

The newly-elected Himachal Pradesh government has reinstated the 'Old Pension Scheme' (OPS) in its first cabinet meeting. Other states ruled by opposition parties have already announced switching back to OPS. These decisions have initiated a fresh round of discussion around freebies and fiscal prudence. Before going to the financial and other aspects of reverting back to OPS, it is necessary to understand the basic differences between these two schemes. In layman terms, under OPS a retiring employee was eligible to get a monthly pension of almost 50 per cent of his last drawn salary. Subsequent increments based on dear-ness allowance hike and pay commission revision was also included in the pension.

Under the new pension scheme (NPS), monthly contributions from both employees and government goes to a fund managed by PFRDA and the returns on this fund are market-linked. At the time of retirement, the employee can withdraw up-to 60 per cent of his corpus and he has to buy an annuity plan from the remaining amount. A monthly pension shall be paid out of the annuity.



In technical terms, OPS is a defined benefit scheme in which the liability of the employer (i.e., government) can go to any extent while NPS is a defined contribution scheme in which the employer is liable to the extent of its contribution. Another key difference between these two schemes is around funding. Matching a future liability with corresponding funding is basic economics and OPS failed on this parameter. While NPS corpus ensures that the future pension is going to be paid out of a dedicated fund created for it, OPS had no specific funding and the yearly outlay was out of budgetary resources. OPS was not only a drain on the government's resources, it was unfair to the taxpayers also because the current generation had to fund the ever-increasing pension bill.

As per RBI data, the pension bill of state governments has increased from Rs. 3,131 crores in 1990-91 to Rs. 406,867 crores in 2021-22 (BE). Pension liability has increased by 130 times over this period but there is no commensurate increase in revenue of the states to fund the bill. All of the states which have gone back to OPS are already facing revenue deficit and their fiscal position doesn't allow them to go for such misadventures. Share of revenue expenditure has been increasing consistently over the years (71 per cent in 1984-85 to 79 per cent in 2018-19, pre-covid era), leaving lesser resources for asset/capacity creation.

NPS was implemented in 2004 and there was a consensus around this policy shift. All the state governments except West Bengal adopted this scheme over the period and breaking this consensus for petty political gains is not in public interest. A small section of society working in government sector will benefit out of this decision but the costs are going to be very huge because spending signi?cant portion of the state's budget on pension will compel the government to curtail its outlays on general welfare as a whole. Former Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia also confessed that reverting to OPS is unwise and suicidal. There can be deliberations around bringing changes in the NPS scheme like introducing new products which have guaranteed return features but outrightly taking a U-turn on the pension reforms for immediate political mileage should be stopped.

If a state wants to implement OPS, then the Cabinet should also consider the present value of pension liability determined by actuaries and the funding status. In case there is an unfunded liability, then the Cabinet should also announce how it is going to meet it. States can't be piling up their debt to fund the extravaganza of politicians. If the opposition is adamant on taking the poison pill, then Centre should consider amending the FRBM Act to include the unfunded pension liability of states due to reintroduction of OPS within the ambit of general government debt.

(The author is a Chartered Accountant and public policy analyst)

Tourism is poised for quantum jump

The Tourism Ministry has been aggressively promoting different tourism products and destinations



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

Ganga Vilas cruise ship is only a mirror for the untapped potential of state tourism. In fact, the tourism industry offers immense potential and expects to earn \$50.9 billion by 2028. India showcased its different tourism products and potential at the Arabian Travel Market, Dubai-2022, as the Middle-East has always been one of the major target markets for Indian Tourism.

The Tourism Ministry also undertook 'Namaste India' campaign for encouraging international visitors to travel to India during this mega event. Several state governments from India participated in the event, showcasing their major tourist destinations. India displayed itself as a holistic destination, revolving around major experiences, such as spirituality, heritage, adventure, culture, yoga, wellness and many more things.

The Tourism Ministry has been aggressively promoting different tourism products and destinations. The major focus has been given to the potential of MICE, Film Tourism, Wellness Tourism, Medical Tourism, Luxury Tourism, Wildlife Tourism and Adventure Tourism. By 2028, Indian tourism and hospitality is expected to earn \$50.9 billion and the travel market in India is projected to reach \$125 billion by FY27 from an estimated \$75 billion in FY20.

The Middle-East becomes very important for the Indian tourism industry, as around three million Indians are living in different countries of this oil-rich region of the globe. Large number of tourists from the Middle-East visit India for MICE, medical, wellness, luxury tourism, etc. Hence, the Ministry of Tourism, has been holistically promoting Indian tourism in the Middle East market.

Participation in Arabian Travel Mart has been one such initiative by the Government. During the event, it was highlighted that India has opened up for the International visitors. Along with the 'Namaste India' campaign for encouraging international visitors, the ministry has also been focusing on confidence-building strategies post-pandemic.

The importance of film tourism and the potential of India as an important destination for film-making, having all physical geographical features and landscape were also discussed at length. The role of North-eastern states as a potential film shooting destination was also showcased. The role of Indian diaspora for publicity and promotion of India in the overseas market was also discussed and sought for.

The appeal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for 'Chalo India', urging Indian Diaspora to inspire at least five of their non-Indian friends every year to visit India, calling them 'Rashtradoot', was also highlighted. The role of the Indian diaspora with regard to the promotion of India in the overseas market was also discussed.

Experts also highlighted the role of social media for the promotion of tourism



BY 2028, THE INDIAN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IS EXPECTED TO EARN \$50.9 BILLION AS COMPARED WITH \$28.9 BILLION IN 2018. THE TRAVEL MARKET IN INDIA IS PROJECTED TO REACH \$125 BILLION BY FY27 FROM AN ESTIMATED \$75 BILLION IN FY20

(The author is a senior journalist)

in India, which they said, could prove the game-changer for the tourism industry. Lots of millennial tourists use social media looking for promotional content such as travel and tourism. Social media also plays the role of influencers in engaging a large number of tourists.

The government showcased India's rich and diversified tourism potential by providing a platform to the tourism stakeholders to showcase the various tourism destinations and products, including niche ones. It presented India as a 'Must See, Must Visit' destination. The India Pavilion showcased India as a '365 Days Destination' with its culture, adventure, cruise, golf, MICE, luxury, wildlife, wellness, and medical tourism, etc.

Various verticals of tourism potential in India were discussed during the event. State governments are also participating vigorously in the event. For example, the government of Uttarakhand discussed the importance of tourist destinations in Uttarakhand that can be leveraged for the promotion of tourism such as adventure tourism, wedding tourism in the State of Uttarakhand. States also highlighted the initiatives undertaken by the respective government with regards to increasing the footfall of tourists in the state. Uttarakhand government also discussed various infrastructure development projects such as Haridwar International Airport and way forward strategies being undertaken by the Govt. of Uttarakhand.

Along with the participants from India representing state governments, tour operators, travel agents, and hoteliers/resorts, are also present in the India Pavilion showcasing the diverse tourism products and services. States like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya



Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Nagaland are enthusiastically participating in the event.

The Ministry of Tourism has recognised adventure tourism as a 'Niche' tourism product in order to promote India as a 365 days' destination and attract tourists with specific interest. The Ministry has issued guidelines for the approval of Adventure Tour Operators, open to all bona-fide Adventure Tour Operators. A Task Force on adventure tourism has been set up to act as a forum for resolving issues related to development and promotion of adventure tourism in the country. The Ministry of Tourism has formulated 'Indian Adventure Tourism Guidelines' (Version 2.0) on safety and quality norms on adventure tourism as basic minimum standards for adventure tourism activities covering 31 verticals involving land, air and water in respect of adventure tourism activities.

Identification and development of tourist places or centres is primarily responsibility of the concerned state government or UT administration. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, had launched the 'Swadesh Darshan Scheme' in 2014-15 for integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country. Under the scheme 15 thematic circuits were identified for development. The projects under the scheme are identified for development in consultation with the State Government/UT and are sanctioned subject to availability of funds, submission of suitable Detailed Project Reports, adherence to scheme guidelines and utilization of funds released earlier. Since its launch in January 2015, the ministry has sanctioned around 76 projects worth Rs 5667.39 crores to 30 states and UTs covering the themat-

ic circuits under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

India's rising middle class and increasing disposable income has supported the growth of domestic and outbound tourism. By 2028, Indian tourism and hospitality industry is expected to earn \$50.9 billion as compared with \$28.9 billion in 2018. The travel market in India is projected to reach \$125 billion by FY27 from an estimated \$75 billion in FY20. The Indian airline travel market was estimated at \$20 billion and is projected to double in size by FY27 due to improving airport infrastructure and growing access to passports.

The Indian hospitality market, including domestic, inbound and outbound, was estimated at \$32 billion in FY20 and is expected to reach \$52 billion by FY27, driven by the surging demand from travelers and sustained efforts of travel agents to boost the market. During 2019, foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India stood at 10.93 million, achieving a growth rate of 3.5 per cent year on year basis. In 2020, FTAs decreased by 75.5 per cent YoY to 2.68 million and arrivals through e-Tourist Visa (Jan-Nov) decreased by 67.2 per cent YoY to 0.84 million. As of March 2021, the e-Tourist Visa facility was extended to citizens of 171 countries.

In April 2021, the percentage share of FTAs was highest from USA (26.85 per cent), followed by Bangladesh (15.65 per cent), Afghanistan (6.92 per cent), UK (5.87 per cent), Nepal (4.59 per cent), Canada (4.27 per cent), Iraq (2.99 per cent), Portugal (2.40 per cent), Germany (1.42 per cent), Russian Fed (1.41 per cent), Maldives (1.39 per cent), France (1.33 per cent), Sudan (1.21 per cent), Korea (Rep.) (1.18 per cent), and Australia (1.02 per cent).

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IT'S UNFORTUNATE WHEN EXAM PAPERS ARE LEAKED REPEATEDLY. IT'S BEING SAID NO LEADER OR OFFICIAL WAS INVOLVED IN IT ...THIS IS 'JAADUGIRI'.
— RAJASTHAN DEPUTY CM SACHIN PILOT



I HAVE STARTED MEETING...EARLIER CORONA CAME...A BIG CORONA ALSO ENTERED OUR PARTY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BROUGHT EXCELLENT .
— RAJASTHAN CM ASHOK GEHLOT

Digital literacy in Rajasthan bridges gender gaps

The interventions by both the government and non-government organisations have contributed towards addressing this gap

Information, communication, and technology play crucial roles in the overall development of young girls and women. Yet, the gender gap in the field of ICT is vast.

In states like Rajasthan where discrimination against women and girls is highly prevalent, efforts to bridge this gap through digital literacy is proving to be a game changer. The interventions designed and being implemented by both the government and non-government organisations have contributed immensely towards addressing this gap, especially in rural regions of the country.

Twenty-one-year-old Deepika Soni, a resident of Lohakhan Basti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, is one such example of how access to digital lit-

NEERAJ GURJAR

(The author is a recipient of Sanjoy Ghose Media Awards 2022: Charkha Features)

eracy can alter the route of development for adolescent girls from underserved communities. Deepika was a student at one of the Sakhi Centres (Tech Centres) run by Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS), a non-government organization based in Ajmer. Today, she has become a digital educator at the same center. She also completed the Rajasthan State Certificate of Information Technology (RSCIT) programme conducted by the Government of Rajasthan.

