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TENSIONS ESCALATE IN
BAB-EL-MANDEB STRAIT

WORLD 8
ISRAELI FORCES RESCUE 2
HOSTAGES IN GAZA RAID

MONEY 10
SENSEX TANKS 523 POINTS ON
PROFIT TAKING IN BANKING

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VIRAT ABSENCE,
GREAT CHANCE FOR
ENGLAND: BROAD
12 SPORTS

Delhi Fortress against Farmers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

A team of Union Ministers held talks in Chandigarh on Monday evening with farmer leaders to dissuade them from their “Delhi Chalo” march. Meanwhile, authorities in Delhi fortified the border points with neighbouring States and imposed a month-long ban on large gatherings. Massive security arrangements were put in place to prevent the protesting farmers from entering the city on Tuesday. The ministers, including Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal and Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, held the second round of talks with the farmer leaders at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26. Leaders such as Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher were among those present at the meeting, which commenced at around 6:30 pm. At the time of going to press, the meeting was still in progress. During the meeting, the Centre has already assured them that some of their demands will be met. However, sources indicate that the farmer leaders are unwilling to relent until the debt waiver and legal

guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) are fulfilled. The demands accepted by the Centre include granting Rs 10 lakh compensation to farmers injured in Lakhimpur Kheri, cancelling FIRs related to the 2020-21 farmers’ agitation, providing compensation and

and paramilitary personnel equipped with anti-riot gear has been implemented. Multiple layers of barricades, concrete blocks, iron nails, and walls of containers have been erected at three border points: Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur. Additionally, makeshift jails have been

processions, or rallies, as well as the entry of tractor trolleys carrying people, in the national capital. The Delhi Police has imposed Section 144 for a month in anticipation of widespread tension and “social unrest” due to the farmers’ “Delhi Chalo March”.



Multi-layered barricading in place at Singhu Border ahead of the scheduled ‘Delhi Chalo’ march by the farmers in New Delhi on Monday PTI

jobs for families of farmers killed in the agitation, and improving the quality of seeds across all crops. This also involves revising licences and imposing penalties on companies manufacturing and selling sub-standard seeds. To prevent the farmers from entering the city on Tuesday, massive deployment of police

established at “specific locations” in anticipation of the farmers’ “Delhi Chalo” march. The police are also using drones to maintain strict surveillance at border points, an official stated, emphasising that they are fully prepared to handle any law and order situation. There will be a complete ban on gatherings,

In addition to a legal guarantee for MSP, the farmers are also demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission’s recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm laborers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases, and “justice” for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Soft diplomacy at work: Modi brings back Naval veterans from Qatar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major diplomatic achievement for the country, eight Indian Navy veterans were released by Qatar, 46 days after their death sentences, handed down last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying duration. They were arrested on alleged charges of espionage. However, neither Qatar nor India made the charges against them public. Seven of them returned home early Monday.

The eight nationals are Captains (retired) Navtej Gill and Saurabh Vasisht, Commanders (retired) Purnendu Tiwari, Amit Nagpal, SK Gupta, BK Verma, and Sugunakar Pakala, and sailor Ragesh.

It was learned that Commander Tiwari stayed back in Doha and is likely to return to India soon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be travelling to Doha in Qatar on Wednesday after his visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra announced here on Monday, adding that the Prime Minister had “personally supervised” developments in the case.

“Prime Minister Modi had personally supervised this issue. This (the release) is



proof of his leadership and also reflects the strength of India-Qatar ties,” the Foreign Secretary said.

While speaking to reporters, Kwatra added, “The Prime Minister has personally and constantly supervised all the developments in this case and has never shied away from any initiatives that would ensure the return of Indian nationals back home.”

The announcement about Modi’s visit to Qatar came a day after the Gulf nation released eight jailed former Indian naval personnel. “We are gratified by Qatar’s decision to release the Indians,” Kwatra said.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned that Modi and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, will hold wide-ranging talks to further expand bilateral ties.

The Indians returned 46 days after their death sentences, handed down last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying duration.

Kwatra also expressed gratitude, saying, “We are grateful for their return. We deeply appreciate the decision of Qatar’s government and the Amir to release them. We are happy to have seven of those Indian nationals back. The 8th Indian national has also been released, and we continue to work with the Qatari government to see how quickly his return to India would be possible.”

In December last year, Prime Minister Modi met Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai and discussed the well-being of the Indian community in

Qatar. This meeting was in the backdrop of Qatar commuting death sentence to jail terms to the eight veterans. National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval played a role in the negotiations with the Qatari authorities in securing the release of the Indians, it was learnt.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Monday India appreciates the decision by the Emir of Qatar to enable the release and homecoming of the Indians, who were arrested in August 2022.

Union Minister Anurag Thakur welcomed the release of eight Navy veterans and said it strengthened the belief in seriousness and the ability of the Modi Government to protect its citizens at any cost.

“This homecoming of our Navy veterans is a moment of happiness and this further strengthens our belief in the seriousness and ability of the Modi government to protect its citizens at any cost,” Thakur said on X.

“Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi means the guarantee of life, limb and liberty of the people of India across the globe,” he said, adding that the veterans were detained “under some false charges”. BJP and Congress welcomed the development.

Nitish survives trust vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/NEWDELHI

The newly formed Nitish Kumar-led NDA Government in Bihar won the trust vote in the State Assembly on Monday, amid a walkout by members of the Mahagathbandhan led by RJD leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav. In the 243-member Bihar Vidhan Sabha, a total of 129 members voted in favour of the motion of confidence. Deputy Speaker Maheshwar Hazari presided over the session as Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary, a member of the RJD, was removed through a resolution. Chaudhary had refused to step down despite his party losing power a fortnight ago. After declaring the motion as passed through a voice vote, Hazari ordered a headcount following a request from Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, which was seconded by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. To facilitate the floor test, Chaudhary was removed with 125 members voting in favour of the no-confidence motion moved against him by the ruling NDA. Only 112 members voted against the motion. Kumar recently abandoned the Mahagathbandhan, of which the RJD was a key constituent, and returned to



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar being greeted by his deputies Vijay Kumar Sinha and Samrat Choudhary after Kumar-led NDA Government in the State won a vote of confidence during the first day of Budget session of the Assembly in Patna PTI

the NDA fold to form the government with the support of the BJP.

Earlier, participating in the debate on the motion, the JD(U) chief alleged that the RJD indulged in corrupt practices during the party’s rule in the State, and the new NDA-led government will initiate a probe into it. Kumar also claimed that during RJD’s tenure, several communal riots took place in Bihar. “There was no law and order. The RJD indulged in corrupt practices during its rule (before 2005)... I will get these probed,” he said. Speaking in the Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav said he always considered Kumar to be a

“father figure” and wondered what forced him to ditch the Mahagathbandhan and return to the BJP-led NDA. “I always considered Nitish Kumar as ‘Dashrath’ (a character from the Ramayan). I don’t know what reasons forced him to ditch the Mahagathbandhan,” he said. The NDA, comprising the JD(U), the BJP, former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi’s HAM, and an Independent, has a combined strength of 128. However, it received a shot in the arm with three RJD MLAs — Prahlad Yadav, Chetan Anand, and Neelam Devi — walking over to the ruling side.

Nyay Yatra shifts gears, turns to Western UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

In the wake of another Congress-led Opposition INDIA bloc ally, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), all set to partner with the NDA, the Congress has decided to cut short their ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Uttar Pradesh by skipping the western part of the State, which is the stronghold of the Jayant Chaudhary-led RLD.

The RLD has been a long-time ally of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and may join hands with the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Though there has been a rift within the RLD leaders and their legislators in the UP Assembly, Jayant has already indicated a switch-over after his grandfather, former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, was conferred with the Bharat Ratna by the Narendra Modi Government last week.

Denying that the sudden shift of the RLD towards the BJP has prompted the Congress to leave the western UP region, Congress said the change in the itinerary of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is only due to the UP Board examinations. Uttar Pradesh Congress spokesperson Anshu Awasthi



said the duration of the yatra in UP is being reduced in view of the State board examinations for Classes 10 and 12. The yatra was earlier scheduled to remain in Uttar Pradesh from February 16 to February 26 before entering Rajasthan. However, it will now end on February 21 and enter Madhya Pradesh by skipping western UP. “Setting an example of sensitivity, Rahul Gandhi ji has prioritised public interest on many occasions. Keeping in mind the UP Board examinations starting from February 22, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will remain in Uttar Pradesh from February 16 to February 21,” Awasthi

said in a statement issued here.

“Earlier, Rahul Gandhi had cancelled his rallies in Bengal out of concern for the people during the COVID-19 period,” the spokesperson added. Elaborating on the schedule of the yatra in UP, Awasthi said it will enter the state through Varanasi on February 16 and then reach Amethi on February 19 via Bhadohi, Prayagraj, and Pratapggarh. On February 19, Rahul Gandhi will address a public meeting in Gauriganj in the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency, and the yatra will reach Rae Bareilly the next day.

Desertions galore, Ashok Chavan quits Congress

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a second major jolt to the Congress ahead of the February 27 Rajya Sabha polls and in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls in the State, Maharashtra’s former chief minister Ashok Chavan on Monday resigned from the grand old party.

Though Chavan said he had not “thought” about joining the ruling BJP or any other party and would decide on his future course of action in the next couple of days, there were no takers for his statement in the State political circles.

Informed sources close to him said that he might join the BJP and he might be given a ticket by the ruling party to contest the biennial Rajya Sabha polls for six seats, scheduled to be held in the State on February 27.

Following Chavan’s resignation, there were speculation within the State political circles that the ruling BJP — which is the single largest Opposition party in the Maharashtra Assembly with a strength of 45 MLAs — might use the use “services” of the senior party leader to engineer a split in the Congress ahead of and during the Rajya Sabha polls.

The news about Chavan



having quit the Congress surfaced after he called on Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar in the morning and submitted his resignation as an MLA. Before long, he took to micro-blogging site “X” and announced that he had quit the Congress.

“I have tendered my resignation as Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from 85-Bhokar Assembly Constituency to the Assembly Speaker Rahulji Narvekar,” Chavan wrote on “X”.

“Today I have resigned from the post of Member of Congress Working Committee of the Indian National Congress Party, membership of Maharashtra Congress Legislature Party and primary membership of the Indian National Congress,” the former chief minister added.

India emerges as a global wedding destination

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Mann Ki Baat appeal for destination weddings within the country, more than 42 lakh weddings are expected to be solemnised this marriage season between January 15 and July 15, incurring an expenditure of Rs 5.5 lakh crore. According to estimates from a traders’ body, in Delhi alone, more than four lakh marriages are expected in these six months, which would bring business prosperity worth Rs 1.5 lakh crore. A survey conducted by the research wing of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) found that

during the wedding season, it is estimated that about five lakh weddings will have an expenditure of Rs 3 lakh per wedding, while about 10 lakh weddings will cost around Rs 6 lakh each. CAIT national president BC Bhartia revealed that following the Prime Minister’s appeal, destination weddings within the country have gained popularity across all types of weddings. Furthermore, it is projected that 10 lakh weddings will incur expenses of Rs 10 lakh per wedding, followed by 10 lakh weddings with expenditures of Rs 15 lakhs per wedding. Additionally, 6 lakh weddings are expected to have an expenditure of Rs 25 lakh

each, 60,000 weddings with Rs 50 lakh expenditure per wedding, and 40,000 weddings with expenses exceeding Rs 1 crore. Overall, during this six-month period, about Rs 5.5 lakh crore will circulate through wedding-related purchases in the markets. Last year, around 35 lakh weddings occurred during the wedding season ending on December 14, with expenses estimated at Rs 4.25 lakh crore. The traders’ body said that banquet halls, hotels, open lawns, community centres, public parks, farmhouses, and various other wedding venues are fully booked across the country, including Delhi. Besides purchasing accessories



at each wedding, a wide array of services is also in demand, including tent decorators, flower decorations, crockery, catering services, travel

services, cab services, professional welcome groups, vegetable vendors, photographers, videographers, bands, musicians, DJ services,

horses for wedding processions, carriages, lighting, and numerous other services, all expected to thrive during this time.

Additionally, event management and packaging of wedding goods and gift items have emerged as significant business prospects. Notably, the wedding season also provides employment opportunities for a large number of people working in the service sector.

“Traders across the country, including Delhi, are optimistic about the current wedding season, which commenced on January 15 and will extend till July 15. During this period, about 42 lakh weddings are expected to take place nationwide, resulting in a substantial capital influx of about 5.5 lakh crore rupees through wedding-related

purchases and services,” the CAIT survey report said. “Before the wedding season, a significant amount of business is conducted in home repairs and painting. Additionally, jewellery, sarees, lehenga-chuni, furniture, readymade garments, clothing, footwear, wedding and greeting cards, dry fruits, sweets, fruits, worship items, groceries, food grains, decoration items, home decor, electrical utilities, electronics, and various gift items are typically in high demand and expected to generate significant business this year,” CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said.

Filariasis Eradication Campaign gains momentum as thousands receive preventive medication

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In adherence to the directives of the state government, an extensive filariasis eradication campaign has been underway in the district from February 10th to February 25th. Deputy Commissioner Manjunath Bhajantri and Deputy Development Commissioner have fervently appealed to all residents to actively participate by taking the prescribed medication of DEC and Albendazole.

As of the latest update, a commendable 3,93,663 individuals have already received the preventive medicine, marking a significant stride

towards the campaign's overall goal. The initiative involves a door-to-door distribution of medications, administered by health workers across all blocks in the district.

Manjunath Bhajantri led by example, taking the filariasis medication along with his family. Meanwhile, Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar motivated girl students at Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya Jugsalai to actively participate in the campaign.

The distribution of DEC and Albendazole medications will continue until February 25th, targeting the entire population of the district, excluding children below 2 years, pregnant women, and those



with serious health conditions. Deputy Commissioner

emphasized the importance of community participation,

stressing that residents prioritize their health and safety by

actively engaging in the campaign. The target is set at providing medication to 85 percent of the total population in the district, overseen by the diligent efforts of Anganwadi Sevikas and Sahiyas from the Health Department.

Bhajantri further highlighted the significance of consuming Albendazole provided under MDA, emphasizing its role in preventing malnutrition. The campaign has already seen a remarkable response, with 3,93,663 people taking the necessary steps to safeguard themselves against filariasis.

The extensive filaria eradication program encompasses all CHCs and urban areas

except Baharagora and Chakulia under the district. The administration of DEC and Albendazole medications aims to reach 19,16,064 individuals, with 4339 trained drug administrators and 254 supervisors ensuring the program's success. The campaign stands as a collaborative effort towards creating a filariasis-free and healthier community.

Emphasizing the importance of community participation, the Deputy Commissioner stressed the significance of safeguarding health and well-being by actively engaging in the campaign against filariasis. The target is to provide medica-

tion to 85 percent of the district's population, with the program being overseen by Anganwadi Sevika and Sahiya of the Health Department.

Highlighting the broader health benefits, it was reiterated that consumption of Albendazole, as part of Mass Drug Administration (MDA), also addresses issues related to malnutrition. The ongoing filaria eradication program covers all Community Health Centers (CHCs) and urban areas within the district, except Baharagora and Chakulia. The target is to administer DEC and Albendazole to 19,16,064 individuals.

YI Masoom empowers 331 children in Jamshedpur with simultaneous awareness sessions

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Young Indians (YI) Jamshedpur's Masoom initiative organised a groundbreaking event with five simultaneous Masoom sessions held at Loyola School Hindi, bringing together a total of 331 enthusiastic children. The sessions, a part of Project Masoom, were conducted by YI Masoom's trained facilitators, namely Rashmi Kanwatiya, Pradhan Mehta, Devasmita Guha (Megha) Bhalotia, Vivek Debuka, and Shraddha Agarwal. All these trainers have received specialized training from Arpan, a renowned organization dedicated to child safety.

The primary objective of the sessions was to raise awareness among school children about the importance of child safety and to empower them against the perils of sex-



ual harassment. Each session aimed to equip children with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to potentially harmful situations.

Under Project Masoom, Young Indians is actively campaigning in schools across the city to sensitize students to

paign, YI aims to create a network of informed individuals who can collectively contribute to making the community a safer place for children.

The success of today's sessions can be attributed to the expertise of the trainers, who have undergone comprehensive training provided by Arpan. Their knowledge and skills were instrumental in creating an engaging and informative environment for the participating children.

