

OPINION 6

WEST ASIAN CRISIS: A THREAT TO GLOBAL PEACE

WORLD 8

REPUBLICANS PLAN MORE MILITARY AID TO ISRAEL

MONEY 11

RBI LIKELY TO CONTINUE STATUS QUO ON SHORT TERM LENDING RATE

DEHRADUN, MONDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹2



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 18 Issue 34 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

ENGLAND 67-1, CHASE RECORD 399 TARGET 12 SPORTS



Modi slams Congress for neglect of North East

PM champions cultural heritage of Assam, says projects will enhance NE connectivity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI

Continuing his attack on the Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed on Sunday that those in power after Independence could not understand the significance of places of worship and set a trend of being ashamed of their own culture for political reasons. Addressing a massive rally in Guwahati after unveiling projects worth Rs 11,600 crore, Modi said no country can progress by erasing its past. He had slammed the Congress at a rally in Bhubaneswar a day earlier.

Regarding the Kamakhya temple corridor project, which is to be developed by the Centre at a cost of Rs 498 crore, Modi said that once completed, a large number of devotees would visit the Shakti Peeth, boosting the tourism sector of the entire Northeast.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, arrives to attend the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of various developmental projects in Guwahati PTI

“Kamakhya Divyalok Pariyojana” would bring about a significant transformation in the pilgrimage experience to the Shakti shrine. The Prime Minister asserted that those who governed the country for an extended period after Independence

failed to comprehend the value and significance of places of belief, neglecting them. He pointed out that, driven by political gains, there was a trend of distancing themselves from their own culture and history. Stressing the importance of preserving the past and maintaining

roots for national development, he said, “However, the situation has changed in the last 10 years.” Modi added that the BJP-led “double-engine” government is committed to a policy of both development and protection of heritage. He cited Assam as an

example, saying that it is a place where beliefs, spirituality, and history are intertwined with modernity. Modi mentioned that the projects he unveiled will enhance connectivity not only in the North-East but also throughout the rest of South Asia.

“Today, the youth aspire to witness the development of Assam and the North-East on par with South Asia. Your dream is Modi’s commitment. Modi will spare no effort to fulfill your dream. This is Modi’s guarantee,” the Prime Minister added.



Delhi Police personnel at the residence of Delhi Minister Atishi Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

GIVE PROOF Police ask Atishi on MLA poaching jibe

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

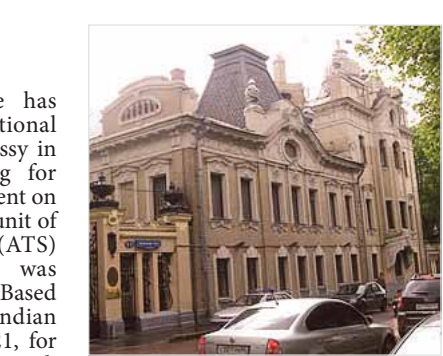
After serving notice on Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi Police Crime Branch issued a notice to PWD and Finance Minister Atishi on Sunday, asking her to respond to charges of poaching attempts by the BJP with evidence. A team from the crime branch also visited Atishi’s residence at Mathura Road and served her the notice. The police waited outside her home as she was not present. Meanwhile, Atishi, who holds the portfolios of education, PWD, culture, and tourism, instructed members of her camp office to receive any notices from the police on her behalf.

Later, it was revealed that Atishi, along with AAP leader and Rajya Sabha member Raghav Chaddha and spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar, were at Chief Minister Kejriwal’s residence. A video showed the crime branch and the media outside Atishi’s home in Delhi. Atishi asserted that these were the same individuals from the BJP who had engaged in MLA poaching in Uttarakhand, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra over the last 8 years. The AAP leader expressed concern, saying, “The political masters of police officers, who have a passion to serve the country and protect women, have turned them into a prime-time gimmick.”

ISI agent working at Indian Embassy in Moscow arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Police has arrested an Indian national working at the country’s embassy in Moscow for allegedly spying for Pakistan’s ISI, an official statement on Sunday said. The Meerut field unit of UP’s Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) called Satendra Siwal, who was working as the IBSA (India Based Security Assistant) in the Indian Embassy in Moscow from 2021, for interrogation, the statement said. Siwal, a resident of Shahmahiuddinpur village in Hapur, could not give satisfactory answers and confessed to his crime during “questioning”, it said. Meanwhile, sources said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is aware of Siwal’s arrest and working with the investigative authorities in this case. “MEA continues to work with the investigative authorities in the matter,” said a source. Siwal was employed as a Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) at the MEA. He was arrested after an FIR was registered against him at ATS police station, Lucknow, under Section 121A of the IPC (waging war against the country) and the Official Secrets Act, 1923, the statement said. The ATS in its probe through electronic and physical surveillance found that he was involved in anti-India activities with the network of the ISI handlers, it said. The ATS said



Satendra Siwal, an Indian national working at the country’s embassy in Moscow, who was arrested by Anti-Terrorist Squad of Uttar Pradesh Police for allegedly spying for Pakistan’s ISI PTI

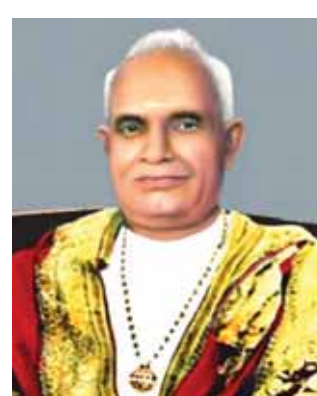
that he was providing important confidential information regarding the strategic activities of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian military establishments for money.

South India’s pioneer of social justice goes global

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

More than five decades after his death, the legend of Mannathu Padmanabhan (1878-1970), the founder of the Nair Service Society (NSS), is reaching the global arena. Mannam, as he is known throughout Kerala, was south India’s pioneer in advocating social justice, inclusive growth, and the abolition of anti-people customs and traditions in Nair society. He opened the doors of his family temple to Harijans and members of the backward community, long before self-styled rationalists and atheists staged demonstrations across Tamil Nadu by garlanding Hindu deities with footwear and garbage.

Mannam exhorted the Nair community members not to rest on their laurels but to pursue higher education and utilise their knowledge for the upliftment of the country’s social and economic life. He declared an open war against untouchability and discrimination based on caste and creed. The impact created on the national psyche by his views is still not widely known in the outside world. G Sukumaran Nair, the general secretary of NSS, said, “Mohandas Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, drew inspiration from Mannathu Padmanabhan, which is why he undertook a political pilgrimage to Kerala to participate in the struggle of the oppressed and depressed classes, enabling them to walk on public



MANNATHU PADMANABHAN (1878-1970)

roads and worship in temples.” The NSS, founded by Mannam, has published a book titled “Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan: Living

Beyond the Ages” this month. A team of researchers led by Prof S Sujatha, Principal of NSS Hindu College, Perunna, has recreated the life and times of Mannam, who is addressed as Samudayacharyan. The lead article has been authored by Sukumaran Nair. Sujatha expressed that it was a dream come true for her to be entrusted with this task. She remarked, “Though there was an attempt to translate his works into English, it did not bear fruit because Mannam’s flowery language could not be aptly translated. He was the Winston Churchill or Samuel Johnson of the Malayalam language,” said Sujatha. There is no sphere in Kerala untouched by Mannam. He

advocated for special care for Harijans and backward communities. “Reservations, as seen today, are unscientific and counterproductive. Economically backward people should also receive special consideration, but merit should never be compromised,” said Sukumaran Nair. Nair himself has written the first chapter of the book, explaining how Mannam, the community leader, integrated service to the community with national and political services. Reverently addressed as the “Kerala Lion” due to his leadership in the Liberation Struggle of 1959, Mannathu Padmanabhan played a crucial role.

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital witnessed light rainfall on Sunday, leading to disruptions in road, flights, and rail operations, causing inconvenience to commuters amid chilly conditions. The rainfall is a result of a fresh western disturbance that hit northwest India on Saturday and currently, along with an induced cyclonic circulation, lies over southwest Rajasthan and adjoining Pakistan. Dense fog, which slightly subsided in the past two days, will make a comeback in Delhi-NCR as the India

More rain in offing; flight delays, road chaos, fog woes continue

Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted the same in the morning hours of February 5 and 6. According to the IMD, no cold day conditions were observed on Sunday. The IMD has predicted more rain and moderate fog during the night hours. In its advisory to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, the IMD said dense fog may affect air, rail



File Photo/Pioneer

routes, and road traffic in the area on Monday and Tuesday. The advisory further suggests driving carefully, and unless precautionary measures are taken, it may lead to some road traffic collisions. A fresh spell of snowfall in Himachal Pradesh has led to the closure of 518 roads in the State, while snowfall across the Kashmir Valley affected normal life on Sunday, with all flights cancelled at Srinagar airport. Officials said 161 roads have been closed in Shimla, followed by 157 in Lahaul and Spiti, 71 in Kullu, 69 in Chamba, and 46 in Mandi district.

Minor throws puppy from high rise, sparks outrage

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

In a distressing incident, a child threw a puppy from a high-rise onto the road, leading to the month-old dog’s demise. The incident occurred in Gaur City-14th Avenue, falling under the jurisdiction of the Birsakh police station area in Greater Noida. The Greater Noida police have registered an FIR against unknown persons in an incident involving a minor boy allegedly throwing a puppy from a high-rise onto the road, resulting in the young canine’s death. A complaint filed by People For Animals (PFA) volunteer Surbhi Rawat highlighted that

the boy, aged around 9-10 years and residing in a high-rise tower, was captured in a video purportedly showing him committing the act. A video has surfaced, showcasing a heart-wrenching incident in a society in Greater Noida West, where a child picked up a helpless puppy before tossing it into the basement of a parking lot. The boy in the CCTV footage appeared to be a minor, callously picking up the helpless puppy, who was hiding with its siblings in a bush. In the 14-second video, the child can be seen picking up and throwing it down the driveway, while onlookers



watch the entire inhuman act unbothered. The FIR stated that the entire act was recorded and circulated in the society groups and on social media as a reel, encouraging others to do the same. According to the FIR, the video clip depicts the boy, allegedly under the supervision of an adult, ruthlessly picking up the nearly month-old puppy, which was hiding in a bush with its siblings. The boy carried the puppy towards the road, despite the canine’s desperate squeals and unsuccessful attempts to escape from his clutches. The FIR mentioned that the boy,

unaffected by the puppy’s desperate cries, proceeded to throw it from a height, leading to its death. The FIR requests the child’s appearance before the juvenile court and an assessment of his mental State. “In the same society, just days ago, a person intentionally crushed a puppy under his vehicle. Another puppy was found dead in suspicious circumstances, possibly poisoned. An autopsy will be conducted. The reason for such brutal actions against puppies is the hatred spewed on the society’s WhatsApp group. Kids nowadays have phones and get easily

influenced by adults who indulge in fear-mongering and spread hatred towards stray animals throughout the day,” said PFA volunteer Surabhi Rawat. PFA Trustee Ambika Shukla expressed concern about seeing a child devoid of any feelings. “It reveals a psychopathic tendency that must be dealt with urgently lest we find a monster in our midst. Those who hurt and abuse animals set a dangerous example that can lead to tragic consequences. Let us not pervert a whole generation with our own prejudices,” she added.

GUEST COLUMN

Muizzu's Maldives muddling: Real concern is terrorism, not tourism



Kripa Nautiyal

The recent boarding of three Maldivian fishing boats by Indian Coast Guard ships at sea and subsequent over reaction by highly pro-China Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu in seeking clarification from India is on expected lines. The Indian Navy and Coast Guard are renowned world over for their professionalism and commitment to ensure safety and security of our maritime frontiers within the legal framework and with due regard to international humanitarian law. Maldives under the anti-India Muizzu has created yet another false narrative in a series of such deliberate rhetoric, with an ulterior motive to defame India. Maldives has long been synonymous with luxury tourism. However, beneath the surface of this paradise, the shadows of security threats loom large. Involvement and credible links of a close relative of President Muizzu with a terrorist organisation has made the situation more precarious for this nation.

Out of my many visits to Maldives, the memories of this strategically located tiny island nation takes me back to December 26 2004 when the Indian Coast Guard ship Sagar, that I was commanding, was diverted from deployment off Maharashtra coast to proceed with best speed to render assistance to severely affected southern islands of Maldives after a tsunami disaster that had caused havoc in many countries including Maldives and India. Plenty of relief material and two helicopters were embarked onboard. An Indian Coast Guard Dornier was the first aircraft to land at Maldives airport after the tsunami without any assistance from local ATC as it was not manned due to severe damage to various facilities. This was followed by landing with relief material by Indian Air Force and In-

dian Navy aircrafts. Our ship reached Maldives along with other naval ships and restored the electricity supply, provided required relief material and assisted in medical assistance and air evacuation of the seriously injured. This goodwill gesture of India - a friend and a dependable neighbour was greatly appreciated by the citizens and government of Maldives. This gratitude of Maldivians was genuine as India despite having faced the brunt of the tsunami itself, spared operational assets, relief material and manpower on a regular basis to Maldives till normalcy was restored.

Earlier also, India had provided swift intervention to thwart the coup attempt in

divers and President Muizzu asking India to stop hydrographic survey has made the situation more complex. This article is not at all a retaliation of disparaging, remarks against India and our Prime Minister by three Maldivian ministers, which at best could be described as an undemocratic, derogatory, full of negativity, utterances of abnormal minds and unacceptable in any civilised society, particularly in the international arena. The aim of the article is to spell out imminent danger of spread of terrorism in Maldives and countries in its proximity due to mushrooming of terrorism in Maldives and President Muizzu's close relative's involvement with a terrorist or-

This thesis also gives an account of the arrest of a Maldivian, Ibrahim Fauzee by US Forces from an Al-Qaeda hideout in Pakistan. He also had a telephone number of a Sudanese teacher who was engaged in assisting Arabs travel to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Fauzee, after knowing his combatant status, was released in 2005. However, ties between Maldives and regional terrorist organisations seemed quite credible.

In an interview to CNN IBN in 2009, President Nasheed had confirmed that thousands of Maldivians youths were being recruited to study at various religious Madarsas or to join Jihadi

vian terrorists trained by ISIS in jail in Afghanistan besides giving credible links of 36 Maldivians with ISIS in Syria. These terrorists are slated to be brought to Male in a chartered flight soon.

The arrest of Mohammad Shah Nawaz, a mining engineer in India in September last year has also revealed his indoctrination by a Maldivian woman for expansion of ISIS in India. Shah Nawaz along with two of his friends were indoctrinated to orchestrate multiple bomb blasts in Ayodhya, Delhi, Mumbai and Gujarat and they had undertaken reconnaissance of the places also.

The Intelligence Review weekly assessment of South Asia, on South Asia Terrorism portal (Jan 9, 2024) also unambiguously highlights that Maldives is not only a hub of Islamic State (IS) operatives, but also of Pakistan based terror groups and narcotics smugglers as well. Sources also indicate many Laskar leaders having settled in Maldives to expand their global activities.

These facts make it abundantly clear that Muizzu's Maldives muddling, more so with his own close relative heading the organisation which indoctrinates young minds, will not only have disastrous consequences for Maldives in the long run, but will also have bearing on the regional and global security scenario as links of Maldivian nationals with various global terrorist organisations have already come to the fore.

Maldives stands at a crossroads and Muizzu's leadership takes a centre stage in steering the nation through these uncharted waters. Navigating the delicate balance between luring tourists and securing the Maldivian and its neighbour's shore from these home grown terrorists is an uphill task for Muizzu and his inexperienced and insensitive ministers. As for India, it has, despite knee jerk reaction from Maldives, maintained pragmatism and maturity expected of a trusted democracy and is monitoring every move of our neighbour closely.

(The author is a retired additional director general of Indian Coast Guard. Views expressed are personal)



the Maldives in 1988. This action of India was hailed world over. Support during the water crisis in Maldives in 2014, medical and logistics support during Covid-19, undertaking various projects including Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Faculty of Engineering Technology and many ongoing projects are developments too recent to be forgotten.

Despite India being a first responder in crisis in Maldives, the election of Muizzu, a known anti-India and pro-China face, has made Maldives an ideological battlefield for India-China competition. Visit of a Chinese research ship to Mal-

divers and President Muizzu asking India to stop hydrographic survey has made the situation more complex.

Lieutenant Hassan Amir of Maldives National Defence Force in his thesis "Islamism and Radicalisation in the Maldives" had in 2011 given enough indication about Maldives becoming a fertile ground for terrorism. It emerged in the thesis that, a number of Maldivian youths studying in Pakistani educational institutions were radicalised and many of them were also known to have travelled to various jihadi training camps in Afghanistan - Pakistan border areas. On return to Maldives, they advocated a Sharia-based state of Mal-

divers and President Muizzu asking India to stop hydrographic survey has made the situation more complex. This article is not at all a retaliation of disparaging, remarks against India and our Prime Minister by three Maldivian ministers, which at best could be described as an undemocratic, derogatory, full of negativity, utterances of abnormal minds and unacceptable in any civilised society, particularly in the international arena. The aim of the article is to spell out imminent danger of spread of terrorism in Maldives and countries in its proximity due to mushrooming of terrorism in Maldives and President Muizzu's close relative's involvement with a terrorist or-

Armed trio attempts to rob jewellery shop in Vikasnagar

Police arrest one, conduct checks to nab two accused

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police sprung into action following an attempted robbery in a jewellery shop by three armed men in the Vikasnagar area on Sunday. According to the police, one of the accused trio was arrested while intensive checking was being conducted in all the checkpoints and barriers in the district for the two absconding accused. On receiving information that a notorious criminal of Saharanpur may be involved in the case, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh directed the sealing of all checkpoints and directed the police team in



laying siege to prevent the accused from escaping out of the district. Considering the seriousness of the crime, the SSP himself left for the scene of the crime. All the police station in-charges were ordered to conduct detailed checks and search for the accused. He warned that strict action will be taken against the official concerned if any negligence is observed in the checking. The police were conducting checks of all vehicles in the area in addition to searching for the suspects till the time of this report being filed.

35 replicas of artifacts prepared at HCC

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In order to facilitate cultural engagement, a total of 35 replicas of the Artifacts showcased at the Himalayan Culture Centre (HCC) have been prepared. An official of the Culture department informed that the department has initiated the making of these replicas with the aim of preserving the culture and utilising the artifacts for various purposes. The preparation and production of replicas began in December last year after receiving approval from the relevant officials, he said. The official further stated that out of the 51 artifacts at HCC initially selected, 35 replicas have been fully completed. He said that the work on the replicas at HCC will be completed by the end of February. In order to preserve the replicas, a separate laboratory will be established at HCC along with skilled artisans who will be responsible for their maintenance. The laboratory operations will commence immediately after the completion of the replicas, the official said. The installation of a ticket counter at HCC has been delayed due to the introduction of the replicas. Addressing this matter, the official stated that once the entire replica project is finished, the ticket counter at HCC will be set up. It will be recalled that the Culture department initiated the creation of replicas of the artifacts displayed at HCC in order to enhance cultural accessibility. The department has entrusted the production of these replicas to experts from the Anupam Heritage Company.

Japan Airlines officials discuss scholarship at Doon University

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Japan Airlines (JAL) officials Manisha Aggarwal and Narender Bisht visited the Doon University on the weekend to promote 2024 JAL scholarships for the students of Japanese language at the university. The officials had a meeting with the

Japanese department head Deepika Bhatia and other faculties of the department to discuss the scholarship and Japanese language education at the University.

They also met the vice chancellor Surekha Dang-

wal and registrar MS Mandarwal to discuss the scope and further prospects of the JAL scholarships and student welfare. Bhatia thanked JAL and said that such opportunities would enable the students to gain exposure.

Panchayat personnels' strike period to be included in accrued leaves: Maharaj

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Panchayati Raj minister Satpal Maharaj has stated that the duration in which the Panchayati Raj department personnel were on strike will be included in their accrued holidays. The Panchayati Raj department personnel had gone on a 12-day strike from January 17 to 28 last year against the functional merger of village Panchayat development officer and village development officer. The minister said that this period of strike will be included in the accrued holidays of the personnel. With this decision, the personnel will get the benefit of salary during the strike period, Maharaj said.



service related cases and they will be paid the salary deducted for the duration of their strike. Maharaj said that the State government under chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has always stood with the employees, adding that

the government will always take care of their interests. He further said that the Panchayati Raj personnel should also work harder and with honesty to further strengthen the Panchayats and make them self-reliant.

The minister said that he had approved the demand of the department personnel to include their strike period in the accrued leaves. This will enable the redressal of their

Renovated tourist spot coming up on Delhi-Nainital highway

PNS ■ HALDWANI

The tourist spot Sanjay Van Chetna Kendra, situated near Nainital on the Nainital-Delhi highway is being developed at a cost of Rs 80 lakh. This site is slated to be opened for tourists by chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama before February 25. The Union minister of State Ajay Bhatt had taken special interest in this project and had directed the officials to develop this location. The Sanjay Van

to be done on it. Bhatt said that he had a telephonic conversation with Raja Sabha member Anil Baluni for Rs 10 lakh to set up a transformer for facilitating electricity supply to this location. Baluni has assured that this will be done soon.

The minister also talked to the Tourism secretary Sachin Kurve seeking co-operation of the Tourism department in developing this spot. The secretary has

minister Pushkar Singh Dhama before February 25. He said that he will talk to the CM soon and submit his proposal in this matter.

"There is no place en route for tourists travelling from Delhi to Nainital where they can rest and enjoy nature. Tourists will enjoy the Sanjay Van Chetna Kendra," Bhatt said. The minister further said that he had also talked to the Uttarakhand Forest



Chetna Kendra tourist spot had been lying closed for more than 30 years.