Through its targeted initiatives such as Digital Kishori Bane Saksham – Computer Learning Programme, Grassroots Journalism, and Each One Teach Ten – Mobile Learning, MJAS has been able to digitally empower over

2000 adolescent girls from rural areas of this district.

Explaining the interventions, Mery Sadumha and Kamini Kumari, two young trainers at the centre, said that the courses are based on the feminist approach to technical learning, in which the girls not only acquire technical knowledge but also learn about their rights and decision-making. This empowers them not only socially but also financially. "Girls from different villages and settlements of the district are learning these courses. They come from different castes and communities," informed the duo.

Nineteen-year-old Maya Gurjar of Padampura village, currently working as the in-charge of MJAS's Sakhi centre in her own village,

expressed: "In 2021, I received a smartphone for a journalism course by the organization. This was the first time I had touched and operated a phone so closely. At that time, I felt as if I had entered a new world," shared Maya with a twinkle in her eyes, adding, "At present, I am fully aware of all the features of Android mobiles and consider myself digitally educated. I don't depend on anyone to know about any government scheme. I can easily get information about government schemes and job vacancies without having to visit eMitra."

Maya also provides training to other girls at the centre on how to use phones and laptops. This allows her to take care of her own educational

and household expenses. Digital literacy has not only empowered the girls to stay updated with the latest information but also contributed towards making them financially self-sufficient.

Like Maya, 18-year-old Monika, a resident of Ajaysar village, manages a Sakhi Center and earns for herself. "I have bought a scooter for myself with the money received by working at the center. And now I can go to the college or anywhere easily," said Monika with a sense of pride.

Talking about other benefits of acquiring digital education, Manju, the assistant in charge at the same center, believes that digital literacy makes it easier for students to prepare for government jobs

from the comfort of their homes. They no longer have to face the problem of a lack of transportation and pay costly fees to the coaching centres as they can easily access tutorial videos on YouTube and other digital platforms.

Reflecting on how difficult it was to start the centres in the villages, Indira Pancholi, the founding member, MJAS, said, "Where there is a ban and financial penalty on the use of phones for girls, it was a difficult task for the organization to provide them complete control of digital resources. Opening such centres was tantamount to challenging the patriarchal society. But these centres have been able to run successfully only because of these girls and their hope to move forward in their lives

and the courage to face the challenges."

So far, MJAS has established nine such Sakhi Centers, where books, libraries, tablets, and internet connections have been made available to digitally empower adolescent girls. At these centers, various programmes on life skills, health, and environment are also organized for the girls in order to raise their awareness on all levels.

These girls from rural areas have not only understood the importance of digital literacy but also made it a way of their lives. At the same time, while several reports state that rural girls have limited access to phones and technology, the examples set by MJAS' centres can provide a ray of hope!

Ukraine’s tragic week shows there’s no safe place in war

AP ■ BROVARY, UKRAINE

A small broom and dust-pan in hand, Olga Prenzilevich cleans up the debris along the road in a sleepy Kyiv suburb next to a cordoned-off mound of charred vehicles and misshapen wreckage. But she can't sweep away the terrible memory of seeing the government helicopter that carried Ukraine's interior minister tumbling through the fog and crashing into the kindergarten building. Or the frantic dash afterward to save the children, their tiny bodies in flames.

"I am still in shock," the 62-year-old custodian says, the acrid stench of burning still in the air. Nearby, Oksana Yuriy, 33, watches investigators photograph the scene to try to piece together how Wednesday's crash happened.

"I thought this was a safe place," she said. "Now I understand there is no such thing."

This is the hard lesson Ukrainians have had to learn in a week of mourning at least 59 dead in places that many considered safe from the violence of the war against Russia, now in its 11th month.

Since February, they have seen lives lost from missile strikes and battlefield combat, and civilians dying in schools,



theaters, hospitals and apartment buildings. They have suffered irretrievable losses: a loved one, a place to call home, and for some, any hope for the future.

But this past week seemed to have a special cruelty to it. It started on the weekend, when a barrage of Russian missiles slammed into an apartment complex that housed about 1,700 people in the south-eastern city of Dnipro. The Jan. 14 barrage killed 45 civil-

ians, including six children — the deadliest strike on civilians since spring — in an area once considered safe for many who fled front-line areas farther east.

Then came Wednesday's helicopter crash at the kindergarten in the Kyiv suburb of Brovary that killed 14, including Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi, other members of his ministry and the aircraft's crew. One child on the ground was killed and 25 people were

injured, including 11 children. Monastyrskyi, 42, had been traveling to the front line when the Super Puma helicopter went down in the fog, although no official cause has been determined. Flowers piled up Friday at the fence outside the kindergarten. A 73-year-old woman hung a plastic bag full of aloe vera plants after reading that they might help heal burn victims. But not all the mourning was in Brovary or Dnipro.

At a cemetery in the town

of Bucha, near the capital, Oleksy Zavadskyi was laid to rest after falling in battle in Bakhmut, where fighting has been intense for months. His fiancée, Anya Korostenstka, tossed dirt on his casket after it was lowered into the grave. Then she collapsed in tears.

"The courage of our military and the motivations of the Ukrainian people is not enough," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a news conference Thursday at the Mariinskyi Palace in Kyiv.

He had appeared a day earlier in a video link to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where he asked his high-powered audience to stand silently to honor those killed in the helicopter crash. His wife, Olena Zelenska, who had traveled to the conference to muster support for Ukraine in person, dabbed tears from her eyes as she learned of the crash.

At an event Thursday at Kyiv's lavish Fairmont Hotel, U.S. Ambassador Bridget Brink told attendees that some of the embassy's staff had died in fighting on the front. "I know a lot of Ukrainians inside and outside the government are hurting right now," she said, urging her audience of diplomats, businessmen and journalists to not lose faith.

Zelenskyy honours those killed in helicopter crash

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held an emotional meeting Saturday with the families of those who died in a helicopter crash earlier this week.

Zelenskyy spoke with family members of seven of those killed in Wednesday's crash in the Brovary area of Kyiv, the capital city. The helicopter carrying Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi and other top officials slammed into a kindergarten building in the residential suburb, killing him and about a dozen other people, including a child on the ground.

Monastyrskyi, who oversaw the country's police and emergency services, was the most senior official killed since Russia invaded Ukraine. His death, along with the rest of his ministry's leadership and the entire helicopter crew, was the second major calamity in four days to befall Ukraine, after a Russian missile struck an apartment building in the south-eastern city of Dnipro, killing dozens of civilians.

At the somber service in Kyiv, Zelenskyy and his wife laid flowers on each of the seven coffins draped in the blue and yellow flags of Ukraine. Zelenskyy then spoke briefly with the families, as a small orchestra played a mournful adagio.



The cause of the crash isn't known, but Zelenskyy said earlier that it happened because the country is at war. That view was repeated by Ruslan Stefanchuk, chairman of Ukraine's parliament, speaking after the service. "All this would not have happened if not for this terrible and undeclared war which the Russian Federation is waging against Ukraine," Stefanchuk said. "Therefore, we must remember this and not forget these people. Because for Ukraine and Ukrainians, every lost life is a great tragedy."

Russia's war in Ukraine, which started nearly a year ago, is "in a state of deadlock," with Ukrainian forces likely achieving small gains in the northeast, near the town of Kreminna, while Russian forces "have likely been reconstituting" in

the eastern town of Soledar after taking it earlier in the week, the U.K. defense ministry said Saturday.

"There is a realistic possibility of local Russian advances" around Bakhmut, an eastern city whose capture would give the Kremlin a long-awaited victory after months of battlefield setbacks, the U.K. ministry said. Fierce battles for Bakhmut have been raging and three civilians were killed by Russian shelling in that area of the eastern Donetsk region, the deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office reported on Saturday morning.

In total, five civilians were killed and 13 wounded by Russian shelling over the past 24 hours in Ukraine's east and south, where active fighting is ongoing, Kyrylo Tymoshenko said in a Telegram post.

Chief diplomats boycott Libya-hosted Arab League meeting

AP ■ CAIRO

A handful of Arab chief diplomats met on Sunday in the Libyan capital in a gathering boycotted by powerful foreign ministers who argued that the mandate of the Tripoli-based government has ended.

Five of the 22 member states of the Arab League sent their foreign ministers to the periodic, consultative meeting. They included the chief diplomats of neighbouring Algeria and Tunisia, local media reported. Others sent their envoys to the meeting in Tripoli.

Among those boycotting the gathering was Egypt, which questioned the legitimacy of Prime Minister Abdel Hamid



Dbeibah's government after Libya's east-based parliament appointed a rival premier last year. The foreign ministers of Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also did not attend.

Najla Mangoush, the foreign minister of Libya's Tripoli-based administration, said in televised comments they "insist on full exercise of Libya's rights" in the Arab League, in reference to the rotating leadership of the pan-Arab organisation.

In September, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry withdrew from an Arab League session chaired by Mangoush, protesting her representing Libya at the pan-Arab summit.

Ahead of Sunday's meeting, authorities in the Libyan capital granted a day off for civil servants and closed off major roads around the Mitiga airport, the only functional airport in the capital, and a luxury hotel where the gathering took place.

Libya's current political stalemate grew out of the failure to hold elections in December 2021 and Dbeibah's refusal to step down. In response, the country's east-based parliament appointed a rival prime minister, Fathy Bashagha, who has for months sought to install his government in Tripoli.

The protracted stand-off between the two governments led to bouts of clashes in

Tripoli last year, risking the return of civil war to the oil-rich nation after months of relative calm.

Last month, the UN's special envoy for Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, warned that signs of partition are already evident, and the political crisis in the country "impacts people's well-being, compromises their security, and threatens their very existence."

The North African nation has plunged into chaos after a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

Libya has been virtually ruled by a set of rival militias and armed groups in the east and west.



Italy eyes boost in strong energy ties with Algeria

AP ■ ALGIERS

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni is looking to boost already strong energy ties with Algeria to further wean Italy off Russian energy, a focus of her two-day visit to the North African nation starting on Sunday.

Russia's war in Ukraine, which upset global strategic and economic dynamics, gave a new and urgent dimension to ties between Algiers and Rome, long dependent on Russian energy. Other European Union nations also have scrambled to find sources of replacement for Russian energy.

Italy and gas-rich Algeria now want to build on then Premier Mario Draghi's successful initiatives last year to boost Algerian energy supplies to Italy and, as an Algerian diplomat said, "push beyond that."

"We want Italy to become a European hub for Algerian gas. A junction for other EU countries," Algeria's ambassador to Rome, Abdelkrim

Touahria, said in an interview with Rome daily Il Messaggero, published on Saturday.

Algeria has replaced Russia as Italy's No. 1 energy supplier, sending natural gas via the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline.

An initial deal last year concluded by Draghi added 9 billion cubic metres of gas by 2023-2024, Eni said at the time. Months later, in July, a USD 4 billion agreement between the companies Eni, the Italian energy company, Occidental and Total was concluded. Meloni is expected to meet with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune as well as the nation's prime minister. Eni CEO Claudio Descalzi is to be among those in the delegation.