In addition to reaching out to schools and students, Young Indians is actively involving parents in the campaign. Preeti Jhunjhunwala, Neha Agarwal, and Vijan Mehta, prominent members of Young Indians, were also present during today's sessions, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative effort involving both schools and parents.

200th birth anniversary of Dayanand Saraswati at DAV Hazaribagh

PNS : HAZARIBAGH

On the occasion of the 200th birth anniversary of Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, a special havan and prayer meeting was organized at DAV Public School under the leadership of Sanskrit teachers Nityanand Pandey, BK Panda and Naval Kishore Mishra. On this occasion, Principal in-charge of DAV, Mrs. Kavita Pandey along with Sampa Srivastava, Kiran Mishra, Ashwini Kumar BK Dubey, Arindam Patnaik, Vijay Bharti, Vishwakarma, Aparajita, Honey Chandra, Tanushree, Najuda Tabassum and other teachers paid floral tribute at the picture of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Addressing the children, Mrs. Kavita Pandey said that Swamiji was the pioneer of cultural renaissance in modern times. By establishing Arya Samaj in 1875 AD, he brought about revolutionary changes in the Indian society through his book 'Satyarthprakash'. Swamiji gave the slogan 'Go back to Vedas'. He had predicted that with the increasing progress of science, in the future, mankind will exploit natural resources wildly for the sake of resources, which will lead to imbalance in nature and lead to disastrous consequences. Vedic Havan will be necessary and beneficial to stop the increasing pollution in the environment. Swamiji laid special emphasis on education for social change.

Today, more than 900 educational institutions of Arya Samaj are active which are providing education through English, Hindi and Sanskrit medium. Swami Dayanand Saraswati played an important role in social upliftment through the purification movement. Swamiji was a strong advocate of women's education. In today's special havan, very beautiful bhajans were also presented by music teacher Shri Vijay Dubey.



Abdul Rauf Ansari new Prez of Anjuman Islamia

PNS : LOHARDAGA

A total of 4292 votes were cast in the voting held on Sunday for the post of President and Secretary of Anjuman Islamia in Lohardaga. After this, counting of votes started late at night under the supervision of police-administration and election committee. In this, Abdul Rauf Ansari won by 602 votes and became the President of Anjuman Islamia Lohardaga. In the counting of votes, Abdul Rauf got 2151 votes. Whereas the nearest rival Haji Sajjad Khan had to be content with only 1549 votes. Similarly, Syed Khalid Shah had to be satisfied with only 412 votes. In the counting of votes for the post of President, 180 votes were declared cancelled. With this, Abdul Rauf Ansari was declared the winner by defeating his nearest rival Haji Sajjad Khan by a margin of 602 votes. Similarly, in the counting of votes for the post of Secretary, Shahid Ahmed won by defeating his nearest rival Nehal Qureshi by a margin of 726 votes.

In the counting of votes, Ehsan Khan got 454 votes, Nehal Qureshi got 1053 votes, Irfan Alam got 742 votes, Syed Shahid Ahmed got 1779 votes, and Tabrez Khan got



98 votes. While 64 votes were declared cancelled. In the triangular contest for the post of Secretary, Shahid Ahmed won the post of Secretary by defeating his nearest rival Nehal Qureshi by 726 votes. After the completion of the counting of votes, Abdul Rauf Ansari, winner of the post of President, and Syed Shahid Ahmed, who won the post of Secretary, were handed over to Anjuman Islamia Election Committee Chief Convener Anwar Ansari, Deputy Convener Afroz Qureshi and Nazim-e-Aala Haji Abdul Jabbar. Certificates signed by were given. During the counting of votes, a jury committee of three people was formed, who were entitled to investigate the canceled votes and take the final decision. They included Abid Hussain, Nesar

Ahmed and Salim Ansari Bade.

During this counting of votes by Anjuman Islamia, Election Committee Convener Haji Ashraf Khan was playing the role of the chief announcer of the counting work, while Asad Rouhani Sahab was playing the role of the Chief Statistics Officer. Chief Convener Anwar Ansari said that the convenors of the election committee were Haji Ashraf Khan, Haji Saud Alam, Haji Tauhid Ahmed, Hasnain Ali, Mohd. Mohamein Baban, Wasif Qayyum, Master Sabir, Ashfaq Khalifa etc. have played important roles in making the elections successful. He expressed his gratitude to the members of Lohardaga Anjuman Islamia, the people of Lohardaga and the police administration.

Consecration of statues of Hanumanji and Vishwakarma



PNS : LOHARDAGA

On Monday, the fourth day of the consecration ceremony of the statues of Hanumanji and Vishwakarma Lord Ji in the newly constructed Siddhi Vinayak Hanuman Temple near the old Shukbazar Ajay Park of the city, ended with altar immersion, pusanjali and peace water harvesting. Purohit Jaishankar Mishra performed the ritual puja aarti with the host Saroj Prajapati wife Sarita Devi Deepak Agarwal wife Piki Agarwal Mahendra Prajapati wife Yashoda Devi Vinay Sharma wife Jayanti Devi and Ravi Shankar Sharma wife

Neelam Sharma, after which Prasad was distributed among the devotees. Priest Jaishankar was present on the spot. Mishra said that salvation is achieved only through devotion to God. Therefore, every person should perform yagya, penance and good deeds during his lifetime. Here a lot of enthusiasm was seen among the devotees and a lot of fireworks and dances were also seen. On the second and Monday also, bhajan-kirtan continued by Mahila Mandal. Temple Committee President Saroj Prajapati, Secretary Kuldeep Gupta, Treasurer Deepak Aggarwal told that on the evening of 13th February,

Bhajan Jagran program will be organized by Dhanbad Ranchi team in Nagar Bhavan. Mahendra Prajapati Ajay Prajapati Indra Prajapati Pramod Prajapati Abhishek Sharma Vinod will help in making the Pran Pratishtha program successful. Prasad Kuldeep Prajapati Gudu Gupta Deepak Gupta Anand Sav Naval Aggarwal Shiv Prajapati Ashish Gupta Suraj Gupta Manohar Gupta Praadeep Kumar Kuldeep Gupta Vivek Sharma Rahul Prajapati Abhishek Sharma Mohan Sharma Raju Gupta Manu Kanu contributed.



Visitors at Raj Bhawan garden on Monday.

Tribal Cuisine draws crowd at Adivasi Maha Kumbh Mela

PNS : DALTONGANJ

This two day Rajkiya Adivasi Maha Kumbh Mela which concluded today had a different stall. It was not of any chicken roll or fish roll. It had no fast food. It sold an altogether different items.

A progressive farmer P R Singh of Hussainabad sub division and his Veer Kuarn Singh Krishak Sewa Sahkari Samiti Ltd made business of black potatoes, red rice, green rice, black wheat, Chiya seed, sugar free rice etc. Singh said "We sold black potatoes @ 100 rupees per kilogram. Black rice was sold for 100 rupees a kilogram. Black wheat was sold @ of 50 rupees per kg."

Singh said "It was a Mela where had come thousands of people. We had not expected Chiya seeds would be bought."

There were buyers who paid 800 rupees for 1 kg of Chiya seeds here in this Rajkiya Adivasi Maha Kumbh Mela. Chiya seeds have immense medical value. It lowers risk for heart attack. It helps in reducing blood sugar level. However Singh said a couple of obese people bought it for weight loss! Chiya seeds have a proven fact to reduce weight. End



Saurabh Tiwary announces retirement from cricket, advocates for improved cricket infrastructure in Jharkhand

PARVINDER BHATIA : JAMSHEDPUR

In a heartfelt announcement on Monday, Saurabh Tiwary, the prominent left-handed cricketer hailing from Jamshedpur, declared his retirement from all forms of cricket. Tiwary, who proudly donned the Indian colours and played a pivotal role in Jharkhand's cricket legacy, revealed that his final match will be during the upcoming Ranji Trophy clash between Jharkhand and Rajasthan at Keenan Stadium in Jamshedpur, scheduled from February 16 to 19, 2024.

Addressing the media at the Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) office, Tiwary, who has dedicated 17 years to the Jharkhand Ranji team, expressed his desire for

young cricketers to step up and showcase their talent. "I believe it's the opportune moment to retire, allowing the younger generation to take the mantle and bring pride to the nation," he remarked.

Reflecting on his illustrious journey, Tiwary stated that he leaves the game with no regrets, having consistently given his best in every match. Expressing gratitude, he acknowledged the pivotal role played by his father and coach Kajal Das in shaping his cricketering career.

"I have enjoyed every moment in my career. All the occasions were special to me. However, the best moment that remained in my heart was when I scored a century against Tripura. Out of sheer happiness my father lifted me in his arms and kissed me. Moreover, every



time I scored a century my dad used to kiss me," said the swash-buckling southpaw.

global stage as a part of the victorious Indian Under-19 team in the 2008 ICC Under-19 World Cup, captained by Virat Kohli.

Notably, Tiwary's IPL journey began with the Mumbai Indians in the inaugural season, and in 2011, he was signed by the Royal Challengers Bangalore for a significant sum of 7.36 crore INR.

He also appreciated the role being played by IPL to nurture young talent. He said that the IPL is the best platform to perform.

As he bids farewell to the cricketering arena, Saurabh Tiwary also highlighted the need for enhanced cricket infrastructure in Jharkhand. His advocacy for improved facilities aims to nurture and support the budding talents in the state, ensuring a bright future for Jharkhand cricket.

CM Champai assures to carry forward the work of his predecessor

CM attends state level capacity building camp of Sakhi Mandal Women

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Champai Soren on Monday said that at present women are not dependent but self-reliant and independent in every matter. Now women are able to do everything equal to men. There are countless inspiring examples of women in our country among all of us. Our women sisters and daughters have made invaluable contributions in many fields including social reform, politics, economy, education, science and research, business, sports and armed forces. Our hardworking sisters and daughters of Jharkhand are making important contributions to the economy of the state as well as the economic development of the country. Today, from this platform, I would like to appeal to all the women self-help group sisters present here that you should recognize your talent



and move forward with confidence. This government will always stand with you at every step and in every situation. Just as the government led by former Chief Minister Hemant Soren stood with you didis, in the same way we too

will stand with you in all your sorrows and happiness. I have come today to assure all of you that there will be no laxity in any way from your state government. Chief Minister Champai Soren said these things while addressing the

program "State Level Exposure and Capacity Building Camp-cum-Women Mahasammelan of Sakhi Mandal Women" organized at Morhabadi Maidan today.

Chief Minister Shri Champai Soren said that the sisters and daughters of our SHG group are continuously doing better work in giving right direction to the family as well as the society and the state. About 30 thousand women of Sakhi Mandal of the state are participating in today's Mahila Mahasammelan. Similarly, in other four divisions also, about 45 thousand sisters and daughters of Sakhi Mandal of the state are associated with this program. The Chief Minister said that our society gives important importance to the contribution of women. This conference is an important step for women's respect and equality in society. The Chief Minister said that we

need to understand that women are the cornerstone of our society and without their contribution our society is incomplete. The Chief Minister said that in the last 4 years, under the leadership of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, the Rural Development Department is continuously implementing development related schemes in the state through Sakhi Mandal. Also, work is being done with commitment to empower women. The Chief Minister said that since the year 2019 till now, Rs 8 thousand 247 crore has been made available to about 1 lakh 40 thousand SHG groups through bank credit linkage. Whereas before the year 2019, this amount was only Rs 642 crore. Our government has been continuously promoting small and big rural entrepreneurship in the state through women self-help groups.

Chief Minister Champai

Soren said that in the last 4 years, many ambitious schemes have been launched for the men and women living in rural areas. Phool Jhano Ashirwad Yojana has also emerged as an important scheme. Through this scheme, women associated with the liquor business are being linked with respectable employment. Identified women are being given interest free loans of up to Rs 50 thousand for alternative employment. So far, more than 33000 women in the state have taken advantage of this scheme and started a respectable life. Women are the pivot of the rural economy. Our government is moving ahead with the aim of including the state in the category of developed states by empowering women. The Chief Minister said that our government is trying to qualitatively increase the income of rural families by connecting

them with one or more means of employment. To increase income, laborers and farmers are being linked to farming as well as non-agricultural means.

Chief Minister Champai Soren said that we will carry forward the thinking of former Chief Minister Shri Hemant Soren at any cost. We will extend the benefits of Abua Awas Yojana to our poor needy families deprived of PM Awas Yojana. Under the Aapki Yojana, Aapki Sarkar, Aapke Dwar campaign, more than 30 lakh applications have been received for the Abua Awas Yojana. Our government will work to provide residential housing to 20 lakh eligible families. Our government understands very well the plight of those who live in mud and straw houses. We will provide three-room permanent houses to such families under all circumstances so that they can live a digni-

fied life. The Chief Minister said that we believe that food, clothing and shelter are absolutely essential for human life. Our government will fulfill the aspirations of former Chief Minister Shri Hemant Soren and provide everyone with the right to food, clothing and shelter.

Chief Minister Shri Champai Soren said that many works are being done for qualitative improvement in the education system in the state. Our government has done the work of converting many government schools in the state into schools of excellence. The 'lamp' of education always shines. Former Chief Minister Hemant Soren has tried his best to ensure that children of all sections of the community, including tribals, indigenous people, Dalits, backward classes, minorities, get quality education. State government is here now

Congmen meet to chalk out strategy for upcoming poll

PNS : RANCHI

To chalk out strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha poll the first meeting of the newly formed Jharkhand State Congress Election Committee was held at Congress Headquarters Ranchi under the chairmanship of the State Congress President Rajesh Thakur in which State Congress In-Charge, Ghulam Ahmed Mir was present as the chief guest.

In the meeting, all the 14 Lok Sabha seats of Jharkhand were discussed in detail and various aspects of each seat were minutely analyzed in which concrete conclusions were drawn keeping in mind the geographical, social, economic, political, caste data situation of the area. An attempt was made to reach. In this sequence, names of three potential candidates for each Lok Sabha have been selected and presented before the high command for the final decision.

In this sequence, Mir said that Congress in Jharkhand is fully prepared to contest elections in all the Lok Sabha constituencies. "The workers are in full enthusiasm. With

the success of Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, a new enthusiasm has arisen among the workers in Jharkhand which will turn into a passion against the anti-people government of the Center till the Lok Sabha elections and this enthusiasm of the workers is against the nefarious government of the Centre," he added.

"We will oust from power. He said that we are keeping a close watch on every activity of the Central Government and the public is also clearly seeing with open eyes the anti-social activities being done by the Modi Government in the Country. A period of change is about to come in the country and its For this, we will have to participate in the elections with full force, our hard work and the support of the people will take the Country into a new era of change," said Mir.

On this occasion, Thakur said that all the members of the Election Committee have expressed their opinion on each seat and with the collective opinion of all the members of the Election Committee, the decision to contest the Lok Sabha seats

and the alliance and selection of candidates is given to the high command. "It has been authorized that the decision of the high command will be the final decision. He said that any party prepares for all the seats to contest the elections, but the matter of alliance is also on the table. After the decision on alliance is taken in time, the final decision regarding seats and candidates will be taken by the high command," he added.

In the meeting, Legislative Party leader Alamgir Alam, Dr Rameshwar Oraon, Subodh Kant Sahay, Pradeep Balmuchhu, Sukhdev Bhagat, Geeta Koda, Bandhu Turkey, Jaleshwar Mahato, Shahzada Anwar, Furkan Ansari, Banna Gupta, Badal Patralekh, Pradeep Yadav, Deepika Pandey Singh, Kali Charan Munda, Brijendra Singh, Rama Khalko, Ashok Choudhary, Bhim Kumar, Sultan Ahmed, Bimla Kumari, Mani Shankar, Niranjan Paswan, Amulya Neeraj Khalko, Satish Rajak Pradesh Youth Congress Chairman Abhijeet Raj, Gunjan Singh, Aamir Hashmi and Nelly Nathan were present.

State likely to witness rain today

PNS : RANCHI

The weather pattern has changed in Jharkhand. The State Capital witnessed light shower of rain on Monday evening. There is a possibility of hailstorm along with rain on Tuesday.

Indian Metrological Center, Ranchi Head, Abhisek Anand said that the effect of western disturbance is being seen in Jharkhand. "There may be light rain with thunder at isolated places in the western, central and adjacent north-eastern parts of the State," he added.