On Sunday, the minister visited the spot and held a discussion with the chief conservator of forests (Kumaon), Udham Singh Nagar district magistrate and other officials concerned. He said that Rs 80 lakh has been spent so far on renovating this tourist spot with some more work

assured all possible assistance in the project. A sum of Rs 20 lakh was released from the district plan last year and Rs 20 lakh this year along with Rs 40 lakh which was released by the district magistrate from the untied fund - totalling to Rs 80 lakh which has been released so far for this task. Bhatt said that attempts will be made to enable the inauguration of this tourist spot by chief

Development Corporation managing director who had assured him that a guest house will also be provided at the location. Bhatt also issued necessary instructions to the police, electricity department and the municipal body to work in coordination to ensure that work on developing this tourist spot is completed soon.

इंडियन बैंक

इलाहाबाद

Indian Bank

ALLAHABAD

ZO MUMBAI WEST, RECOVERY DEPARTMENT :- First Floor, B-wing, 101, Neo Vikram CHSL., Sahakar Nagar, New Link Road, Andheri (W), Mumbai-400 058.

E-AUCTION ON 06.03.2024, AT 11.00 A. M. TO 05.00 P. M. UNDER SARFAESI ACT 2002 "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS, AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" through E-Auction platform provided at the website <https://www.mstcecommerce.com>

APPENDIX-IV-A" [SEE PROVISO TO RULE 8 (6)] SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Securi ty 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 / charged to the Secured Creditor, the Symbolic Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Indian Bank Secured Creditor, will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" AND "WHATSOEVER THERE IS" on 06.03.2024 for recovery as follows:-

DATE & TIME OF DOCUMENT, PROPERTY & INSPECTION :		EARNEST MONEY DEPOSIT UPTO 05.03.2024			
04.03.2024 FROM 10.00 A. M. TO 04.00 P. M.		BETWEEN 10.00 A. M. TO 04.00 P. M.			
Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower	Description of the Property (Status of Possession) Property ID	Amount of Secured Debt	Reserve Price (R. P.) Earnest Money Deposit up to 05.03.2024	Branch Address & Contact Details for Sale Details
1	M/s. Orkide Exports & Consultants Pvt. Ltd.	Upper Casetleton Compound Municipal limits of Nainital Nagar Palika, Tah & Dist. Nainital Possession Symbolic Property ID- IDIBCAOE01	Rs. 3,10,69,222/- as per demand notice dated 07.08.2023, plus interest till the date of realization & cost, charges & other expenses	Rs. 1,44,03,000.00 (Rupees One Crore Forty Four Lakhs Three Thousand only) Rs. 14,40,300.00 (Rupees Fourteen Lakhs Forty Thousand Three Hundred Only)	14 - Mehta Industrial Estate Near - W E H. Metro Station, Andheri Kuria Road, Andheri (East) Branch- Chakala Branch Head -Anandrao Sahebrao Kolekar Mob- 8976754738

For downloading further details and Terms & Conditions, please visit : (i) <https://www.indianbank.in>, (ii) <https://www.mstcecommerce.com>, (iii) <https://www.ibapi.in>. Platform (https://www.mstcecommerce.com) for E-Auction will be provided by our E-Auction service provider M/s. MSTC Limited having its Registered Office at 225-C, A. J. C. Bose Road, Kolkata-700 020 (Contact Phone & Toll Free Numbers 079-41072412 / 411/ 413 or 1800-103-5342).

Important note for the prospective bidders : (E-Auction through <https://www.mstcecommerce.com>). Registration should be completed by intending bidder on or before EMD Date and there should be EMD balance in global wallet. Bidder has to complete following formalities well in advance : - **Step 1** : Bidder / Purchaser Registration - Bidder to register on E-Auction portal (link given above) <http://www.mstcecommerce.com> (i.e. <https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/>) using his Mobile Number and Email ID. **Step 2** : KYC Verification - Bidder to upload requisite KYC documents. KYC documents shall be verified by E-Auction service provider (may take 2 working days). **Step 3** : Transfer of EMD amount to his Global EMD Wallet : Online / Off-line transfer of fund using NEFT / Transfer, using challan generated on E-Auction portal. Step 1 to Step 3 should be completed by bidder well in advance, on or before EMD date.

Date: 05.02.2024
Place: Mumbai

Sd/-
Indian Bank, Authorized Officer

Note : This is also a notice to the Borrower / Guarantors / Mortgagees of the above said loan about holding of this sale on the above mentioned date and other details.

Four-day session of U'khand Assembly to commence today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Assembly will start its historic four-day session on Monday in Dehradun. The State government will table the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) bill in this session. The session which is being dubbed as the special session is an extension of the winter session of the Assembly. On Sunday the business advisory committee (BAC) meeting and the all party meeting was held. The speaker Ritu Khanduri chaired both these meetings. The business of the house was discussed in the BAC meeting. It is learnt that the leader of the opposition (LoP) in the Assembly Yashpal Arya and Congress MLA from Chakrata Pritam Singh opposed the plan of the government to do away with the question hour during the four-day session. It was then decided that the meeting of the BAC will again be held on Monday to decide on the issue and the business of the other days. On Monday the government will move a condolence motion. The members will pay their tributes to the Manglaur MLA Sarwat Karim Ansari who died recently. The members will also offer condolences to the former members who have passed away recently.



Interacting with the media persons in her office on Sunday the speaker Ritu Khanduri said that she has appealed to the leaders of the political parties to give their contribution for smooth conduction of the house. She said that only the agenda for Monday was discussed and finalised in the meeting of the BAC on Sunday. She informed that the condolence motion will be discussed in the house on Monday and the BAC will meet again to discuss the agenda for the next three days. When asked to comment on the UCC, the speaker said that being the speaker she will not participate in the discussion. However, Khanduri added that she personally is in the favour of the

UCC. She said that the UCC

UCC bill makes Assembly session special, historic

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Pushkar Singh Dhami government is all set to table the bill on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the State Assembly commencing on Monday. The government has made all the deliberations on the important bill which will be tabled in the Assembly on February 6. The expert committee headed by Justice (retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai has submitted its exhaustive report on the UCC to the chief min-

will help in making women more empowered. The speaker added that the women belonging to all religions and castes will benefit from UCC and Uttarakhand is on the verge of creating history by being the first State in the country after independence to implement UCC.

The Parliamentary Affairs minister Subodh Uniyal, LoP Yashpal Arya, BSP leader Mohammad Shahjad and others attended the meeting of BAC.

ister Pushkar Singh Dhami who had taken a resolve to implement the UCC in the State. The draft of the bill on UCC is likely to include most of the recommendations made by the expert committee. After the passage of the bill and its subsequent endorsement by the governor, Uttarakhand will become the first State in the country after independence to have its own UCC.

Bhatt appeals to all MLAs to participate in constructive debate

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party State president Mahendra Bhatt has appealed to all the MLAs to rise above partisan lines and participate in a constructive debate in the four-day Assembly session starting on Monday. He said that all members should participate constructively in debate on issues of public concern during the session.



In a statement released to the media on Sunday, Bhatt stated that various bills related to different issues of public welfare are slated to be tabled in the Assembly during this session. As always, the people of Uttarakhand are waiting to see the role of their public representatives in the Assembly. "It is necessary that detailed and healthy debate is held on all technical and practical aspects of all the issues in the house. Considering this, I request all the MLAs to rise above partisan lines and participate in a healthy debate so that the bills tabled in the Assembly are passed and enacted as laws for the betterment of the State and its progress," the BJP State president stated.

He appealed to the opposition MLAs to set aside politics and participate in the debate with an open mind as all want to make Uttarakhand an ideal State as per the aspirations of the people. In the past too the

Assembly has taken historic decisions to pass bills on subjects including anti-copying law, anti-conversion law and reservation for women, among other issues. Still, a number of public expectations have to be passed through the Assembly and the benefit of the same has to be provided to the public. Along with deliberations on development and public welfare works, the Assembly is the best platform for raising issues related to the problems of the public. He expressed hope that along with the ruling party, the opposition MLAs will also make the best use of this important opportunity, Bhatt added.

Statehood activists to launch stir if reservation bill not passed by Assembly: Pratap

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Senior leader of Uttarakhand Congress and chief patron of Chhinhit Rajya Andolankari Sanyukt Samiti Dharendra Pratap has threatened that the statehood activists will start a massive agitation if the bill granting 10 per cent horizontal reservation in the government jobs to the statehood activists is not passed by the State Assembly in its session commencing from Monday. He said that the statehood activists will observe February 8 as 'Dhikkar Diwas' in all parts of the State if the reservation bill

is not passed by the Assembly.

Pratap told The Pioneer that the patience of the statehood activists is fast waning and their anger could get manifested in the form of agitation in Garhwal and Kumaon. He demanded that the government restart the process of identification of statehood activists which is stalled at present. Pratap said that Uttarakhand was created due to sacrifices of the statehood activists and they should not be ignored by the government.

Two youths arrested for eloping with minors, one also booked for rape

Dehradun police act promptly, arrest duo shortly after lodging case

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Acting swiftly on complaints regarding two young men kidnapping minors in two different cases, the Dehradun police arrested the two accused, of which one is accused of raping the girl he had kidnapped. According to

escape to his native place in Laksar from Doiwala to evade arrest. However, the police managed to nab him within three hours of receiving the complaint.

In another case, a woman



the police, a woman residing in the Doiwala area submitted a complaint on Saturday stating that a man named Aftab had lured her 13-year-old daughter to accompany him from her school. Registering a case in the matter, the police activated the informers' network and also checked the footage from CCTV cameras at locations of interest. The police managed to catch the accused on the same day from Nunnawala area.

The police informed that the girl was found with Doiwala resident 19-year-old Aftab. Based on the statements of the victim, the police added relevant sections of IPC and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act against the accused for raping the minor. After kidnapping the minor, he was preparing to

submitted a complaint in the Rajpur police station on Saturday stating that a man named Monu had lured her 14-year-old daughter to elope with him. A case was registered and the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh issued necessary instructions to the police considering the sensitivity of the case. The police team searched for the accused in all possible locations while also activating the informers' network. The police also resorted to electronic and mobile phone surveillance to trace the accused. Based on a tip off provided by an informant, the police caught 20-year-old Monu Safi from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh along with the minor girl. The accused who is a resident of the Madhuban area of Ghaziabad was presented in court, the police added.

State witnesses snowfall & rain, more forecast today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN/JOSHIMATH

Various high altitude mountainous regions of the State witnessed snowfall while there was light rainfall in the lower altitudes and plains on Sunday resulting in a marked drop in the temperature. Similar weather conditions are expected to prevail on Monday with the State meteorological centre forecasting that very light to light rain is likely to occur at a few places in the mountains and at isolated places in the plains of the State. Further, light to moderate snowfall is likely to occur at a few places situated at altitudes of 2,500 metres and above. The meteorological centre has further forecast that the provisional

to light rain likely to occur in some areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 17 degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

Meanwhile, on Sunday various high altitude mountainous regions in different districts witnessed snowfall on Sunday. The Chakrata region in Dehradun district and the Char Dham located in Chamoli, Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi districts also witnessed snowfall. In Chamoli district snowfall started in the high altitude areas in the morning with rainfall in the

Hemkund, Valley of Flowers and the Niti valley, along with other high altitude rural areas.

The snow sports destination Auli near Joshimath also witnessed snowfall with a blanket of white covering the slopes in Auli and the roads and mountains in the area. Most people were forced to remain indoors and bring out more warm clothes along with lighting fires to seek relief from the intensifying cold conditions. However, visitors reaching Auli had a good time in the snow covered area. The snowfall and rains have been welcomed by the farmers who state that the snow will prove to be a

Provide better amenities to tourists: CM to Transport Dept, UTC

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has said that the number of pilgrims and tourists is increasing rapidly in Uttarakhand. He said that both the Transport department and Uttarakhand Transport Corporation (UTC) have the major responsibility of making the facilities and amenities better for these visitors. He was addressing a programme at

tribute in this endeavour.

He said that the State government is working dedicatedly to create employment and self employment opportunities for the youngsters. Dhami said that many recruitment processes are going on in the State in a transparent manner. He said that the State government has brought a strict anti-copying

also handed over driving licenses to 16 women after successful completion of free driving training given by the Transport department.

Congratulating the newly appointed employees, the CM said that they should work hard and show dedication towards their work from the beginning of their career.



his camp office on Sunday in which appointment letters were handed over to drivers and conductors. These candidates have been given appointments in the UTC on grounds of compassion. In the programme appointment letters were handed over to 16 assistant accountants who were appointed in the Transport department.

The CM said that the state government is committed to make Uttarakhand as one of the leading States of the country and everyone should con-

law and enforced it strictly. The CM claimed that all the recruitment examinations after this law have taken place in a fair and transparent manner.

Dhmi also flagged off a road safety public awareness rally on the occasion. In the campaign awareness about road safety will be raised in all the districts of the State.

He also released a data book based on road safety and a road safety calendar on the occasion. In the programme the CM

He said that the role of drivers and conductors is of paramount importance in smooth operation of the transport services. Stressing on the importance of self discipline, the CM said that one should adhere to a strict daily routine from the early stage of their job.

The cabinet minister Ganesh Joshi, Transport secretary AS Hyanki, managing director of UTC Anand Srivastava and others were present on the occasion.



A blanket of white covers a road and surrounding mountains in Chamoli district after fresh snowfall in the higher reaches on Sunday

State capital Dehradun is likely to witness a partly to generally cloudy sky with very light

comparatively lower altitude regions. Considerable rainfall was reported in Badrinath,

boon for the Rabi crop and cultivation of fruits like apples.



Fog shrouds the Naini lake and surrounding mountains in Nainital on Sunday which witnessed intermittent rain throughout the day

Justice Ritu Bahri becomes first woman Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Ritu Bahri took oath of office as the first woman chief justice of Uttarakhand High Court on Sunday. The governor lieutenant general (retd) Gurmit Singh administered the oath to her at a ceremony held at the Raj Bhawan.

Born on October 11, 1962, chief justice Bahri was first enrolled as an advocate in 1986. She practiced at Punjab and Haryana High Court in civil, constitutional, taxation, labour and service matters.

Her field of specialisation is service and tax matters. She was appointed as an



additional judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court in August 2010 and as

a permanent judge in February 2012. She is due to retire on October 10, 2024.

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, the governor's wife Gurmit Kaur, cabinet ministers Satpal Maharaj and Dhan Singh Rawat, MP Nareish Bansal, chief secretary Radha Raturi, officiating director general of police Abhinav Kumar, additional chief secretary Anand B a r d h a n , Uttarakhand High Court registrar general Ashish Naithani and others were also present during the swearing-in ceremony.

India in driver seat of Quad: US envoy

PTI ■ JAIPUR

US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said India is in the "driving seat" of the Quad, while America is in the seat next to it with the "corrective steering wheel", and added that it is up to India to "forcefully define" the nature of the diplomatic partnership.

Garcetti, speaking here at the 17th edition of Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), used a rather unique analogy of 'eating, drinking and sharing a ride together' to explain the different roles of member countries in the Quad.

"The Quad is a diplomatic partnership between India, the US, Australia, and Japan to deepen economic, diplomatic, and military ties among the four countries."

"India is very much in the driver seat of the Quad... May be America is in the next seat with the corrective steering wheel, I think Japan has been an avid navigator from the beginning and Australia is really excited to be back in the car and asking if everybody has enough to drink and eat,



and where we are going.

"So it is a great time and we love these different roles. I want to sit in the back some other time and relax, but it is in some ways up to India to most forcefully define what we want to do with the Quad," said Garcetti on Saturday in a session, "Heart of the Matter: Quad and the new Indo-Pacific Vision."

The 53-year-old said the Quad can be the "model for the world" as it is "very strong and stable", not just in geometry but in diplomacy as well - more than multilateral insti-

tutions such as the UN, which he claimed "don't have much efficacy".

"Bilaterals are always engaging but the two countries get a little bored of each other when it is just direct," he added.

Garcetti used another analogy to explain his point better. "It is like a dinner party, invite three people, it gets more interesting, four people, now you have a party, when others want to come to the party... Now you know you have got something special," he explained.

Though he admitted that the Quad is not a group where the four member countries agree on every vote in multilateral institutions, Garcetti asserted it is not a "talk shop" either.

He gave examples with the kind of work being done by the member countries on semiconductors, artificial intelligence and space projects. "We can talk about the domain awareness in the Indian Ocean that is actually commencing and moving forward. Space projects that are actually not talk but actually probably as robust as any place on earth. So I don't think it is a talk shop but it is also not ever going to be a place where 'Hey! How are we all going to vote at the UN together,' he pointed.

Former Australia PM Malcolm Turnbull, who was also part of the panel discussion, said one should look at how far the Quad has come since its inception in 2007, rather than reflecting on why it hasn't turned into a "whole strategic alliance".

He called the Quad to some extent a case of "same bed, different dreams".

"The point is some of our dreams are different but we have a lot of dreams in common, and they are the ones that Shinzo Abe defined in his original vision.

"Countries that are committed to freedom... Doesn't mean that they are going to agree on every issue but it does mean that they can stand together to defend freedom, sovereignty and the openness that democracy demands," Turnbull, one of the key people behind the reinstatement of the Quad in 2017, added.

The Quad group, which had first met in 2007, went into cold storage after protests from China. It was reinstated in 2017 -- after a gap of 10 years -- in the face of China's growing assertiveness in world affairs.

Australian Ambassador to India Philip Green and former foreign secretary Shyam Saran also participated in the session. The JLF 2024, touted to be the "biggest literary festival in the world", will see participation of the world's best thinkers, writers, and speakers till February 5.

CBI chargesheets Air India former CMD, IBM, SAP in software deal irregularities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against the then CMD of Air India, German firm SAP AG and IBM in connection with alleged irregularities in procurement of software worth Rs 225 crore by the national carrier in 2011, officials said on Sunday.

The CBI has registered the case on the recommendation of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) which found prima facie procedural irregularities in the procurement of the software, according to people in the investigation agency in know of the development.

After nearly six years of probe, the CBI has filed a charge sheet against former CMD Air India Arvind Jadhav, IBM India Private Limited, SPA India Private Limited and six others under the IPC section 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, they said.

The CVC, in the note to the CBI, said that initial probe by



Air India's chief vigilance officer shows that the national carrier had selected the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software system from SAP AG without following proper tendering procedure. It was also alleged that there was no approval from the civil aviation ministry even though Air India had claimed that it had made a presentation before the Group of Secretaries on July 9, 2009, and before the Group of Ministers in 2010. The commission had said that Air India had selected the

software from the largest ERP provider of the world without justifying the need for the same since already a similar system of Oracle was in operation. It was stated that the Oracle system had some problems but no efforts were apparently made to either set them right or upgrade the existing system.

Also, open tender system was not adopted for procurement of new ERP software, the CVC said in the note. "Instead, the contract was awarded to SAP and IBM on nomination basis."

YouTuber chargesheeted by CBI for presenting forged documents at death of actress Sridevi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against a self-styled investigator alleging that she presented "forged" letters from high dignitaries, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, to support her claims made in a YouTube video regarding the death of actor Sridevi.

Last year, the CBI registered a case against Deepti R Pinniti, based in Bhubaneswar, and her lawyer Bharath Suresh Kamath following a complaint from Mumbai-based lawyer Chandni Shah, which was referred to the agency by the Prime Minister's Office. Shah alleged that Pinniti had produced several documents, including letters from the



prime minister and the defence minister, along with documents related to the Supreme Court and records from the UAE government, which appeared to be forged. Pinniti has been an active participant in social media dis-

cussions on the death of Bollywood actors such as Sridevi and Sushant Singh Rajput.

Sridevi died in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates on February 2018.

With regard to Sridevi's death,

she made sensational claims, including a "coverup between the two governments" in one interview, based on her "investigations."

After filing an FIR against her last year, the CBI had conducted searches at her residence in Bhubaneswar on December 2, seizing digital devices, including phones and laptops.

According to the CBI's report submitted to a special court, the investigation revealed that the documents presented by her during YouTube discussions, pertaining to the prime minister and the defence minister, were "forged."

The agency has filed a charge sheet against her and Kamath under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 465, 469, and 471.

NIA files chargesheet against 3 Myanmar nationals for trafficking of Rohingyas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a charge-sheet against three nationals of Myanmar in a case involving the illegal infiltration and trafficking of foreign nationals, primarily of Rohingya origin, into India through the India-Bangladesh border, an official said on Sunday.

The accused are Rabi Islam alias "Rabiul Islam", Shafi Alam alias "Sofi Alam" alias "Sayedul Islam", and Mohammad Usman -- all permanent residents of Maungdaw district in Myanmar -- a spokesperson of the federal agency said.

According to the NIA, they had entered India illegally, in collusion with traffickers and touts, without valid travel doc-



uments and were also involved in facilitating the infiltration of numerous other foreign nationals through unauthorised and illegal border routes.

Part of a well-organised network of traffickers and touts involved in various illegal activ-

were then sold for forced marriages across various Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Telangana and Haryana.

The NIA's investigation uncovered instances and evidence of forgery of documents and established that Rabi Islam and Mohammad Usman had obtained Aadhaar cards fraudulently. The duo had also used these cards to procure multiple SIM cards and open bank accounts, further concealing their true identities, the spokesperson said.

With this charge sheet, the official said the NIA, which had started probing the case on November 7 last year, has taken a significant step towards uncovering and dismantling a major international human trafficking racket.

Sanjay Jaju I&B secretary, Chandra health secretary in top shakeup

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior bureaucrat Sanjay Jaju was on Saturday appointed as the new Information and Broadcasting Secretary, in place of Apruva Chandra who was holding the post as along with Health Secretary.

Chandra was appointed as the full time Health Secretary as part of a top-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre on Saturday. Chandra is a 1988-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Maharashtra cadre.

Chalai is currently Secretary, North Eastern Council Secretariat, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. Niten Chandra, who was the first IAS officer to be appointed to the post of legal affairs secretary, is also the secretary to the high-level committee on "One Nation, One Election".

