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AAP, BJP protest against each other

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Rivals AAP and BJP held parallel protests against each other, a few hundred metres away from each other on the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) Marg, turning Central Delhi into a fortress with layers of barricades on roads and a large deployment of police personnel.

AAP workers were seen tearing off posters put up by BJP against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal while the BJP workers clashed with the police on Friday morning and broke down barricades to enter their headquarters. The party has been protesting over "corruption in the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)".

On the other side of the Capital, the Delhi Chief Minister was at the AAP headquarters, leading a stir over the recently declared Chandigarh mayoral election results, which the BJP had won.

A total 200 workers from both BJP and AAP were detained by the Delhi Police over the protests. The workers and leaders of both parties could not reach their planned protest sites covering a distance of hardly 800 metres owing to a wall of barricades and police personnel on the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) Marg.

The AAP had planned its demonstration against "cheating" in the mayoral elections in front of the BJP headquarters, and the BJP its protest over "corruption" in the



Ranjan Dimri

Arvind Kejriwal government in front of the AAP office. But workers and leaders of both parties could not reach their planned protest sites covering a distance of hardly 800 metres owing to a wall of barricades and police personnel on the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) Marg.

The AAP march began soon after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann left the protest site announcing peaceful protest to their party workers.

They asked them to stop where the Delhi police stops them.

On the other hand, hundreds of BJP workers and leaders held a protest at the AAP office at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, raised slogans against Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal and demanded his resignation.

Just not in central Delhi, police said "elaborate arrangements" had also been made on the national capital's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to maintain law and order.

"Over 200 workers of AAP and BJP were detained on Friday afternoon while they were marching towards each other's offices at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg here. At least, 27 workers of the AAP entering Delhi from the Singhu border (with Haryana) were detained by the Delhi Police. The protestors were taken to the Narela Industrial Area police station. The detained persons were released a few hours after verification," a senior officer said.

"We had already made elaborate arrangements with multi-layered barricades to stop the workers to reach to the party offices. About 150



Ranjan Dimri

workers from AAP and 60 from BJP have been detained and taken to separate police stations in buses," an official said.

An official said over 1,000 personnel were deployed around ITO and DDU Marg. Two companies of paramilitary comprising women staff and personnel from Delhi Police's armed unit were deployed at the DDU Marg with anti-riot gears and baton to control over the protestors, the official said.

The AAP alleged that Delhi assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, deputy mayor Aaley Mohd Iqbal and some of its leaders, including MLAs and councillors, have been placed under house arrest ahead of its protest. The BJP's protest was led by its Delhi unit head Virendra Sachdeva.

"Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel and Deputy

Mayor Aaley Mohammad Iqbal have been placed under house arrest. MLAs of Rajouri Garden, Bijwasan, Chhatarpur and Krishna Nagar, and councillors of Laxmi Nagar, Badli, Tri Nagar, Moti Nagar and Timarpur have also been placed under house arrest," Delhi Minister and AAP leader Gopal Rai told a press conference. He added that "police should issue a clarification on this".

"The job of police is to maintain law and order and not to spread anarchy. The way the police are arresting people and stopping them. It seems as if they are instigating people to spread anarchy," he alleged and added that this is an "unprecedented situation".

"The BJP and Narendra Modi's government are conveying that if you are with them, it's good, but even a slight oppo-

sition will lead to crushing through the help of police, ED, CBI, and other government agencies," the AAP leaders said.

In a post on X, earlier in the day, Kejriwal had said that, "First votes were stolen in the Chandigarh mayoral elections. Now, people coming to protest peacefully against this are being stopped at various places across Delhi."

Describing the scene around the AAP office, Rai said it has been turned into a "fortress" by police. "It seems that it is a protest by police. At various places, our party workers have been detained. We want to stage a peaceful protest. Events and protests have been organised earlier also by the AAP but never has such a large deployment been made by police," he said.

AAP leader Durgesh Pathak claimed that Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi was placed under house arrest and it seemed like the BJP has turned Delhi into a "jail".

In a post on X earlier, Delhi Minister and AAP leader Atishi said, "Heavy barricaded all across Delhi. Buses full of AAP volunteers being detained. Hundreds of paramilitary forces outside the AAP office."

"Why is the BJP so scared of a protest on the Chandigarh mayoral elections?" she asked. BJP leaders and workers, who gathered in large numbers in front of their party's office waving flags and with placards and posters criticising the Kejriwal, attacked his government, alleging it is corrupt.

Cops visit Kejriwal house to serve notice

AAP accuses BJP of poaching its MLAs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal alleged that the BJP was attempting to "buy" seven AAP MLAs to destabilise his Government, a team of Delhi Police Crime Branch visited the Chief Minister's residence to serve him a notice in the case.

But the notice could not be served to him because he was not present at his residence. However, the Chief Minister's Office said that the crime branch sleuths returned without handing over the notice as they were ready to take the notice. A team of crime branch of Delhi police also visited Delhi minister Atishi's residence but returned without serving her notice as she was not at her residence.

The sudden visit by the cops to Kejriwal's residence comes at a time when Kejriwal is on the radar of the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the liquor scam. Kejriwal skipped five summons by the agency so far calling the summons unconstitutional.

The Crime Branch's action comes after a BJP delegation met the Commissioner of Police, seeking an inquiry into Kejriwal's "misleading allegation of BJP luring AAP MLAs". However, the Delhi BJP had rubbished these allegations and challenged AAP to name the MLAs and the people who

allegedly contacted them with the offer.

Reacting on the development, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that Kejriwal has been exposed and now he refused to take the notice of the crime branch. Sachdeva said now that the Crime Branch has served notice to Kejriwal, he should either submit evidence to support his allegations or be prepared to face criminal proceedings. "We fail to understand why Kejriwal has refused to accept Crime Branch notice as he had said we have evidence of BJP luring hos MLAs," he added.

Kejriwal had alleged that the BJP made an offer of Rs 25 crore each to buy out seven of his MLAs. The BJP had filed a police complaint in the matter. The Delhi Police reports to the Union Home Ministry.

On January 27, Kejriwal took to X and said 'they' contacted 7 MLAs of AAP and said Kejriwal would be arrested shortly and after that there would be horse-trading of MLAs.

During a press conference held last week, Delhi Minister Atishi made allegations against the BJP, asserting that the party had offered Rs 25 crore each to seven of AAP's MLAs to encourage them to leave the party. Additionally, she claimed that the BJP had issued threats to overthrow the Kejriwal government.

JNU to start short term online courses

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) plans to introduce various short-term online learning courses for students across the country as it aims to foray into the e-learning segment this year. The varsity is working on modalities to develop infrastructure to support e-learning on campus catering to students belonging to underprivileged sections and residing in rural areas, they added.

JNU has received a HEFA loan of Rs 455 crore and is in the process of creating infrastructure to support faculty members to develop these courses," BS Balaji, chairperson, Special Center for E-learning, JNU said.

The university plans to set up a video recording room with camera, light, and sound proof facilities where teachers can hold or record these classes, he added. This year, JNU plans to introduce a four-credit and 15-week long massive open online course (MOOC) on Climate and Environment Protection

Twin protests choke Central Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Protests by the BJP and the AAP a few hundred metres apart on the DDU Marg here left commuters stranded in long traffic jams in Central Delhi as police barricaded roads and diverted vehicles. Bumper-to-bumper traffic was also witnessed on the National Highway-24 and National Highway-9 near Akshardham. There were long jams near India Gate, Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, Minto Road near Connaught Place, NH-24, Kashmiri Gate, IGBT, road connecting Anand Vihar to Shahdara border, Marginal Pusta Bund road, Mathura road. The commuters also posted on X on the heavy traffic at Sarai Kale Khan, on Vikas Marg near Preet Vihar and at Dayanand Vihar. The traffic was also affected near Town Hall Chadni Chowk.

Commuters in Central, East and north Delhi faced major disruptions as traffic movement was restricted on Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg due to ongoing demonstrations by AAP and BJP workers. While



Ranjan Dimri

the AAP staged a protest outside the BJP headquarters over alleged cheating in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, the BJP protested near the AAP's head office against "corruption" in the Kejriwal government. The police official said arrangements have been made in such a way that the workers of both the parties cannot come face-to-face. The headquarters of both the parties are on the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) Marg and the distance between them is less than 800 metres.

"As the DDU Marg has been

barricaded between ITO Chowk intersection and Minto Road crossing, traffic is being diverted on alternate routes for commuters travelling to and from New Delhi railway station from Ajmeri Gate side. Those coming from eastern parts of Delhi, Ghaziabad, and Noida or Sarai Kale Khan side are being asked to reach the railway station either via Delhi Gate or from Connaught Place circle," said a police officer. The officer added traffic personnel have been developed in sufficient numbers to assist commuters.

There was bumper-to-bumper traffic on Vikas Marg connecting central Delhi with east Delhi via Laxmi Nagar, the Ring Road from Sarai Kale Khan and Delhi-Meerut Expressway, the Delhi-Noida Direct flyway, Pragati Maidan tunnel, Purana Quila Road, Mathura Road towards ITO Chowk from Delhi Zoo, Netaji Subhash Marg from Daryaganj towards the ITO Chowk, and Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg from the Ring Road towards Ajmeri Gate. With barricades put up on several areas in Central Delhi, other roads too saw bumper-to-bumper traffic. "Diversions have been made for smooth flow of traffic. We are witnessing traffic on GT Karnal road and some parts of central Delhi. Staff have been deputed to manage the traffic jams," a senior official of the Delhi traffic police said. No traffic advisory regarding the traffic diversions or closure of the DDU Marg was issued until Friday afternoon. The social media handles of the traffic police were responding to the complaints regarding traffic disruptions.

Bomb hoax sparks panic in RK Puram school

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Public School in RK Puram on Friday received a bomb threat via email following which the premises were immediately vacated and a search operation launched, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said nothing suspicious was found during the search.

"With the help of school management, the fire brigade team, quick response teams and the police evacuated the school and launched a search operation. A prima facie investigation suggested that it seemed to be a hoax bomb threat. We have asked our cyber unit and other teams to track the IP address of the email," he said.

"The school and hostel have been thoroughly searched by the bomb detection team (BDT) and dog squad but nothing was found suspicious by the teams. Further investigation into the matter is underway. No FIR has been registered so far," Meena said.

Police said that the school received an email about two bombs on the premises around 9 am after which the administration immediately informed the police about the matter.

"More than 500 people, including students, vacated the building. We also asked the management to stay calm and arrange buses to send students and teachers back to their homes safely," Meena said, adding that the management announced an off for the day. No immediate reaction was received from the school. In September last year, the Lal Bahadur Shastri School in RK Puram received an email about a bomb on the premises that later turned out to be a hoax.

In May, the Delhi Public School in Mathura Road received a similar hoax email about a bomb. The Indian School in Sadiq Nagar received two bomb threats, the last on April 12, 2023, via email. The first one was over phone in November 2022. Both turned out to be hoaxes.

Family of slain student protests, seeks action against school head

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Family members of a 12-year-old boy who died after he was allegedly beaten up by his seniors at a Government school here staged a protest on Friday, demanding action against its principal. They along with others held the demonstration in front of the school in north Delhi. Police on Thursday had registered a case of culpable homicide in connection with the incident. During their protest, family members demanded strict action against the school's principal.

"We have met the principal many times just to tell him that he must take strict action against those seniors. We requested CCTV camera footage, but we were sent back with only assurances," a family member said.

On January 20, information was received from the Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital regarding the death of the boy during treatment, according to police.

Mamata on dharna for Central funds

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday began a two-day dharna that was likely to be stretched further if the State's demand for release of locked up funds towards the payment of 100-days work and other projects were not met soon.

Attacking the Centre for influencing the Comptroller and Auditor General report on the issue Banerjee said, "they are not sending us the funds citing the CAG reports and alleging that we had not sent them the utilization certificates but it is completely untrue as we have sent all the utilisation certificates of funds that had been sent to us earlier."

Saying that she had written a "strong letter" to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Banerjee said "during the present regime "most of the agencies and high constitutional offices have been made subservient to the BJP".

In the letter to the Prime Minister the Chief Minister wrote, "In the State finance audit report it has been reported that there has been a delay in submission of report of utilisation certificate ... however the concerned departments of State Government had submitted the reports" on time and that "you are well aware that ... there is no pending utilisation certificate ... hence it is shocking to say that high constitutional office of CAG" too had submitted wrong reports.

While the State Government has been claiming that the Centre has not been clearing the MNREGA funds to the tune of ₹7,000 crore held up for the past two years the BJP have been insisting that the State had not sent the utilisation certificates to the Centre.

"They have not sent the utilization certificates because they don't have the face to send it as there has been large-scale corruption by the way of generating fake job cards," BJP State president Sukanta Majumdar said.

Banerjee also alleged that not only MNREGA funds the Centre was not clearing funds worth more than ₹1 lakh crore earmarked for various schemes like rural housing, health, roads and



other infrastructure development projects.

"They take away thousands of crores from the State as GST but refuse to give back our share of it ... this is defiance of federal structure ... the money belongs to the people of the State and you have to give it," she said adding, "payment of (MNREGA) wages to the workers who have already worked is a constitutional duty and the workers' constitutional right and if it is not paid then the defaulter should go to jail."

On the Budget Banerjee said it was not an "interim but an Antim (last) Budget" of the present regime. "In the Budget they were talking about past and future but nothing was said about the youth the women and the poor who are suffering under this regime," she said adding how the Centre has allowed an unprecedented inflation which stood to a staggering 10 percent.

She said, "apart from high inflation rate which is due to high petroleum prices including kerosene and gas — which has been reduced by ₹2000 today due to polls but will again increased by ₹400 after that — they have allowed unemployment rate to go up to 40 percent ... they are befooling the youth and diverting their attention to other issues."

On the Centre's water scheme Ghar Ghar Jal Banerjee said "whereas a cumulative 75 percent of the share including maintenance, initial funds and labour is spend by the State they want to use it for their own advertisement ... they want to hijack everything."

Will visit Delhi for One nation One election meeting: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that she would be going to Delhi to attend the meeting on One nation, One election but iterated the concept single vote for the country was unrealistic and outlandish.

"I will be going to Delhi on 5th February to attend the meeting on 'One nation, One election' on 6th February ... it will not be a political visit but an official one though I have already made my mind clear about what I think about the idea," Banerjee said adding such a system was being aimed at converting India into a presidential system.

"I have already made my opinion clear earlier ... this concept of one nation one vote is unrealistic because you will have to explain as to what will happen to the governments that are already in their midsession ... what will happen during the transition period," Banerjee said adding "suppose where there are governments which have their sessions till 2024, 2025 or 2026 how will you propose to bring them in one place ... or are you planning something different?"

Smelling rat in the "entire scheme of things," Banerjee asked, "are you really meaning

to do something constructive or you are have some different motive ... that you want to make a presidential form of government where there will be one vote, one president, one monarch, one view point one food, one language, pone dress." Alleging that the concept of One nation, One election was akin to what was happening in the BJP-ruled States like MP, UP, Rajasthan etc where the non-vegetarian shops were being brought down by pay-loaders, Banerjee said, "in all the BJP ruled States of Rajasthan, MP, UP they are closing down egg, meat and fish shops ... many shops they are pulling down with bulldozers ... you can have your food habits I have my own ... I don't too support vegetarianism but why will you dictate me on my foods or what I will wear or what colour I will prefer ... I want to ask only one question that what the people who do not prefer vegetarian food eat ... will they eat agarbatti ashes," Banerjee said adding One nation, One election was a prelude to final hegemony of the BJP led Centre.

"I will request you all who are planning to buy clothes to wait for some more time so that you do not have to waste your garments because tomorrow they will ask you to wear a particular colour only," Banerjee said.

Bengal CM says she too has built temples

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Apparently uneasy about the impact that January 22 inauguration of Ram Temple at Ayodhya could produce on the coming general elections, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that she too had constructed temples and revived them but never made a political issue out of it.

Stopping short of naming Prime Minister Narendra Modi the Chief Minister said, "I too have renovated and constructed many temples and religious places but never have made a political issue out of it like it is done in many places after inaugurating temples ... my question is why we should join politics with religion."

Banerjee who had chosen not to speak much on the Ram Temple inauguration before said, "we have renovated the Kalghat Temple and other similar temples at Dakshineswar, Kankalitala, Nalhateshwari, Jalpeshwar and many other religious places ... even we are constructing the replica of the Puri Jagannath Temple at Digha which is much bigger than the original one ... the only difference is that unlike the Puri Temple where the idol is made of Neem wood ours will be made of marble stone ... so many work we have done on religious places..."

LG grants permission to ACB to file case against PWD engineer

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has accorded permission to the Anti-Corruption Branch for registration of a case against an executive engineer of the city government's PWD for allegedly misusing his official position, Raj Niwas officials said on Friday.

The LG has accorded approval under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) for registration of case against the executive engineer for allegedly causing undue loss to the government exchequer in the work of strengthening of road at the Guru Harkishan Marg from Britannia Chowk of the Outer Ring Road at West Enclave.

The LG had earlier granted permission to register case against four other officers of the Public Works Department (PWD) in the same matter. The LG had earlier granted permission to register case against four other officers of the PWD in the same matter.