The Meteorological Department has issued Orange alert in four districts of the State and Yellow alert in five districts for Tuesday. Orange alert has been issued in view of the strong possibility of hailstorm at isolated places in Garhwa, Palamu, Chatra and Latehar districts. There is a possibility of hailstorm at isolated places in Gumla, Lohardaga, Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Koderma districts.

During this period, there may be light to moderate rainfall along with thunder and lightning. There is no possibility of any major change in the minimum tem-



perature during the next five days in the state. There is a possibility of thunderstorm along with rain on February 14 also. In the last 24 hours, light rainfall occurred at some places in the State. Highest rainfall of 5.2 mm was recorded in Jaldega and Simdega blocks. The highest maximum temperature of 29.6 degrees Celsius was recorded in Chaibasa while the lowest minimum temperature of 9.7 degrees Celsius was recorded in Godda.

JMM to support nationwide strike on February 16

PNS : RANCHI

Ruling party in the State, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), on Monday, said that it will support the Nationwide strike called by the farmers associations on February 16 to protest against anti farmers policies of the Central Government.

Addressing a press meet at the party headquarter JMM General Secretary cum Spokesperson, Supriyo Bhattacharya said that they will compete against the fascist forces. "From 15th, the voice of protest will be ready at the Panchayat level and will continue for the coming days until the reality of the conspiracy against our leader comes to light, he added.

"A new tradition started here that remand was taken from ED for 13 consecutive days. There is so much fear that it has been kept in the basement. So that he dies of suffocation. Do not expose it to light so that it becomes blind. There should be no sound so that his hearing ability is lost. They have been kept in this inhumane situation. Okay, it is your responsibility to know whatever you want to know. Why did you skip 1 day? Would have taken



14 days together, why is this posturing happening that Hemant Babu left the ED office and reached the court premises. Why is a media trial happening? It seems as if Hemant Babu has developed wings and will fly away. You people are cowards," said Bhattacharya.

On ongoing farmers' protest the party General Secretray said that the border of Haryana which is in Punjab has been barricaded like Kiev because the farmers are going there. "Why are you so afraid of your own people? He also said that the businessmen here who want Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal and all such states where resources are abundant have to establish themselves there. "Be it human resources, mineral resources or biological resources. The entire game of this was created in Bihar. The basic element in Jharkhand is community. It has been the bearer of tribal culture since

ancient times. Therefore his intention did not succeed. The tradition of community was not destroyed here. But it happened in Bihar," he added. This is the culmination of ending the parliamentary tradition. We saw that RJD, which is in the opposition, went and sided with the ruling party with impunity. The patron of the house gave him recognition. The one who was a protector is today a devourer. And that is a power which operates from Delhi. The leader who said that the DNA of the people of Bihar is finished. Today it has been proved right there. So why did you eliminate that DNA? So why did you make an excuse and go among the people? I will turn into dust and die but will not go with you. Why do you have to go through the thief door again and again? It is God who made us realize that if such a leader remains in any alliance, that alliance will be destroyed. That's why no one even made him a Sanyajok.

Bhattacharya also said that a new tradition has started. It was in 2014 that this time it was Modi Government, it was hit by inflation and corruption, in 2019 the army was put at stake.

ED gets three more days to interrogate Ex CM Soren

Soren's counsel says there was no ground left for any further remand. They (ED) just want to buy time.

PNS : RANCHI

A PMLA court in Ranchi has granted a three-day extension to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) remand for former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren in connection with an alleged money laundering case.

Earlier, the Jharkhand High Court postponed the hearing on a petition filed by the arrested Hemant Soren against the ED until February 27. The court instructed the central agency to submit a consolidated affidavit.

Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan mentioned that they contested the arrest of the former chief minister, and the high court permitted the submission of their amended application.

The ED was asking for a four-day remand. They have no ground left for any further remand. They (ED) just want to buy time. They didn't have any new ground. They just want the case to be alive and stretch the remand period," Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan, Soren's counsel, told reporters.

Earlier on February 7, Soren was remanded to five days of ED custody by the special PMLA (the Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court. On February 2, the court had granted five days of ED remand to Soren.

Soren was arrested on the night of January 31 after a seven-hour grilling by the ED in the money laundering case. Earlier, the ED claimed it had recovered cash in excess of Rs 36 lakh from the possession of the JMM chief, along with documents linked to the ongoing investigation

into the alleged acquisition of land by 'fraudulent means'.

The agency added that land parcels spanning 8.5 acres were part of the criminal proceeds that the former CM allegedly acquired. ED stated that in a raid conducted on April 13, 2023, they unearthed several property-related records and registers that were in the possession of Revenue Sub-Inspector Bhanu Pratap Prasad.

It informed further that the probe further revealed that Bhanu Pratap Prasad and others are part of a "very large syndicate involved in corrupt practices of acquiring properties forcefully as well as on the basis of false deeds. The probe pertains to proceeds of crime generated by allegedly forging official records by showing 'fake sellers' and purchasers in the guise of forged or bogus documents to acquire huge parcels of land having value in crores.

The ED told the court that Soren was requested to produce his mobile in which he had conversations and chats with Binod Singh. "However, he has submitted frivolous reasons for not producing his mobile to conceal information associated with the properties acquired and possessed by him, which are nothing but proceeds of crime," the ED said in its remand paper.

On February 7, the ED brought a litany of charges into the public domain.

These charges involved misusing his position not only to acquire the proceeds of crime but also to destroy the evidence to conceal the proceeds of crime.

Cabinet nod to 'Manki Munda' Scholarship scheme for girl students

Approval was given for the formation of JET Examination Conduct Rules

PNS : RANCHI

The Jharkhand Cabinet on Monday approved the proposal to provide scholarship to girl students to pursue technical education.

Under the 'Manki Munda' Scholarship scheme, a girl student will get Rs 15,000 scholarship per annum for pursuing diploma courses, while Rs 30,000 annually for engineering courses.

The decision was taken at the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Champai Soren. Cabinet Secretary Vandana Dadel said the scholarship scheme was introduced to encourage girl students for technical education in the state, as boys and girls ratio in state technical institution is 6:1.

"Around 3,000 girl students pursuing diploma courses will benefit from the scheme in the first year. Similarly, 1,200 students will get the benefit for the first year in engineering courses", she said. To avail the benefit in the next academic session, the student will have to pass the examination with 50 per cent marks in aggregate without any back paper, she said. The Champai Soren government has also decided to provide interest-free loans to Jharkhand farmers, provided they return the loan within the stipulated period. The cabinet approved the proposal of interest subvention of 4 per cent from the existing 3 per cent, Dadel said. Currently, farmers are charged 7 per cent on loan in the country. Centre and state each offer a 3 per cent interest subvention, bringing down the loan interest to farmers at 1 per cent. "Now, Jharkhand has decided to increase the interest subven-



tion to 4 per cent, which means farmers will get interest free loan in Jharkhand", state agriculture secretary Aboobacker Siddique said.

As many as 25 agendas were cleared by the cabinet including approval to the revised amount of Rs 114.47 crore for houses being built for 11 cabinet ministers in Ranchi Smart City. Earlier, the administrative approval for the project was Rs 69.90 crore. The cabinet also gave the go-ahead to the proposal of hiring non-government organizations (NGOs) for operation of the 593 SC, ST and OBC hostels in the state. "The NGOs will have to arrange cook, night guard and librarian for the hostel. They will also be liable for housekeeping of the hostels", Dadel said. The cabinet also decided that in the appointment of assistant professors in the universities of Jharkhand state, including constituent and affiliated colleges (including deficit-funded minority colleges) and Ph.D. Approval was given for the formation of JET Examination Conduct Rules for conducting Jharkhand Eligibility Test (JET) for admission in Jharkhand. After the Governor relaxed the educational qualification

at the time of appointment of SC/ST teachers of the colleges adopted in the fourth phase, the service adjustment and salary determination of 22 SC/ST teachers will be done from the date of absorption against the available created posts. Apart from this, approval was also given for the formation of Jharkhand Technical Education Service Rules, 2023 for recruitment and service conditions for appointment to teachers and other posts in the Directorate of Education, Government Engineering Colleges and Government Polytechnic Institutes. Revised administrative approval was given on the revised estimate of total amount of Rs. 114,47,21,100/- (Rupees One Hundred Fourteen Crore Forty Seven Lakh Twenty One Thousand One Hundred) for the residence of 11 Cabinet Ministers of Jharkhand Government under construction under Ranchi Smart City area. Went. Approval was given to adopt and establish the law faculty running in Jamshehpur Co-operative College under Kolhan University, Chaibasa as Jamshehpur Co-operative Law College.

The approval of the Council of Ministers was given on the point of introducing the Jharkhand Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023 in the upcoming budget session of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly to enact the Jharkhand Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023. A plan of only Rs. 15722.45 lakh (Rs. one hundred fifty seven crore twenty two lakh forty five thousand) was made for the implementation of Solid Waste Management Scheme under Bishrampur Municipal Council on the basis of Public Private Partnership Mode. Administrative approval was given. Approval was given to create 01 (one) post of 'Senior Appointed Secretary to the Governor' in the establishment of Governor's Secretariat, Jharkhand, Ranchi, in the pay scale PB-IV, 37400- 67000/-, GP-8700/- . To complete the remaining works under Jharkhand Complete Electricity Covering Scheme, approval was given to extend the period of the scheme till March 2024. Post-facto approval was given to extend the tenure of Jharkhand State Law Commission from 14.11.2023 to 13.11.2025 with retrospective effect. Approval was given for the formation of the Fifth State Finance Commission under Article 243-Y of the Constitution of India and Section 114 (1) of the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act 2001. Widening, strengthening and rehabilitation of "Union Bank Gandey Mod to Union Bank Pratappur road (total length - 10.465 km) under Giridih by transferring it from Rural Works Department to Road Construction Department.

DWA gifts cheque worth Rs. 3 lakh to PM Care Fund

DOCTORS' WIVES ASSOCIATION presented a cheque worth Rs. 300000 to Shri Arjun Munda, the Minister of Tribal Affairs and also Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in PM Narendra Modi's Cabinet. The cheque is in favor of PM CARES FUND. In line with DWA's commitment to Social Welfare the cheque was handed over to Shri Munda who gave his assurance that he would forward it to the PM CARES FUND. Chairperson Vinita Sharan & Co-chair person Jhooma Sarkar along with other DWA members did the honors. DWA had organised DWA MELA 2023 on 14th-15th July '23, the proceeds of which were pledged to Social Welfare. The Mela, planned and put up by President (2023) Seema Maheshwari, Secretary (2023) Madhu Gupta and their team which included Amrita Singh, Anju Singh, Pallavi Sharan, Rinkoo Choudhary, among other DWA members, was a resounding success and DWA was able to achieve its goal of donating a substantial amount. The contribution signifies DWA's commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at aiding those in need. Members present at the event included Amrita Baidya, Shobha Kumar, Rashmi Sinha, Rekha Mishra, Shreela Choudhary, Monideepa Dasgupta, Renu Tiwary, Pallavi Sharan, Arti Singh, Rashmi Bakshi, Neelam Shekhar.



Aastha Train left for Ayodhya

Aastha train left for Ayodhya with 1350 Ram devotees. Rambhaktis under Ranchi Lok Sabha were included in this train. All of them will visit Ramlala in Ayodhya. BJP State President and former Chief Minister Babulal Marandi and State Organization General Secretary Karmaveer Singh flagged off the train by showing the saffron flag. On this occasion, BJP State President Babulal Marandi said that all devotees of Ram are lucky that in a few hours you will see Ramlala in the grand and divine temple in Ayodhya. Said that Ram temple is not just the temple of Lord Ram, it is the temple of India, the temple of the nation. Marandi said that in 1992 when he visited Ayodhya, Lord Shri Ram used to be in a tent and today a grand and divine temple is ready there highlighting India's cultural nationalism in the world.

Global Legend Award-2024 to Tushar

Ranchi well-known social worker Tushar Kanti Sheet has been honored with the Global Legend Award-2024. He has been given this honor by MT TV News Media Private Limited. MT TV News Founder Sushil Pal and Managing Director Ashish Vyas honored Sheet by awarding him the title of Global Social Icon of the year 2024 on behalf of their organization. Sheet has been active in environmental protection, service to the poor and needy and other social works for the last three decades. Till now, he has planted about five thousand fruit and medicinal plants and is working towards their conservation and promotion. At the same time, till now he has got the cremation of about six thousand unclaimed dead bodies done at his level. He played a major role in arranging the marriage of about two dozen girls from poor families. He has also done many remarkable works in the field of service to the suffering humanity.

Navy veterans on death row in Qatar thank Modi for release

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amid chants of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', the Indian Navy veterans returned to Delhi early Monday morning and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his intervention in the issue.

"It wouldn't have been possible for us to stand here without the intervention of PM Modi. And it also happened due to the continuous efforts of the Government of India," one of the Navy veterans said.

His colleague voiced similar sentiments and said, "We waited almost for 18 months to be back in India. We are extremely grateful to the Prime Minister. It wouldn't have been possible without his personal intervention and his equation with Qatar."

"We are grateful to the Government of India from the bottom of our hearts for every effort that has been made and this day wouldn't have been possible without those efforts," he added.

Dr Meetu Bhargava, Commander Purnendu Tiwari's sister, said her brother had not come home yet but he had been freed and the fam-



ily was very happy. "If my brother had come, our happiness would have been complete," she told PTI Videos in Gwalior while thanking the prime minister, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and the government as well as the Emir. The BJP credited the government for the release of the former Navy personnel asserting that the protection of interests of Indians, wherever they may be, has been a priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Indian Minister Smriti Irani told reporters that the manner in which the Navy veterans have returned to India is due to the government's special efforts.

Referring to the evacuation of Indians at different points of

time from Ukraine, Sudan and Nepal during crises, Irani said "ghar wapsi" and protection of interests of Indians, wherever they may be in the world, have been Prime Minister Modi's priority. The release of eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel nearly three-and-a-half months after they were handed down death sentences is a "big diplomatic win" for India, BJP Spokesperson Shazia Ilmi said. "It seemed at one point of time it will be very difficult to make it happen. But they have come back safe and sound. That is great news for every Indian. It shows how much the words of the Indian foreign ministry and Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) matter," Ilmi

said.

"It is a big diplomatic win for India. It shows how India has negotiated so well that we have our Navy veterans back," she said. The Congress expressed relief and happiness at Qatar releasing eight former Indian naval personnel nearly three and a half months after they were handed down death sentences, and it greeted them and their families.

In a post on 'X', Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The Indian National Congress joins the entire nation in its relief and happiness that the eight former Indian Navy personnel earlier sentenced to death by a court in Qatar have been released and are back home." "It sends its greetings and good wishes to them and their families," he said. Senior Congress leader and former minister of state for external affairs Shashi Tharoor said the release of the Indians was "a huge relief." "It's a huge relief — and a matter of quiet celebration for all Indians — that eight of our compatriots who were sentenced to death in Qatar have been freed & returned home. Congratulations to all those who worked quietly behind the scenes for their release," he said.

Army Chief on US visit to strengthen, expand bilateral military engagement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Monday left for the US on a four-day visit aimed at exploring ways to further strengthen and expand bilateral military engagement. The Army described General Pande's visit from February 13 to 16 as "significant" and said it underscores deepening military cooperation between the two countries.

He will engage in high-level discussions and interactions with General Randy George, Chief of Staff of the US Army, and other senior American military leaders.

"This visit underscores the deepening military cooperation and strategic partnership between India and the United States, aiming to further strengthen defence cooperation and foster stronger bonds between the armies of both nations," the Army said.

Highlights of the visit include a prestigious US Army Honour Guard ceremony, a solemn laying of the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arlington National Cemetery and a comprehensive tour of the Pentagon. These engagements symbolise



the respect and mutual commitment towards global peace and security shared between the two countries, the Army said. "This visit is another milestone in the Indo-US defence relationship, reflecting a mutual desire to enhance military collaboration, exchange strategic perspectives on global threat perceptions, and work together toward future force development and modernisation," it said.

"The engagements between General Manoj Pande and senior leadership of the United States Army are poised to yield substantive outcomes, fostering an environment conducive to shared security interests and defence cooperation," it said. Ideas will be exchanged on crucial topics such as the trans-

formation in the Indian Army, global threat perception, future force development and modernisation, and co-production and co-development initiatives, officials said. These discussions are aimed at sharing insights, ideas, and best practices between the two armies, they said.

Pande's itinerary includes a visit to the Army Geospatial Centre at Fort Belvoir, the National Defence University at Fort McNair and interactions with the leadership at Headquarters 1 Corps.