Senior IAS officer Anil Malik has been appointed as Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Ministry of Women and Child Development. He will take over as Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development after superannuation of incumbent Indevnar Pandey on February 29, the order said.

Ashish Kumar Bhutani, a 1992-

batch IAS officer of Assam-Meghalaya cadre, will be Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation.

Senior bureaucrat Raj Kumar Goyal has been appointed as Secretary, Department of Border Management.

Legal Affairs Secretary Niten Chandra will now be Secretary, Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare, and K Moses Chalai has been named Secretary of Inter State Council Secretariat under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Chalai is currently Secretary, North Eastern Council Secretariat, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region.

Niten Chandra, who was the first IAS officer to be appointed to the post of legal affairs secretary, is also the secretary to the high-level committee on "One Nation, One Election".

Senior IAS officer Anil Malik has been appointed as Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Ministry of Women and Child Development. He will take over as Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development after superannuation of incumbent Indevnar Pandey on February 29, the order said. Sumita Dawra, Special Secretary (Logistics) in the Department

for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, will now be Officer on Special Duty in the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

She will take over as Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment after the retirement of Arti Ahuja this month-end.

Vijay Kumar, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Cooperation, has been named as Chairman, Inland Waterways Authority of India.

The ACC has also approved in-situ upgradation of posts held by four officers.

Accordingly, P Daniel will now be Secretary, Central Vigilance Commission in the rank and pay of Secretary. Rashmi Chowdhary will be Secretary, Central Information Commission in the rank and pay of Secretary to the government of India. A Neeraja will be Special Secretary in the Department of Fertilizers and Shyam Bhagat Negi has been appointed as Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat.

The ACC has also approved appointment of Reeta Vasishtha, in-charge of Central Agency Section, Ministry of Law and Justice, as the Member Secretary, 22nd Law Commission of India, the order added.

Government extends track and trace system implementation for pharma exports by 1 year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a breather to the pharmaceutical sector, drugmakers have got yet another extension, this time up to one year till February next for implementing the Track and Trace system for export of pharmaceuticals and drug consignments. The move aims to address counterfeit and product recall challenges.

In simple words, the Track and Trace system is typically designed to monitor and trace the movement of pharmaceutical products throughout the supply chain. This can include tracking the production, distribution, and sale of medications, with the aim of preventing counterfeit drugs, ensuring product authenticity, and improving overall safety for consumers.

According to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), the date for implementation of track and trace system for export of drug formulations with respect to maintaining the parent-child relationship in packaging levels and its uploading on Central Portal has been extended up to February 01, 2025. Notably, the extension is applicable to both small scale industries (SSI)



and non-SSI manufactured drugs.

"This initiative aims at enhancing transparency and accountability in the export of drug formulations, emphasizing the maintenance of the parent-child relationship in the packaging levels and their movement in the supply chain," said Santosh Kumar Sarangi, director general (DG), DGFT.

The new implementation deadline will provide pharmaceutical companies with additional time to align their operations with the stringent requirements of the track and trace system. This extension comes as a relief for pharmaceutical manufacturers, allowing them more time to integrate the necessary technological infrastructure, ensuring the seamless implementation of the track and trace system.

Regular use of cleaning products can lead to uncontrolled asthma: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Beware, the crisp scent of disinfectants and the inviting aroma of cleaning products that seems to create an atmosphere of cleanliness and well-being can be an invitation for uncontrolled asthma.

According to the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, frequent use of household disinfectants and cleaning products (HDCPs) and uncontrolled asthma are proportionally connected with each other.

The study, utilizing data from the 2018 French Web-based NutriNet-Santé cohort, analyzed the habits of 37,043 participants, revealing noteworthy insights. Asthma is a condition in which your airways narrow and swell and may produce extra mucus. This can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing. In severe cases, it may even escalate to life-threatening asthma attacks. Asthma can't be cured, but its symptoms can be controlled.

The research indicates that the risk of uncontrolled asthma significantly escalates with almost daily use of HDCPs, including irritants, green products, sprays, and disinfecting



wipes.

Demographic factors played a role, with those who had current asthma and uncontrolled asthma tending to be younger, female, current smokers, and overweight. Additionally, individuals with uncontrolled asthma generally had lower educational status.

Notably, specific products showcased distinct associations. Those using irritants and green products almost daily were found to be at least twice as likely to experience uncontrolled asthma. Similar heightened risks were observed with the regular use of sprays and disinfecting wipes. Even when not used in conjunction with irritants and sprays, both disinfecting wipes and green products retained statistically significant associations with uncontrolled asthma. The study also highlighted a stronger association between the use of irritants, sprays, and green products and current asthma among subjects with overweight.

Congress attacks BJP over 'unemployment crisis' in last ten years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday attacked the Centre over the issue of unemployment, alleging that Prime Minister "Modi-made jobs famine" is the height of the "anyay kaal" of the last 10 years.

Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh cited an analysis of long-term trends in job creation in the Indian labour market to attack the government. Ramesh said that during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Rahul

Gandhi has been consistently highlighting the urgency of "Yuva Nyay (justice for the youth). The jobs famine in the country has been caused by the Modani-karan (Modanisation) of the economy," he said.

Now, a new analysis of India's unemployment crisis "exposes" the unemployment crisis of the last 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he claimed. Ramesh said it comes from one of the world's leading economists, a professor at the London School of Economics. "Compared to 10 years ago, less

people are working, the youth are worst affected, and jobs are paying much less," he said. Citing the analysis, Ramesh claimed that the percentage of Indians who have jobs is still lower than it was 10 years ago. "Youth unemployment rate reached a peak under the Modi government, and today at above eight per cent, is much higher than the four per cent it was 10 years ago," he said. Ramesh further said that for the first time in more than 30 years, Prime Minister Modi has managed to decrease the share of workers getting a salary.



"It had been rising continuously from 15 per cent to almost 25 per cent under the previous government but has now come

all the way back down to 22 per cent," he said.

"Even for the lucky few with jobs, after taking away the effect of price rise, earnings have not increased at all under the Modi government. Salaried workers' earnings are 12 per cent lower than (what was) five years ago, while rural labourers' earnings are 5 per cent lower," Ramesh claimed. Meanwhile, the prime pinister is handing India's resources away to his "crony industrialist friends", while stealing the future of India's youth, he alleged.

"Today, the top 20 companies make 90 per cent of profits, while all the lakhs of other companies in India are left with just 10 per cent of profits. In 2014, the market was much more fair --? the top 20 companies made 40 per cent of profits," he said.

Adani was the 609th richest person in the world in 2014, with USD 8 billion in net worth, Ramesh said. "However, with 10 years of 'Modi magic', his wealth grew 10 times to USD 80 billion, and he became the world's second richest person. The prime min-

ister generously gifted Adani six airports, power plants, gas pipelines, and now Dharavi in Mumbai," he alleged.

Even making weapons for our armed forces has been handed over to "the PM's best friend", Ramesh claimed. "How many jobs has this created? Very less," he added. In 2019, the Modi government cut corporate taxes by 25 per cent, leading to a loss of over Rs 1 lakh crore per year, the Congress leader alleged. "Rs 14.5 lakh crore in bank loans have been waived off. All these lakhs of crores rightfull-

ly belong to the people of India, to spend on schools and hospitals, for secure government jobs, but it has been handed over to PM Modi's friends," he alleged.

"India's Modi-made jobs famine as a result of Modanikaran of the economy is the height of ANYAY-KAAL of the last 10 years," Ramesh said in his post.

The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy and raising concerns over "increasing" unemployment and price rise.

Sikkim CM sounds Assembly election bugle

Promises regularisation of all Government staff working for over 4 years

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Sunday announced that all government employees, who have been working for more than four years, will be regularised and a notification in this regard will be issued this month. "He said that 300 beneficiaries from each of the 32 constituencies of the state will get houses under Garib Awas Yojna from this year. "Tamang also sounded the poll bugle, as he urged people to give him a second

term in office to fulfil his dream of a developed and prosperous state in the next five years. "The assembly election in the small Himalayan state is due in a few months. Tamang, the president of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), became the chief minister in May 2019. "All government employees who have been working for more than four years on ad-hoc, muster roll and work charge basis who have crossed 4 years in service will be regularized. The notification for this will be issued within this month,"



the chief minister said. "He was addressing a gathering on the occasion of the party's 12th foundation day at Rangpo. "We have brought Sikkim on the track of peace and development by respecting each vote cast in favour of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in the last assembly polls. I seek your votes again for a second term in office to fulfil my dreams for a developed and prosperous Sikkim," Tamang said. "The SKM president named various schemes of the state and central governments during his speech.

"Tamang also said that the state cabinet has decided to revert to the old pension scheme. "The chief minister said that his government was committed to help Sikkimese youths get a better education for which steps like sponsoring seats for MBBS students and supporting students for higher studies are being taken. "On the assembly election, Tamang said that the SKM has identified candidates for all 32 assembly seats. He, however, did not divulge their names. "He asked the party cadres to

dedicate themselves to the service of Sikkim and its people. "The chief minister thanked the people of Sikkim for reposing their trust in his party to serve them and asserted that he will continue to strive to work in the best interests of the state. "Together, we've surmounted challenges, embraced progress, and diligently worked towards a brighter future for our state. We must continue to make significant strides toward our shared goals through our unity, dedication, and collective spirit," he said.



BJP protests over Suresh 'separate nation' remarks

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Several members of the BJP gathered outside the residence of Congress MP DK Suresh here on Sunday to protest his recent statement that southern states would be forced to demand for a separate nation if the 'injustice' in distribution of funds is not rectified by the Centre. Protesters were heard shouting slogans 'Vande Mataram', 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', 'down down D K Suresh' outside his residence in Sadashivanagar here. However, the agitators were soon removed from the spot by the police and shifted into a bus, police said. Suresh is the brother of Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress President D K Shivakumar. "A group of members from the BJP had gathered outside the residence of the Congress MP. They tried to stage a protest there against his statement over demand for a separate nation for southern states. But our officials immediately removed them from the spot and took them into custody. The situation is under control," a senior

police officer said. Suresh, who represents the Bangalore Rural Lok Sabha constituency, had also alleged that Hindi was being 'imposed' on South India in every aspect. Reacting to the protests, Suresh said in a democracy everyone has the right to protest and freedom of speech. "... I happily welcome their protests... May god bless them," he told reporters here. Accusing the BJP of trying to 'distort' his statement, the lone Lok Sabha member of Congress in Karnataka said, "I never said this country has to be divided, they (BJP) are moving in that direction, they are trying to do politics." Asked why BJP is trying to twist his statement, Suresh said, "you (media) should ask them... Media which is showing my statement has to go through it and speak. I don't know whether it is media's mistake or BJP's or mine." "I believe that media is the fourth estate in a democracy, if you say no we are in favour of one side, I can't do anything," he said, adding that his statement is very clear and it is being distorted by the BJP.

Goa: NCP asks why CM protecting Gaude amid Speaker scam allegations

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Nationalist Congress Party on Sunday asked why Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant was defending his minister Govind Gaude after the latter was accused by Assembly Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar of being involved in a scam. "In a media statement, Clyde Crasto, the Goa observer of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, said Tawadkar had accused Gaude of being involved in a scam pertaining to alleged misuse of funds given to various clubs and organisations by the state arts and culture department. "Crasto said Tawadkar had claimed that CM Sawant was



informed about the scam by sarpanches. "Even when the NCP had raised questions about funds being given for renovation of the Kala Academy building without inviting tenders, the

CM had defended Gaude, Crasto claimed. "After the roof of the Kala Academy collapsed, we had sought an inquiry but in vain. Why is the CM supporting Gaude? Both Sawant and Gaude are answerable to the people of Goa," Crasto said. "Gaude, who is minister of art and culture, had earlier claimed the funds were distributed to various clubs and organisations to hold events in order to encourage grassroot talent. "Refuting all allegations, Gaude had said funds disbursed are taken back if these clubs and organisations fail to submit utilisation certificates of his ministry.

3 killed, 1 injured in road accident in Sikar

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Three people were killed and a 15-year-old youth was injured after a speeding car collided with a pole in Rajasthan's Sikar district, police said on Sunday. "The incident occurred late Saturday night in Losal police station area, they said. "Shishram (20), Dharmendra Jat (19) and Lokesh Jat (20) died on the spot while Sunil Jat (15) was injured after the car going from Sanglia to Molasar collided with a pole on Didwana road, police said. "The bodies have been kept in the hospital mortuary for post-mortem, they said. "The injured youth has been admitted to a hospital for treatment, police said.

Former Gujarat Congress MLA Chirag joins BJP



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Former Congress MLA Chirag Patel joined the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Gujarat on Sunday in the presence of state BJP chief CR Paatil. "Patel, a first-time MLA from Khambhat seat in Anand district, resigned as member of the state assembly on December 14, 2023 after citing disappointment with the working style of the Congress leadership and alleging groupism in the party's state unit. "In the December 2022 state assembly polls, Patel had defeated BJP's Mayur Raval by a narrow margin of less than 4,000 votes. "On Sunday, Patel joined the BJP along with a large number of his supporters at an event in Khambhat. "State BJP chief Paatil, who is also an MP, inducted Patel into the party fold. "In his speech, Paatil indicated that Patel might be the BJP's candidate from Khambhat seat for the by-election, necessitated after his resignation. "Earlier in the day, around 2,500 Congress workers including sarpanchs and booth level workers from Borsad assembly constituency joined

the BJP in Paatil's presence at Borsad Anand district. "Chirag Patel, in his speech, said he has joined the BJP to participate in the task undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and state BJP head Paatil to make the country and the state prosperous and united. "He urged Paatil to pay special attention to Khambhat's development. He also thanked the BJP leadership for taking up the issue of water supply and the government for sanctioning Rs 160-crore project for 56 villages in the assembly seat. "Paatil said the BJP government will not let the area lag behind in development. "He praised Modi's leadership and said people all over the world are praising the manner in which the PM is taking India ahead. "Many people sacrificed their lives and many suffered for their resolve to get the temple of Lord Ram constructed in Ayodhya, a dream that has come true in a peaceful and legal manner because of the strong leadership of PM Modi, Paatil said.

Puducherry Minister urges BJP workers to work for party win in Lok Sabha polls

PUDUCHERRY, FEB 4 (PTI)

With indications that the BJP would field its nominee from the lone Lok Sabha seat in Puducherry, the Union Territory's Home Minister A Namassivayam exhorted the party workers and cadres to put in an 'united work to ensure that it emerged victorious' from the constituency in the forthcoming Parliamentary elections. "Addressing the Puducherry unit's office-bearers at a consultative meeting here

Saturday, Namassivayam, a senior BJP leader, said "we should put in strenuous efforts for the success of the party in the polls." "He said the high command would finalise the party's nominee and that "it is the duty of everyone in the organisation to work for the victory of the party." "You should all put in arduous work and through self-confidence the success would emerge for the party's candidate. Whoever is the candidate fielded by the party high command it is the duty



of everyone in the party to work hard and with unity for the success of the candidate," Namassivayam told the party members at the meeting. "The BJP is a partner in the

coalition ministry headed by the AINRC here. "Nirmal Kumar Surana, the BJP's election in-charge for Puducherry and the Union Territory's Home Minister and the party's local unit President S Selvaganapathy had a meeting on Saturday with Chief Minister N Rangasamy at his residence and discussed poll-related strategies. "Party sources said the Chief Minister had given his nod for the BJP fielding its candidate from the Puducherry seat.

Tripura allocates land to CCHRC for setting up of cancer hospital

PTI ■ AGARTALA

The Tripura government has allocated 15 acres of land to Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (CCHRC) free of cost for setting up a cancer hospital in North Tripura district, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Sunday. "The CCHRC is a non-profit NGO located in Silchar in Assam and provides cancer treatment and education to the underprivileged, free of cost. "The Council of Ministers in its last meeting approved a proposal of allocating 15-acre land to Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (CCHRC) for setting up a cancer hospital in North Tripura district," he said at a programme to mark World Cancer Day. "Eminent Oncologist Dr R Ravi Kannan who was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for revolutionising cancer treatment in the country, is the director of the CCHRC. "Saha said normally the government charges money for allocating land to any organization or individual but in this case, the land has been given free of cost since Dr Ravi Kannan is working for the cancer patients free of cost. "If a cancer hospital is set up in North Tripura, the patients of two districts-North and Unakoti will benefit immensely. Everybody knows North and Unakoti districts have high cancer prevalence districts of the state," he said. "Claiming that Atal Bihari Regional Cancer Hospital (ABRCH) in Agartala has emerged as one of the best cancer treatment centre in the northeastern region, the Chief Minister said more facilities will be made available there.

President Murmu to attend Swami Dayanand 200th birth anniversary

PTI ■ MORBI

President Droupadi Murmu will on February 12 attend an event to be organised by the Arya Samaj to mark the 200th birth anniversary of its founder Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati at his birth place Tankara in Gujarat's Morbi district, the organisers said on Sunday. "Murmu will be the chief guest at the event on February 12 and address the Arya Samaj members who will gather in a large number from all over the world for the celebration to be organised from February 10 to 12, said a release by a committee organising the event. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually address the event on February 11, it said. "Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat and Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel will attend the inaugural event on February 10, while Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the event on February 11, the release said. "The event is set to attract a remarkable assembly of more than two lakh Arya Samaj members worldwide, representing the impact of the profound teachings of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati," it stated. "Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati was born in Tankara on February 12, 1824, and devoted his entire life pursuing Vedic knowledge and cultural heritage. "Through his ideas and messages he motivated the society towards prosperity, freedom and equality. "Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati's



birth anniversary is of historical and philosophical significance, as it commemorates the establishment of the reform movement in India and his ardent advocacy for the Vedas and Vedic culture," the release said. "In February 2023, Prime Minister Modi officiated the year-long celebrations commemorating the 200th birth year of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, and the upcoming event will serve as the pinnacle of these exuberant festivities, it said. "Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati's 200th birth anniversary presents a significant occasion to reflect upon his concepts and pay tribute to his immeasurable contributions, it added.

Karnataka reviews steps after 2 deaths due to monkey fever

PTI ■ BENGALURU,

Two people have succumbed to Kyasanur Forest Disease so far in Karnataka this year, prompting Health department officials to hold meetings and review the preparedness to tackle spread of the viral infection. "According to the Health department, the first death due to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), commonly known as monkey fever was reported in Hosanagar taluk of Shivamogga district on January 8 wherein an 18-year-old girl succumbed to the virus. The second fatality was reported at Manipal in Udipi district when a 79-year-old man from Sringeri taluk in Chikkamagaluru died in a private hospital. "So far, the state has witnessed 49 positive cases of monkey fever with a maximum of 34 cases being reported in Uttara Kannada district followed by 12 in Shivamogga and the remaining three in Chikkamagaluru district. "Amid an increase in the number of KFD cases and two deaths, Karnataka's Health and Family Welfare Commissioner D Randeep on Saturday visited Shivamogga and held meetings with health officials from Uttara Kannada, Shivamogga and Chikkamagaluru districts



where cases of KFD have been reported, a senior Health official said. "Randeep along with a team of senior officials from the state Health department reviewed the preparedness to tackle the spread of the viral infection. "According to the state Health Commissioner, from January 1 this year, the Health department has collected 2,288 samples from the affected districts where cases of KFD were reported and of them, 48 have tested positive for the disease. "We have taken all precautionary measures and are working in close coordination with the officials of the districts where cases of KFD have been reported to prevent its spread. As of now, there is no vaccination available for the disease, so we need to be extra cautious. Awareness is

being created about the precautionary measures to be taken to tackle the infection from spreading further. The vaccination provided earlier was found ineffective. So, we have approached ICMR for the vaccination," another senior health official said. "According to Health officials, monkey fever spreads due to the bites of ticks that generally survive on monkeys. This tick bites humans which causes the infection. Humans also contract the disease by coming in contact with cattle bitten by ticks. "The authorities are carrying out door-to-door awareness programmes about the precautions to be taken. Those living in and around the forest area need to be more careful as they are at high risk of contracting the disease, they said.

Telegana felicitates Padma awardees

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government on Sunday felicitated former Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, Telugu actor Chiranjeevi and others who have been selected for Padma awards. "Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, and his cabinet colleagues felicitated Venkaiah Naidu and Chiranjeevi, who have been recently conferred with the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian honour in the country and the other Padma Shri awardees. "The Padma Shri awardees, included Gaddam Sammaiah, Velu Ananda Chari, Kethavathi Somlal, Dasari Konthappa, Uma Maheshwari and Kurella Vittalacharya. "Speaking on the occasion, Revanth Reddy said this was an apolitical programme. "We all should unite and move forward to protect our culture and traditions. Hope Telugu pride Venkaiah Naidu will ascend to the post of President of India," he said, according to an official release. "A cash prize of Rs 25 lakh was presented to the Padma awardees on behalf of the government, it said.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

Dead, Undead!

