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NIA tightens noose on Khalistanis

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In a multi-State clampdown against Khalistanis and the terrorists-gangsters-drug smugglers syndicate, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday conducted synchronised raids in several places and detained a number of suspects linked to Canada-based "listed terrorist" Arsh Dalla and his cohorts, including dreaded gangsters. Dalla is operating his cartel through a network of gangsters in India.

A total of 53 locations were raided during the day-long operation, which started early on Wednesday. State Police forces provided the necessary support and assistance in the raids.

The search operation spanned the six States of Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and the Union Territory of Chandigarh.

During the raids, the NIA seized pistols, ammunition, large numbers of digital devices and incriminating materials.

Besides Arsh Dalla, others covered in the NIA raids are notorious gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi, Sukha Duneke, Harry Maur, Narender alias Lali, Kala Jatheri and Deepak Tinu among others.

The searches follow a recent intelligence input against gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, a criminal mastermind with a notorious track record, who has

been linked to several high-profile crimes, including the murder of renowned Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala and threats issued against Bollywood actors Salman Khan, officials said.

Recent intelligence inputs suggest an alarming development in Bishnoi's illicit activities suggesting he has established a direct line of communication with Nasir Khan, an operative of Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

"The connection suggests that Bishnoi and his gang might be diversifying their criminal portfolio by procuring weapons with the help of Pakistan Intelligence Operatives (PIOs) and making use of these weapons for furthering gangster activities in the region," reads the Intelligence report.

Bishnoi's gang is notorious for involvement in extortion and killings but the recent revelation of links with Pakistan-based entities suggests a "strategic shift in the gang's operational focus."

"The gang's involvement in arms smuggling represents a significant escalation in their criminal activities and poses a considerable risk to the nation's security. The potential backing by Pakistan ISI operatives also indicates a concerning overlap between organised crimes and geopolitical adversaries, enhancing the threat profile of Bishnoi's operations," the report warned.

The latest round of search-



Police personnel outside a residential premises during a raid by National Investigation Agency in Dehradun on Wednesday PTI

es were the seventh in the series of such crackdowns launched by NIA following the registration of five cases since August 2022, including the two new cases registered against Organised Criminal Gangs in July 2023. The cases relate to conspiracies of targeted killings, terror funding of pro-Khalistan outfits and extortion by the gangsters, many of whom are lodged in various jails or are operating from various foreign countries, including Canada, Pakistan, Malaysia, Portugal and Australia and the United States among others, officials said.

"The focus of today's raids, aimed at dismantling the terror-gangster-drug smuggler nexus, was on weapon suppliers, financiers and logistics providers associated with various hardcore gangs and their operatives. These gangs are working with drug smugglers and terrorists based out of other countries, including Pakistan, the UAE, Canada, Portugal, etc," the NIA said in a statement.

NIA investigations so far have revealed that the conspiracies under investigation were being hatched in jails of different States and were

being executed by an organised network of operatives based abroad. Notable among such conspiracies were the sensational killing of Maharashtra builder Sanjay Biyani, mining trader Mehal Singh and international Kabaddi player Sandeep Nangal Ambia in Punjab last year.

Many of the criminals and gangsters who were earlier leading gangs in India have fled abroad in recent years and are now pursuing their terror and violence related activities from there, the NIA probe has unraveled.

Extrajudicial killing is not India's policy: Jaishankar

PTI ■ NEW YORK

In the wake of Canada's allegations about India's "potential" involvement in the killing of a Khalistani separatist on its soil, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that New Delhi conveyed to Ottawa that it is not the Government of India's policy and it is open to looking at "specific" and "relevant" information in the case.

Jaishankar made the comments in a conversation at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on Tuesday after addressing the UN General Assembly session.

"Yes, I do have a comment. I will share with you very frankly what we told the Canadians," Jaishankar said when asked if he had any comment on recent allegations by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that "agents" of the Government of India are linked to the killing of Khalistani extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil on June 18.

"One, we told the Canadians that this is not the Government of India's policy," Jaishankar said.

"Two, we told the

Canadians saying that look, if you have something specific, if you have something relevant, let us know. We are open to looking at it," Jaishankar said while responding to a question from former US Ambassador to India and CFR Distinguished Fellow Kenneth Juster, in his first public comments on the issue.

Jaishankar asserted that one must also understand the context because the "picture is not complete" without the context of it.

"You also have to appreciate that in the last few years, Canada actually has seen a lot of organised crime relating to the secessionist forces, organised crime, violence, extremism. They're all very, very deeply mixed up," he said.

"We have actually been badgering the Canadians, we have given them a lot of information about organised crime leadership, which operates out of Canada. There are a large number of extradition requests. There are terrorist leaders who have been identified," he said, adding that one has to understand that there is an "environment out there," he said.

"That is important in a way

to factor in if you have to understand what is going on out there. And our concern is that it is really been very permissive because of political reasons. So, we have a situation where actually our diplomats are threatened, our consulates have been attacked and often comments are made about 'there is interference in our politics'. And, a lot of this is often justified as saying, well, that is how democracies work," Jaishankar said.

When asked by Juster whether the Government of India will cooperate with Canada if there are specific pieces of evidence provided to it, Jaishankar said, "If somebody gives me something specific, it doesn't have to be restricted to Canada, but if there is any incident which is an issue and somebody gives me something specific, as a government I would look at it. Of course, I would look at it."

When asked about reports that intelligence about the killing was shared amongst the Five Eyes, Jaishankar said, "I'm not part of the Five Eyes. I'm certainly not part of the FBI. You are asking the wrong person."

Cracks in INDIA Bloc

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

A "difference of opinion" has surfaced in the Opposition INDIA bloc over the venue for its fourth meeting. The Congress is insistent that the meeting should take place in a city within the poll-bound States of Madhya Pradesh or Chhattisgarh.

However, INDIA bloc parties like the Samajwadi Party, the JD(U), the NCP, and others are advocating for the meeting to be held in Delhi, sources said.

According to sources, the Samajwadi Party has cited their reasons for the choice of venue, arguing that it should not create an impression that the Congress, as the grand old party, is attempting to assume an elder brother role in the Opposition alliance.

The Congress sources have refuted this argument, emphasising that any victory by a member of the coalition will undoubtedly bolster and contribute to the success of the INDIA bloc.

The Opposition bloc has so far conducted three meetings with the first at Patna, coordinated by senior JD(U) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, followed by Bengaluru where the Congress wrested power from the BJP this year,

and then at Mumbai under arrangements by the MVA alliance partners — the Congress, the NCP and the Shiv Sena.

During the alliance's meeting in Mumbai, there was a general consensus that the forthcoming gathering of the INDIA bloc should take place in Bhopal, coinciding with the inaugural joint public rally featuring leaders from various Opposition parties.

In the first coordination meeting of the INDIA bloc, the discussion revolved around organising the third meeting in the national Capital, with coordination led by AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

However, soon after the coordination committee meeting at NCP leader Sharad Pawar's residence in Delhi where it was announced that a joint rally will be held at Bhopal, it stood cancelled at the backdrop of massive controversy over the Sanatan Dharma row fuelled by its alliance partner DMK leaders.

"The modalities and date of the meeting are yet to be finalised, however, it is likely that it can be held sometime in the first fortnight of October. Delhi was also considered among the venues in the last meeting but Bhopal remains the preferred one for many

leaders," said a top Congress source.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Congress emerged victorious in the previous Assembly elections and held the Government for a year and a half.

However, it faced a setback when a faction of its party MLAs defected to the BJP, resulting in the formation of a new Government. The State is set to hold elections later this year, alongside neighbouring Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, both of which currently have Congress-led Governments.

Just as the Samajwadi Party and the JD(U) expressed their dissatisfaction with the media boycott call by the INDIA bloc, these same parties are now opposing the Congress' initiative to host the fourth meeting in the Lake City of Madhya Pradesh. The alliance members believe that the grand old party has a stronger electoral advantage in the Assembly polls there.

"The Congress attitude is still the elder brother type. They did in the media boycott call and we had to rally behind it," a JD(U) leader told *The Pioneer* over phone from Patna.

Already Nitish seems to be increasingly out of sync with the RJD on its "backward versus forward" politics.

See Page 4: INDIA Bloc in tatters in Bengal

Shooters do India proud

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Young star Sift Kaur Samra stole the show with a gold medal in the women's 50m rifle 3 position event as Indian shooters set the range ablaze by securing as many as seven medals at the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

In the same event, Ashi Chouksey, who was in contention for a silver, settled for bronze with a score of 451.9, while Esha Singh claimed silver in the women's 25m pistol event with a total of 34.

On her way to silver, Esha upstaged her senior Manu Bhaker who finished a disappointing fifth after topping the qualification.

Samra produced some excellent shooting to claim the yellow metal with a world and games record score of 469.6. She also became the first Indian shooter to win gold in rifle 3 position.

Earlier, the triumvirate of Bhaker, Esha and Rhythm Sangwan fired in tandem to shoot the gold medal in the women's 25m pistol team event, as Indian shooters dominated proceedings at the Hangzhou Shooting Range Hall.

In the day's last shooting final, Anant Jeet Singh Naruka



Shooter Sift Kaur Samra poses for photos with her gold medal during the presentation ceremony of the women's 50m rifle 3 positions event at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou in China on Wednesday PTI

claimed the silver medal in men's skeet event, adding to the team bronze he won alongside Angad Vir Singh Bajwa and Gurjoat Khangura.

Naruka finished his last round with 10/10 to end his event with an impressive 58/60

but it was still not good enough for gold as Kuwait's Abdullah Alrashidi equalled the world record with a perfect 60/60 to finish on top of the podium.

Nasser Al-Attiya of Qatar bagged the bronze with 46. Manu, Esha and Rhythm

totalled 1759 to finish on top of the podium and help the country clinch its fourth gold medal in the ongoing sporting extravaganza. This was the second gold medal for India in shooting in these Games.

Meanwhile, the Indian



team of Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, Gurjoat Khangura and Anant Jeet Singh Naruka bagged the team bronze medal in the men's skeet event.

The trio shot a total of 355 to settle for the third position. The hosts China won the gold medal while Qatar claimed the silver.

The Indian women's team, however, crashed out of the skeet event by finishing in the fourth position behind Kazakhstan, China and Thailand.

In the women's 3P event, host nation China's Qiongyue Zhang crashed what could have been an India one-two, by winning the silver with a score of 462.3.

Before her triumph in the final, Samra broke the Asian Games record in qualification with a total score of 594 (out of 600) along with China's Xia Siyu, who finished on top by virtue of higher inner 10 scores (closer to the centre of the target.)

Canada's weird reasons on India travel advisory

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

During Justin Trudeau's tenure, Canada has taken a diplomatic disagreement with India to an unprecedented level. The Canadian Government has provided peculiar explanations to its citizens, urging them to exercise caution when visiting India.

The reasons — strange and exaggerated — include extreme weather conditions, frequent train accidents, forced marriages, incidents of rape and sexual assaults in yoga centres and ashrams, as well as the overall poor road conditions across the country.

This travel demarche has been issued at a time when India and Canada find themselves entangled in a diplomat-

ic dispute over the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

"Forced marriage affecting foreigners occurs, sometimes without the affected person's prior knowledge or consent and some Canadians have been forced into marital arrangements and have been detained against their will," reads the advisory.

"They have been subjected to threats, intimidation and violence by family members," claimed the advisory uploaded on Canada's official website travel.gc.ca.

Highlighting women's safety issue, it warned that reports of rape and assault against foreign women have increased. "You should be particularly vigilant in Delhi, Goa, and at

yoga centres, ashrams and other places of spiritual retreats. If you are travelling to India to meet someone you have other- wise only met online, you may be the victim of a scam," it warned.

"Be alert to attempts at fraud by persons who profess friendship or romantic interest over the internet," it said.

"Crimes committed against women frequently occur in India. Foreign women are often the target of unwanted attention. Staring, verbal abuse, groping, and other forms of sexual harassment can occur anywhere, including in tourist sites and areas. Attackers sometimes act in a group," it said, adding, credit card and ATM frauds also occur.

According to the advisory,

India is prone to extreme weather events such as avalanches, cyclones, dust storms, earthquakes, floods, landslides and extreme temperatures that can occur in both spring and summer.

Advising people to limit their activities outdoors, the advisory said smoke haze and other types of air pollution can be extremely hazardous in urban areas and cities like Delhi.

"It is typically at its worst in winter. In rural areas, air quality can be affected by agricultural burning. Dust storms also occur across northern India," it said.

The advisory further said demonstrations/mass gatherings, general strikes, "bandh" or "hartal," take place frequently.

"Even peaceful demonstrations can turn violent at any time. They can also lead to disruptions to traffic and public transportation. Stampedes have occurred during mass gatherings, including religious ceremonies, and resulted in deaths and injuries. Local authorities may impose curfews and other restrictions at short notice. Avoid areas where demonstrations and large gatherings are taking place," it advised.

The advisory also cautioned that road conditions and road safety are poor throughout the country. Most roads, including major highways, are poorly maintained.

"There is severe traffic congestion. Driving conditions may be hazardous during the rainy season, and some roads

can become impassable. India has an extensive passenger train system. Rail accidents are common, mostly due to poor maintenance. Thefts are frequent on certain train lines," it said.

The advisory warns people against travelling to States like Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home State, Punjab and Rajasthan, which share borders with Pakistan, due to presence of "landmines".

The advisory said petty crime, such as pick-pocketing and purse snatching, is common.

"Criminals may target foreigners, especially in major cities and tourist areas. Petty crime frequently occurs on public transportation and overnight trains, it said.

However, serious crime against foreigners is less frequent, but incidents do occur, it cautioned.

The Canadian Government advisory also warned that tourist areas and airports are of particular concern where scammers particularly target foreigners.

"Scams involving the exportation of jewels, gemstones, carpets, and other items have occurred. Taxi drivers may approach you, offering money to export such items," it said.

Amid the diplomatic row over the killing of Nijjar, Canada has further updated its travel advisory for its citizens in India to "remain vigilant and exercise caution".

Tensions flared between

the two countries after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's explosive allegations of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani extremist Nijjar, 45, on his country's soil on June 18 in British Columbia. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

In a riposte, India dubbed the allegations as "absurd" and "motivated" and expelled a senior Canadian diplomat in a tit-for-tat move to Ottawa's expulsion of an Indian official over the case.

New Delhi also announced temporarily suspending issuance of visas to Canadian citizens in view of "security threats" faced by its High Commission and consulates in Canada.

Officials unite to guarantee orderly Eid Milad Un Nabi celebration, ban on DJ sets

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The city police on Wednesday beefed up security in view of Eid Milad-un-Nabi, the birth anniversary of Prophet Mohammad, which will be celebrated in the city tomorrow. Police officials informed that over 600 police personnel have been deployed in view of the celebration. Entry of heavy vehicles to the city would be prohibited from 6 am till 11 pm.

In a concerted effort to ensure the peaceful conduct of the upcoming Eid Milad Un Nabi procession, Senior Superintendent of Police, Kaushal Kishore, and Deputy

Development Commissioner, Manish Kumar, held a crucial meeting with representatives of the Pesh-e-Imam and Mosque President/Secretary.

The gathering saw the presence of key administrative and law enforcement figures, including SDM Dhalbhum Piyush Sinha, ASP City Sumit Agarwal, DCLR Ravindra Gagrai, SDM Ghatshila Satyaveer Rajak, DTO Dhananjay, alongside officials from municipal bodies and Deputy Superintendent of Police, station-in-charges.

During the meeting, Senior Superintendent of Police Kaushal Kishore and Deputy Development Commissioner



Manish Kumar provided essential guidance to the Pesh-e-Imam and Mosque officials, emphasizing the

importance of a peaceful procession and robust law and order maintenance. It was mutually agreed that the pro-

cession would not include DJ sets, trailers, or other heavy vehicles, a decision welcomed by the administration.

Additionally, concerns related to civic amenities, including water logging, cleanliness, and road repairs, were raised during the meeting. The administration assured prompt action on these issues. To ensure security, the city has been divided into seven zones, and magistrates and police officers have been deputed accordingly. Senior Superintendent of Police Kaushal Kishore underscored the significance of cooperation from peace committee members, procession representatives, and volunteers in ensuring the timely and peaceful progression of the event. He encouraged residents to report any

law and order concerns promptly to the relevant authorities, emphasizing the importance of responsible social media usage. Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar pledged that the administration would address all suggestions and concerns related to the procession's conduct and cleanliness. He urged residents to maintain coordination and provide necessary cooperation to ensure a harmonious and peaceful celebration. A medical team and ambulance will be stationed along the procession route, and residents were urged not to share unconfirmed information on social media to pre-

vent the spread of rumors.

SDM Dhalbhum Piyush Sinha emphasized that the procession must adhere to the prescribed route, with no diversions allowed. The defined route will pass through various key points in the city, and surveillance will be maintained through CCTV, videography, and drone cameras. Stringent measures will be in place to monitor biker gangs and prevent disruptions to law and order. The district administration is committed to taking all necessary steps, including barricading and drop gate installations, to ensure the safety and success of the event.

RPF Garhwa road rescues fallen train passenger from river

PNS : DALTONGANJ

A 22 year old youth identified as Manoj Karmali of Mahuatarn under Bokaro district was lifted 18 meter high from the bed of the river Koyel by a team of 3 RPF personnel monitored by the inspector incharge RPF Garhwa road railway station Banarasee Yadav on September 27. Manoj had slipped into the river Koyel from a general coach of Jammu Tawai Tata Sambalpur express train where he was standing at the door of the general coach probably due to his dozing off on September 27 morning.

The incident occurred at railway bridge 2 on the river Koyel. Manoj fell at the foun-



RPF inspector incharge Banarasee Yadav (in chair) with the rescued Manoj at the Garhwa road RPF post. Photo by PNS

tion of pillar 8 of this railway bridge. He was all surrounded by water in the river.

RPF Inspector incharge Banarasee Yadav said, "At 8.43 am on September 27 railway traffic inspector Vijay Prasad informed the RPF of a man lying at the foundation of pillar 8 of the railway bridge number 2 amidst water all around." "We informed the Rehla police to help us in rescuing this man. When we saw precious time was passing and Rehla police were nowhere around, three of us took a strong and long rope, dropped it to this man and with 'desi jugaad' lifted this man Manoj up on the bridge safely" added Yadav.

Manoj was fit and conscious. He was rushed to the

community health centre at Bishrampur where he was treated. Manoj was advised to be admitted there but he declined saying he is fine and fit said the RPF inspector incharge Yadav.

Yadav said "Manoj and his friend Vijay had boarded the Jammu Tawai Tata Sambalpur express train at old Delhi station on September 26. Both were in the general coach."

"On September 27 morning his friend was on his seat while Manoj was at the door of this express train. Here he said he had a nap of sleep and he fell 18 meters down at the foundation of pillar 8 of this railway bridge 2 on the river Koyel. He cried for help but in vain." said Yadav.

DVC Bokaro Thermal conducts cleanliness drive

SURESH NIKHAR : BERMO

Here on Wednesday, a cleanliness campaign was conducted by the Human Resources Department in the new administrative building at DVC, Bokaro Thermal under "Swachhata Hi Seva Pakhwada and Cleanliness Day 2023".

BG Holkar, Deputy General Manager (Admn.) and other officers and employees themselves cleaned the building premises with brooms.

The Deputy General Manager has said that we have to keep our office and surrounding areas clean like our home. While assistant manager SAA Ashraf said that this cleanliness program will continue till October 2, under which programs have been organized at different places.

On this occasion, Vigilance Officer, Tariq Saeed, Sunil Kumar of Human Resources Department, Rohit Kumar, Anju Bopai, SK Ojha, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Rajdev Singh, Bhola Mahato, Ravi Chandra Kumar, PK Bala, Atun Mandal and Shahid Ikram, etc. were present on the occasion.