He will also engage with units at the forefront of military innovation and strategy, including the Stryker Unit, 1st Multi-Domain Task Force, the first Special Forces Group at Seattle and the Defence Innovation

Unit in San Francisco.

A visit to the California National Guard is also planned, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the visit aimed at exploring avenues for more significant training, co-development and co-production engagements, according to an Army statement.

General George had recently visited India for the Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs Conference (IPACC) that was jointly hosted by the Indian Army and the US Army. The conference was attended by 18 Chiefs of Armies and 12 countries represented by heads of delegations.

During IPACC, General George and General Pande engaged in constructive dialogue, addressing a wide range of issues related to military cooperation.

"The Indian Army and the United States Army share a commitment to peace, democracy, and stability across regions. This tour epitomises the shared values and interests that underpin the partnership between India and the United States, aiming at a future of enhanced cooperation and mutual development in defence and security domains," the Army said.

BJP Government gave 1.5 times more jobs than previous dispensation: Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said his Government has given 1.5 times more jobs in its 10 years than the previous dispensation did in the same duration.

Handing over recruitment letters to government jobs to more than one lakh youngsters via video conference during a Rozgar Mela programme, Modi castigated the previous government for taking an inordinately "long time" to complete recruitment exercises and said it bred bribery.

The prime minister said his government has brought transparency and is working to ensure that recruitment is done in a time-bound manner. Youngsters now believe that they all have equal opportunity and can find a place for themselves in the government system through hard work and talent, he said. The prime minister asserted that the measures taken by his government, be it a scheme for rooftop solar power for one crore homes or the mas-

sive investment in infrastructure, have been creating a lot of employment opportunities.

With over 1.25 lakh start-ups, India is the third largest ecosystem in the sector, and youngsters are launching new firms in even smaller cities, he said, adding that it is creating lakhs of jobs.

Modi said 40,000 modern coaches like those used in the Vande Bharat trains will be manufactured and included in normal trains to increase convenience and comfort for passengers. Accusing previous governments of not paying due attention to the railways, he said the entire sector is transforming now.

"They neglected the common people's expectations," Modi said, attacking the previous governments.

The prime minister said his government has extended tax rebates to start-ups and has announced a fund of Rs 1 lakh crore for research and innovation.

Highlighting the far-reaching impact of connectivity, Modi spoke of new markets, expansion of tourism, new businesses and the creation of

lakhs of jobs due to this.

"Investment in infrastructure is being ramped up to accelerate development," he said, adding that Rs 11 lakh crore has been earmarked for investment in infrastructure in the recent budget.

'Rozgar Melas' have played a crucial role in enhancing the contribution of the country's young population in nation-building, the prime minister said, adding that a sizeable number of recruits will join the Central Armed Police Forces.

Recruitment examinations in the forces have now begun to be conducted in 13 Indian languages apart from Hindi and English, he said, adding that this will give equal opportunity to candidates.

On the occasion, he also laid the foundation stone of phase I of the integrated complex "Karmayogi Bhavan" here. This complex will promote collaboration and synergy among various pillars of 'Mission Karmayogi'. The recruits will be joining the government in various ministries and departments, according to a statement issued earlier.

Mild heat waves contribute more to mortality than extreme ones, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Surprisingly, mild heat waves, despite being more common, contribute more to mortality over time compared to extreme heat waves. This has been revealed by a study conducted in India in ten cities, underscoring the importance of investigating the health risks associated with temporarily elevated temperatures, especially as heat waves are projected to become more common due to climate change.

The research, published in the journal Environment International, analyzed excess mortality with different climate zones over a decade from 2008 to 2019.

Surprisingly, the mildest heat waves were found to be the deadliest due to their frequency. Researchers in their study published in journal Environment International called for adjusting heat warning systems to trigger warnings at lower temperatures to protect more people.

They emphasized the need for policymakers to plan for both mild and extreme heat waves to safeguard public health effectively. By selecting the days that were hotter than 95, 97 or 99 per cent of all days in the different regions, the researchers led by Jeroen de Bont from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden were able to create different definitions of heatwaves and examine the health risks associated with them.

Unsurprisingly, the hottest and longest heat waves, those that were hotter than 99 per cent of days and lasted at least

five days, increased mortality the most - by over 33 percent. Heatwaves that were hotter than 95 percent of all days and lasted only one day increased mortality the least - by just over 10 percent.

"This is also because the milder heatwaves were so much more common than the hotter ones. In the end, the most extreme heat waves turned out to cause the lowest number of deaths because they were so infrequent. One consequence of this may be that heat warnings may need to be triggered at lower temperature thresholds to protect more people," said Jeroen de Bont.

The researchers now argue that policymakers and other stakeholders need to understand and plan for both the relatively mild, short and common, and the extreme, long and uncommon heatwaves in order to offer relevant measures to protect public health in the future.

The study suggests that current heat warning systems may need adjustments to trigger warnings at lower temperature thresholds in order to protect more people, given the significant impact of mild heat waves on mortality.

Additionally, the researchers emphasize the importance of policymakers and stakeholders planning for both mild, short-duration heat waves and extreme, long-duration ones to implement effective measures to protect public health in the face of increasing temperatures. This comprehensive approach is essential for mitigating the health risks associated with heat waves in the future, the study said.

Modi meets family of Karpaoori Thakur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met family members of former Bihar Chief Minister late Karpaoori Thakur, who was bestowed Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian award, last month. The family members of the prominent socialist leader, led by his son Rajya Sabha member and JD(U) leader Ram Nath Thakur, met the prime minister at his 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence.

"Very happy to meet the family members Bharat Ratna awardee Jananayak Karpaoori Thakur ji. Karpaoori ji has been the messiah of the backward and deprived sections of the society, whose life and ideals will continue to inspire the countrymen," the prime minister said.

Ram Nath Thakur said he thanked the prime minister for the honour on behalf of his family, on behalf of Bihar and on behalf of the oppressed, Dalits, and backward communities.

"It was a joyous moment for us, just like a second Diwali. Crackers were burst and sweets were distributed," Ranjit Kumar, the former chief minister's grandson said.

He said the prime minister called them a day after the award was announced. He spoke with every family member and invited them to meet him in Delhi, he added. "I felt that the prime minister was one amongst our family," he said. Fondly known as Jan Nayak, Karpaoori Thakur served as the chief minister of Bihar from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979.

Place runway safety teams to curb flight overshooting, DGCA asks stakeholders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

To prevent instances of runway incursions at airports, aviation watchdog DGCA has asked stakeholders to put in place a runway safety team at all airports and adopt technologies to improve situational awareness, among other measures. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued a circular in view of the collision of planes due to runway incursion at the Haneda airport in Japan last month. Apart from establishing a runway safety team at all aerodromes and ensuring their effective functioning, the regulator has emphasised on comprehensive training for pilots, air traffic controllers, aircraft maintenance engineers, and drivers operating inside an airport.

Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) should ensure that stop bars are switched on to signal a stop and switched off to indicate traffic may proceed.

In no case, aircraft or vehicles be instructed to cross illuminated red stop bars, DGCA said in a release on Monday. Further, the watchdog said that aerodromes, ATCs and airlines should implement contingency measures to cater to unserviceable stop bars.

Another recommendation is adoption of technological interventions to improve situational awareness, thereby assisting Air Traffic Control (ATC) and other stakeholders to identify the traffic within the manoeuvring area. Other recommendations include ensuring adherence to standard procedures by all



involved personnel/stakeholders, and recognising the influence of human factors on performance, which may contribute to runway incursions.

The rate of runway incursions are decreasing and by ensuring a proactive approach among all stakeholders, the risk of such incidents can be reduced further, according to DGCA. In a fatal incident on January 2, a large passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway at the Haneda airport and burst into flames. Five people onboard the plane of the coast guard were killed.

The incident happened due to runway incursion by Japanese coast guard's DHC-8 aircraft when Japan Airlines aircraft was in the process of landing.

Following the incident, DGCA undertook a review of its existing requirements and safety measures in place for runway safety and prevention of runway incursions. In August last year, a mishap was averted at the Delhi airport involving two Vistara planes as the air traffic controller inadvertently gave clearance for crossing and take off of two different aircraft on the same runway at the same time before cancelling the take off.

97 per cent of migratory fish at risk of extinction: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Overexploitation including hunting and fishing, both targeted and incidental has emerged as the greatest threat for many migratory species, surpassing habitat loss and fragmentation, a global report has painted a grim picture of the migratory species world with one in five such species threatened with extinction.

At the same time, 44 per cent have a decreasing population trend, according to the United Nations' first 'State of the World's Migratory Species' report released on Monday. The situation is particularly dire for aquatic ecosystems, where a staggering 97 per cent of migratory fish are at risk of extinction. These fishes are listed for protection under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).



under Appendix I of the convention are threatened with extinction, and 76 per cent have a declining population trend. Eighteen per cent of Appendix II species are globally threatened, with almost half (42 per cent) showing decreasing population trends. The convention's Appendix I lists migratory species which are endangered. Appendix II

lists migratory species "which have an unfavourable conservation status and require international agreements for their conservation and management". The report also identifies 399 globally threatened and near-threatened migratory species (mainly birds and fish) that are not yet listed in the CMS Appendices that may benefit from inter-

national protection. According to CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel, overexploitation (hunting and fishing, both targeted and incidental) emerges as the greatest threat for many migratory species, surpassing habitat loss and fragmentation.

The report said the habitat fragmentation resulting from dams is currently greatest in East Asia, Europe, the Indian sub-continent, North America, and Southern Africa. By-catch of non-target species in fisheries is a leading cause of mortality of many CMS-listed marine species.

Other key threats to migratory species include pollution (including light and noise pollution), climate change, and invasive species. Inger Anderson, the Executive Director of the United Nations' Environment Programme (UNEP), said the report is a significant step for-

ward in the development of a conservation roadmap for migratory species. "Given the precarious situation of many of these animals, and their critical role for healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, we must not miss this chance to act — starting now by urgently implementing the recommendations set out in this report," she said. Action under the Convention is crucial for achieving the global commitments set out in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including commitments to restore and establish well-connected networks of protected areas, halt human-induced extinctions, and ensure that any taking of wild species is sustainable, safe, and legal. Established in 1979, the CMS focuses on bringing countries and stakeholders together to agree on the actions needed to ensure that migratory species survive and thrive.

Undertake prompt rescue of animals, AWBI urges fire services

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern that there have been frequent instances of birds and animals—both wild and domesticated—trapped in hazardous situations such as building ledges, pits, open drainage, and fire to name a few, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) has urged all the Chief Fire Services across the States/UTs to undertake prompt compassionate rescue operations so as to ensure well-being of the animals, preventing unnecessary stress and fatalities.

"It is pertinent to mention that each year, a multitude of animals find themselves trapped in precarious locations such as building ledges, pits, open drainage or wells, overhead wires, trees, and other challenging situations," said AWBI chairman OP Chaudhary in his letter written recently to all



the Chief Fire Services across the States.

However, animals and birds, including domesticated pets and wildlife, often suffer and perish due to stress and starvation when not rescued promptly. Lack of skilled rescue workers and equipment further complicates timely rescue efforts.

"It is observed that your department's firefighters are widely acknowledged for their dedication and longstanding history of saving lives, including those of animals," AWBI

Chief said to the fire officials in the letter while referring the Standing Fire Advisory Committee/ Council, constituted by the Union Home Ministry that recommends the provision of special services for rescuing animals, offered free of charge for all types of life rescues.

Besides Chief Fire Services, the AWBI Chief has also written to Chief Wildlife Wardens across the country to ensure their local service units are equipped and prepared to provide proficient animal rescue services, collaborating with animal welfare organizations. Chaudhary also stressed the importance of reporting details of animal lives lost, injured, and rescued, and recommended that the Union Animal Husbandry and Wildlife Departments offer necessary support, including training, to the State Fire Service Departments.

Manipur passing through troubled times, says CM

Government working to make future better: Biren Singh

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh described the current situation in the state as a battle for survival and identity, reflecting the gravity of the challenges being confronted. Speaking at the launch of a skill development programme here on Monday, Singh emphasised the need to address the crisis facing the state. "We are passing through troubled times. The crisis we are facing today is one of struggle for existence, survival, and identity. The properties and identity, inherited over centuries, have now become insecure due to the lack of vision of certain politicians. Our generation is insecure today, so the government is working to make your future secure," he said.



Singh also highlighted Union Home Minister Amit Shah's post on social media regarding the cancellation of the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR), underscoring its importance in addressing internal security and demographic challenges.

He stressed that the government's actions, including fencing and the cancellation of FMR, aim to ensure a safe and secure future, thereby putting an end to widespread illegal immigration and activities like drug smuggling and arms trafficking.

"The insecurity we have today will not be faced by the generations to come. That is why we are bearing all the criticisms," Singh added. Addressing the launch of Honda India Foundation's project 'Buniyaad - Aatmanirbharta Ka Adhaar,' Singh expressed gratitude to the foundation for choosing Manipur. He praised the people of the state for their gentle nature, discipline, and cleanliness. Foundation trustee Vinay Dhingra said, "With Project Buniyaad, we envision a brighter future for the youth of Manipur where learning knows no bounds and opportunities are limitless. It is our sincere belief that by investing in skill development, we are investing in self and societal development."

Siddaramaiah slams arrest of Karnataka farmers heading to Delhi

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday condemned the arrest of farmers from the State in Bhopal when they were on their way to New Delhi to take part in a protest and urged the Madhya Pradesh government to release them immediately. According to farmers' body Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), around 100 farmers from Karnataka, who were travelling in a train to the national capital to participate in the protest on February 13, were stopped at Bhopal by the state police. Taking to social media platform 'X,' Siddaramaiah said the arrest of Hubballi farmers by the Madhya Pradesh government, as they were heading to New Delhi to take part in the protest, is highly condemnable. "I demand that the Madhya Pradesh government immediately release all the farmers from our state who have been arrested and allow them to participate in the protest at Jantar



Mantar in Delhi tomorrow. Although it is the government of Madhya Pradesh that has made the arrests, it is clear that the criminal brain behind this act is the central BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he alleged in the post. The Chief Minister further said that by arresting and intimidating them, the farmers' struggle cannot be suppressed. "Such repression might only lead more farmers to take to the streets, but the struggle of the sons and daughters of the soil will not cease. If the Central government truly cares about

peace and order, it should immediately meet the demands of the farmers and resolve the issue, rather than repressing and brutalizing them to silence," he said. Terming the BJP as anti-farmer, Siddaramaiah further alleged that whether it's at the Centre or in the states, whenever the BJP comes to power, history bears witness that their first act of aggression is against farmers. "The first time the BJP came to power in Karnataka, farmers asking for fertilizers were ruthlessly shot down by the government led by B S Yediyurappa. Several farmers

died due to the violence inflicted on protesting farmers in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh by Narendra Modi's government at the Centre," he alleged in his post. "Looking at the current actions of the Narendra Modi government, it seems their main aim is to intimidate the farmers into submission," he charged. Earlier in the day, addressing a press conference in Delhi, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) South India Convenor Shanthakumar said he was also travelling with the group in the train and "the police stopped us at the Bhopal station, and some of our members were injured." Shanthakumar somehow managed to reach the national Capital. Several farmer associations, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, have called for a march on February 13 to demand a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price for their produce, one of the conditions they had set when they agreed to withdraw their agitation in 2021.

More Central forces deployed in curfew hit Banbhoolpura

PTI ■ HALDWANI

Additional paramilitary forces were deployed Monday in the town's Banbhoolpura area where violence erupted last week after authorities demolished an "illegally built" madrasa, officials said. Nainital District Magistrate Vandana Singh said 120 arms licences have been cancelled in Banbhoolpura and the police are trying to trace people who took part in the rioting on February 8 in which police personnel and municipal corporation workers were attacked and a police station set on fire. Six people, including five alleged to be rioters, were killed while 60 people were injured in the violence, officials said. "Every effort is being made to maintain peace in Haldwani," Singh said. She added that the situation in all areas of Haldwani, including Banbhoolpura, is now "normal and under control". Nainital Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Prahlad Meena said additional companies of central paramilitary forces have been deployed at sensitive places in Banbhoolpura. Earlier, over 1,000 security per-



sonnel were already deployed in the area. The curfew has been lifted in the rest of Haldwani except the Banbhoolpura area, after which the administration has started streamlining the essential services, the officials said. "Buses, trains and other essential services have been started in Haldwani. Schools and markets have opened. The restrictions are limited to Banbhoolpura," the DM said. SSP Meena said essential commodities are being supplied to the residents of the curfew-hit area and more facilities will also be provided to them soon. Banbhoolpura Primary Health Centre and the medical stores in the area have been opened

and gas cylinders are also being supplied to the residents, Meena said. General manager of Kumaon Mandal Development Corporation A P Vajpayee said gas cylinders are also being distributed in other curfew-affected areas like Kidwai Nagar, Indira Nagar, and Nai Basti among others. Along with this, vendors of vegetables, milk and other essential items are being allowed into the Banbhoolpura area, he said. The police have so far arrested 30 people on charges of inciting violence during the demolition of the "illegal" madrasa and a structure where namaz was held.