Poonam Pandey's crude act, if anything, has belittled cervical cancer survivors and activists

Adult entertainer Poonam Pandey's latest antic has not entertained people one bit, rather it has left them shocked and angry. Hours after she posted steamy photos from Goa on her social media account, her PR manager claimed that Poonam has died of cervical cancer, only for her to disclose a day later that she was "here, alive". The pathetic excuse for the reprehensible 'death' hoax: It was to raise awareness about cervical cancer, to make people talk about it. Effectively, does she believe that all our brand ambassadors for polio eradication, menstrual safety and suchlike social awareness campaigns need to announce their deaths for the public to start talking about the cause close to their heart? But ye public hai, sab jaanti hai.... Everyone knows it for what it was – a cheap publicity stunt for another 15 minutes of fame! But this time, Poonam has crossed the line and ventured into uncharted territory. The incident has sparked outrage on social media, with users and celebrities severely condemning her action. On Friday, her team announced that Poonam had died on Thursday night due to cervical cancer. However, the very next day, the model-actor's posts announced that she was alive. In her videos, she said, "I am alive. I didn't die of cervical cancer. Unfortunately, I can't say that about those hundreds and thousands of women who have lost their lives because of cervical cancer." She went on to discuss the disease, expressing concern about the lack of knowledge surrounding it and emphasising the need for awareness. The 'news', which initially prompted messages of condolence and mourning, quickly gave rise to a storm of criticism on social media. Users started slamming Poonam for what they considered a tasteless and insensitive publicity stunt. Celebrities, including her industry friends, expressed disappointment and disbelief, with some accusing her of crossing ethical boundaries. This is not the first time Poonam, whose claim to fame is showing skin and indulging in theatrics, has courted controversy for publicity. She gained attention for her promise to strip if the Indian cricket team won the 2011 Cricket World Cup. Reckless publicity stunts, especially those involving fake deaths or serious health issues, must be unequivocally condemned due to their inherent unethical nature. Breaking the law of the land (and this one in particular is a criminal offence), causing public nuisance, manipulating emotions, spreading false information and exploiting sensitive topics for personal gain demonstrate a lack of moral integrity and a disregard for the potential harm caused to society. Individuals engaging in such behaviour not only compromise their credibility but also harm the cause. Public figures have a responsibility to act with integrity and authenticity as their actions influence and shape public perception. Admonishing those who resort to deceptive publicity stunts sends out a clear message that ethical boundaries must be upheld, fostering a more honest and transparent media approach. Encouraging genuine efforts for awareness and social causes ensures that the public remains informed and engaged without falling victim to any manipulation. Even if we are to assume that she had a genuine desire to raise awareness about cervical cancer, how did she achieve that? In a way, her act ridiculed cancer survivors and used their plight to garner likes and increase her online following. If one is serious about cancer patients, one could do it many ways; this was certainly not one of them. While Poonam has gained attention for various reasons, it is henceforth important to approach any information about her with reinforced scepticism. She has been a controversial figure, often making headlines for her bold and provocative statements or actions. In the past, she gained attention for her association with the Kingfisher Calendar, which propelled her into the limelight. She later ventured into acting and appeared in a few forgettable Bollywood films. Poonam has often used her social media presence to grab attention and boost her career. This incident also has lessons for those who blindly believe in media posts. They would do well to cross-check facts rather than believe every news that comes their way, especially through social media. Poonam's fake death stunt has undeniably backfired; it sheds light on the lengths some individuals may go to hog the limelight in the age of social media. Even if it be a rap on the knuckles, Poonam must face legal consequences. Time alone will tell how the public and the entertainment industry she belongs to, make her pay. Ideally, she ought to! We demand legal action.



started slamming Poonam for what they considered a tasteless and insensitive publicity stunt. Celebrities, including her industry friends, expressed disappointment and disbelief, with some accusing her of crossing ethical boundaries. This is not the first time Poonam, whose claim to fame is showing skin and indulging in theatrics, has courted controversy for publicity. She gained attention for her promise to strip if the Indian cricket team won the 2011 Cricket World Cup. Reckless publicity stunts, especially those involving fake deaths or serious health issues, must be unequivocally condemned due to their inherent unethical nature. Breaking the law of the land (and this one in particular is a criminal offence), causing public nuisance, manipulating emotions, spreading false information and exploiting sensitive topics for personal gain demonstrate a lack of moral integrity and a disregard for the potential harm caused to society. Individuals engaging in such behaviour not only compromise their credibility but also harm the cause. Public figures have a responsibility to act with integrity and authenticity as their actions influence and shape public perception. Admonishing those who resort to deceptive publicity stunts sends out a clear message that ethical boundaries must be upheld, fostering a more honest and transparent media approach. Encouraging genuine efforts for awareness and social causes ensures that the public remains informed and engaged without falling victim to any manipulation. Even if we are to assume that she had a genuine desire to raise awareness about cervical cancer, how did she achieve that? In a way, her act ridiculed cancer survivors and used their plight to garner likes and increase her online following. If one is serious about cancer patients, one could do it many ways; this was certainly not one of them. While Poonam has gained attention for various reasons, it is henceforth important to approach any information about her with reinforced scepticism. She has been a controversial figure, often making headlines for her bold and provocative statements or actions. In the past, she gained attention for her association with the Kingfisher Calendar, which propelled her into the limelight. She later ventured into acting and appeared in a few forgettable Bollywood films. Poonam has often used her social media presence to grab attention and boost her career. This incident also has lessons for those who blindly believe in media posts. They would do well to cross-check facts rather than believe every news that comes their way, especially through social media. Poonam's fake death stunt has undeniably backfired; it sheds light on the lengths some individuals may go to hog the limelight in the age of social media. Even if it be a rap on the knuckles, Poonam must face legal consequences. Time alone will tell how the public and the entertainment industry she belongs to, make her pay. Ideally, she ought to! We demand legal action.

West Asia crisis: A threat to global peace

The spectre of escalating tensions in West Asia casts a shadow that extends far beyond; if steps are not taken now, it would be a catastrophe on global scale



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The recent series of Houthi attacks, ongoing skirmishes between Israel and Hamas, and mounting tensions over the UNRWA's involvement in the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel have reignited concerns about the prospects for peace and negotiation in the volatile region of West Asia. As Israel continues to deny accusations, the coming days are poised to present defining moments for the peace prospects in the area.

Efforts to Resolve the Conflict: Various initiatives have been undertaken to quell the long-standing regional conflict. The President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Mr. Joan E. Donoghue, called on Israel to halt its strikes across Gaza, offering a glimmer of hope. However, the situation remains dire, with the West Asian Conflict having already claimed over 26,000 lives and caused substantial devastation in recent months. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh has urged an immediate end to Israel's offences and called for an expedited relief operation to save lives. The Houthis' increasing support for the Palestinian cause, coupled with their recent attacks on Israel in the Red Sea, has further heightened tensions. The backing from Hamas and Hezbollah for the Houthis raises concerns about the expanding web of terror and conflict in the Red Sea, affecting trade, commercial interests, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean Area.

India's Stance: India, expressing concern for regional peace, has consistently called for the de-escalation of violence and emphasized the importance of negotiations. India advocates for peaceful coexistence by respecting Israel's security needs while fostering an international environment for Palestine to exist independently and securely. The United States is also apprehensive about the rising tensions in the region. However, recent trends indicate the difficulty in persuading Hamas to abandon its plans for further strikes on Israel, considering its history of attacks, including the ruthless assault on October 7, 2023, which claimed



over 1,200 Israeli lives. **Challenges Faced by Israel:** Israel's preparedness to counter new and unexpected forms of attacks, such as kidnappings and chemical assaults, relies heavily on gathering comprehensive intelligence daily. Both the U.S. and Israel have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization, complicating the situation further, given Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel's right as a state and its territorial claims. **The Struggle for Peace:** Hamas enjoys a significant advantage due to political, military, and local factors. The Palestinians' desire for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, coupled with Hamas's military capabilities and ideological mobilization at the grassroots level, poses a formidable challenge. **The Historical Context:** The conflict between Israel and Palestine has deep historical roots, with both sides gradually realizing the necessity of a two-state solution for survival. While initial agreements, such as the Oslo Peace Accord in 2007, provided a ray of hope, subsequent developments, including ongoing Israeli attacks, have jeopardized the peace process. The existence of separate governments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has complicated matters.



AS THE WORLD WATCHES THESE CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTS, THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE AND NUANCED APPROACHES TO PEACE REMAINS PARAMOUNT

Challenges to Mediation: Efforts towards negotiations must address complex issues, including settlement disputes, security concerns, education, water, refugees, and other vital aspects. The international community, especially Islamic nations, must carefully navigate the delicate situation to prevent the region from turning into a battlefield. Peter T. Coleman's perspective on polarized conflicts suggests that understanding the system as a whole is crucial for finding a resolution. Awareness of the context and detailed considerations of the stakeholders' positions can pave the way for more effective mediation efforts. The current escalation of tensions in West Asia demands careful handling and diplomatic efforts to navigate the intricate landscape. As the world watches these critical developments, the need for comprehensive and nuanced approaches to peace remains paramount. The global community must work towards establishing a permanent link between Israel and Palestine, fostering an environment where negotiations can address underlying issues. In the face of extreme circumstances and the seeming absence of hope for reconciliation, addressing the root causes of the conflict becomes

paramount. The ongoing violence necessitates a comprehensive approach, delving into minute details to understand and resolve the multifaceted challenges at play. As efforts for mediation intensify on a global scale, a nuanced and all-encompassing strategy is required to address the intricacies of the Israel-Palestine crisis. Key issues such as resolving settlement disputes, ensuring security, providing essential services like food and education, addressing water concerns, handling the refugee problem, and seeking amicable solutions through peaceful negotiations must be central to any diplomatic initiatives. International support, particularly from Islamic countries, can play a pivotal role in guiding the region toward a more stable and secure future. Despite past agreements and hopeful moments, the persistent challenges have made the situation increasingly complex. Yet, as the region grapples with the aftermath of recent events, there is an opportunity for the global community to reevaluate and reinvestigate efforts towards lasting peace in West Asia. (The writer is a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award and is a professor and expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TELEPATHIC REVOLUTION

Sir — In a twist reminiscent of our favourite childhood sci-fi movies, Elon Musk's Neuralink is turning Professor X's telepathic dreams into reality. Musk recently announced the successful implantation of the first telepathy chip in a human brain, marking a pivotal moment in the convergence of science fiction and reality. This telepathy chip will revolutionize human communication by allowing individuals to control electronic devices with their thoughts. Neuralink's surgical robot, implants the chip, enabling wireless communication between the brain and Neuralink. With Alexa and Google AI nestled inside our heads, the implications are profound, ranging from aiding the disabled to transforming how we interact with technology. Yet, this technological leap comes at a cost. The potential invasion of privacy is staggering. The chip's ability to read thoughts and record memories poses a threat to personal information, passwords, and the very essence of human cognition. The imaginary scenario of humanity succumbing to artificial intelligence looms large, with the risk of widespread hacking and manipulation. While the telepathy chip offers unparalleled benefits, enhancing the lives of those with disabilities and neurological disorders, its dark side raises alarms. Are we on the edge of a utopian future or hurtling towards a dystopian nightmare where humanity is assimilated into a robotic existence? **Preetiyukta Mohakud | Bhubaneswar**

THE DROP BOX IS DISAPPEARING

Sir — The drop box facility which was hitherto available 24x7 is now dispensed with in all banks purportedly due to new instructions from the RBI. The drop box is available now but with a rider. The customer has to visit the bank during working hours to drop the cheques. To my surprise, today when I wanted to drop a cheque in the early hours before going to

Snow leopard count falling



The presence of the elusive and enigmatic snow leopard is a vital indicator of the Himalayan ecosystem, especially the region's rivers. The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SLPAI), under the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLESP), has put the number of snow leopards in India at 718. The study that covered 1,20,000 km of the trans-Himalayan region has recommended the setting up of a dedicated snow leopard cell at the Wildlife Institute of India.

Appropriate, considering India's 5 per cent share of the global snow leopard population. One of the most lovely big cats, snow leopards are seen predominantly in six Himalayan states—Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Their anatomy is perfect for high altitude because they possess a large nasal cavity and an abundant number of Red Blood Corpuscles (RBC), that help them breathe oxygen well unlike other animals. The large and thick fur, along with the long and girthy tail, help the snow leopard to wrap itself up in the biting cold of the Himalayas. No wonder, it is a 12-country-range animal. Sadly, habitat loss, poaching for its skull, climate and infrastructural change, and man-animal conflict have reduced the snow leopard number. Among these, the last mentioned factor is avoidable since the big cat's favourite feast, the white sheep (argalis), is the livestock of the locals. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

work, I could not do so as banks were accordingly instructed to give access to the drop box only during working hours of the bank. When enquired, the officials contend quoting RBI that the cheques are safer when the drop box is accessible only during working hours. How did RBI reach this conclusion? Was there large-scale misuse of stealing drop boxes or pouring water etc and if so to what percentage, more so when security is provided round the clock? Why should a customer lose a day just because he/she cannot drop the cheques at their convenience? I request RBI to reconsider this decision. **D Nagarjuna | Kushaiguda**

IMRAN KHAN ON A STICKY WICKET

Sir — Imran Khan getting two separate jail terms for 10 & 14 years in just two days for revealing some official secrets and for illegally selling state gifts respectively, comes as a severe blow to the cricketer-turned-politician, and the verdicts

seem to have totally annihilated his political career. Pathetically, Khan, who was hailed as one of the most popular politicians in Pakistan, has already been knocked out of the general elections contest scheduled to be held in the country on February 8. A wily cricket captain during his international playing days, Imran Khan was always on a sticky wicket on the political field. The two latest verdicts should foment Khan to introspect, to understand the mistakes that he committed, and to take corrective measures. The story of Imran Khan teaches an important lesson that charisma and popularity alone will not be enough to govern a country. Rather it underscores the need for efficiency, transparency, accountability, and above all sense of responsibility. **Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

India fast emerging as ultra luxury destination

High-end real estate rates soar in the country as global demand attracts high networth investors



MANOJ SHARMA

There has been a definite turnaround in the real estate market. After the Covid-19 pandemic, homebuyers are increasingly opting for larger and more luxurious homes. This surge in demand for luxury housing, defined as projects priced above Rs 1.5 crore in most Indian cities, has led to a substantial increase in the launch of new projects in this category. According to a report from real estate consultancy Anarock in October, out of the 116,220 units launched in Q3 2023 across various price brackets in India's top seven cities, approximately 27 per cent were in the luxury category. This represents a significant rise from Q3 2018 when luxury housing comprised only 9 per cent of the total units launched. Anuj Puri, Chairman of Anarock Group says "This quarter's luxury supply is the highest in the past five years. Moreover, ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNIs), with a net worth of \$30 million or more, have have interest in the luxury real estate market. Popular destinations for Indian real estate investments abroad include London,



Dubai, Singapore, Australia, and New York. Dubai, in particular, is a favoured location due to its tax-friendly environment, business opportunities, and the benefits of golden visas. In Q1 2023, Indian investors contributed 20 per cent to all property transactions in Dubai, totalling close to \$2 billion. London is also attractive for its potential for capital growth, strong rental yields, and an easy purchase process. But interestingly enough India is also emerging as a chosen destination for UHNIs across the world. Now it ranks just below the UK, UAE, and USA and is at par with Canada. In terms of regional trends, Hyderabad led in new luxury supply in Q3 2023 among India's top seven cities, followed by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The demand

for luxury homes is notably driven by high-net-worth individuals, including corporate C-suite executives and startup entrepreneurs, residing in these cities. The desire for expansive luxury properties as alternative living destinations, particularly those offering a second home in green surroundings, has become a significant aspect of the Indian ethos post-pandemic. The future of commercial real estate in the United States is undergoing significant changes, marked by uncertainties in the economy, shifts in technology, and transformations in how and where people work. The industry's tectonic changes, including inflation, interest rate increases, and technological shifts, impacting the demand for various types of properties is the reason new destinations are emerging. To fill in the supply side many new ventures are coming up. Godrej properties, Mahindra Lifespaces, Oberoi realty were already there and are now upbeat Many new ones are joining them. For instance, Forbes Property, a JV of media house Forbes has ven-

tured into properties its Indian arm is already in the business. In India's 14 Tier 1 cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai, there have been 4.13 lakh new launches, out of which there were 14,754 luxury projects (per unit more than INR 5 crore) and almost all, 14,654 had immediate takers. It is noteworthy that luxury projects make up nearly 4% of the total launches. Michael W. Jalbert, CEO, of Forbes Global Properties, is optimistic about the India story. "Our expansion into India is particularly meaningful. The nation's burgeoning markets present unlimited opportunities for discerning buyers and investors seeking ultra-luxurious homes, coveted estates, and premium developments," he said. Their first offering will be in New Delhi. It has tied up with the JV of Orange Smart City in Navi Mumbai for the development of 1200 acres of land. Indeed, after a short lull due to the pandemic, the Indian property market is all set to reach dizzy heights! (The writer is a market consultant; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF BEEJ MANTRAS

Harnessing natural vibrations for spiritual growth



SWAMI CHARANASHRIT

Beej mantras, also known as seed mantras, are ancient and powerful sound vibrations deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. These sacred syllables are believed to carry a unique resonance that connects the practitioner to higher states of consciousness, facilitating spiritual growth and well-being. The term "Beej" is derived from the Sanskrit word for "seed," emphasizing the potential for profound transformation inherent in these primal sounds.

Origins of Beej Mantras:

The origins of 'beej' mantras can be traced back to ancient Vedic texts, where the power of sound was recognized as a fundamental force in the universe. According to Vedic philosophy, everything in existence has a vibrational frequency, and by chanting specific sounds, individuals can harmonize with these frequencies to invoke positive energies.

How Beej Mantras Work:

The efficacy of 'beej' mantras is believed to lie in the vibrational quality of the sounds. Each syllable is considered to resonate with a particular frequency that corresponds to a specific chakra or energy centre in the body. Chanting these mantras is thought to activate and balance these energy centres, promoting physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. For example, the mantra "Om" is a universal beej mantra that is said to represent the primordial sound of the universe.

Popular Beej Mantras and Their Significance:

Om (Aum): Significance: Represents the sound of the universe, symbolizing the essence of ultimate reality. Associated with the crown chakra, promoting spiritual awakening and connection to the divine.

Shrim: Significance: Linked to the goddess Lakshmi, the embodiment of wealth, prosperity, and abundance. Aligns with the heart and solar plexus chakras, fostering love, compassion, and abundance.

Hrim: Significance: Connected to the goddess Durga, symbolizing strength,



courage, and protection. Activates the solar plexus chakra, enhancing inner strength and confidence.

Kleem: Significance: Associated with the goddess Kali, representing transformation and the fierce aspect of the divine feminine. Influences the root chakra, aiding in grounding and overcoming obstacles.

Chanting and Meditation with Beej Mantras:

The practice of chanting beej mantras is often incorporated into meditation and spiritual rituals. Devotees may repeat the chosen mantra either verbally or internally, focusing on the vibrations and the intended qualities associated with the mantra. Repeat the chosen beej mantra with sincerity and intention. Allow the vibrations to permeate your being, fostering a deep connection with the divine energy.

Benefits of Beej Mantra Meditation:

Stress Reduction: Regular practice of beej mantra meditation has been shown to reduce stress and promote relaxation.

Enhanced Concentration: It helps improve focus and concentration, making it an effective tool for those seeking mental clarity.

Spiritual Growth: The transformative power of beej mantras facilitates spiritual growth, awakening a deeper connection to the self and the divine.

Balanced Energy Centers: By activating and balancing the chakras, beej mantra meditation promotes holistic well-being, both physically and energetically. Beej mantras serve as potent tools for spiritual seekers, offering a pathway to connect with the divine within and without. The profound impact of these sacred sounds lies in their ability to resonate with the universal energy that permeates all of creation. Whether seeking inner peace, abundance, strength, or transformation, the practice of beej mantra meditation provides a time-honoured and accessible approach to spiritual growth.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Interim Budget is a harmony in harvest

Budget 2024-25 allocates ₹1.27 lakh crore to agriculture, aligning with Sanatan Dharma principles



ANIL AGRAWAL

In the Interim Budget, the allocation for the Agriculture Ministry for the fiscal year 2024-25 has been earmarked at Rs1.27 lakh crore, marking an increase from the revised estimates of Rs1.16 lakh crore in 2023-24 and the budget estimates of Rs 1.15 lakh crore for the same period. The budget reaffirms a commitment to enhance various initiatives aimed at value addition in the agricultural sector, empowering women, and augmenting the incomes of farmers. Over the past decade, the government has provided direct financial assistance to 118 million farmers through the PM-Kisan Samman Yojana, a cash handout programme for every landholding agricultural family. These advancements are a result of farmer-centric policies, income support, risk coverage through price and insurance support, and the promotion of technologies and innovations facilitated by start-ups. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the agriculture sector has witnessed nearly 4% growth, reflecting a positive trajectory for inclusive development and increased productivity. The increase in the agricultural budget can be symbolically connected to the principles of Sanatan Dharma, the eternal and universal values inherent in Hinduism. Sanatan Dharma emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment, fostering an attitude of reverence and responsibility towards nature. Increasing the allocation for agriculture reflects a commitment to supporting farmers, who are integral to the cycle of life and contribute significantly to the well-being of society. The budgetary focus on agriculture acknowledges the importance of nurturing the land, providing a livelihood for farmers, and fostering a harmonious relationship with the environment—an embodiment of the principles embedded in Sanatan Dharma.

In the vast tapestry of Bharat's cultural heritage, the philosophical connection between Sanatan Dharma and agriculture emerges as a thread that weaves through centuries, nurturing not just crops but a way of life deeply rooted in harmony, sustainability and spiritual understanding. Sanatan Dharma, often referred to as Hinduism, is not just a religious system; it is a way of life that encompasses diverse facets, including the intimate relationship with nature and agriculture. Sanatan Dharma and agriculture share a timeless bond, exploring the spiritual, cultural and ecological dimensions that have shaped this symbiotic relationship.

A Timeless Bond Nurturing Harmony
At the core of Sanatan Dharma lies a deep respect for nature, considering it not merely as a resource but as a manifestation of the divine. The reverence for the Earth as "Bhudevi" and the acknowledgement of plants, animals and natural elements as integral parts of the cosmic order emphasises the spiritual significance attributed to agriculture. The concept of "Yajna," a ritualistic offering with roots in Vedic literature, symbolises the sacred reciprocity between humans and nature. Agriculture, viewed as a form of Yajna, becomes a spiritual act where farmers are considered custodians entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing the earth.