A complaint filed on 19.05.2017 alleged that the payments were made to the contractor Mohd Iqbal, owner of M/s MHA Construction Pvt Ltd without proper verification of work at the site, as no work



was undertaken, rather it has been just a paper exercise. It was also alleged that the work of strengthening of Road No 43 Guru Har Kishan Marg was awarded for Rs 11,59,66,020/- which was 24.31 per cent below the estimated cost of Rs 15,32,11,811/- to the contractor and was to be executed between 20.12.2013 and 09.07.2014. However, the work was never carried out and was fraudulently shown to be completed on 10.04.2015.

In the same matter, the ACB had after conducting the preliminary enquiry, registered a complaint against other PWD officers - Ajay Kumar, Amar Singh (both Assistant Engineers), Sunil Singh and Narender Kumar (Both Junior Engineers) - against whom the LG had earlier accorded permission for registration of case u/s 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act.



OPINION 6 TANK ZORAWAR TO RULE THE BATTLEFIELD

WORLD 8 US BOLSTERS DEFENCES AROUND JORDAN BASE

MONEY 10 7 PER CENT GROWTH RATE NEXT YEAR EMINENTLY DOABLE: DEA SECRETARY

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JAISWAL 179 GIVES INDIA UPPER HAND 12 SPORTS

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Mamata abandons INDIA Bloc

TMC chief mocks Rahul, says Congress will not win even 40 LS seats

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

For the first time after confirming her "ekla chalo" policy in Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee directly attacked the Congress party on Friday, said that with all the yatras and rallies they were undertaking in the country, they would not be able to win even 40 seats in the Parliamentary elections. Launching a scathing attack on the Bengal leg of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra, where Banerjee's arch-rival CPI(M) made a full-blast appearance, the West Bengal Chief Minister said, "I had told them, as a constituent of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), that the Congress should contest from 300 seats, and the remaining 245 seats the INDIA partners will fight. There, the Congress must not interfere. But what we saw here, without informing me, they have come here in a Yatra."



Directly refuting the Congress' claims that it had repeatedly requested Banerjee to join the Yatra in Bengal, Banerjee said, "Why don't you go to Rajasthan, UP, and MP where you used to be strong and which places you have lost to the BJP? You have come to disturb us here as vote cutters." She continued, "You may be a bigger party, but such is your arrogance that you do not even have the courtesy to respect others."

INDIA. Why did you start your Yatra from Bengal and not any other place?" Comparing Rahul to Vasant Kokil (cuckoo) or any other bird, Banerjee said, "Some people appear during or before the elections and then simply vanish, whereas we work for the people throughout the entire year.

Here, some people are going to bid workers as though they are bidders, and indulge in selfies, but such tactics will not work in Bengal because only the TMC can take on the BJP here and no one else." Stating that the Congress had rejected her proposal on seat sharing, she said, "We had offered them two seats, which

they cannot win alone, but they are asking for many more seats. Then I told them to contest from all the seats and came out of the discussion, deciding to contest alone." Meanwhile, Rahul's Yatra of Bengal ended on Friday when it entered neighbouring Jharkhand via Birbhum district.

Kejriwal skips ED summons again; protests across Delhi

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal skipped the fifth summons issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday for questioning in a money laundering case linked to an alleged liquor policy scam. Instead, he joined AAP leaders and workers in a protest near the BJP headquarters on DDU Marg. The ED issued a fresh summons on Wednesday, marking the fifth time, after Kejriwal had previously skipped four summons over the last four months. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said that Kejriwal will not appear before the agency for questioning. Terming the summons "illegal", the party stated that the ED is repeatedly sending notices to Kejriwal with the intention of arresting him. The AAP also alleged that the BJP aims to topple its government in Delhi by having Kejriwal arrested. The AAP asserted that it will not allow this to happen. Days after Kejriwal alleged that the BJP was attempting to "buy" seven AAP MLAs to destabilise his government, a team of Delhi Police Crime Branch visited the Chief Minister's residence to serve him a notice in the case. But the notice could not be served



BJP supporters raise slogans during a protest against the AAP Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

to him because he was not present at his residence. Meanwhile, the BJP challenged the AAP to take the matter to court and have the ED summons issued to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal quashed if the party believes it is "illegal". North East Delhi BJP MP Manoj Tiwari pointed out that Kejriwal has skipped five summonses from the ED so far and questioned whether Kejriwal wants to convey the message to the children of Delhi not to follow the law. Tiwari said, "But by skipping ED summonses, he acknowledges that corruption has occurred, and he is also guilty." Union Minister and senior BJP leader Meenakshi

Lekhi, in the Parliament House complex, said that Kejriwal is avoiding the ED for questioning because he knows that corruption has occurred and is attempting to evade accountability to the probe agency. Kejriwal has skipped ED summonses for November 2 and December 21 in 2023, as well as January 3 and January 18 this year, labeling these notices as illegal. Addressing protesting AAP workers on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, Kejriwal attacked the BJP, saying that if it can "rig" the Chandigarh mayoral polls, it could go to any extent in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Continued on Page 4

Parliament erupts over Congress MP's southern nation demand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The demand for a separate nation comprising the southern States of India by Congress Lok Sabha member DK Suresh created a hornet's nest on Friday, with the ruling party BJP and the Opposition Congress engaged in a war of words both inside and outside Parliament. This also led to protests by BJP members who alleged that the grand old party has a tradition of dividing the nation, which still persists. The BJP said Congress leader DK Suresh has no right to remain an MP even for a minute, as it accused him of openly talking about breaking India, violating his oath to protect the country's unity and sovereignty. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi demanded an apology from Congress Parliamentary Chairperson Sonia Gandhi over Suresh's demand for a separate nation comprising



southern States, alleging bias in budgetary allocations. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in his capacity as Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, condemned the statement made by his party colleague, although he mentioned that the MP has already clarified. "We will not tolerate any statement that calls for breaking the country. That statement may be from any party, be it from my party or

their (BJP) party, or somebody else. Whether someone says it or not, I, Mallikarjun Kharge, will say that India is one from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and will remain one. It is for this cause that Indra Gandhi gave the supreme sacrifice of her life, and Rajiv Gandhi gave his life. Can such a party talk of breaking the country? We will not tolerate such a thing." It is not correct to repeat in the House what Suresh has not said, he added. Raising the issue during the

Zero Hour in Parliament, Joshi said that Congress member Suresh had demanded a separate nation comprising southern States. He said that the remarks were an insult to the Constitution and its architect, Babasaheb Ambedkar. "I condemn the statement of the Congress member and demand that the matter be referred to the Ethics Committee of the Lok Sabha," Joshi asserted. Members of the Opposition INDIA bloc, including the Congress and the DMK, were on their feet trying to make some point as Joshi made the statement in the House. They later walked out for a brief while. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla called the Opposition members to make their point after the laying of parliamentary papers on the table of the House. "I think they have boycotted the proceedings," the Speaker remarked, referring to the empty Opposition benches. Continued on Page 4

HC refuses to stay puja at Gyanvapi Mosque cellar

PTI PRAYAGRAJ

The Allahabad High Court on Friday did not give any immediate relief to the Gyanvapi Masjid committee which had challenged the order of the Varanasi court allowing Hindu prayers in a cellar of the mosque. The court will now hear the matter on February 6. Justice Rohit Ranjan Agrawal passed the order while hearing an appeal filed by the committee, which looks after the affairs of the mosque. The Anzuman Intezamia Masjid Committee had moved the high court within hours of the Supreme Court refusing to hear their plea against the Varanasi district court's order and asking them to approach the HC. The Varanasi court had ruled on Wednesday that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the mosque. Appearing on behalf of the committee, advocate SFA Naqvi submitted before the court that the order was passed in a "very hurried manner" and on the day of retirement of the judge concerned.

Champai sworn in as Jharkhand CM



PRANAV PRATYUSH RANCHI

Senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader and six-time MLA Champai Soren took the oath of office and secrecy on Friday, becoming the 12th Chief Minister of Jharkhand. In a simple ceremony at the Darbar Hall of

Raj Bhawan on Friday, Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered the oath to Champai Soren and two ministers — Congress Legislature Party leader in the State Alamgir Alam and the lone MLA of Rashtriya Janata Dal, Satyanand Bhokta. The swearing-in ceremony followed 40 hours of political uncertainty in the State, as the former Chief Minister was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate after resigning from his post. There was no government in the State between Wednesday at 8 pm and Friday at 12.15 pm. According to sources, there were discussions about the possibility of former CM Hemant Soren's brother, Basant Soren, being sworn in as a Minister, but the decision could not be finalised until the last moment. Immediately after the swearing-in ceremony, Chief Minister Champai Soren and two ministers visited Sido Kanhu Park, where they paid tributes to the martyrs of Santhal Pargana. Continued on Page 4

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Modi to launch projects in Odisha, Assam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Odisha and Assam on February 3-4 to lay the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure and connectivity projects. On Saturday, the PM will dedicate to the nation projects worth over ₹68,000 crore during a public programme in Sambalpur, Odisha before travelling to Assam on Sunday to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of various development initiatives worth more than ₹11,000 crore during a public programme in Guwahati.

In Sambalpur, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the 'Dhamra — Angul Pipeline Section' (412 Km) of the 'Jagdishpur-Haldia & Bokaro-Dhamra Pipeline Project (JHBDPL)'. Built at a cost of



more than ₹2,450 crore under the 'Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga', the project will connect Odisha with the National Gas Grid. He will also lay the foundation stone of 'Nagpur Jharsuguda Natural Gas Pipeline Section' (692 Km) of the Mumbai-Nagpur-Jharsuguda Pipeline. The project to be developed at a cost of more than ₹2,660 crore will improve the availability of natural gas to states like Odisha, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

During the programme, PM Modi will also dedicate to the nation and lay the foundation stone of multiple power projects worth about 28,980 crore. He will lay the foundation stone of the Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) Talabira Thermal power project worth more than 27,000 crore. Strengthening the PM's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat,

this state-of-the-art project will provide reliable, affordable and round-the-clock power contributing significantly to the nation's energy security and playing a vital role in the country's economic growth and prosperity. The prime minister will also inaugurate coal infrastructure projects of Mahanadi Coalfields Limited including Sambalpur Railway Station, whose architecture is inspired from the Sailashree Palace. He will also dedicate the Sambalpur-Talcher Doubling Railway Line (168 Kms) and Jhartarba to Sonepur New Railway line (21.7 kms), enhancing the rail network capacity in the region. Prime Minister will also flag off Puri-Sonepur-Puri Weekly Express, which will improve connectivity for the rail passengers in the region.

In Guwahati, the PM will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of projects worth ₹11,000 crore. Providing world-class amenities to people visiting pilgrim sites has been a key focus area of the PM. In yet another step in this endeavour, one of the key projects for which the foundation stone will be laid by him includes Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana

AICTE: Interim Budget speaks volume for Viksit Bharat by 2047

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

AICTE chairman Professor ATG Sitharam on Friday said the Interim Budget 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks volume for Viksit Bharat by 2047.

"The people centric approach, growth oriented policies and highly inclusive announcements of the budget aligns with the motto of New India which focus on 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan'. Termed as the Viksit Bharat Budget, it facilitates the Yuva Peedhi as beneficiaries of New India and paved the way for the youth to flourish more in the field of innovation and research and

development," the AICTE chairman said. Budget for 'GYAN' (Garib, Yuva, Annadata, Nari) Sitharam said the announcement of the 'Jai Anusandhan' scheme is most promising and relevant for India's new generation.

Decoding the Potential Benefits of ₹1 lakh crore Corpus, he said this fund is designed to offer a robust financial foundation for cutting-edge research and development, particularly in emerging sectors. "By providing long-term financing or refinancing options characterized by extended durations and minimal to zero interest rates, the initiative aims to stimulate the private sector's involvement in scaling up research and innovation efforts.

INDIA Bloc cricket team with 11 captains: BJP in LS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A BJP member in Lok Sabha on Friday took a swipe at the Opposition by dubbing the INDIA Bloc as a cricket team with 11 captains not willing to accommodate other players. Initiating the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address, Heena Gavit said INDIA bloc leaders were like 'Big Boss' participants who live under one roof but everyone eyes the 'trophy' of becoming the prime minister.

After moving the motion, she said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is witnessing all-round development and hence, it will not be surprising that INDIA bloc



leaders start switching sides one after the other. Describing TMC leader Mamata Banerjee as the "captain" of West Bengal, Gavit said she is unwilling to accommodate Congress in her team. Similarly, she said, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal is

the captain of Punjab who is treating Congress as the 12th member of the team. Gavit, who represents Nandurbar (Maharashtra) in the Lok Sabha, said people will once again vote for Modi in the upcoming parliamentary elections and his government will present a full-fledged Union Budget in the coming days.

It was remarkable to note, she said, that a woman president addressed the joint sitting of the two Houses on January 31 and the next day a woman finance minister presented an interim Budget. She said now she, a woman MP who represents a tribal area, was moving the motion to thank the president for her address.

Scindia discusses changes in airport interior design

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya M Scindia held a meeting with an advisory committee involving top officials of Airport Authority of India, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru to discuss possible changes in airport interior design and use of new technologies to expedite immigration and security check processes for international passengers. The meeting delved into solutions derived from studying international airport models such as those of Singapore and Canada. According to officials, use of biometrics, cross utilisation of X ray machines and increasing number of security



machines will help in making the check in process faster for the passengers. To ensure proper movement of machines from one place to another, changes in existing airport designs will be explored, an official said. With respect to deploying new technologies, the "proof of concept trials for use of e-gates and e-biometrics for immigration are already underway". Further, a thorough analysis has been undertaken with regard to manpower requirement of CISF and immigration officers. This analysis takes into account the planned expansion of existing as well as new airports, including those coming up in Jewar and Navi Mumbai, the release said.

Congress leader accuses BJP of misgovernance in LS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Friday accused the BJP Government of misgovernance which he said was reflected in decisions such as demonetisation, growing unemployment and transgressions along the country's borders.

Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks on President's Address in the Lok Sabha, Gogoi also accused the government of resorting to distracting the attention of the nation from economic distress and trying to muzzle the voice of the opposition by unleashing central investigation agencies on its leaders.

"I wish to say... That we (the opposition) will not be scared by such tactics... The nation is not run by some divine powers, but as per the Constitution," Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, said amid strong objections from the treasury benches.

The Congress leader also accused the BJP of hatching a well-thought-out plot to transform this Parliament from a temple of democracy to a royal court.

"This government has a doctorate in event management. They have a PhD in attention management. When we ask why didn't the prime minister go to Manipur, they say look at the G20, the prime minister is in Paris. When we say 100 people died during demonetisa-

tion, they say look at Modi's face on Paytm," he said. "When we raise questions on China entering our territory, they try to divert the attention by saying that 'we are more powerful than the Maldives'. When we say 10 per cent of the population is controlling 50 per cent of the country's wealth, they claim to be the fastest-growing economy," Gogoi said. The Congress leader said he respected the prime minister a lot as he has risen to the top position from very humble beginnings.

"But the sad part is that he has taken his chair to such a height that he cannot listen to the problems faced by the people. He cannot see the tears of the unemployed youth," Gogoi said. The Congress leader said in search of jobs, a number of unemployed youths have been resorting to illegal immigration to go to America. "A few days back a movie called 'Dunki' was released. Dunki is not merely a movie, it is the reality," Gogoi said. He said the government itself has admitted that the trend of illegal immigration by Indian nationals has increased in the last five years.

"In 2022-23, 90,000 people tried to enter the US illegally, sometimes from Canada, sometimes from Mexico. They are forced to go to UAE, Canada and America leaving their families and homes behind," Gogoi said, alleging that the prime minister was ignorant about this.

Indian Navy foils yet another piracy attempt off Somalia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy has foiled yet another piracy attempt off Somalia and rescued 19 crew members including eight Pakistanis of an Iranian flagged fishing vessel on Friday, officials said here. Indian warships in the past few weeks have carried similar missions thereby ensuring security of sea lanes. Giving details of the latest mission, Navy officials said here swift response by Indian Navy foiled another piracy attempt along East coast of Somalia. Information regarding piracy attempt on Fishing Vessel FV Omari was monitored on

January 31. Indian Navy successfully located FV Omari and INS Sharda, deployed for anti-piracy mission in the region was diverted to intercept the boat. FV Omari, an Iranian Flagged Vessel, had been boarded by seven pirates who had taken the crew as hostages. INS Sharda intercepted the vessel in early hours of Friday and coerced the pirates for safe release of crew along with the vessel. The ship has ensured successful release of the crew (11 Iranian and 08 Pakistani nationals) members along with the boat. The ship also undertook confirmatory boarding



on FV Omari to sanitise and check on the well-being of the crew who had been held captive by the Somali pirates. Relentless efforts by Indian Naval platforms, mission deployed for anti-piracy and

seven incidents of hijacking of vessels on high seas by pirates have been reported during the last three years. One hijacking incident of merchant vessel Lila Norfolk. 21 crew were present including 15 Indian nationals onboard on January 04-05 this year. Further, two hijacking incidents occurred involving Fishing Vessel - Iman (January 28) and Fishing Vessel - Al Naeemi (January 29) which did not have any Indian crew onboard. These details came in the backdrop of the Indian Navy warships rescuing crew from the two fishing vessels and chasing away pirates. Indian Navy has been proac-

tively engaging with the regional and extra-regional navies and maritime forces, to promote maritime security. Since 2008, Indian Navy has deployed units in Gulf of Aden and East Coast of Africa towards antipiracy patrols, minister of state for defence Ajay Bhatt said in the Lok Sabha. A total of 3,440 ships and over 25,000 seafarers have been safely escorted. For restoring maritime security in the region, enhanced presence of ships, aerial surveillance by maritime patrol aircraft and remotely piloted aircraft in the Central Arabian Sea and Off East of Coast of Somalia is being undertaken by Indian Navy.