Urgent Social Awareness Programme on Dengue

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a proactive move to address the rising concerns surrounding Dengue fever, a Social Awareness Program on Dengue was conducted at Motilal Nehru Public School. The program, aimed at students from Class IX to XII, was organized by the Health Department of Tata Steel UISL (erstwhile Jusco).

The students were provided with vital information on preventive measures crucial to combat the ongoing Dengue outbreak in the city. It was emphasized that, despite the dedicated efforts of medical professionals, Dengue cases are expected to persist over the next month.

During the program, the Jusco Health officer presented survey reports indicating that while Dengue cases had seen a decrease in recent years, the tropical disease has resurged in India, reaching a



five-year high. Students were advised to observe a "dry day" once a week, during which they should inspect their homes for stagnant water, as Dengue larvae tend to thrive between July and October.

Key points highlighted during the session stressed that proper administration of oral fluids can cure up to 70% of Dengue fever cases. The Health Department underscored, "The need of the hour is to raise awareness about prevention, treatment options, and dispel common myths about the disease.

Instead of panicking and spreading fear, we must all collaborate to address the issue and prevent as many cases as possible."

This initiative by Motilal Nehru Public School, in collaboration with Tata Steel UISL, reflects the commitment to public health and the importance of educating the younger generation about the preventive measures and facts surrounding Dengue. As the city grapples with the Dengue menace, such efforts are integral in safeguarding the health and well-being of the community.

Police conduct mock drill ahead of Eid

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

To maintain law and order in the district, a mock drill was conducted in the police lines on Wednesday. In this various types of exercises were conducted by police officers and soldiers to deal with the unruly crowd and anti-social elements. SP Haris Bin Zaman said that to maintain law and order of the district police, a mock drill was conducted in the police line on Tuesday afternoon in which various types of exercises were conducted by the police personnel to deal with the unruly crowd and anti-social elements.

Police spokesperson Pradeep Nain said that district police officials and soldiers were trained to deal with adverse situations by forming prevention teams to maintain law and order and deal with anti-social elements and hooligans. In



this, a special mock drill was conducted for all the contingents of the police force. They were given information about various types of performances to deal with unruly crowds and anti-social elements. The tear gas team also participated in the said mock drill, who were given special information about dropping tear gas shells and using Vajra vehicles and water

cannon vans.

SP Haris Bin Zaman made the soldiers practice their preparedness to deal with every emergency situation through mock drills. Police lathi charge, firing tear gas shells and even firing bullets if necessary were practiced. In the Police Line ground, police personnel in the guise of common villagers attacked the police administration, presenting a scene of agitation and even stone pelting. At the same time, the police personnel first explained to the opponents and agitators by miking, then when they started pelting stones, they retaliated by lathi charge and firing tear gas shells. SP Haris Bin Zaman said that in view of the festival, the police administration has conducted mock drills to deal with every situation. The police administration is alert regarding the safety of the common people.



Will make Hazaribag center point of health services : Jayant Sinha

AVINASH ANJAN : HAZARIBAG

MP Hazaribagh cum Co-Chairman Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance Jayant Sinha Hazaribag has always been striving to improve health services in the Lok Sabha. To commemorate the birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, under Seva Pakhwada, he is organizing free health camps in all five constituencies of Hazaribag Lok Sabha. Till now these camps have been organized in Barhi and Sadar assembly. In this sequence, on Wednesday, a free health camp was organized at the Community Health



Center located in Vishnugarh of Mandu Assembly. During this period hundreds of people took advantage of the camp.

In this camp, important tests including eye, sugar, blood pressure, dengue, malaria and typhoid were done free of cost. General

physician was also present here. The public appreciated this camp a lot and thanked Jayant Sinha for it. So far, more than 600 people have benefited from the health camps organized in three assemblies. This camp will be organized at Barkagaon Community Health Center on September 28.

Jayant Sinha said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are providing better health facilities to the public. This event is being organized in every assembly of the area. I am very happy to see that a large number of people are coming to these camps and taking benefits. With the basic

mantra of Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas, we are working to provide facilities to the last person in the queue. Jayant Sinha's effort is to provide world class health facilities in Hazaribag parliamentary constituency.

They are working to achieve this goal on a large scale. The facility is being provided to every community health center. This is part of the free health camps being organized under Seva Pakhwada. He wants to make Hazaribag the center of education, religious and health services in Jharkhand. The work of providing better health services to every area resident is going on.

PNS : RANCHI

Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) conducted its 51st Annual General Meeting (AGM), today at Company's headquarters at Lodhi Road, New Delhi. Amarendu Prakash, Chairman, SAIL addressed the shareholders in the meeting, held through a virtual platform.

Addressing the company's shareholders, Amarendu Prakash, Chairman, SAIL, said that he is very confident and bullish about the company while outlining what to look forward to in the future. He said that SAIL's inherent strength and its endeavour to work on the company's core areas in the recent past are

the factors that gave him the optimism and belief that SAIL can face the uncertainty and volatility in the Steel Industry.

Summarising the company's performance during FY 2022-23, he pointed out that SAIL achieved a record annual production performance of 19.4 million tonnes (MT) and 18.3 MT of Hot Metal and Crude Steel respectively, where all its integrated Steel Plants achieved their best-ever production, leading to the best ever Crude Steel capacity utilization of about 94%. He also mentioned that SAIL surpassed a turnover of Rs 1 Lakh Crore for the second consecutive year. He added that focusing on the improvement of operating practices and realigning cus-

tomers demand to optimize the product mix helped mitigate risks arising from volatility in the market.

While emphasizing on the two focus areas of the company which is to maximise capacity utilisation and providing best value to SAIL's customers, he said the same necessitated strategic interventions by way of ramping up of production, securing raw materials, improving the quality of inputs, reducing business risks over the long term in resource mobilization, and providing a better customer experience while focusing on decarbonisation and sustainability.

Chairman SAIL's address also included the company's sustainability initiatives, product development, digital interventions, future plans and ethical business practices adopted by it. Emphasising on the growth prospects of the Indian steel industry, he said that SAIL remains cognizant of the significant shifts that the steel industry is witnessing and is taking all necessary steps to strengthen its competitive advantage and enhance value for its stakeholders.

Dr RP Singh's legacy continues to serve masses

PNS : RANCHI

Late doctor R P Singh was the person who established orthopaedics as a speciality in then South Bihar, which is called Jharkhand now. He was a very good teacher, efficient clinician and a very successful Orthopaedic surgeon.

Dr R P Singh was born on 26th September 1924, in village Chasi, under Naubatpur Block of Patna district. He had a brilliant academic career. Graduated in 1949 from Patna Medical College he did his MS in Surgery and went to England to do FRCS. He did his fellowship from Edinburgh and came back to India, did his MS in orthopaedic surgery and became lecturer in orthopaedic surgery Department at PMCH Patna and later he joined at RMCH (now RIMS Ranchi). Dr Singh was the founder of the department of orthopaedics at RMCH Ranchi and was working as professor and

head of the department from 1972 till 1983, his year of retirement.

He organised the state conference of arthritis and has been its president and in 1974 he organised the national conference of orthopaedic surgeons of India. He served as president of Bihar State orthopaedic surgeons Association for many years. Also, he was founder secretary of Bihar State orthopaedic surgeons Association.

Dr Singh died of a massive heart attack on 3rd October in 2001, at Apollo Hospital Ranchi.

He established the first private nursing Home in Ranchi at Bariatu in 1964, which was upgraded to RPS Hospital by his family members in 2015. The hospital is now a super speciality Hospital and giving flawless service to the ailing masses by a dedicated team of doctors, besides his two sons, both daughters in law and grandchildren.

XITE students gain valuable insights during visit to Tata Motors

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The Department of Commerce at XITE College, in collaboration with the Jamshepur Management Association, organized an enriching industry visit for their second-year B.Com and BA English students to the esteemed Tata Motors facility in Jamshepur. The visit, which took place on Tuesday, saw the enthusiastic participation of 30 students eager to explore the inner workings of one of India's leading automobile manufacturers.

The meticulously planned itinerary ensured that students received a comprehensive understanding of various facets of the automobile industry. The day commenced with a visit to the Tata Motors Skill Development Centre, where the company conducts apprenticeship training programs. This firsthand exposure allowed students to witness the crucial role skill development plays in Tata Motors' workforce development strategy, aligning with XITE College's commitment to holistic learning. During this



segment of the visit, students gained insights into the practical aspect of skill acquisition, furthering their appreciation for the importance of skill-building in today's competitive job market.

Subsequently, the group proceeded to the heart of the Tata Motors operation—the manufacturing plant. Here, students were introduced to the intricate processes involved in assembling, testing, and quality control of automobiles. Observing the assembly line and quality assurance procedures in

action at an industry leader like Tata Motors proved to be an eye-opening experience, providing students with a deeper understanding of the industry's rigorous standards.

Dr. Swati Singh, a professor from XITE College, and Anushka Mahato, a representative from the Jamshepur Management Association, accompanied the students throughout the visit. Additionally, three officials from TATA Motors graciously guided the students, sharing their expertise and knowledge. XITE College's commit-

ment to a well-rounded education is evident in its emphasis on exposure through industry visits and internships. Such hands-on learning opportunities not only complement the academic curriculum but also prepare students to become industry-ready professionals. This industry visit to TATA Motors stands as a testament to XITE College's dedication to providing its students with invaluable experiences that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world applications.

HMC organises camp in town area to solve problems of residents

SHAILESH SHARMA : HAZARIBAG

Hazaribag Municipal Corporation organized a one day camp in Hurhuru mohalla to solve the problems of residents. In the camp applications for Pradhanmantri Sahari Awas Yojana were also received. The employees of HMC also collected the dues taxes from the public.

The camp was conducted under the leadership of town commissioner Prerna Dixit. On this occasion the town commissioner said that we have decided to organize the camp in every ward of the town areas. She further said that many residents of the municipal area are not aware of the different government plans which are run by the state and central government. We will make aware the common masses regarding the different plans and how to apply to get the benefit of the plans.

The town commissioner appealed to the common masses to apply in corporation office. The employees of the corporation received two dozen applications for the demand of Pradhanmantri



Sahari Awas Yojana. She assured the applicants for quick disposal of their applications. She has appealed to the residents to pay the holding and other taxes in time. This will solve the problem of financial crises of the corporation. The employees have collected the 20042 rupees cash of holding tax, renewal of trade licence in the camp. The residents demanded the construction of roads in the areas. She has directed the executive engineer to prepare the estimate for final approval and start the work.

CM urges PM to recognise Sarna Religious Code

Soren has written to Modi to protect rights of tribals

PNS : RANCHI

The demand for granting separate religious columns to tribals—Sarna religious code has once again gained momentum with Chief Minister Hemant Soren writing a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking recognition of the 'Sarna' code for tribals in order to safeguard their religious existence and constitutional rights.

Soren in his letter has mentioned that the population of tribals is shrinking; a separate religious code will protect the rights and interest of tribals. Soren claimed that the

population of tribals in the state has declined to 26 per cent from 38 per cent in the last eight decades.

"There is a continuous decline in the percentage of their population, as a result of which it is natural to have an adverse effect on the policies of tribal development under the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution," he said.

Sources said that the timing for demand for separate religious code for tribals gains importance as the central probe agency in the past few months has tightened its screw with the Enforcement Directorate issuing summons to CM for fifth times. In its lat-

est summons, the ED has asked the CM to appear before the central agency office on October 4. While, at the same time CM has knocked Jharkhand High Court door against the summons issued by ED.

Meanwhile, CM in its letter has raised the concern of protecting the traditional religious existence of tribals... is certainly a serious question. Today, the demand for Tribal/Sarna Religious Code is being raised so that this nature-worshipping tribal community can be confident about its identity.

"At present, when the demand for Uniform Civil

Code is being raised by some organisations, positive initiative on this demand of Tribal/Sarna community is absolutely necessary for their protection," he said.

Soren highlighted that the tribal population in the state has decreased from 38 per cent to 26 percent over the past eight decades.

"We, the tribals, are followers of ancient practices and are worshippers of trees and hills. We consider protecting the forest our religion. There are around 12 crore tribals as per the Census 2011. There are more than 1 crore tribals in Jharkhand that I represent, which is a

tribal-majority state. A large number of people follow the Sarna religion. Our rivers, land, and forests are the living scriptures of our ancient Sarna religion. The traditions, worship rituals, and beliefs of the Sarna religions are distinct from all other religions," he said in the letter.

"At present, when the demand for Uniform Civil Code is being raised by some organisations, positive initiative on this demand of Tribal/Sarna community is absolutely necessary for their protection," he further added.

It is noteworthy here that there was a provision of a separate code for them in the

census column of the year 1951, but due to certain reasons, this arrangement was abolished in the subsequent decades.

Therefore, Tribal/Sarna Code is very necessary for the proper development of the tribal community and in view of this, a proposal in this regard has also been passed in the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly, which is currently pending for decision at the Central Government level," Soren has said. The Jharkhand Assembly in November 2020 unanimously passed a resolution seeking the inclusion of Sarna as a separate religion in Census 2021.



State Chief Minister Hemant Soren had even urged President Droupadi Murmu to assist the state in getting Centre nod for its proposal to include the 'Sarna Code' as a separate religious category.

Imbibe values of Swami Vivekananda to build a strong society: CM

CM participates in Convocation ceremony of RK Mission VERI as chief guest

PNS : RANCHI

Be it the field of agriculture or animal husbandry, be it players or workers. Whether you want employment or self-employment, whatever field you want to progress in, the government will provide you full help," Chief Minister Hemant Soren said these things today while addressing the annual convocation-2023 of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Education and Research Institute, Morhabadi, Ranchi. While presenting gold medals and degrees to the students, he expressed hope that youth coming out from here will create a distinct identity for themselves and will contribute to building a strong society by following the ideals of Swami Vivekananda.



Chief Minister Hemant Soren lights a lamp along with Agriculture Minister Badal during the Annual Convocation of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

today mines and factories are visible in place of fields. In such a situation, completely ignoring the traditional system in the blind race of development is not a good sign for a state like Jharkhand. This is the reason why our government is strengthening the rural economy. If villages become strong then the state and the country will also become strong.

Soren said that if many schemes of the government fail, then we too are responsible for it. If we see, cleanliness campaigns have been going on in the entire country for years, but even today many people throw the filth of their houses on the streets. Action plans have been made for cleaning the rivers. Crores and billions of rupees have also been spent. But today the rivers do not appear to be as clean as they should be. This carelessness of ours will somehow become a cause of

danger to the entire state and country. In such a situation, we need to work with full dedication and service spirit.

The CM said that the government has special attention on the weak people in the society. All steps are being taken to take them forward. The government is bearing the expenses of education of economically and socially weaker children. In this series, young men and women of primitive tribes are being given free residential coaching for the preparation of competitive examinations. From preparation for competitive exams to courses like medical engineering and law, the government is also providing financial assistance for higher education abroad. To ensure that girls are not deprived of education, they are being linked to Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana. The aim of the government is to prepare stu-



Chief Minister Hemant Soren presents a certificate to a student during Annual Convocation of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

dents for a better future with the improvement of education.

The CM said that Jharkhand is also a labour dominated state. The workers here are simple as well as hardworking. This is the reason why the workers of our state are making important contributions to the development of every part of the country with their hard work. Recalling the Corona period, the Chief Minister said that even during the time when people were confined to their homes, thousands of labourers were engaged in road construction work in the border and remote areas of the country like Leh-Ladakh without caring for their lives, because it was a matter of national security.

The Chief Minister paid homage to the statue of Swami Vivekananda located on the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram premises by garlanding it. He gave the mes-

sage of environmental protection by planting trees here. The Chief Minister said that he had a long-standing desire to come to this institution and know and understand its activities, which was completed today with the help of Swamiji. The way Ramakrishna Mission is working for the uplift of a state like Jharkhand is commendable. On this occasion, the Chief Minister also released two magazines of Ramakrishna Mission.

On this occasion, Agriculture Minister Badal, Swami Suvidanand Ji Maharaj of Ramakrishna Mission Ashram, Ranchi, Swami Sarvatmanand Ji Maharaj, Swami Atmanand Ji Maharaj and Swami Bhaveshanand Ji Maharaj, besides other Swamijis and students associated with Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute were present.

JMM asks BJP to approach court than levelling 'baseless' allegations

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), on Wednesday, attacked Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for efforts to tarnish the State Government's image by using false data and figures. JMM asked that if the facts and figures are correct, then what is BJP doing in its State office and it should have filed a PIL in the court.



JMM General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya during a press conference at the party office in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

Addressing a press meet, JMM General Secretary cum Spokesperson termed the entire BJP as Mir Jafar and said that BJP is playing the role of Mir Jafar in Jharkhand. He attacked BJP National Spokesperson, Jafar Islam and said that BJP is trying to destabilize the State Government which is doing a large number of works of development in the State. "BJP's leaders through the press meet misleading people through wrong facts and figures. The biggest question is that from where Zafar Islam got the figure that he has accused the present Government of a scam of Rs 77,000 crore. These things should be made public," he added. "It is very strange that all the scams and officers whose names have been mentioned by the spokesperson are from the tenure of former CM Arjun Munda and former CM Raghubar Das who talked about zero tolerance. The officers who were during his tenure are also during our tenure. JMM challenged BJP and said that if it has the courage then it should come out of the State office and go

to the villages and fields among the tribals and local people to express its views. They could not have even imagined the opposition they will face. In Adani's friendship, BJP has started talking not of lakhs, not of one-two crores but of thousands of crores," Bhattacharya.

The Party Spokesperson said that actually the whole matter is about BJP's uneasiness with the functioning of the Hemant Government. "Hemant Government has started recruitment, doing something different for every category, women are becoming self-reliant, our girls are taking advantage of the Savitri Phule Bai Scheme, putting pressure on the Central Government by passing the proposal of Sarna religious code. BJP is not able to digest all this from

Ranchi to Delhi. Therefore, now it is talking nonsense and directly attacking the Soren family without any issue," he added.

Bhattacharya said that ED, CBI and Income Tax are working in the direction of BJP. "Earlier, the opposition parties of the Country used to allege that the Central Government and the Central's investigation agencies were trying to destabilize the non-BJP Government but now evidence has also started emerging. The example of Maharashtra is in front of everyone. If BJP is thinking that by doing all this we will bow down, then it is mistaken. If the image of a CM is tarnished then why would they go to the ED office, he has gone to the court. We have full confidence in the court," he added.

Marandi hits out at State Govt over poor law and order



State BJP President Babulal Marandi waves to people during 'Sankalp Yatra' in Jharia on Wednesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

PNS : RANCHI

BJP State President and former Chief Minister Babulal Marandi today addressed the 43rd public meeting of his Sankalp Yatra in Jharia assembly constituency. Marandi, targeting the JMM/ Congress alliance government, said that the Chief Minister is deeply immersed in corruption, is trembling with fear of ED and is knocking the door of the Supreme Court and the High Court.

adding a name to the ration card. Officials and employees openly ask for money.

He said that today the Chief Minister is filling his coffers by looting the grains of the poor. The state's minerals like coal, iron, stone and sand have been looted. River sand is going to Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Mumbai and people of Jharkhand are caught by police and booked for picking up sand.

He said that today criminals are rampant. Incidents of murder, robbery, kidnapping and dacoity are happening every day. The honour of sisters and daughters is not safe. In the last six months, 23 businessmen have been murdered, 9 of whom had appealed for protection in writing.

He said that the Chief Minister should constitute an SIT and get it investigated and

He said that it is painful to see the condition of the state today. BJP wants to rescue the people of the state from this suffering.

Marandi said that today there is bribery everywhere in the state. People have to pay for death certificates, income certificates and mutation. One has to pay money even for

Ranchi Smart City bags India Smart City Contest Award



President Droupadi Murmu hands over a citation to Urban Development Secretary Vinay Kumar Choubey along with others during India Smart Cities Conclave 2023 in Indore on Wednesday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

Smart City Ranchi has once again won the India Smart City Contest Award. Smart City Ranchi, which has established itself as the best performer in the implementation of the Smart City Mission under the efficient leadership of the State Government and the guidance of Chief Minister, Hemant Soren, has been awarded the Best Performer City Award among the Smart Cities of the Eastern Zone.