Cultural Festivals Mirroring Agrarian Cycles

The cultural landscape of Bharat is adorned with festivals and rituals intricately tied to agriculture, mirroring the agrarian cycles and seasons. Festivals like Makar Sankranti, Pongal, and Baisakhi mark the harvesting



THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN SANATAN DHARMA AND AGRICULTURE EMERGES AS A THREAD THAT WEAVES THROUGH CENTURIES, NURTURING NOT JUST CROPS BUT A WAY OF LIFE DEEPLY ROOTED IN HARMONY, SUSTAINABILITY AND SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

season, celebrating the abundance of nature and expressing gratitude through rituals and festivities. Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata incorporate narratives of agricultural practices, with Lord Rama cultivating the barren land and Arjuna spending years in disguise as a farmer. These stories not only embed agricultural wisdom but also highlight the humility and dedication associated with the act of farming. Traditional agricultural practices, such as organic farming and crop rotation, align with ecological sustainability principles that were deeply ingrained in ancient agricultural wisdom.

Government Initiatives in Harmony with Sanatan Dharma

In recent years, the Government of India has embarked on a transformative journey to promote organic farming, drawing inspiration from the timeless principles embedded in Sanatan Dharma. This paradigm shift reflects a commitment to sustainability, environmental stewardship and a holistic understanding of agriculture deeply rooted in the country's cultural and spiritual heritage.

The government has been promoting organic farming as a priority in the country since 2015-16 through the schemes of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Mission Organic Value Chain Development for the North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER). Both schemes stress providing end-to-end support to farmers engaged in organic farming, i.e., from production to processing, certification, and marketing and post-harvest management training and capacity building, which are integral parts of the scheme.

Under PKVY, states and UTs of the country are provided financial assistance of Rs 50,000/ha for 3 years, out of which Rs 31,000/ha for 3 years is provided directly to farmers through DBT for on-farm and off-farm organic inputs. Financial assistance of Rs. 8,800/ha for 3 years is provided for marketing, packaging,

branding, value addition and other marketing initiatives. Apart from this, Rs 2,700/ha for 3 years is provided for certification and residual analysis. Under the scheme, assistance is also provided at Rs. 7,500/ha for 3 years for training and capacity building.

Under MOVCDNER, the assistance of Rs 46,575/ha for 3 years is provided for the creation of FPO, support to farmers for organic inputs, quality seeds and planting material, training, handholding, and certification. Financial assistance of Rs 32,500/ha for 3 years is provided to farmers for off-farm or on-farm organic inputs under the scheme. The government has also developed a web portal, www.Jaivikkheti.in/, as an online marketing platform for the direct sale of organic produce by farmers to consumers to help them achieve better price realisation. A total of over 6.09 lakh farmers have been registered under the Jaivik Kheti portal.

The National Centre for Organic and Natural Farming (NCONF), a subordinate office of the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (DA&FW), has been organising various training and capacity-building programmes, namely a 30-day certificate course, field demonstration and training, an extension officer training programme, and a 7-day online or offline training course on various aspects of organic farming.

A multidisciplinary team of scientists from the Indian Council of Agriculture (ICAR) is involved in providing need-based training to farmers and extension agents and giving technical support to state agencies for the promotion of organic farming. Scientists at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) organise regular training programmes for farmers and extension personnel on organic agriculture, including the production and use of organic inputs. Under Soil Health Card (SHC) schemes, the government is

also promoting Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) through the judicious use of chemical fertilisers in conjunction with bio-fertilisers and organic manures for improving soil health, fertility, and productivity.

Prioritising Farmer Welfare

Traditional agricultural practices, often found in ancient texts like the Vedas and Puranas, emphasised the importance of working in harmony with nature. The use of natural fertilisers, crop rotation, and the avoidance of synthetic chemicals were integral to these practices, fostering a sustainable approach that resonates with the principles of organic farming. Farmers are encouraged to view their work as a service to the environment, promoting a sense of responsibility and reverence for the land.

Sanatan Dharma places significant emphasis on the welfare of all individuals, and the government's push for organic farming aligns with this principle by prioritising the well-being of farmers. By integrating cultural and spiritual values into agricultural practices, Bharat aims to not only secure a healthier and more sustainable future but also to honour the timeless wisdom embedded in its cultural heritage.

This timeless bond between Sanatan Dharma and agriculture exemplifies a holistic worldview where spirituality, culture, and ecology converge harmoniously. As we navigate the challenges of modern agriculture and environmental concerns, revisiting the principles embedded in our cultural heritage can offer valuable insights into sustainable and ethical farming practices. In preserving and promoting this profound connection, we not only safeguard our agricultural traditions but also contribute to a more harmonious coexistence with the Earth—a timeless legacy that transcends generations.

(The author is a member of Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

Collaborative innovation: Reshaping climate technology for a sustainable future

Collaborative spirit is now indispensable in the urgent realm of climate technology, where the need to combat global warming races against time

Complex problems require a collective intelligence system to conjure creative solutions. Just about a decade ago when Google was finding it difficult to make its machines learn to clearly distinguish between the pictures of a cat and a dog; the company felt that to meet the desired levels of accuracy in face recognition systems, it might require a substantial scale-up of its processing capacities. But then its engineers stumbled upon the NVIDIA GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) which is quite popular in enabling high-quality video gaming environments and is powered with better chipsets and algorithms. Google partnered with NVIDIA and the collabora-



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV

tion now delivers crucial breakthroughs in AI. It is widely acknowledged that the intersection of various disciplines is perhaps the most fertile space leading to path-breaking innovations; the Neuralink brain chip is one such very recent example. Such interdisciplinary collaborations become indispensable particularly in the realm of climate technology,

when there is a race against time to contain warming to 1.5 to 2 degree celsius limit. Key Challenges to a Collaborative Paradigm: The intellectual property regime is built upon the philosophical foundations where it is believed that healthy competition among the entities serves the greatest common good. However, for addressing an existential crisis like climate change, collective efforts too must be incentivised by the regulatory framework.

Consortium-based Innovation Model:

An innovation model developed through integrating the industry, academia, and policymakers, can fast-track the technological maturity, augment efficiencies and nudge

consumer behaviour towards sustainability. In high-velocity industries such as biotech, computers and electronics, an institutional consortium can create collaborative innovation wherein learning occurs through network relationships and institutions are both actors and the recipients of the skills and expertise that the learning brings. Moreover, the convergence of the key stakeholders also elevates the Research-Practice integration. Such accelerated learning mechanisms are much needed for climate change management and adaptation. As we explore its application in climate technology, let's delve into specific areas where collaborative efforts can reshape our approach to environ-

mental challenges: **Renewables and Storage:** Unpredictability in solar and wind resources necessitates storage solutions in any reliable clean energy scheme. Thus, solar and wind developers getting formally networked with battery or other storage solution providers and grid managers could help towards building a more resilient energy ecosystem. On similar lines auto manufacturers too can be brought under the collaborative umbrella. Imagine a scenario where the power grid has a demand surge, and one gets paid for supplying electricity to the grid through the battery in the electric vehicle. Time of Use tariffs and Device-Tagged Electricity Bills:

Electricity during lean demand periods can be cheaper. Think of a washing machine in your house running only when the electricity is the cheapest during the day or night. The collaboration of the device/appliances manufacturers, digital technology players and the power distribution companies can enhance transparency, and efficiency and cut down the peak demand requirements of the power generation units; notably such peaks are often met by coal-based plants. A power distribution network incentivised by time-of-use tariffs facilitates more sustainable consumer behaviour.

Augmenting Forecasting through AI:

Let's envision a

personal device hardware requirements, and blockchain may edge out inefficient intermediaries thus contributing to sustainability. The recent union budget announcement on the creation of a corpus of rupees one lakh crore targeted towards interest-free long-term assistance to private entities for research and innovation could go a long way towards cultivating a culture of innovation. A synergy of efforts could indeed be a catalyst, as timing is crucial for the deployment of climate-friendly technologies.

(The writer is an Indian Railway Service officer and a Commonwealth scholar; views are personal)

Electricity during lean demand periods can be cheaper. Think of a washing machine in your house running only when the electricity is the cheapest during the day or night. The collaboration of the device/appliances manufacturers, digital technology players and the power distribution companies can enhance transparency, and efficiency and cut down the peak demand requirements of the power generation units; notably such peaks are often met by coal-based plants. A power distribution network incentivised by time-of-use tariffs facilitates more sustainable consumer behaviour.

Augmenting Forecasting through AI: Let's envision a

personal device hardware requirements, and blockchain may edge out inefficient intermediaries thus contributing to sustainability. The recent union budget announcement on the creation of a corpus of rupees one lakh crore targeted towards interest-free long-term assistance to private entities for research and innovation could go a long way towards cultivating a culture of innovation. A synergy of efforts could indeed be a catalyst, as timing is crucial for the deployment of climate-friendly technologies.

(The writer is an Indian Railway Service officer and a Commonwealth scholar; views are personal)

US, UK and allies strike Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US and the UK have conducted joint strikes on 36 Houthi targets across 13 locations in Yemen, in another wave of assaults intended to degrade the capabilities of the Iran-backed militia that has targeted international shipping vessels in the Red Sea in response to the Israel-Hamas war.

The Pentagon said the UK, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand were involved in Saturday's strikes against Houthi targets.

The latest strikes, executed with fighter jets and ships, come after the US launched strikes on 85 targets in Syria and Iraq on Friday in response to a deadly drone attack on a US military base in Jordan last Sunday that killed three of its service members.

"Military forces from the United States and the United Kingdom conducted additional strikes against the Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen," Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said in

a statement.

This collective action sends a clear message to the Houthis that they will continue to bear further consequences if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels, Austin said.

"We will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways," Austin said.

These strikes, he said, are intended to disrupt further and degrade the capabilities of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia to conduct their reckless and destabilising attacks against US and international vessels lawfully transiting the Red Sea.

Austin said that the coalition forces targeted 13 locations associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defence systems, and radars, Austin said.

A joint statement issued by the US, the UK and its other coalition partners said that the militaries of the United States and United Kingdom, with support from Australia, Bahrain,

Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand conducted an additional round of proportionate and necessary strikes against 36 Houthi targets across 13 locations in Yemen.

This was in response to the Houthis' continued attacks against international and commercial shipping as well as naval vessels transiting the Red Sea.

These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of innocent mariners.

The strikes are in response to a series of illegal, dangerous, and destabilising Houthi actions since previous coalition strikes on January 11 and 22, 2024, including the January 27 attack which struck and set ablaze the Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker M/V Marlin Luanda, the statement added.

"Today's strike specifically targeted sites associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defence systems, and radars," it said.

The Houthis' now more



This photo issued by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on Sunday, shows a RAF Typhoon FGR4 aircraft returning to the base, following strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. The US and Britain struck 36 Houthi sites in Yemen in a second wave of assaults meant to further disable Iran-backed groups that have relentlessly attacked American and international interests in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. In addition to the strikes on Saturday, US Central Command says it conducted an additional "self-defence" strike on Sunday against a Houthi anti-ship cruise missile.

AP/PTI

than 30 attacks on commercial vessels and naval vessels since mid-November constitute an international challenge.

"Recognising the broad consensus of the international community, our coalition of like-minded countries commit-

ted to upholding the rules-based order has continued to grow," the statement said.

"We remain committed to protecting freedom of navigation and international commerce and holding the Houthis accountable for their illegal and

unjustifiable attacks on commercial shipping and naval vessels," it said.

"Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea but let us reiterate our warning to Houthi leadership: we will not hesitate

to continue to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in the face of continued threats," said the statement issued by these countries.

Two US destroyers fired Tomahawk missiles as part of the strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, a US official told CNN.

The USS Gravelly and USS Carney, both of which are Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, fired the land-attack cruise missiles during the operation.

F/A-18 fighter jets from the USS Dwight D Eisenhower aircraft carrier also took part in the strikes, officials said.

Earlier Saturday, the US struck six Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles before they were launched toward the Red Sea, US Central Command said.

US Central Command forces also conducted a strike in self-defence against a Houthi anti-ship cruise missile prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea.

The strikes on consecutive days come as the Biden administration has adopted a "multi-

tiered" response to a drone attack that killed three US service members and wounded scores more last weekend.

Saturday's strikes are the third time in recent weeks that the US and UK attacked Houthi targets as part of a joint operation. On January 11, the two militaries struck approximately 30 Houthi sites. Less than two weeks later, the US and UK struck another eight sites. The previous strikes targeted Houthi weapons storage facilities and radar sites in an attempt to disrupt the ability of the Iran-backed rebel group to attack international shipping lanes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, some of the world's most critical waterways.

But the Houthis have remained defiant, vowing after the last round of US-led strikes they are "more determined to confront" what they called the US and the UK "aggressors."

Iran-backed militias have mounted more than 165 drone, missile and rocket attacks on US troops in Iraq and Syria since the Israel-Hamas war began in October.

28 killed as shell hits bakery in Russian-occupied Ukraine

AP ■ MOSCOW

Moscow-installed officials say Ukrainian shelling killed at least 28 people at a bakery in the Russian-occupied city of Lysychansk.

At least one child was among the dead Saturday, local leader Leonid Pasechnik wrote in a statement on Telegram. A further 10 people were rescued from under the rubble by emergency services, he said.

Ukrainian officials in Kyiv did not comment on the incident.

Both Moscow and Kyiv have increasingly relied on longer-range attacks this winter amid largely unchanged positions on the 1,500-kilo-

meter (930-mile) front line in the nearly 2-year-old war.

However, Ukrainian forces have come under intense Russian attack over the past 24 hours, with continuous assaults along the front line, Ukraine's General Staff said in a statement Sunday.

Fighting has been particularly fierce in the eastern city of Avdiivka, where Moscow is attempting to encircle Kyiv's troops, while Ukrainian forces have also been on the defensive in Kupiansk, Lyman, Bakhmut and Zaporizhzhia, officials said.

The military administration for Ukraine's northern Sumy region said Sunday that

Russian forces had shelled the region in 16 separate attacks the previous day, firing on the border communities of Yunakivka, Bilopillia, Krasnopillia, Velyka Pysarivka, and Esmen. Gen. Serhii Naiev, commander of the Ukrainian Joint Forces, also said that Kyiv's troops had pushed back Russian sabotage and reconnaissance units attempting to cross the border in the Sumy region.

With Ukraine's soldiers concentrated in the eastern regions of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv, the reported incursion suggests that Moscow could be probing vulnerabilities on a new front to further stretch Ukrainian resources.

Republicans plan more military aid to Israel, leave out Ukraine

AP ■ WASHINGTON

House Republicans will move forward with a USD 17.6 billion package next week that provides military aid to Israel and replenish US weapons, but leaves out more help for Ukraine, underscoring the challenges facing supporters of a comprehensive national security package that would also include billions of dollars for immigration enforcement.

The move gives Speaker Mike Johnson and House Republicans the chance to show support for Israel even though there is little chance the Senate will go along. Meanwhile, text of a broader Senate compromise is expected to be released this weekend

and a key test vote on that package will be held during the week. Johnson said that Senate leadership is aware that by failing to include the House in their negotiations, they have eliminated the ability for swift consideration of any legislation.

"As I have said consistently for the past three months, the House will have to work its will on these issues and our priorities will need to be addressed," Johnson said in a letter to colleagues.

The House has already approved a nearly USD 14.5 billion military aid package in November for Israel that the Senate declined to take up. Republicans also insisted it be paid for with cuts elsewhere. The bill targeted the Internal

Revenue Service for cuts, though the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said doing so would end up costing the federal government a net USD 12.5 billion because of lost revenue from tax collections.

The tactic of including IRS cuts also turned it into a more partisan, 226-196 vote. Johnson said in his letter to colleagues that removing the offsets should allow for swift passage of the Israel aid.

"During debate in the House and in numerous subsequent statements, Democrats made clear that their primary objection to the original House bill was with its offsets," Johnson said. "The Senate will no longer have excuses, how-

ever misguided, against swift passage of this critical support for our ally."

Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., released the text of the military assistance bill for Israel. It would provide USD 4 billion to replenish missile defense systems and USD 1.2 billion to counter short-range rockets and mortar threats. There's also funding for the procurement of advanced weapons system and to enhance the production of artillery and other munitions. To ensure the support does not compromise US readiness, it includes USD 4.4 billion to replenish US stocks of weapons provided to Israel. There's also USD 3.3 billion for current US military operations in the region.

Parents wanted me to speak without accent, says Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

Rishi Sunak, the UK's Indian-origin Prime Minister, has said that he experienced "racism" when he was a child and his parents sent him for extra drama lessons so that he could "speak properly" without an accent to "fit in". The 43-year-old former Chancellor of the Exchequer, a devout Hindu, is the youngest British prime minister in 210 years. He is also the first Hindu Prime Minister of Indian heritage in the UK.

Speaking to ITV News, Sunak shared how his parents were so determined he should fit in and speak without an accent that he was sent for extra drama lessons. "You are conscious of being different," he said.

"It's hard not to be, right, and obviously I experienced racism as a kid."

Sunak also recalled the pain of hearing slurs directed at his younger siblings, adding that racism "stings" and "hurts in a way that other things don't".

He felt what he experienced would not happen to his children now.

Discussing his Indian heritage, Sunak said his parents were keen for him and his siblings - a brother and sister - to "fit in and not for it to be, in any way, shape or form, a barrier".

His mother, he added, was particularly conscious of how her children spoke. "One of the things my mum was obsessed with was that we didn't speak with accents and we would speak properly," he said. "So she was keen for us to try to do some extra drama."

"I think any form of racism is simply unacceptable," he continued, adding that when he speaks to world leaders, "most people look to the UK as an example of how to get this right".

Sunak admitted that he never dreamed there might one day be an ethnic minority prime minister "because you didn't have role models like that. [It] hadn't happened yet."



Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, centre, sits with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardane (left) and the First Lady of Sri Lanka Maithree Wickremesinghe, during the 76th Independence Day commemoration ceremony of Sri Lanka in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Sunday.

Israel issues detailed warning to Hezbollah

AP ■ RAFAH

Israel's military has issued its most detailed warning yet to Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon that it would be "ready to attack immediately" if provoked, as it recounted its actions along the northern border during four months of war in Gaza and made a rare acknowledgement of dozens of airstrikes inside Syria against the militant group.

"We do not choose war as our first priority, but we are certainly prepared," military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said, adding: "We will continue to act wherever Hezbollah is present, we will continue to act wherever it is required in the Middle East. What is true for Lebanon is true for Syria, and is true for other more distant places."

The comments followed the defense minister's warning that a cease-fire in Gaza against the militant group Hamas wouldn't mean Israel wouldn't attack Hezbollah as needed.

Efforts to close wide gaps between Israel and Hamas in pursuit of a cease-fire continued in the region where concerns about a wider war with Iran-allied groups remain. A top Hamas official, Osama Hamdan, said they were studying the proposal put forward by the US, Egypt, Qatar and Israel but insist on Israel accepting conditions including a permanent cease-fire.

The war in Hamas-run Gaza has leveled vast swaths of the tiny besieged enclave, displaced 85 per cent of its population and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Saturday that 107 people were

killed over the past 24 hours, bringing the wartime total to 27,238. More than 66,000 people have been wounded.

In Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, at least 17 people including women and children were killed in two separate airstrikes overnight, according to the registration office at Abu Yusef al-Najjar hospital where the bodies were taken.

The first strike hit a residential building east of Rafah, killing at least 13 people from a single family. Four women and three children were among the dead, hospital officials said.

"Two children are still under the rubble, and we don't, still we don't know anything about them," relative Ahmad Hijazi said. The second strike hit a house in Rafah's Jeneina area, killing at least two men and two women.

Namibian President dies in hospital during treatment

AP ■ HARARE

Hage Geingob, President of Namibia, one of Africa's most stable democracies, died Sunday while receiving medical treatment at a local hospital, his office announced.

The Namibian presidency said Geingob's medical team at Lady Pohamba Hospital did its best to help him, but he died with his wife, Monica Geingob, and children by his side, in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Angelo Mbumba, Namibia's acting president, called for calm, saying in the same post that the "Cabinet will convene with immediate effect in order to make the necessary state arrangements in this regard."

Geingob was undergoing treatment for cancer. The 82-year-old had a colonoscopy and a gastroscopy on Jan 8, followed by a biopsy, his office said last month.

He returned home on Jan. 31 from the United States where he had undergone a trial two-day "novel treatment for cancerous cells," according to his office.

In 2014, he said he had survived prostate cancer.

Geingob, president of the southern African nation since 2015, was set to finish his second and final term in office this year. He was the country's third president since it gained independence in 1990, following more than a century of German and then apartheid South African rule.

After spending nearly three decades in exile in neighbouring Botswana and the U.S. as an anti-apartheid activist, Geingob returned to Namibia as its first prime minister from 1990 to 2002. He also served in the same capacity from 2008 to 2012.

Soft-spoken but firm on advancing Africa's agenda as an important stakeholder in world affairs, Geingob maintained close relations with the US and other Western countries.

But, like many African leaders, he also forged a warm relationship with China, refuting claims that Beijing is aggressively asserting economic influence over countries in Africa as a form of colonialism.

Myanmar guards forced to take refuge in B'desh

PTI ■ DHAKA

At least 14 members of Myanmar's paramilitary Border Guard Police (BGP) have sought refuge in Bangladesh after escaping the junta-run country amid reports of heavy gunfights between the government troops and the rebel resistance fighters, officials said here on Sunday.

The soldiers entered through the Tambru border in predawn hours and sought shelter from the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB).

"The 14 members of their BGP fled their country. They are now in our custody," an official of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) told reporters on Sunday at the southeastern Cox's Bazar, bordering Burma. Asked about the matter, Minister of Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan said, "There are about 14 of them. They are called BGP or Border Guard Police."

"As you know, they have been fighting with the Arakan Army. At one point, they came here and took shelter. We are speaking to the Myanmar government about the matter," bdnews24.com quoted Khan as saying.