403 Indian students died abroad since 2018, informs Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The government informed Parliament on Friday that a total of 403 incidents of death of Indian students abroad have been reported since 2018 due to various reasons including natural causes, accidents and medical conditions with Canada topping the list with 91 cases followed by 48 in the UK. Giving these details in the Lok Sabha, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said the welfare of Indian students abroad is one of the foremost priorities for the government. "As per the information available with the ministry, 403 incidents of death of Indian students abroad have been reported since 2018 due to various reasons including natural causes, accidents and medical conditions," he said. Jaishankar was replying to a question on safety of Indian students abroad. "Indian missions/posts abroad respond to any issues faced by Indian students on priority basis," he said. Jaishankar also provided the country-wise details of deaths of Indian students abroad since 2018. The data showed 91 Indian students died in Canada, 48 in the UK, 40 in Russia, 36 in the US, 35 in Australia, 21 in Ukraine and 20 in Germany. According to the statistics, 14 Indian students died in Cyprus, 10 each in Philippines and

Italy and nine each in Qatar, China and Kyrgyzstan. To a separate question, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said India's policy towards Palestine has been long standing and consistent. "We have supported a negotiated two State solution, towards establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine within secure and recognised borders, living side by side in peace with Israel," he said. The minister said India has strongly condemned the October 7 terror attacks on Israel and the loss of civilian lives in the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. "We have called for restraint and de-escalation and emphasized peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy," he said. To a separate question, Minister of State for External Affairs RajKumar Ranjan Singh said India's 'Neighbourhood First policy' continues to guide its approach towards the management of relations with countries in its immediate neighbourhood. He said the policy is an institutional priority for all the relevant arms of the government. "The Neighbourhood First policy, inter alia, has resulted in enhancing physical, digital and people to people connectivity across the region, as well as augmenting trade and commerce," Singh said.

India, Maldives holding talks on continued operation of Indian military on island

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and the Maldives are holding crucial talks on Friday with a focus on finding a mutually workable solution to enable continued operation of the Indian military platforms in the island nation. The second meeting of the India-Maldives high level core group is underway in Delhi over two weeks after the first one in Male could not make any significant headway on the contentious matter, sources said here. The core group meeting is underway with a focus on finding a mutually acceptable solution. The two sides decided to set up the core group following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maldivian President Muizzu on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai in December. Last month, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu asked India to withdraw all its military personnel from the island nation by March 15. At present, around 80 Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft which carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions. The ties between the two countries came under some strain since Muizzu came to power in November. After assuming charge, Muizzu, widely seen as



a pro-China leader, maintained he will keep his election promise of evicting Indian military personnel from his country. Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male. Muizzu was sworn in as the new Maldivian president on November 17. A day after taking charge of the top office, he called for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel from the Maldives. After the first meeting of the core group on January 14, the Ministry of External Affairs said sides were looking at finding a mutually workable solution to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medical evacuation services to the people of Maldives.

Kejriwal... Parliament erupts...

From Page 3 The demonstration was initially planned in front of the BJP headquarters, a few hundred meters away on DDU Marg, but AAP members could not reach there due to heavy police deployment and barricading. Kejriwal pointed out that the world's largest party was caught on camera 'stealing' votes in the Chandigarh mayoral polls. Earlier, the AAP had alleged that some of its leaders, including MLAs and councillors, were placed under house arrest or detained, while its volunteers were prevented from participating in a protest outside the BJP headquarters here. The protest was attended by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

Champai...

From Page 3 Soren, along with the ministers, also went to Birs Chowk to pay respects to Bhagwan Birs Munda, offering flowers at his statue. Later in the day, the Champai Soren Cabinet held its first Cabinet meeting. During the meeting, a decision was made to convene a special session of the Assembly on February 5 and 6. The government will undergo a floor test during this session. Notably, Champai Soren has submitted a signed letter of support from 43 MLAs to the Governor to claim a majority in the House.

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Former law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, at a press conference, criticised Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, along with their India bloc allies, for maintaining a "conspicuous silence" over his "shameful" and "unconstitutional" comments.

Prasad emphasised that before contesting an election and after winning it, anyone takes an oath of allegiance to the Constitution and the country's unity and sovereignty. "He has committed a gross impropriety as an MP by openly talking of the breakup of India. It is a clear violation of the constitution's main point of unity and integrity," he said. In a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, who had led his party's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' earlier and is now spearheading the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', the BJP leader said that he is supposedly working to unite the country but has now disowned the comments of his party's MP. Rejecting the Congress MP's charge of discrimination, he mentioned that Modi had recently inaugurated a Boeing facility in Karnataka, and the state has been given a tax share of over Rs 1.35 lakh crore during 2014-19, against Rs 53,996 crore during 2009-14 when the Congress-led UPA was in power. Union Minister Piyush Goyal also sought an apology from the Congress for the controversial statement by the party MP. Kharge said Suresh

is not a member of the Rajya Sabha, and therefore, his conduct cannot be debated in the House. However, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said that his earlier rulings had made it clear that the statement by a Lok Sabha MP can be discussed in the Upper House. "Congress leaders have made sacrifices for the country," he said, adding that the MP in question has clarified on TV that he did not state what is being reported. If he has said anything, the matter should be looked into by the privileges committee (of Lok Sabha), Kharge said. Goyal had read out the English translation of the statement Suresh made in Kannada on Thursday. The MP from the Bengaluru Rural constituency had purportedly stated that southern states are not receiving their dues as taxes collected from them are being distributed in the north. He purportedly said that the southern states would be forced to demand a separate nation if the injustice was not rectified. Calling himself a 'proud Indian', Congress MP DK Suresh issued a clarification for his "separate country for South India" remark, saying the intention behind his statement was to bring to notice the "injustice in funds distribution" by the BJP-led central government. A BJP leader from Dakshina Kannada lodged a complaint against Suresh at JMFC Court in Mangaluru and Mangaluru North police demanding action against the Congress MP under section 124A (Sedition).



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Taking stock

Centre may release a White Paper before Lok Sabha polls on UPA Govt's 'economic mismanagement'

As the Lok Sabha elections draw near, the Government is considering a White Paper highlighting apparent economic mismanagement by the UPA Government before 2014. This document aims to shed light on the economic policies and decisions that may have shaped India's financial trajectory before this pivotal year. The period before 2015 witnessed a variety of economic challenges and opportunities for India. The global crisis of 2008 had a profound impact on economy, and India was not exempt from its repercussions. However, the years leading up to 2015 also saw robust economic growth, technological advancements and increased foreign direct investment. The Government's planned move indicates a desire to scrutinise economic decisions made during this period, potentially aiming to highlight any perceived mismanagement that may have influenced the nation's financial standing. After assuming office, the Modi Government implemented several economic reforms and initiatives. One of the landmark policies was the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, which aimed to simplify the indirect tax structure and create a unified market. The 'Make in India' initiative, launched in 2014, sought to boost manufacturing and transform India into a global manufacturing hub. This initiative, coupled with efforts to improve the ease of doing business, aimed at attracting foreign investment and spur growth. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, also launched in 2014, aimed at financial inclusion by providing access to banking services for all. It played a crucial role in expanding the reach of formal financial services.



The Government's initiative to release a White Paper on economic policies before 2015 reflects a commitment to transparency, allowing the nation to scrutinise the events and evaluate the performance of the previous administration. However, it would have been more comprehensive if the Government also presented a similar paper on economic management from 2015 to now, allowing the citizens a fair opportunity to assess the decade's economic governance. While the post-2015 period has seen several commendable economic initiatives, there have also been challenges and criticisms. There have been instances of economic imbroglis in recent times which the current dispensation would not be proud of. The implementation of demonetisation, for instance, faced backlash due to disruptions in cash-dependent sectors, leading to short-term economic slowdowns. The introduction of GST, while a significant structural reform, encountered implementation challenges and criticism from businesses and taxpayers. The global economic slowdown, exacerbated by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, also posed challenges for India's economy in the recent past. The need for economic recovery and issues like unemployment and inflation are still a cause of concern. Indeed, it is crucial to critically assess the economic landscape objectively and transparently so that we can all cast our vote as informed citizens.

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PICTALK



Tourists play with snow after fresh snowfall, in Shimla

Tank Zorawar to rule the battlefield

Tank Zorawar is expected to dominate the proceedings of war with its fleet-footedness, adaptability and instinct for battle on punishing high altitudes

Legendary (and sadly unsung) Dogra General, Zorawar Singh, is arguably the boldest, noblest and most successful Indian warrior whose unparalleled conquests entailed far-flung regions of Ladakh, Baltistan, Skardu and even areas up to Western Tibet (Ngari Khorsum). Military historians who realise the audacity and incredibility of his valour refer to him as 'Napoleon of India'. History is rife with heroics of horse-mounted Dogra cavaliers, who were especially effective in mountain warfare at unforgiving heights of what is current-day Chinese territory. Unbeknownst to most Indian citizenry, the name 'Zorawar' struck fear in those distant lands and indeed there was a fearless and dashing Indian General who conquered large tracts of lands that are today in the control of either the Chinese or the Pakistanis. Recognising the surreal spirit of Zorawar, the local Tibetans built a Chorten (cenotaph) calling it 'Singh ba Chorten' (Cenotaph of the 'Singh Warrior').

Today, Zorawar's forts silently dot the rugged and unforgiving heights of the region. His gallant Dogra clan celebrate his memory with statues of a horse-born Zorawar wielding a sword in the Duggar land (Dogra region of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and parts of Punjab). Zorawar's proud progeny bear his bust with pride and josh in Regiments like the Dogra Regiment and the direct inheritors of J&K State Forces i.e., Jammu & Kashmir Rifles. With time, the territories that Zorawar's legendary horsemen conquered were lost to the proverbial 'other' and the evolution of time ensured that the dynamics of warfare changed too. Soon, the metalead battle tanks became the new horse, in terms of daring spirit, mechanized efficacy and fine lineage. Horse cavalry gave way to the Armoured Corps. The advent of the Twentieth Century saw the tanks make their roaring entry with decisive roles with the likes of fabled Panzer divisions of the German Army. While Panzer then itself was a relatively light



tank (25 tons), the platform of tanks soon became deadlier, larger and more powerful, and therefore decidedly heavier with the likes of T-90 (48 tons), M1A2 (63 tons), Leopard (67 tons) to our very own Arjun MK 1-A (69 tons). Even though the French-built AMX light tanks (17 tons) acquitted themselves with great utility and efficacy against the Chinese forces in the Chushul sector, preventing the Chinese advance to Leh - the concept of light tanks soon gave way to more 'loaded' heavier tanks. Secondly, the morphing of Pakistan as the 'enemy number one' in sovereign imagination and the consequential impact of thinking shifted the tank territories to the deserts of Rajasthan or the plains of Punjab and Jammu region necessitating import, manufacture, or development of tanks like T-54/T-55, T-62, T-72 and later the Arjun. After multiple hitches and improvements, the Arjun was ultimately believed to have fared well when equated to T-92 - but it also became suspect for certain roads, bridges, and canals along the Pakistan border, given its weight. To deploy the same in the higher reaches of battlegrounds once conquered by Zorawar's cavalry was impossible.

Recent years have seen a clear revision of the primary enemy and the same is now China,



RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN A CLEAR REVISIONING OF THE PRIMARY ENEMY AND THE SAME IS NOW CHINA, WITH BLOODY FACE-OFFS HAPPENING IN THE SUMMER OF 2020

with the bloody face-offs happening in the Summer of 2020. Eerily, much of the tense Sino-Indian theatre is the same as the one that was once ably dominated by the band of Zorawar's Dogra Army. Criticalities of war preparedness and its starting deficiencies threw up the issue of tanks and mechanized elements in the said region - the Chinese had tellingly deployed their purpose tanks (Type 15 light tanks) to boost their offensive capacities for high-altitude warfare. The relative ease of transportability, deployment, mobility and operability in mountain environs (along with technological advancements like being 'informationised' with other platforms) adds to the overall formidability of force. The heavier Indian tank armoury other than weight and accompanying transportability and mobility issues were not intended to operate in such regions with rarefied air, high-altitude terrain and -40 degrees Celsius conditions. Therefore a Request for Information (RFI) for light tanks to meet the looming Chinese threat states, "new generation combat vehicle platform, approximately 350 Light Tanks in a phased manner, along with performance-based logistics, niche technologies, engineering support package, and other maintenance and training require-

ments..." was importantly issued in 2021 towards fast-tracked development. This urgency bore expression in 'Zorawar', a lightweight tank (25-ton, air transportable with amphibious capabilities) jointly made by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) along with a private company, Larsen & Toubro (L&T). It is expected to meet the requisite and critical power-to-weight ratios, as indeed other competitive parameters of communication (e.g., integration with drones), firepower, artificial intelligence, surveillance, protection et al, to outmatch the Chinese T-15. Essentially the sacred spirit of 'Zorawar' comes back to the region, albeit, in the form of a light tank for 'trials' before the final induction of the initial batch of 59 tanks. The tank 'Zorawar' is not a replacement for the heavier tank, but only to complement the existing armoured tanks. Like its nomenclature predecessor and legendary warrior, this 'Zorawar' too is expected to dominate the proceedings of war with its fleet-footedness, adaptability, and instinct for battle in the punishing high altitudes. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)



BHOPIINDER SINGH

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEMANT SOREN ARRESTED

Sir - Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 in connection with a land scam case, shortly after he resigned as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand. The resignation followed after the ED questioned him for over seven hours at his official Ranchi residence. He submitted his resignation to Jharkhand Governor C P Radhakrishnan, who has accepted it. After meeting with the Governor for half an hour, Soren was taken to the ED's Ranchi office. Soren has challenged his arrest in the Jharkhand High Court; the hearing will take place on February 1. The land scam case pertains to the alleged purchase and sale of tribal land by forging documents between 2020 and 2022. ED officials had visited Mr Soren's Delhi residence for questioning; however, he was not found there. He was untraced for 32 hours, emerging in Ranchi on January 30. During Mr Soren's questioning, JMM workers protested near the CM's house and Raj Bhavan. Tribal bodies in the state have also called for a bandh today to protest Mr Soren's arrest. Champai Soren, a senior member of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has replaced junior Soren.

Gundu Maniam | Mumbai

FOCUS ON INFRASTRUCTURE

Sir - The Interim Budget 2024 demonstrates a continued commitment to bolstering infrastructure development, proposing an 11.1% increase in capital expenditure to ₹11.1 lakh crore, equivalent to 3.4% of the GDP, aligning with market expectations. This focus on infrastructure investment holds multifaceted significance, as it not only spurs economic activity by generating employment and stimulating demand for construction materials but also lays the groundwork for long-term growth and competitiveness through enhanced connectivity and logistics. Moreover, infrastructure projects are renowned for their capacity to create job

A mass marriage scheme



Nowadays, many activities are taken by many organizations. Social service is a part of it. But many secrets are hidden to make it happen and then somehow the organizers get the satisfaction of completing this activity. But what falls in the ranks of the public and the beneficiaries? This question is unanswered. In Uttar Pradesh, the Chief Minister's Mass Marriage Scheme was organized in Balia under the Mass Scheme. A total

of 568 couples were married in this place. The special thing is that many marriages were solemnised without the bridegroom. Moreover, hundreds of brides wore garlands around their necks when there was no groom. Even though many of them were married earlier, many stood up for marriage and took Akshata on their heads. This news was read recently. Overall, we got to hear a glimpse of what is done while deciding a public program and programs are done by pretending and now this plan is going to be investigated by the police. The fun part was that many young women came to visit. You were involved in this ceremony so that you stand for marriage and you will get a lot of money. It is even more special that these young women are ready to marry again for money, at least in a ceremony. Now the investigation findings will come out through this police investigation and committee.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

opportunities across various skill levels, further contributing to economic empowerment. However, while the surge in capital expenditure is a positive step, concerns regarding its long-term sustainability linger among analysts. Additionally, the efficacy of this spending heavily depends on the efficiency and transparency with which it is executed. Nevertheless, the Interim Budget's emphasis on infrastructure development signifies a commendable stride towards driving economic growth, provided that funds are allocated prudently to maximize benefits for both the economy and the populace.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

USHA UTHUP IS AN ICON

Sir - Usha Uthup has come a long way from being a bargirl singer to becoming India's 'Queen of Pop', picking up India's third highest civilian award, the Padma Bhushan recently. It has been an amazing journey for someone who, as a student, was told to leave the music class

because her type of voice was just not suitable for singing. Today, her name has become synonymous with a singularly husky voice and a unique persona that is rather incongruous with what she does on stage. Her audience can never have enough of her vocals as that of her traditional Indian look - a bold, full moon 'bindi' on a huge expanse of a forehead, umpteenth bangles, a well-draped silk saree and those mischievous, twinkling black eyes that are so full of mirth and innocence. Usha hails from the state of Tamil Nadu, but she has the unique ability to gel with audiences across India. This really makes her an Indian icon. Born in the same year that India achieved independence, Usha has been a familiar figure in India's musical landscape. Here's wishing her "Rumba Ho" in the months and years to come.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Balancing climate action with economic equity