This award was given by President of India, Draupadi Murmu at the India Smart City Conclave 2023 organized at the Brilliant Convention Center in Indore, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. On behalf of the State Government, Secretary, Urban Development and Housing Department, Vinay Kumar Choubey and Chairman cum Managing Director of Ranchi Smart City Corporation, Amit Kumar, CEO of Ranchi Smart City Corporation and Director of State Urban Development Agency and General Manager

of Smart City Ranchi. Rakesh Kumar Nandkeolyar received this honour by the hands of the President. Housing and Urban Affairs Minister of the Government of India, Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Kaushal Kishore and Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary, Manoj Joshi, present on the stage, congratulated the Jharkhand Government and Ranchi Smart City for this honour. On this occasion, many dignitaries including Governor, Madhya Pradesh, Mangubhai Patel and Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan were present on the stage. This award is prepared on the basis of India Smart City Contest Award 2022. Before the decision of this award, proposals are sent from all the 100 cities of the Country through power point presentations and videos about the special efforts being made in different fields in their cities. After that, the team of the Ministry goes to every city. She also goes and verifies if



A delegation of HEC Bachao Morcha led by former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay hands over a memorandum to Governor CP Radhakrishnan at Raj Bhawan in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

Birhor daughters admitted to residential school

PNS : RANCHI

Following the instructions of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, six-year-old Sanoti Kumari and five-year-old Parvati Kumari, residents of Paharsingh Birhor Toli of Angada, have been enrolled in class one of Scheduled Tribe Girls Residential High School, Tamar. Following the instructions of the Chief Minister, the District Welfare Officer has been ordered by the officials to keep an eye on the entire matter.



The Chief Minister received information that Bahadur Birhor, a resident of Paharsingh Birhor Toli of Angada block, along with his wife and his one and a half year old daughter, had left for Ranchi station by taking a train from Kita station to sell Dona Pattal and Datun

on the morning of September 1. But they have not returned yet. Both the girls are crying and in bad condition due to the non-return of their parents. After getting information about this matter, the Chief Minister had directed the officials to provide all possible help to the girls and to find the parents of the girls soon.

3 vehicle thieves arrested, cyber fraud held

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi and Gumla police have achieved great success and arrested three car and bike thieves on Wednesday. Two have been arrested from Gumla and one from Ranchi.

On the information of the three, the police have recovered 12 stolen bikes and one car. There is a BJP flag on the seized Swift car.

The two arrested by Gumla police are said to be a couple and masterminds of

the theft case. Ranchi Police has also arrested a mastermind. The police are thoroughly interrogating all three. On the trail of the three, police are conducting raids in different areas of Ranchi and Gumla. Police are confident

that many more stolen vehicles may be recovered. The police have also received important information about many thieves and based on the input received, the police are busy taking further action. Meanwhile, a cyber-

criminal who cheated Rs 87.29 lakh has been arrested. Cyber cell of CID has taken the action. CID has arrested 29 year old Luv Kush Sharma, resident of Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Two mobile phones, bank account and documents

used in the fraud have been recovered from him. It is noteworthy that a case was registered in Cyber Cell police station on January 20, 2023 by Bindeshwari Singh, resident of Hatia in Jagannathpur police station area.

BJP may field Central Ministers in four other States also

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Given the fact that close contests are expected in the upcoming Assembly polls, the BJP may strategically soon announce candidates for Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana with “surprise” inclusions in line with Madhya Pradesh Assembly list.

The BJP’s move to field three Union Ministers and several senior Members of Parliament in the upcoming Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections may be repeated in the four other State Assembly polls, including Rajasthan, where the BJP hopes to cash in on “anti-incumbency” against the Ashok Gehlot-led Congress.

Rajasthan voters traditionally not repeating a government twice has also made BJP optimistic of winning the election as it is also working hard to keep its house in order in the desert state.

The factional division in the Rajasthan unit and former two-time Chief Minister Vijaya Raje’s tug of war with Union war minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat are expected to be “neutralised” by fielding ‘heavy weight’ Central ministers and MPs who would impact on the assembly segments other than their own, sources said.

The entry of senior leaders in the assembly poll would also be done to positively tilt caste equations - Rajputs, jats, SC, STs - in the state, according to sources.

Working on the MP model, the party may include Central Minister and Jodhpur MP Shekhawat, Minister of state for law , Arjun Ram Meghwal, Rajsamand MP Diya Kumari, and Jaipur (Rural) MP Rajyavardhan Rathore.

Despite Raje wanting to be projected as the Chief Ministerial candidate, the Central leadership has made it amply clear that as in the case of Madhya Pradesh, the elections in the state will be contested under a “collective leadership” with Prime Minister Narendra Modi being the main engine of the poll campaign, they said.

With the likely induction of senior leaders in the assembly fray, there could be more claimants to the CM post in Rajasthan as may be the case in Madhya Pradesh also where three top Central ministers have been fielded as assembly candidates.

BJP had recently appointed Arjun Meghwal, a backward class leader, the convenor of BJP’s Election Manifesto committee, for Rajasthan.

In Madhya Pradesh - Union Minister for agriculture, Narendra Singh Tomar, will be

contesting from Dimani; Pralhad Patel, minister of state for food processing from Narsinghpur; and minister for state for rural development, Faggan Singh Kulaste who has been given a ticket from Niwas, a seat reserved for STs.

All three are now ‘competitors’ to the incumbent four-time CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan. Tomar and Kulaste have been fielded from the assembly seats won previously by the Congress.

In Telangana also , MPs, including Union Minister and State Chief GK Reddy, are expected to enter the electoral fray where BJP is seeking to be the main opposition party vis-à-vis the current Chief Minister

KC Rao’s ‘Bharat Rashtira Samithi, even though the Congress has now emerged as the main challenger to the ruling dispensation..

Union Minister and BJP’s Rajasthan election in-charge Pralhad Joshi said his party would soon announce the list of candidates for Rajasthan but did not confirm that it may include bigwigs from the Centre.

He said that the BJP has given tickets in Madhya Pradesh to its leaders in that state but the Congress Party ‘does not have a leader.’ “This is the problem of the Congress party,” he said.

“We are going to win with a huge majority in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Rahul Gandhi himself has admitted that they are losing in Rajasthan,” the BJP leader said.

On Sunday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had said that as of now the Congress is certainly winning Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, probably winning Telangana, and there is a ‘very close’ contest in Rajasthan that the party believes it will be able to win.

Prime Minister Modi on Monday visited Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan which would go to the polls along with Chattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram, before December - and blamed the Congress for making them lag-gard states.

INDIA Bloc in tatters in Bengal SC tags plea seeking FIR against Udhayanidhi

Cong playing second fiddle to BJP: TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) looks to be in tatters from the beginning in Bengal not only with the Left Front categorically declaring its no-truck formula with the Trinamool Congress but also the latter fighting an ongoing war of words with the primary INDIA constituent Congress accusing the tri-colour party’s Bengal unit of playing second fiddle to the BJP.

A day after Chowdhury accused Mamata Banerjee of making fun trips to Spain and splurging taxpayers’ money for her personal reasons at a time when Dengue was wreaking havoc in Bengal, TMC leader

and Minister Dr Shashi Panja hit back saying, “by making such statements Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is only weakening the INDIA alliance ... I don’t know whether he is hitting out at the Alliance itself.”

Chowdhury had earlier questioned how Banerjee paid her hotel bills in Madrid. “We have heard that the Chief Minister does not take her salary. She earns her sustenance from the sale of her books and from her paintings. If that is so then how she could afford to stay at a hotel in Madrid that costs Rs 3 lakhs per day” the Congress MP from Behrampore asked.

The counterattack from Panja came hours after TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh attacked Chowdhury saying, “he is sounding like a BJP man ... he seems to have a plan to weaken the INDIA alliance ... by his statement it is clear that he playing the B Team of



the BJP in Bengal ... his party leadership should take note of this.”

Ghosh said that the Congress high command “should reign in Chowdhury if they really want the Alliance to work well.”

Ghosh’s hard-hitting statement notwithstanding Chowdhury attacked the Chief Minister once again saying, the “dengue situation in Bengal is manmade ... rather I will call it Mamata made ... rather we can also call it government-sponsored dengue.”

While the TMC and the Pradesh Congress traded fire,

the second most visible Congress leader in the State Kaustav Bagchi on Wednesday sprung a second surprise by walking alongside senior BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari in a protest rally of recruitment scam victims.

While the Pradesh Congress leadership remained tightlipped on Bagchi who has from the very beginning protested against the Congress joining hands with Mamata Banerjee “who has literally decimated the Congress in Bengal by engineering defections and whose goons daily attack, loot and rape our grass-roots workers” the Congress odd ball said he was walking for a cause and not with any person.

“I have walked in a rally which has no flags ... I have no problem with Suwendu Adhikari — despite him being a BJP leader and promoting different ideology — insofar as he

is fighting for a cause that relates to the people,” Bagchi a lawyer-turned-politician said provoking the TMC once again to draw the attention of the national leadership.

“We will expect the Congress leadership to take note of these issues in Bengal if they really are serious about the INDIA alliance,” Ghosh said even as NCP leadership too asked the two parties to refrain from open war of words like this.

Meanwhile, TMC sources said that Mamata Banerjee would embark on a tour of other States beginning with Assam where she would campaign for the INDIA alliance.

According to sources TMC Assam leader Ripun Bora had a meeting with party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee where it was decided that the Bengal Chief Minister would embark on a tour of Assam in the month of November.

SC tags plea seeking FIR against Udhayanidhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday tagged a plea, which has sought registration of an FIR against Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin over his “eradicate Sanatan Dharma” remark, with another similar pending petition. A bench of justices Aniruddha Bose and Bela M Trivedi was hearing a plea seeking direction for registration of an First Information Report (FIR) against Udhayanidhi Stalin and DMK leader A Raja for their comments on Sanatan Dharma.

On September 22, the top court had agreed to hear a separate plea filed by Chennai-based lawyer B Jagannath seeking registration of an FIR against Udhayanidhi Stalin and



others over his “eradicate Sanatan Dharma” remark, which the petitioner likened to hate speech. Udhayanidhi Stalin, who is also an actor, is the son of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and ruling DMK chief M K Stalin.

The plea filed by Delhi-based advocate Vineet Jindal came up for hearing before the bench on Wednesday. “We will not issue notice but we will tag it,” the bench told the counsel

appearing for the petitioner. The lawyer appearing for Tamil Nadu argued that the plea was “public interest litigation in the nature of publicity interest litigation”.

He said the top court had last week issued notice on the other petition having similar prayer and there was no need to have another such plea. “Instead of taking notice, we will take it up on that day,” the bench said, adding, “The question of entertaining itself, we will take it up that day”. Terming it an “unfortunate scenario”, the state’s counsel said in this matter, several writ petitions have been filed in different high courts and it becomes difficult for the State. “You have the appropriate remedy under the Constitution,” the bench observed, adding, “We are only tagging it”.

Fresh SC bench to hear Naidu's plea for quashing FIR in ₹371-crore scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A new bench of the Supreme Court will hear on October 3 former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu’s petition for quashing the FIR against him in the alleged ₹371 crore scam in the State’s Skill Development Corporation as Justice SVN Bhatti on Wednesday recused himself from hearing it.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for the TDP leader, rushed to a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud after Justice Bhatti, who was sitting with Justice Sanjiv Khanna, recused himself from hearing his petition.

“We will list it before an appropriate bench on Tuesday,” said the bench, which also comprised justices JB Pardiwala



and Manoj Misra. The apex court also made it clear that it cannot restrain the trial judge from dealing with the prosecution’s plea seeking further police custody of the TDP leader.

Naidu was arrested on September 9 for allegedly misappropriating funds from the Skill Development Corporation when he was the Chief Minister in 2015, causing a purported loss of Rs 371 crore to the State exchequer. His judicial remand has been extended by the trial court till October 5.

India, US hold 2+2 dialogue to strengthen logistics cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Given the robust ties between the two countries with focus on defence and security, officials of India and US held discussions on opportunities to further strengthen interoperability and logistics cooperation during the India-US 2+2 Intersessional Dialogue.

Underscoring the transformative momentum in the India-US relationship, the officials late Tuesday in Washington also discussed combined maritime engagements in the Indian Ocean Region, as well as expanded cooperation in the space and cyber domains, the Pentagon said.

The Indian delegation was led by Additional Secretary



Vani Rao of the Ministry of External Affairs and Joint Secretary Vishwesh Negi of the Ministry of Defence, it said. The American side was led by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner and Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu. “The officials also discussed regional security developments and

strategic priorities across the Indo-Pacific region,” a statement said.

The 2+2 Intersessional Dialogue advanced a wide range of ambitious initiatives across the breadth of the US-India partnership, including defence and security, emerging technologies, people-to-people ties, clean energy, and supply chain resilience, the Pentagon said.

3-day Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs meet held by Indian Army ends

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A three-day Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC) organised by the Indian Army with the US Army as the co-host, culminated here on Wednesday. The event witnessed participation from 30 countries and provided an opportunity for the delegates to exchange ideas and views on security and other contemporary issues of mutual interest, with core efforts directed to promote ‘Peace and Stability’ in the Indo-Pacific region.

The event commenced with a call-on by General Randy George, the Chief of Staff (COS) of the US Army to General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Indian Army on September 25. Both Chiefs discussed



issues of mutual interest and shared views on contemporary issues.

The next day, the Chiefs and the Heads of Delegations laid wreath at the National War Memorial paying homage to our fallen heroes. This was followed by a Joint Press Brief by the COAS Indian Army and COS of the US Army.

The COAS Indian Army

remarked that the region is not only a cauldron of cultures, histories, resources and opportunities but also a theatre of complexities and challenges. The COS of the US Army highlighted the role of land power and said it not only contributes to the shared security of the region but land power is also the decisive force in dealing with crises.

Centre directs banks to depute doorstep executives to help immobile pensioners

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With reports of several pensioners in their late nineties, immobile or bedridden and hence facing difficulty in visiting the facilities to collect their pensions, the Centre has woken to the cause and directed the pension disbursing banks to depute doorstep executives to such pensioners submit their life certificates.

All pensioners have to give a life certificate (proof that they are alive) annually to continue receiving pension. There are about 69.76 lakh central government pensioners.

An order issued by the Department of Pension and Pensioners’ Welfare (DoPPW) also asked all banks to create awareness about the convenience of obtaining the life certificate digitally by using the face authentication technology by super senior pensioners (those aged 80 and above).

In view of the digital life certificate through face authentication technology, it is now possible for every citizen to submit a digital life certificate (DLC) either from home using an Android smartphone or at the bank branch, said the order dated September 25.

“It is suggested that all



banks may utilise the various platforms for creating awareness of the convenience of obtaining a life certificate by using the face authentication technology,” it said.

Banks can facilitate the submission of life certificates by deputing doorstep banking executives, said the order. They can widely publicise the methodology for submitting DLC by pasting information posters at branches and ATMs, it added.

Banks may send SMS/emails/WhatsApp messages to the pensioner with a link to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for face authentication to empower the super senior pensioner to submit their life certificate through face authentication technology using their Android phone, the order said.

The DoPPW has asked the banks to circulate the SOP on DLC through face authentication via email among their concerned officials to enable them to get familiar with the usage of this technology.

“Necessary instructions may be issued to all the bank branches to make suitable arrangements for submission of life certificates by the super senior pensioners/family pensioners aged 80 and above from 1st October of every year,” the order said.

The Centre had in 2019 asked banks to allow senior pensioners aged 80 and above to give their life certificates with effect from October 1 every year instead of November. The remaining pensioners below the age of 80 years have to give their life certificate in November.

Navy to unveil updated ‘indigenisation roadmap’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With special stress on self-reliance, the Indian Navy will unveil an updated new “indigenisation roadmap” next week with a focus on specific initiatives to achieve self-reliance in acquiring various critical technologies and platforms to boost its overall military might.

The roadmap will be released at the second edition of the annual ‘Svayamban’ seminar to be held on October 4 and 5, Navy officials said on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to attend the conclave.

At a media briefing, Vice Chief of the Naval Staff Vice Admiral Sanjay Jasjit Singh said the Navy resolved to develop 75 technologies at the Svayamban seminar last year and the aim has been achieved.

“Last year, in the presence of the prime minister, the Indian Navy had committed to develop at least 75 technologies as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav,” he said.

The Vice Chief said the Navy has invested considerable time and efforts towards realising this commitment. “Today, I can say with confidence that the Svayamban initiative has



gained critical mass, and is gathering continuous momentum. And, I am happy to inform you that the promises made last year have been fully met, and even surpassed in some cases,” he said.

These technologies will be showcased during the upcoming Svayamban seminar.

An updated “Indian Navy indigenisation roadmap”, a document titled ‘Svayamban 2.0’ and new challenges for the industry are planned to be released at the seminar, said another senior official.

The Navy will showcase the new technologies that include swarm drones of various categories as well as applications of robotics and artificial intelligence at the seminar. Vice Admiral Singh said over the past year, each and every proposal received by the Navy has been examined, processed and pursued by dedicated teams of

officers to ensure that the force has an array of “trials cleared products”, which are consequently ready, or nearly-ready, for induction. “We have already obtained Acceptance of Necessity for 12 such cases, worth close to 1500 Crores, and procurement orders for products worth 200 crore amongst these have already been signed. In the coming weeks, we are looking to conclude many more such contracts,” he said.

The Navy is encouraging development of new products under the ‘Sprint’ initiative that was launched at the Naval Innovation and Indignation Organisation (NIIO) Seminar in July last year.

These products are being developed under the innovation for defence excellence scheme of the Ministry of Defence and Technology Development Acceleration Cell of Indian Navy.

Chhattisgarh Government withdraws plea challenging ED's action against officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Chhattisgarh Government on Wednesday withdrew from the Supreme Court its plea challenging on the ground of jurisdiction the Enforcement Directorate’s action against State Government officials in money laundering case. The money laundering case lodged in 2022 stems from an FIR registered on a complaint by the Income Tax department over allegations of illegal collection of levy on coal as well as attempts to influence public servants through corrupt means in Chhattisgarh.

The ED charged a “massive scam” took place between 2019 and 2021 in coal transportation in Chhattisgarh as part of which a “cartel” of politicians, officers and others was allegedly running a parallel system of exporting illegal levy. In its plea, the Chhattisgarh Government argued that the ED, on the basis of the FIR lodged in Bengaluru, registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in Raipur on September 29, 2022

and started an investigation against State Government officials.

Chhattisgarh standing counsel Sumeer Sodhi told a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and SVN Bhatti on Wednesday he has instructions to withdraw the plea. The bench allowed the State Government to withdraw the petition and recorded Sodhi’s submission. The petition demanded the court to declare the ED’s action illegal, without jurisdiction and unconstitutional.

The State Government had earlier this year filed a suit challenging the constitutional validity of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) alleging that central investigating agencies are being misused to “intimidate, harass and disturb” the normal functioning of the non-BJP State Government.

The Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government filed the original suit challenging the law under Article 131 of the Constitution which empowers a state to move the Supreme Court directly in matters of dispute with the Centre or any other State.

Varanasi gets Best Smart City Award in North Zone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi has written a new chapter of development with heritage as it has received the 'Best Smart City Award' in the North Zone on Wednesday when at a programme organised in Indore (Madhya Pradesh) by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Municipal Commissioner and CEO of Varanasi Smart City Shipu Giri was honoured by President Draupadi Murmu on Wednesday.

Varanasi was selected as the best smart city out of more than 30 smart cities of North Zone including Agra, Lucknow, Dehradun, Srinagar and Shimla. An exhibition has also been organised in this event, which was inaugurated on Tuesday by Kaushal Kishore, Minister of State, Ministry of Urban and Housing Affairs. Major works of Varanasi were displayed in the exhibition.