Residents in several frontier Bangladesh villages moved to safety amid skirmishes between the Myanmar government troops and the rebel Arakan Army.

Chile forest fires cause devastation

AP ■ VINA DEL

Intense forest fires burning around a densely populated area of central Chile have caused at least 46 deaths, Chile's president said Saturday evening, and officials said at least 1,100 homes had been destroyed.

In a nationally televised address, President Gabriel Boric warned that the death toll could worsen as four large fires burn in the region of Valparaiso, where firefighters have struggled to reach the most threatened neighbourhoods.

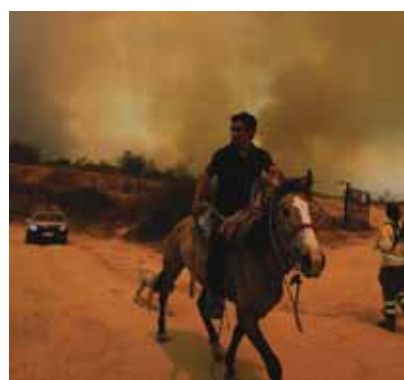
Boric urged Chileans to cooperate with rescue workers.

"If you are told to evacuate don't hesitate to do it," he said. "The fires are advancing fast and climatic conditions have made them difficult to control. There are high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity."

Interior Minister Carolina Tohá said earlier Saturday that 92 forest fires were burning in the center and south of the country, where temperatures have been unusually high this week.

The deadliest of the fires were in the Valparaiso region, where authorities urged thousands of people to evacuate their homes.

In areas farther away from the fires, meanwhile, residents were told to stay at



home so that fire engines, ambulances and other emergency vehicles can get about on the roads with greater ease.

Tohá said two fires near the towns of Quilpué and Villa Alemana had burned through at least 8,000 hectares (19,770 acres) since Friday. One of the fires was threatening the coastal resort town of Viña del Mar, where some neighbourhoods had already been hit hard.

In Villa Independencia, a hillside neighbourhood on the eastern edge of the town, several blocks of homes and businesses were destroyed. Burned cars with broken windows lined the streets, which were covered in ash.

"I've been here 32 years, and never

imagined this would happen," said Rolando Fernández, one of the residents who lost his home.

He said he first saw the fire burning on a nearby hill Friday afternoon and within 15 minutes the area was engulfed in flames and smoke, forcing everyone to run for their lives.

"I've worked my whole life, and now I'm left with nothing," Fernández said.

Three shelters were set up in the Valparaiso region, and 19 helicopters and more than 450 firefighters were brought into the area to help battle the blazes, Tohá said.

The fires were burning on mountains that are hard to reach, such as neighbourhoods built precariously on the edge of Viña del Mar.

Officials reported power blackouts as a result of the fire, and Tohá said that in the Valparaiso region, four hospitals and three nursing homes for the elderly had to be evacuated. The fire also destroyed two bus terminals, the interior minister said.

The El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and hotter than usual temperatures along the west of South America this year, increasing the risk of forest fires. In January, more than 17,000 hectares (42,000 acres) of forests were destroyed in Colombia by fires that followed several weeks of dry weather.

Voters must have maximum choices, says Pak SC

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
 Ahead of Pakistan's general elections, the Supreme Court has ruled that electoral laws must be interpreted to favour enfranchisement to ensure voters have maximum choices to elect their future leadership, a media report said on Sunday.
 Justice Syed Mansoor Ali wrote this in a judgement as a three-judge bench of the apex court overturned a high court order upholding the rejection of the candidature of former prime minister Imran Khan's party member, the Dawn newspaper reported.
 Pakistan goes to polls on February 8.
 The nomination papers of Tahir Said, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party candidate from the National

Assembly (NA) constituency 49 (Attock-I), were rejected by the returning officer (RO) for being a "proclaimed offender". The Lahore High Court upheld the RO's decision, which Said challenged in the Supreme Court.
 Justice Shah, who headed the bench, said that Articles 62 and 63 did not mention that a "proclaimed offender" was disqualified from being elected or from being a member of parliament.
 He also said that the grounds provided for the nomination paper's rejection did not empower an RO to reject the candidature for being the proclaimed offender, according to the report.
 Setting aside the LHC order, the judgement said that the LHC made a legal error in rejecting the petitioner's nom-

ination paper and added that there was nothing on record to show that the petitioner was a proclaimed offender.
 "The aim of prescribing qualifications and disqualifications (under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution) for candidates to contest elections is to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the political process," the report said, citing Justice Shah's judgement. It added that the criteria are designed to ensure that individuals holding public office meet certain standards.
 Shah urged courts to deal with the acceptance or rejection of the nomination papers with this approach, which he said is "rooted in the constitutional rights and values."
 "The right to vote freely for the candidate of one's choice is the essence of a democratic

society, and any restrictions on that right strike at the heart of representative government," he wrote.
 As guardians of democracy and fundamental rights, courts should approach "electoral matters with circumspection and ensure that their interventions uphold the democratic principles upon which the nation thrives and the fundamental rights of citizens to contest elections and vote for candidates of their choice," Shah said.
 Ahead of the general elections, 71-year-old Khan's PTI party has been robbed of the iconic cricket bat election symbol, his and his party colleagues' nomination papers have been rejected and at least one of his party leaders has been killed in the poll-related violence.

Pak judge draws flak for hurting woman's dignity in Imran Khan's nikah case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
 The controversial judgement in the 'un-Islamic' marriage case of ex-prime minister Imran Khan and his wife has created a storm in Pakistan, with feminists and women lawyers criticising the judge for violating the settled principle of law on the issue and hurting the dignity of a woman by prying open private affairs like menstruation.
 Senior Civil Judge Quratullah sentenced Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to seven years in jail and imposed a Rs 5,00,000 fine on each for "contracting marriage during the 'iddat' (period of waiting)" in a case filed by Bibi's former husband Khawar Maneka in November last year.
 The first couple had married on January 1, 2018, and Maneka approached the court about six years after the marriage, alleging that the two married without Bibi completing her 'iddat' and that the two were also in an adulterous relationship even before marriage.
 The proceedings were held in the Adiala Jail of Rawalpindi for security reasons. The 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician has been held in jail since he was arrested on August 5 last year after a conviction in the Toshakhna corruption case.
 Bushra Bibi, 49, has been imprisoned at the Banigala residence of Khan following her conviction.
 The judge set aside the *nikah* of January 1, 2018, by announcing the sentence under Section 496 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which read: "Whoever, dishonestly or with a fraudulent intention, goes through the ceremony of being married, knowing that he is not thereby lawfully married, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall be liable to fine."
 Khan and Bushra Bibi are still in a "legitimate relationship" as the court ruled that their second *nikah* performed on

February 14, 2018, was legal.
 The case attracted criticism as it was deemed as an intrusion by the court in private affairs.
 Lawyer and political commentator Reema Omer said that from Maneka's statement that his wife was "absolutely normal" in her menstruation to Judge Quratullah questioning whether "any sort of meeting in isolation" by namehram (stranger) male and female is permissible in Islam — this judgment is shameful and a travesty of justice, human rights."
 "The proceedings + convictions in the 'iddat case' (or specifically, "going through a marriage ceremony fraudulently without being lawfully married") are a damning blot on our justice system. Horrifying, the State stooped this low seemingly just to humiliate IK, Bushra Bibi," she wrote on X.
 She also said that by "making a woman's menstrual cycle the subject of criminal inquiry (as well as public debate), this case has cast a blow to women's right to dignity and privacy, as well as their freedom to make decisions about divorce and marriage without fear of being dragged in court."
 Nighat Dad, lawyer and feminist, in her comments, termed the verdict an "appalling miscarriage of justice" and said that it "epitomises the grotesque intrusion into women's private lives, stooping to the extent of public humiliation."
 It is a brazen assault on women's autonomy, dignity, & privacy, a dangerous

precedent for state overreach into personal spheres".
 She said despite several amendments enacted in Pakistan to shield women from legal abuse related to adultery and fornication if the state whimsically invokes sections 496 & 496-B PPC, it renders women's protection merely illusory in the face of arbitrary state power.
 "This egregious ruling echoes the dark history of the 1980s Zina Ordinance of Zia era, highlighting how powerful entities can introduce & wield flawed laws as weapons against individuals, brazenly trampling upon the constitutional principles of dignity and privacy," she wrote on X.
 Dad went on to say that the judgement was not just about one woman but a chilling glimpse into a future where thousands of women in this country could face similar injustice based on this repugnant judgment.
 Maleka Bokhari, lawyer and a former PTI leader said that it was a "dark and regressive day" for the rights of women and girls across Pakistan because a former first lady who lawfully divorced her former husband, and remarried has been convicted in a weak case with the judge ignoring the law laid down in Supreme Court judgments, dictates of shariah law and Federal Shariat court judgments.
 "This flawed judgment has set a bad precedent, opened floodgates and witch hunts against women and girls by their former husbands. Women & feminists - I hope this will be condemned unequivocally by all of us," she said in a statement on X.
 Another women lawyer, Rida Tahir, the judgment violated the ruling of Justice Zia Ali Bajwa of the Lahore High Court who held that re-marriage without observing the period of *iddah* cannot be treated as a void marriage.
 "Today's judgement is a huge blow to women's human rights and opens the door for maligning the character of women and turning them into social outcasts," she said on X.



(stranger) male and female is permissible in Islam — this judgment is shameful and a travesty of justice, human rights".

Qureshi barred from contesting polls

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
 Pakistan's election commission has disqualified Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a close aide of jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan, from contesting elections for five years after the former foreign minister was sentenced to 10 years in prison for leaking state secrets.
 The disqualification of Qureshi, 67, comes five days before the February 8 general elections, which Khan's

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party is contesting despite a state crackdown and without its famous election symbol, the bat.
 The announcement comes days after a special court, established under the Official Secrets Act, awarded Qureshi 10 years imprisonment in the high-profile cypher case along with Khan.
 Citing the special court's judgement dated January 30, 2024, the Election Commission

of Pakistan (ECP) said that any convicted individual, in accordance with the Constitution and the law, cannot participate in elections, The Express Tribune reported.
 "As a consequence, Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi has become disqualified under Article 63(1)(h) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan read with Section 232 of the Elections Act, 2017. Therefore, Mr Makhdoom Shah Mehmood

Qureshi is disqualified to contest General Elections-2024 and any subsequent elections for a period of five years," the ECP said on Saturday.
 The cipher case pertains to a piece of paper, purported to be a diplomatic cable — the cipher — that Khan had waved at a public rally on March 27, 2022, and naming the US, had claimed that it was 'evidence' of an "international conspiracy" to topple his government.

Israeli minister's criticism of Biden sparks anger

AP ■ JERUSALEM
 Criticism of President Joe Biden by a far-right minister in Israel's government sparked outrage on Sunday, underscoring the sensitivity of US relations as Washington provides key support for the offensive against Hamas in Gaza.
 The Biden administration has expressed unwavering support for Israel since Hamas' October 7 attack that triggered the war, skirting Congress to rush weapons to Israel and shielding its ally from international calls for a cease-fire.
 But the White House has also urged Israel to take greater measures to avoid harming civilians and to facilitate the delivery of more humanitarian aid to Gaza.
 Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister, criticised that approach in an interview with The Wall Street Journal, saying Biden was hindering Israel's war effort and that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump would give Israel greater latitude in fighting Hamas.
 "Instead of giving us his full backing, Biden is busy with giving humanitarian aid and fuel (to Gaza), which goes to Hamas," Ben-Gvir said. "If Trump was in power, the US conduct would be completely different."
 His remarks drew fire from Benny Gantz, a retired general and member of Netanyahu's three-man War Cabinet, who said Ben-Gvir was "causing tremendous damage" to American-Israeli relations. In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Gantz said any disputes must be "conducted in relevant forums and not in irresponsible statements in the media."
 Opposition leader Yair Lapid, also posting on X, said Ben-Gvir's remarks prove that he "does not understand foreign

relations" and that Netanyahu had lost control over extremists in his governing coalition.
 Netanyahu, without mentioning Ben-Gvir by name, appeared to refer to his remarks when addressing a weekly Cabinet meeting on Sunday. The prime minister thanked Biden for his support while highlighting his own experience of dealing with multiple US administrations, describing a give-and-take approach to Israel's most important alliance.
 "There are those who say no' to everything, receiving applause at home, but they're also endangering vital interests," he said.
 Ben-Gvir, along with other far-right figures, has called for "voluntary" mass emigration of Palestinians from Gaza and for the return of Jewish settlements, which Israel dismantled when it withdrew troops from the territory in 2005. The Biden administration is opposed to any such scenario.
 The dispute came at a sensitive time, as Netanyahu faces pressure from the US and the international community to scale back the offensive even as Ben-Gvir and other key members of his governing coalition have threatened to bring down the government if they believe he is too soft on Hamas.
 Israel is also involved in tense negotiations mediated by the US, Qatar and Egypt aimed at freeing more than 100 captives held by Hamas in return for a cease-fire and the release of Palestinians jailed in Israel.
 The war in Gaza has levelled vast swaths of the tiny besieged enclave, displaced 85 per cent of its population and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Sunday that 127 bodies have been brought to hospitals in the last 24 hours, bringing the overall death toll from nearly four months of fighting to 27,365.

Biden wins South Carolina's Democratic primary in re-election bid

AP ■ COLUMBIA
 President Joe Biden easily won South Carolina's Democratic primary, clinching a state he pushed to lead off his party's nominating process after it revived his then-struggling White House bid four years ago.
 Biden on Saturday defeated the other long-shot Democrats on South Carolina's ballot, including Minnesota's Rep. Dean Phillips and author Marianne Williamson. His reelection campaign invested heavily in driving up turnout in what it saw as a test drive of its efforts to mobilize Black voters, a key Democratic bloc central to Biden's chances in a likely November rematch against former President Donald Trump.
 "In 2020, it was the voters of South Carolina who proved the pundits wrong, breathed new life into our campaign, and set us on the path to winning the presidency," Biden said in a statement.
 "Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that

you have set us on the path to winning the Presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again."
 His win comes after he led a Democratic National Committee effort to have South Carolina go first in the party's primary, citing the state's more racially diverse population compared to the traditional first-in-the-nation states of Iowa and New Hampshire, which are overwhelmingly white.
 South Carolina is reliably Republican, but 26% of its residents are Black. In the 2020 general election, Black voters made up 11% of the national electorate, and 9 in 10 of them supported Biden, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of that election's voters.
 Biden pushed for a revamped primary calendar that will see Nevada go second, holding its primary on Tuesday. The new order also moves the Democratic primary in Michigan, a large and diverse swing state, to Feb. 27, before the expansive field of states voting on March 5, known as

Super Tuesday.
 New Hampshire rejected the DNC's plan and held a lead-off primary last month anyway. Biden didn't campaign and his name wasn't on the ballot, but still won by a sizable margin after supporters mounted a write-in campaign on his behalf.
 South Carolina, where Biden has long held deep relationships with supporters and donors, also played a pivotal role in his 2020 campaign, where a big win helped revive a flagging effort in other early-voting states and propelled him to the nomination.
 Biden was aided by South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn, whose 2020 endorsement served as a long-awaited signal to the state's Black voters that Biden would be the right candidate to advocate for their interests.
 Clyburn said Saturday night that he believed New Hampshire's delegates should be seated at the party's convention this summer and that Democrats should avoid any further infighting.



Both Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman and Asian American to serve in the role, have consistently thanked the state's Democrats for their support. Biden a week ago told attendees at a state party fundraiser that "you're the reason I am president." He also argued to an audience of hundreds of party faithful that they were "the reason Donald Trump is a loser. And you're the reason we're going to win and beat him again," framing the

likely general election matchup with the GOP's current front-runner.
 Earlier in the day, in South Carolina's capital of Columbia, Democratic National Committee Chairman Jaime Harrison said, "We all know that we, because of the color of this, we, our great grandparents, our grandparents, could not always vote here." Harrison is a South Carolina native who is Black.
 "For this president to say, Jaime, for the entirety of your life, we have started this process in Iowa and New Hampshire, and now, we're going to start it in South Carolina — no other president before ever decided to touch that issue," he added. "But Joe Biden did, and I will always be grateful to the president for giving us a chance, for seeing us, and understanding how much we matter."
 Black voters interviewed during the recent early voting period listed a range of reasons for supporting Biden, from his administration's defense of abortion rights to appointing Black jurists and other minori-

ties to the federal courts. Some echoed Biden's warnings that Trump would threaten democracy as he continues to push lies that the 2020 vote was stolen.
 "We can't live with a leader that will make this into a dictatorship. We can't live in a place that is not a democracy. That will be a fall for America," said Lajoia Broughton, a 42-year-old small business owner in Columbia. "So my vote is with Biden. It has been with Biden and will continue to be with Biden."
 Some voters said they were concerned about the 81-year-old Biden's age, as many Americans have said they are in public polling. Trump is 77. Both men have had a series of public flubs that have fueled skepticism about their re-election.
 "They're as old as I am and to have these two guys be the only choices, that's kind of difficult," said Charles Trower, a 77-year-old from Blythewood, South Carolina. "But I would much rather have President Biden than even consider the other guy."



Members of an Iraqi Shiite militant group attend a funeral for the group members who were killed by a US air strike, in Baghdad, on Sunday. AP/PTI

Iran warns US over spy ships in the Mideast

AP ■ JERUSALEM
 Iran issued a warning on Sunday to the US over potentially targeting two cargo ships in the Mideast long suspected of serving as a forwarding operating base for Iranian commandos, just after America and the United Kingdom launched a massive airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels.
 The statement from Iran on the Behshad and Saviz ships appeared to signal Tehran's growing unease over the US strikes in recent days in Iraq, Syria and Yemen targeting militias backed by the Islamic Republic.
 Those attacks, themselves a retaliatory campaign for the killing of three US soldiers and

wounding of dozens of others in Jordan, all stem back to Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, which has escalated tensions across the wider Middle East and raised fears about a regional conflict breaking out. The Yemen strikes overnight on Sunday struck across six provinces of Yemen held by the Houthi rebels, including in Sanaa, the capital. The Houthis gave no assessment of the damage but the US described hitting underground missile arsenals, launch sites and helicopters used by the rebels.
 "These attacks will not discourage Yemeni forces and the nation from maintaining their support for Palestinians in the face of the Zionist occupation

and crimes," Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said. "The aggressors' airstrikes will not go unanswered." US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin warned the Houthis after the strikes that "they will continue to bear further consequences if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels."
 That message was echoed by British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, who said: "The Houthi attacks must stop."
 The Behshad and Saviz are registered as commercial cargo ships with a Tehran-based company the US Treasury has sanctioned as a front for the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines.

British Indian doctor to undertake 'ground-breaking' cancer vaccine trial

PTI ■ LONDON
 A British Indian doctor is the chief investigator of a "ground-breaking" trial of a vaccine to treat early bowel cancer for patients worldwide, following a UK-Australia collaboration between scientists and doctors.
 Dr Tony Dhillon, a Consultant Medical

Oncologist at the Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust, proposed the idea for the trial and has worked with Professor Tim Price in Australia for the last four years to develop the vaccine. The trial, announced recently, will be run by the Cancer Research UK Southampton Clinical Trials Unit at the University of Southampton in collaboration with Royal Surrey and

Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Adelaide, Australia.
 "This is the first treatment vaccine in any gastrointestinal cancer and we have high hopes that it will be very successful. We think that for a lot of patients, the cancer will have gone completely after this treatment," said Dr Dhillon.
 "This is ground-breaking. I feel as if we are on the edge

of something really big here. The vaccine makes the immune system go after the cancer. It will be life-changing because it means that potentially, patients may not need to have surgery — they may just have the vaccine," he said.
 There will be 10 sites for patients to be enrolled — six in Australia and four in the UK, with 44 patients to be enrolled in the study over an 18-month

period.
 The vaccine will be used to treat patients before surgery, in the hope that it will cause the body to attack the cancer. It would mean any surgery would be less invasive. It is also hoped that the strength of the vaccine could support the immune system to respond if there is a relapse and the cancer returns later on. "We are hugely proud to

have been involved in the launch of this ground-breaking new vaccine. As the fourth-largest cancer centre in the UK, helping to fight cancer is a huge part of what we do and this will really provide an opportunity for bowel cancer patients and give them real hope of beating the disease," said Louise Stead, Royal Surrey Foundation Trust Chief Executive.

Patients will have an endoscopy, and then a tissue sample will be tested to see if they are eligible for the trial. If they are, they will have three doses of the vaccine before having surgery to remove the cancer.
 The trial will be available for just 44 patients around the world. After the trial finishes, the vaccine will either be licensed for use or if it's suc-

cessful, a bigger study will be carried out.
 Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the third most common cancer, with a worldwide annual incidence of over 1.2 million cases and a mortality rate of approximately 50 per cent.
 The vaccine has been designed by Imugene Ltd, a clinical-stage immuno-oncology company.

RBI likely to continue status quo on short term lending

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Coming close on the heels of the interim budget which maintained the status quo on policy front, the Reserve Bank is likely to continue with the pause on the short-term lending rate in its upcoming bi-monthly monetary policy this week as retail inflation is still near the higher end of its comfort zone, say experts.

"It is almost a year since the Reserve Bank has kept the short-term lending rate or repo rate stable at 6.5 per cent. The benchmark interest rate was last raised in February 2023 to 6.5 per cent from 6.25 per cent to contain inflation driven mainly by global developments.

"The retail inflation in the current financial year has declined after touching a peak



of 7.44 per cent in July, 2023, it is still high and was 5.69 per cent in December 2023, though within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone of 4-6 per cent.

"RBI Governor-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will start its three-day deliberations on February 6. Governor Shaktikanta Das will announce the decision of the six-member panel on February 8.

"Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda, said the MPC is likely to maintain an unchanged approach in terms of both rate and stance.