"Today we are the leading energy partner of Italy," Touahria said. "But we aim to push beyond that." Touahria, the Algerian ambassador, said that Italy's Eni and the Algerian oil company Sonatrach are also looking together to the future with projects like oil and gas exploration in the south Sahara.

Turkish Muslims protest Quran-burning in Sweden

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Outrage over a Quran-burning protest in Sweden produced a second day of protests in Turkey, reflecting tensions between the two countries. Some 250 people gathered outside the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul, where a photo of Danish anti-Islam activist Rasmus Paludan was set on fire. Paludan burned Islam's holy book outside the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm on Saturday, sparking protests in Istanbul and Ankara that night.

Participants in Sunday's event carried green flags featuring the Islamic proclamation of faith and banner that said "We condemn Sweden's state-supported Islamophobia."

A sign on a window of the Swedish Consulate read, "We do not share that book-burning idiot's view."

The protests have renewed concerns about Turkey holding up Sweden and Finland's bid to join NATO. Turkey has not yet ratified the Nordic nations' memberships in the military alliance, saying Sweden needs to address Ankara's security concerns. Turkish officials slammed Sweden for allowing the Quran-burning protest but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan did not comment on it during his week-end speeches.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson tweeted late Saturday that freedom of expression was crucial to democracy but added that "what is legal is not necessarily appropriate." "Burning books that are holy to many is a deeply disrespectful act. I want to express my sympathy for all Muslims who are offended by what has happened in Stockholm today," Kristersson said.

US ambassador heading to Africa as part of Biden’s big push

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, is the second Cabinet member heading to Africa as part of President Joe Biden's big push to engage with the world's second-largest continent.

The US Mission to the UN said Sunday she will travel to Ghana, Mozambique and Kenya starting January 25 "to affirm and strengthen our partnerships with key current and former UN Security Council members."

Thomas-Greenfield's visit follows last week's start of a 10-day African visit by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. She arrived in Dakar, Senegal late Wednesday and will also visit

Zambia and South Africa. Biden announced at the end of a US-Africa Leaders Summit in December that he will visit sub-Saharan Africa in 2023, the first trip to the region by a US leader in a decade.

The summit and trip are aimed at strengthening US relations with Africa, where China has surpassed the US in trade and is aiming to increase its military presence, and Russia has military ties with the authorities in Mali and Central African Republic.

Biden stressed at the summit that he is serious about increasing US attention to the continent and told the 49 African leaders attending the meeting in Washington that "Africa belongs at the table" in every conversation of global

consequences.

The first stop for Thomas-Greenfield, a former US assistant secretary of state for Africa, is Ghana, which is in the second year of a two-year term as an elected member of the Security Council. On January 25 she will meet with women leaders and civil society representatives, the US mission said.

Thomas-Greenfield then heads to Mozambique, which is just starting its first-ever two-year term on the council.

During her visit on January 26-27, the US mission said she will meet with UN officials, entrepreneurs, alumni of US exchange programmes, international relations students and civil society members engaged in work to adapt to climate change, the mission said.

The ambassador's final stop on January 28-29 is Kenya, whose two-year term on the council ended on December 31.

The US mission called Kenya "a key partner" and said Thomas-Greenfield's visit will focus on humanitarian programmes, including the regional response to drought and assistance to refugees, and on "the impact Russia's war against Ukraine continues to have on global food security, which has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region."

The ambassador will also meet refugees pending resettlement in the United States and Kenya-based entrepreneurs "at the forefront of the country's transition to a green economy," the mission said.

EXPLAINER: Tensions high over isolated Azerbaijan region

AP ■ MOSCOW

Two years after Azerbaijan and Armenia ended a war that killed about 6,800 soldiers and displaced around 90,000 civilians, tensions between the countries are again high in a dispute over a six-kilometre (nearly four-mile) road known as the Lachin Corridor.

The winding road, which is the only land connection between Armenia and the ethnic Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan, has been blocked by protesters claiming to be environmental activists since mid-December, threatening food supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 people.

The dispute raises fears that new fighting could break out. It also could destabilise Armenia's

chronically excitable politics.

As well, it casts doubts on the competence and intentions of Russia, whose peacekeeping troops are charged with keeping the road secure.

ROOTS OF THE DISPUTE

Mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh, smaller than the US state of Delaware, has significant cultural importance to both Armenians and Azeris. It had a substantial degree of autonomy within Azerbaijan when it was part of the Soviet Union.

As the USSR deteriorated, Armenian separatist unrest broke out, later turning into a full-scale war after the Soviet Union collapsed.

Most of the Azeri population was driven out by the end of the fighting in 1994. Ethnic Armenian forces backed by



Armenia took control not only of Nagorno-Karabakh itself but of sizable surrounding Azerbaijani areas.

For the next quarter-century, Nagorno-Karabakh was a "frozen conflict," with Armenian and Azerbaijani forces facing off across a no man's land and occasional clashes.

In September 2020,

Azerbaijan launched a full-scale assault to take the region. The fierce fighting lasted six weeks.

The war ended with a Russia-brokered armistice under which Azerbaijan regained control of parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and all the surrounding territory previously occupied by Armenians.

Russia sent a peacekeeping

force of 2,000 troops to maintain order, including ensuring that the Lachin Corridor remained open.

CURRENT TROUBLE

In mid-December, Azeris claiming to be environmental activists began blocking the road, saying they were protesting illegitimate mining by Armenians.

Armenia contends the protests are orchestrated by Azerbaijan. In turn, Azerbaijan alleges that Armenians have used the corridor to transport land mines into Nagorno-Karabakh in violation of the armistice terms.

After more than a month of blockages, food shortages in Nagorno-Karabakh have become severe as reserves run low.

The local government on Friday implemented a coupon system allowing only limited purchases of rice, pasta, buckwheat, sugar and sunflower oil.

Local authorities have called for a humanitarian airlift for critical supplies, but Azerbaijan hasn't given authorisation for the region's airport to operate.

Azerbaijan also has sporadically cut gas supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh — most recently on Saturday evening — and electricity supplies are reduced.

Although Russia is tasked with ensuring the Lachin Corridor's operation, it has taken no overt action to end the blockade.

The European Parliament has called for Russian peacekeepers to be replaced by a mission from the Organisation for

Security and Cooperation in Europe — even though it criticised the OSCE for failing to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh's status during the decades that preceded the 2020 war.

CONSEQUENCES

With its attention focused on the fighting in Ukraine, Russia has taken a wait-and-see approach to the Lachin Corridor blockade, angering Armenia.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan this month refused to allow Armenia to host military exercises of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation alliance, saying that "Russia's military presence in Armenia not only fails to guarantee its security, but it raises security threats for Armenia."

Armenia hosts a Russian

military base. Russia's involvement in ending the 2020 war was seen as a significant accomplishment that boosted its influence in the region.

The esteem it gained could be lost if it doesn't take stronger measures to open up the road.

Pashinyan's assenting to the Russia-brokered agreement to end the fighting was widely unpopular in Armenia, with opponents accusing him of being a traitor and large protests demanding his resignation.

Failure to resolve the current dispute, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians suffering and isolated, could provoke new unrest — and Pashinyan is aware of the potential power of such protests, having become prime minister himself on the heels of large demonstrations in 2018.

US lawmakers seek to bar insurrectionists from holding office

AP ■ ALBANY

Democratic lawmakers in a handful of states are trying to send a message two years after the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol: Those who engage in an attempted overthrow of the government shouldn't be allowed to run it.

New York, Connecticut and Virginia are among states where proposed legislation would prohibit anyone convicted of participating in an insurrection from holding public office or a position of public trust, such as becoming a police officer.

While the bills vary in scope, their aim is similar.

"If you've tried to take down our government through violent means, in no way should you be part of it," New York state Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal said.

He is sponsoring a bill that would bar people convicted of engaging in an insurrection or rebellion against the United

States from holding civil office, meaning they would not be able to serve as a judge or member of the Legislature.

Hoylman-Sigal said he introduced the bill this year because he saw more people who were involved in the riot in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021, running for office last year.

He described the assault on the Capitol as "a real attack on the foundations of our free and fair democracy and the values which enable that to persist."

A Virginia lawmaker introduced a bill this month, on the second anniversary of the Capitol riot, that would prohibit anyone convicted of a felony related to an attempted insurrection or riot from serving in positions of public trust — including those involving policymaking, law enforcement, safety, education or health.

A Connecticut bill would prohibit people convicted of sedition, rebellion, insurrection or a felony related to one of those acts from running for or



holding public office. Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, who introduced the measure, told The Associated Press that he wants the legislation eventually to bar them from holding state or municipal jobs.

The legislation in the states

comes after the House Jan. 6 committee's final report, which found Donald Trump criminally engaged in a conspiracy to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 presidential election he lost and failed to take action to stop his supporters from

United Democracy Center, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for fair elections.

Some Republicans say the legislation is unnecessary.

In New York, Republican Assemblyman Will Barclay, the minority leader, called the bill there a "political statement," saying it is "more political than it is a concern about public policy." He said existing rules already apply to people in certain positions who are convicted of crimes and that those laws "should be sufficient."

The legislation is another example of how the Capitol riot has become a political Rorschach test in the country.

Many Republicans refuse to see the attempt to violently halt the presidential certification — which was based on lies that 2020 election was stolen — as an insurrection, while a strong majority of the party continues to believe that President Joe Biden was not legitimately elected. Even students are being taught different versions of the attack, depend-

ing on whether they live in more conservative or liberal parts of the nation.

The opposing realities came into sharp focus this month in Pennsylvania during a fraught exchange between two lawmakers. In a committee hearing, Republican state Sen. Cris Dush slammed his gavel as he ruled Democratic state Sen. Amanda Cappelletti out of order after she described the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 as "the site of an insurrection."

"Insurrection, nobody has been charged with that," Dush said. "There's not been a single charge against any of those people as insurrectionists. In this committee, we are not using that term."

Nearly 1,000 people have been charged in the Capitol riot with federal crimes, with about half of them pleading guilty to riot-related charges and more than three dozen convicted at trial. The charges range from misdemeanors for those accused of entering the Capitol illegally but not participating in

violence to felony seditious conspiracy for far-right extremist group members accused of plotting to stop the transfer of presidential power.

In November, two leaders of the Oath Keepers extremist group were convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors alleged was a weekslong plot to use force to keep Trump in office. Leaders of the Proud Boys and additional members of the Oath Keepers are currently standing trial on the sedition charge, which carries up to 20 years behind bars.

Weeks after the committee exchange, Cappelletti told The Associated Press that it's important to make sure people understand that the attack on the Capitol was an insurrection.

"These are factually correct things," she said. "That doesn't mean that we can't disagree politically about policy or other things, but we can acknowledge that that happened and start to figure out how we move forward to work together to build up that public trust again."

Brazil's army chief fired in aftermath of capital uprising

AP ■ BRASILIA, BRAZIL

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva fired Brazil's army chief Saturday just days after the left-leader openly said that some military members allowed the Jan. 8 uprising in the capital by far-right protesters.

The official website of the Brazilian armed forces said Gen. Julio Cesar de Arruda had been removed as head of the army. He was replaced by Gen. Tomás Miguel Ribeiro Paiva, who was head of the Southeast Military Command.