Kerala not to display Modi picture, selfie points at ration shops

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government on Monday said it will not comply with the Union Government's directive to display signboards and flexes featuring photos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with the National Food Security Act (NFSA) logo at ration shops across the state. Responding to a question posed by IUML MLA P Abdul Hameed in the assembly, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the selfie campaign, at a time when the Lok Sabha polls are around the corner, was part of BJP's election campaign. "This campaign is at a time when the Lok Sabha polls are around the corner and it is clear that this is part of their (BJP's) election campaign. We will point this out and inform the Union government that this is not right and will be difficult to implement. We will also see whether we can approach the Election



Commission over this issue," Vijayan said. Earlier, state Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, G R Anil said the Centre had issued directions to display flex and banners featuring the prime minister's photo across over 14,000 ration shops in Kerala. He said the Centre also gave instructions to install the PM's selfie points at select 550 ration shops and asked the officials to inspect the same. It also issued directions to use carry bags with its logo. Anil said the state government will not implement such campaigns during the election year.

Assam Government ready for talks with ULFA (I): Minister

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government is ready to hold peace talks with the hardliner ULFA (Independent) and doors for negotiations with its chief Paresh Barua are open, Parliamentary Affairs minister Pijush Hazarika said in the state Assembly on Monday. The Barua-led faction has remained outside the ambit of negotiations even as a peace pact has been signed with the pro-talks group, Hazarika said. Responding to a discussion on the recently-signed tripartite peace agreement with ULFA, Hazarika, on behalf of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who also holds the Home department, said the government is willing to hold talks with the ULFA (I) also. "The ULFA had split into two groups, and the one led by Arabinda Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia, had come forward for talks and the peace pact was signed. The other faction, led by Barua, is yet to engage in talks and rechristened itself as ULFA (I)," he said. "The government has been



repeatedly urging Paresh Barua to come for talks and we feel that peace will be further strengthened in the state if his faction also come overground", the minister added. The matter was raised by opposition Congress MLA Kamalakshya Dey Purkayastha, who raised apprehensions over the utility of the peace agreement when one of the faction was not a signatory. The pro-talks ULFA had signed the agreement with the Central and state government in New Delhi on December 29 last year. Hazarika, replying to a ques-

tion by another Congress legislator Bharat Chandra Narah, laid in the House that the peace agreement with the ULFA has 12 clauses. Among these are clauses dealing with political demands, Scheduled Tribe status for six communities, reservations in education and jobs, illegal migration, and matters dealing with identity, culture, heritage, etc. The minister said a joint committee comprising representatives of Central and state governments and the ULFA will monitor the implementation of the various clauses from time to time.

Next hearing on Soren plea against ED on February 27



PTI ■ RANCHI

The High Court of Jharkhand on Monday adjourned the hearing on a petition filed by arrested ex-chief minister Hemant Soren against the Enforcement Directorate (ED) till February 27. The court will again hear the plea on that day. It asked the federal agency to file a consolidated affidavit. Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan said they had challenged the arrest of the former chief minister, and the high court allowed their amended application to be submitted. "ED has been directed to give a consolidated reply. The court has fixed February 27 as the date for final disposal. The amendment to our application has been allowed...Now hearing will be on the turn of events (leading to Hemant Soren's arrest). This is a good indication, now we can place all the facts before the court," Ranjan, Soren's counsel, said. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal argued on behalf of Soren.

Additional solicitor general SV Raju appeared on behalf of the central agency. "In our amendment prayer, we have said that the entire process (initiated by the ED against Hemant Soren) is motivated by malice. There was no crime but inquiry was on against a sitting chief minister...ED acted beyond its power. We have challenged the entire proceeding by the ED. It is illegal," the advocate general said. The high court had on February 5 asked the central agency to file its reply on Soren's petition. The JMM leader was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. On February 2, he was remanded to ED custody by a special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court in Ranchi for five days. Later, the court had on February 7 extended the ED remand of the former chief minister by five days in the money laundering case.

INDIA bloc strong despite Nitish exit: Ramesh

PTI ■ KORBA

Senior Congress leader S Jairam Ramesh on Monday said the opposition INDIA bloc is strong and all constituents will soon finalise seat sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Addressing a press conference in Barpali village in Chhattisgarh's Korba district, he said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) as well as the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) quitting the Congress-led bloc will not have any impact. "INDIA alliance is strong. Nitish ji has done volte-face and RLD is trying to do the same. There were 28 parties in the alliance and two have left. However, discussion is underway with AAP, DMK, NCP, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv

Sena (UBT) and Mamta Banerjee ji over seat sharing (for Lok Sabha polls)," he said. "We are strong and soon seat sharing in different states will be given a final touch," he added. Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ramesh said the former spoke about 'one nation, one tax' and 'one nation, one election' but in reality it has become about "one nation, one company" in the last 10 years (of NDA rule). The Congress and Rahul Gandhi are raising their voice against this capitalism through the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' and 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', he said, adding that inflating was rising while the unemployment rate was the highest in the last 45 years. "In Bastar (during Assembly



poll campaigning), the PM said NMDC's steel plant will not be privatised but he has been engaged in selling for the last three years. Former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel had exposed it. In this way, all economic policies are being adopted to benefit one friend, one

company," he alleged. "Jungles are being cut and coal mines are being given. If Modi ji retains power at the Centre, the NTPC's power plant will also be sold. Even Bhilai, Bokaro, Durgapur and Rourkela are in danger as the PM and his special friend don't

want to leave any PSU," he said. Ramesh went on to joke about LK Advani getting the Bharat Ratna by saying the "typist committed a mistake" and typed the BJP stalwart's name instead of "Adani". When asked about Congress prospects in the Lok Sabha polls, he said, "You may recall the film 'Bees Saal Baad' starring Biswajit and Waheeda Rehman. In 2003, we lost Assembly polls in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh but the Congress-led UPA formed government at the Centre in 2004. What happened in 2004 will be replicated in 2024," he asserted. In 2004, it (BJP's poll campaign) was about 'India Shining' and in 2024 it is about 'India vishwaguru', Ramesh said. "You will see

surprising results (in the Lok Sabha polls)," he claimed. Asked if Rahul Gandhi will be the face of the opposition alliance, he showed the palm (the Congress' symbol) and said it would be the face. "In our country elections are not fought between two persons. Sorry to say but it's not a beauty contest. It is contested between parties based on ideologies, manifesto and election campaigns. The question is not who will be PM or CM, the question is which political party is going to form the government," he said. The system followed in India is not the American system (presidential) but parliamentary democracy and it should continue to remain so, Ramesh added.

DMK regime ignored advice to show due respect to national anthem: TN Raj Bhavan

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Governor RN Ravi's advice to the Tamil Nadu government to show due respect to the national anthem and play it at the beginning and end of the Governor's customary address to the Assembly was ignored by the DMK regime, the Raj Bhavan alleged on Monday. Speaker M Appavu launched a tirade in the Assembly against the Governor and called him a 'follower of Nathuram Godse' and hence, the Governor, with due regard to the dignity of his office, left the House. The Speaker's conduct was unbecoming of his office, lowered the dignity of his chair and grace of the House, it said. Alleging misleading claims and facts in the address, the Governor's office said had Ravi read out the address it would have amounted to 'Constitutional travesty'. Explaining the sequence of events that unfolded in the House, an official Raj Bhavan release said the draft Governor's address was received



on February 9 and that it had 'numerous passages' with 'misleading claims far from truth'. Ravi, therefore, returned the file and also advised the government to show due respect

to the national anthem by playing it at the beginning and end of the Governor's address. In this regard, the Governor had written letters to the Chief Minister and the Speaker in the past as well. The state government, however, 'chose to ignore' the advice of the Governor. "The Governor's address should reflect government's achievements, policies and programmes and to inform the House of the causes of its summons and should not be a forum for peddling misleading statements and venting blatantly partisan political views." Though the Speaker read the government prepared Governor's address with which Ravi had disagreement, he 'sat through it, till the conclusion of the address'. Appavu read the Tamil version of the address. When the Speaker concluded the address, the Governor stood up for the national anthem, as scheduled. However, the Speaker, instead of following the schedule, launched a tirade against the Governor and called him a follower of Nathuram Godse and more. The Speaker with

his unbecoming conduct lowered the dignity of his chair and grace of the House. While the Speaker went on his tirade against the Governor, the Governor with due regard to the dignity of his office and the House, left the House. On the reason for Governor not reading out the customary address, the Raj Bhavan said Ravi, with due regard to the 'Constitutional proprieties' expressed his 'inability' to read the address as it contained numerous passages with misleading claims and facts and 'reading them would have amounted to Governor's address becoming a Constitutional travesty'. Hence, he expressed his respect to the house, wished the session to be productive for the good of people of Tamil Nadu and concluded. The Governor greeted the Speaker, Chief Minister MK Stalin, MLAs and the people of Tamil Nadu, and read out the first paragraph which contained a 'Kural' (couplet from Tamil classic Tirukkural) of the renowned saint Thiruvalluvar, Raj Bhavan added.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Reaping discontent

Both the Cong and BJP accuse each other of remembering farmers only for votes; who is true?

The electoral war cry between the BJP and the Congress is getting only shriller: The latest point of contention is which party has done more for the welfare of villagers, farmers and the poor. With the last sitting of the 17th Lok Sabha behind us and the announcement of election dates likely anytime soon, both the sides are sharpening their attack on each other and portraying themselves as the real benefactor of the marginalised classes. It all started with the Congress making a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Government, accusing them of neglecting the welfare of rural communities, the impoverished and farmers, except during election season. In his counterattack, the Prime Minister touted the Congress' record on rural development and agricultural reforms. The party remembers farmers only at the time of elections, was Modi's charge. The Congress, one of the principal Opposition forces, has a long history of championing the cause of marginalised sections of society. However, the BJP



has made inroads into its territory and the Congress' grip on its core support base has loosened. To support its stand, the BJP argues that initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, which provides direct income support to farmers, demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of rural communities. However, to regain lost ground, the Congress has been vocal in criticising the BJP's farm policies, including the three Bills which were later withdrawn amid huge protests. With a massive farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' rally scheduled today, the Congress is again accusing Modi of paying lip service to these constituencies while failing to deliver meaningful change. Though the latest salvo seems timed with the poll dates announcement, the Congress' criticism of the Modi Government's approach to rural and agrarian issues is not new. It has long accused the BJP of pursuing a development agenda that prioritises the urban elite and big business interests over the needs of the rural poor. However, with elections on the horizon, the rhetoric has reached fever pitch. Amid mounting agrarian distress, farmers across the country are protesting against contentious reforms introduced by the Modi Government. The protesters are demanding a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP), implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases and justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence. The Congress leaders have seized upon this discontent to launch a blistering attack on the Government, alleging that the BJP's pro-corporate policies have exacerbated inequality and widened the gap between the rich and the poor; thousands of farmers still commit suicide every year. The parties may accuse each other of ignoring farmer welfare but the fact is that no one has done enough for the farmers. Their demands may again go unheard today; the bitter truth is everyone remembers farmers only for their votes.



Visitors pose for photos with a model of rhinoceros at the 37th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, in Faridabad

Develop skills with experimental learning

Embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the changing world

In an ever-evolving world, the ability to acquire and adapt skills is crucial for success. While traditional learning methods hold value, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development. By immersing individuals in real-world scenarios, it fosters deeper understanding, boosts knowledge retention, and cultivates essential soft skills.

Experiential Learning? Experiential learning, rooted in the work of David Kolb, emphasises learning through active engagement and reflection on experiences. It's a hands-on approach, contrasting with passive knowledge absorption. Individuals "learn by doing," applying theoretical concepts to practical situations, whether through simulations, projects, internships, or real-world challenges.

Key Components: Engagement: Experiential learning places a strong emphasis on engagement. Students are actively involved in the learning process, whether through experiments, projects, field trips, or interactive activities. This engagement helps capture



their attention and encourages a sense of curiosity.

Reflection: A crucial aspect of experiential learning is the reflective process. After engaging in an activity, students are prompted to reflect on their experiences, analyse the outcomes, and connect the practical knowledge gained to theoretical concepts. This reflective phase enhances their critical thinking skills.

Application: Experiential learning encourages the immediate application of knowledge. By directly applying what they have learned in real-world scenarios, students can see the practical relevance of their education, leading to a deeper understanding and retention of information.

Experiential Learning in Skill Development:

- Critical Thinking
- Problem-Solving
- Experiential learning challenges students to think crit-

ically and solve problems on their own. Through hands-on experiences, they learn to analyse situations, make decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances - essential skills for success in both academic and real-world settings.

Teamwork and Communication: Collaborative projects and group activities inherent in experiential learning help students develop strong teamwork and communication skills. They learn to express their ideas, listen to others, and work cohesively towards common goals, mirroring the dynamics of the professional world.

Creativity and Innovation: Hands-on experiences stimulate creativity and innovation by encouraging students to think outside the box. When faced with real-world challenges, students are prompted to generate unique solutions, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and adaptability.

Emotional Intelligence: Experiential learning enhances emotional intelligence by exposing students to diverse situations. They learn to understand and manage

their emotions, as well as empathise with others, preparing them for a more emotionally intelligent and socially aware future.

Long-term Retention: The active involvement and application of knowledge in experiential learning contribute to better retention. Students are more likely to remember and understand concepts that they have personally experienced, as opposed to those learned through passive methods.

In the 21st century, where adaptability and a diverse skill set are crucial for success, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development in schools. By integrating this pedagogical approach, educators can foster not only a deep understanding of academic concepts but also the critical skills needed for future success. As schools continue to evolve, embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the rapidly changing world.

(The writer is an educator and expert on education policies; views are personal)



KIRANJIT SINGH PANNU

Tensions escalate in Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

With recent attacks by Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the strait, the region faces heightened security risks which could disrupt world economy

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a narrow passage linking the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden, has thrust itself into the international spotlight. Situated on the northern side of the Red Sea lies the renowned Suez Canal, a monumental feat of engineering connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This vital waterway, spanning approximately 193 kilometres in length and nearly 200 meters in width, serves as a lifeline for global trade and maritime transportation. However, recent events have cast a shadow over the tranquillity of these waters. The Houthis, a rebel group from Yemen, have launched a series of attacks targeting vessels passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. These assaults, primarily aimed at ships with ties to Israel, have sparked concerns over maritime security and the free movement of goods through this crucial chokepoint. In response to these escalating tensions, Operation Prosperity Guardian, spearheaded by the United States, was initiated to safeguard the Bab-el-Mandeb and ensure the unimpeded flow of maritime traffic. Over 20 nations have expressed their support for this initiative, underscoring the collective effort to protect this strategic waterway. The motives behind the Houthi attacks are rooted in geopolitical complexities, with their actions perceived as retaliation against Israel's military operations in Gaza. Houthi leaders have explicitly stated their intent to target any ship associated with Israel, leading to a spate of attacks on vessels carrying goods to or from the region. The Houthis contend that peace in Gaza is intrinsically linked to stability in the Red Sea, warning of further conflict if hostilities persist. The significance of the Red Sea extends beyond its immediate vicinity, serving as a conduit for maritime trade connecting Europe to the rest of the world. The Mediterranean Sea, accessed through the Suez Canal, plays a pivotal role in global shipping routes, facilitating trade between continents and enabling vital economic exchange. Traditionally,



ships traversed the African tip to reach their destinations, but the recent turmoil has complicated maritime navigation. With a substantial portion of goods bound for Israel passing through the Suez Canal, disruptions in this route have reverberated across global supply chains. The increased travel distance and associated costs pose significant challenges for shipping companies and commodity markets alike. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal has historical roots, dating back to its inception in the 19th century. However, its relevance has endured through numerous conflicts, including both World Wars, underscoring its status as a linchpin of global maritime trade. The economic ramifications of disruptions in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait are far-reaching, affecting industries reliant on the timely delivery of goods and materials. Major shipping companies, such as the Mediterranean Shipping Company and Merk and Hapag Lloyd, have suspended operations in the region, exacerbating supply chain disruptions and logistical challenges. Amidst these geopolitical tensions, the concept of the blue economy emerges as a beacon of sustainable maritime development. Championed by advocates of ocean conservation, the blue economy emphasizes the responsible utilization of marine resources for economic growth while

“WHILE INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES SHARE A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, DIFFERENCES IN MARITIME POLICIES AND MILITARY OPERATIONS UNDERSCORE THE COMPLEXITIES OF NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL WATERS

ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests. However, divergent perspectives on maritime sovereignty and strategic alliances complicate the geopolitical landscape. While India and the United States share a strategic partnership, differences in maritime policies and military operations underscore the complexities of navigating international waters. Russia's stance on maritime cooperation underscores the need for inclusive approaches to ocean governance, emphasizing collaboration over competition. As global leaders grapple with the challenges of maritime security and sustainable development, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of oceanic ecosystems and geopolitical dynamics. In conclusion, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait stands at the intersection of geopolitical rivalries and maritime commerce, symbolizing the challenges and opportunities inherent in our interconnected world. As nations navigate these turbulent waters, cooperation and dialogue remain

essential to ensuring the security and prosperity of maritime nations and the preservation of our oceans for future generations.