"This is so as inflation, as per the December data, is still high and there are pressures on the food side. This is notwithstanding the fact that core inflation has come down," he said.

"Going by RBI's forecasts on

GDP growth would turn out in FY25 will be useful given that the budget has outlined the contours," said the chief economist with the public sector bank.

"The government has mandated the central bank to ensure the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

"On expectations from the RBI on monetary policy, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head Research and Outreach, ICRA, said the CPI-based inflation is expected to moderate in FY25, although a well-distributed monsoon will be critical.

"We don't expect any change in rates or stance in the upcoming review. Our baseline expectation is that the earliest rate cut could be seen in August 2024 with a stance change in the preceding review," she said.

"Goldman Sachs report expects the RBI to keep the policy repo rate unchanged until the third quarter of calendar 2024 (Q3 CY24).

"With Q1 CY24 headline inflation still above the RBI's target, we maintain our view that the RBI will keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent at the February 8 policy meeting, continue with hawkish guidance, and reiterate the 4 per cent inflation target. We further expect the RBI to retain its tight liquidity stance," it said.

"Meanwhile, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to address the central board of Reserve Bank of India on February 12 and highlight key points of the interim Union Budget presented by her in Parliament on February 1.

"It is customary for the finance minister to address the Reserve Bank of India board after the Budget.

"Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com, too expects the central bank to maintain the repo rate at its current level in the upcoming monetary policy meeting.

"This decision reflects the central bank's cautious approach as it navigates the delicate balance between promoting economic growth and keeping inflation in check. With the persistent risk of inflation exceeding the upper limit of 6 per cent, the possibility of a rate cut may only materialize in the latter half of this fiscal year, once inflation shows signs of further moderation. Maintaining the status quo on the policy rate signifies a commitment to stability in interest rates," he opined.

Existing taxation structure for corporate very reasonable: Revenue Secretary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The existing taxation structure for corporates with a 22 per cent tax is "very reasonable" when compared to an economy of the size of India and hence the concessional tax regime which was in force for four years for new manufacturing units was not extended beyond March 2024, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra said.

"In an interview with PTI, Malhotra said the Interim Budget 2024-25 provides for continuity in taxation regime and the benefits given to taxpayers in the last years are showing results in the form of huge buoyancy in personal income tax.

"Taxpayer services have been a major focus of the government and this will continue going forward. Taxpayer services includes rationalisation, simplification and trust-based taxation with less scrutiny and more pinpointed assessments and use of technology. We are hopeful taxpayer services will continue to improve helping us in compliance and improving tax collection efficiency," Malhotra said.

"To a question on why the concessional tax regime for corporates was not extended beyond March 31, 2024, Malhotra said the scheme was introduced in 2019 and companies were given a long time to set up new units to avail of the concessional 15 per cent rate of tax.

"A long period of four years was given. This is the time that a large company put on the ground right from conceptualisation, planning, raising of funds, sufficient time was given it was extended by another year till March 31, 2024, because of Covid. These investments have a long gestation period.

"The existing taxation of our country now for corporates at 22 per cent, when compared to the economy of our size, is very, very reasonable. In light of all these, it was felt that this was the date that it was to sunset and it should sunset," Malhotra said.

"The government in 2019 announced that any new domestic company incorporated on or after October 1, 2019, making fresh investment in manufacturing, will have the option to pay income tax at the rate of 15 per cent if they commenced their production on or before March 31, 2023. The date was extended till March 31, 2024, in the Budget presented on February 1, 2023.



SIAC denies Sony plea to restrain Zee from approaching NCLT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zee Enterprises Ltd on Sunday said the Singapore Arbitration Centre has denied Sony Group's plea seeking a restraint against the Indian media company's move to the NCLT for enforcing the merger that was called off by the Japanese company's Indian arm.

"An Emergency Arbitrator of Singapore International Arbitration Centre denied the interim relief sought by Culver Max and BEPL (Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd) to restrain Zee Entertainment



Enterprise Ltd (ZEEL), observing it lacks jurisdiction to pass such an order, ZEEL stated in a filing to stock exchanges.

"We wish to inform that the Emergency Arbitrator has passed an award dated February 4, 2024 denying the application for emergency interim relief filed by Culver Max and BEPL and has determined that the Emergency Arbitrator has no jurisdiction or authority to injunct the Company from approaching the NCLT to implement the Merger Scheme since these are

matters which fall within the statutory system and are for the NCLT to decide," it added.

"Sony had last month terminated the merger agreement with ZEEL to merge its two Indian entities - Culver Max Entertainment (earlier known as Sony Pictures Network India) and BEPL.

"Sony Group Corporation (SGC) had said ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions and initiated arbitration proceedings before SIAC claiming USD 90 million (around Rs 748.5 cr) as a termination fee.

"While, ZEEL filed a petition before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), seeking a direction to Sony group to implement the merger scheme.

"ZEEL had also initiated appropriate legal actions to contest the claims of USD 90 million filed by Sony Group before SIAC.

"It asserted that Sony Group firm Culver Max and BEPL (Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd), which were to be merged with ZEEL, "are in default of their obligations to give effect to" and implement the scheme of merger that was sanctioned by the NCLT.

"The company approached the NCLT, Mumbai-bench, inter alia seeking directions to implement the merger scheme," ZEEL had said in a regulatory filed on January 24, two days after Sony terminated the merger agreement.

Government, industry discuss ways for implementation of PLI schemes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior government officials and industry players have discussed ways to enhance collaborations and create a clear action plan for successful implementation of PLI schemes, an official statement said on Sunday.

"Around 1,200 delegates including beneficiary companies under the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme for 14 sectors and officials met on February 3 to discuss and chart out the strategy for effective and seamless implementation of these schemes, the commerce and industry ministry said.

"Officials from ministries and departments, including NITI Aayog, electronics, IT, telecommunications, heavy industries, renewable energy, and pharmaceuticals,



participated in the discussions.

"The opening session was followed by two interactive sessions covering all the 14 sectors, with the objective of exploring areas of collaboration between the government and industry champions and creating a clear action plan for successful implementation of PLI Schemes.

Mukesh Ambani No.2 globally in Brand Guardianship Index

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani has been ranked first among all Indians and second globally in the Brand Guardianship Index 2024 compiled by Brand Finance.

"The chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries Ltd overtakes the likes of Microsoft's Satya Nadella, and Google's Sundar Pichai to be ranked No.2 globally only behind Tencent's Huateng Ma.

"According to the publication, the Brand Guardianship Index is a global recognition of CEOs, who are building business value in a sustainable manner, by balancing the needs of all stakeholders - employees, investors, and the wider society.

"Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran is ranked at No.5, up from No.8 in the 2023 ranking. He is followed by Anish Shah of Mahindra & Mahindra at No.6 and Infosys' Salil Parekh at No.16.

"In the 2023 ranking as well Ambani was placed at No.2 position globally.

"This year he was ranked No.1 in Brand Guardianship Index 2024 among the 'Diversified conglomerates.

"Ambani was ranked ahead of global majors like Satya Nadella of Microsoft, Google's Sundar Pichai, Apple's Tim Cook and Tesla's Elon Musk.

"Brand Finance's survey gave Ambani a BGI score of 80.3, just below 81.6 of Huateng Ma of China-based Tencent.

"Brand Finance constructs a balanced scorecard of measures designed to identify the factors that best capture the ability of CEOs to act as a steward of their company's brand and steward long term value.

"This year's analysis reveals that ESG has become the single most important driving force in determining CEO reputation.

"Being regarded as 'a sustainability champion' accounts for 14 per cent of variation in reputation scores, ahead of factors such as perceived trustworthiness (12.5 per cent), having 'a strong strategy and vision' and global recognition.

"According to Brand Finance, the role of a brand guardian is to build brand and business value.



Switch from Paytm to other payment apps: CAIT to traders

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Traders' body CAIT on Sunday issued a cautionary advisory to traders to switch from Paytm to other payment options for business-related transactions following RBI curbs on Paytm wallet and bank operations.

"The Reserve Bank of India has imposed certain restrictions, prompting CAIT to recommend that users take proactive measures to protect their funds and ensure uninterrupted financial transactions. Large number of small traders, vendors, hawkers and women are making payments through Paytm and as such RBI restrictions on Paytm could lead financial disruption to these people," the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) stated.

"Money laundering concerns and questionable dealings of hundreds of crores of rupees between popular wallet Paytm and its lesser-known banking arm had led Reserve Bank of India to clamp down on tech poster boy Vijay Shekhar Sharma-run entities, according to sources.

"The central bank has ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to halt most of its business including taking further deposits, conducting credit transactions and carrying out top-ups on any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, and cards for paying road tolls after February 29.

"This means customers can access their existing deposits and pay for services with money stored in their wallets till February 29. And in case, RBI does not relent, top-up for Paytm wallet will stop and transactions through it would no longer can be carried.

"CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that the recent restrictions imposed by RBI on Paytm have raised concerns about the security and continuity of financial services provided by the platform.

"He emphasised the urgency of this advisory, urging traders to act promptly and make informed decisions to mitigate any potential adverse effects on their financial operations.

FMCG firms report single digit growth with better margin in Q3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies have reported single-digit volume growth with improved margins in most segments during December quarter, helped by moderating commodity inflation, though operating environment remained challenging.

"Some of the companies also reported a decline in their topline numbers, as they extended the benefits of softening commodity prices to the consumer by lowering the prices, which had a bearing on their gross sales numbers.

"Companies such as HUL, ITC, Marico, Dabur, and Godrej Consumer Products said urban markets continued their moderate growth, while consumer demand from rural India remained subdued even as they expect an improvement in coming quarters.

"Moreover, the late arrival of winter also impacted the pickup of relevant products such as lotions, oils and creams.

"Hindustan Unilever (HUL) reported a muted growth in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,508 crore and its sales were marginally down to Rs 15,259 crore.

"Overall, FMCG demand trends have largely remained stable and similar to what we saw last quarter. While market volumes grew at high single digits year-on-year, this came on a base period where volumes declined in mid-single digit," said HUL CEO & MD Rohit Jawa in his latest earnings call.

"Like past quarters, modern trade channels are doing well and continue to outpace general trade. Similarly, the volume growth of premium products is significantly ahead of mass products in the market.

"Echoing the view, Marico said, "General trade continued to drag as it grappled with liquidity and profitability constraints, while alternate channels grew healthily."

"Marico's India business posted a volume growth of 2 per cent in the third quarter year on year though its turnover was down 3 per cent to Rs 1,793 crore.

"During the quarter, demand trends were stable with no visible improvement from the preceding quarter. Rural demand remained soft, while urban demand steadied its moderate growth trajectory," said the earnings statement from Marico which owns brands like Saffola, Parachute, and Livon, among others.

"Within the sector, mass home and personal care categories aligned closely with the rural demand trajectory, while packaged foods led the sector owing to higher urban salience and penetration-led growth, it said.



Global summit on woodwork

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has recorded the highest growth rate in terms of deposit mobilisation among public sector lenders at a time when most lenders are facing difficulty in achieving double-digit growth.

"Out of 12 public sector banks, only BoM and State Bank of India (SBI) could log a double-digit growth in deposits in the third quarter ended December 2023.

"The Pune-based lender BoM reported a 17.89 per cent growth in deposits followed by SBI at 12.84 per cent during the quarter, according to published quarterly numbers of the public sector banks (PSBs).

"However, SBI's total deposits were about 18.5 times higher at Rs 45,67,927 crore, as compared to Rs 2,45,734 crore of BoM in absolute terms.

"Central Bank of India was the third by clocking a 9.53 per cent growth in deposits while Punjab National Bank recorded a 9.10 per cent increase.

"In terms of low-cost CASA deposits, BoM continued to top the chart with 50.19 per cent followed by Central Bank of India with 48.98 per cent.

"Higher level of Current Account and Savings Accounts (CASA) helps banks to keep their cost of funds low.

"On the asset quality side, BoM and SBI reported the lowest gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) with 2.04 per cent and 2.42 per cent respectively as of December 31, 2023. In terms of Net NPAs, BoM and Indian Bank reported the lowest net NPA with 0.22 per cent and 0.53 per cent respectively.

Bengaluru: The 13th edition of INDIAWOOD will take place from February 22 to 26, offering a comprehensive showcase of woodwork and furniture production technologies at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre, Bengaluru. Featuring over 950 companies, from more than 50 countries, 75,000+ trade visitors and 75,000 sqms of exhibition area. The event will offer a glimpse into the latest innovations, technology and offer unparalleled networking opportunities. INDIAWOOD 2024 will bring together industry leaders, technology suppliers and buyers from around the world.

₹1020 million investment for lab grown diamonds

New Delhi: Bhavnagar based BSE SME listed company Dev Labtech Ventures Ltd has signed agreement with Government of India in Gujarat Vibrant Summit 2024. It has plans to invest Rs 1020 millions for expansion in manufacturing of eco-friendly lab grown diamonds having wide range of applications in semi-conductors plates, cutting tools blades and lazer machines. This expansion also provides further employment opportunities for more than 500 peoples.



DAVIS CUP: INDIA BLANK PAKISTAN 4-0, SEAL PLACE IN WORLD GROUP I

Indian Davis Cup team capped its historic visit to Pakistan after 60 years by sealing its place in World Group I as it blanked Pakistan 4-0 with Yuki Bhambri and Saketh Myneni recording a comfortable victory and Niki Poonacha making a winning debut, here Sunday.

Taking the court with a 2-0 lead in pocket, Bhambri and Myneni subdued the home team of Muzammil Murtaza and Aqeel Khan 6-2 7-6(5) in the doubles rubber to extend India's dominance of Pakistan in the tournament.

Aqeel replaced Barkat Ullah in the side. The idea was to have an experienced player for the do-or-die match, the defeat in which would have clinched India the tie.

However, Bhambri and big-serving Myneni did not put a foot wrong in the match in



which they were not troubled by their rivals much. The gulf in quality in the two teams was apparent.

"Myneni's big serves were too hot to handle for the home team. Myneni hardly lost a point on his serve and was

also superb at the net also. The Indian players' returns were also better as several times Bhambri sent down winners between the two Pakistani players.

The 28-year-old Poonacha was then asked to play the

dead fourth rubber against Muhammad Shoaib, who he beat 6-3 6-4. The fifth match was not played.

Shoaib struggled with his serve but had a terrific backhand. Realising Shoaib's strong point, Niki did not

feed many balls to his backhand and comfortably logged the win. Shoaib also struggled to contain unforced errors, giving many free points to the Indian.

It was India's eighth win in as many meetings in the event, dubbed as World Cup of tennis and now it will compete in World Group I in September this year while Pakistan will stay in Group II. The Indian team adapted well to the tough conditions and the heavy security around them, not letting the restrictions on their movement have an adverse impact on them.

The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) did well in creating a safety net around the players, as several agencies worked in tandem to ensure that the historic tie went without any untoward incidents.

"The organisation was spot

on. All the arrangements were good. We thank Pakistan Tennis Federation for being wonderful hosts," India captain Zeeshan Ali said.

Bhambri and Myneni had a tight grip over the contest from the beginning. They broke Aqeel in the first and fifth games for a commanding 4-1 lead. In game one, Aqeel hit a backhand long and wide to be down two breakpoints. While Myneni hit wide on first, he found an easy volley winner on Aqeel's feeble return.

The Pakistani stalwart again dropped serve in game five. His overhaas flat smash flew over the baseline at 30-all and Bhambri sent down a crushing forehand winner between the two players to close the game.

Murtaza went down by three set points in game seven but saved all as the two players finally got some rhythm.

Inter Miami cruises past Hong Kong XI despite missing injured Messi

Lionel Messi stayed on the bench for the full 90 minutes on Sunday as Inter Miami defeated a Hong Kong XI 4-1 in the latest stop on the MLS team's preseason Asian tour.

"While the Argentine's non-appearance was a disappointment for the fans who snapped up all 40,000 tickets at Hong Kong Stadium within an hour when they went on sale in December, it was a better performance for Miami after a 6-0 thrashing by Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr in Riyadh on Thursday.

"Messi played the final seven minutes of the losing effort but a tight hamstring kept the eight-time Ballon D'or winner on the sidelines in Hong Kong along with Uruguayan forward and former Barcelona teammate Luis Suarez.

"The fans who filled the same arena a day earlier at least saw



the 2022 World Cup winner in an open training session along with Miami co-owner David Beckham.

"Robert Taylor opened the scoring for Miami five minutes before the break with a curling shot from the corner of the area. Henri Anier quickly leveled for the hosts, led by national team coach Jorn Andersen.

"Lawson Sunderland restored Miami's lead early in the second half and then, after 56 minutes, provided the assist for Leonardo Campana, who made it 3-1. Ryan Sailor headed a fourth five minutes from the end.



Avani finishes 10th as Chinese Taipei golfer crowned champion

India's Avani Prashanth registered her fourth straight under par round with a one-under 71 to sign off tied 10th, her best finish in the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championships here on Sunday.

"She carded 68-69-71-71 for a total of nine-under 279, but felt she could have done much better.

"I missed a lot of chances, but the positive is that I could still get 9-under without my 'A' game. The first 36 holes (7-under) I played great but the last 36 (2-under) was disappointing," said Avani, who has a busy schedule ahead of her.

"Avani, who birdied only one par-5 in four days and missed numerous small putts, was nine shots behind the winner.

"Chun-Wei Wu of Chinese Taipei, starting the day four shots clear of the field, overcame a nervy start with two bogeys in the first three holes.

"She saw her lead dwindle to as little as one, but birdied twice in the last four holes to hang on for a two-shot win. She carded 67-65-66-72 for 18-under 270 total to become the second player from Chinese Taipei to win the WAAP title, which opens multiple doors for her over the rest of the year.

"India's 15-year-old Saanvi Somu, making her debut at

the event, carded a final 75 after dropping a double bogey at the ninth, her closing hole. She had cards of 73-72-75-73 for a creditable 5-over 293 and was tied 48th.

"Avani started with a birdie but gave that shot back on the third. She followed it with a string of nine par before picking back-to-back birdies on 13th and the 14th.

"Over the next four holes, she missed at least three makeable putts, two of them for birdies and bogeyed the last.

"I just could not make the putts, didn't convert the chances I created," said Avani, who will now play in Kenya and two big amateur events in Sage Valley and the Augusta National Women's Amateur in the US.

"The winner Wu's rewards include berths into three Majors -- the AIG Women's Open at St Andrews, the Amundi Evian Championship in France, and the Chevron Championship in the United States of America.

"Apart from the Rae-Vadee T Suwan Champion's Medal, she will also receive invitations to the Hana Financial Group Championship, the ISPS HANDA Women's Australian Open, the 121st Women's Amateur Championship and the Augusta National Women's Amateur.

Para Shooting World Cup in jeopardy after paralympic panel suspension

The hosting of the Para Shooting World Cup in India next month is in jeopardy following the sports ministry's decision to suspend the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) for not holding elections on time.

"The Para Shooting World Cup, to be held at the Karni Singh Ranges here from March 6-15, is the first-ever mega para shooting competition allotted to India and offers 24 Paris Paralympic quota places.

"More than 500 pistol, rifle and

shotgun shooters from 52 countries are expected to compete in the competition and aim to secure Paralympic quota places in the last tournament of the qualification cycle.

"Several top Indian para shooters are also in the fray for Paralympic quota places.

"However, following the ministry's decision on February 2, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the prestigious event at a time when the PCI is in the final phase of confirming entries of competitors by name, arranging their visas, stay and putting in place a technical team for the conduct of the competition.



"The ministry had on February 2 issued an order suspending the PCI's recognition for 'intentional delay' by the national body 'to elect a new executive committee' as per the National Sports Code.

"The four-year term of the PCI ended on January 31 this year and, as per the ministry, the elections should have been held before the expiry of the term. The PCI has scheduled the election for March 28 this year.

"PCI secretary-general Gursharan Singh told PTI on Sunday that the ministry had been informed that the elections were getting delayed only because of the impending Para

World Cup.

"Yes, they have suspended the recognition of the PCI. How can they when no national sports federation (NSF) has received recognition for the current year.

"The ministry is saying that they suspended our recognition because we did not hold the elections on time. Our election was due on January 27 this year but because of the Para World Cup, which has been awarded to India for the first time, we had to postpone the elections.

"We announced the dates of the elections in March after the Para

World Cup.

"Yes, they have suspended the recognition of the PCI. How can they when no national sports federation (NSF) has received recognition for the current year.

"The ministry is saying that they suspended our recognition because we did not hold the elections on time. Our election was due on January 27 this year but because of the Para World Cup, which has been awarded to India for the first time, we had to postpone the elections.

"We announced the dates of the elections in March after the Para

Odisha FC climb back to top of table with convincing win

Title contenders Odisha FC bagged three points with consummate ease when they brushed aside city-mates Sports Odisha 3-1 in the Indian Women's League football here on Sunday.

"The winners led 2-0 at half-time with goals from Lynda Kom (8') and Win Theingi Tun (45+3'). Tun scored her second in the 50th minute.

"Sports Odisha scored pulled one back through Manisha Naik in the 67th minute.

"On paper, the match was deemed the Odisha Derby.

"But in reality, it was a total mismatch as the top-ranked team in the league table were pitted against a side struggling to avoid finishing



at the bottom.

"Odisha FC moved to the top of the chart with 19 points from seven matches, while Sports Odisha continued to be at the bottom having collected only two points from eight outings.

"After a few challenge-free runs through both flanks, the winners opened their scoring when Indumathi Kathiresan ran down the left to cross the ball in the six-yard box.

"Lynda Kom, who was following the movement, was left unchallenged and it made her task of pushing the ball in easier.

"That Odisha FC had to wait until the add-on time of the first session to score their second goal was a surprise because their dominance in the match was so complete.

"Sports Odisha, in contrast, could hardly make a decent movement into the rival area.

"Odisha FC goalkeeper Shreya Hooda never had to collect the ball, leave alone making a serious save.