Lula, who did not comment publicly on the firing, met with Defense Minister Jose Mucio, chief of staff Rui Costa and the new army commander in Brasilia at the end of the day.

Speaking to journalists afterward, Mucio said the Jan. 8 riots had caused "a fracture in the level of trust" in the army's top levels and the government decided a change was needed.

In recent weeks, Lula targeted the military with criticism after supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro stormed through government buildings and destroyed public property in an attempt to keep Bolsonaro in office.

The uprising underlined the polarization in Brazil between the left and the right.

Lula said several times in public that there were definitely people in the army who allowed the rioting to occur, though he never cited Arruda.

During a breakfast with the



press, Lula said earlier this week that "a lot of people from the military police and the armed forces were complicit" and had allowed protesters to enter the buildings with open doors. In another interview, the presi-

dent said that "all the military involved in the coup attempt will be punished, no matter the rank."

The comments were followed by Lula scheduling several meetings with the defense minister and the armed forces' commanders. Mucio denied they had mentioned the Jan. 8 rioting, but he said relations between the military and the government needed adjustment.

On the eve of Arruda's firing, a video of a Paiva speech earlier in the week was released in which he said the election results should be respected in order to guarantee democracy.

Rioters who stormed through the Brazilian Congress, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court in Brasilia sought to have the military intervene and overturn Bolsonaro's loss to Lula in the presidential election.

In a video posted on social media from inside the presidential palace on the day of the

attack, a colonel is seen trying to stop police from arresting Bolsonaro's supporters who had invaded the building. He asks for patience from the military police, which report to the federal district's government.

More than a thousand people were arrested on the day of the riot and the morning after the disturbance, which bore strong similarities to the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Congress by mobs who wanted to overturn former President Donald Trump's election loss.

A Brazilian Supreme Court justice earlier this month authorized adding Bolsonaro in its investigation into who incited the rioting in Brasilia as part of a broader crackdown to hold responsible parties to account.



Building collapse in Syrian's Aleppo leaves 16 dead

AP ■ BEIRUT

A neighbourhood in Syria's northern city of Aleppo early Sunday, killing at least 16 people, including one child, and injuring four others, state media reported.

The five-story building housing about 30 people is in the Sheikh Maksoud neighbourhood under the control of the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. It collapsed overnight, according to the report, after water leakages weakened the structure's foundation.

Dozens of firefighters, first responders and residents covered in debris and dust were searching through the rubble for the remaining residents with drills and a bulldozer.

Some relatives of the tenants waited anxiously nearby,

while others mourned at the entrance of a nearby hospital as the bodies arrived in ambulances and on the backs of trucks.

Hawar News, the news agency for the semiautonomous Kurdish areas in Syria, initially reported that seven people were killed and three were injured, two of them critically.

Many buildings in Aleppo were destroyed or damaged during Syria's 11-year conflict, which has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million.

Although the Syrian government under President Bashar Assad has retaken Aleppo from armed opposition groups, Sheikh Maksoud is among some neighborhoods under the control of Kurdish forces.

China rings in Lunar New Year with Covid rules lifted

AP ■ BEIJING

People across China rang in the Lunar New Year on Sunday with large family gatherings and crowds visiting temples after the government lifted its strict "zero-COVID" policy, marking the biggest festive celebration since the pandemic began three years ago.

The Lunar New Year is the most important annual holiday in China. Each year is named after one of the 12 signs of the Chinese zodiac in a repeating cycle, with this year being the Year of the Rabbit. For the past three years, celebrations were muted in the shadow of the



pandemic.

With the easing of most COVID-19 restrictions, many people could finally make their first trip back to their hometowns to reunite with their families without worrying about the hassles of quarantine, potential lockdowns and suspension of travel.

Larger public celebrations

also returned for what is known as the Spring Festival in China, with the capital hosting thousands of cultural events — on a larger scale than a year ago.

In Beijing, many worshippers offered morning prayers at the Lama Temple but the crowds appeared to be smaller compared to pre-pandemic days. The Tibetan Buddhist site allows up to 60,000 visitors a day, citing safety reasons, and requires an advance reservation.

Thronges of residents and tourists swarmed pedestrian streets in the Qianmen area near Tiananmen Square. Many of them enjoyed snacks from

barbecue and New Year rice cake stands, and some children wore traditional Chinese rabbit hats. Others held blown sugar or marshmallows shaped like rabbits.

Beijing resident Si Jia said she felt that life in Beijing was back to normal in general, pointing to the return of tourists. She said she brought her 7-year-old son to Qianmen to experience the festive vibe in Beijing and learn about traditional Chinese culture.

"He has never experienced what a traditional new year is like because he was too young three years ago and he had no memory of that," she said.

Netanyahu fires Cabinet ally, heeding court ruling

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired a key Cabinet ally on Sunday, heeding a Supreme Court ruling commanding him to do so and deepening a rift over the power of the courts.

A statement from Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the Israeli leader fired Interior and Health Minister Aryeh Deri, who the court decided could not serve as a Cabinet minister because of a conviction last year over tax

offenses.

Benjamin Netanyahu announced the firing at a meeting of his Cabinet.

The court ruling came as Israel is mired in a dispute over the power of the judiciary. Netanyahu's far-right government wants to weaken the Supreme Court, limit judicial oversight and grant more power to politicians.

Critics say the move upends the country's system of checks and balances and imperils Israel's democratic fundamentals.

FBI searches Biden's Wilmington home, finds more classified material



PTI ■ WASHINGTON

FBI investigators have found additional classified documents from US President Joe Biden's residence in Wilmington after conducting a 13-hour search of the home, intensifying the probe into discoveries that could become a political and possible legal liability for him as he prepares to launch a reelection bid in 2024.

Bob Bauer, the President's personal attorney, said in a statement that during the search on Friday, "Department of Justice took possession of materials it deemed within the scope of its inquiry, including six items consisting of documents with classification markings and surrounding materials, some of which were from the President's service in the Senate and some of which were from his tenure as vice president."

"DOJ also took for further review personally handwrit-

ten notes from the vice-presidential years," he said.

The total number of classified documents found in the residences and private offices of Biden has now increased to nearly a dozen and a half. All documents, including from his term as vice president from 2009 to 2016, have now been taken into possession of federal agents.

"DOJ requested that the search not be made public in advance, in accordance with its standard procedures, and we agreed to cooperate," Bauer said. Biden is spending time at his Wilmington, Delaware residence this weekend.

"DOJ had full access to the President's home, including personally handwritten notes, files, papers, binders, memorabilia, to-do lists, schedules, and reminders going back decades," Bauer said.

Last week, US Attorney General Merrick B Garland appointed a special counsel Robert Hur to investigate the discovery of the classified documents at the private offices and residence of the President.

Richard Sauber, Special Counsel to the President, said that Biden directed his personal lawyers to be fully cooperative with the Justice Department as part of its ongoing investigation. That has been the case since a small number of materials were initially discovered at the Penn Biden Center, he said.

Registered Office Address: Unit No.601, 6th Floor Piramal Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Kamani Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kurla (West), Mumbai- 400 070.
CIN: L65910MH1984PLC032639. Website: www.piramalfinance.com
Branch Address : Dhiraj Baug, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Agra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West) – 400 602.

DEMAND NOTICE

Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of **Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL)** (formerly known as **Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL)**) under Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act), in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to PCHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Property_Address
(LC No. 11900000054 of Noida Branch) Ram Kumar (Borrower) Harish Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 716514 /- (₹ Seven lakh Sixteen Thousand Five Hundred Fourteen Only) NPA (14-10-2022)	Plot No-136, Pocket-h, Sec-20, Yeida Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 203207
(LC No. 11900000305 of Noida Branch) Kamal Kant (Borrower) Ved Prakash Khurana (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 785505 /- (₹ Seven lakh Eighty Five Thousand Five Hundred Five Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	H - 1403, 14th Floor,plot No.- Gh-01 Homes 121,sector-121 Noida Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 203207
(LC No. 09200001046 of Rohini Branch) Abrar Wasim (Borrower) Afsha (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1898090 /- (₹ Eighteen lakh Ninety Eight Thousand Ninety Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Unit No 405 Fourth Floor Tower J Officer City 1 Village Noor Nagar Raj Nagar Extn N H 58 Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh:- 201012
(LC No. 19900041151 of Faridabad - Sector 19 Branch) Charumita (Borrower) Gaurav Chauhan (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1246499 /- (₹ Twelve lakh Forty Six Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Nine Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	Flat No K1 1201 12th Floor Patel Neetown Gh 03 Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 201301
(LC No. 19900042134 of Faridabad - Sector 19 Branch) Sumit Sharma (Borrower) Ashalata Samanta (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1551287 /- (₹ Fifty Five lakh Twelve Thousand Two Hundred Eighty Seven Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat No- 403, 4th Floor Tower- K, Block-I, Nagri, Phase-2 Fatehabad Road Agra Agra Uttar Pradesh :- 283111
(LC No. 19700041552 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Gopal Tripathi (Borrower) Chandra Prakash Tripathi (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 3073120 /- (₹ Thirty lakh Seventy Three Thousand One Hundred Twenty Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Flat No 1001, 10th Floor, Tower A2 Geotech Blessing, Plot No. Gh 16a Sector-01, Greater Noida West Gautam Budh Nagar Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 201308
(LC No. 19000000629 of Raj Nagar Branch) Sukanto Bank (Borrower) Babu Bank (Co Borrower 1) Priyanka Bank (Co Borrower 2)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1682388 /- (₹ Sixteen lakh Eighty Two Thousand Three Hundred Thirty Nine Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Flat No- 403, 4th Floor Tower- K, Block-I, Delhi 99 Bhogpura Tila More Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201005
(LC No. 19600044855 of Delhi - Safdurjung Branch) Jatni Dosaj (Borrower) Mahmood Ahmad (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 5004616 /- (₹ Fifty lakh Four Thousand Six Hundred Sixteen Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat No- E-114, 11th Floor Tower E Meadows Vista Phase-2 Raj Nagar Extension,gaziabad Uttar Pradesh Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201010
(LC No. 27900000233 of Greater Noida Branch) Pramod Kumar (Borrower) Neetu Singh (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 966160 /- (₹ Nine lakh Sixty Six Thousand One Hundred Sixty Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	Property No.- S-F-3, Second Floor Plot No- B-3/10, (Rear Rhs) D L F Ankur Vihar, Loni, Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201010
(LC No. 25500000217 of Netaji Subhash Place Branch) Ved Prakash Khurana (Borrower) Madhu Bala (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1588378 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Eighty Eight Thousand Three Hundred Seventy Eight Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Plot No- 2/45-a, First Floor Prem Gall, Babar Pur Shahdara, Delhihi New Delhi Delhi :- 110032
(LC No. 27900000333 of Greater Noida Branch) Ajay Kumar Rai (Borrower) Sunita Rai (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 918896 /- (₹ Nine lakh Eighteen Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety Six Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	Flat No: 212 Ground Floor Sector- Chi-Phi Greater Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 201308
(LC No. 27300000017 of Dwarka Branch) Rajesh Kumar (Borrower) Rakesh Kumar Saini (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 2851446 /- (₹ Twenty Eight lakh Fifty One Thousand Four Hundred Forty Six Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	House No. Bk-1/70 First & Second Floor With Roof Rights Shalimar Bagh, Delhihi New Delhi Delhi :- 110088
(LC No. 19000000664 of Raj Nagar Branch) Vikram (Borrower) Kamla Saxena (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1179076 /- (₹ Eleven lakh Seventy Nine Thousand Seventy Six Only) NPA (30-09-2020)	Flat No- C- 801, 8th Floor, Tower C Urban Homes Sahapur Bametha, Nh-24 Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201010
(LC No. 19700044528 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Satyanand Singh (Borrower) Kanchan Singh (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 3922654 /- (₹ Thirty Nine lakh Twenty Two Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Four Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat No 202 Second Floor Tower P 5 Prime Residency Sec 32 Karnal Karnal Haryana:- 132001
(LC No. 12900000712 of Faridabad Branch) Kamal Kishore Bharti (Borrower) Prem Lata Bharti (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 755962 /- (₹ Seven lakh Fifty Five Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Two Only) NPA (03-02-2020)	708 Srs Palm Homes Tower A6 Sector-7 Palwal Faridabad Haryana :- 121102
(LC No. 19000000823 of Gurgaon Branch) Sanjeev Kumar (Borrower) Rani Kumari (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 511389 /- (₹ Five lakh Eleven Thousand Three Hundred Ninety Eight Only) NPA (03-02-2020)	Flat No 1201 12th Floor Tower A1 Type A Srs Palm Homes Sector 7 Palwal Faridabad Haryana :- 121102
(LC No. 11900001449 of Amit Kumar (Manoj) Aggarwal (Borrower) Amit Kumar Aggarwal (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1032230 /- (₹ Ten lakh Thirty Two Thousand Two Hundred Thirty Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Flat No- F-1, Plot No-390 First Floor (Ihs) Khanna Nagar, Village Loni Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201011
(LC No. 13300000143 of Cannanught Place Branch) Aman Kumar (Borrower) Bhakti Kochhar (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 9489469 /- (₹ Ninety Four lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Four Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (01-04-2021)	Flat No 302, Tower No 01 Prime Residency, Sec 32 Karnal Haryana Karnal Haryana :- 132001