Balancing global climate efforts requires nuanced policies, considering socio-economic differences for equitable and sustainable solutions

The global policing community's approach to climate change has been a significant challenge thus far. Hotspot events driven by the warming of the Earth's upper crust in both land and water, commonly known as 'Global Warming', have given rise to extremism. The warming of water on Earth's surface, accounting for 91 per cent of climate heating, is a major contributor, followed by land at approximately 5 per cent, alongside ice loss and atmospheric warming. The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), obliges all member states to adhere to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, primarily carbon dioxide. NDCs aim to solidify individual state contributions in combating global environmental challenges. Consequently, nations bear the responsibility to implement policies and regulations, working towards achieving net-zero emissions globally by 2050, aligning



with the Paris Agreement's objectives. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), akin to the Emission Trading System (ETS), seeks to dissuade carbon-intensive economies from producing high-carbon products. To avoid 'carbon leakage', high-value carbon products face significant taxes for their export. This mechanism aligns with the polluter pays principle and the precautionary principle, as articulated in Article 191(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Developing nations, recognizing the impact of globalisation, anticipate a decline in demand for their products in the EU market due to reduced competitiveness. Countries like India and China, reliant on carbon-based manufacturing, generated \$8.2 billion in

export revenue in the EU market in 2022, as reported by the Global Trade Research Initiative. The steel industry, a cornerstone of India's development, faces significant challenges. The global climate effort must consider the interests of the global south. While objections can be addressed in international bodies like the World Trade Organisation, fostering long-term bilateral relations necessitates domestic policies aligned with global socio-economic aspirations. A thorough socio-economic audit is essential to evaluate the proportionality and impact of imposing a heavy carbon tax burden on third-world countries. The polluter pays and the precautionary principle are crucial in attributing responsibility, considering factors such as size, area, population, industrial activities, and mitigation efforts. However, applying bilateral disincentives uniformly across states with disparate economies undermines the equity principle, placing high-polluting nations on par with those contributing less. The stringent nature of CBAM poses

challenges for countries like India unless they can negotiate more favourable terms. In conclusion, addressing the complex challenge of climate change requires a nuanced and collaborative approach that considers the diverse socio-economic landscapes of nations. The burden of combating climate change should be shared proportionately, acknowledging the unique circumstances and contributions of each nation. A careful balance between environmental responsibility and economic development is crucial to ensure equitable and sustainable solutions. Moreover, the international community must actively involve and accommodate the concerns of developing nations in policy-making processes. In the pursuit of a greener future, a holistic and inclusive approach is paramount. As the world collectively addresses this urgent issue, finding common ground that aligns with both environmental and developmental aspirations is the key to building a sustainable and resilient future for all. (The writer is a research scholar; views are personal)



ABHAYA DUBEY



FIRST COLUMN

DEVELOP A HOLIDAY HOME IN THE MIND

Relaxation begins and ends in the mind, enabling it to withstand the vagaries of life



RAVI VALLURI

Summer was simmering, temperatures were rising in Delhi, and the beer-guzzling husband and wife duo, and their college-going children fed on junk food, were looking forward to their first overseas trip 'together.' Meanwhile, a message flashed on the pretentious mobile of the husband.

"Eureka," he screamed, "Leave sanctioned."

"Trip to Chiang Mai will now be a reality," screamed the children and wife. The husband had clambered up the corporate ladder with a bloated ego, riding roughshod over his colleagues; however, at the cost of his deteriorating health condition. This is a familiar tale of several upper-middle-class families and the ones who mimic them as they crave to keep up with the Joneses.

The prana levels of such individuals are low.

Just as an architect designs buildings, we humans can construct an oasis of peace in our minds where we can luxuriate on a genuine holiday. Humans should develop a mental state where they can appreciate and embrace nature and its myriad flavours. Many years ago, there was an old farmer. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbours came to commiserate.

"Maybe," the farmer replied laconically. The next morning the horse returned, bringing along with it three other wild horses.

Taken aback at the turn of events, the neighbours congratulated the farmer. "Maybe," was the reply. His son tried to ride one of the untamed horses and was thrown off the saddle and broke his leg. The neighbours expressed their grief.

"Maybe," answered the farmer.



Shortly, some military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. The wounded son was not recruited. Soon congratulatory messages poured in from the neighbours as the son escaped the hazardous employment.

"Maybe," said the farmer. The stoic farmer remained unfazed in all situations. He was neither egoistical nor judgmental or given to hyperbole or despondency. The mind remained quiet and was in a perpetual state of positivity and holiday. The supercilious family from Delhi was so full of themselves and hurtling towards imminent disaster that it would undeniably benefit by learning a few secrets from the old farmer. They could discard their pomposity; and erase egos and narcissistic tendencies. Instead of planning an annual holiday, the family ought to create a sacred space within their hearts and minds where positivism mushrooms and develop a delicate balance of detachment like the old farmer. It would be sagacious to dwell on the inner self and practice deep faith and prayer to connect with the self by sublimating noise and ego.

They could visualize and connect to a soothing terrain in their minds, which would restore equilibrium to their disoriented lifestyles. This topography could upend the pyramid and radically alter a desultory lifestyle to a more harmonious one. Imagine the mind conceptualizes a retreat within its containments. This chamber would generate abundant energy and an aura that the individual would like to revisit hundreds of times. Pranayama and the practice of yoga – be it for the propertied or poor, healthy, or unhealthy – help in mental reconfiguration, rejuvenation, and revitalization, which soothes frayed nerves and makes individuals joyous and happy. This is a harbinger of a sanctuary of radiance. This should be the springboard for the family to rekindle and construct their holiday home where their prana levels are indeed high.

(The writer is a CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Rupee as an international currency



SURAJIT MAHALANOBIS

To truly establish rupee as a global currency, there is a need to focus on low-tech manufacturing, the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises

India's steady efforts to shift to pay off energy imports in exchange for the Rupee can be understood as a determined move towards the internationalisation of the national currency. It is not to replace the all-pervasive dollar. It is to enter into a competition, hitherto unexplored, through dynamic diplomacy. Last July India signed an agreement with the UAE for rupee settlement in exchange for crude imports. Soon after Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) made payments for the purchase of a million barrels of crude oil from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) in Rupee. By doing that it was 'Bharat' that was active, and not 'India', because the change towards making Indian currency in a proactive position in the international currency market, is essentially an indigenous policy shift, ever since instituting the concept of ease of doing business by the Narendra Modi government in 2014. This can be best explained as Bharatiyata in pursuit of the Kautilyan lines of statecraft, which the colonial rulers and the Mughal rule over India had ignored.

Earlier, India tried this with Russia. But the effort did not succeed. It is because the Indian Rupee is said not yet "fully convertible". The major reason, as reported in a study of Indian exports from 2015 to 2021, is the harsh reality that India's share of global exports of goods has been only 1.77 per cent. Incapability in exports is a factor that diminishes the need for other countries to hold Indian currency in reserves. Russia has already been holding Rupees worth over US\$ 40 billion.

Growth of low-tech SMEs in India compared with China's

Save the deal with the UAE, the idea of a Rupee for oil has not materialised enough. The West Asian states currently hold a lesser amount of Rupee as their foreign exchange, than Russia. A major reason is, that India is not producing enough manufactured goods in machines and tools and household equipment, which can be export worthy for generating faster revenue and creating international demand for the Rupee.

India needs to stress manufacturing low-tech machines and tools, even as the thrust for hi-tech manufacturing must keep going. This is not only to compete with China but also to create effective deterrence to Chinese border dreams. According to a study, the manufacturing sector in China contributed over 42.6 per cent to the country's GDP in 2014. Over 140 million SMEs function in China, producing 68 per cent of goods of China's total exports to markets the world over. The SMEs in China create 79 per cent of total national jobs and contribute 60 per cent to the country's GDP till 2020. To promote the government reduced the interest rates for SMEs and large firms by 4.84 per cent and 5.06 per cent, respectively, at 0.02 and 0.05 percentage points compared to 2019. These also create Chinese economic power enough to influence the world order.

A study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that China's trade surplus rose to US\$ 218 billion in 2006, putting up an eight per cent growth in the GDP. In H1 of 2023, China experienced lower demand from external markets than in H2 of the previous year, yet performed the best among the major Asian countries. That became possible due to continued demand for its share of advanced manufacturing products, namely, new energy vehicles (NEVs), solar panels, and lithium batter-



INDIA NEEDS TO MANUFACTURE EVERY GOOD THAT CHINA PRODUCES, FIRST BY EMULATING, THEN INNOVATING ON THESE, AND THEREAFTER, BY EXCELLING IN QUALITY

ies. These studies, however, did not take into cognisance how much revenue China generates, or what is the percentage of Chinese products distributed to meet its domestic needs, or which are its revenue generated from exports of low-tech household products.

Indian exports need to upgrade on standardisation and quick processing practices. For example, equipment and assembly parts of many goods have to be procured from different geographies for which quick processes like clearances, expenses of handling processes in various airports, etc., all come into play. All these create challenges for India to join the race for technology manufacturing in the world. However, India's challenges are mostly in high-tech enterprises. Such anomalies or obstacles should not pose in low-tech productions, which are doable domestically.

After all, Make-in-India needs to be followed by the clarion call for selling also outside India, especially the low-skilled and daily-use products which would bring faster revenue and improve the international market share of Indian exports. India also needs to develop niche technological sophistication for exports, while innovating in the production structure. That alone can bolster Rupee's chance to be more convertible in the world market.

As the manufacturing enterprises are carried out mostly in hi-tech domains, by established industrialists, the focus on the low-tech SMEs has been less prioritised so far. It started from a lesser dominant position in 2019 at a share of 30.5 per cent to a more dominant position of the total Indian manufacturing of 43.6 per cent in FY 2022-23. The output growth is by 10.4 per cent, which is commendable.

However, most of these investments have been in the agriculture and high-technology sectors of high-investment enterprises. The contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP was Rs 7154.65 billion in the Q3 of 2023 or 14 per cent. Comparatively, the contribu-

tion of Indian SMEs to the national GDP is 27 per cent. According to data published on 1 November 2023, India has established 20.09 million SMEs till June 2023.

Looking Back

India had started promoting MSMEs rather late after Independence. There may have been many reasons, one major being the five expensive wars India had to be engaged with since 1948, with the third and fourth planning years tormented by Chinese aggression (1962) and the Pakistan war (1965), respectively; yet from the Fifth planning the push could have been given to the MSMEs.

After over 60 years, in 2007, the government started pushing for more small manufacturing enterprises. The erstwhile ministries for small-scale and agro-rural industries were clubbed to create a ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in 2007. That is, over 16 long years of economic liberalisation in 1991. With occasional changes in statuses between 2007 to 2014, such as 134 in 2007 and 142 in 2014, India posted a status at 79 in 2014, and 63 in 2019. The irony is, albeit improving India's ease of doing business status to 63 in 2019 from 134 in 2007, India continues to struggle with the issues of lack of timely financial support, technological upgradation, cheap non-polluting power supplies, dependence on imports, and tough competition from global players.

The SMEs currently contribute only 7 per cent to the GDP of India, employing about 28 million workers. The production lines are mostly in food products, beverages, tobacco and tobacco products, cotton textiles, wool, silk, synthetic products, jute, hemp & jute products, wood & wood products, furniture and fixtures, paper & paper products, printing publishing and allied industries, machinery, machines, apparatus, appliances and electrical machinery.

Counterbalance Chinese Goods

A comparison of China with a democratic India may sound

imperfect, given the political processes enshrined in rules and regulations for decision-making systems in the two states. Yet considering India's priority to develop manufacturing capabilities to reduce imports from China or a hostile country, that would contain the muscle flexing episodes in Indian borders, India has no option other than intensifying export worthiness of the MSME goods, simply because these goods shall generate faster revenue.

India needs to manufacture every good that China produces, first by emulating, then innovating on these, and thereafter, by excelling in quality. So that Indian goods can pose strong competition to Chinese goods in all world markets. That is the only process to counterbalance China. For this to happen, India needs to create incubation hubs for youths to engage in SMEs. They need to be harnessed from the unemployed and/or unorganised pool of talents from every nook of Indian society. The SME incubation hub may turn out to be the best labour bank in manufacturing. Who can best mentor these hubs other than the established Indian industrialists, who have the acumen in competing in the world markets?

It is high time since 2019, that India has started the battery of underprivileged youths into the incubation entrepreneurship. By scouting them from the grassroots such as from the unorganised marketplaces, villages, shops, and institutes, including the ITIs, eliciting their skills at innovation, and growing them in the manufacturing incubation centres under the mentorship of the established industrialists, India will only create a new Bharat brighter and more brilliant. After all, manufacturing is the genesis of economic advancement.

(The writer is an academic counsellor, at Indira Gandhi National Open University and specialises in energy politics, views are personal)

Shaping global future: The changing landscape of student mobility

In the tapestry of Indian student mobility, each thread weaves a story of ambition, resilience and adaptability

In the ever-evolving landscape of global education, the pursuit of knowledge transcends borders, and Indian students stand at the forefront of this international academic journey. Career Mosaic recently engaged in a comprehensive discussion with Abhijit Zaveri, unravelling the intricacies of Indian student mobility. From the factors driving the surge in studying abroad to the impact of geopolitical changes and the transformative role of the digital era, our conversation unveiled key trends shaping the choices of the ambitious Indian student community. Rising Interest in Overseas Education: The surge in Indian students pursuing higher education abroad is evident, with projections indi-



ABHIJIT ZAVERI

ating a staggering 18 lakh students by 2024. Motivations behind this trend are diverse, encompassing a desire for superior educational standards, easier acceptance at foreign universities, and the practical applications offered by global institutions. Key factors guiding these choices include the theoretical nature of the Indian educational system, seeking quality education, a comprehensive curriculum, research opportuni-

ties, cultural exposure, diversity, and access to specialized programs.

Embassies' Role in Facilitating the Journey: Embassies play a pivotal role in the visa issuance process, contributing to a more efficient and supportive experience for international students. The recent expansion of the US Embassy, with new consulates in Bangalore and Ahmedabad, aims to streamline the visa process and enhance accessibility, exemplifying their crucial role in supporting aspiring international students.

Geopolitical and Economic Impacts: Recent geopolitical and economic changes have shifted student mobility trends, with safety concerns arising from diplomatic ten-

sions affecting international student experiences. Medical students, in particular, are exploring alternative fields, leading to a reassessment of study destinations. While traditional choices like the USA, UK, and Canada remain popular, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Ireland are emerging as strong contenders due to lower course costs and innovative education approaches.

COVID-19's Influence on Student Mobility: The pandemic has significantly impacted student mobility, prompting a re-evaluation of traditional study destinations. Interest is growing in countries like New Zealand, Germany, and Ireland, with a substantial increase in enrolments for master's and bach-

elor's programs. Despite challenges, there has been a remarkable 65% growth in study abroad applications, emphasising the resilient pursuit of global educational opportunities.

Digital Transformation's Impact: The digital transformation has empowered Indian students with increased awareness and accessibility to information about international academic opportunities. This shift has broadened the comparison of options, allowed for a national-scale evaluation of institutions and programs. Future Trends in Student Mobility: The United States and various European countries are becoming preferred destinations, with a growing interest in diverse academic

programs. Post-COVID, countries effectively managing the pandemic, such as Germany, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and New Zealand, are expected to be prioritized. The evolving global educational landscape, academic preferences, and pandemic management considerations will shape future trends.

Regional Trends within India: Unique regional trends within India showcase preferences for foreign languages and choices of study-abroad destinations. Tier 1 city students prioritise a mix of cultural exposure and academic quality, indicating a shift in priorities. Meanwhile, differences in program choices between Tier 1 and Tier 2/3 cities highlight the diverse aspirations. As the landscape of student

mobility continues to evolve, understanding and adapting to these trends will be crucial for institutions and service providers seeking to cater effectively to the diverse needs of Indian students.

As we navigate the complex tapestry of international education, it is evident that the aspirations and choices of Indian students are dynamic and influenced by a multitude of factors. The surge in interest in overseas education, driven by a quest for superior academic standards and practical applications, signals a shift in the traditional paradigms of education. Looking ahead, the future trends in student mobility from India promise a diverse landscape. Regional trends within India showcase the diversity of

choices and aspirations, emphasizing the importance of understanding and adapting to the unique needs of students across different tiers. As institutions and service providers continue to evolve, this understanding will be paramount in providing effective support and guidance to the growing community of Indian students embarking on their global educational journey.

As we witness this transformative journey, it is clear that the pursuit of knowledge knows no bounds, and the global stage awaits the next generation of Indian scholars with open arms.

(The writer is founder Career Mosaic and a strategic advisor to universities, views are personal)

Imran urges people to use 'weapon of vote' on Feb 8

PTI ■ LAHORE

Days ahead of the February 8 general elections in Pakistan, jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Friday claimed he had not challenged the US might, no premier in Pakistan could have dared to withstand such blatant foreign interference in its internal matters in the future.

Khan, currently lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, took to X to explain why he was 'punished' in several concocted cases and also urged the people to use the weapon of vote in the elections to overthrow the "crooks."

Khan, 71, handed down 10- and 14-years imprisonment for revealing the state secrets and selling state gifting, respectively, has been imprisoned since August last year. His party symbol, the cricket bat, has been snatched away, his and his party leaders' nomination papers have been rejected and earlier this week, one of his party leaders was killed in poll-related violence. It is believed that his X handle is being used by his relatives to post messages on behalf of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder.