The Future of Maritime Security and Sustainable Development

Looking ahead, addressing the complex issues surrounding maritime security and sustainable development requires concerted international efforts and innovative solutions. The Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a wake-up call for global leaders to prioritise ocean conservation and cooperative strategies to mitigate geopolitical tensions. Investments in technology, such as satellite surveillance and unmanned maritime vehicles, hold promise for enhancing maritime surveillance and response capabilities. Additionally, strengthening legal frameworks and multilateral agreements can foster greater cooperation among nations and promote sustainable ocean governance. Ultimately, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis underscores the interconnected nature of global maritime challenges and the urgent need for collective action. By working together to address the complex issues facing our oceans, we can build a more resilient and sustainable future for generations to come.

(The author is associate professor at Pondicherry Central University; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE KILLED BY DOGS?

Sir — This refers to Hiranmay Karlekar's article, "The Killing of a Puppy: Murder Most Foul" (February 10, 2024). A few days ago, a seven-month-old boy was killed by a pack of stray dogs in Bhopal. All stray dogs must immediately be sterilised and kept in an enclosed area to minimise colossal loss of human lives. India has around 20,000 rabies deaths a year which according to the World Health Organisation, "accounts for 36 percent of the world's deaths." Most of the victims of rabies in India are under the age of 15 years.

This fatal disease has been eliminated from many countries. It is a challenging job in a country like India where dogs are allowed to roam freely. Rabies can be eliminated by vaccinating all dogs for a number of years and by sterilising the stray dog population. Bhutan has successfully sterilised and vaccinated its entire stray dog population after pursuing a 14-year-long programme. Bhutan sets an example which India needs to follow. Most of the victims of dog bites and rabies belong to the poor working class of our society who build our roads, bridges and houses for all of us and who serve everything at our door starting from morning newspapers to food packets. It is really perplexing that their deaths evoke little public sympathy and a lukewarm response from the authorities. I love dogs as much as I hate such insensitive attitudes towards poor workers.

Sujit De | Kolkata

BEYOND GRADES

Sir — Cheating often stems from the intense pressure to excel in India's education system, where success is often equated with academic achievements. This pressure creates a culture where students feel compelled to resort to dishonest means to secure top positions. However, this toxic environment not only fosters unethical behaviour but also leads to severe consequences such as

Crafting the Olympic medals



It's really astounding and delightful to know that the medals made for the upcoming Paris Summer Olympics are simply remarkable and fantastic. In addition to the customary gold, silver and bronze, each winner's medal will feature a small piece of iron straight from the Eiffel Tower! Small chunks of the iconic tower — the symbol of Paris and France and one of the wonders of the world — have been included in the medals to mark the 100 years since last hosted the Olympic Games. Each and every medal

has at its centre a hexagon of iron from the tower. They all come from pieces removed from the structure during different renovations over the last so many decades. The pieces of metal were carefully preserved, and the organisation in charge of the Eiffel Tower's preservation donated them to the Paris Olympic Committee to create the unique medal designs. Definitely, it would be joy unlimited as medalists will get an unforgettable souvenir of Paris made from this unique metal. The "puddle iron" which has been used to make the tower is a special pure material, which is extremely strong. These special Olympic and Paralympic medals were designed by craftworkers at the famous Chaumet House of Jewellery and it is for the first time in the history of the Games that a jeweller has designed the medals. An out-of-the-box idea by the organisers these medals are definitely a symbol of excellence, a source of motivation, a symbol of ultimate achievement and historically precious.

M Pradyu | Kannur

mental health issues and even suicides among students.

To address this, a comprehensive reform of the education system is crucial, emphasizing holistic development and emotional well-being alongside academic performance. Implementing mentoring programs, stress relief initiatives and mental health awareness campaigns can provide vital support to students, fostering a healthier and more conducive learning environment. By prioritizing student well-being and nurturing individual growth, India can mitigate the underlying causes of cheating and cultivate a generation equipped to thrive in the real world.

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

FOOD WASTAGE

Sir — The issue of food waste intersects with the stark reality of hunger and malnutrition, particularly evident in the

context of those struggling to afford even two meals a day. With millions worldwide facing food insecurity, the recent suggestion by the Central Government to integrate lessons on food wastage into school curriculums aims to foster awareness among students. Shocking statistics from the United Nations, revealing that approximately 931 million tons of food were wasted globally in 2019, underscore the urgency of addressing this issue. Despite ample resources, food wastage persists in our country, exacerbating the plight of the hungry and malnourished. This paradox highlights the need for a shift in mindset towards valuing food and combating wasteful practices, especially among those blinded by material wealth.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

STRIVE FOR ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT

Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of the inner being



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

All of us dream of a world without poverty, that is equitable, that respects the dignity of all living beings, and the sacredness of the natural world. There is no doubt that it is an achievable dream, but we all must collectively pave a new way to make it into reality. Over the past two millennia, man has made great strides in almost every field of development as a result of which, today we have achieved a standard of living and scientific development unimaginable even half a century ago. But, if development concerns the betterment of the human being and his relationship with other humans and beings, then one would find that we have come down the wrong path in our quest for material fulfilment. Right? When we discuss development, we usually talk of economic development to meet material needs, measured perhaps through growth in the GNP or GDP. So, is this all that there is to development?

Does economics measure everything? The answer to this is NO, because if we are aiming at all-round development, then it must include not only material progress but social and cultural dimensions as well. It's a fact that cannot be denied that the ideal of development as a continuing process of growth, creation, improvement and positive change has yielded to a reality more frequently marked by destruction, degradation and negativity. In his quest for improving his lot, man first turned to religion, which not only provided an anchor for his life but also answered some of the questions about his existence in this world and his place vis a vis the universal scheme of things. However, with time, religion itself got corrupted by ritualism and the greed for power, thereby making men disillusioned, who then turned to politics, to make their lives better. They sought succour and salvation from political ideologies but to no avail, resulting in their pinning hopes on science. With the aid of



science, much development happened in several fields. Today as we stand on the threshold of both hope and fear of losing everything, we realise that materialistic progress is a transient solution and hence the effort to establish lasting peace and prosperity for all has to come from an imperishable source. The seed of lasting peace and happiness lies in human values and wisdom, which are both eternal and universal. The need of the hour is that we have to look at our development from a broader perspective than the one we have been adopting so far. Our narrow concept of development can find its roots in a narrow concept of the self that neglects the larger reality of the soul and overlooks the essential unity of the human family. Hence we need to move from an overly materialistic approach to one that includes the broader and deeper realities of human life and experience i.e. the inner world of our thoughts and values and the innate spirituality on which our worth and dignity are based.

Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of our inner being. From this awareness may follow steps to develop or change the self in ways that are conducive to the kind of world we want. Values and spirituality are at the heart of not just who we are but also of the political, social, economic and environmental issues we are facing. Remember! A development that sustains all people depends at least as much on spiritual empowerment as on material progress and prosperity. So let us inject values into our society by effective education in self-awareness, and spiritual principles and realize our dream of a world that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist; views are personal)

Delink disinvestment from the Budget

There is a need for a paradigm shift in the approach to disinvestment; the Government must detach it from budgetary constraints and tackle legacy issues



UTTAM GUPTA

In a briefing following the presentation of the interim Budget for the financial year (FY) 2024-25 by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2024, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan stated that the "government no longer views disinvestment - fancy nomenclature for sale of Union government shareholding in central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) - from the perspective of balancing the budget". The statement is out of sync with Sitharaman setting a target of Rs 50,000 crore as proceeds from disinvestment for the FY 2024-25 though it wasn't mentioned in her speech.

If, the government's intent was not to view it as an exercise in balancing the budget - as stated by the finance secretary - then, it made no sense to fix a target. Yet, setting a target for boosting non-tax revenue receipts means that it hasn't shed its age-old stance of linking this exercise with the budget. To plan for garnering resources from the sale of government shares in CPSUs is inherently flawed. This is because unlike tax revenue, which can be projected with a degree of certainty based on the existing tax rate and a reasonable assessment of the growth in nominal GDP, the same cannot be said about proceeds from disinvestment. In this case, a lot depends on the market scenario and, in particular, the perception of investors about the company in which share-sale is contemplated.

In cases where the strategic sale (it reduces the government's holding in the CPSU to below 50 per cent or privatization) is mooted, the Government faces a bigger challenge as apart from a favourable market, it needs bidders with deep pockets. The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape further undermines the chances of its kicking the ball rolling just around the time when the strategic investors are ready to put in their bets.

The Niti Aayog identifies companies for disinvestment which are then considered by the Core Group of Secretaries on Divestment (CGD), a long-drawn process by itself, which takes it to the Alternative Mechanism (AM) - a group of ministers, including finance, road transport & highways, administrative reforms, etc., - for approval. After AM's approval, the Department of Investment and Public



THE MAJORITY OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR SEVERAL DECADES HAS INGRAINED IN THE BUREAUCRAT A FEELING OF EXERCISING COMMAND OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PSU

Asset Management (DIPAM) moves a proposal for in-principal approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). It is therefore not surprising that the Modi - government has missed its disinvestment targets ever since it started the process in 2015-16 with a particular focus on 'strategic' sales. Only during two years viz. 2017-18 and 2018-19, it achieved the target. That was primarily because, in those years, it had conducted two big-ticket sales of its shares from one CPSU to another. During 2017-18, the government sold 51.11 per cent of its shareholding in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) yielding Rs 37,000 crore. In the following year, it undertook the sale of its 52.63 per cent stake in the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) yielding Rs 13,000 crore. But, those sales can't be termed as strategic as the purchaser being another CPSU namely ONGC/PFC, the Government continues to have effective ownership over the divested entity viz. HPCL/REC.

For the current FY, while presenting the budget on February 1, 2023, Sitharaman had set a target of Rs 51,000 crore for proceeds of disinvestment. This has since been revised downwards to Rs 30,000 crore. Against this, as of February 1, 2024, the government has raised only about Rs 12,500 crore, and it is unlikely that even the revised divestment target will be met.

At a fundamental level, disinvestment of the government's shareholding in a PSU is in effect sale of its assets. Therefore, receipts arising therefrom can only be treated as 'capital receipts' (CRs). While preparing the budget, it won't be logical to plan for receipts from this source in the same manner as it is done for revenue receipts (RRs) which are receipts generated from

the day-to-day business activities e.g. dividends on shares held by the government. The government should change the track. It should unequivocally fall in line with what the finance secretary has indicated. It should pursue share sales 'independent' of the budget exercise. The government's tax revenue is buoyant (for three years in a row since 2021-22, these have exceeded the BE) and it is getting higher dividends from CPSUs as also higher dividends from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and state-run banks. These positive trends should be good enough for managing fiscal deficits. Hence, its budget need not have to depend on proceeds from disinvestment.

The FM has referred to the approach to share sales outlined in her Budget speech for 2021-22. Under it, CPSUs are divided into two broad categories i.e. strategic and non-strategic. The strategic group covers atomic energy, space and defense; transport and telecommunications; power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and banking, insurance and financial services. The non-strategic category includes all other sectors such as industrial and consumer goods, hotel and tourist services, trading, and marketing.

While, the government wants to sell CPSUs in the strategic sector with the caveat that at least one (and a maximum of four) will be retained in the public sector, it will privatize 'all' undertakings in non-strategic sectors. All loss-making undertakings in the latter category will be closed. However, it needs to unshackle the process from a host of legacy issues.

Foremost, the majority ownership and control by the Government for several decades has ingrained in the bureaucrat a feeling of exercising command over the management of the PSU. Although things have improved under the Modi - dispensation (courtesy of its focus on a

'policy-driven state', and increase in 'transparency'), the basic ingredients remain intact. This mindset has to go.

Second, even after strategic sales, the government wants to remain in the driver's seat. This is amply reflected in a statement in Sitharaman's budget speech for FY 2019-20. She had stated the intent was to change the existing policy from "directly" holding 51 per cent or above in a CPSU, to one whereby its total holding, "direct" plus "indirect", is maintained at 51 per cent. This stance remains intact.

Third, it remains inclined to use CPSUs for achieving other unrelated objectives. For instance, it uses fertilizer PSUs to ensure adequate availability of this politically sensitive agri-input in every nook and corner of the country. This has come in the way of taking up the strategic sale of nine CPSUs in the fertilizer sector (it falls in the non-strategic category) recommended for sale by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and Niti Aayog. Despite, the deregulation of petrol and diesel prices way back in 2010/2014, the government continues to regulate their prices.

For this purpose, it rides piggyback on oil PSUs which control over 90 percent of the total sales. For this reason, the strategic sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) hasn't happened nearly four years after it was initially mooted in 2019-20.

Fourth, the government wants to use CPSUs to build infrastructure and invest in green transition to meet climate mitigation goals. While the argument is tenable, this doesn't undermine a case for vigorously pursuing strategic sales to maximize asset value besides involving the private sector in achieving climate goals. Modi should remove all legacy obstacles and de-bureaucratize the process of share sale.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Advancing the maxim of 'One Earth, One Health'

Modi's vision of 'One Earth, One Health' rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, reflects India's enduring commitment to universal health

India raising the slogan of 'One Earth One Health' in itself tells how India wants to develop health infrastructure. This philosophy includes holistic health protection and care for all beings - humans, animals and even plants. Apart from this, making medical treatment affordable has also been a top priority of the Government of India. This may surprise many people, but the fact is - only two welfare health schemes - 'Ayushman Bharat' and 'Jan Aushadhi Yojana' have provided more than Rs 1 lakh crore to patients mainly coming from the poor and middle class. Have saved. Ayushman Bharat has not only increased the demand for new hospitals but is also increasing the opportunity to open new hospitals and med-



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

ical colleges. But also creating a new and complete health ecosystem with technology at the centre of operations. These revived efforts for healthcare services have given a big push to the highly potential healthcare sector, which promises to be worth Rs 10 lakh crore in the coming years, if there is proper coordination between the private sector and medical academia. Of course, It would have been even better here if

proper coordination with the state governments had taken care of the primary health centres also. Which perhaps the present ministry has failed to do. Whereas at smaller village health centers the testing facility could be linked to the district hospital.

The focus on technology in healthcare is a huge opportunity for healthcare entrepreneurs, investors and professionals. The allocation of Rs 89,155 crore in the Union Budget 2023-24 has also given new impetus to the sector. There is a clear difference in focus between pre- and post-Covid situations. Springing into action, India focuses not just on treatment but also on wellness. Putting aside the absence of an integrated long-term approach to

health for several decades after independence, it is now better to pursue a whole-of-government approach under PM Modi, rather than confining the subject of health to the health ministry alone. Points towards the future. Keeping in mind the problems of common people, the government has given top priority to affordable treatment. More than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras provide affordable medicines to the needy. The PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission is not only giving birth to new hospitals but also creating a new and complete health ecosystem.