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Property_Address
(LC No. 13300001105 of Cannanught Place Branch) Hari Krishan Dhoundiyal (Borrower) Meena (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 6091340 /- (₹ Sixty lakh Ninety One Thousand Three Hundred Forty Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat No. 201, second Floor Tower No. P-4 , prime Residency Sector 32 Karnal , Haryana, India Karnal Karnal Haryana :- 132001
(LC No. 13300001107 of Cannanught Place Branch) Geeta Devi (Borrower) Sarita Kumari (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 2852049 /- (₹ Twenty Eight lakh Fifty Two Thousand Seven Nine Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat Ni - 101, Tower No - 08 Prime Residency Sector - 32 Karnal Haryana Karnal Karnal Haryana :- 132001
(LC No. 13300001108 of Cannanught Place Branch) Pushpendra Kumar (Borrower) Seema Singh (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 4830363 /- (₹ Forty Eight lakh Thirty Thousand Three Hundred Sixty Five Only) NPA (30-07-2021)	Flat No 102 Tower No P 06 Prime Residency Sector 32 Karnal Karnal Haryana :- 132001
(LC No. 19700043148 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Ajit Singh (Borrower) Sudesh Devi (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1488781 /- (₹ Fourteen lakh Eighty Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Eighty One Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	Janta Flat 271 Ground Floor Cat C Sec16 B Pocket B Dwarka New Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110075
(LC No. 19600042551 of Delhi - Safdurjung Branch) Ashu Oswal (Borrower) Lalit Oswal (Co Borrower 1) Sahil Oswal (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1674294 /- (₹ Sixty Seven lakh Forty Two Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Four Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Plot No-11, Second Floor, Pocket - E-2 Sector-7, Rohini Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110085
(LC No. 25500000635 of Netaji Subhash Place Branch) Geeta Devi (Borrower) Ram Chander (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 2411785 /- (₹ Twenty Four lakh Seventeen Thousand One Hundred Eighty Five Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Property No-38, Ground Floor Block & Pocket- D-7 Sector- 32 Karnal Haryana New Delhihi :- 110075
(LC No. 19000001038 of Raj Nagar Branch) Anil Kumar (Borrower) Usha (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1207526 /- (₹ Twelve lakh Seven Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Six Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Plot No- S-7 Flat No- G-4 G F Rear Rhs Shalimar Graden extn-1 Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201012
(LC No. 27300000144 of Dwarka Branch) Balender Kumar (Borrower) Rabinder Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 4473969 /- (₹ Forty Four lakh Seventy Three Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Plot No- B-537- A, 1st Floor Village- Basai Darapur, Sudarshan Park Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110075
(LC No. 25500000845 of Netaji Subhash Place Branch) Rakesh Kumar (Borrower) Sumitra Devi (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1176597 /- (₹ Eleven lakh Seventy Six Thousand Five Hundred Ninety Seven Only) NPA (29-09-2022)	Plot No-564, Third Floor Rear Side Block-c, Old Plot No-42b,khasra No-113/6 Village Palam, Mahavir Enclave Part-III, New Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110045
(LC No. 131000001434 of Noida 1 Rajendra Place Branch) Indu Bala (Borrower) Rajender Gupta (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1653610 /- (₹ Sixteen lakh Fifty Three Thousand Six Hundred Ten Only) NPA (30-10-2022)	Plot No-2138-2139, Ground Floor Ward No-12, Shora Kothi Subzi Mandi, Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110007
(LC No. 19600042775 of Delhi - Safdurjung Branch) Jai Kumar Dewar (Borrower) Rinki Devi (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1529628 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Twenty Nine Thousand Six Hundred Twenty Eight Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	House No. 763 First Floor Block B Weavers Colony Ashok Vihar Phase 4 New Delhihi New Delhihi :- 110091
(LC No. 19700043728 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Naval Tyagi (Borrower) Naresh Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 2692768 /- (₹ Twenty Six lakh Ninety Two Thousand Seven Hundred Sixty Eight Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	H. No. 216/348(new) H. No. 3869/31(oid) Kharsa No 5580/31 Rajender Park Gurgaon Gurgaon Haryana :- 122001
(LC No. 27900001306 of Greater Noida Branch) Sarif Khan (Borrower) Marjina Bili (Co Borrower 1) Manjay Kumar Pandey (Co Borrower 2)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 1571882 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Seventy One Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Two Only) NPA (08-11-2022)	SF-4 second Floor Mig Flat With Roof Ri Rear Side Lhs Plot No C-1/6, Block C1 Diff Ankur Vihar Gaziabad Gaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201101
(LC No. 135000003371 of Chandigarh Metro Branch) Sunil Khurana (Borrower) Richa Khurana (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 107306 /- (₹ One lakh Seven Thousand Three Hundred Five Only) NPA (08-11-2021)	Plot No. 439 Gulmohar City, Kauli Majra Lalru Mohali Chandigarh Chandigarh :- 160036
(LC No. 13500000466 of Chandigarh Metro Branch) Rakesh Kumar (Borrower) Reshma Devi (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 506869 /- (₹ Five lakh Six Thousand Eight Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (09-10-2022)	Plot No. 307 (As Per Colony Plan) Gulmohar Vally, Handala Road Village Koli Majra , Lalru Lalru Patiala Punjab :- 140602
(LC No. 28600000540 of Haridwar Branch) Mukesh Kumar (Borrower) Kamlesh Wo Mukesh Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	27-12-2022 / ₹ 578493 /- (₹ Five lakh Seventy Eight Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Three Only) NPA (09-06-2022)	Plot No. 18 Kh. No. 202 Krishna Nagar Garmur Mehndod 2 Jwalapur Haridwar Haridwar Haridwar Uttaranchal :- 249407

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of PCHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date : 23-01-2023
Place : Delhi

Sd/-
(Authorised Officer)
Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited

‘Govt may not announce capital infusion for PSU banks in Budget 2023-24’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is unlikely to announce capital infusion for public sector banks (PSBs) in the upcoming Budget as their financial health has improved significantly and they are on track to earn a combined profit of Rs 1 lakh crore, sources said.

Their capital adequacy ratio is much above the regulatory requirement and varies between 14-20 per cent.

To augment their resources, banks are raising growth funds from the market and also by selling their non-core assets, they added.

The government last provided capital support to banks in 2021-22. It had earmarked Rs 20,000 crore for recapitalisation of PSBs through supplementary demands for grants.

The government infused Rs 3,10,997 crore to recapitalise banks during the last five financial years i.E., from 2016-17 to

2020-21, out of which Rs 34,997 crore were sourced through budgetary allocation and Rs 2,76,000 crore through issuance of recapitalisation bonds to these banks.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the fifth and final full Budget of the Modi 2.0 government on February 1.

All the 12 public sector banks earned a cumulative profit of about Rs 15,306 crore in the first quarter which increased to Rs 25,685 crore in the September quarter.

On a year-on-year basis, the growth was 9 per cent in the first quarter while it surged to 50 per cent in the second quarter.

During the second quarter, SBI reported the highest-ever profit of Rs 13,265 crore. On a year-on-year basis, this was 74 per cent higher.

In the first half of FY23, the cumulative net profit of all PSBs increased by 32 per cent to Rs 40,991 crore. The com-



bin profit more than doubled to Rs 66,539 crore in 2021-22 despite COVID-19 pressure.

Many state-owned banks after a hiatus also declared dividends in last financial year. In all, nine banks, including SBI, declared dividends of Rs 7,867 crore to shareholders.

Recently, the Finance Minister had said the govern-

ment's efforts to reduce bad loans are yielding results with 12 PSBs reporting a 50 per cent jump in combined net profit at Rs 25,685 crore in the September quarter.

NPAs declined as a result of the government's 4Rs strategy of Recognition, Resolution, Recapitalisation and Reforms, she had said.

B20 India inception meeting begins; policymakers, global CEOs participating

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Several policymakers, including Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal besides business leaders and senior executives representing businesses of the G20 countries are participating in the three-day B20 India inception meeting, which commenced here on Sunday.

As India holds the presidency of G20 in 2023, it will host the 18th G20 Summit in September. The Business 20 (B20) is amongst the most prominent official engagement groups in G20, with companies, business associations and multilateral organizations as participants.

The G20 or Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum of the world's major developed and developing economies. It comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi

Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US, and the European Union (EU).

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has been formally designated as the B20 secretariat by Government of India to lead and host B20 during India's G20 presidency.

"The inception meeting will bring together several policymakers, thought leaders, business leaders, CEOs and senior executives representing businesses of the G20 countries along with the presence of the representatives of several multilateral organisations, stimulating enriching discussions and deliberations on the business agenda under B20 India," CII said in a statement.

B20 India will work through seven task forces and two action councils.

During the course of the presidency, B20 India will host a series of discussions and policy advocacy initiatives, across India, covering the identified industry prior-



ities, with the aim to realize the B20 strategic vision and translating it into concrete and actionable policy recommendations, it added.

"Out of the many initiatives planned by the B20 India Secretariat, the inception meeting officially inaugurates the presidency work of all the task forces and action councils under B20 India," it added.