"When the cipher case emerged, I warned that unless we dealt with it decisively, no Prime Minister in the future would be able to withstand such blatant foreign interference in Pakistan's internal matters. General Musharraf also surrendered to the US' threats of 'bombing Pakistan into Stone Age,'" he said.

Khan further said the unfolding of the Toshakhana, Cipher, and Iddat cases only highlights their "frivolous, baseless, and politically motivated" nature.

"But to appease their masters, who orchestrated the regime change operation, I was deprived of my legal right of cross-examining the witness or presenting my witnesses, as the handlers knew that it would unmask another great betrayal in our political history just like that of Mir Jaffer of Bengal," he said. He was referring to an 18th century Bengal ruler (in undivided India), who ditched



his Mughal master to join hands with the British to consolidate his position. The PTI leader said he led his life with impeccable financial integrity and credibility with the people of Pakistan donating billions of rupees for his philanthropic projects. "Therefore, the Toshakhana case was concoct-

ed because no evidence of financial corruption against me could be found," he said. "Even during the sham trial, when they sensed that the trial would conclude in absolving me, they deprived me of my fundamental right to cross-examination.

Meanwhile, the iddat case

has been expedited only because they want to create a narrative against my dream of establishing Pakistan on the principles of Riasat-e Madinah. Therefore, they are concluding it in haste without an iota of fairness in the trial just to announce me guilty," Khan alleged. Urging people of the country, he said: "You must know that all of these cases have no legal basis; they are part of an ongoing political circus in the country for the past 22 months. The hasty manner in which all these cases are being concluded is for only one purpose, which is to demoralise the voters, especially the youth."

"But, you must not be disheartened, as Allah is the ultimate planner. Our most powerful and meaningful weapon is that of our vote, and we must wield it to overthrow crooks who have been imposed upon us," he concluded his longish X post.

Giving impression of predetermined polls results 'insult to people': Bilawal

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

As authorities in Pakistan scrambled to keep peace ahead of next week's general elections, the country's restive Balochistan province was rattled with at least 10 bomb and grenade attacks on Thursday, resulting in the death of one person. Several police stations and deputy commissioners' offices were targeted in the attacks in which six persons, including a police officer and a jail warden, were injured, the Dawn newspaper reported. Pakistan will go to polls on February 8.

"At least 10 bomb and grenade attacks happened across Balochistan, including provincial capital Quetta," the senior official told the paper. A bomb, placed along a footpath on the China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation (CPEC) road in the Spinny area of Quetta, went off, killing a passerby, according to Quetta SSP (operations) Jawad Tariq. The intensity of the blast rocked

Ten bombs, grenade attacks rock Balochistan province

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

several areas of the provincial capital, according to officials. The police cordoned off the area and shifted the body to Civil Hospital. Hospital officials said the victim's body was mutilated due to his proximity to the bomb at the time of the blast. The deceased was identified as an 84-year-old man. SSP Tariq added that around 8kg of explosive was used in the improvised explosive device.

The target of the bomb was unknown as there was no election campaign-related event scheduled within the vicinity, the SSP said, adding that security was already on high alert due to the upcoming elections. In another attack near Quetta's outskirts, an assistant sub-inspector Ghulam Raza, was injured. Unknown attackers hurled a hand grenade at the Shalkot police station, which exploded in the courtyard. The attack damaged the station's building and some vehicles in the parking area. The injured police officer was admitted to

the Civil Hospital. In Mastung, the central prison was attacked by hand grenades, which exploded inside the jail, resulting in damage to the building. The jail warden was injured in the attack.

In the attacks in Quetta, Khuzdar and Turbat, the offices of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and National Party, and a joint office of Balochistan National Party Mengal (BNP-M) and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) were targeted with grenades. However, no loss of life was reported. The offices of deputy commissioners in Dhadar and Panjgur were also targeted with hand grenades. One person was injured in another grenade attack on the house of the Kachhi deputy commissioner.

In a blast in the Turbat market area, one person was injured while a grenade was also lobbed at police and Frontier Corps (FC) posts, but no casualty was reported, according to the Dawn report.

PTI defers organisational poll; Army most trusted institution in Pak: Survey

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The organisational elections of jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party were postponed due to an "unfortunate security situation created by the administration" and concerns raised by members, an official statement said on Friday.

With the country's general elections barely a week away, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party had on Thursday announced fresh intra-party polls on February 5. The party Chairman, Gohar Khan, announced the postponement of the organisational elections on the former prime minister's directives, asserting that the organisational polls can divert attention from next week's general elections, Geo News reported.

"Intra-party elections can divert the attention of candidates and voters from the

general elections," the report quoted the PTI chief. In a notification issued on Friday, the party said that its internal polls would take place after the general elections, the Dawn newspaper reported.

It said that the intra-party elections were rescheduled due to the "unfortunate security situation created by the administration" and concerns raised by members. This comes after police and security officials in plainclothes reportedly raided and took control of the party's central secretariat on Thursday and stopped members from entering the premises.

"At the time of holding the general body meeting of the PTI on January 31, the designated venue of the party where the meetings were set to take place and the entry of participants were unlawfully blocked by the administration, including sealing of the Islamabad office, thus forcing us to search for and confirm

alternate places and seek legal remedies," the statement said. "While we are ready for holding intra-party elections on the basis of secret ballot through digital balloting, the arrangements for availability of alternate venues require additional time," the report said, citing the statement.

It said that the holding of intra-party elections needs to be rescheduled, "taking cognisance of the security situation created by the administration" and the requests from its members who said they were unable to find time to participate in the internal elections due to preparations for the February 8 general elections. "They will now take place after the national elections on a date within the mandate and timeframe approved by the general body meeting. The amended schedule will be duly announced by the office of the Federal Election Commission shortly," it said.

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Ahead of the February 8 general elections, the powerful Pakistan Army has emerged as the "most trusted institution" with 74 per cent approval ratings in a survey in which the election commission is the least trusted among eight institutions, according to a media report on Friday.

Ipsos Pakistan carried out the 'Political Participation Landscape of Pakistani Youth' survey for Voice of America (VOA) in January 2024. "The sample size of the survey was 2,050 respondents. The target respondents were people aged 18-34 from across the country," The News International newspaper said. After the Pakistan Army, the second most trusted institution of the country is the Supreme Court with an approval rating of 58 per cent while the media turned out to be the third largest trusted institution.

The powerful Pakistan Army, which has ruled coup-prone Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of exist-

ence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. Political parties' approval rating according to the respondents is 50 per cent, the newspaper said. Incidentally, there was a division on whether the media covers the issues that really matter, a significant 2 in 5 think it doesn't. "Males and affluent are over-indexed in this sentiment," the report said.

The participants of the survey were asked whether they think any organisation can rig the general elections to which, "2 in 3 young Pakistanis responded that they believe in the fairness of upcoming 2024 elections." The participants of the survey were asked whether they believed that any foreign or international influences can positively or negatively affect the performance of the Pakistani government. "One in 3 participants believes that there is 'international influence' on Pakistan," the report said.

Further, whopping 75 per cent of the respondents (3 in 4) believe that the next week's

elections will steer the country in the right direction and 2 in 3 respondents expect the elections will be free and fair. "Moreover, 88 per cent believe that their vote is important," the report said.

Only 54 per cent of youth replied that they stay informed about politics, candidates, and their manifestos in their constituency whereas only 29 per cent say they support certain politicians and political parties and intend to participate in their rallies and processions.

The respondents were asked whether they would cast their votes in the upcoming general elections on February 8. Some 70 per cent claimed they will. The survey further reveals that from 2018 to 2024, 1 in 5 have switched their preferred party, 78 per cent claimed they will vote for the same party whereas 22 per cent are intending to switch the preferred party.

The Ipsos survey further revealed that 3 in 5 youngsters in Pakistan think political leaders do not understand their issues or priorities. This senti-

ment is higher in females, rural as well as in Islamabad. For the Pakistani youth, TV, social media, and word of mouth are considered the most preferred sources. As per the survey, the female population prefers TV more than males, while males prefer social media for news.

"Interestingly, among the youth, WhatsApp is the most used social media platform, followed by Facebook. Twitter is only 8 per cent. Social media usage has significant gender disparity," the survey revealed.

When it comes to the issues that matter, according to the survey, economic issues surpass all other issues in salience, whereas education and health are the biggest priorities. Inflation, according to 70 per cent of participants, is the main national issue followed by poverty 59 per cent.

The survey further shows that the highest importance is given to health & education in responses by the youth whereas the military interference in politics is of least importance, the survey findings added.

Gilani: US shared apprehensions of Osama hiding in Pak much before he was killed

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani has said that ex-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had shared her apprehensions with his government that Osama bin Laden was hiding in the country much before American commandos killed the dreaded al Qaeda leader in Abbottabad in 2011. Gilani served as Pakistan's prime minister from 2008 till 2012.

Rice visited Pakistan four times while she was in office. She met Gilani in the first week of December 2008 when she made a surprise visit to Islamabad after holding talks in New Delhi soon after the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008. "Condoleezza Rice had visited Pakistan and her apprehensions were that he (bin Laden) was in Pakistan," Gilani told Geo News in an interview on Thursday, ahead of the general elections in Pakistan on February 8.

When asked how he responded to Rice's informa-

tion, Gilani said: "When she shared that, I said it was disinformation."

Osama bin Laden, one of the world's most notorious terrorist leaders, was killed by US Navy Seals in a stealth operation on May 2, 2011. The 54-year-old Saudi-born militant leader was hiding in the Pakistani garrison city of Abbottabad in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Rice, 69, is an American educator and politician, who served as the national security adviser (2001-05) and secretary of state (2005-09) to US President George W. Bush. She is the current director of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Gilani, 71, served as the 18th prime minister of Pakistan. He is a veteran leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party and was elected as a Senator in 2021.

On whether it was a shock when bin Laden was found in the Pakistani garrison city of Abbottabad, Gilani said that it

was an intelligence failure of the world. Responding to a question whether he thought it was American intelligence that was conveyed to him via Rice, Gilani said: "If they had any evidence they should have given it to us. We would have helped them because we were against terrorism and we were fighting a war against terrorism and lost many precious lives of military men and civilians who were martyred and we also lost billions of dollars."

Gilani was asked about his speech in Pakistan's National Assembly, questioning bin Laden's presence in Pakistan. He answered that Pakistan's motive was to stop the international media because bin Laden was not a Pakistani citizen and came from abroad.

Responding to a question if he was given a complete picture by the ISI (spy agency) regarding bin Laden or if the entire story was not shared with him, Gilani responded that he "used to get briefings and they were very clear."

US bolsters defences around Jordan base

Washington (AP): The US has bolstered defences at a base in Jordan that was attacked by Iran-backed drone fired from Iraq, the official said. In the days since the attack, the US has bolstered the defences around Tower 22, which houses about 350 US troops and sits near the demilitarised zone on the border between Jordan and Syria. The Iraqi border is only 6 miles (10 kilometers) away. In response, the US is weighing response options to include striking militia leaders. The US options under consideration include targets in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, where the Iranian-made drone that killed the service members was fired from, the official said. The US has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias. On Thursday Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin indicated that the US response against the militias would widen.

While previous US responses have been more limited, the attack on Tower 22, as the Jordan outpost is known, and the deaths of the three ser-

vice members has crossed a line, the official said. The base was struck by an Iranian-made drone fired from Iraq, the official said. In the days since the attack, the US has bolstered the defences around Tower 22, which houses about 350 US troops and sits near the demilitarised zone on the border between Jordan and Syria. The Iraqi border is only 6 miles (10 kilometers) away. In response, the US is weighing response options to include striking militia leaders. The US options under consideration include targets in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, where the Iranian-made drone that killed the service members was fired from, the official said. The US has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias. On Thursday Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin indicated that the US response against the militias would widen.



A protester holds a sign as police deploy outside Congress where lawmakers are debating a bill promoted by Argentine President Javier Milei, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday. The bill includes a broad range of economic, administrative, criminal and environmental reforms. AP/PTI

Hamas says it's studying Gaza cease-fire proposal

AP ■ BEIRUT

Hamas officials said on Friday that the group is studying a proposed cease-fire deal that would include prolonged pauses in fighting in Gaza and swaps of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, but at the same time appeared to rule out some of its key components.

Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official in Beirut, said the group remains committed to its initial demands for a permanent cease-fire. Hamdan also said the group seeks the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners being held for acts related to the conflict with Israel, including those serving life sentences. He mentioned two by name, including Marwan Barghouti, a popular Palestinian uprising leader seen as a unifying figure. Hamdan's

comments on the prisoners were the most detailed demands yet to be raised by the group in public.

The insistence on large-scale prisoner releases and on an end to the fighting in Gaza put the group at odds with the multi-stage proposal that officials from Egypt, Israel, Qatar and the United States put forth this week. The proposal does not include a permanent cease-fire.

"There is no way that this will be acceptable by the resistance," Hamdan told Lebanon's LBC TV on Friday, referring to proposed successive pauses in fighting. Israeli leaders have said they will keep fighting until Hamas is crushed, even while agreeing to long pauses that are accompanied by the release of hostages. Hamas and other militants captured about 250 hostages during their dead-

ly October 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the war. They continue to hold dozens of captives, after more than 100 were released during a one-week truce in November, in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners.

Since Israel's offensive began, more than 27,000 Palestinians have been killed and 66,000 wounded, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The conflict has also left vast swaths of the tiny coastal enclave levelled, displaced 85 per cent of its population and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation.

In his remarks, Hamdan also said Hamas wants to free Palestinian prisoners of all factions — not just those affiliated with the militant group. In addition to Barghouti, he named Ahmed Saadat, the

head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a small PLO faction.

The prisoner release is a "national cause, not only for Hamas," he said.

Both Barghouti and Saadat were convicted of involvement in fatal attacks during the second Palestinian uprising against Israel's occupation a generation ago.

Alluding to additional points of dispute, Hamdan also said that Israel is carving out a buffer zone on the Gaza side of the border. Israel has not acknowledged such plans officially, but satellite photos show new demilitarised along a 1-kilometre-wide path along the border between Israel and the enclave.

As the war nears the four-month mark, fighting continued in the southern city of Khan Younis. The Israeli mil-

itary said on Friday that its efforts focused on fighters, weapons and infrastructure in the city, a key target of Israel's ground offensive in recent weeks.

Tens of thousands of residents of Khan Younis and surrounding areas have fled south to the town of Rafah, on the border with Egypt, which the United Nations said on Friday is becoming a "pressure cooker of despair."

"We fear for what comes next," said Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "It's every week we think, you know, it can't get any worse. Well, go figure. It gets worse." Hamdan's remarks reaffirmed statements from other Hamas officials, including the group's top political leader Ismail Haniyeh, who said on Tuesday that the

group was studying the terms but remained committed to seeking the "full withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza and steps toward a long-term cease-fire.

Another Hamas official said on Friday that the group would answer "very soon" and ask for several unspecified changes. He refused to give any details on what they're seeking or how many hostages would be released in return for how many prisoners.

The multi-stage proposal on the table was drafted by officials from the United States, Israel, Qatar and Egypt. Qatar and Egypt have been serving as mediators between Israel and Hamas.

A senior Egyptian official familiar with the discussions on Friday described the proposal, which he said Hamas had sent positive signals about.

Malaysia halves prison term for ex-PM Najib

Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)

(AP): Malaysia's Pardons Board said Friday it has reduced ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak's 12-year jail sentence by half and sharply cut the fine imposed after he was convicted in a corruption case linked to the theft of billions of dollars from state coffers.

With the sentence commuted, Najib will be freed by August 23, 2028, the board said in a statement. The board also cut Najib's 210 million ringgit (USD 44.5 million) fine to 50 million ringgit. It is unclear if Najib is still eligible for additional time off for good behaviour. If so, he could be out as early as August 2026.

Despite his conviction, Najib is still influential in his party, the United Malays National Organisation, which

is now a member of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's unity government that took power after 2022 general elections.

The Pardons Board didn't explain why it commuted Najib's sentence, nor why it waited until Friday to announce it. The board isn't required to give any grounds for its action, but calls are mounting for it to explain the move.

The board said it considered Najib's application for a royal pardon at its meeting Monday and decided instead to reduce his sentence and fine after considering advice and opinions.

The meeting was chaired by the country's then-king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, who is from Najib's home state of Pahang.