The security cover of Varanasi was shown live during the exhibition through advanced surveillance cameras installed in the city. Apart from this, Rudraksh



President Draupadi Murmu giving Best Smart City Award in North Zone to Varanasi MC Shipu Giri in Indore (MP) on Wednesday.

International Convention Centre, Machhodari Model School, modern development of streets of Varanasi, Integrated City Command Centre and Colony Parks were also showcased through 360 degree virtual reality tour. Benia Bagh, development of ancient streets etc have also been demonstrated. According to reports received here, a huge crowd of visitors gath-

ered at the stall of Varanasi Smart City to see the growth journey of 'Brand Banaras'. Dr D Vasudevan, Chief General Manager (CGM) of Varanasi Smart City, called this award an honour of the people of Varanasi. The project undertaken by Varanasi Smart City has been completed within the stipulated time frame and with quality. This is being taken full care of even in the

Gatimaan project. He said that a scheme worth Rs 1,017.69 crore was approved in Varanasi Smart City in 2018, the work of which has been completed. State-of-the-art development has been done in many areas of the city. At the same time, work on three projects worth Rs 329 crore is in progress. It is likely to be completed by March 2024, he added.

CHC Misirpur Supdt given adverse entry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Superintendent of Community Health Centre (CHC) Misirpur has been given adverse entry for not giving proper response regarding low institutional delivery in block Kashi Vidyaapeeth. This was ordered by the Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal while presiding over a meeting of the District Health Committee at Vikas Bhawan here on Tuesday.

In the meeting, information was obtained regarding the status of payment under Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY). Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that payment of 266 beneficiaries of last year is pending in the district. The CDO expressed displeasure over the non-payment of last year's pending payments in the district under the JSY and directed all the medical officers in charge to ensure that all the beneficiaries are paid.

The divisional accounts manager was taken to task for not providing satisfactory information about the progress of the amount spent in relation to the allocated budget and not being able to provide item-wise information about the amount spent. He was directed to attend the upcoming meetings with



CDO Himanshu Nagpal holding a meeting of District Health Committee in Varanasi on Tuesday.

complete information. Similarly, block account managers Harhua and Pindra were taken to task for laxity in their work and directed to take strict action. The CDO also sought the information about Seva Pakhwada of Ayushman Bhava campaign. The CMO said that about 500 units of blood were collected in the blood donation camp organised during the Ayushman Bhava campaign.

The CDO said that all the medicines should be kept as per the standards in the health and wellness centres (HWCs) including the district hospitals so that the patients do not have to purchase medicines from outside. Apart from this,

displeasure was expressed over at least four antenatal check-ups and less identification of complicated deliveries in the RCH portal. He laid emphasis on safe delivery of women with high risk pregnancy (HRP) at all the FRUs in the district. Apart from this, the CDO conducted a thorough review of all the programmes.

The CDO also reviewed the progress of Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 5.0, which was conducted in the month of September. While receiving information about the progress of the currently running Ayushman Bhava campaign, he directed that as per the guidelines pre-

scribed for this campaign, all the blocks should conduct the same as per the department-wise microplan. While reviewing the programme, it was directed that the report should be sent to the district headquarters on time. The CDO said that the programmes to be conducted on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti should be organised in 100 per cent gram sabhas.

The superintendents of all government hospitals, all ACMOs, Deputy CMOs, Divisional Accounts Manager, Senior Finance and Accounts Officer, DCPM, incharge medical officers and other medical officers were also present in the meeting.

CM praises Prayagraj police for best use of latest tech

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has applauded the role of Prayagraj police for making the best use of latest technology (Artificial Intelligence (AI)/Machine Learning (ML)-based traffic enforcement solutions for vehicle tracking) and inter-district coordination in nabbing an inter-state gang of robbers.

The CM's praise came during an online review meeting held recently. The meet was also attended by Commissioner of Police Ramit Sharma who briefed the CM about the use of technology in cracking the case.

The Prayagraj police had

recently arrested four key members of a Katihar (Bihar) based gang, who had executed two loots in UP, including Prayagraj and Sitapur, on September 12 and 15 respectively.

Explaining about the technology that helped cops in tracing out the escape route, Sharma told reporters "We took the advantage of the AI/ML based traffic enforcement solutions technology that helps in vehicle tracking. The Prayagraj police with the help of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera and Red Light Violate Detection (RLVD) traced the escape route of robbers who had executed a ₹7 lakh loot

near MG Road under Civil Lines police station in the city on September 12."

"After tracking their bike's registration and through CCTV network, police found that the robbers had entered the city from Varanasi. Then the Prayagraj police coordinated with their Varanasi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Sitapur and Barabanki counterparts and shared information to tighten the noose around the law breakers," Sharma added.

Similarly, various police teams assigned to crack the incident also coordinated with each other and seniors with the help of Integrated Control and Command Centre (ICCC).

The police also took help from different toll plazas and hotel industry to find out their exact route and stay details.

The CP added that a group of four robbers on two separate bikes in a bid to dodge cops had escaped on two different routes i.e Prayagraj-Kanpur and Prayagraj-Lucknow. However, one was spotted moving to Kanpur and Lucknow with the help of ICCCC, he added.

Sharma said the ICCCC facilities at Varanasi, Lucknow, Prayagraj and Sitapur helped in tracking the route of criminals. Moreover, the Operation Trinetra (that involves installing CCTVs) also helped cops to ascertain the identities of the criminals.

7 kids hurt in terrace collapse

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

As many as seven kids sustained injuries after they were trapped under the debris of a collapsed terrace in Parsara village under Kokhraj police station of Kaushambi. The injured kids — Aditya (12), Riya (8), Sneha (10), Aryan (6), Kanak (8), Shreyansh (10) and Kashish (10) were taken to the district hospital, Manjhanpur, from where doctors referred Aditya and Shreyansh to

Prayagraj for better treatment.

The incident took place when a group of children were playing under the dilapidated terrace attached to a wall. "Some kids climbed the terrace following which it collapsed trapping the kids. They were pulled out with the help of locals and taken to Manjhanpur hospital. Two of them were later referred to the SRN hospital in Prayagraj for better treatment," Kaushambi SP Brijesh Kumar Srivastava said.

ABETMENT TO SUICIDE CASE AGAINST TEACHER: A case has been registered against a teacher for abetment to suicide of a female student here. The student, Palak Jaiswal, was a class XI student in a college. She had posted a video of the programme organised in the college on Teachers' Day on WhatsApp status in which the school teacher is seen dancing. It is alleged that after seeing the status the teacher got

angry, called the student and threatened to get her name removed from the college. After this the student committed suicide at home. The family members were continuously visiting the police station to register a case against the teacher but the police allegedly scolded them and sent them away. When MLA Harshvardhan Vajpayee took cognizance of the matter, a case was registered against the teacher on the Tuesday.

UP Board disposes of 59,860 correction-related complaints

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The authorities of Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad, popularly known as UP Board, claimed to have disposed of 59,860 complaints related to correction in certificates and marksheets of students pending since 1984 after holding special camps in different districts.

He added the board had received as many as 59,860 backlogs/complaints, including Prayagraj region (8356), Meerut (24,512), Bareilly (5188), Varanasi (18,591) and Gorakhpur (3213) related to correction of errors in students' certificates/marksheets.

"This is despite the fact that the board had been repeatedly demanding proof and certified documents from students/principals/BSA and

the board authorities have taken outstanding measures to solve the long-pending backlogs and complaints of students pending since 1984.

He added the board had received as many as 59,860 backlogs/complaints, including Prayagraj region (8356), Meerut (24,512), Bareilly (5188), Varanasi (18,591) and Gorakhpur (3213) related to correction of errors in students' certificates/marksheets.

"This is despite the fact that the board had been repeatedly demanding proof and certified documents from students/principals/BSA and

DIOS concerned to get the errors rectified," he said. Shukla added the oldest complaint was from Meerut region wherein the applicant had registered his plaint regarding the correction of his father name's spelling in High School certificate in 1984. Similarly, in Prayagraj region a complaint of Rae Bareilly-based applicant was pending since 1986 wherein the father's name in High school certificate was misspelt. The board authorities after taking serious note of problems being faced by students and their guardians, had decided to hold camps in different districts

with the help of BSAs and DIOSs concerned and invited the applicants or complainants to come with proper proofs, documents to get grievances sorted out on the spot.

"All the 59,860 backlogs were sorted out within two months. The corrected documents have been uploaded on parishad's website as well," Shukla said adding that the board has decided to take online applications from students, developing its tracking system and seeking online documentation to get the errors cleared as well as online verification within stipulated time.

Air show to impact operation of flights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The air show to celebrate the Air Force Day will impact the operation of flights from different cities to Prayagraj between October 3 and October 8. The mega air show will be organised on October 8 and is likely to be attended by President Draupadi Murmu. Authorities have already cancelled flights from Indore, Raipur, Lucknow and

Dehradun. Besides 76 other flights will be cancelled between the given dates. Although the main event is on October 8, flight operations at Prayagraj airport will remain affected from October 2 itself. On October 6 there will be a full dress rehearsal of the event. The Indigo has released information about the cancellation of 76 flights during this period. Apart from this, timings of flights operated by Alliance Air have been changed and will

be delayed by one hour. At present flights to Bhubaneswar, Delhi and Mumbai are allowed from October 2 to October 8. Although this may also change later but Prayagraj-Dehradun, Prayagraj-Indore, Prayagraj-Raipur, Prayagraj-Lucknow will remain cancelled for seven consecutive days.

Likewise, Prayagraj-Bengaluru service will also remain cancelled on October 3, 5 and 8 and will operate only on October 2, 4, 6 and 7. The

Prayagraj-Bhopal flight will also remain cancelled on October 3, 5 and 7 and will operate on the rest of the intervening days.

On the 91st foundation day of India Air Force (IAF) an air show is being organised by the IAF at Sangam. While a number of flights operating from Prayagraj Airport are being cancelled, a radius of three kilometres around Bamrauli Air Station has been declared as 'no flying zone'.

‘Kanya Janmotsav’ programme held

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

District Magistrate Priyanka Niranjana while addressing the 'Kanya Janmotsav' programme organised by the Probation department at the Women's Hospital on Tuesday as the chief guest said that equal right was a must for the girls to move forward. She appealed to the parents of newborn girls for registration under Kanya Sumangla Scheme for their future. She said that the government has increased the amount of help from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000 which will be available to the girls from time to time. On the occasion she gave gift kits to all the 30 girls and blessed them. Congratulating the mothers for giving birth to girl child the DM said no discrimination should be done between boys and girls. Probation Officer Shakti Tripathi said the 'Kanya Sumangla Yojana' was a scheme to empower girls and threw light over the other schemes related to women welfare.

After the function the DM inspected the maternity ward and interacted with patients about the facilities which were being provided to them by the hospital. She directed the officials concerned to make avail-

able medical facilities properly and ensure the availability of other benefits too. Inspecting the premises the DM took the officials concerned to task for the filth and warned to maintain cleanliness otherwise remain prepared to face the music. She made it clear that medical waste should be disposed of as per norms. She inspected the buildings which were to be demolished for new construction, including the nursing school. During the inspection the DM was accompanied by Chief Development Officer (CDO) Srilaxmi VS, Principal Medical College Dr RB Kamal, Dr Juhi Deshpande, representative of working agencies and other officials concerned.

Meanwhile the DM while presiding over the meeting of the District Health Committee, Ayush Committee and inter-departmental Coordination Committee at the Collectorate on Tuesday directed the doctors posted at the CHCs as well as the PHCs to upload their photographs on group while doing rounds in wards. Reviewing the availability of the health facilities to patients the DM expressed her discontent over the attitude of doctors under which pregnant women

were being referred to other hospitals instead of treatment. Taking a strict view the DM directed the doctors to mention proper reason in referral cases. She sought details from the chief medical officer (CMO) about the admitted pregnant women and the figure of referred cases in comparison to admitted patients. She directed the CMO to issue show-cause notice to the incharge of Women's Hospital for mismanagement. She directed the doctors deployed at the CHCs and PHCs to do the round in the wards at midnight and upload the photograph on the group. She said no doctor was allowed to leave the place of posting without the prior permission. She made it clear that it was a wrong practice that most of the doctors were not staying at the place of posting during night time. The DM directed the CMO to prepare a list of the ASHAs according to the performance. On the issue of bad progress in the distribution of Ayushman cards the MOIC Rajgarh was taken to task and the DM directed the CMO to review the progress regularly and take action accordingly.

ARRESTED: The City Kotwali police arrested three

accused of theft and recovered three gas cylinders on Tuesday. Pushpa Devi of Gafoor Khan Ki Gali Vasliganj under City Kotwali police station had on September 23 lodged a case at the police station stating that her gas cylinder and a mobile phone had been stolen at night. After registering the case SHO Bal Mukund Mishra handed over the investigation to sub-inspector (S-I) Ajay Kumar Ojha. During investigation the IO interrogated a suspect who was identified as Sunil Lodhi of Oliyar Ghat under City Kotwali police station who said he used to steal household goods with Sonu of Takiya Danu Shah under City Kotwali police station. On identification of Sunil the police nabbed Sonu but nothing could be recovered from his house. The police recovered a gas cylinder from Sunil's house. The two accused said they used to sell the cylinder to Suresh Nishad of Machhali Ka Pul under City Kotwali police station who was working at a gas agency. On information provided by the accused the police raided the house of Suresh Nishad and received two gas cylinders. After completing the legal formalities the police sent the trio to jail.

BLW employees pledge for clean food, water

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A campaign was run in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) on Wednesday with awareness and pledge of clean food, water and environment and 'no use of single waste plastic'. The employees improved the workplace by offering shramdaan. As per the guidelines of the Ministry of Railways, a cleanliness campaign was conducted in the Officers' Guest House, Officers' Rest House and Office Canteens in the series of Swachhata Pakhwada-2023 being organised from September 16 to 30. Under the cleanliness campaign, along with a thorough inspection of the catering units and food facilities available in the canteens, high quality cleaning arrangements were also tested. The food and beverages available in the canteens were inspected and necessary guidelines were given for cleanliness.

Under the public awareness programme, every canteen employee of BLW was educated about clean food, water and environment and also the availability of separate dustbins for dry and wet wastes. During the drive, the ill effects of single use plastic were explained



Employees taking a pledge for clean food, water at BLW in Varanasi on Wednesday.

and people were encouraged to use it and to use only cotton bags. Various types of posters and messages related to cleanliness were also displayed in BLW Officers' Guest House, Officers' Rest House and office canteens.

Earlier, under the ongoing Rajbhasha Fortnight, various programmes are also being organised in BLW. In this direction, a seminar on Bhartendu Smriti Hindi Original Composition was organised at the Hall of Fame. The programme was presided over by BLW's Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Chief Mechanical Engineer (SE) Neeraj Jain. The subject

was introduced by Senior Rajbhasha Officer Dr Sanjay Kumar Singh. Public Relations Officer (PRO) Rajesh Kumar and others were also present. In the seminar, many BLW employees mesmerised the officers and employees by reciting their own poetry. Alok Kumar Singh, Vikas Pandey, Naval Kishore Gupta, Dr Sunita Tiwari, Amlesh Srivastava, Karuna Singh, Om Prakash Chanchal, Nitu Prakash Jaiswar, Bijendra Kumar, Arvind Pratap Singh and many others took part in the programme.

In the same direction, a technical seminar and Hindi

workshop was organised at BLW's Technical Training Centre (TTC). Junior translator Alok Kumar gave detailed information about the technical aspects of e-Office and Unicode.

Junior translator Dr Shashi Kant Sharma talked in detail about the use of punctuation marks in Hindi, technical words, full forms, foreign expressions as well as common mistakes in Hindi.

The programme was conducted by senior translator Amlesh Srivastava, while the vote of thanks was proposed by senior translator Vinod Kumar Srivastava.

FIRST COLUMN

HOW TO GET HELP FROM GOD?

To begin with, accept the ‘Karmaphala’ principal’ — “what we sow we reap”



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We have to make suitable efforts to do that. God is unlike our parents, who are obliged to help, especially when we are quite young. In the case of God, we have to deserve His help. If it wasn't so, God would be obliged to help everyone. Even parents stop helping as children become self-supporting, except to guide, as required. Therefore, we have to get rid of this false impression that God will help no matter what. Yes, He will if we become deserving. In this article, I will detail some thirty ways we can successfully do that, and which are mostly simple.

The first one has to be following dharma because it is most dear to God. God even incarnates to re-establish dharma. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 4.7) Dharma is the bedrock upon which the creation is based. Don't we know what social and other norms are? Then, we must not cross their 'Maryada' (limits). The second one is to be dutiful because this is the only right given to us. (2.47) Goodness must follow in our behaviour. We must be headed towards purity, as practised by yogis. (5.11) We should try to remember God because He is everything. (7.19) This will lead to 'dhyana' – the process of meditation.

Now I take up processes involving others. The first one has to be charity. All of us have something to spare, whether material objects or personal time. Human birth demands that we become useful to others. How else can the creation go on? We must help/serve others and others will do likewise.

The next group of acts are when we directly address God. The first one has to be praying, which comes to us naturally, whenever we are in trouble; even children pray when fearful. We should express our thanks if God responds. Shouldn't we be highly obliged? If God still does not respond, it is time to seek forgiveness and begin repenting for sins done in the past. Shouldn't we wonder about God's non-response and what we must do to deserve His help? Gradually, we must begin giving our minds and intelligence to God. What does this mean? Simply stated, God must be brought into our psyche; we must begin to think about God.



By now we would have become humble enough to do 'namaskar' to God giving up our highly bloated ego; visit a nearby temple to have 'darshan' of God. These places are generally highly charged with spiritual energy, which will help us to become God-conscious. We can begin worshipping God in our homes. We can begin by choosing a photo of God in whatever form attracts us the most; God has multiple forms. Similarly, we can start chanting God's name or mantra, whatever appeals to us. All these will lead to our becoming inquisitive about God's instructions, as detailed in bona fide scriptures like the Geeta. We can try to do whatever God wishes us to do (16.24), which will ensure God's pleasure. By now, we would have become highly deserving of God's help, because we in effect would have taken God's shelter.

This takes us to another level. God takes charge of our lives; He begins to use us as His 'nimitta' (instrument). Our lives will begin to become greatly fulfilling. God will get everything done and we will get credit. We will become very useful and highly satisfied. 'Tapasya' will begin to come naturally, which will qualify us for more gains, because in the spiritual domain also, the 'karmaphala principle' works, the only difference being: in this case our acts are spiritual. The word 'yogi' will no longer be a distant concept, we will become one. Sky is the limit then, as Sanjaya of the Mahabharata fame has described, "Where there is the yogeshwar Shri Krishna and where there is the archer Arjuna (in our case us), there will be 'saubhagya' (opulence), victory, wealth and definite principles (morality)".

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Punjab is reeling under socio-economic distress



AS MITTAL

Without sustainable economic growth, local employment generation, and self-reliance, Punjab's well-being will continue to be a challenge



It's worrisome that Punjab only receives 45 paise for every rupee it contributes to the Centre's tax kitty. This is especially concerning when comparing it to states like UP and Bihar, which receive Rs 1.80 and Rs 1.20, respectively. This revenue-sharing disparity is a significant contributor to the socio-economic distress experienced by Punjab. As a landlocked border state, it's even more crucial for Punjab to overcome this fiscal distress since India's and Pakistan's bilateral trade also halted through the Wagah-Attari route majorly affected Punjab's economy only. The said cost-effective cross-border route can directly short-connect to Europe, a big potential to catalyse the Punjab economy as strong as the economy of Southern-Western States, because of near to seaports.