There has been a revolution of sorts in the medical education sector in the last 10 years. More than 260 new medical

colleges have been opened, doubling the medical seats in undergraduate and postgraduate medical courses as compared to 2014. However there is a need to change the policy decisions regarding the establishment of medical colleges, and more work needs to be done on how to make India's doors easier for Indian medical students studying abroad. However, in the latest budget, a lot of emphasis has also been given to the nursing sector. 157 nursing colleges around the medical colleges, a major step towards medical human resources. Technologies like 5G are creating new opportunities for startups. Drones are revolutionizing drug delivery and testing services. The medical device sector has seen a growth of 12-14% due to ini-

tiatives like Bulk Drug Park, and Medical Device Park, over Rs 30 thousand crore on PLI schemes.

Apart from this, starting courses like biomedical engineering, industry-academia and government collaboration in IITs also has a lot to offer for the sector. However, instead of increasing the infrastructure of primary health centres, we added more to patient care OPD in institutions like AIIMS, while AIIMS remained identified as a research institute and their old contribution to the research sector.

The government's efforts on preventive health care and awareness such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for cleanliness, Ujjwala Yojana for smoking-related diseases, Jal Jeevan

Mission to tackle waterborne diseases, National Nutrition Mission to address anaemia and malnutrition, obesity Focus on grains - Shri Anna, PM Matru Vandana Yojana, Mission Indradhanush, Yoga, Fit India Movement and increasing focus on naturopathy, alternative medicine system including Ayurveda have saved people from diseases. All these measures of the government are the beginning of a new era for the people and also a vision of India regarding health in front of the world. Which can be understood in an earlier address of the Prime Minister.

In which the Prime Minister warmly welcomed health ministers from across the world and representatives from West Asia, SAARC, ASEAN and

African regions. Quoting an Indian scripture which translates to 'Let everyone be happy, let everyone be free from diseases, let good things happen to everyone, and let no one suffer from sorrow', the Prime Minister expressed his vision of an inclusive country. Highlighted and mentioned that India's vision of health was universal even when there were no global pandemics thousands of years ago. He underlined that One Earth One Health follows the same beliefs and is an example of the same idea in action. "Our vision is not limited to humans only. But also a beautiful earth for every living being. That is the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Israeli forces rescue 2 hostages in Gaza raid that killed 67

AP ■ RAFAH

Israeli forces rescued two hostages early Monday, storming a heavily guarded apartment in the Gaza Strip and extracting the captives under fire in a dramatic raid that was a small but symbolically significant success for Israel. The operation killed at least 67 Palestinians, including women and children, according to Palestinian health officials in the beleaguered territory.

To assist the rescue forces, heavy airstrikes pounded the area near the apartment in Rafah, a city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting elsewhere in the Israel-Hamas war.

The raid was celebrated in Israel as a victory in the slugish battle to free the hostages, with more than 100 captives still held by Hamas and other Gaza militants, and briefly lifted the spirits of a nation still



Hostages Fernando Simon Marman, right, and Luis Har, second from left, hug relatives after being rescued from captivity in the Gaza Strip, at the Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel, Monday. AP/PTI

reeling from Hamas' cross-border raid last year.

But in Gaza, where civilians have borne a staggering toll since the war erupted on October 7, the operation

unleashed another wartime tragedy, with many Palestinians killed or wounded.

More than 12,300 Palestinian minors — children and young teens — have been

killed in Israel's war against Hamas, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Monday.

That means minors make up about 43 per cent of the total number of 28,176 Palestinians killed so far. About 8,400 women were also among those killed.

The ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, provided the breakdown of minors and women at the request of The Associated Press. Israel claims to have killed thousands of Hamas fighters.

The plight of the hostages has profoundly shaken Israelis and the government has made freeing the dozens of remaining captives a top aim of its war, along with destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities.

But as the fighting drags on, now in its fifth month, their freedom remains elusive and rifts have emerged in Israel over the best approach to end their ordeal.

'It's critical to receive EU aid soon'

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said Monday that it's vital that it receives new European Union funding within weeks because Israel appears to be readying a ground assault on Rafah, where many civilians have taken refuge.

The aid agency UNRWA is reeling from allegations that 12 of its 13,000 Gaza staff participated in the October 7 Hamas attacks in southern Israel. UNRWA immediately fired the staff, but more than a dozen countries suspended funding worth about USD 440 million, almost half of UNRWA's budget for 2024.

Asked how important it is that UNRWA receive an 82 million euro (USD 88 million) EU payment by the end of the month, UNRWA

Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said, "It's absolutely critical." He has previously warned that the agency might be forced to close by the end of the month.

Two UN investigations into Israel's allegations are underway, but the European Commission -- the third biggest donor to UNRWA after the United States and Germany -- has demanded a separate audit and wants to appoint experts to carry it out.

The audit would focus "on the control systems needed to prevent the possible involvement of (UNRWA) staff in terrorist activities," the EU's executive branch said. It also is insisting on "a review of all UNRWA staff" to confirm they had no role in the attacks.

Of the UN agency's 13,000 Gaza staff members, more than 3,000 continue working there.

Screening them all within weeks would be impossible, and time is of the essence.

The agency has been the main supplier of food, water and shelter during the war in Gaza, where around 85 per cent of the population has been displaced.

Part of the audit would involve a new "pillar assessment" of UNRWA. The commission routinely carries out these checks of agencies that it funds to ensure that they're complying with EU standards. But even the EU's crisis management commissioner, Janez Lenarcic, conceded on Monday that such an assessment of UNRWA "has been concluded very recently."

The agency was also included in an audit the commission launched in October, which found that no funds were reaching Hamas.

Dutch court orders Netherlands to stop export of F-35 parts to Israel

The Hague (AP): An appeals court ordered the Dutch government on Monday to halt the export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, citing a clear risk of violations of international law.

A trio of human rights organisations brought a civil suit against the Netherlands in December, arguing authorities needed to reevaluate the export license in light of Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip.

"It is undeniable that there is a clear risk that the exported F-35 parts are used in serious violations of international humanitarian law," Judge Bas Boele said in reading out the ruling, eliciting cheers from several people in the courtroom. The exports must cease within seven days. The decision came as Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte travelled to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss the conflict. Rutte was also expected to separately meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

"We are extremely grateful that there is justice and that the court was willing to speak out on justice," lead lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld told reporters after the hearing. Oxfam Novib, Pax Nederland and The Rights Forum filed the case in December. They argued the continued transfer of the aircraft parts makes the Netherlands complicit in possible war crimes being committed by Israel in its war with Hamas.

In January, a lower court sided with the government, allowing the Dutch to continue sending US-owned parts stored at a warehouse in the town of Woensdrecht to Israel.

The Netherlands is home to one of three F-35 European regional warehouses. Other countries are also considering restricting weapons sales to Israel. AP

Finland elects new president

AP ■ HELSINKI

Finland has a new president after former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb narrowly won a runoff vote Sunday for the key post in this Nordic country. Stubb, who takes over in March, will steer Finland's foreign and security policy, including integrating the NATO newcomer into the alliance's core structures.

The final tally shows Stubb, of the centre-right National Coalition Party, had 51.6 per cent of the votes, while independent candidate and former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto from the green left got 48.4 per cent of the votes. The two were the contenders in the second round of the election. Haavisto had served as Finland's top diplomat from 2019-2023.

Stubb is taking over from the hugely popular President Sauli Niinistö, whose second six-year term expires next month and who wasn't eligible for reelection. A runoff was



required after none of the original nine candidates got a majority of the votes in the first round on January 28. In tradition with consensus-driven Finnish politics and no below-the-belt attacks during the campaign, Stubb visited Haavisto's election party event late Sunday after the result was clear.

"You're one of the nicest people I have ever met," Stubb told his opponent at the party event, according to Finnish

broadcaster YLE. The presidency is a key political post in this northern European country of 5.6 million people. Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government. But he is also expected to remain above the fray of day-to-day politics and stay out of domestic political disputes while acting as a moral leader of the nation.

2 including 5-year-old, injured after woman opens fire at Texas church

PTI ■ HOUSTON

A 5-year-old child and a woman were injured and a woman was killed after she opened fire inside a church here in the US state of Texas, police said. The violence erupted at pastor Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston on Sunday where a 2 p.m. Spanish service was set to begin. Two off-duty law enforcement officers — a Houston police officer and an agent with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission — engaged and struck the woman who entered the massive church with the boy who was later hurt in the shootout.

The woman, roughly 30-35 years old, was wearing a trench coat and a backpack and was armed with a long rifle, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said. Lakewood Church — a building with a

16,000-person capacity that was previously an arena for the NBA's Houston Rockets — has grown tremendously over the past 25 years since Joel Osteen took over after his father died in 1999 and introduced an upbeat style of Christian televangelism that has captured a following of millions. "Unfortunately a 5-year-old kid was hit and is in critical condition at our local hospital," Finner said. It was unclear what the child's relationship to the shooter was, he said. A 57-year-old man — who authorities believe was not connected to the incident — was shot in the leg and is seeking treatment at a hospital, Finner said.

"I want to commend those officers. She had a long gun and it could have been a lot worse," Finner said. An investigation will take place into the shooting and both law enforcement officers will

be placed on administrative leave while the probe is ongoing. The woman had also threatened she "had a bomb", but authorities searched her vehicle and a backpack she was wearing and found no explosives, Finner said.

"She was also spraying some type of substance on the ground," the chief added.

The woman's identity has not yet been revealed. Speaking during the news conference, Osteen, the pastor, said the shooting took place "in between services", noting the timing of the incident likely helped prevent further injuries and damage.

"I can only imagine if it would have happened during the 11 o'clock service," he said. "So, you know, if there's anything good of it ... (it's) that she didn't get in there and do a whole lot worse

damage," Osteen said of the shooter.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire lamented that the violence took place while people were preparing to practise their faith and others looked forward to the Super Bowl encounter between the San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs. "We find ourselves gathered here to respond to this tragedy," he said.

In a statement Sunday afternoon, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said: "Our hearts are with those impacted by today's tragic shooting and the entire Lakewood Church community in Houston. Places of worship are sacred."

The governor added he has been in contact with local and state officials to "help this community and help bring swift justice to the criminal who committed this heinous act".

US Defence Secy Austin hospitalised

Washington (AP): US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin was hospitalised again on Sunday to address a bladder issue as he continues to recover from prostate cancer and has transferred authorities to his deputy, the Pentagon said. Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer in December and continues to deal with complications from his treatment.

At about 2:20 pm Sunday, he was transported by his security detail to Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre "to be seen for symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue", Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement.

While Austin initially intended to retain the "functions and duties of his office" at about 5 pm Sunday he transferred those authorities to Deputy Secretary of Defence Kathleen Hicks. As of Sunday evening, he remained hospitalised.

A statement from Walter Reed medical officials late Sunday said Austin was admitted into the critical care unit for supportive care and close monitoring. Dr. John Maddox, the trauma medical director, and Dr. Gregory Chesnut, director of the Centre for Prostate Disease Research of the Murtha Cancer Centre, said while it was unclear at this time how long Austin will remain hospitalised, "the current bladder issue is not expected to change his anticipated full recovery."

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was notified, as well as the White House and Congress. Austin was scheduled to depart Tuesday for Brussels to hold a meeting of the Ukraine contact group, which he established in 2022 to coordinate military support for Kyiv after Russia's invasion.

After that, Austin was scheduled to attend a regular meeting of NATO defence ministers.

It was not immediately clear if this hospitalisation would change those plans. Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer in December and underwent a procedure called a prostatectomy to treat it on December 22.

Yemen's Houthi rebels fire missiles at Iran ship

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two missiles at a ship bound for a port in Iran on Monday, causing minor damage but no injuries to its crew, authorities said. The attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-operated bulk carrier Star Iris shows just how widely the Houthis now target ships travelling through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait connecting the two waterways. The Star Iris had been heading from Brazil to Bandar Khomeini in Iran, the main backer and armer of the Houthis in Yemen's years-long war.

The Houthis sought to describe the Star Iris as an "American" vessel without offering evidence, and said they targeted the ship with multiple missiles.

The Houthi's military "will not hesitate to carry out more operations in retaliation to the Zionist crimes against our brothers in the Gaza Strip, as



well as in response to the ongoing American-British aggression against our dear country", Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said in a statement after the attack. The British military's United Kingdom Trade Operations centre, which oversees Mideast waters, reported the attack, saying it happened while the Star Iris was travelling south through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that separates East Africa from the Arabian Peninsula. The ship's captain "reports his vessel was attacked by two missiles and reports

minor damage", the UKTMO said. "Vessel and crew are safe. Vessel proceeding to next port of call."

The attack on the Star Iris follows days in which no Houthi attacks on ships were reported. It's unclear what caused the pause, though the US and British militaries have conducted multiple rounds of airstrikes targeting the Houthi's missile arsenals and launch sites in territory they hold.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza.

UK may send asylum-seekers to Rwanda

AP ■ LONDON

The British government's plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is "fundamentally incompatible" with the UK's human rights obligations, a parliamentary rights watchdog said Monday, as the contentious bill returned for debate in the House of Lords. Parliament's unelected upper chamber is scrutinizing a bill designed to overcome the UK Supreme Court's ruling that the Rwanda plan is illegal. The court said in November that the East African nation is not a safe country for migrants.

The Safety of Rwanda Bill pronounces the country safe, makes it harder for migrants to challenge deportation and allows the British government to ignore injunctions from the European Court of Human Rights that seek to block removals. Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, which has members from both government and opposition parties, said in a report that the bill "openly invites the possibility of the UK breaching inter-

national law" and allows British officials "to act in a manner that is incompatible with human rights standards."

Scottish National Party lawmaker Joanna Cherry, who chairs the committee, said the bill "risks untold damage to the UK's reputation as a proponent of human rights". "This bill is designed to remove vital safeguards against persecution and human rights abuses, including the fundamental right to access a court," she said. "Hostility to human rights is at its heart and no amendments can salvage it."

The Home Office said the Rwanda plan is a "bold and innovative" solution to a "major global challenge". "Rwanda is clearly a safe country that cares deeply about supporting refugees," it said in a statement. "It hosts more than 135,000 asylum seekers and stands ready to relocate people and help them rebuild their lives."

Under the policy, asylum-seekers who reach the UK in small boats across the English Channel would have their claims processed in Rwanda, and stay there permanently. The plan is key to Prime

Minister Rishi Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" bringing unauthorised migrants to the UK. Sunak argues that deporting unauthorised asylum-seekers will deter people from making risky journeys and break the business model of people-smuggling gangs. Human rights groups call the plan inhumane and unworkable, and no one has yet been sent to Rwanda.

In response to the Supreme Court ruling, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants. Sunak's Conservative government argues the treaty allows it to pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe destination. The bill was approved by the House of Commons last month, though only after 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher.

It is now being scrutinised by the Lords, many of whom want to defeat or water down the bill. Unlike the Commons, the governing Conservatives do not hold a majority of seats in the Lords.

Serbs protest decision to abolish Serbian dinar

Mitrovica: Thousands of minority Serbs in Kosovo on Monday protested a ban of the use of the Serbian currency in areas where they live, an issue that has been the cause of the latest crisis in relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

Tensions escalated after the government of Kosovo, a former Serbian province, banned banks and other financial institutions in the Serb-populated areas from using the dinar in local transactions, starting February 1, and imposed the euro. The dinar was widely used in ethnic Serbian-dominated areas, especially in Kosovo's north, to pay pensions and salaries to staff in Serbian-run institutions, including schools and hospitals. The ban has angered both Kosovo Serbs and Serbia.

The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo sparred over the issue at a meeting last week at the United Nations Security Council. AP

Children in Abu Dhabi giving final shape to gifts for attendees of first Hindu temple inauguration

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Over 100 Indian school children here are busy painting "tiny treasure" stones which will be gifted as mementos to the guests attending the inauguration of the first stone Hindu temple here in the UAE's capital on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Bocharanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, the first traditional Hindu stone temple in the UAE.

The children have been offering "stone seva" at the temple site every Sunday for three months and are now giving the final touch to the gifts called "tiny treasures".

For 12-year-old Tithi Patel, stone seva is a weekend activity which she enjoys with her



friend. "We collected leftover stones and small rocks at the temple site. We then washed and polished them followed by a layer of primer and then paint. Each rock has a motivational quote on one side and any part of the temple painted on the other side," she told PTI.

Reva Karia, 8, who spent this

Sunday packing the stones in gift boxes, said they have named the gift "tiny treasure" because children are making them with their tiny hands.