Breast cancer leading cause of cancer deaths in India: WHO

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The latest data on cancer burdens, as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), paints a sober picture as India with over 14.1 lakh new cancer cases and more than 9.1 lakh deaths, with breast cancer emerging as the leading cause in India. Globally, 2 crore new cancer cases and 97 lakh deaths were estimated. But what is more worrying, as revealed in the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) survey from 115 countries is that a majority of them have failed to adequately fund essential cancer and palliative care services, crucial components of universal health coverage (UHC). The gap is likely to take a toll on the families as well as the health infrastructure given that 35 million new cancer cases are pre-

dicted by 2050, a 77 per cent increase from 2022, adding a concerning dimension to the future trajectory of cancer's prevalence on a global scale. This exposes a global gap in prioritizing these critical healthcare needs and calls for an action, urging comprehensive global strategies to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the escalating cancer crisis. The report delves into the gender-specific prevalence of cancers, highlighting lip, oral cavity, and lung cancers as the most common among men, while breast and cervix cancers dominate among women. Notably, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) emphasizes the need for global efforts in cancer prevention, early detection, and improved healthcare, recognizing the evolving risk factors and socio-

Opposition walks out of RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Political developments in Jharkhand in the past few days figured in the Rajya Sabha on Friday with opposition parties led by the Congress staging a walk out. The party claimed Jharkhand governor did not make interim arrangements for governance in the state after JMM leader Hemant Soren resigned as chief minister. Leader of the Opposition in the House and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge drew parallels with the happenings in neighbouring Bihar just a week back when Nitish Kumar had resigned

as chief minister, his resignation being immediately accepted, he being asked to continue till a new government was formed and again being sworn-in as the chief minister, all in a matter of 12 hours. But in Jharkhand, when Soren resigned on Wednesday, no interim arrangement was made, he said. After Soren's resignation, the name of his successor with signatures of 43 supporting MLAs in a 81-member assembly was given, Kharge said and added that four other MLAs, who were supporting such a transfer, were outside the state and could not give their signatures.

7 incidents of hijacking in high seas reported in last 3 years: Government to Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday informed Parliament seven incidents of hijacking of vessels on high seas by pirates have been reported during the last three years. One hijacking incident of merchant ves-

sel Lila Norfolk. 21 crew were present including 15 Indian nationals onboard on January 04-05 this year. Further, two hijacking incidents occurred involving Fishing Vessel - Iman (January 28) and Fishing Vessel - AI Naeemi (January 29) which did not have any Indian crew onboard.

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM
R.K. TENT HOUSE ROAD, 1st FLOOR, VIDHYA COMPLEX, KUSUMKHERA, HALDWANI, DISTT.- NAINITAL

Letter No.: 129/Nivida/33 Date: 02-02-2024

E-Tender Notice

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender Value (Rs. In Lakh)	Period of Completions
1.	Construction of VC Rooms at Sub Jail Haldwani (District - Nainital)	67.69 Lakh	9 Month

1. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal: 03-02-2024 (17:00 hrs)
2. Online Bid submission: End date :- 21-02-2024 (17:00 hrs)
3. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 23-02-2024 (12:00 hrs)
4. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: - Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Haldwani.
5. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 06-02-2024 (11:00 hrs) Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Haldwani.
6. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in

PROJECT MANAGER

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 22.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 21,89,610/- (Rupees Twenty One Lakh Sixty Nine Thousand Six Hundred Ten only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLRHM0017548, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 23.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 24.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from AMARDEEP and YOGITA.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 12,50,000/- (Rupees Twelve Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,25,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Twenty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PROPERTY BEING GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS, BEING PART OF FREEHOLD BUILD - UP DDA PROPERTY BEARING NO. 62, AREA MEASURING 33.80 SQ. MTRS., IN POKKET 3, SECTOR A-8, SITUATED IN THE LAYOUT PLAN OF NARELA INDUSTRIAL SCHEME, NARELA, NEW DELHI - 110040, WITH PROPORTIONATE FREEHOLD RIGHTS OF THE LAND UNDER THE SAID BUILD - UP FOUR STOREY PROPERTY NO. 62.

BOUNDRIES:
EAST : SERVICE LANE 3.0 MTRS., NORTH : PLOT NO. 64
WEST : ROAD 9.0 MTRS WIDE SOUTH : PLOT NO. 84

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 30.01.2024
Place : NEW DELHI

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION WING, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM
E-32, JUDGE FARM, HALDWANI, DISTT.- NAINITAL (PIN 263139)

Letter No.: 303/Nivida-Anubandh/Haldwani/37 Date: 02-02-2024

E-Tender Notice

1. Name of the work:- Construction/Extension of Boundary Wall, Construction of Road & Renovation Work of Soban Singh Jeena Base Hospital, Haldwani, District-Nainital.
2. Estimated Cost: - Rs. 84.95 Lakh (without G.S.T.)
3. Period of Completion:- 12 Months
4. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal: 03-02-2024 (10:00 hrs)
5. Online Bid submission: End date :- 17-02-2024 (17:00 hrs)
6. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 20-02-2024 (11:00 hrs)
7. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: - General Manager (Kumaon), Nirman Wing, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Haldwani.
8. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 07-02-2024 (11:00 hrs) Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Haldwani.
9. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in

GENERAL MANAGER

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 26.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 42,81,614/- (Rupees Forty Two Lakh Eighty One Thousand Six Hundred Fourteen only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLVAS00181277, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 30.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 31.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from SANJEEV KUMAR, SACHIN GUPTA and POOJA.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 23,00,000/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,30,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Thirty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

HIG FLAT NO. F-4, FIRST FLOOR FRONT SIDE, PLOT NO. B-191 PART, DLF DILSHAD EXTN. GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 201001.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 31.01.2024
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

M.P. MADHYA KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN CO. LTD.
(Govt. of M.P. Undertaking)
Nishtha Parisar, Bijlalee Nagar, Govindpura, Bhopal-462023
Phone No. : 0755-2602033-36, Fax : 2589821, 2586636

Ref. :- MD/MK/04/NIT/4002 Date : 01.02.2024

TENDER NOTICE

MPMKVVCL, Bhopal, invites following bids from manufacturers through e-tendering.

Tender specification Number	Particulars	Approx. Value (Rs. Lakh)	Tender Fee including GST (in Rs.)	Date of Pre-Bid Conference	Date of opening of Tender
MD/MK/04/1039	Tender for Supply AC Distribution Board 415 Volt and DC Distribution Board 30 Volt Indoor Floor/Wall Mounted under MPMKVCL, Bhopal	546.75	11800	15.02.2024 03:00 P.M.	27.02.2024 03:00 P.M.

Other details and full Tender documents will be available on Company website <https://portal.mpcz.in> & Govt. Website <https://mptenders.gov.in> shortly.
M.P. Madhyam/113576/2024

CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (PROC.)

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE

TOTD/TWP/PL/150/2022-23/200 dtd. 01.02.2024

Name of the work: "Allotment of vacant halls (02nos), at 2nd floor of newly constructed building near Gate-3 inside Port Prohibited area on Annual Premium Basis." Annual Premium: Rs.43,80,232/-

Period of allotment: 5 years. Last date & time of submission of bid: 21.02.2024 up to 10:00 hrs. Date and time of opening (Technical bid): 22.02.2024 at 15:00 hrs.

Refer our website for details
<https://eprocure.gov.in> & <http://paradipport.gov.in/>

Sd/-
Traffic Manager
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/82/2023-2024 dttd.02.02.2024

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Kumud Kant Ambasta & Mrs. Sweta Weerangana who is purchasing the Entire Ground Floor without roof terrace rights super area measuring 1070 Sq. Ft. on Plot No.303, area measuring 200 sq. yds., out of Khara No. 37/715, Ashoka Enclave Extn. No.III, Faridabad, in the revenue estate of Village Sarai Khawaja, Tehsil & District Faridabad, having purchased the same from Mrs. Savita Dhingra & Rishi Magu, vide Sale Deed dated 01.08.2022, which is registered vide Document No.4732, at Sub-Registrar-Faridabad, on 01.08.2022, and same to be finance & mortgage by Khara No. 37/715, Ashoka Enclave Extn. No.III, Faridabad, in the revenue estate of Village Sarai Khawaja, Tehsil & District Faridabad, having purchased the same from Mrs. Savita Dhingra & Rishi Magu, vide Sale Deed dated 01.08.2022, which is registered vide Document No.4732, at Sub-Registrar-Faridabad, on 01.08.2022, and same to be finance & mortgage by Khara No. 37/715, Ashoka Enclave Extn. 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7 per cent Growth rate next year eminently doable: DEA Secretary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth on Friday said Budget proposals are non-inflationary and will help achieve 7 per cent-plus growth rate for the fourth year in a row in 2024-25. Although there are external risks arising from geo-political tensions, "the growth rate of about 7 per cent next year is eminently doable," Seth told PTI in a post-Budget interview with PTI. Having contracted 5.8 per cent in 2020-21, the Indian economy recorded a growth rate of 9.1 per cent in the following year. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate was 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 and is estimated to inch up marginally to 7.3 per cent in the current financial year. The interim Budget 2024-25 projected a nominal GDP

growth 10.5 per cent against the 11 per cent for the current fiscal. The nominal GDP for BE 2024-25 has been projected at Rs 3,27,71,808 crore, assuming 10.5 per cent growth over the estimated nominal GDP of Rs 2,96,57,745 crore, as per the First Advance Estimates of FY24. "The estimates, which we have assumed are 10.5 per cent, and which we feel is a realistic estimate of normal growth rate for the next year," Seth said. As far as the current fiscal is concerned, he said, the economy is doing very well and the policies, the fiscal stance, as well as the emphasis on capital expenditure will have much higher multiplier effect and generate employment. The government has hiked capital expenditure (capex) by 11.1 per cent to Rs 11.11 lakh crore for the next financial year



from Rs 9.5 lakh crore estimated for the current financial year. He said the government has taken prudent measures to

keep the total expenditure under check. The size of Budget 2024-25 has increased 6.1 per cent to Rs

47.66 lakh crore as against the Revised Estimate of the total expenditure is Rs 44.90 lakh crore for the current financial

year. With regard to fiscal deficit, Seth said it is 10 basis points less than the 5.9 projected earlier this financial year. As far as the next year is concerned, "the government is adhering to the fiscal consolidation path announced by the Finance Minister three years ago... Now moving forward we see fiscal deficit to be moderating to 5.1 per cent (FY25)". Tax buoyancy and realistic estimate of expenditure will help meet the realistic target of fiscal deficit of 5.1 per cent of GDP, he said. "If you recall the numbers, the nominal growth rate assumption is 10.5 per cent while the growth rate in taxes is 11.5 per cent. The second one is a realistic estimate of the expenditure. At the same time, the economy doing well also helps (in achieving 5.1 per cent)," he said.

Forex reserves rise USD 591 million to USD 616.7 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves increased USD 591 million to USD 616.733 billion for the week ended January 26, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped USD 2.795 billion to USD 616.143 billion. The country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion in October 2021. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year. For the week ended January 26, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased USD 289 million to USD 546.144 billion, the data said. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include



the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased USD 269 million to USD 47.481 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up USD 27 million to USD 18.248 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was up USD 6 million to USD 4.86 billion in the reporting week, the RBI's data showed.

Do not share documents with unknown entities for KYC, cautions RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India on Friday cautioned the public against fraud in the name of KYC updation and advised not to share documents with unknown entities. In the wake of continuing incidents and reports of customers falling prey to frauds being perpetrated in the name of KYC

updation, RBI urged the members of the public to exercise caution and due care to prevent loss and safeguard themselves from such malicious practices. In past also the central bank has cautioned the public regarding such frauds. "Do not share KYC documents or copies of KYC documents with unknown or unidentified individuals or organizations," it

said. Also, do not share account login credentials, card information, PINs, passwords, OTPs with anyone, the RBI added. "The modus operandi for such frauds usually involves customers receiving unsolicited communications, including phone calls/SMS/emails, through which they are manipulated into revealing personal

information, account/login details, or installing unauthorised or unverified apps through links provided in the messages," it said. RBI further said such communications often employ tactics of creating a false urgency and threatening of account freezing/blocking/closure, if the customer fails to comply. "When customers share essen-

tial personal or login details, fraudsters gain unauthorised access to their accounts and engage in fraudulent activities," it added. On what should be done in the event of receiving any request for KYC updation, RBI said directly contact their bank/financial institution for confirmation/assistance. "Obtain contact number/cus-

tomers care phone number of the bank/ financial institution only through its official website/ sources," the central bank said. One should also inform the bank/ financial institution immediately in case of any cyber fraud incident. It also cautioned the public against clicking on suspicious or unverified links received in mobile or email.



Now, pay for Eiffel Tower visit through UPI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tourists visiting Paris' Eiffel Tower will now be able to book their trip to the iconic monument using India's Unified Payment Interface, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) said on Friday. The NPCI said its arm NPCI International Payments (NIPL) has tied up with French e-commerce and proximity payments Lyra, which will help ensure that the UPI payment mechanism is accepted in the European country, starting with the Eiffel Tower. "Indian tourists can now book their visit to the Eiffel Tower by purchasing tickets online using UPI (Unified Payment Interface), making the transaction process quick, easy, and hassle-free," an official statement said. The announcement was made in Paris at an event organised by the Indian Embassy in France to celebrate India's Republic Day, it added. At present, Indian tourists rank as the second largest group of international visitors to the Eiffel Tower, it said. Indian tourists can

simply scan a QR code generated on the merchant's website and initiate a payment. Eiffel Tower is the first merchant to offer UPI payments in France, and the service will soon be extended to other merchants in the tourism and retail space across France and Europe. NPCI's chief executive Ritesh Shukla said the entity aspires to enable acceptance of NPCI's payment solutions in international markets to create an interoperable global payment system. "We aim at actively collaborating with financial institutions worldwide to establish partnerships and provide consumers with convenient and secure cross-border payment solutions," Shukla said. Lyra France's commercial director Christophe Mariette said the company has been present in India for 17 years. "For the players in the French and European tourism ecosystem, this partnership represents a major advancement and the promise of new business opportunities to come," he said.

Investors have no voting rights on CEO change, says BYJU'S

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Edtech major Think and Learn Pvt Ltd, which operates under the brand name BYJU'S, on Friday said investors have no voting rights on the CEO or management change as per the shareholder's agreement. At least six BYJU'S investors have called for an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to address issues at the edtech major and oust founders from having control over the firm. "Think & Learn Pvt Ltd has noted with sorrow, statements from a select few investors calling for an EGM to replace founder and group CEO Byju Raveendran. Under these unfortunate circumstances, we would emphasise that the shareholder's agreement does not give them the right to vote on CEO or management change," the company said in a statement. The investors led by Dutch investment firm Prosus in the EGM notice requested the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues and the reconstitution of the Board of Directors.

Markets rebound on firm global cues

PTI ■ NUNBAI

Benchmark equity indices bounced back sharply on Friday, with the Nifty hitting its lifetime peak in intra-day trade, tracking a rally in global markets along with buying in Reliance Industries, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 440.33 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 72,085.63. During the day, it jumped 1,444.1 points or 2 per cent to 73,089.40. The Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,853.80. During the day, the benchmark soared 429.35 points or 1.97 per cent to reach its lifetime peak of 22,126.80. Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid, NTPC, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, JSW Steel, Wipro, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers. Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Larsen & Toubro and ITC were among the laggards. "A conservative interim budget had no slowdown effect on the market, which continued to grow on the pre-election rally. The drastic fall in the fiscal deficit target is leading to a



reduction in bond yields, which will lead to lowering of corporate borrowing costs, increasing incentives to step up investment," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.80 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.49 per cent. Among the indices, oil & gas jumped 4.22 per cent, energy went up by 3.44 per cent, metal (2.95 per cent), services (2.22 per cent), utilities (2.18 per cent), IT (2.17 per cent) and power (1.81 per cent). Financial Services, FMCG, telecommunication and bank were the laggards. On the weekly basis, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,384.96 points or 1.95 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 501.2 points or 2.34 per cent.

Paytm shares tank another 20 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, slumped another 20 per cent on Friday, as the RBI has directed Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29. The stock tanked 20 per cent to Rs 487.05 -- its lowest trading permissible limit for the day -- at the BSE. On the NSE, it tumbled 20 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit of Rs 487.20. Shares of One97 Communications plummeted 20 per cent on Thursday as well. In two days, the company's market capitalisation (mcap) eroded by Rs 17,378.41 crore to Rs 30,931.59 crore. Fintech firm Paytm sees an impact of Rs 300-500 crore on its annual operational profit, as its customers will not be able to add money to their wallets, FASTags etc as RBI barred Paytm Payments Bank from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account.

Sebi mulls revamping nominations framework

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Friday proposed revamping the nominations framework in a bid to reduce unclaimed assets in the securities market as well as smoothen the process for claiming the assets by surviving successors of the deceased investors. The regulator proposed revisions to nomination facilities for securities such as shares, bonds, units of REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts), InvITs (Infrastructure

Investment Trusts), AIFs (Alternative Investment Funds) and other securities held in dematerialised form and for units of mutual fund schemes that are expressed in a statement of account. This will address the objective of providing convenience to investors. Such revamped nomination facilities will operate without affecting the prevalent systems of law governing transmission and succession -- rule of survivorship in case of joint holdings, when a person has died leaving a Will; and when a person has died without it.

BUSINESS BRIEF



'INTERIM BUDGET BEACON OF HOPE FOR EDUCATION SECTOR'

Commenting on the Interim Union Budget and its impact for the education industry, Prajodh Rajan, Co-Founder & Group CEO, Lighthouse Learning (formerly EuroKids International), said, "The Interim Union Budget offers a beacon of hope for India's education landscape. As rightly mentioned by the Union Finance Minister, the National Education Policy 2020 has ushered in transformational reforms in terms of delivering quality education across the country." Rajan, an education entrepreneur who has made pioneering efforts in early childhood education in the country, further said that Upgrading Anganwadi centers through Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 is a welcome step, to not only expedite the improved nutrition delivery but also prioritise early childhood care and development.