Being far away from the seaports is one of the major disadvantages that Punjab is struggling with, and has a crippling impact on industrial growth. Secondly, adjoining the sensitive Pakistan border not only halted the trade but Pakistan led to illegal arms supply and drug terror scuffed the social fabric and law and order of Punjab. Keeping these two major geographical disadvantages centre stage till any central government has not compensated Punjab as it faces odd challenges in comparison to other states. Not even a fair share of tax kitty given, the Rural Development Fund(RDF) and Mandi Fee of Rs 5337 crore have not been released for long. Thus, how long does a fiscally distressed state government alone take forward the most development and welfare-oriented expenditure?

When a state's economy weakens, its people and progress suffer together. This is evident in the current crisis in India-Canada relations, as Punjab's economic distress has led to a migration of its human resources to Canada. Unfortunately, this migration has created a breeding ground for radicals and anti-Indian khalistan extremist activities on Canadian soil, a globalised challenge that has gone unaddressed. The Canadian connection to khalistani is longstanding. Since the mid-80s, there has been a significant exodus of Punjabi youth to Canada, where they often



WHEN A STATE'S ECONOMY WEAKENS, ITS PEOPLE SUFFER. PUNJAB'S ECONOMIC DISTRESS HAS LED TO A MIGRATION OF ITS HUMAN RESOURCES TO CANADA

(The author is vice-chairman of Sonalika group, vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

do odd jobs to sustain themselves. Unfortunately, some of these young people become prey to anti-India extremists.

It is not good to allow a lop-sided economic development of a sensitive state like Punjab. It has its serious repercussions. If we fail to ensure holistic development, then we will be accused of inefficiencies in handling human resources. Unemployment is a multi-faceted problem exacerbating the distressed places associated with poorer mental health, crime and drug abuse. There is enough evidence of drug abuse and distress in the law-and-order situation, that an issue of brimming, can be ascribed directly to unemployment.

Punjab, which used to be a prosperous and progressive state even during its toughest time, is currently facing a significant problem of uncontrolled unemployment due to distressed farming and an imbalanced industrial base. This has resulted in Punjab's GDP growth rate dropping to 6%, which is lower than the national growth rate of 7.24% in 2022-23. Punjab is currently ranked at the 19th position, whereas it ranked first in GDP among the states in 1981 and fourth in 2001. Interestingly, UP and Bihar, which were once part of the economically sick states known as 'BIMARU' (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh), are now fast-growing economies. UP achieved an impressive growth rate of 16.8%, with a GDP of Rs 20.48 lakh crore in 2022-23, while Bihar's growth rate was 10.98% with a GDP of Rs 7,45,310 crore.

It is crucial to acknowledge that Punjab has immense potential that should not be overlooked when compared to the Southern and Western states. Presently, Punjab's contribution to the country's tax kitty stands at approximately 3%, and it only receives 1.8% of

the divisible pool of taxes allocated by the Fifteenth Finance Commission. In contrast, the Western and Southern states contribute 67% to the central exchequer but only receive a meagre 3-4%. While their argument may appear valid, it is essential to consider that the Southern and Western states account for 53% of India's total factories and have the advantage of being closer to seaports, which can drive economic growth and result in more contributions to the central exchequer. Punjab's sluggish growth may dampen overall economic sentiments, but it still holds enormous potential for growth and contribution to the country's economy.

Undoubtedly, Punjab has the potential to contribute 10-15% as it possesses a strong capable and committed entrepreneurial spirit to overcome this economic distress. This spirit has been evident in the past when it overcame the challenges of the partition of India in 1947 and 13 years of militancy in the mid-80s to mid-90s. Within a few years of these events, Punjab was able to rehabilitate its economy and become the richest state in India in the 80s. Today, Punjab seeks a fair interface without any political interference to compete on a level playing field and strengthen its economy, ultimately reducing unemployment.

It is important to consider Punjab's significant contribution to national food security. However, the large areas and population figures of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar provide them with additional leverage from the central tax pool. It is concerning that Punjab only received 1.8% of the Rs 8,16,649 crore distributed by the centre to the states during 2022-23. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh received the highest share at 18% (Rs 1,46,525 crore) and Bihar received the second-highest share

at 10%. This highlights why Punjab and other states argue that they are not receiving a fair share of funds, despite contributing more to the exchequer.

During the fiscal year 2022-23, Punjab contributed a sum of Rs 32,800 crore to the central taxes fund, which included CGST, income tax, corporation tax, wealth tax, union excise duty, customs, and service tax. However, in return, the state only received Rs 14,756 crore. This has led to Punjab raising the issue with the Fifteen Finance Commission, as it believes it deserves a fair share of central tax. Despite its efforts, Punjab has been unable to secure an amendment to the Finance Act.

Constitutionally, the purpose of the finance commission is to create some kind of 'equalization' among advantaged and disadvantaged states. From the point of view of equalization, the adoption of population figures as one of the criteria of devolution needs to be justified. Therefore, the constitution provides for a fair share of union revenue to be devolved to the states to address this issue.

The Way Forward:

In a federal structure, the central government needs to prioritise the improvement of economic conditions and livelihood prospects for the people of Punjab, which are facing unique challenges in comparison to other states.

It is crucial to take a comprehensive approach that ensures employment opportunities and social respect regardless of demographic and political differences. Without sustainable economic growth, local employment generation, and self-reliance, Punjab's well-being will continue to be a challenge, which is indispensable for the overall well-being of our nation.

Goat-rearing can be an excellent source of livelihood in rural Bihar

To provide livelihood, the government should provide adequate training and information to landless, marginal farmers about the goat farming schemes

Anita Devi, a 40-year-old resident of Hussainpur village, located about 65 kilometres from the Muzaffarpur district in Bihar, lost her husband two years ago. Left with no means to support her family of seven, including four daughters and two sons, she started goat farming to earn a livelihood. She faced criticism when she began rearing goats as a woman farmer. However, Anita resisted because her motivation to provide for her family kept her going. She had started with just two goats. Today, she has eight adult goats and 20 young ones. Goat rearing enabled her to protect her family and improve her financial status.



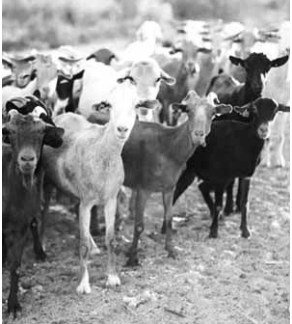
SIMRAN KUMARI

(The writers is a student from rural Bihar; views expressed are personal)

Alongside manual labour, agriculture-based employment like cattle, poultry, ducks, and goat farming is a crucial source of income, especially for economically disadvantaged individuals like landless, small-scale farmers, agricultural labourers, and socially oppressed individuals. According to the latest 2019 Livestock census, India has a population of 150 million goats, the second largest in the world. In around half a million remote villages, 70 million farmers are involved in the goat farming business. The primary income from Goat farming comes from milk, which has a production of about 42000 Kgs and meat production, which stands at 8500 Kgs.

Like Anita Devi, Goat farming is an excellent means of self-employment for many rural women. Around rural areas in Muzaffarpur, many women earn their livelihoods through goat farming, becoming breadwinners for their families. 35-year-old Champa Devi, resident of the same village as Anita, also supports her three daughters and two sons by raising goats.

In other instances, older women in the village claim that their sons and daughters-in-law have stopped providing for them in their old age. These women have, therefore, started rearing 2-4 goats to earn a living. These women leave for the fields in the morning to



graze their goats and only return in the evening.

Goat farming is a hard job, especially during the monsoons. It can be a challenge to find adequate fodder for the goats. The farmers rely on bananas, bamboo, and Banyan leaves to keep the cattle alive. People invest their capital into it. Even

after that, we see an increasing number of women who raise goats in the village. It has become a source of livelihood for many families.

Various non-governmental and government organisations run programs to strengthen the village economy through agriculture-based employment like cattle, poultry, ducks, and goat farming. The Bihar government provides subsidies up to 60% for promoting goat farming. Under the Integrated Goat and Sheep Scheme, there is a provision for subsidising ten goats plus one buck, and 40 goats and two bucks. The government also provides financial aid to disadvantaged communities like Scheduled Caste/Schedule Tribe and

Other Backward Classes. These continuously disadvantaged groups get up to 60% subsidy, while the rest get 50%.

In addition, the capital investment required for raising 20 goats with one buck is about two lakhs, and farmers can take a loan from the bank for this purpose. This process of approving loans goes through the Department of Animal Husbandry in consultation with the bank. After that, subsidies get deposited into the beneficiaries' bank accounts in two instalments. However, because of a lack of awareness, many rural families do not know these schemes, leading women farmers like Anita and Champa to take loans with

high interest rates to start goat farming. On top of that, due to their lack of training, It is difficult for farmers to acquire high-quality breeds.

To promote livelihoods, the government should provide adequate training and information to landless, marginal farmers, and labourers about the goat farming schemes. Details about these schemes should be available in the Panchayat office or Gram Sabha. Ward members should be responsible for disseminating information about these programs to goat farmers. Only then women in vulnerable situations will be able to continue goat farming as a career and give themselves and their families a better future.

Wedding hall fire in Iraq kills 100, hurts 150

AP ■ MOSUL (IRAQ)

A raging fire seemingly caused by fireworks set off to celebrate a Christian wedding consumed a hall packed with guests in northern Iraq, killing around 100 people and injuring 150 others as authorities warned Wednesday the death toll could still rise.

Authorities said that flammable building materials also contributed to the latest disaster to hit Iraq's dwindling Christian minority. In the fire's chaotic aftermath, officials offered conflicting death tolls and security officials said they had detained staff at the wedding hall as part of their investigation.

The fire happened in the Hamdaniya area of Iraq's Nineveh province, authorities said. That's a predominantly Christian area just outside of the city of Mosul, some 335 kilometres (205 miles) north-west of Baghdad. There was no official word on the cause of



People gather at the site of a fatal fire, in the district of Hamdaniya, Nineveh province, Iraq on Wednesday. A fire that raced through a hall hosting a Christian wedding in northern Iraq killed multiple people, authorities said Wednesday. AP/PTI

the blaze, but the Kurdish television news channel Rudaw aired footage showing pyrotechnics shooting flames up from the floor of the event and setting a chandelier

afire. Multiple witnesses, including 50-year-old wedding attendee Faten Youssef, said the fire started as the bride and groom began their slow dance.

The flames raced through plastic decorations and the ceiling started collapsing, she said. "Flames started falling on us," Youssef told The Associated Press. "Things were

falling down and blocked the way to the exit." She said her family found their way out through a kitchen, after the family struggled through smoke and flames and her son failed to kick through a jammed exit door.

It wasn't immediately clear if the bride and groom were among those hurt.

Survivors arrived at local hospitals in bandages, receiving oxygen, as their families milled through hallways and outside as workers organized more oxygen cylinders. Some of those burned included children. Ambulance sirens wailed for hours after the fire as paramedics brought out the injured.

Extravagant wedding ceremonies are common in Iraq, like many countries in the Middle East. Families often invite hundreds of relatives and members of the broader community, spending heavily on spectacular ceremonies with elaborately decorated

halls, music and entertainers, often including pyrotechnics.

Casualty figures fluctuated in the hours after the incident.

An initial Health Ministry statement, carried by the state-run Iraqi News Agency, said the blaze killed over 100 people and injured 150. Health officials in Nineveh province put the death toll at 114, while Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir al-Shammari later put the death toll at 93.

A Health Ministry official, speaking to the AP at midday Wednesday on condition of anonymity as he did not have authorization to talk to journalists, said that 30 bodies have been identified by their relatives, but the rest are so badly burned that will require DNA identification.

He put the death toll at 94, with around 100 people still receiving medical treatment. "The death toll is expected to rise as some are in critical condition," he said.

Leader of Spain's conservatives loses first bid to become PM

AP ■ MADRID

The leader of Spain's conservatives failed Wednesday in his long-shot first bid to become the country's next prime minister when he fell short of the votes he needed in the Spanish parliament to form a government. As expected, Popular Party leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo came up four votes shy of the necessary absolute majority of 176 votes in his favour. Feijóo will try again on Friday when the bar is lowered and he needs only more "yes" than "no" votes from parliament's 350 lawmakers.

The Popular Party holds 137 seats in the Madrid-based Congress of the Deputies, the most of any party. But even with backing from the far-right Vox's 33 lawmakers and two from small conservative parties representing Navarra and the Canary Islands, Feijóo only reached 172 votes in his favour to 178 against him.

Spain's July 23 national election left the parliament highly fragmented with its legislators spread between 11 different parties, setting the stage for a difficult path to power for any party. If Feijóo fails to win approval on his second attempt, acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez would get a shot at staying in the Moncloa Palace. The centre-left Socialist leader would have to round up enough support of lawmakers from a group of competing leftist, regionalist and separatist parties from Catalonia and the Basque Country. The parliament debated Feijóo's bid to become prime minister for several hours on Tuesday and on Wednesday morning before the vote. The debate, however, was dominated by the possibility that Sánchez is considering accepting demands from Catalan separatist parties that Spain grant an amnesty for hundreds, possibly thousands, of people who participated in a failed 2017 secession bid by northeast Catalonia. Sánchez, who has pardoned several high-level Catalan separatists, has kept quiet on the possibility of an amnesty, and only said that he wants to continue "normalising" relations with the northeast region where tensions have decreased in recent years.

6 climate activists take on European nations

AP ■ STRASBOURG

Six young people argued that governments across Europe aren't doing enough to protect people from climate change at the European Court of Human Rights on Wednesday in the latest and largest instance of activists taking governments to court to force climate action.

Legal teams for the 32 nations — which includes the 27 EU member countries, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Russia and Turkey — questioned the admissibility of the case as well as the claim that the plaintiffs are victims of climate change harm.

But lawyers representing the young adults and children from Portugal said the nations they're suing have failed to adequately address human-caused warming and therefore violated some of the group's fundamental rights.

Barrister Sudhanshu Swaroop, a counsel for United Kingdom, said national governments understand the threat

of climate change and its challenges and are determined to tackle it through international cooperation.

He said the plaintiffs should have gone through national courts first, and stressed that since they are not nationals of the countries they are attacking, other than Portugal, the European Court of Human Rights cannot have jurisdiction.

"There was no attempt by the applicants to invoke, let alone exhaust domestic remedies," agreed Isabelle Niedispacher, a legal expert for Belgium.

Pleading on behalf of the young people, Alison Macdonald told the judges about the urgency to tackle the "biggest crisis that Europe and the world" have perhaps faced, and that they should play a bigger role in helping control planet-warming emissions. "It cannot be within a state's discretion whether or not to act to prevent catastrophic climate destruction," she said.

US allows Israeli citizens to travel to America visa-free

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is admitting Israel into a select group of countries whose citizens are allowed to travel to the United States without getting a visa in advance.

The decision announced Wednesday comes despite Washington's concerns about the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinian Americans and marks a major accomplishment for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has sparred frequently with the Biden administration.

Under the waiver programme, Israelis will be able to travel to the US for business or leisure purposes for up to 90 days without a visa simply by registering with the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation. But even if they are authorised to travel under that system, US officials at the airport can still bar them from entering the country. Israel had been facing a

Saturday deadline, the end of the US government's budget year, to gain admission to the programme without having to requalify for eligibility next year.

The Department of Homeland Security administers the programme, which currently allows citizens of 40 mostly European and Asian countries to travel to the US for three months without visas.

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the agreement, after more than a decade of work, "will enhance our two nations' collaboration on counterterrorism, law enforcement and our other common priorities" and make the allies more secure.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a joint statement with Mayorkas, cited enhanced "freedom of movement for US citizens, including those living in the Palestinian Territories or travelling to and from them". Israel's admission has been a priority for successive Israeli leaders. It comes as

Netanyahu is facing months of mass protests against his proposed remake of Israel's judicial system that critics say will make the country less democratic.

Countries that want to take part in the visa programme have to meet three critical benchmarks.

Israel met two of those benchmarks over the past two years: a low percentage of Israelis who applied for visas and were rejected and a low percentage of Israelis who have overstayed their visas. Israel had struggled to meet the third, for reciprocity that essentially means all US citizens, including Palestinian Americans, must be treated equally when travelling to or through Israel.

Claiming national security reasons, Israel has long had separate entry requirements and screening processes for Palestinian Americans.

Many complained that the procedures were onerous and discriminatory.

Azerbaijan says 192 of its troops were killed in last week's offensive

AP ■ BAKU

A total of 192 Azerbaijani troops were killed and 511 were wounded during Azerbaijan's offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh last week, the country's Health Ministry announced on Wednesday. It also said that one Azeri civilian died in the hostilities. Nagorno-Karabakh officials said earlier that at least 200 people on their side, including 10 civilians, were killed and over 400 were wounded in the fighting.

The military operation allowed Azerbaijan to reclaim full control over the breakaway region that was run by separatists for about 30 years.

Tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians — more than a third of the region's population — have already left. More are likely to follow after separatist troops agreed to lay down arms and Azerbaijan lifted a

10-month blockade of the road linking the territory to Armenia.

Azerbaijan and separatist officials have held two rounds of talks on the "reintegration" of Nagorno-Karabakh and its ethnic Armenian population into the mainly Muslim country, but how exactly it would happen remains unclear.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region of Azerbaijan that came under the control of ethnic Armenian forces, backed by the Armenian military, in separatist fighting that ended in 1994.

During a six-week war in 2020, Azerbaijan took back parts of Nagorno-Karabakh along with surrounding territory that Armenian forces had claimed during the earlier conflict.

In December, Azerbaijan imposed a blockade of the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with

Armenia, alleging that the Armenian government was using the road for mineral extraction and illicit weapons shipments to the region's separatist forces.

Armenia charged that the closure denied basic food and fuel supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh's approximately 120,000 people. Azerbaijan rejected the accusation, arguing the region could receive supplies through the Azerbaijani city of Aghdam — a solution long resisted by Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, who called it a strategy for Azerbaijan to gain control of the region.

Some 42,500 people, or about 35 per cent of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population, had left for neighbouring Armenia as of Wednesday morning, according to Armenian authorities. Hours-long traffic jams were reported on Tuesday on the

road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

An explosion at a gas station near the region's capital Stepanakert, where people were queuing to fuel up their cars before leaving for Armenia, on Monday night killed at least 68 people, according to Nagorno-Karabakh's human rights ombudsman Gegham Stepanyan.

Another 290 were wounded, and a total of 105 were considered missing as of Tuesday evening, he said.

The Armenian Health Ministry on Wednesday said 237 people wounded in both the hostilities last week and the gas station explosion on Monday had been evacuated by ambulance and helicopter from Nagorno-Karabakh.

They're receiving necessary treatment, and the process of evacuating the injured continues, the ministry said.

UK authorities first drug consumption room

AP ■ LONDON

Scottish authorities on Wednesday approved a 2.3 million-pound (\$2.8 million) pound drug consumption room, the first government-backed place in the UK where users can take illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin under the supervision of medical staff.

Local officials in the Scottish city of Glasgow on Wednesday approved the facility, which had long been delayed by political disagreements.

Authorities hope the pilot project will help tackle drug misuse problems in Scotland, which has the highest drug death figures in Western Europe and saw almost three times the rate of drug poisoning deaths compared to the UK average in 2021.

The facility, which will start recruiting staff next year, was first proposed in 2016 following an HIV outbreak in Glasgow among people

who injected drugs in public places.

It's backed by the Scottish government, although some lawmakers have raised concerns about the impact on local residents and businesses.

Proponents, including Scotland's drug and alcohol policy minister Elena Whitham, say evidence from more than 100 similar facilities worldwide, including in Germany and the Netherlands, show they work to save lives and reduce overall costs to health services.

The centre will be staffed by trained health care professionals and offer a hygienic environment where people can consume drugs they obtained elsewhere.

Officials say people can't share drugs with others in the facility, and that health and social workers at the centre will offer advice and support on recovery and welfare.

Churchill's Old War Office launched as luxury hotel

PTI ■ LONDON

The Old War Office (OWO) of Britain's World War II era prime minister Winston Churchill opened its doors as a brand-new luxury hotel in London with a glittering launch event, complete with surprise musical performances by musicians Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber and Andrea Bocelli.