The subject of seven task forces include digital transformation; tech, innovation and

R&D; inclusive global value chains for resilient global trade and investment; financing for global economic recovery; and energy, climate change and resource efficiency.

On Monday, prominent business leaders who would address include N Chandrasekaran, Chair, B20 India and Tata Sons Chairman; Bajaj Finserv Ltd CMD Sanjiv Bajaj; and Vice Chairman & President, Strategic Growth, Mastercard Michael Froman.

India FTA can be clinched this year, but no more visa offers: UK Trade Min

PTI ■ LONDON

The India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) is expected to be clinched this year but it won't involve any boost of free movement visa offers for Indians, British trade minister in charge of the negotiations has said.

Kemi Badenoch, who was in New Delhi last month to kick off the sixth round of FTA talks with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, said that former prime minister Boris Johnson's 'deal by Diwali' deadline last year was not feasible and had to be

changed.

In an interview with 'The Times' recently, the UK Secretary of State for Trade also ruled out any major similarities between the FTA the UK had struck with Australia - one of the first post-Brexit trade deals - and that with India.

"We left the EU (European Union) because we didn't believe in free movement, we didn't think it was working. This is not a deal that's negotiating some kind of free movement with India," Badenoch told the newspaper, with reference to more visa offers.

The minister indicated a

willingness to make concessions on issues like business mobility, but ruled out the prospect of Indians getting the same kind of deal as with Australia - which allows under-35s to live and work in the UK for three years.

The reciprocal UK-India Young Professionals Scheme, formally launched earlier this month, is seen as overcoming this hurdle by annually offering 3,000 18 to 30-year-old graduates visas to live and work in either country for up to two years.

"We have to make sure that each trade agreement we

sign is tailored to the specific country. The kind of mobility offer I can do to a country like Australia is not going to be the same kind of mobility offer I can do with a country like India, which has got many times the population," said Badenoch.

"And what people from the UK want to do when they travel to Australia is probably slightly different from what they do when they travel to India, and vice versa as well," she told 'The Times'.

Distancing from the previous Tory government's approach of deadline-bound

FTA negotiations as "unhelpful", Badenoch reiterated the Rishi Sunak led government's more flexible approach going forward.

"The 'deal by Diwali' mantra is one of the things I have changed since becoming Trade Secretary. I tell people it's about the deal, not the day. I think that having a fixed day where everything needs to be completed is not helpful in a negotiation because the other party can run down the clock," she said.

Johnson had set a Diwali 2022 deadline for the FTA during his prime ministerial

visit to India in April last year. However, amid major political upheavals in the UK, that deadline fell by the wayside and most ministers have since been reluctant to set a fresh timeframe.

"I do think a deal this year. I don't know when. But after a while if things don't conclude then people just move on, on both sides. I'm very keen to sign a deal this year," said Badenoch.

According to official UK government data, India-UK bilateral trade currently stands at around GBP 29.6 billion a year. Both sides for-



mally launched FTA negotiations at the start of last year, with Sunak committing to working "at pace" towards an

FTA that does not "sacrifice quality for speed" after that October 2022 Diwali deadline was missed..

Noida gets investment intents worth ₹5.86 lakh crore

PTI ■ NOIDA

Gautam Buddh Nagar, which includes industrial cities of Noida and Greater Noida, has received investment proposals worth Rs 5.86 lakh crore since the announcement of Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit in November 2022, according to district officials.

The UP Global Investors Summit is scheduled from February 10 in Lucknow and the state government, led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has set a target of Rs 17 lakh crore investments through the ambitious drive.

In the run-up to the GIS, Adityanath had also instructed state officials to hold investment summits at district-level in each of the 75 districts of the state, while road shows are being held in other states and foreign countries as well to attract investments.

"The district-level investor summit in Gautam Buddh Nagar was held on January 20 during which investment proposals worth Rs 11,502 crore



from around 250 investors were received," Deputy Commissioner (Industries) Gautam Buddh Nagar Anil Kumar said.

"So far in Gautam Buddh Nagar, investment intents worth Rs 5.86 lakh crore have been received from 871 investors. These investments will create 18.46 lakh jobs. Of these 871 investors, 792 investors have signed MoUs (memorandum of understanding) worth Rs 3.78 lakh crore. These investment intents have come since November 21, 2022," Kumar told PTI.

The deputy commissioner

said the investment proposals have been received in various fields such as agriculture, cooperative, dairy development, civil aviation, information, renewable energy, medical education, MSME, export promotion, food and civil supplies, handloom, textile, IT and electronics, housing, infrastructure, and tourism. Gautam Buddh Nagar adjoining Delhi in western Uttar Pradesh has often been dubbed as the financial capital of the state and it is show window to the world, owing to the presence of a large number of factories, industries and private firms.

UP has better environment for setting up industry than before: Assocham

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Amid ongoing preparations for Global Investors Summit in Uttar Pradesh next month, industry body Assocham has said the state now has a much better environment for setting up industry than before besides having one of the best investment opportunities.

Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood said the government itself is now taking steps towards industries and trying to show them investment opportunities.

This is a very positive step and will not only benefit the economy of Uttar Pradesh but also the whole of India, said Sood who was in Lucknow for a two-day conference organized by Assocham on January 20-21 under 'Environmental Security and Green Energy Friendly Campaign'.

Sood spoke to PTI about the events to be held in Lucknow on February 10-12 during the Global Investors Summit.

Asked about the prospects of success of the summit, he said, "As far as Uttar Pradesh is

concerned, it has very strong and vast opportunities to attract investments."

"Uttar Pradesh is the third largest economy of the country, its connectivity with other states is very good and now the experiences of businessmen regarding the state are also very encouraging. Businesses consider a strong and stable policy and better law and order as the criteria. Now both these things are very positive in Uttar Pradesh, which was not there earlier," he said.

Sood said that recently several members of Assocham have invested in Uttar Pradesh and their experiences have been very good, and the pace at which work is being done in the industrial sector in UP is unbelievable.

Referring to the government's efforts for industrial investment, he said, "The government itself is taking steps towards industries, trying to show them opportunities and encouraging them to invest in the state. This is a very positive step."

About the data centre set up in Greater Noida, he said, "This data centre, which is

amongst the largest centres in the country, was completed in a very short time. The way the government is promoting industries in the state, is laudable. The work being done towards industrial development under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very encouraging."

Asked about the government's target of making Uttar Pradesh a trillion-dollar economy, Sood said, it is a big target, but if the capacity is created in sectors like automobile, hardware and electronic hardware, there is infinite potential in UP.

"To achieve the target of making UP a one-trillion-dollar economy, small targets have to be set. First the target of USD 500 billion has to be achieved. Then the target of USD 700 billion and then one-trillion-dollar should be achieved. But the target of one-trillion-dollar should not be considered as an end, UP has to think beyond that as well," Sood said.

Explaining further he said, "Actually a continuous pipeline is needed. For this, availability



of land, basic infrastructure, water and environmental clearances, upgradation of workforce and market development will have to be done and overall per capita income of the state will also have to be increased. The government is working by making a road map on these aspects and I am hopeful that UP is in a position to become one-trillion-dollar economy."

To a question on delay in getting the investment agreements on the ground, the Assocham Secretary General said, "There are a lot of talks about an investment deal. It is not necessary that one deal should get on the ground within a year. Many investments take time to implement."

"MoUs are an indication of

a pipeline. MoUs should also be seen from the point of view of how much investment potential is there. For that, how much additional infrastructure and how much allied infrastructure is needed, so that investment agreements can be implemented on the ground."

Asked about the role of Assocham in Global Investors Summit, Sood said , all its members will participate in the summit. "It is obvious that the government needs investment but a business is looking for opportunities."

The Yogi Adityanath government of Uttar Pradesh is organising Global Investors Summit in Lucknow from February 10-12 with an investment target of Rs 17 lakh crore.

Increased E&P, import diversification, biofuels part of India's four-plank energy security strategy: Puri

PTI ■ VARANASI

India, the world's third largest energy consumer, is increasing domestic oil and gas exploration, diversifying import basket, switching to alternate sources and using gas and green hydrogen as a pathway to energy transition and security, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said Sunday.

Puri, who was here for an event showcasing age-old boats on the 'ghats' of the holy city switching to CNG instead of polluting diesel, said India is projected to contribute fourth of the world's energy demand growth in next couple of decades.

While the nation is dependent on imports to meet 85 per cent of its oil needs and 50 per cent of its natural gas requirements, India is mixing ethanol extracted from sugarcane and other agri produce in petrol to cut overseas reliance.

It will achieve 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2025, Puri said.

"Our energy security strat-

egy is based on four pillars of diversification of energy supplies, increasing exploration and production footprint, using alternate energy sources, and meeting energy transition through the gas-based economy, green hydrogen and EVs," he said.

India increased the number of its crude oil suppliers from 27 countries in 2006-07 to 39 in 2021-22, adding new suppliers like Columbia, Russia, Libya, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea etc.

Crude oil extracted from below the earth's surface is refined to produce fuels like petrol and diesel. Natural gas too is found below the surface and is used to generate electricity, make fertilizer and convert into CNG to run automobiles and piped to homes for cooking purposes.

Energy prices globally shot up following Russia's invasion of Ukraine but consumers in India were largely insulated as state-owned retailers did not raise prices commensurate with the spurt.

Prices of diesel -- the most used fuel in the country -- rose by only 3 per cent between December 2021 and December 2022 while they went up by 34 per cent in the US, 36 per cent in Canada, 25 per cent in Spain and 10 per cent in the UK, Puri said.

Diesel price increased from Rs 86.67 per litre in December 2021 to Rs 89.62 a year later. Rate of petrol rose from Rs 95.41 per litre to Rs 96.72.

The increase was tempered by a cut in excise duty. The government had raised the excise duty on petrol by Rs 13 a litre and that on diesel by Rs 15 per litre in 2020 when the pandemic had battered global energy prices. This hike was rolled back in two instalments in November 2021 and May 2022.

Also, some states cut VAT or local sales tax on fuel to help consumers. Puri said the government is targeting to increase India's exploration acreage to 0.5 million square kilometre by 2025 and 1 million sq km by 2030.

Exploration over a wider



area will yield more discoveries, raising domestic oil and gas output and cutting reliance on imports. Also, India increased the ethanol blending in petrol from 1.53 per cent in 2013-14 to 10.17 per cent in 2022 and advanced its target to achieve 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol from 2030 to 2025-26. The phased rollout of E20 will commence from this month or February, he said.

Simultaneously, the government is supplementing supplies by setting up compressed biogas (CBG) plants that use animal and agri waste to pro-

duce gas.

And for making India a hub for the production of green hydrogen - the fuel of the future which has zero carbon footprint - an incentive of Rs 19,744 crore under the National Green Hydrogen Mission has been announced, he said, adding the target is to produce at least 5 million tonne per annum of green hydrogen by 2030. Towards energy transition, fuel retailers are setting up alternate energy sources such as EV charging, CNG and LPG at 22,000 petrol pumps by May 2024, he added.

Sebi launches information database on municipal bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has launched an information database on municipal bonds.