'BUDGET LAUDABLE STEP TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT'

Talking about the Interim Budget presented yesterday Md. Sajid Khan, Director-India, ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) said that the Interim Union Budget paints a promising picture of India's transformation. He said, "The focus on skilling India's youth through initiatives like NEP and Skill India Mission, and the emphasis on both traditional and non-traditional skilling avenues is a laudable step towards India's aspirations of becoming a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047." Khan said public-private partnerships and leveraging industry expertise will be crucial in bridging the skill gap and empowering the 'Amrit Peedhi' for a developed India by 2047.



'BUDGET BALANCES GROWTH, FISCAL MEASURES'

The union interim Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, prioritised growth-oriented measures while carefully balancing the fiscal considerations, said Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI). Arun Alagappan, President, said the Budget proposals, containing much needed measures to accelerate growth in infrastructure, blue economy, agriculture & aerospace, defence and green energy sectors are welcome steps. "The government's commitment to agriculture is commendable. The budget proposal to promote private and public investment in post-harvest activities including aggregation, modern storage, supply chains, primary and secondary processing, marketing and branding is a step in the right direction, Alagappan said.



Gold appreciates by ₹200; silver rallies ₹400



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices appreciated Rs 200 to Rs 63,650 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong cues in global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 63,450 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 76,500 per kilogram, while it had ended at Rs 76,100 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,650 per 10 grams, up Rs 200, taking cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of com-

modities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading higher at USD 2,054 per ounce, up USD 10 from the previous close. Traders are looking for US non-farm payrolls data to be released on Friday, which could offer more cues on the macro front for the US Fed's monetary policy outlook, Gandhi added. Also, silver was quoting with gains at USD 23.15 per ounce. Gold prices stayed positive this week on the back of Middle East tensions and uncertainty over US Fed's monetary policy interest rate, Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said.

Reliance Industries shares climb all time high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Reliance Industries were in heavy demand on Friday, climbing over 2 per cent, adding Rs 41,860.54 crore to its market valuation. The stock of the country's most valued firm went up 2.18 per cent to settle at Rs 2,914.75 on the BSE. During the day, shares of the company jumped 3.40 per cent to hit its all-time high of Rs 2,949.90. At the NSE, it climbed 2 per cent to Rs 2,913. The market valuation jumped Rs 41,860.54 crore to Rs 19,72,028.45 crore. With this, it has come within the striking distance of reaching the Rs 20 lakh crore-mark in market capitalisation (mcap). Rally in the stock was instrumental in markets recovery on Friday. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 440.33 points, or 0.61 per cent, to settle at 72,085.63. In traded volume terms, 6.54 lakh shares of it were traded at the BSE, and over 98.26 lakh shares at the NSE during day.

I-T dept will erase petty tax demands on its own: CBDT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The income tax department will "erase" petty tax demands pending against about 80 lakh taxpayers on its own and issue a "speaking order" explaining the process to be followed, CBDT chairman Nitin Gupta said Friday, a day after the measure was proposed in the interim Budget. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on Thursday declared the government's proposal to withdraw outstanding direct tax demands up to Rs 25,000 till 2009-10 fiscal and up to Rs 10,000 for financial years 2010-11 to 2014-15. This was being done, she said, as part of an effort to improve ease of living and ease of doing business for citizens. The finance minister added that there were "a large number" of petty, non-verified, non-reconciled or disputed direct tax demands, many of them dating as far back as the year 1962, which continue to remain on the books, causing anxiety to honest taxpayers and hindering refunds of subsequent years.

"We will erase these demands, we will extinguish such a demand from the records of the tax department. The taxpayer does not have to do anything and we will not be getting in touch with them (taxpayer) at all." "This process will not be adverse to the assessee," Gupta told PTI in a post-Budget interview. However, he said, such demands will be put on the e-filing portal of the individual taxpayers so that they can also have a look and if there is any issue, the department will resolve it, the top tax department officer said. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is the administrative authority for the I-T department. Gupta added, "If the taxpayer has an issue with regard to these demand cases like rectification or there could be a case where appeal effect has not been given or a refund issue is pending, then it will be taken care of." "We will come out with a speaking order that will explain everything..." he said. About 80 lakh taxpayers will

benefit from this measure and the amount involved here is about Rs 3,500 crore, the CBDT chief said. He said only the base figure of the demand (Rs 25,000 and Rs 10,000) will be the "deciding factor" for such cases and not the interest amount riding on the basic demand over the years. "This is basically a measure to give relief to the taxpayers where there were mismatches... Like the taxpayer claiming that he has paid the tax but we (I-T department) don't have the records and even the taxpayer may not have the records and hence grievances came up," Gupta said. Due to this, the entire process of issuing refunds is getting slowed down. The income tax department is a very old organisation and earlier the processes were paper-based and gradually it embraced technology and hence issues came up when the records were being digitised, he said. "The government has now taken a call that smaller demands can be extinguished so that these do not come up on a recurring basis," he said.

LACK OF DRAG FLICKERS CONCERNING FOR INDIAN WOMEN HOCKEY



PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian women's hockey team's woeful penalty corner conversion rate is due to the lack of drag flickers in the side, according to chief coach Janneke Schopman, who stressed on the need to have a more effective talent development programme in the country. Penalty corner conversion has been a thorn in the flesh for the Indian women's team of late. The inability to convert was one of the reasons the side struggled at last month's Olympic Qualifiers, eventually missing the bus for the Paris Games. "We need potentially more depth in our penalty corner. That is a concern in women's hockey in India," Schopman said on the eve of India's FIH Pro League match against China.

"If you look at any other country in the top 10, they have 5-6 drag flickers and we do not. So there's work that needs to be happening in talent development." Schopman said while the team is still hurting after its shocking failure to qualify for the Olympics, it is time to look ahead and make the most of the opportunities the Pro League will provide. "As a team we are hurting still, it has been a tough two weeks. We have done a lot of talking and thinking about what happened and why it happened. We want to show that we are a good team and we can play against good teams as well. "We won't get the Olympics back but we can only move forward and that is our plan here, to move forward, to play to our strengths, and to show that we can play well."

Schopman said she was happy with the way the side played in the Olympic qualifier despite finishing fourth. "The hockey they played there we created a lot of opportunities to score goals but we didn't (score). I believe we can play dominating hockey. We want to be a good team here and we want to score goals. "In the last six months, in the Asian Games, I wasn't happy with our team performance there, I was happy with the performance at the Olympic qualifiers." Schopman rued the lack of fixtures last year. "I have said this before... Unfortunately, in the last year we haven't played very many matches that mattered to be completely honest. We were not in the Pro League. From January to September we maybe played four official

matches. In Pro League you play 16." India will take on reigning Asian Games Champions China in their first game, followed by a clash with the Netherlands on Sunday. They will face off against Australia on February 7 before playing their last game in Bhubaneswar against the United States on February 9. "In the Pro League we have the opportunity to see how we fare against some of the best teams in the world, like the Netherlands and Australia, the exciting thing is that we are up against these teams and they are not practice matches, it is hugely important for them before the Olympics and it will be great to take them on." "I think we can score goals and defend well but we are facing good teams and it will be interesting to see how it unfolds."

Hitaashee ends 22 months title drought

PTI ■ KOLKATA

In-form Hitaashee Bakshi ended a 22-month title drought as she triumphed at the third leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour with a superb performance at the Tollygunge Club here on Friday. Hitaashee won three times in 2022, but then had a winless 2023 during which she was also injured. After two successive runner-up finishes on the 2024 Hero WPG Tour, she finished on top by a convincing margin of four shots. Playing steady golf with two birdies against one bogey, she carded 1-under 69 and was 2-under 208 for the week. Hitaashee's last win on the Tour came 22 months ago in September 2022 in the 11th Leg of the 2022 season in Hyderabad. Jasmine Shekar shrugged off an early double bogey to bring in 69, the only other under par card of the day to be second at 2-over 212. Ananya Garg, who was tied for second overnight, dropped bogeys on the 16th and 17th and finished third, while Ridhima Dilawari, who was also tied second after two rounds, ended fourth. Hitaashee, who recently won the Qualifying School and full playing rights to the All-Thailand Pro Golf Tour, started the day with a three-shot margin over Ananya and Ridhima, both of whom dropped further back with a bogey start. Hitaashee parred the first two holes and a birdie on the third put her further ahead. Neither Ananya nor Ridhima could come close to Hitaashee, who played solid with just one bogey on the sixth, which she made up for with a birdie on the seventh. She parred the last 11 holes. Jasmine did make a bid with three birdies,



but the double bogey dented her hopes, and she also missed a few birdie putts. Amateur Anaahat Bindra (72) was tied fifth with Seher Atwal (74), while Khushi Khanijau (70), the first round leader, was seventh. Sneha Singh (71), winner of the second leg, ended in a tie for eighth place with Amandeep Drall (75) and Gauri Karhade (77). Hitaashee also moved to the top of the

Hero Order of Merit with the win, and she followed second place finishes in the first two legs. Hitaashee has now won Rs 3,69,000 while Sneha has taken home Rs 3,29,500 and Jasmine Rs 2,16,900. Khushi Khanijau and Amandeep Drall are fourth and fifth on the Hero Order of Merit. The fourth leg of the Hero WPGT will be held at the Vizag, East Point Golf Club from February 6 to 9.

AIFF plans countrywide structure for talent scouting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation on Friday said it plans to create a robust three-stage country-wide structure for talent scouting and recruitment for its ambitious FIFA-AIFF Talent Academy. In a joint effort with the Ministry of Education and FIFA, the AIFF desires to use the 'Football 4 School' programme as a pathway in identifying talent, scouting and recruitment for its FIFA-AIFF Academy in Bhubaneswar. In this regard, AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey and FIFA

High Performance Expert Ged Roddy and Philippe Senderos called on Education and Skill Development Minister Dharmendra Pradhan here on Thursday to present a blueprint and seek the government's support. "I'm thankful for the support we have been assured by the honourable Minister for Education Mr Dharmendra Pradhan, the ministry and its nodal agencies without which it will be very difficult to attempt a pan-India scouting programme," Chaubey said in a release. "We want to go as far as possible, reach every possible

12-13 year talent in our quest to find and horn skills of a home-grown talent. Minister Mr. Pradhan has shown keen interest in our proposal and has assured full support." According to the release, Pradhan expressed confidence that the integration of 'Football 4 School' as talent scouting platform for the academy will be successful with the commitment of FIFA, AIFF and the Ministry of Education. "The FIFA-AIFF plan is exciting and something never attempted before at this scale. The Football 4 School programme has already been

introduced in 5 states and we wish to take it to every school, every student and every PE teacher." The Bhubaneswar-based first FIFA-AIFF Talent Academy plans to have an intake of 40-50 best scouted talents per year, over the next three years to enable a continuous scouting inflow in U-13, U-14 and U-15 age categories. AIFF is also on a lookout to establish five additional Talent Academies in India, for which a combined FIFA-AIFF delegation will visit existing academies in India, by mid-March.

Chaliha enters Thailand Masters semifinals

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's Ashmita Chaliha dished out a brilliant performance as she beat Ester Nurumi Wardoyo of Indonesia in straight games to storm into the women's singles semifinals of the Thailand Masters badminton tournament here on Friday. The 24-year-old Chaliha remained the only Indian in the fray after Mithun Manjunath lost his men's singles quarterfinals while the women's doubles pairs of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also exited from the Super 300 tournament in the last-eight stage. World no. 61 Chaliha, who made it to the main draw from the qualifiers, beat Wardoyo, ranked 44th, 21-14 19-21 21-13 in a 57-minute match. The first game saw both Chaliha and Wardoyo fighting on an even keel as they tied the score at 7-7 and 8-8, before the Indonesian took a 14-10 lead. Chaliha fought back and made it 14-14 but she could not stop the Indonesian from taking seven straight points to pocket the first game.



The player from Assam made amends in the second game with a superb fight back. She won six-straight points from 15-19 down to win the second game and take the match to the decider. With the momentum going her way, Chaliha just outplayed her opponent in the deciding game as she did not allow her opponent to take the lead even once. It was Chaliha all the way as she took 12-3 lead before wrapping up the match with ease. Chaliha will face the winner of the match between fourth seed

Supanida Katethong of Thailand and Wen Chi Hsu of Chinese Taipei in the semifinals. However, sixth seeded doubles pair of Treasa and Gayatri suffered a narrow loss to fourth seeds Indonesia's Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Amallia Cahaya Pratiwi 12-21 21-17 21-23 in the last-eight match that lasted one hour and seven minutes. In the men's singles, national champion and world no. 63 Manjunath lost to Dutchman Mark Caljouw 19-21 15-21 in 43 minutes in the quarterfinals.

Cantlay takes off PGA Tour board hat

AP ■ PEBBLE BEACH

Patrick Cantlay has spent about as much time on the phone as the golf course this week as a PGA Tour board member trying to nail down a deal for a \$3 billion investment. It didn't seem to affect his day job at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am. On a surprising day of weather when umbrellas gave way to sunglasses, Cantlay saved par five times and had eight birdies at Spyglass Hill for an 8-under 64 that left him one shot behind Thomas Detry of Belgium. Detry worked his own short-game magic at the end, chipping in from thick, damp rough for birdie on the 18th at Spyglass to finish with three straight birdies and a 63. Torrey Pines winner Matthieu Pavon had the best round at Pebble Beach, closing with four birdies over the last five holes for a 65. Rory McIlroy, no longer on the PGA Tour board but offering eye-opening comments this week that LIV Golf players



should be able to return without punishment, was among the leaders until it all fell apart at the end at Spyglass. He was leading at 6 under, coming off five birdies in seven holes, when he three-putted for bogey. And then on the par-5 seventh, he drove into trouble and took a penalty drop by going some 20 yards back on his line and then moving one club length to the right. One problem - that rule was changed to allow that in 2019, and then changed back in 2023. McIlroy was supposed to drop on the line between his ball and the hole. So the two-shot penalty turned his bogey

into a triple bogey, and he shot 71. "I wasn't aware that that rule was changed again in 2023, so I took a drop thinking of the 2019 rules when everything was changed, not knowing that the rule was changed again in 2023," McIlroy said. "So got a two-stroke penalty there." The 80-man field - the strongest and smallest for Pebble Beach, which is now a signature event offering a \$20 million purse - was mostly happy they weren't drenched from a forecast that suggested even more rain on top of the 1.5 inches that dropped overnight.



Avani on fifth, stays in hunt

PTI ■ PATTAYA

India's Avani Prashanth stayed in the top five with another solid card of 3-under 69 in the second round of the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championships here on Friday. The 17-year-old Avani began with a flourish with three birdies in the first six holes, but thereafter the putter went dry, and she had just one more birdie and one bogey. At 7-under for 36 holes, Avani is tied fifth with China's Yahui Zhang (69), but the leader, Chun-Wei Wu of Taiwan, playing in the second last group after a tenth tee start, was on fire in her second nine. Wu carded 7-under 65 to get to 12-under and five ahead of the Indian. "I have not made any birdies on Par-5s so far, but they are also not all that easy. But I am hoping I will be able to get some over the next two days," said Avani. Apart from Avani, the only other Indian to make the cut was debutant Saanvi Somu (72) who played superbly to hang on for the weekend. The other Indians missed the cut. Vidhatri Urs, who was 1-over after the first added a 77 and at six-over as she missed the cut by four shots. She had a rough 7-over front nine. Mannat Brar (82-75) showed a lot of improvement,

and Heena Kang (81-79) and Keerthana Rajeev Nair (81-79) also missed the cut. Avani was happy with her putting. "I think I putted really well today. Started off average with pulling my tee wood on first and then leaving my approach short, and then had a good 10-footer for par. I think that put me into a good roll. "I birdied 3rd, 4th, and 6th and I was really happy with that. I made a bit of an error on 9 hitting the hazard and saved bogey there. Putter dried up a little bit on the back nine but then made one birdie and I am glad I finished 3-under. I'm sitting in a good position." Avani, who loves to rally from behind, said, "I love chasing, so this has put me in a good positive frame of mind. I'm doing what I like and there is no unnecessary pressure on me. I'm just excited to see how it pans out." Leader Wu birdied five times in her second nine, which was the front side of the challenging Siam Country Club. Wu, who began the day with a birdie-birdie start from the 12th, carded 7-under 65 and was 12-under for 36 holes. Wu held a two-shot lead over second placed Japan's Minano Muguruma (66) and in shared third place were Korea's Lee Hyosong (66) and Thailand's Pimpisa Rubrong (68) at 8-under.

Hamilton will leave Mercedes at end of 2024

AP ■ LONDON

Lewis Hamilton shocked the motorsports world when the seven-time Formula One champion said he will leave Mercedes at the end of the season to join Ferrari, which had tried to land Hamilton before he signed his latest contract extension with the Silver Arrows. Hamilton only finalized a two-year extension with Mercedes at the end of August. Mercedes said Thursday the 39-year-old British driver has activated a release clause in that new deal that will allow him to join Ferrari in 2025. "I have had an amazing 11 years with this team and I'm so proud of what we have achieved together. Mercedes has been part of my life since I was 13 years old," Hamilton said in a team statement. "It's a place where I have grown up, so making the decision to leave was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. But the time is right for me to take this step and I'm excited to be taking on a new challenge."