Princess Anne — the Princess Royal, the sister of King Charles III, officially unveiled the plaque for The OWO after a tour of the hotel with Hinduja Group co-chairman GP Hinduja on Tuesday evening. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also made a quick stopover, along with parliamentarians, entrepreneurs, hoteliers and stars of film and television. The Indian-origin Hinduja Group conglomerate and the UK's richest family had acquired the landmark on Whitehall, opposite Downing Street, over eight years ago and tied up with Raffles Hotels to transform the building into an extravagant hub complete with luxury residences, restaurants and spas. "We have always been working to see what best we can do between India and the UK because we believe our responsibility is to act as a bridge between the host country and the motherland," said GP Hinduja.

"It took us eight years and in these eight years we had a lot to do, but finally this iconic building has been converted into peace and solace, not World Wars. It is the legacy not only of the Hinduja Group but London as a great destination. Everyone who lands in London will first come here to see what it is," he said. After the launch event, which also showcased the food of 3-Michelin-starred chef Mauro Colagreco as the chef partner for The OWO, the hotel will welcome its first guests starting this Friday.

UN asked to declare 'gender apartheid' as Af womens' mental health worsens

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The UN's most powerful body must support governments seeking to legally declare the intensifying crackdown by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers on women and girls "gender apartheid", the head of the UN agency promoting gender equality said Tuesday.

Sima Bahous, executive director of UN Women, told the Security Council that more than 50 increasingly dire Taliban edicts are being enforced with more severity, including by male family members. That is exacerbating mental health issues and suicidal thoughts especially among young women and is shrinking women's decision-making even in their own homes.

"They tell us that they are prisoners living in darkness, confined to their homes with-



out hope or future," she said.

Under international law, apartheid is defined as a system of legalized racial segregation that originated in South Africa. But a growing consensus among international experts, officials and activists says apartheid can also apply to gender in cases like that of

Afghanistan, where women and girls face systematic discrimination.

"We ask you to lend your full support to an intergovernmental process to explicitly codify gender apartheid in international law," Bahous urged the 15-member council, including its five permanent

members: the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

There is no existing international law to respond to "mass, state-sponsored gender oppression," Bahous said. But she said the Taliban's "systemic and planned assault on women's rights... must be named, defined and proscribed in our global norms so that we can respond appropriately."

The Taliban took power in August 2021 during the final weeks of the US and NATO forces' pullout from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. As they did during their previous rule of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban gradually reimposed their harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, barring girls from school beyond the sixth grade and women from almost all jobs, public spaces, gyms

and recently closing beauty salons.

The Security Council meeting on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' latest report on Afghanistan took place on the final day of the annual meeting of world leaders at the 193-member UN General Assembly.

On Wednesday, Zabihullah Mujahid, the main spokesman for the Taliban government, slammed the council meeting for focusing on domestic Afghan matters of "women's education and their work" instead of issues such as security, peace and stability.

"It was necessary to discuss the end of the blacklist in the United Nations, the removal of sanctions, the release of seized assets," Mujahid said on X, formerly known as Twitter. He said the UN gathering should also have discussed "the recog-

nition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" as the Taliban call their government.

No country has recognized the Taliban, and the assembly's credentials committee hasn't either, primarily over its effort to relegate women to their homes and failure to form an inclusive government. This has left UN recognition with the now-ousted previous government led by Ashraf Ghani. For the third year, its representative did not speak at the high-level gathering.

Bahous said that over the past year, UN Women collaborated with the UN political mission in Afghanistan known as UNAMA and the UN International Office for Migration to interview over 500 Afghan women.

Among their key findings, she said: 46% think the Taliban should not be recognised under

any circumstances; 50% think the Taliban should only be recognised after it restores women's and girls' rights to education, employment, and participation in government.

The women interviewed said the dramatic shrinking of their influence on decision-making, not just at the national or provincial level but also in their communities and homes, is driven by increased poverty, decreasing financial contribution and "the Taliban's imposition of hyper-patriarchal gender norms," Bahous said.

In a grim sign of women's growing isolation, she said, only 22% of the women interviewed reported meeting with women outside their immediate family at least once a week, and a majority reported worsened relations with other members of their family and community.

Kakar admits military influence to continue in Pakistan polity

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Underscoring the inevitable role of the army in Pakistan, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has admitted that the country's military will continue its hold in politics unless civic delivery institutions are strengthened in the coup-prone country. The powerful Army, which has ruled coup-prone Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy.

Kakar was speaking during an interview with the news channel TRT World, a Turkish public broadcaster, on Tuesday, when he spoke about the Pakistani military's major role in politics.

"Pragmatically, realistically and honestly ... affirmative, yes," was his answer when the interviewer asked if the disciplined military would continue to stay for a foreseeable future in Pakistan's polity.

Kakar was replying to a question about the "undue influence, whether suspected or real, of the military establishment of Pakistan" and its role.

He was asked: Can Pakistan work as a democracy when most Pakistanis believe

their leadership is beholden to the almost nefarious relationship with the military?

"As far as the civil-military relationship and its imbalance is concerned, I personally view it as a pure government structure. Pakistani politicians, all the political leadership, have had a marital alliance with this military institution for their own specific interests," the caretaker prime minister said.

"And once they are out of power, it is one of their favourite mantras to criticise and shift the onus of their own failures in terms of governance and pinpoint the reason behind that failure as an imbalance between the civil and military relationship," he pointed out.

"Unfortunately, in our case, the civilian institutions who (sic) are responsible for the service delivery at the behest of the government or state, are performing quite poorly in last three-to-four decades be it in our health services, be it in our education services, be it our disaster management, be it our tax revenue collection," he said, adding, "So, when there is poor governance challenge, the only institution which has the organizational capability left with us is military."

"So anyone who is leading the government has to rely on



the day-to-day basis on the challenges of government and engage them to do that delivery part," the leader from the Balochistan region said.

He also offered a remedial measure: "If somebody is genuinely interested that the military should not meddle in the affairs of the state structure, then we need to enhance the capability of these civilian institutions." The question about the military's influence had earlier stemmed from another question about the alleged US involvement in former prime minister Imran Khan's ouster.

Kakar promptly dismissed it as a "conspiracy theory" that is common in all kinds of political cultures. Khan was ousted from power in April 2022 after losing a no-confidence vote, which he had then

alleged was part of a US-led conspiracy targeting him because of his independent foreign policy decisions on Russia, China, and Afghanistan.

Khan is also facing more than 140 cases across the country and faces charges like terrorism, violence, blasphemy, corruption, and murder.

Observing that they (Khan's party) themselves had "retreated and they retrieved that allegation themselves in a couple of months, Kakar said, "How would I, or anyone else, believe in such a conspiracy when people who brought it to public domain backtracked from it (sic)."

Kakar said his government, even if a caretaker dispensation, has ensured that "no one, whether it is the USA or any other power, meddles in our domestic affairs." "We are a sovereign country, we are a sovereign nation. We do things according to our own interests. Whether that was a good decision or a bad decision to oust Imran Khan's government, but all we know is for the last many, many, many years, that was the only way and time that he was ousted constitutionally. There was no military coup. That was all constitutional and lawful," Kakar asserted.

9 killed in blast as kids play with rocket shell in Pak's Sindh

Karachi (PTI): At least nine people, including five children, of the same family were killed on Wednesday when a rocket launcher's shell exploded at a house when the kids were playing with the ammunition in Pakistan's Sindh province, police said. Kashmiri-Kandhkot Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rohil Khosa said children found a rocket shell while playing on the ground and brought it home where it exploded, killing nine people, including five children, two women, and two men, of the same family. He said besides the casualties five others were injured in the explosion and rushed to hospital. "This is an area on the riverine belt and the rocket shell must have been left there by dacoits who hide out deep into the riverine belt areas," Khosa said.

The SSP said the police had reached the site and further investigation was underway and an "emergency" had been declared at the Kandhkot Civil Hospital. Pakistan Peoples Party's Chairman and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said in a tweet that the riverine areas of Sindh and Punjab had become a safe haven to many criminal gangs and urged the government to clear the region from such elements.

Iran launches imaging satellite into orbit amid tensions with the West

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran claimed on Wednesday that it successfully launched an imaging satellite into space, a move that could further ratchet up tensions with Western nations that fear its space technology could be used to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran's Communication Minister Isa Zarepour said the Noor-3 satellite had been put in an orbit 450 kilometres (280 miles) above the Earth's surface, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

It was not clear when exactly the launch took place.

There was no immediate acknowledgment from Western officials of the launch or of the satellite being put into orbit.

The US military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Iran has had a series of failed launches in recent years.

Zarepour said the aerospace arm of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has had success in launching satellites in the past, had carried out the most recent launch.

Authorities released footage of a rocket taking off from a mobile launcher without saying where the launch occurred. Details in the video corresponded with a Guard base near Shahroud, some 330

kilometres (205 miles) north-east of the capital, Tehran. The base is in Semnan province, which hosts the Imam Khomeini Spaceport from which Iran's civilian space program operates. The Guard operates its own space program and military infrastructure parallel to Iran's regular armed forces and answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

It launched its first satellite into space in April 2020. But the head of the US Space Command later dismissed it as a "tumbling webcam in space" that would not provide vital intelligence. Western sanctions bar Iran from importing advanced spying technology.

The United States has alleged that Iran's satellite launches defy a UN Security Council resolution and has called on Tehran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The US intelligence community's 2022 threat assessment claims the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology.

Iran has always denied seeking nuclear weapons, and says its space program, like its nuclear activities, is for purely

civilian purposes. US intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran abandoned an organised military nuclear program in 2003.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space.

The program has seen recent troubles, however. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh program, another satellite-carrying rocket.

A fire at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in February 2019 killed three researchers, authorities said at the time. A launchpad rocket explosion later that year drew the attention of then-President Donald Trump.

Tensions are already high with Western nations over Iran's nuclear program, which has steadily advanced since Trump five years ago withdrew the US from the 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers and restored crippling sanctions on Iran.

Efforts to revive the agreement reached an impasse more than a year ago. Since then, the IAEA has said Iran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons grade levels to build "several" nuclear weapons if it chooses to do so.

Pak inches closer to holding polls

Lists of prelim delimitation of constituencies published

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Wednesday inched closer to the holding of the much-awaited general elections as the country's chief election body published the lists of preliminary delimitation of constituencies. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had announced it would hold the election in the last week of January after finalising the setting up of electoral districts in the light of the data of the census, which was held earlier this year.

In a press release, the ECP said that the report of preliminary delimitation has been uploaded on the commission's website and can be accessed by the public, where maps of the delimitation are also available.

"The publication of the preliminary constituencies will continue for 30 days from Sept 27 to Oct 26," it said, highlighting that objections to the preliminary constituencies can be made by the voters of the concerned constituency. The through representations would be in the form of representations addressed to the commission's secretary and be submitted to the ECP Secretariat in Islamabad by October 27.

"The ECP will take decisions on these representations from Oct 28 to Nov 26 after hearing the positions of the

respective parties," the release said. The final list of constituencies would be published on November 30, followed by issuance of the elections schedule and polling.

The completion of the delimitation brings ECP closer to holding polls by the last week of January, as planned by the body. A specific date for the elections is yet to be announced. The ECP earlier stated 54 days were required to let the candidate file nominations, their scrutiny and final approval as well as time for election campaign. That is why it said that the elections would be held in the last week of January. The initial listing of electoral districts is the first major step to fulfill the commitment to hold polls by the end of January.

The National Assembly

was dissolved on August 9 and constitutionally, the elections should be held within 90 days but the process was delayed by the ECP due to the delimitation exercise which became mandatory in the wake of the new census held this year. The previous government just days before the end of its term endorsed the results of the census which obligated the ECP to set up a new electoral district on the basis of the latest population. The move led to fears that the polls meant to be held within 90 days may be delayed till next year as the delimitation process would take about four months to complete. The National Assembly consists of 266 general seats and 60 seats reserved for women. Ten seats have also been reserved for non-Muslims.

Pakistan receives first shipment of LPG from Russia

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan has received the first shipment of liquefied petroleum gas from Russia, marking the cash-strapped nation's second major Russian energy purchase.

The shipment of 100,000 metric tonnes of LPG was delivered by Russia to Pakistan through Iran's Sarakhs Special Economic Zone, the Russian embassy in Islamabad said on Tuesday. However, it did not provide details on Iran's involvement, and it was not immediately clear how much the LPG cost or if it was discounted. The Russian embassy said consultations are on for the next shipment.

Tuesday's shipment comes after Pakistan received its first-ever delivery of Russian crude oil in June under a deal struck between the two countries earlier this year.

Russia accuses Ukraine's Western allies of helping attack its Black Sea Fleet HQ

AP ■ KIVY

Russia on Wednesday accused Ukraine's Western allies of helping plan and conduct last week's missile strike on the Black Sea Fleet's headquarters in annexed Crimea.

"There is no doubt that the attack had been planned in advance using Western intelligence means, NATO satellite assets and reconnaissance planes and was implemented upon of the advice of American and British security agencies and in close coordination with them," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at a briefing.

Moscow has repeatedly claimed that the US and its NATO allies have effectively become involved in the conflict by supplying weapons to

Ukraine and providing it with intelligence information and helping plan attacks on Russian facilities. The accusation came the day after video appeared to show the fleet's commander, Adm Viktor Sokolov, was still alive despite Ukraine's claims — without providing supporting evidence — that he was among 34 officers killed in Friday's strike on the port city of Sevastopol.

The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has been a frequent target since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine 20 months ago. Crimea has served as the key hub supporting the invasion and has increasingly come under fire by Ukraine.

Ukraine said the strike

that put a large hole in the main building of the headquarters had wounded 105 people, though those claims could not independently be verified.

Russia initially said one serviceman was killed but quickly retracted that statement and said the person was missing. Moscow has provided no further updates and has not commented directly on Sokolov's status.

The Ministry of Defence, however, posted video Tuesday showing Sokolov among other senior officers attending a video conference with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Sokolov did not speak in the clip shown.

Ukraine's Special Operation Forces posted a statement Tuesday saying its sources claimed Sokolov was among the dead, many of

whom had not yet been identified. It said it was trying to verify the claim after the video surfaced.

Sokolov was shown speaking to journalists about the Black Fleet's operations in a video posted on a news channel linked to the Russian Defence Ministry.

It wasn't clear when the video was recorded. The video didn't contain any mention of the Ukrainian attack on fleet headquarters.

Zakharova's statements follow comments made Tuesday by Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council, who said the arrival of American-made Abrams tanks in Ukraine and a US promise to supply an unspecified number of long-range ATACMS missiles would push NATO closer to a direct conflict with Russia.

Philippines says it will remove any barrier China installs in disputed South China Sea

AP ■ MANILA

Philippine forces would dismantle any floating barrier that China's coast guard may install in the disputed South China Sea, a Philippine admiral said Wednesday after Manila infuriated China by removing one such obstruction in a contested shoal. Philippine officials strongly condemned the installation last week of a 300-metre (980-foot) -long barrier by Chinese coast guard vessels at the entrance to the lagoon of Scarborough Shoal as a violation of international law and the country's sovereignty. The barrier has prevented a swarm of Filipino boats from entering the rich fishing area, they said. The shoal lies within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone just west of the main Luzon Island, but has been occupied by China since 2012 as part of a push by Beijing to lay claim to virtually the entire

South China Sea.

On Monday, the Philippine coast guard said it has complied with an order by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr to launch a covert operation to remove the rope and net barrier held up by small buoys in the mouth of the shoal. China reacted on Tuesday by asking the Philippines "not to make provocations or seek trouble".

"Huayang Island is China's inherent territory," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in a news briefing in Beijing on Wednesday, referring to the Chinese name for Scarborough.

"What the Philippines (has) done is nothing but a farce that entertains itself. China will continue to safeguard territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of Huangyan Island."

Philippine Vice Adm

Alberto Carlos, who heads the military's Western Command in charge of overseeing the

South China Sea, told journalists he was concerned that the Chinese coast guard may also install a similar floating barrier at the entrance to Second Thomas Shoal, which is occupied by a small Philippine navy contingent on a long-grounded warship but has been surrounded by Chinese coast guard ships. "My concern is, if they also put a barrier in Ayungin...we also have to remove the barrier," Carlos told journalists, using the Philippine name for Second Thomas Shoal. "Whatever they install, we will remove." Under Marcos, who took office last year, the Philippines has intensified efforts to fight China's increasingly aggressive actions in one of the world's most hotly contested waters. The Philippine coast guard now often invites journalists to join its territorial patrols in an effort, it says, to expose China's bullying in the busy waterway.

3 astronauts return to Earth after a year in space

AP ■ CAPE CARNIVAL

A NASA astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts returned to Earth on Wednesday after being stuck in space for just over a year. American Frank Rubio set a record for the longest US spaceflight — a result of the extended stay.

The trio landed in a remote area of Kazakhstan, descending in a Soyuz capsule that was rushed up as a replacement after their original ride was hit by space junk and lost all its coolant while docked to the International Space Station.

What should have been a 180-day mission turned into a 371-day stay. Rubio spent more than two weeks longer in space than Mark Vande Hei, who held NASA's previous endurance record for a single

spaceflight. Russia holds the world record of 437 days, set in the mid-1990s.

The Soyuz capsule that brought Rubio and cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin back was a replacement launched in February. Russian engineers suspect a piece of space junk pierced the radiator of their original capsule late last year, midway through what should have been a six-month mission. Engineers worried that without cooling, the capsule's electronics and any occupants could overheat to dangerous levels, so the craft returned early.

There wasn't another Soyuz to launch a fresh crew until this month. Their replacements finally arrived nearly two weeks ago. "No one deserves to go home to their families more than you," the space station's

new commander, Denmark's Andreas Mogensen, said earlier this week. Prokopyev told ground controllers throughout the descent that all three were feeling good. They experienced more than four times the force of gravity as their capsule streaked through the atmosphere and came to a touchdown in the barren Kazakh steppes. Helicopters moved in with recovery crews to fetch the astronauts.

"Rubio's record ride comes to an end," NASA commentator Rob Navias said from Mission Control in Houston.

Rubio, 47, an Army doctor and helicopter pilot, said at a news conference last week that he never would have agreed to a full year in space if asked at the outset. He ended up missing important family milestones including the oldest of

his four children finishing her first year at the U.S. Naval Academy and another heading off to West Point.

Rubio said the psychological aspect of spending so long in space was tougher than he expected. "Hugging my wife and kids is going to be paramount, and I'll probably focus on that for the first couple days," he said. Rubio may hold on to this record for a while. NASA has no plans as of now for more yearlong missions.

It was the first spaceflight for Rubio and Petelin, 40, an engineer. Prokopyev, 48, an engineer and pilot, has now pulled two long station stints.

They logged 157 million miles (253 million kilometres) since launching from Kazakhstan last September and circled the world nearly 6,000 times.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This Notice is hereby given to general public that Mrs. Pooja Bansal and Mrs. Manita Bansal who claimed to be the owner and possession of First Floor (without roof rights), Property No. 43, area measuring 139.35 Sq. Meters, Khasra No. 28/20, Radhey Sanyam Park, Khurji, Khas, Jhansi, Shikhar, Delhi through Sale Deed dated 29/06/2022, Doc. No. 5752, regd. SRO-VIII Delhi from Mr. Bindu Bhushan Mehta, Mr. Sushel Bhushan Mehta, Mr. Rakesh Kumar Mehta and Mr. Sanku Kumar Mehta and they have become the owner of the said aforesaid property by virtue of Relinquishment Deed dated 12/07/2022, Doc. No. 1000, registered at the address mentioned below within 07 days from the date of publication, failing which claim, if any, of such persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Anuradha Rawat (Advocate)
Ch. No. 340, Civil Side, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Puneet Kumar is in process to evicting loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd. against his Plot No. 136, area measuring 100 sq. yds. Out of Khasra no. 29/15 Situated at waka mauja Dabha Tehsil Badkhal Distt. Faridabad Haryana. And whereas he has lost the following original document pertaining to the said property read with FR dated 06.6.2019.