As part of efforts to develop the bond markets, an outreach programme on municipal bonds and municipal finance was organised by Sebi in the national capital on January 20 and 21, according to a release on Sunday.

Representatives from various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, municipal corporations, stock exchanges, credit rating agencies, merchant bankers and debenture trustees, participated in the programme.

At the event, Sebi Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch emphasised the potential of municipal bonds in infrastructure development and nation building.

The information database



was launched at the event.

"The information database contains a wide range of information in the form of statistics and regulations, circulars, guidance note and Frequently Asked Questions issued by Sebi in respect of municipal debt securities," it said.

Social media boosts marketing of e-cigarettes despite ban

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The use of e-cigarettes is proliferating globally, notably among youth and children. Yet, little is known about the landscape of digital e-cigarette marketing, particularly in India where 268,000 people are currently using these products, despite complete ban on it.

A new study released in Frontiers in Public Health compares e-cigarette marketing in India, Indonesia and Mexico—three countries with different e-cigarette regulations and large populations of youth online—to detail the extent and messaging of e-cigarette marketing. In India, 100% of marketing originated from accounts associated with third-party retailers.

With the rise of social media and digital marketing, India's youth have worryingly become a more easily reachable market for the tobacco industry, said Vaishkahi Malik, Associate Director, South Asia, Vital Strategies.

SWIATEK, GAUFF DUMPED OUT

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Top seed Iga Swiatek and a tearful Coco Gauff both crashed out in straight sets in the last 16 on Sunday on another day of shocks at the Australian Open.

Swiatek's defeat to Elena Rybakina makes it the first Grand Slam in the Open era -- since 1968 -- to lose the top two seeds in the men's and women's draws before the quarter-finals.

There was no such trouble for Jessica Pegula, however, the American third seed surging into the last eight with a 7-5, 6-2 win over former French Open champion Barbora Krejcikova.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina swept past the 2022 French and US Open winner Swiatek 6-4, 6-4 in 1hr 29min at a stunned Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne.

Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina, seeded 22, moves on to a last-eight encounter with Jelena Ostapenko.

The Latvian 17th seed provided the second upset of a crazy few minutes by knocking out seventh seed Gauff 7-5, 6-3 on neighbouring Margaret Court Arena.

The 18-year-old Gauff broke down in tears during an emotional post-match press conference.

World number one and hot favourite Swiatek admitted that Rybakina deserved to win.

"I felt the pressure," Swiatek, 21, said. "I felt that I didn't want to lose instead of wanting to win."

Swiatek, who dominated women's tennis last year and is already a three-time major champion, added: "I felt today that I don't have that much left to fight even more."

"I felt like I took a step back in terms of how I approach these tournaments, and I maybe wanted it a little bit too hard."

"So I'm going to try to chill out a little bit more."

Swiatek follows second seed Ons Jabeur out the Melbourne exit door, the Tunisian having gone out in the second round in another surprise.

The American Gauff had been favourite to defeat Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open winner.



Pegula warns 'long way to go'

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Jessica Pegula surged into the Australian Open quarter-finals in straight sets on Sunday, but warned there was "still a long way to go" to win the title despite Iga Swiatek's exit leaving her the woman to beat.

The American third seed is the highest-ranked player left in the women's draw after beating former French Open champion Barbora Krejcikova 7-5, 6-2 in 1hr 41min.

Pegula will face either 24th seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, who won the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013, or China's Zhu Lin for a place in the semi-finals.

Pegula, 28, has never made it to a Grand Slam semi-final before, and didn't regard herself as the Australian Open favourite.



"I look at the draw and there's still Jelena (Ostapenko) -- she won the French Open. You have Rybakina, who won Wimbledon last year," she said. "You have Vika (Azarenka), who does really well here and Caroline (Garcia) won the WTA Tour championships," said Pegula.

"It doesn't really feel like I'm the highest (player) left, even though I guess that's a cool stat."

"It feels like there's still a long way to go, to be honest."

But, with seven of the top 10 women's seeds already knocked out before the second Monday of the tournament, Pegula accepted this could be her big chance.

"I mean, I have a great shot here," she said. "I've been playing the best I have than in any of my other Grand Slam quarter-finals."

But the 25-year-old Ostapenko was always in control to ensure that Gauff must wait at least a bit longer for a first major title.

Gauff told reporters it was a "little bit frustrating", then her voice suddenly began to crack, the tears flowed and the teenager was offered a tissue.

"I'm OK, we can keep going," she said.

'NEVER DOUBTED'

Former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko said Sunday she never doubted she could win another major as she reached her first Grand Slam quarter-final since 2018.

The 2017 Roland Garros winner last reached the last eight of a Slam at Wimbledon four and a half years ago and has been clawing her way back into the elite after dropping outside the top 40 in 2019.

Now she faces current Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina for a place in the semi-finals.

Asked by reporters if she had ever thought a second Grand Slam title was beyond her, the Latvian world number 17 said: "I honestly haven't really doubted it."

She added: "I always knew and believed in my game. If I play well, I can beat almost anyone."

The 25-year-old Ostapenko was just 19 when her life was changed by winning the French Open and she said it took a long time to adjust after being thrust into the spotlight.

"Everybody expected you almost to win every single tournament, which is crazy, because you are still a human and you cannot feel great every day," she said of the expectation placed on her young shoulders.

"I needed some time to get used to it. Of course, a lot of attention from everywhere outside the court, like photo shoots and all those kind of things."

"You become more popular in your country. Everybody is watching you. Of course it's great, but I needed some time to get used to it."

"I'm just more hungry now to win another Grand Slam and just to play well, to be back in the top 10 and just to play consistent."



Korda claims another upset at Aus Open

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Giantkiller Sebastian Korda said that learning from his mistakes helped him surge into a maiden Grand Slam quarter-final on Sunday at the Australian Open.

The American 29th seed came through a rollercoaster 10-point deciding tiebreak to beat 10th seed Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (10/7) on Rod Laver Arena.

He faces 18th-seeded Karen Khachanov next after the Russian crushed Yoshihito Nishioka 6-0, 6-0, 7-6 (7/4), incredibly winning the first 14 games before the Japanese player woke up.

Korda, whose father Petr won the title in 1998, produced one of the performances of his career to upset two-time Australian Open finalist Daniil Medvedev in the third round.

After more heroics against Poland's Hurkacz, Korda said his displays were down to learning from previous blockbuster matches he had lost, including to Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"I think I'm really good at just kind of moving forward, learning from my mistakes, what I've done in the past, then using them in matches like this," he said.

"I've had a tough match with Rafa, serving for it a

couple times. Match point with Djokovic. I think that really helped me, especially in the last match (in Melbourne) with Medvedev.

"Then today as well. I think all those little moments that I've gone through, kind of learning from them, staying patient, staying positive, going through the process. I think have really helped me going forward."

Elsewhere, Jiri Lehecka stunned Felix Auger-Aliassime to surge into the quarter-finals in only his fifth Grand Slam appearance as yet another seed fell.

The 21-year-old Czech was knocked out in the first round at the four majors last year but was too hot for the sixth-seeded Canadian on Margaret Court Arena, winning 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3).

It was his first defeat ever of a top-10 player and built on his victories over ATP Masters 1000 champions Borna Coric and Cameron Norrie in earlier rounds.

"Honestly, it feels amazing," said Lehecka, who has climbed 70 places in the rankings over the past year to 71.

"It's tough to find the words because what I've been through in the last year and now coming back to Australia.



Kunlavut, An Seyoung emerge champions at India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn and Korea's An Seyoung emerged champions at the India Open after stunning wins over two-time world champions Viktor Axelsen and Akane Yamaguchi in their men's and women's singles finals, respectively, here on Sunday.

Kunlavut beat Olympic champion Axelsen of Denmark 22-20, 10-21, 21-12 in 64 minutes to claim his maiden Super 750 tournament title, while An saw off world No. 1 Yamaguchi 15-21, 21-16, 21-12 in the women's singles summit showdown.

World No. 11 Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang came out as the winners in men's doubles after seeing off star Malaysian third seeds Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik 14-21,

21-19, 21-18 in the final for their second World Tour title following the triumph at Japan Open last year.

The other two doubles matches didn't happen following two withdrawals, both featuring Chinese pairs, on the final day of the tournament due to ill health.

Wang Yi Lyu, who was due to play the mixed doubles final with Huang Dong Ping, and Chen Qing Chen, who was to feature in the women's doubles final with Jia Yi Fan, reported sick. They were suffering from diarrhoea and withdrew from their respective matches.

Japan's Yuta Watanabe and Arisa Higashino won the mixed doubles title, while Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida, also from Japan, claimed the women's doubles crown.

Sania loses in women's doubles, Jeevan-Balaji duo also ousted

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Sania Mirza's last women's doubles Grand Slam match ended in defeat as she went down 4-6, 6-4, 2-6 in the second round of the Australian Open here on Sunday.

Mirza and her Kazakh partner Anna Danilina, seeded eighth, lost to Belgium's Alison Van Uytvanck and Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina in a clash lasting little over two hours.

The Indian men's doubles

pair of N Sriram Balaji and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan's run in the competition was also halted by the French duo of Jeremy Chardy and Fabrice Martin in the second round.

Balaji and Nedunchezhiyan, who came into the tournament as an alternate team, were handed a 4-6, 4-6 defeat, ending India's challenge in the men's doubles event.

A set down and trailing 0-3 in the second, Mirza and



Pep could walk if Man City stars don't heed wake-up call

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Pep Guardiola has hinted his glorious reign as Manchester City manager could be cut short if his players do not respond to his rallying cry to halt a slip in standards.

Guardiola called out his stars for lacking the hunger and desire to reel in Arsenal at the top of the Premier League despite coming from 2-0 down to beat Tottenham 4-2 on Thursday.

The Catalan coach has overseen the most successful spell in the club's history by winning four league titles in the past five seasons.

Guardiola even extended his contract at the Etihad to 2025



in November, but admitted he has personal experience of the slacking off that comes with success as a player.

"I won four La Ligas in a row when I was a football player," said the former Barcelona midfielder.

"In the fifth (season) I was not the same, in the sixth I was not the same. I was not starving enough. I thought 'How good I am' and Madrid beat me the fifth

and the sixth.

"I understand (the challenge) but I am here to do it. The chairman knows that. I want to be here, otherwise I don't sign."

"But if I lose the team or I lose something I cannot be here. Here people don't wait."

Arsenal hold a five-point lead over Guardiola's men and have a game in hand.

However, City could cut the gap at the top to two points with victory over Wolves on Sunday before Arsenal host Manchester United at the Emirates.

City and Arsenal also still have to face each other three times this season, the first of which comes in the FA Cup fourth round on Friday.



WFI's emergency general council meeting in Ayodhya called off

PTI ■ AYODHYA

The Wrestling Federation of India's (WFI) emergency general council meeting, scheduled here for Sunday, was called off after the Sports Ministry directed it to suspend all ongoing activities owing to the various allegations against the sports body and its president.

The ministry Saturday said it has asked the WFI to suspend "all ongoing activities with immediate effect", including the Ranking Tournament in Gonda, UP, the federation president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's stronghold.

Sharan has been accused of sexually harassing women wrestlers and working like a dictator by some of the country's top wrestlers, including Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang

Punia, Sakshi Malik and Ravi Dahiya.