Hamilton moved from McLaren to Mercedes in 2013 and won six of his seven titles with the Silver Arrows. His 103 race victories are an F1 record, but his last win was in the penultimate race of the 2021 season as Mercedes has struggled to get its new car up to speed against rival Red Bull. News first broke early Thursday about Hamilton's move, but it took the remainder of the day for the teams to address the speculation. Mercedes, with comment from both Hamilton and team principal Toto Wolff, finally said Hamilton was leaving and moments later Ferrari posted a team statement that said simply "Scuderia Ferrari is pleased to announce that Lewis Hamilton will be joining the team in 2025, on a multi-year contract." Next came a statement from current Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz Jr., who had been in talks on a contract extension but negotiations had seemed to stall near the end of last year. "Following today's news, Scuderia Ferrari and myself will part ways at



the end of 2024," Sainz wrote. "We still have a long season ahead of us and, like always, I will give my absolute best for the team and for the tifosi all around the world. News about my future will be announced in due course." Hamilton will finish his run at Mercedes alongside current teammates George Russell. He will be teammates at Ferrari with Charles Leclerc, who in December agreed to a long-term extension. Hamilton will be 40 when he moves into a red and black uniform to represent Ferrari. His last championship was in 2020 and he was enroute to a record-breaking eighth

title in the 2021 season finale until a controversial finish gave the title to Max Verstappen, who has since gone on to win three consecutive titles as Red Bull has surpassed Mercedes as the top team in F1. Ferrari, meanwhile, has not won a drivers' title since Kimi Raikkonen in 2007. The Hamilton move is fairly stunning, even after prolonged negotiations on the extension he signed last year led to speculation he was considering a move to another team. During one news conference last season, Leclerc was asked about the rumors of a new teammate at Ferrari and turned to Hamilton, laughed, and said "Hello, Lewis." Still, Hamilton signed the Mercedes extension and insisted he wanted to end his career with his current team because of "unfinished business" and a desire to help Mercedes rebuild its struggling team. Instead, Wolff said both sides knew their relationship "would come to a natural end at some point, and that day has now come."

Jaiswal 179 not out puts India in strong position

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM
Yashasvi Jaiswal batted with supreme confidence for an unbeaten 179 off 257 balls that single-handedly drove India to 336 for six on day one of the second Test against England here on Friday and secured his place at the top of the order for the foreseeable future. Unlike the series opener, Jaiswal made sure he converted his strong start into a big hundred but the other Indian batters failed to make the most of batting friendly conditions. The 22-year-old now has two hundreds and as many fifties to his name in only his 10th Test innings. His maiden Test ton - a 387-ball 171 - came against the West Indies last year. "I wanted to play it session by session. When they were bowling well, I just wanted to get through that spell. However, I wanted to convert the loose balls, and play till the end," Jaiswal said after the day's play. Jaiswal, whose special effort comprised 17 boundaries and five sixes, had R Ashwin (5) by his side at stumps. India made 111 runs in the final session for the loss of three

wickets including Axar Patel (27 off 51) and K S Bharat (17 off 23). For England, debutant Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed picked up two wickets apiece. Debutant Rajat Patidar (32 off 72) played one on to his stumps while offering a forward defence to leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed. A total of 93 overs were bowled with four spinners in operation. Trailing 0-1 in the five-match series, India would like to get to at least 500 on day two and then put pressure on the England batters on a pitch where variable bounce is expected to come into play from day three. The odd ball kept low even on the opening day but conditions remained favourable of the batters. However, the injury to Ravindra Jadeja has resulted in a longer tail, which will need to wag for India to get anywhere close to 500. Veteran James Anderson, playing his first game since July last year, was the most economical and effective bowler for England, returning figures of 17-3-30-1. However, England's inexperienced spin attack, including



debutant Shoaib Bashir, Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Joe Root, could not extract much out of the surface. The 20-year-old Bashir was the pick of the spinners as he was able to generate more bounce due to his tall structure. The 6'4" tall off-spinner got the prized wicket of Rohit Sharma in the first session before he had Axar caught at backward point towards the end of the day. Jaiswal changed the tempo of the innings with his attractive strokeplay in the second session in which India collected 122 runs in 32 overs to reach 225 for three. The youngster, who took 89 balls to reach his half-century in the morning, took another 62 deliveries to complete his second Test century. The standout feature of Jaiswal's innings was his ability to hit the ground and strike aerial shots with equal ease.

His fearless approach was best summed up when he stepped out to smash let-arm spinner Tom Hartley for a six over long on to get to three figures. He raised his arms in celebration and the Vizag crowd along with his teammates duly applauded his special feat. Jaiswal played a lot of cuts off the spinners in the early part of his innings but turned to drives and lofted drives against them in the second session. He mainly attacked Hartley, collecting three straight fours in the 45th over, including drives past the bowler and through extra cover. His inside out shots were also a treat to watch, especially the six off Joe Root. Jaiswal shared a 90-run stand with Shreyas Iyer (27 off 59 balls), who once again failed to capitalise on a start. It came as no surprise that Anderson employed the short ball tactic against Iyer, who was up to the task on the day. However, he tried to cut one off Hartley and ended up under-edges to Ben Foakes, who took a sharp catch behind the stumps. In the morning, Bashir had Rohit Sharma caught at leg slip

as the cautious hosts reached 103 for two at lunch. Shubman Gill (34 off 46) looked good before James Anderson had him caught behind with a beauty. The failure to convert the good start is set to add more pressure on the talented youngster. India expectedly decided to bat first on a flat surface and made three changes to their playing eleven, bringing in Patidar, Kuldeep Yadav and Mukesh Kumar for K L Rahul, Jadeja and Mohammed Siraj respectively. Openers Rohit and Jaiswal batted in a sedate fashion especially in the first hour of play, collecting only 40 runs in 16 overs. England opened the bowling with their lone pacer in the playing eleven, Anderson, and off-spinner Root. Anderson was accurate and frugal in his opening spell, giving away only six runs in five overs. The surface had minimal help for him but the 41-year-old still made life tough for Rohit by targeting his stumps. It was very unlike Rohit to not to go for his shots and his innings ended without a boundary.



India A make remarkable comeback

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
India A staged a remarkable comeback to dismiss England Lions for 199 before the batters propelled the home team to a position of strength on the second day of the third and final unofficial Test here on Friday. At stumps, India A were well-placed at 148 for three in their second innings and 141 runs ahead of the visitors, who suffered an inexplicable collapse after starting the day at 98 for one. Sai Sudharsan (54 off 141 balls) was going strong in the middle, capping a fine outing for the hosts who were in all sorts of trouble on the opening day. Tilak Varma (46 off 85 balls) got out after getting his eye in and his dismissal brought the day's play to an end. Thanks to the brilliant display by their bowlers, India A limited England Lions' first-innings lead to a mere seven runs at the Narendra Modi Stadium. The right-left pace duo of Akash Deep (4/56) and Yash Dayal (3/32) shared seven wickets between them while plotting the visiting team batters' downfall in their first innings. Dayal, whose mother was inconsolable and had stopped eating after the left-arm seamer was smashed for five successive sixes by state-

mate Rinku Singh in an Indian Premier League (IPL) match last year, has come a long way, giving his team the day's first breakthrough. Bowling a fine line and length, he had Oliver Price (31) trapped in front of the wicket as the overnight batter could add just 11 runs to his score of 20. Dayal then took the big wicket of opener Alex Lees (64), who had started the day on 48, to raise hopes of a comeback. Dayal had also picked up the wicket of opener Keaton Jennings (17) on Thursday evening before adding two more to his tally on the second day. Meanwhile, Akash Deep got into the act by removing rival skipper Josh Bohannon for 10 as England Lions slipped to 136 for four, offering the hosts more reasons to smile. The tourists needed a partnership at that stage but that was not forthcoming as the batters who got starts failed to convert them into meaningful contributions. While the duo of Deep and Dayal inflicted maximum damage, Mumbai's left-arm spinner Shams Mulani supported them well with two wickets. When India A came out to bat the second time in the match, Sai Sudharsan and Tilak dominated the English bowlers with an 88-run stand for the third wicket before the latter was dismissed.

Didn't feel any pressure: Patidar

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM
Years of toil on the domestic circuit made Rajat Patidar fully equipped for his red-ball India debut and day one of the second Test against England was just another "normal" day in the life of the 30-year-old late bloomer. Patidar, who made his first-class debut with Madhya Pradesh way back in 2015, knew that he was going to be

part of the playing eleven a day before the game. Having recently scored back-to-back hundreds against England Lions for India A, Patidar went into the big game high on confidence. He looked assured in his 72-ball 32 and one of his three boundaries came via a reverse sweep. He could not convert the start as he played on while going for a forward-defensive shot against leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed. "It was a dream come true



moment for me. Representing the country is a dream for every player. Going into the

middle, there was no pressure as I have played lot of games in domestic cricket. I slept well last night. It was normal for me," Patidar said after close of play. "I have also played two series at the A level (NZ and England). It gives a lot of confidence when you play at that level. I gained in confidence playing against Lions (recently). The two hundreds against Lions were very crucial for me." The Test debut on Friday and ODI cap last month came after

a major setback for Patidar, who missed the whole of IPL last year due to an achilles heel injury that required surgery. On the long wait for his Test debut, he said: "Waiting for so long is common in Indian cricket (laughs). There are lot of players. I was just focussing on things that are in my hands. So at the age of 30 I came here, feeling pretty good," said Patidar, who was handed his Test cap by former pacer Zaheer Khan.

Karnatak a slip to 90 for 6

PTI ■ SURAT
The stuttering Karnataka batters squandered the advantage given by their bowlers, slipping to 90 for six at close of play on the first day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group C match against Railways here on Friday. However, the Karnataka bowlers had a good day in the park, bundling out Railways for 155. Pacer Vasuki Koushik (3/22) and 17-year-old left-arm spinner Hardik Raj (3/28) derailed Railways. During their reply, the Karnataka batters' focus was taken away a bit by the absence of their prolific captain Mayank Agarwal after he was ruled out of this match. Agarwal could not travel to Surat as he felt burning sensation in his mouth and throat after accidentally consuming a spurious liquid from a pouch during his flight out of Agartala a couple of days back. He is recovering in Bengaluru. Without Agarwal's solid presence, Karnataka top-order caved in against left-arm spinner Akash Pandey, who took three for 21. Earlier, skipper Pratham Singh made a solid 56 off 131 balls but he could not keep the consistent Karnataka bowlers at bay for long. Brief Scores: At Surat: Railways 155 all out in 56 overs (Pratham Singh 56, Mohammad Saif 45; Vasuki Koushik 3/22, Hardik Raj 3/28) vs Karnataka 90/6 in 27.5 overs (KV Aneesh 27; Akash Pandey 3/21). At Povorim: Goa 241 all out in 75.5 overs (Suyash Prabhudesai 104, KV Siddharth 69; R Sai Kishore 4/73, S Ajith Ram 3/46) vs Tamil Nadu 20 for no loss in 7 overs. At Ahmedabad: Tripura 146 all out in 47.4 overs (Widdhiman Saha 59 not out, Sankar Paul 29; Arzan Nagaswalla 4/47, SA Desai 4/43) vs Gujarat 127/4 in 39.2 overs (Sunpreet Bagga 42; Parvez Sultan 2/36).

Australia big win in 1st ODI over West Indies

AP ■ MELBOURNE
Fast bowler Xavier Bartlett took 4-17 in his ODI debut as Australia thrashed West Indies by eight wickets with 69 balls remaining in their series opener on Friday. Josh Inglis showed little signs of testing positive for COVID-19 the day before when he smacked a quick-fire 65 off 43 balls for Australia. Asked to bat first, West Indies was eventually bowled out for 231 in 48.4 overs after Bartlett's stunning three-wicket opening burst had left the tourists in trouble at 59-4 as he went on to record Australia's second-best ODI figures on debut. Captain Steven Smith (79 not out) and Cameron Green (77 not out) struck fine unbeaten half centuries as Australia eased to 232-2 in 38.3 overs. "Amazing way to start my career," the 25-year-old Bartlett said after he was made player of the match. "Couldn't ask for more with that first wicket, hit the stumps ... happy to contribute here." Australia didn't feel the absence of its key World Cup-winning players, including skipper Pat Cummins, who



was rested ahead of the tour of New Zealand. Bartlett ran through the top order on the lively MCG wicket after he shared the new ball with another newcomer, pace bowler Lance Morris, as Australia went with two debutants to share the new ball for the first time in this format since Andy Bichel and Anthony Stuart at the Gabba in 1997. Bartlett was instrumental in Brisbane Heat's Big Bash League title this year and he struck off his third ball when he hit Justin Greaves top of the off stump with an impeccable outswinger. Bartlett could have had Alick Athanaze lbw when he struck the opener's front pad three balls later but Smith didn't go for a TV referral. Replays suggested the ball was hitting the top of leg stump. But Bartlett found the outside edges of Athanaze and captain Shai Hope in a sensational opening spell of 3-9 before Keacy Carty (88) and Roston Chase (59) shared a century-stand. Carty showed plenty of aggression against Morris, who ended up with 0-59, while Chase dominated Adam Zampa before he was bowled around his leg by the legspinner just when West Indies looked to accelerate. Carty looked set for his century but was run out when he went for an unnecessary single and Sean Abbott hit the stumps from extra cover.

Comparisons with Dhoni hurt: Pant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Mahendra Singh Dhoni has been Rishabh Pant's sounding board for a while now but there was a time when comparisons with the legendary former India skipper left the young keeper-batter so stressed that he struggled "to breathe" Pant is still recovering from a life-threatening car crash in 2022 and acknowledged that at this stage, Dhoni is the only person with whom he is comfortable sharing just about everything in his life. But he also admitted that comparisons with the iconic Ranchi man were hard to take in the early days of his career. "I used to really feel very bad. I used to go back to my room and cry at 20-21 years of age. Under stress, I couldn't breathe. So much pressure, and I didn't know what to do. I missed a stumping in Mohali, and the crowd started to chant 'Dhoni Dhoni'," Pant said in a 'Star Sports' series that documents his recovery from the accident. Pant said at this point he feels emotionally overwhelmed while talking about his dynamics with the 2011 World Cup winner. "I always find it difficult to explain my relationship with MS. Dhoni. There are some with



whom you can talk freely. I discuss everything with MSD. I have learned so much from him. "I discuss things with him that I wouldn't discuss with anybody else. That's the kind of relationship (I have) with him," Pant said. Pant, who was arguably India's biggest game-changer in Test cricket before being thrown off track by the horrific crash, said before it became hurtful, he was genuinely confused by the comparisons with a bonafide legend like Dhoni. First of all, I didn't understand why questions were raised. I had just made it to the team, and people were talking about being a replacement," Pant said. "Why were people raising such questions at a youngster? Why are you comparing? There shouldn't be any comparison at all. Some have played five matches and the others have played 500. It's been such a long journey, so many ups and downs, so the comparison is not fair."

New Zealand faces under strength South Africa

AP ■ WELLINGTON
As cricket fans savor two of the most thrilling finishes in test match history, New Zealand is preparing to play South Africa in a series that some say will damage the status of the longer format of the game. The West Indies' eight-run win over Australia in Brisbane and England's 28-run win over India at Hyderabad seemed to reinforce test match cricket's place at the very pinnacle of the game. But at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui from Sunday, New Zealand will face a South Africa team entirely stripped of its

leading players who have been kept at home for a domestic Twenty20 series. New Zealand has mostly been diplomatic about the selection of the Proteas team which features eight uncapped players, including its captain Neil Brand. But other voices have been raised in strident criticism of South Africa's decision to give a local T20 competition priority over a test series. Former Australia captain Steve Waugh said the Proteas selection showed South Africa "obviously doesn't care" about test cricket. "Is this a defining moment in the death of test cricket?" Waugh wrote on X, formerly Twitter.



"History and tradition must count for something. If we stand by and allow profits to be the defining criteria, the legacy of Bradman, Grace and Sobers will be irrelevant." In a subsequent interview with the Sydney Morning Herald, Waugh called for concerted action to save tests. "If the ICC or someone doesn't step in shortly then test cricket doesn't become test cricket because you're not testing yourself against the best players," he said. "I understand why players don't come. They're not getting paid properly. "I don't understand why the ICC or the top countries who are making a lot of money

don't just have a regulation premium set fee for test matches so people are incentivized to play test cricket." New Zealand now finds itself in a no-win situation in the two-test series. The Black Caps haven't lost a test series at home since March 2017 but has never beaten South Africa in a test series. If it wins the upcoming series, the achievement will be devalued by the quality of the South Africa team; if it loses it may face ridicule. Former captain Kane Williamson, who has recovered from a hamstring strain and will play in the first test, said New Zealand has to put those

considerations aside. "For us, we just want to focus on the cricket that we want to play and the plans that we have and that doesn't change from opposition to opposition," he said. "So we are under no illusions that it is going to be a tough contest for sure. They are all very good players and we just want to keep bringing the focus back to our cricket." New Zealand currently is third place in the Test Championship behind Australia and South Africa. The Black Caps could move up to second with a series win. "Any win anywhere is crucial," Williamson said. "That's why it is difficult to micro-manage a

Test Championship campaign. . . It's such a long period of time and the games can come a bit sporadically." Bland said South Africa also needs to ignore external chatter about the series. "Obviously going over to New Zealand, making your debut and captaining is quite interesting and probably quite rare," he said. I am obviously delighted. "This (Proteas) team has 96 games per player as an average. That's a lot of first-class cricket in the group. There's a lot of experience in terms of domestic cricket and that has to count for something. There's not a lot of test matches but you've still got to see it as a positive.