1. Original Sale Deed dated 22.05.1995 executed by Smt. Puspita in favour of Smt. Puspita Dwivedi as Doc. No. 2193

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise, however, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vashi, G.B., N.P. Mob. 9810063531

APPENDIX IV-A

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to **Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor")**, of the **constructive possession** of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **31.10.2023 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 21,19,171/- (Rupees Twenty One Lakh Nineteen Thousand One Hundred Seventy One only)** pending towards the Loan Account No. **HLHDMT00453825**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **22.09.2023** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **23.09.2023** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **MANOJ KUMAR and DURGESH**.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 16,00,000/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 1,60,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Sixty Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY	
FLAT NO. FF-302 (M. I. G) HAVING COVERED AREA 51.09 SQUARE METERS EQUIVALENT TO 550 SQUARE FEET ON FIRST FLOOR (FRONT LHS) (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT NO. A-7/2 SITUATED IN DLF ANKUR VIHAR, PARGANA & TEHSIL LONI, DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, GHAZIABAD-201102, UTTAR PRADESH.	
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com . For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in	
Date : 23.09.2023 Place : GHAZIABAD	Sd/- Authorized officer Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

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The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 69,25,000/- (Rupees Sixty Nine Lakh Twenty Five Thousand only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 6,92,500/- (Rupees Six Lakh Ninety Two Thousand Five Hundred only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY	
PROPERTY BEING RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. D - 366 AREA MEASURING 50 SQUARE METERS EQUIVALENT TO 60 SQUARE YARDS, BLOCK - D IN THE RESIDENTIAL COLONY KNOWN AS "SUSHANT LOK PHASE - II", SITUATED IN VILLAGE GHATA, TEHSIL SONHA, DISTRICT GURUGRAM, GURUGRAM - 122001, HARYANA AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:	
NORTH : PLOT NO. D-365	EAST : ROAD
SOUTH : PLOT NO. D-367	WEST : PLOT NO. D-370
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com . For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in	
Date : 23.09.2023 Place : GURUGRAM	Sd/- Authorized officer Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Sensex rebounds from early lows

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rebounded from early lows to settle higher by 173 points on Wednesday following buying in Reliance Industries, Larsen & Toubro and ITC and positive trends in Asian and European markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 173.22 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 66,118.69 with 20 of its components ending in the green and 10 closing lower.

The index opened lower and fell further to a low of 65,549.96 in morning trade. However, buying in Reliance, L&T, Infosys and Maruti helped it recover losses. Later, it jumped 226.8 points or 0.34 per cent to a high of 66,172.27.

The Nifty gained 51.75 points or 0.26 per cent to end at 19,716.45. It moved between a low of 19,554 and a high of 19,730.70 in day trading.



Among the Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, ITC, Sun Pharma, Maruti, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank and Hindustan Unilever were among the gainers. Titan, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Tata Steel and Nestle were the major laggards.

“The market inched higher in the second half, driven by positive openings in European markets. Concerns about glob-

al interest rates and elevated oil prices are being balanced by several domestic factors, such as promising economic growth prospects and the potential for strong earnings, which validate the premium valuation,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Persistent outflows of foreign funds and rising US bond yields are expected to keep the broader indices in bleak terrain,

in the near term, Nair added.

Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said that markets remained volatile but ended higher due to recovery in select heavyweights.

“The impending rebound in select heavyweights like Reliance and ITC largely contributed to the recovery,” Mishra said, adding that the scheduled monthly expiry of derivative contracts would keep the volatil-

ity high.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.76 per cent and smallcap index jumped 0.68 per cent.

Among the indices, capital goods jumped 1.14 per cent, healthcare climbed 1.13 per cent, industrials (0.97 per cent), FMCG (0.77 per cent), realty (0.70 per cent), IT (0.48 per cent) and tech (0.43 per cent).

Bankex, consumer durables and oil & gas were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the green. European markets were trading mostly in positive territory. The US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.98 per cent to USD 94.88 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 693.47 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

AMNS India’s Hazira project to be started by 2026: Mittal

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

ArceorMittal executive chairman Lakshmi N Mittal on Wednesday expressed confidence that AMNS India’s Hazira project, which is under expansion, will be commissioned by 2026.

In October last year, ArceorMittal’s arm AMNS India had stated that it will invest Rs 60,000 crore to scale up capacity of its steel plant at Hazira to 15 million tonnes (MT).

“We have full confidence that with the cooperation of the Centre and Gujarat government, we will be able to commission the project by 2026, Mittal said here while speaking at the celebrations of 20 years of ‘Vibrant Gujarat’ summit.

Hazira expansion project is moving at a fast pace and over 20,000 people are involved in the project construction, he said.

“It is our target to double our production capacity in the first phase and then triple...We will also make advance products for technology,” he said, adding it would help India reduce imports and become self-reliant.

The company is also committed for sustainability, he said.

He also said that because of the ‘Vibrant Gujarat’ summit, different states are organising investor summits and this is helping India attract foreign investments.

Today India is termed as the fastest growing economy in the world and global firms are keen to invest in the country.

He added that the successful G20 Summit has further enhanced the image of India.



The summit not only reflected India’s diplomatic and organisational success, but also showed India’s image as a global consensus builder.

Talking about the state, Mittal said that Gujarat is a leading industry state as it has presence of industries from varied sectors such as petrochemicals, automobile, pharma, port, textiles, electric vehicles, green hydrogen and semiconductors.

The state, he said, provides reliable infrastructure, stable policy environment, and professional administration.

In January 2022, he said the company signed an agreement with the state to invest over Rs 1 lakh crore.

Further, he said that at a time when India is attracting the eyes of the world, there is a need to focus on talented manpower and industry 4.0.

Speaking at the event, Welspun Chairman B K Goenka said that the investor summit in Gujarat has helped in increasing investments and promoting socio-economic development

in the state.

The Vibrant Gujarat summit has become like WEF (World Economic Forum), where top global industry leaders participate.

He added that Kutch is going to be the capital of green hydrogen.

The next Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit is scheduled from January 10-12 next year in Gandhinagar. Takashi Suzuki, Director General, JETRO- The Japan External Trade Organisation, said that Japan contributes significantly to the ‘make in India’ initiative.

“We plan to invite a Japanese business delegation focusing on semiconductor electronics...In November,” he said, adding, “we would like to show every new opportunity and happening in Gujarat to attract them.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated the Summit during his tenure as the chief minister of the state in 2003 with the aim of making Gujarat a leader on the global map of industry



Adani Ports to buy back another \$195 mn of bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone will prepay USD 195 million of debt due in 2024 as the conglomerate helmed by Gautam Adani looks to boost investors’ confidence post being targeted by a US short-seller.

In a stock exchange filing, APSEZ said it will buy back USD 195 million of bonds due in 2024 using its cash reserves. Out of the USD 520 million principal outstanding, USD 325 million will be left after the buyback, it said.

The company board “has approved tranche II of the tender offer to purchase for cash up to USD 195 million in aggregate principal amount of the outstanding 3.375 per cent senior notes due 2024 which represents 30 per cent of the principal amount of the notes,” it said.

In May, the company had bought back its July 2024 bonds for cash USD 130 million in aggregate of the principal amount and stated that it would buy back 20 per cent of the principal amount of the bonds in each of the next four quarters.

In the second tranche of this, the company is now proposing to purchase up to USD 195 million of bonds. This represents 30 per cent of the principal amount of the bonds (USD 650 million). After USD 130 million buyback in May, USD 520 million remained outstanding.

The buyback tender is open till October 26, the filing said.

Adani Group has been attempting to rebuild investors’ confidence since Hindenburg Research in a January 24 report accused it of accounting fraud and improper use of offshore tax havens for stock manipulation.

The group has denied all allegations. The company has engaged Barclays Bank, DBS Bank, Emirates NBD Bank PJSC, First Abu Dhabi Bank PJSC, Mizuho Securities (Singapore) Pte Ltd, MUFG Securities Asia Singapore Branch, SMBC Nikko Securities (Hong Kong) and Standard Chartered Bank to serve as deal managers for the offer. The company will pay accrued interest, in respect of any notes purchased in the tender offer.

Implementation of NFSA, LPG subsidy to be evaluated

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Niti Aayog is looking to hire a technical consultant to evaluate the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and LPG subsidy to ensure benefits are reaching eligible beneficiaries.

The government think tank’s Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) has floated a tender to select a technical consultant for “Central Coordinating Agency for Evaluation of the National Food Security Act and LPG Subsidy”. “The government implements one the largest public food and nutritional safety nets in the world through the National Food Security Act (NFSA), enacted in 2013.

“...However, despite the large public expenditure, gains in the food security and nutritional outcomes in India have been slow, with the country accounting for roughly 30 per cent of the global burden of hunger,” DMEO said in the RFP (request for proposal) document.

The National Food Security Act provides a legal mandate for the distribution of foodgrains at subsidised prices, cooked meals, take-home rations, and food security allowance through a network of schemes — namely the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) scheme.



The cost of implementing the food subsidy under TPDS was Rs 4,22,618.11 crore in 2021 (Revised Estimate). The cost of implementing MDM and ICDS was Rs 12,900 crore and Rs 17,252.21 crore (Revised Estimate), respectively.

According to the DMEO report, “More than 1/3rd of children less than 5 years are stunted (35.5 per cent, NFHS-V, 2019-20), one-quarter of adolescents aged 10-14 years have low body-mass-index (BMI) for their age (24 per cent, CNNS, 2016-18), and more than half of all women aged 15-59 years and 15-19 years are anaemic (57 per cent and 59.1 per cent, NFHS-V, 2019-20)”.

Elaborating on the rationale behind the evaluation of the LPG subsidy, DMEO further said that India is the third largest energy consumer in the world after China and the US.

“The current consumption of LPG in India has risen to 12.3 per cent of total petroleum products compared to 1.13 per cent of kerosene. The ongoing

schemes will potentially increase the usage of LPG further, thus, making their evaluation imperative,” it added.

DMEO also said the demand for oil and gas has been burgeoning over the years with rising population, economic growth, and concomitant demand for cleaner energy.

To meet future energy demands, a market-determined price mechanism (MDPM) was introduced through price deregulation, which allowed the refineries to stipulate refinery gate prices of petroleum products that would compete with prices of imported products, it added.

DMEO pointed out that the LPG subsidy not only reflects the policy makers’ cognizance of the need to augment the transition from traditional cooking fuel, such as firewood and dung cake to cleaner cooking fuels but also to provide them to a majority of the underserved population — mostly from rural areas and economically weaker sections — at subsidised rates.

Rupee snaps two-day fall, recovers 6 paise against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

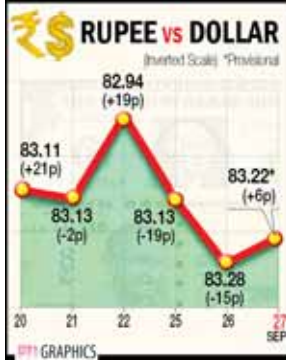
The rupee on Wednesday staged a recovery after two days of steep losses to end 6 paise higher at 83.22 (provisional) against the US dollar on positive cues from domestic equity markets.

However, selling pressure from foreign equity investors amid elevated levels of American currency and surging crude oil prices weighed on the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 83.23 and traded in a narrow range of 83.18 to 83.24 against the greenback. It finally settled at 83.22 (provisional), registering a gain of 6 paise from its previous close.

The rupee lost 34 paise in the past two sessions. It closed 15 paise lower at 83.28 against the dollar on Tuesday, a day after registering a decline of 19 paise.

The downward movement of the rupee was attributed to



a strengthening dollar amid a record rise in US Treasury yields. Also, the US dollar surged to a ten-month high level after a Federal Reserve policymaker hinted at a prolonged interest rate hike cycle. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.05 per cent to 106.28.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.87 per cent higher at USD 94.78 per barrel.



Churchill’s Old War Office launched as luxury hotel by Hinduja

PTI ■ LONDON

The Old War Office (OWO) of Britain’s World War II era prime minister Winston Churchill opened its doors as a brand-new luxury hotel in London with a glittering launch event, complete with surprise musical performances by musicians Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber and Andrea Bocelli.

Princess Anne - the Princess Royal, the sister of King Charles III, officially unveiled the plaque for The OWO after a tour of the hotel with Hinduja Group co-chairman GP Hinduja on Tuesday evening.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also made a quick stopover, along with parliamentarians, entrepreneurs, hoteliers and stars of film and television.

The Indian-origin Hinduja Group conglomerate and the UK’s richest family had acquired the landmark on Whitehall, opposite Downing Street, over eight years ago and tied up with Raffles Hotels to transform the building into an extravagant hub complete with luxury residences, restaurants and spas.

“We have always been working to see what best we can do between India and the UK because we believe our responsibility is to act as a bridge between the host country and the motherland,” said GP Hinduja.

“It took us eight years and in these eight years we had a lot to do, but finally this iconic building has been converted into peace and solace, not World Wars. It is the legacy not only of the Hinduja Group but London as a great destination. Everyone who lands in London will first come here to see what it is,” he said. After the launch event, which also showcased the food of 3-Michelin-starred chef Mauro Colagreco as the chef partner for The OWO, the hotel will welcome its first guests starting this Friday.

Raffles London at The OWO, as it is officially known, has been developed in partnership between the Hinduja Group and French multinational hospitality group Accor.

“When we came to Whitehall, the team were blown away by the size and beauty of this majestic building. No expense has been spared in bringing it back to its former glory and paying homage to its heritage, whilst breathing new life into it.

Along with Raffles London at The OWO, we hope to create a legacy that is both timeless and unsurpassed,” said Sanjay Hinduja, who has overseen the project.

IGST on ocean freight exempted from Oct 1

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has exempted payments made for goods imported through ocean freight from 5 per cent integrated GST with effect from October 1.

The Finance Ministry has notified changes to the IGST Act with regard to payment of integrated GST on ‘ocean freight’ on imported goods with effect from October 1. Currently, importers are required to pay 5 per cent GST under the Reverse Charge Mechanism.

KPMG Indirect Tax Head & Partner Abhishek Jain said the amendments proposed are aligned with the apex court’s ruling in the case of Mohit Minerals and help explicitly mention the government’s alignment to the position. “While this has been issued prospectively, the indus-

try has been seeking and successfully claiming refund of taxes already paid for the past period, where credit has not been availed,” Jain added.

Giving its ruling in the Mohit Minerals case, the Supreme Court in May last year had held that since the Indian importer is liable to pay IGST on the ‘composite supply’, comprising of supply of goods and supply of services of transportation, insurance, etc in a CIF (Cost Insurance Freight) contract, a separate levy on the Indian importer for the ‘supply of services’ by the shipping line would be in violation of the GST Act.

In the Mohit Minerals case, the company challenged the validity of the CBIC notification regarding the levy of IGST on ocean freight in the Gujarat High Court.



Fire risk forces Hyundai, Kia to recall 3.4 mn vehicles

AP ■ DETROIT

Hyundai and Kia are recalling nearly 3.4 million vehicles in the US and telling owners to park them outside due to the risk of engine compartment fires.

The recalls cover multiple car and SUV models from the 2010 through 2019 model years including Hyundai’s Santa Fe SUV and Kia’s Sorento SUV.

Documents posted Wednesday by the US safety regulators say the anti-lock brake control module can leak fluid and cause an electrical short, which can touch off a fire while the vehicles are parked or being driven.

The automakers are advising owners to park outdoors and away from structures until repairs are done.

Dealers will replace the anti-lock brake fuse at no cost to owners. Kia says in documents that it will send notification letters to owners starting Nov 14. For Hyundai the date is Nov 21.

Messages were left early Wednesday seeking comment from both companies.

Moody’s downgrades Vedanta Resources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Moody’s Investors Service has downgraded the rating of Vedanta Resources Ltd because of the elevated risk of debt restructuring over the next few months, as the firm has not made progress on refinancing its upcoming debt maturities.

Moody’s said it has downgraded to Caa2 from Caa1, the corporate family rating (CFR) of Vedanta Resources Limited (VRL).

At the same time, Moody’s has maintained a negative outlook.

“The downgrade reflects the elevated risk of debt restructuring over the next few months because VRL has not made any meaningful progress on refinancing its upcoming debt

maturities, in particular the USD 1 billion bonds maturing each in January 2024 and August 2024,” said Kaustubh Chaubal, a Moody’s Senior Vice President and lead analyst on VRL.

VRL’s credit quality is constrained by its weak liquidity because of large refinancing needs and interest expenses amid tightening financing conditions in global capital markets, the agency noted.

“The company continues to face challenges in refinancing its debt, a reflection of reduced appetite from the lending community, and a key credit concern,” the rating agency said.

“VRL’s Caa category CFR reflects the company’s unsustainable capital structure, aggressive risk appetite and weak financial management.”

Travel & tourism sector sees 44 per cent jump in hiring in Aug: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With the country witnessing a boom in the travel and tourism sector, the industry saw a 44 per cent growth in hiring demand in August, compared to the same month last year, a report said on Wednesday. This optimistic growth can be attributed to increased disposable incomes and higher spending on leisure and business travel in the country, a report by foundit (formerly Monster APAC & ME) said.

Pre-pandemic trends indicate that the travel and tourism sector experienced a robust 16 per cent growth in 2019, however, with the pandemic-related disruptions,



travel restrictions and lockdowns, there was a 47 per cent fall in job postings in 2020 and 27 per cent dip in 2021.

While the industry began to bounce back with a marginal 3 per cent growth in hiring in 2022, it has dramatically recovered this year, as people regained confidence in travel, the report stated.

The foundit report is based on the data as of August 2023. The report also includes annual data comparisons for the period August 2023, against August 2022.

“The travel and tourism industry has truly bounced back from the pandemic with a boom, driven significantly by the government initiatives focused on infrastructural development and heritage promotion.

“India has also opened its doors by allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) for tourism construction projects, and participation in the G20 summit has further bolstered sustainable tourism in the country,” foundit, a Quess company, CEO Sekhar Garisa said.

NARUKA BAGS SILVER IN MEN’S SKEET



PTI ■ HANGZHOU

India's Anant Jeet Singh Naruka claimed the silver medal in men's skeet event at the Asian Games here on Wednesday, adding to the team bronze he won alongside Angad

Vir Singh Bajwa and Gurjoat Khangura.

Naruka performed well and looked on course to win the gold, having not missed a shot until the business end of the final. Naruka finished with an impressive 58/60 but it was still

not good enough for gold as Kuwait's Abdullah Alrashidi equalled the world record with a perfect 60/60 to finish on top of the podium.

Nasser Al-Attia of Qatar bagged the bronze with 46.

It was a good competition.

The gold winner is a very experienced shooter. He is a two-time Olympic bronze medal winner. But I was not thinking about him but focusing on my performance," said Naruka.

"I lost my rhythm a bit in the middle. Later, I recovered.

This is also my first Asian Games medal," he added.

He said the day's performance was his best.

"You need to imagine what your targets would be. I tried to break the targets in my head. I have to make a vision of how I have to break them.

"But it all depends on the particular day. Everyone performing at the highest level would tell you, on the day if you are shooting well and your rhythm is going on, anyone can win. It is just about the rhythm and experience counts," he added.

He said the humidity at the Fuyang Yinhu Sports Centre Range was energy-sapping.

"Throughout the day, you are mentally exhausted but you need to keep going," Naruka added.

Earlier in the day, the trio of Naruka, Bajwa and Khangura shot a total of 355 to win the team bronze.

Hosts China won the gold medal while Qatar claimed the silver.

The Indian women's team, however, crashed out of the shotgun skeet event by finishing in the fourth position behind Kazakhstan, China and Thailand.



Sarvanan wins bronze; sailors end campaign with one silver, two bronze

PTI ■ NINGBO

Indian sailor Vishnu Sarvanan won a bronze, the country's first-ever medal in the men's dinghy ILCA-7 event at the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

Sarvanan finished with a net score of 34 points to miss the silver medal by just one point in the gruelling 11-race competition.