"The Netherlands men's hockey team arrived here on Sunday to participate in the Pro League scheduled at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium here from February 10 to 16 and Birsu Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela from February 19 to 25.

"The preparations have been going really well. We have done a great job in training sessions. We love to be in

Looking forward to tough battles against India, Australia: Dutch skipper

World's top-ranked side Netherlands is relishing the challenge of facing India and Australia during the FIH Hockey Pro League to prepare for the Paris Olympics, said Dutch skipper Thierry Brinkman on Sunday.

"The Netherlands men's hockey team arrived here on Sunday to participate in the Pro League scheduled at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium here from February 10 to 16 and Birsu Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela from February 19 to 25.

"The preparations have been going really well. We have done a great job in training sessions. We love to be in

India and there is a good team spirit among all of us. We are excited for the campaign to begin," Brinkman said in a Hockey India release.

"Five national teams - Ireland, The Netherlands, India, Spain and Australia - will participate in the India leg of the Pro League, facing each other once in Bhubaneswar and once in Rourkela.

"We are curious about Australia, they could be tough opponents for us. Of course, facing India in front of their home crowd will be a challenge, especially in stadiums as vast as the ones in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela. So, we are looking forward to those tough battles," Brinkman said.

No question of going back on IOA CEO appointment, says PT Usha

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief PT Usha on Sunday asserted that she has full confidence in the newly-appointed CEO and there was no going back on the decision to hire him for the top post.

"Reports had suggested a majority of the IOA Executive Council (EC) members signing a suspension order declaring the appointment of Raghuram Iyer as CEO null and void.

"The IOA had appointed

Indian Premier League side Rajasthan Royals' former official Iyer as its Chief Executive Officer on January 6, a year after it was due and following repeated reminders from the International Olympic Committee.

"However, within weeks of his appointment, several members of the IOA EC alleged that the legendary athlete had "exerted pressure" on them to pave the way for Iyer's appointment as CEO, a charge that Usha termed "shameful".

"About 12 out of 15 EC members had then said that Iyer's recruitment wasn't ratified by the apex body.

"Asked whether she seemed rattled with problems ever since she took charge as IOA president, Usha said, "Every time. It has to be solved. When you do the wrong thing, then you have to be scared. When you are doing right and proper then why worry on it."

"Asked to comment on the latest development on the CEO episode, Usha, attending



a function organised by the Delhi Sports Journalists Association (DSJA) and Sports Journalists Federation of India (SJFI) here, said: "CEO is working. I've already appointed the CEO in a very proper way and he is working there."

"On whether he would continue to perform his normal duties despite several EC members reportedly wanting his removal, she said, "100 per cent (he will continue). Why not? He is a very good CEO, and because

the IOC needs good ones (officials) only.

"We always wanted IOA to have a big one (a renowned person on the CEO's post)...And (it can help) sports in a very big way. I'm thinking that way only," said Usha after the function where she was honoured with a medallion, a citation and a memento by the sports journalists.

"I'm believing on him (CEO) and I have got confidence in whatever he is doing now," she added.

Hamrin, Sweden great who was last living player from 1958 World Cup final, dies at 89

Kurt Hamrin, a former Fiorentina and Sweden great who was the last living player to have participated in the 1958 World Cup final, has died. He was 89.

"The Swedish soccer federation announced Hamrin's death on Sunday. No more details were disclosed.

"One of Swedish football's biggest icons has left us. Rest in peace Kurt 'Kurre' Hamrin," it said in a statement on social media.

"Kurre' Hamrin was a big

factor in Sweden's World Cup silver in 1958. He is a legend at both AIK and Fiorentina for his efforts at the clubs.

"Our thoughts go out to Kurt's family and friends. Thank you 'Kurre' for all the blue and yellow memories you have helped create for so many," it added.

"Hamrin scored 17 goals in 32 matches for Sweden. He netted in the semifinal against West Germany in 1958, but Sweden was beaten 5-2 by Brazil in the final.

"Hamrin was also Fiorentina's record goalscorer - tied with Gabriel Batistuta - with 203



goals in his nine years with the club before leaving for AC Milan in 1967.

"He also played for Napoli and IFK Stockholm before moving back to Florence after retiring. He was living in the Italian city when he died.

"President Rocco Commisso, his family, the Fiorentina board and everyone associated with the club share the pain of Kurt Hamrin's family and the entire footballing world for his passing," Fiorentina said.

"Hamrin was and will always be a true legend for all

football fans, in particular for Fiorentina fans. He still holds the record for most goals scored for the club, tied on 203 with Gabriel Batistuta. He won the Cup Winners' Cup and two Italian Cups with the Viola and had strong ties with the city of Florence.

"Hamrin started his career at AIK in Sweden before moving to Italy and Juventus, which was apparently alerted to his skills by a passionate letter from a miner.

"He only spent one season there before moving to Padova on loan and then Fiorentina in 1958.

Iran beats Japan 2-1 to reach Asian Cup semis

Alireza Jahanbakhsh's last-minute penalty gave Iran a 2-1 win over Japan on Saturday and a place in the Asian Cup semifinals for just the second time since 2004.

"Iran will next play tournament host Qatar, which beat Uzbekistan 3-2 in a penalty shootout following a 1-1 stalemate after extra time in their quarterfinal encounter.

"Jahanbakhsh kept his cool in the sixth minute of second-half stoppage time to keep Iran on course for a first title since 1976 and fourth overall. Ko Itakura had been whistled

for the foul and Jahanbakhsh gave goalkeeper Zion Suzuki no chance.

"Iran should be proud," Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei said. "The players gave everything they had and I think the result can be a turning point for Iranian football."

"Iran came from behind after Hidemasa Morita put pre-tournament favorite Japan ahead in the first half of an entertaining quarterfinal match at Education City Stadium.

"Mohammad Mohebi leveled the score in the 55th minute. "Iran started aggressively with Jahanbakhsh firing just over from the left after 13 minutes.

Shortly after Saeid Ezatollahi shot straight at goalkeeper Zion Suzuki.

"Out of nothing however, Japan, looking for a record fifth Asian Cup title, took the lead in the 28th minute. Morita collected a pass, skipped past Hossein Kanani to enter the area and while his shot was soft, it seemed to confuse Alireza Beiranvand and the ball bounced off the goalkeeper's leg and into the net.

"Iran, without suspended star striker Mehdi Taremi, almost leveled six minutes before the break when Brentford midfielder Saman Ghoddos shot just wide.

ENGLAND 67-1, CHASE RECORD 399 TARGET

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

India's questionable batting approach left the door ajar for England's batters to go for a record yet achievable 399-run target in the second Test here Sunday, the hosts once again allowing their fearless opponents to come back into the game. Like the series opener, India had the opportunity to bat the Englishmen out of the game after Shubman Gill's 104 off 147 balls but their inexplicable batting approach in the final session left the door open for the visitors. India ended with 255 all out in their second innings. On expected lines, England came out attacking through openers Zak Crawley (29 batting off 50) and Ben Duckett (28) before R Ashwin had the left-hander caught in his first over. England ended at 67 for one



at stumps with Crawley and night watchman Rehan Ahmed (9 batting) in the centre, still needing for 332 runs for a famous victory. Though the odd ball is keeping low, there doesn't seem to be any demon in the

pitch and England will be backing themselves to gun down the target and take a 2-0 series lead in the series. The West Indies getting to 395 in Bangladesh two years ago remains the highest chase recorded in Asia.

India, who were 227 for six at tea and led England by 370 runs, could only manage 28 runs in 14.3 overs with their long tail not wagging again. Rather than going for strokes, the likes of R Ashwin (29 off 61) and Jasprit Bumrah (0 off

26 balls) were happy to bat time, not helping the team's cause eventually. In the first innings, barring double centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal no batter crossed 40 and in the second innings, the highest individual score after

Gill's hundred was 45 from Axar Patel. While James Anderson (2/29) was relentless in his opening spell, the inexperienced spin trio of Shoaib Bashir (1/58), Rehan Ahmed (3/88) and Tom Hartley (4/77) bowled the bulk of the overs in the absence of Joe Root, who did not come out to field in the last two sessions after getting hit on his right little finger. India's bizarre tactics came after Gill overcame a lean patch to score his third Test hundred before tea. India made 97 runs in the afternoon session courtesy an 89-run stand between Gill and Axar. Gill stole the show with his century but Axar also looked assured batting at number six. Gill, who had completed his half century before lunch, continued to attack the spinners.



Love watching Bumrah, Shami bowl: Harmison

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former England pacer Steve Harmison loves watching the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami go about their business and thanks to their unbelievable skills, he feels India have become a formidable force in all conditions. Shami, who is nursing an ankle injury and is not part of the India-England series yet, is a master of seam bowling while Bumrah on Saturday showed his wide of variety of skills by running through the England batting with a sensational display of reverse swing. In fact, the second Test has been dominated by pacers with Bumrah recording his best figures in Indian conditions and James Anderson defying age with incisive spells. "They both have been brilliant. It shows their class. If you got great skill sets, you will survive, you will ask good questions and that is what Anderson and Bumrah have got. They are unbelievable bowlers," Harmison told PTI on Sunday. "In Hyderabad, where Bumrah got Root and Duckett, that was one of most engrossing hours of test

cricket you would see in a long time and in this Test, Anderson and Bumrah have been incredible," said the tall fast bowler who took 226 wickets in 63 Tests and was part of the iconic Ashes triumph in 2005. Harmison, who played only one Test in India and is here on a commentary assignment, also is fan of Shami and Siraj's work. In his playing days, India did not have a battery of world class pacers like they possess now. As part of their tribe, Harmison can only be happy about the rapid growth of fast bowling in India. "The skills of Bumrah, Shami and even Siraj, I love watching them bowl. They have a great bowling attack, fantastic spin attack and seam bowlers who can be effective anywhere in the world. That is why there are one of the best team in the world," he reckoned. Talking about the ongoing five-match series, Harmison feels the Ben Stokes-led side have a very good chance of succeeding. "The 2005 Ashes was different as it was in England where you have smaller totals and closer games. Here if a team bats first and gets a big score in the first innings it gets difficult (to comeback).



Williamson, Ravindra tons lift New Zealand

PTI ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI (NEW ZEALAND)

Kane Williamson scored his 30th Test century and Rachin Ravindra his first as New Zealand reached 258-2 by stumps on the first day of the first Test against South Africa on Sunday when runs at times flowed like treacle. Williamson was 112 not out at stumps and Ravindra 118 in an unbroken partnership of 219. For much of the day, scoring had been difficult. New Zealand scored 65 runs from 25 overs in the first session and 60 runs from 27 overs in the second as a novice South Africa attack produced a spirited performance and tied down the New Zealand batters. The payoff for that hard graft came in the extended last session when New Zealand scored 133 from 34 overs, bumping up their run rate for the day to three runs an over. Both players at times were frustrated by the slow pace of scoring. Williamson adapted and persevered through an innings which had lasted almost 6-1/2 hours by stumps. Ravindra had a knack of picking out fielders when he played forcefully but he showed maturity to concentrate and carry on. Both players gave catching chances: Williamson at 47 when he was dropped by Edward Moore from the bowling of Ruan de Swardt and Ravindra by Duanne Olivier off the same bowler when he was 80. Otherwise

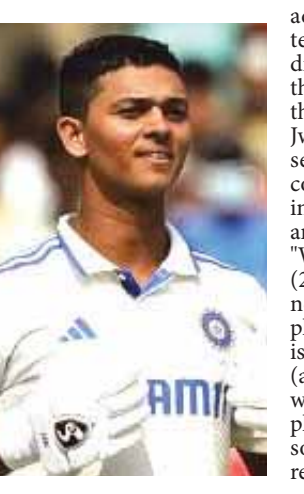
they negotiated the day with patience and gradually put New Zealand in command. Williamson played a characteristic innings, showing again why he is the top-ranked batter in Test cricket. He was balanced, composed and patient, prepared to endure in the morning, then through the afternoon when runs were scarce. He was more forceful in the final session, reaching his century with his 13th boundary from 241 balls. It was his fourth century against South Africa and his 17th in New Zealand. Kiwi fans have waited a long time to see Ravindra realize his massive potential and produce such an innings in Tests. He made his debut three years ago and his previous highest score in three test matches was 18. It was serendipitous that he batted on Saturday with Williamson, who was such a calming influence and source of sound advice. Ravindra came to the crease when New Zealand was 39-2 in the 17th over, with the home side under considerable pressure. He dug in and had batted more than five hours by stumps in an innings which contained 13 fours and a six. South Africa's lineup contained six new caps, including captain Neil Brand who won the toss on debut and chose to bat. Its novice attack, stripped of almost all of its big names who remained at home two play in a Twenty20 competition, rose to the occasion.

Jaiswal adaptability makes him different: Coach

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's adaptability between formats and temperament make him stand out among his peers at the highest level, believes his childhood coach Jwala Singh. At 22 years and 36 days, Jaiswal on Saturday became the third youngest from the country after Vinod Kambli and Sunil Gavaskar to score a Test double ton. He smashed 19 fours and seven sixes to make 209 from 290 balls against England in the second Test at Visakhapatnam. "If you see his junior cricket,

like when he was playing for Mumbai under-16s, he scored a double hundred, (also for) Mumbai under-19s, (in the) Irani Cup, Duleep Trophy and Vijay Hazare (Trophy). He has the knack of playing long innings with his aggressive nature," Jwala told PTI. "He always puts pressure on the bowler because he keeps hitting the boundaries. This is how he has grown his cricket, his stroke-playing, his mindset. That is called adaptability. "In T20 cricket, he plays (with) a different attitude. In Test cricket, he plays with a different approach. His



adaptability and temperament is really different from the others and that makes him different from the other players." Jwala said having long batting sessions during the coronavirus pandemic-induced break turned things around for Jaiswal. "When he came from the IPL (2021) in Dubai, he was very nervous and he cried over phone saying, 'Sir, my cricket is over. I don't think I will play (any) higher'. At that time, he was not a very aggressive player. He used to just play some good shots," Jwala recalled.

Bhut seals Saurashtra win

PTI ■ SOLAPUR

Left-arm spinner Parth Bhut did the star turn with seven wickets and fashioned a 48-run victory for Saurashtra over Maharashtra in their Elite Ranji Trophy Group A match here on Sunday. The 26-year-old Bhut returned excellent figures of 7/44, as Saurashtra bowled out Maharashtra for 164 in their second innings after being set a target of 208 on the third and penultimate afternoon of the match. Off-spinner Yuvrajsinh Dodiya supported Bhut well with two wickets, while Dharmendrasinh Jadeja, who also bowls left-arm spin, picked up one to cap off a fine all-round performance. Jadeja's first-innings knock of 72, at a time when his team was desperately looking for someone to bail them out of a precarious situation, and his 118-run partnership for the



sixth wicket with Prerak Mankad (52), went a long way in Saurashtra sealing the match in their favour. Jadeja also picked up four wickets in Maharashtra's first innings, and combined with Bhut and Dodiya, to bowl their opponents out for 159 and ensure a handy first-innings lead of 43 runs for their team. Bhut, who was out for a golden duck and was one of three Saurashtra batters to

have failed to open their account in the second innings -- Cheteshwar Pujara and Harvik Desai being the other two -- made up for his failure with the bat with a brilliant show with the ball. Bhut, who had grabbed two wickets to leave Maharashtra struggling at 104/5 at stumps on the third evening and still 104 runs adrift of the target, picked up all the five wickets to fall in the final morning to secure full points for his team.

India A beat England Lions, bag series 2-0

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India A spinners turned the knife into England Lions' batting line-up to give their side a commanding 134-run victory on the fourth day of the third and final unofficial 'Test' here on Sunday. Chasing an improbable 403, the Lions were bundled out for 268 in their second innings as India A bagged the three-match series 2-0. Mumbai left-arm spinner Shams Mulani (5/60) and Madhya Pradesh off-spinner Saransh Jain (3/50) grabbed eight wickets among them as England crumbled after resuming from overnight 83 for two. England Lions opener Alex Lees, who started the day from 41, completed his fifty



and looked good for more. But his stay was cut short when Mulani trapped him in front of the wickets for 55. England were 120 for 4 then and they lost another three wickets while adding 20 more runs to slip to 140 for seven. Mulani added the scalps of Lions' skipper Josh Bohannon (18) and Dan Mousley (5) to his kitty in this period. However, the Lions were not ready to fade away without

one last fight. Wicketkeeper-batter Ollie Robinson (80, 105 balls, 7x4, 2x6) and James Coles (31, 58 balls, 3x4) added 104 runs for an entertaining eighth-wicket stand from a little over 23 overs. The Lions moved past the 200-run mark with ease, but it always was the case of getting that one wicket. Mulani did the job of snapping the partnership, winning a leg-before appeal against Coles. Once Jain castled Robinson, the Lions' innings and the match came to a quick close. Brief scores: India A: 192 & 409 beat England Lions: 199 & 268 all out in 72.4 overs (Ollie Robinson 81, Alex Lees 55, James Coles 31; Shams Mulani 5/60, Saransh Jain 3/50) by 134 runs.

Zadran picks four as Afghanistan ends Sri Lanka 1st innings for 439

PTI ■ COLOMBO (SRI LANKA)

Fast bowler Naveed Zadran picked up four wickets to help Afghanistan dismiss Sri Lanka for 439 runs in its first innings on the third day of the only cricket test against Sri Lanka. Afghanistan was 35 without loss at lunch on Sunday,

trailing the hosts by 206 runs. They were bowled out for 198 in the first innings. Ibrahim Zadran was batting on 21 with Noor Ali Zadran on 12. Sri Lanka resumed the day on 410-6 with Sadeera Samarawickrama batting on 21. Chamika Gunasekara who is playing his first test joined

him at the crease as Sri Lanka's top scorer Angelo Mathews (141) was out hit wicket on the last delivery of the second day. Samarawickrama (27) was dismissed with just 17 runs added Sunday when he caught by Rahmat Shah off Naveed Zadran. Naveed Zadran bowled

tailender Prabath Jayasuriya (2) with an inswinger and seamer Nijat Masood ended the innings bowling out Asitha Fernando (0). Gunasekara (16) who was struck on the helmet by a Zadran bouncer had retired hurt after facing a few further deliveries and did not return to bat.

Kasun Rajith was used as the third seamer, a concussion substitute for Gunasekara, when Sri Lanka came out to bowl. Naveed Zadran returned 4-83 on his test debut. Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal formed the backbone of Sri Lanka's first innings having shared 232 runs for the fourth wicket on

Saturday. Chandimal made 107, his 15th test century and Mathews recorded his 16th. Dimuth Karunaratne made 77 runs. This is the first test match between the two countries since Afghanistan was admitted as a test playing nation in 2018.

Abbott leads Australia to series win against West Indies

AP ■ SYDNEY

Sean Abbott exhibited his all-rounder skills and powered Australia to a series deciding 83-run win over the West Indies in the second one-day international on Sunday. Abbott made a better than a run-a-ball 69 and lifted Australia to a competitive 258-9 at his home ground after West Indies won the toss and opted to field. The tall fast bowler then struck inside the batting powerplay before he picked up key wicket of Keacy Carty, who top-scored with 40, in his return spell to finish with 3-40 as West Indies was held to 175 all out in 43.3 overs. "We thought 220 would be competitive but were very competitive with partnerships, taking it over 250," Abbott said. "It's a really good (Australian) attack. It's such a good environment. I've been

enjoying it. Love getting out there and playing in front of a home crowd." Just like at the MCG two days ago where Australia romped to an eight-wicket win in the first game, the West Indies top order stuttered against pace in their run-chase. Abbott grabbed a superb catch at mid-off when Alick Athanaze tried to go hard at Aaron Hardie and Jason Greaves was well caught by debutante Will Sutherland over his head before Abbott had the West Indies reeling at 34-3 inside the first 10 overs. Carty and captain Shai Hope (29) rebuilt the chase with a 53-run stand before both fell in Josh Hazlewood's (3-43) and Abbott's return spells with the West Indies skipper losing his off stump to a brilliant Hazlewood ball that nipped back at the right-hander. Sutherland picked up 2-28 and Adam Zampa finished off the



West Indies timid batting when he had No. 10 Gudakesh Motie trapped leg before wicket in his final over.

Earlier, Australian top-order batters couldn't convert good starts before the home side was rescued by Abbott's career-best

ODI knock. Spinners Moti (3-28) and Roston Chase (0-40) conceded just two boundaries in 20 overs

between them before Abbott's countercharge against the fast bowlers. Jake Fraser-McGurk had an

eventful five deliveries on his ODI debut as he smacked a four and a six before edging Alzarri Joseph (2-74) in the first over and Josh Inglis (nine) was smartly caught by Roston Chase at point. Fraser-McGurk made his debut in place of Travis Head, who has been released from the squad for the remaining limited-overs games to rest ahead of the test series in New Zealand starting in late February. Sutherland made his debut and replaced fast bowler Xavier Bartlett, while Hazlewood returned in place of Lance Morris. Cameron Green (33) didn't hold back and smashed Joseph for three consecutive boundaries down the ground before captain Steven Smith dragged Matthew Forde back onto his stumps as the West Indies pacers kept striking at regular intervals inside the

powerplay. Green and Marnus Labuschagne (26) left Australia in a spot of bother at the 91-5 but Australia's inexperienced middle-order showed plenty of batting muscle. Hardie (26) and Matthew Short (41) combined for a half-century stand before Sutherland added further 57 runs with Abbott to give Australia a challenging total on a tricky wicket. Abbott smashed two successive sixes to Romario Shepherd (2-50) before he got deceived by the fast bowler's slower delivery and played on to his stumps, but his half-century proved enough to give Australia a 2-0 lead in the series. The last match of the series will be played at Canberra on Tuesday before both teams compete in a three-match T20 series, starting at Hobart on Friday.