The ministry on Saturday also suspended WFI's assistant secretary Vinod Tomar, a fallout of the grapplers' allegations of sexual harassment and corruption against the sports body's chief.

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

On Friday, Sharan's son Prateek had said that his father would issue a statement on the allegations against him after the sports body's meeting.

While the ministry has directed Sharan to stay away from the day-to-day affairs of the WFI, he was present during the wrestling event in Nandini Nagar on Saturday. Also on Friday, Sports

Minister Anurag Thakur had announced the formation of an oversight committee to probe the charges levelled by the top wrestlers against Sharan and his body.

The ministry is expected to announce the names of its oversight committee members on Sunday.

In a press release on Saturday, 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".

Griezmann shines in Atletico romp

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid produced one of their best performances of the season to defeat Real Valladolid 3-0 on Saturday, with Memphis Depay making his debut.

Real Sociedad, third, continued their fine form with a 2-0 win at Rayo Vallecano, while struggling Sevilla snatched a 1-0 win over Cadiz with a late Ivan Rakitic penalty.

Atletico's new Dutch forward Depay, signed from Barcelona on Friday, came off the bench in the second half but by then Antoine Griezmann's virtuoso display had the hosts in full control at



the Metropolitan.

The French forward produced a sublime assist for Alvaro Morata to open the scoring and then struck the second himself.

Mario Hermoso netted the third from the rebound after his header from Griezmann's free-kick was parried back into his path.

Those three goals in an 11-minute spell in the first half wrapped up the points for fourth-placed Atletico.

Diego Simeone's team have endured a tough season both in the league and also in Europe, where they were eliminated, but earned a second win in seven league games to get

heading back in the right direction.

On Thursday they face rivals Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey quarter-finals, important both as a derby but also their last realistic chance of silverware this season.

"I'm very happy, very pleased with the team's performance," Griezmann told DAZN.

"We have been doing well since the World Cup, playing with intensity, hard work, having chances up front, but we lacked a goal."

"That was largely my fault, because I was having chances but couldn't get it in. This goal will help me a lot mentally to get scoring again."

HEARTBREAK IN HOCKEY

India out of Men's World Cup after losing crossover match against New Zealand in sudden death

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Hosts India made a shock exit from the FIH Men's World Cup after losing to New Zealand in sudden death in their must-win crossover match in front of a relentlessly cheering 15000 home crowd here on Sunday.

The loss ended India's hopes of a World Cup medal after 48 years.

Despite vociferous support from the jampacked Kalinga Stadium crowd, India allowed New Zealand to come back from two-goal deficit in the regulation time as the match ended at 3-3 in the regulation time.

In the penalty shootout, the scores were also tied after the first five set of strikes, and the match was finally decided via sudden death.

Captain Harmanpreet Singh had the golden chance to take India to victory in sudden death but he failed to do that as he missed the target.

Veteran goalkeeper PR Sreejesh made two saves in the shootout to rescue India after they were 2-3 down. He saved another one during the sudden death and got himself injured and Krishan Pathak replaced him in the next three rounds of strikes. Finally, Shamsher Singh missed and Sam Lane scored to hand New Zealand the win.

New Zealand will now face defending champions Belgium, who topped Pool B, in the quarter-finals here on Tuesday.



In the penalty shootout, the scores were also tied after the first five set of strikes, and the match was finally decided via sudden death.

In the regulation time, India earned as many as 11 penalty corners and converted two of them while New Zealand got just two PCs.

Yet again, it was a case of ample goal-scoring opportunities for India but the forwards lacked finishing skills.

India were on the offensive as soon as the match began with Mandeep Singh, who started despite taking a hit on his knee during training on Saturday, making a fine run into the New Zealand circle.

But India doubled the lead soon with Sukhjeet Singh scoring in the 24th minute, following India's fourth penalty corner.

Harmanpreet's drag-flick was palmed away by the New Zealand goalkeeper but it went up high and Sukhjeet was at the right place at the right time to volley it in.

New Zealand pulled one

back a minute before half time as Sam Lane deflected a Child's low cross from the left into the Indian goal.

India were 2-1 up at the half time.

New Zealand pressed for an equaliser in the third quarter and they got into the Indian 'D' on a few occasions but the home side swelled its lead by two goal margin through a penalty corner conversion in the 41st minute.

India earned three penalty corner in the third quarters, and scored from the third PC and seventh overall with Varun Kumar sounding the board cleanly.

Three minutes later, New Zealand again cut the deficit to just one goal with Kane Russell converting a penalty corner.

In the last quarter, New Zealand made a spirited fight-back and restored parity in the 50th minute following their second penalty corner of the match as Sean Findlay deflected in a Hayden Phillips strike.

Goalkeeper Krishan Pathak saved India from disaster as he palmed away a high shot from Sam Hiha in the 51st minute.

In the earlier crossover match of the day, Spain beat Malaysia 4-3 in penalty shootout to qualify for the quarterfinals after the two sides were locked 2-2 in the regulation time.

Spain will face title contenders and Pool A toppers Australia in the last eight stage on Tuesday.

Shami advises Umran: If you work on line and length you can rule the world

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Veteran Indian pacer Mohammed Shami feels young Umran Malik, with his raw pace, has a bright future ahead and the youngster "can rule the world" if he works on his line and length.

The Jammu and Kashmir speedster has impressed with his express pace, bowling at 150 clicks consistently but has struggled with accuracy.

"There's only one piece of advice I want to give. I don't think it's easy to play against the pace that you have. Just that we need to work a little on line and length. If we can get a command over it, we can rule the world.

"You have a lot of power, future is bright. Best wishes for you, hope you do well," Shami said during a chat with Umran, which has been posted by bcci.Tv.

Shami and Mohammed Siraj generated considerable seam movement to run through the New Zealand's top-order as the hosts cantered to an eight-wicket win in the second ODI to seal the three-match series here on Saturday.

When Umran asked how he remains so calm and happy in every match, Shami said "When you are playing for the country, you shouldn't take pressure on yourself. You should keep trust-



Umran has impressed with his express pace consistently but has struggled with accuracy

ing your skills. You tend to get carried away when under pressure.

"But, when you keep your cool and keep trusting your skills, you have better opportunity to execute your plans. When you are doing well, then the importance of focussing is more.

"Keep your smile on, it's white-ball cricket, anybody can get hit. But keep believing in your skill and keep an eye on the pitch and bowl accordingly," he added.

AFP ■ MANCHESTER (UK)

Erling Haaland's fourth hat-trick in 19 Premier League appearances hauled Manchester City to within two points of leaders Arsenal with a 3-0 win over Wolves on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola got the reaction he was hoping for from the English champions after questioning their hunger to retain the title after Thursday's 4-2 win over Tottenham.

The hosts had to come from 2-0 down in a dramatic second half against Spurs, but there was little mystery over the destination of the three points once Haaland had broken Wolves' resistance five minutes before half-time.

Haaland's scoring rate has slowed marginally in recent weeks, but his header from Kevin De Bruyne's cross moved him level with the 23 league goals that saw Mohamed Salah and Son Heung-min share the Golden Boot with last season.

The 22-year-old took his tally to 30 goals in all competitions from the penalty spot early in the second half after Ilkay Gundogan had been upended by Ruben Neves.

Wolves then gifted Haaland his hat-trick just four minutes later as goalkeeper



Jose Sa presented the ball to Riyad Mahrez, who unselfishly squared for his teammate to roll into an unguarded net.

Guardiola quickly took the chance to give his star striker a rest as Haaland was replaced on the hour mark by Julian Alvarez to Wolves' relief.

City should still have

inflicted further punishment on Julen Lopetegui's men.

Mahrez just failed to hold his run as he was flagged off-side after dinking in De Bruyne's through ball before Gundogan headed a glorious chance over.

But three goals were more than enough for the three

points to put pressure on Arsenal ahead of their clash at home to Manchester United later on Sunday.

Just a second league defeat since Lopetegui took charge leaves Wolves still outside the relegation zone only on goal difference.

Leeds edged one point

clear of the bottom three, but remain without a league win since November after a 0-0 draw at home to Brentford.

David Raya denied the in-form Wilfried Gnonto with the best save of the game to salvage the Bees a point that moves them above Liverpool into eighth.

Indian women start favourites against West Indies

PTI ■ EAST LONDON

Hoping for its seniors to return to the playing XI, the Indian team will look to continue the winning run, when it takes on the West Indies in the Women's T20 Tri-Series match here on Monday.

The Indians, without skipper Harmanpreet Kaur in the win over hosts South Africa, gave a good account of themselves in their opener.

The captain missed the tie against South Africa owing to illness and it remains to be seen if she returns for the match against the West Indies, who are coming off a big loss against the home side.

India's playing XI also didn't feature the returning Shikha Pandey, Renuka Singh and Pooja Vastrakar in their first game.

Handed the India cap by



stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana, debutant Amanjot Kaur made her first outing a memorable one with a fine performance.

Reeling at 69 for five at one stage, India went on to make a fighting 147 for six after Amanjot's 30-ball 41 while batting at number seven.

Fitting, she was named the Player of the Match in a 27-run victory.

Irrespective of whether the seniors return or not against the West Indies, a bit of focus will surely be on the 21-year-old Amanjot here on Monday, when the Women in Blue will look to consolidate their position in the tournament.

"It's an unreal feeling. I had never thought my first match for India would go this way. This is my first press conference. And to be the Player of the Match - that was even more unexpected," Amanjot said after the opening match here.

The tri-series is significant as it is the last tournament before the Women's T20 World Cup which South Africa is hosting next month. The tri-series is slated to end on February 2.

Even though some seniors have taken ill and teen sensations Shafali Verma and Richa Gosh are busy with their commitments in the U-19 World Cup, India can call on the services of their ever-reliable senior all-rounder, Deepti Sharma.

Deepti was at her best against the South Africans, scoring a 23-ball 33 and taking 3/30 in a brilliant all-round display. She will look for an encore in the upcoming match.

As far as the West Indies are concerned, they will need to improve in all departments if they are challenge the Indians.

Gardner faults Australia Day match vs Pakistan

AP ■ SYDNEY

An indigenous Australian member of the Australian national women's cricket team has condemned a decision to play a T20I against Pakistan on Australia's national day.

The holiday on January 26 commemorates the arrival in 1788 of the "first fleet" which brought first white settlers to Australia.

But some indigenous Australians commemorate the day as Invasion Day or Colonization Day because the arrivals set in motion the seizure of lands and the diminution of the indigenous Australian culture.

Ashleigh Gardner who is the second indigenous Australian woman to play test cricket for Australia said January 26 is a "day of hurt and a day of mourning" for her people. In a tweet Gardner said playing a



match on the day "certainly doesn't sit well with me as an individual but also all the people I'm representing.

"For those who don't have a good understanding of what that day means it was the beginning of genocide, massacres and dispossession," she said. "When I take the field for this game I will certainly be reflect-

ing and thinking about all of my ancestors and peoples' lives who changed from this day."

Cricket Australia has yet to confirm details of the match but the Australian Associated Press reported the Australian players will likely perform a barefoot ceremony before the match and wear an indigenous-themed uniform.