South Korea's Jeemin HA took the second spot with 33 points. Singapore's Jun Han Ryan Lo claimed the gold with a net score of 26.

Lack of wind, however, denied India a medal in women's single dinghy ILCA-6 event where Nethra Kumanan had to settle for a disappointing fourth place finish after race No 12, which was to be the final one in the category, was cancelled.

After the penultimate race, Nethra (41 net points) was three points behind Singapore's Jing Hua Victoria Chan (38).

But she eventually failed to secure a podium finish as race 12 could not be held and the event was cancelled.

Nevertheless, the Indian sailors matched their 2018 Asian Games feat of one silver and two bronze medals here.



Nikhat sails into quarters; Shiva, Sanjeet bow out



PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen cruised to the 50kg quarterfinals but seasoned Indian pugilist Shiva Thapa and Sanjeet bowed out of the Asian Games boxing competition here on Wednesday.

Nikhat notched up an easy 5-0 win over South Korea's Chorong Bak in the second round of the women's event.

However, record six-time Asian Championship medallist Shiva couldn't capitalise on a favourable draw as he was beaten comprehensively (5-0) by Kyrgyzstan's Askat Kultaev in the 63.5kg pre-quarterfinals.

Sanjeet (92kg) was completely outpunched (5-0) by world championship bronze medallist Lazizbek Mullojonov.

After two back-to-back losses in the day, Nikhat gave the Indian camp something to cheer about with her dominant display. After sizing up her opponent, Nikhat released a series of punches, using her longer reach effectively.

The Indian controlled the proceedings but Bak made her task difficult by moving around the ring. Nikhat landed a couple of left crosses to end the second round.

After taking the opening two rounds, Nikhat conserved energy like she did in her previous bout, evading attacks by Bak to move to the quarters.

Earlier, Shiva, who received a first round bye, was beaten by Kultaev's relentless attacks and pace in a draining pre-quarterfinal bout.

It is a shocking defeat as Shiva was a strong medal contender.

Kultaev started off aggressively, as his onslaught caught Shiva off guard. The Indian took a few seconds to regroup and connect his powerful hooks.

But at a slight height disadvantage, Shiva was forced to fight from a distance with the judges ruling the first round 4-1 in favour of Aksat.

The 21-year-old from Kyrgyzstan continued his attacks in the second round. He kept throwing punches which didn't necessarily connect but it forced Shiva to defend.

Shiva was more patient with his punches, which cost the Assam boxer the second round.

Trailing, Shiva tried his best to land a flurry of punches in the final three minutes but his younger opponent stepped back and defended easily.

In the second Indian bout of the day, Sanjeet found it tough to respond to the 2022 super heavyweight Asian Champions' punches and was forced to go into a defensive mode. Trailing 0-5, Sanjeet lost his balance after being struck by Mullojonov's punch, which got him an eight count.

Indian men in quarters in basketball 3x3

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

The Indian men's 3x3 basketball team continued its winning streak, progressing to the quarterfinal with a dominating win over Macao in a Pool C game at the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

Sahaij Pratap Singh Sekhon scored a maximum of 10 points in the match and helped India beat Macao 21-12.

Macao's only positive in the match was Hou In Ho, who scored five points in the match.

India had previously defeated Malaysia by 20-16 on the first day of the event.

India will face last-edition gold medallist China in their next match on Friday, while the women will take on China later in the day.



Sathiyani-Batra, Harmeet-Sreeja pairs enter mixed doubles pre-quarters

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

India's G Sathiyani and Manika Batra stormed into the mixed doubles pre-quarterfinals of the table tennis competition in the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

Sathiyani and Batra defeated Thailand's Napat Thanmathikom and Suthasini Sawettabut 10-12, 11-8, 11-3, 11-8.

Later, Harmeet Desai teamed up with Sreeja Akula to overcome Macau's Chi Cheng Cheong and Hui Li Seak 12-10, 11-7, 11-7 to also enter the last 16 stage.

Sathiyani and Batra made a rather cold start to the match losing the first game 10-12.

Perhaps, stung by the loose game they dished out, the



Indian pair showed more purpose in the second game.

The Thai duo tailed their Indian counterparts 6-6 but Sathiyani and Batra upped their

game when it was needed the most. Nipat could not return Sathiyani's fierce forehand when India were leading 10-8, as India levelled the scores.

Sathiyani and Batra had little trouble in quelling the challenge of Thai players in the third set, winning it quite easily 11-3.

David Beckham advances to men’s sprint quarterfinal

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

India's David Beckham Elkatochoongo shone in the cycling track, making the quarterfinal in men's sprint event at the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

On a difficult track of at the

CSC Velodrome, David edged out his Kazakhstan rivals Sergey Ponomaryov and Andrey Kazchugay in final repechage to confirm his last-eight place.

Earlier in the final heat, David edged out Ponomaryov by 0.188 seconds to make the



last-eight. Ronaldo Singh Laitonjam however failed to progress losing to Andrey Chugay of Kazakhstan in the 1/16 final repechage round.

David and Ronaldo had come up with timings of 10.030s and 10.086s to take ninth and 13th positions

respectively and make the 1/16 finals.

In women's keirin, India's Shushikala Agashe (+1.087) finished fifth in her heat to fail to qualify for the semifinals, while Triyasha Paul (+1.109) narrowly missed qualification after finishing at third spot in her heat.

Sangita hits hat-trick as India blank Singapore 13-0 in women’s hockey

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Young striker Sangita Kumari slammed a hat-trick as a dominant Indian women's hockey team scored goals at will to thrash lowly Singapore 13-0 in its opening Pool A match at the Asian Games here on Wednesday.

While the Indians pumped in as many as eight goals in the first two quarters, the Singaporeans did show some resistance after the halfway break as they conceded just five goals.

Sangita (23rd, 47th, 56th) scored thrice, while Navneet Kaur found the net twice in the 14th minute.

Udita (6th), Sushila Chanu (8th), Deepika (11th), Deep Grace Ekka (17th), Neha (19th), Salima Tete (35th), Monika (52nd) and Vandana Katariya (56th) were the other goal scorers.

India will take on Malaysia in their next pool match on Friday.

"It was a good performance, we are happy with the result. The young girls com-

mented the seniors well. It made our job easy," skipper Savita said after the match.

"We are taking match-by-match here. Our next focus is on Malaysia, we have ode day gap in which we will prepare and study Malaysia's game. We will just focus on our plans.

"There is also Korea in our pool and they are a very good team but we will try to win and top the pool. Our mindset is right, everybody knows why they are here. Our target is to qualify (for Olympics) directly," she added.



The gulf between India and Singapore was evident as the Savita Punia-led side mounted attack after attack to score eight goals in the opening two quarters.

The Indians' relentless attacks resulted in a heap of penalty corners and they managed to convert five of them.

India took the lead in the sixth minute when Udita scored from a penalty corner with a slap shot. Two minutes later, they were awarded a penalty stroke and Sushila made no mistake.

Penalty corners came thick and fast for the Indians and Deepika tripled the lead with a perfect flick. Navneet scored two quick goals a minute from the first quarter -- first from a penalty corner and then a field goal seconds later.

Navneet snatched the ball from a defender and then dodged past the Singapore goalkeeper -- with fine stick work to push the ball in.

Deep Grace then joined the party scoring with a slap shot from a penalty corner before Sangita scored a fine field goal

after one-two with Lalremsiami.

Neha then converted a penalty corner to go into the half-time with a healthy 8-0 lead.

The Indians continued in the same trend after the change of ends and kept up the pressure on Singapore's defence with continuous attacks.

The Singaporeans showed some fight in defence in the last two quarters but still India managed to pump in five more goals to make a perfect start to their campaign.

Australia beat India by 66 runs to score a consolation win in 3rd ODI

PTI ■ RAIKOT

Australia avoided an unprecedented series whitewash after registering a 66-run victory over India in the third ODI here on Wednesday. Chasing a massive 353 to win, India were restricted by Australia to 286 in 49.4 overs. India however won the three-match series 2-1.

The Aussies motored to 352 for 7 after Mitchell Marsh (96), Steve Smith (74), Marnus Labuschagne (72) and David Warner (56) made impact knocks. Jasprit Bumrah took three for 81 and emerged the most successful among Indian bowlers. India made a fist of chase through captain Rohit Sharma (81) and Virat Kohli (56), but soon fizzled against the off-spin of Glenn Maxwell.

Earlier, Mitchell Marsh's stroke-filled 96 and Marnus Labuschagne's polished 72 took Australia to a commendable 352 for 7 against India in the third and final ODI here on Wednesday.

While Marsh missed reaching triple figures by a whisker, Australia's batters came good collectively in what will be their last official ODI before the start of the World Cup.

David Warner had himself to blame for his dismissal after a fiery 56 off 34 balls (6x4s, 4x6s), but he set the tone for Australia early on.

Steve Smith also put brakes on his poor run of scores to make a rapid 74 and towards the end, Labuschagne upped the ante with his 58-ball knock to help Australia post their challenging score. Labuschagne also became Australia's top run-getter in the ongoing calendar



year. On a hot and humid day, drinks were brought out more often than not between change of over while batters dropped down to their haunches, turning out to be quite a laborious effort for the Australian batters after their captain chose to bat.

Marsh took the attack to Jasprit Bumrah (3/81 in 10 overs), hitting two fours and a six and forcing India to take off the solitary slip since there was no early movement on offer.

Warner too shrugged off a slow start to hit Mohammed Siraj for two imperious sixes as Australia seized early

momentum.

The assault continued as Prasidh Krishna was hit for three fours and a six in his opening over with Warner taking the lead. The Australian opener completed his ninth fifty against India and 31st overall with a six over fine leg off Siraj. However, Warner's charge ended while trying to scoop Prasidh, walking across the wickets but only to edge it behind.

In search of a big score, Smith opted for consolidation with Marsh, who had long shifted gears to drop the anchor.

Bumrah was brought back for the 23rd over but Marsh clobbered him for

three fours and two sixes to collect 19 runs — he gave that many in two separate overs — which finally forced India to bring Kuldeep Yadav (2/48) into the attack.

While India found it difficult to penetrate owing to a placid surface, the Australian pair of Marsh and Smith amassed 137 from 119 for the second wicket.

However, the Australian pair did struggle with the heat and humidity late in the afternoon and increasingly looked for boundaries while sacrificing the doubles.

For the second time this year and against the same opponent, Marsh came close to bringing up only his second ODI century but missed it by four runs.

All the hard work of getting close to the mark while braving the conditions went in vain when Marsh hit straight to Krishna at cover off Kuldeep.

Smith perished soon after as Siraj pinned him in front of the wickets for 74 off 61 balls, including eight fours and a six.

Alex Carey (11) had a short stay as he misjudged a slower ball from Bumrah to chip it straight to Virat Kohli at cover in the 37th over.

Bumrah, mixing his deliveries well in this spell, cleaned up Glenn Maxwell (5) for his second wicket of the game but one that also dented Australia's hopes of acceleration in the remaining overs.

Australia's slide continued as Kuldeep had Cameron Green (9) caught at long on, but Labuschagne and Pat Cummins put on 46 to take them to their overall fourth highest ODI total against India.

Tough to look beyond Shreyas in WC playing XI: Azharuddin



PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Ashwin should find a spot in final-15

Former captain Mohammad Azharuddin can't look beyond Shreyas Iyer in India's playing eleven in the ODI series against Australia, is expected to replace Axar Patel in the squad if the latter doesn't regain full fitness. He gave a good account of his skills in the first two ODIs before being rested for the final game in Rajkot.

The wily off-spinner also has Azhar's vote. "Ashwin is someone who should be in the team. It is not very easy to line up against him as he has got a lot of variations. The team has already been announced. It remains to be seen whether Axar is in there or not.

"Instead of two left-arm spinners, Ashwin can also bat well, he should find a place," said Azhar, who captained India in three World Cups. While Shardul Thakur has done alright in the chances he has got, he doesn't match the skills of Mohammad Shami who should be preferred over the former in the playing eleven, said the 60-year-old.

The recent selection showed that the management has not fully made up its mind on the fast bowling combination. Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj walk into the playing eleven.

"Shami has been doing well for a long time. Shardul too has done alright in the limited chances he has got. But you don't require everyone to bat in the 11. Shami has also batted well at times.

"Shardul is a bowling all-rounder not a batting all-rounder. When you already have Haridk Pandya you don't need Shardul in the playing eleven," he said.

For him, the Indian player to watch out for will not be Rohit Sharma or Virat Kohli, as he has put his money on Shubman Gill.

Gill has been in sensational form over the past 12 months and has racked up five ODI hundreds this year.

"This time, Gill will be the main player for India. Obviously, the others around him are also batting well. If he can give India a good start it will set the ball rolling," said Azhar.

'Pressure will be on India'

Considering India have not won an ICC event since 2013, Azhar feels the team is bound to feel the pressure of not being able to win knock-out games over the past decade.

"It is going to be a very competitive world cup. India have a very good team. Grounds will be full as India are hosting after a long time." Asked if India are peaking at the right time following the Asia Cup title and series win over Australia, Azhar said: "I really don't understand this peaking business. When you are playing you are playing well, doesn't matter whether you are peaking or not peaking.

"Sometimes you lose two three matches even after peaking and that has happened with this team. Rather than thinking about all of this, one should focus on the game, rather than thinking about semis and finals straightaway.

"Yes, there will be a lot of pressure to win an ICC tournament which we have not won for a long time. I am sure the boys are fully aware of that," he said.

His home city of Hyderabad will be one of the 10 venues staging the World Cup games. But Azhar is disappointed that Hyderabad is not hosting an India match.



Williamson likely to play World Cup warm-up matches

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson is set to return from a long injury layoff in his side's World Cup warm-up matches, starting in India this week.

The star batter hasn't played any cricket since March when he ruptured the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in his right knee while fielding for Gujarat Titans in the IPL. He underwent surgery in April.

"The plan is to be involved in the warm-up games. There is a strong desire to be involved as much as I can," Williamson said ahead of the team's departure to India.

"Basically, it's just wanting to progress what I am doing now - the running, the fielding, time in the middle with the bat."

New Zealand will take on Pakistan and South Africa in World Cup warm-up matches on September 29 in Hyderabad and October 2 in Thiruvananthapuram respectively.

They play England in the

tournament opener in Ahmedabad on October 5.

Asked if he was still experiencing discomfort, Williamson said: "Not a huge amount.

"Although the load is going to keep increasing, so there is a little bit of an unknown. But it has felt pretty good really in the last few weeks."

"Although it's going well, you still have days that vary a little bit. So it's working through those warm-up games to get as much out of it as I can, and as a team, without bothering it too much," he added.

Williamson had played a crucial role in New Zealand's campaign in 2015 and 2019 editions when they reached successive finals.

Talking about the most difficult aspect of his recovery Williamson said: "Not so much the sprinting, more the slowing actually. From sprinting, the braking, a little bit of a change of direction. It's all been part of the plan, and introducing it towards the end of recovery."

Nepal batters break three world records in T20Is

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Nepal batters smashed three world records en route to becoming the first team to amass a 300-plus total in T20Is, in the Asian Games here on Wednesday. Kushal Malla, a 19-year-old left-handed batter, struck the fastest-ever T20I hundred in 34 balls, eclipsing David Miller and Rohit Sharma's joint previous record (35 balls).

Batting at No 3, Malla smashed 12 sixes and eight



fours to remain unbeaten on 137 and power Nepal to the highest-ever T20I score of 314 for 3

against Mongolia, who opted to field. Their No 5 batter Dipendra Singh Airee also rewrote the record books, blasting a nine-ball fifty that bettered Yuvraj Singh's 16-year-old record.

Yuvraj took 12 balls for his fifty en route to scoring 58 in the World T20 match against England on September 19, 2007.

The previous record for the highest innings total in a T20I was held by Afghanistan, who had amassed 278 for 3 against Ireland on February 23, 2019.

going forward," said Smith, who has always shared a cordial relationship with the Indian board, both as player and administrator. "The highlight of the first season of SA20 was to see some youngsters and more established stars perform together. I think they played in the competition and were exposed to best practices by franchises — exposed to way of global thinking, getting the best coaches, best medical advice," said Smith, who is very satisfied with how the league has shaped up in just one season.

In fact, Smith is happy that SA20 has kept a salary cap of USD 2.3 million, offering the best pay scale outside IPL.

So, do you plan to increase

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The kind of generational Indian T20 stars that IPL has produced in the last one and half decades has set the template to follow for a new franchise competition like SA20, former South Africa captain and commissioner of league Graeme Smith said on Wednesday.

"Our ambition is to be the biggest league outside India," Smith told PTI ahead of the second season's auction. The SA20 comprises six franchises — MI Cape Town, Joburg Super Kings, Durban Super Giants, Paarl Royals, Pretoria Capitals, Sunrisers Eastern Cape, all of which are owned by the owners of IPL teams.

"I think IPL was there in the beginning. It took a couple of years to develop a number of generational stars and work within BCCI managed to create outstanding depth of cricketers in India. It will be our goal too

Our ambition is to become biggest T20 league outside IPL: SA20 Commissioner Graeme Smith



the salary cap this time? "Our salary cap is USD 2.3 million and teams can work with significant numbers for a league outside the IPL. It gives us the ability to attract quality players," he said. Smith believes that SA20 brought a lot of positivity in South African cricket. "The Season 1 exceeded all the expectations. We had such a limited amount of time to get up and running and we were able to attract six partners like six global franchises," said Smith.

As the league's commissioner, Smith has worked tirelessly with his team to deliver a product that is acceptable in the market. "Apart from the commercial side, it was important to bring some positivity back to

South African cricket and see the fans flock to the stadium.

"Most importantly, the cricket in season 1 was outstanding. Some local young talent really stood up, global stars shone through and it was a very successful season," he said.

In Season 2, each franchise can buy up to 15 players with six uncapped ones, which will also help South Africa promote its own local talent, beneficial to the national team in future.



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Nishant Kumar Sandil S/o Dara Singh Sandil R/o Vill-Jaipur, Po-Kera, Chakradharpur, West Singhbhum Jharkhand-833102 have changed my name to Nishith Singh Munda.

PD(168)A

Spain routs Switzerland in first home match since Women's WC title

AP ■ CORDOBA (SPAIN)

Spain's women's team received the support of a record crowd in its first home match since winning the World Cup title. A crowd of 14,194 saw Spain rout Switzerland 5-0 in the Nations League on Tuesday, surpassing the previous record of 11,209 fans for a women's national team match in Spain, which was achieved in a friendly against the United States last year.

The local crowd, which did not fully fill the 21,000-capacity Nuevo Arcangel Stadium in Cordoba, showed their support for the players who have been fighting against sexism since their world title was tarnished by a scandal sparked by the former Spanish soccer federation president, Luis Rubiales, kissing player Jenni Hermoso on the lips during the World Cup awards ceremony.

Players boycotted the national team but eventually a



deal was reached with the federation and government medi-

ators for significant reform in the beleaguered federation.

A banner shown by fans in Cordoba read "Your fight is our

pride. You are not alone." Before the match, players

from both teams got together and held a banner with the words "Se Acabo" — Spanish for "this is over" — followed by "Our fight is the global fight."

The "Se Acabo" slogan was started by Hermoso's teammate Alexia Putellas, Spain's star player, and has been a rallying call amid the scandal. New coach Montse Tomé left Hermoso out of the squad "as a way to protect her."

Players also wore wristbands with the "Se Acabo" slogan, and raised their wrists while posing behind the banner.

The national team showed off the World Cup trophy to the fans, with Putellas and Irene Paredes raising it in front of the home crowd.

"We were excited about being able to celebrate with the fans," said Aitana Bonmati, who scored twice on Tuesday. "It was an atypical week but we were able to overcome everything. The players showed

that they are professionals."

Spain's first match after the World Cup was a 3-2 come-from-behind win at Sweden in the Nations League last week.



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