"The stone will make the guests remember their first visit to the grand temple. For me, this has been an experience of teamwork, a weekly outing with friends and a creative

activity. I come with my parents here and they also offer their seva at parts of the temple," she said. Aarnav Thakkar, 11, said the designs being painted on the stones are reflections of affirmation and represent peace, love and harmony.

"They are later varnished so they can last for many years as the temple," he said.

Thakkar said they will continue to do this activity for a few months so that when the temple is opened to the public, the visitors in the initial months can get the gift.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir, located in Abu Mureikhab, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, has come up on around 27 acres of land in Abu Dhabi and the work for the structure has been going on since 2019.

Iraq says, US troop drawdown talks depend on peace

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Iraqi government met again with the US government on Sunday on how to draw down American troops, who have been deployed there for years combating the Islamic State. The two governments had held their first, long-awaited meeting January 27, but those meetings had been put on pause after Iran-backed militants struck a base in Jordan the very next day with a drone that killed three US service members.

In the weeks since, the US has launched multiple retaliatory strikes in Iraq and Syria including a strike last week that killed a high-ranking commander of the powerful Kataib Hezbollah militia who the US said is responsible for "directly planning and participating in attacks" on American troops in the region. Both Iraq and the

US had agreed last August to enter into talks to transition US forces from their long-standing role in assisting Iraq in combating IS. There are approximately 2,500 troops in the country, and their departure will take into account the security situation on the ground, and the capabilities of the Iraqi armed forces, the Iraq government said in a statement on Sunday posted to X, formerly Twitter.

The resumed meetings will continue to chart a path to a new bilateral relationship "as long as nothing disturbs the peace of the talks", Iraq said in its statement.

Iraq has long struggled to balance its ties with the US and Iran, both allies of the Iraqi government but regional arch-enemies. Since the Israel-Hamas war broke out in the wake of Hamas' October 7 attacks, Iran-aligned groups have struck at US facilities in

Iraq, Syria and Jordan 170 times, prompting retaliatory airstrikes by the US, which blames Kataib Hezbollah for a string of those attacks.

The Iraqi government has angrily condemned US airstrikes against Kataib Hezbollah, which is part of the Popular Mobilization Forces.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF, are state-sanctioned, mainly Shiite militias, which have grown into a powerful political faction estimated to have the most seats in the Iraqi parliament.

But the deaths of three US service members at Tower 22 in Jordan was a red line for the US and in the days following the deadly strike, Iran disavowed any knowledge or connection to the attack, and Kataib Hezbollah said it would cease launching attacks in order to not embarrass the Iraqi government.

PML-N, PPP discuss power-sharing formula to form government in Pak

AP ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The top leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party have discussed a new power-sharing formula for dividing the five-year tenure between them, as efforts to form a coalition government gathered pace on Monday following a split verdict in the elections.

Despite independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party winning the most seats in Parliament, questions loom over what the next government of Pakistan will look like. None of the three major parties, the PML-N, the PPP, or the PTI have won the necessary seats to secure a majority in the 266-member National Assembly and, therefore, will be unable to form government on their own, leaving it unclear who will be picked as the cash-strapped country's next prime minister.

The leaders of PML-N and the PPP discussed the idea of appointing a prime minister for half the term during their first meeting held on Sunday following the February 8 elections as part of their efforts to form a coalition government in the Centre and provinces, according to a source privy to the development. "It has been proposed that a PML-N candidate will serve as prime minister for three years and PPP's leader for two years," the source said, adding that it was not yet decided who will get the first term. The meeting was attended by PPP-Parliamentarian President Asif Ali Zardari, PPP Chairman Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari, and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif from the PML-N.

The same power-sharing formula was chalked out by PML-N and National Party (NP) in Balochistan in 2013 when two chief ministers from the two parties held office for half of the five-year term.

PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif is still in the race for the prime ministerial slot despite his party not securing a simple majority in the Feb 8 general

elections in Pakistan, some PML-N leaders said on Monday.

"We are having discussion with the PPP over power-sharing formula in the upcoming coalition government in the Centre and Nawaz Sharif cannot be ruled out as the prime ministerial candidate," PML-N Senator Irfan Siddique told a private news channel.

He said Nawaz Sharif, 74, is the candidate for the prime minister slot from the PML-N. In the Sunday meeting at the Bilawal House in Lahore, the two sides agreed in principle to cooperate for the country's political stability following the general election, the sources said. They confirmed that so far several open and behind-the-doors meetings have been held between the leaders of PML-N and PPP and other parties since the powerful Pakistan Army has also indicated that they will back a unity government to pull the country out of the challenges it faced. "The main hurdle is who will lead the government as both parties are pushing forward their candidates but after a lot of discussion, some sort of middle ground may emerge," according to a leader of the PML-N. A PPP leader said the party was not withdrawing from its demand that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

should be the prime minister because he was endorsed for the post by the PPP's Central Executive Committee (CEC) even before the elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced that independent candidates, a majority of them supported by the PTI secured 101 seats, followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 75 seats, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) getting 54 seats, and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) bagging 17 seats. Other parties got 17 seats while the result of one constituency was withheld. Though the PTI initially claimed to form the government but its chances looked grim from the beginning as at least 169 seats, in the house of 336, were needed to form the government. A total of 266 seats are directly contested while 60 women-reserved seats and 10 minority seats are allocated based on proportional representation to the winning parties. As PTI was not allowed to contest as a single party with a common symbol, it was not qualified to get the reserved seats.

The PTI hence decided to sit on the opposition benches, leaving the field open for PML-N and PPP as well as others to form a coalition, party leader Barrister

Gohar Ali Khan said, adding that the PTI would form a strong opposition.

"We don't feel comfortable with both (PML-N and PPP) of them. There will be no talks with anyone to make a government or to make a government together with them. It is better to sit in the opposition than to make a government [with them], but we think we have the majority," Gohar Khan told Dawn News on Sunday.

Rejected ballots exceed victory margin in 24 constituencies

Islamabad (PTI): The number of rejected ballots was greater than the margin of victory in at least 24 National Assembly constituencies, according to an interesting statistical nugget from Pakistan's recent general elections. The difference potentially opens doors for legal battles as several losing candidates have flooded the courts with petitions to review the results.

According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, 22 constituencies with a greater number of rejected votes than the margin of victory fell in Punjab, with one each in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh province. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won the electoral race in 13 of these constituencies, five were claimed by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), four by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed independents and two by other independents. Going by their numerical strength, both the PML-N and the PPP are in a position to form a coalition government in the Centre. However, PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif announced that all parties except PTI should join hands in the upcoming

coalition set-up. According to the results announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) till Sunday, of the total 265 National Assembly seats, PTI-backed Independents bagged 93 seats, followed by PML-N at 73, PPP at 54, MQM at 17 and others at 19.

The highest number of rejected votes was in the NA-59 (Talagang-cum-Chakwal) area of Punjab where Sardar Ghulam Abbas of PML-N secured 141,680 votes against

his closest rival PTI-backed Muhammad Ruman Ahmad, who got 129,716 votes.


The margin of victory was 11,964 while the number of ballot papers rejected was 24,547. It was followed by NA-213 Umerkot (17,571 ballots). The lowest number of ballots excluded are reported from NA-236 Karachi East-II (51 ballots). In total, around two million ballot papers have been excluded from the count from the 265 National Assembly constituencies.



OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYPAL NIGAM
GHINGARIKHAL, RANIKHET, DISTT- ALMORA 263645
Letter No.: 221/NvIda/48 Date: 12-02-2024

E-Tender Notice
1. Name of the work:- CONSTRUCTION OF APPROACH ROAD AT GOVERNMENT MEDICAL COLLEGE ALMORA, DISTRICT-ALMORA.
2. Estimated Cost:- Rs. 55.92 Lakh (Without GST)
3. Period of Completion:- 02 Month
4. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 12-02-2024 (17.00 hrs)
5. Online Bid submission: End date:- 19-02-2024 (17.00 hrs)
6. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening:- 20-02-2024 (16.30 hrs)
7. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid:- Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peypal Nigam, Ranikhet.
8. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in
PROJECT MANAGER

KEY CORP LIMITED						
CIN No..:L65921UP1985PLC007547						
Regd. Office:16/16-A, Civil Lines, Kanpur - 208001						
Email: keycorppltd@gmail.com ; Phone: 0512-3013416, 3010422, 2305416						
STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULT (REVISED) FOR THE THIRD QUARTER ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023						
(₹ in Lakhs)						
Sl. No	Particulars	Current Quarter ended (31.12.2023) (Unaudited)	Corresponding Quarter ended (31.12.2022) (Unaudited)	Nine Months ended (31.12.2023) (Unaudited)	Corresponding Nine Months ended (31.12.2022) (Unaudited)	Previous Year ended (31.03.2023) (Audited)
1.	Total Income from Operations	3015.38	1786.93	3036.97	1805.87	1618.02
2.	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	2981.78	1771.32	2984.36	1742.19	1536.16
3.	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	2981.78	1771.32	2984.36	1742.19	1536.16
4.	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	2981.78	1771.32	2984.36	1742.19	1536.36
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	516.69	32.05	1449.87	36.04	123.27
6.	Equity Share Capital	600.00	600.00	600.00	600.00	600.00
7.	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year	-	-	-	-	4103.36
8.	Earnings Per Share (of ₹10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) - Basic & Diluted (in ₹)	8.61	0.53	24.16	0.60	2.05
Notes: 1. The above unaudited financial results have been revised as per directions of BSE notified to the company vide their e-mail dated 29.01.2024. 2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial Results (Revised) filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 & Regulation 52 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 as amended. 3. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results are available on the websites of the Stock Exchange(s) and the listed entity. https://www.bseindia.com/stock-share-price/key-corp-ltd/keycorp/507948/financials-results-special/ . The above results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the board of directors of the company at its meeting held on 12.02.2024. The Statutory Auditor of the company have carried out a limited review of accounts of the company for the third quarter ended 31st December, 2023.						
By Order of the Board (G.D. Maheshwari) Whole Time Director DIN 00235209						
Place: Kanpur Date: 12.02.2024						




SUPERIOR FINLEASE LIMITED
CIN No. :- L74899DL1994PLC061995
Regd. Office : 92, Khasra No-33/21, Ranaji Enclave, Najafgarh, Near Arjun Park Bus Stand New Delhi -110043
Email id: superiorfinlease@gmail.com; Website: www.superiorfinlease.com; Phone No.: +91-9953798335

Extract of Statement of Standalone Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter ended on December 31, 2023
(Rs. in Lakhs)

Sl No.	Particulars	Quarter Ended 31.12.2023 (Unaudited)	Quarter Ended 30.09.2023 (Unaudited)	Year Ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)
1	Total Income from Operations	31.16	32.07	223.81
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.59	(9.36)	45.08
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.59	(9.36)	45.08
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.59	(9.36)	33.36
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	3.59	(9.36)	33.36
6	Equity Share Capital	300.10	300.10	300.10
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet	77.58	77.58	77.58
8	Earning Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each)			
1. Basic :		0.01	(0.03)	0.11
2. Diluted :		0.01	(0.03)	0.11

NOTE:
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter ended 31.12.2023 filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly Unaudited Financial Results is available on the websites of the Stock Exchange www.mseil.in and www.bsindia.com and the Company's website www.superiorfinlease.com.
For Superior Finlease Limited
Sd/-
(RAJNEESH KUMAR)
Director
DIN: 02463693

Place : New Delhi
Date : February 12, 2024



JINDAL LEASEFIN LIMITED
CIN: L74899DL1994PLC059252
Regd. Office: 110, Bahar Road, New Delhi 110001

EXTRACT OF STATEMENT OF STANDALONE UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED 31.12.2023
(Rs. in Lacs)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Three Months Quarter Ended 31.12.2023 (Unaudited)	Three Months Quarter Ended 30.09.2023 (Unaudited)	Three Months Quarter Ended 31.12.2022 (Unaudited)	Three Months Quarter Ended 31.12.2022 (Unaudited)	Year Ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)
1	Total Income from Operations	0	0	0	0	0
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	-2.07	-1.41	-2.02	-8.85	-11.92
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	-2.07	-1.41	-2.02	-8.85	-11.92
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	-1.53	2.02	-1.68	-6.55	-8.97
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	8.36	13.43	-9.09	27.07	-3.47
6	Equity Share capital	300.89	300.89	300.89	300.89	300.89
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year	522.44	514.09	486.55	522.44	486.55
8	Earning per Share (face Value of Rs.10/- each) (not annualised)					
1. Basic :		-0.07	0.06	-0.06	-0.24	-0.3
2. Diluted :		-0.07	0.06	-0.06	-0.24	-0.3

NOTE :
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly/Annual financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/Annual financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange website www.bsindia.com. The same is also available on the Company's website www.jindalleasefin.in.
2. The above results duly reviewed by the Audit Committee, were approved by the Board of Directors in their meeting held on 12.02.2024.
For Jindal Leasefin Limited
Sd/-
(SURENDER KUMAR JINDAL)
Managing Director

Date : 12.02.2024
Place : New Delhi

IMF team likely to visit Pak for bailout package


PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A delegation of the IMF may visit cash-strapped Pakistan once a new federal government is formed, negotiations for which are ongoing between major political parties after the general elections threw a hung Parliament, a media report said on Monday.

The International Monetary Fund's review mission might visit Islamabad by the end of this month or early next month, provided the government formation at federal and provincial levels was complete, according to the Ministry of Finance's assessment, Geo News reported.

The visit assumes significance as it is crucial for the completion of the USD 3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA), which is going to expire on April 12. The mission will finalise the salient features of the anticipated medium-term bailout package to avert a default on repayment of foreign debts, the report said. In its recent staff report, the IMF talked about rephasing access for the second review, to March 15, 2024, to provide sufficient time to complete the programme's structural agenda. However, in the wake of controversy over the poll results, the mission's possible delay for the completion of the last tranche worth USD 1.2 billion under SBA could lead to fears of default, the report said. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves hovered around USD 8.04 billion during the week ending February 2, after witnessing a decline in reserves by USD 173 million due to external debt repayments. A Finance Division official said the IMF would only come to begin the second review talks once a new government was sworn in at the national level, according to the report.

The official added the last and third tranche of USD 1.2 billion was conditional upon the newly elected government assuming office. The new agreement will also be finalised with the new government, he said.



MODI RUBBER LIMITED
CIN: L25199UP1971PLC003392, Registered Office: Modinagar - 201204 Dist. Ghaziabad (U.P.), Corporate Office: 4-7C, DDA Shopping Centre, New Friends Colony, New Delhi 110025
Website: www.modirubberlimited.com Email: investors@modigroup.net Phone: +91-11-2684 8416

EXTRACT OF STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED UN-AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023
(Amount in Lacs)

Sl. No.	Particulars	QUARTER ENDED						NINE MONTHS ENDED				YEAR ENDED	
		STANDALONE			CONSOLIDATED			STANDALONE		CONSOLIDATED		STANDALONE	CONSOLIDATED
		31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	30-Sep-23	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	30-Sep-23	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	31-Mar-23	31-Mar-23
		Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Un-Audited	Audited	Audited
1	Total Income from operations (Net)	70.55	41.38	63.12	722.30	140.57	498.59	197.88	152.96	1,699.39	246.16	271.58	532.36
2	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period (before tax and exceptional items)	(205.53)	(410.01)	2,503.27	694.85	716.39	687.02	3,091.09	1,390.35	1,966.35	2,741.97	1,126.38	3,140.96
3	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period before tax (after exceptional items)	(205.53)	(410.01)	2,503.27	694.85	716.39	687.02	3,091.09	1,390.35	1,966.35	2,741.97	1,126.38	3,140.96
4	Net Profit/ (Loss) for the period after tax (after exceptional items)	(371.92)	(289.04)	2,293.40	558.71	834.67	317.60	2,504.85	1,094.35	1,237.07	2,443.54	796.64	2,765.51
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (after tax)	(151.11)	(343.00)	2,485.68	962.64	938.03	662.90	2,889.62	728.44	1,828.99	1,492.44	137.69	1,931.71
6	Equity Share Capital (Face value of share is Rs. 10/- each)	2,504.05	2,504.05	2,504.05	2,499.55	2,504.05	2,499.55	2,504.05	2,504.05	2,499.55	2,504.05	2,504.05	2,499.55
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserves as shown in the Balance Sheet of previous year)	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
8	Earnings per share (EPS) (of Rs. 10/- each) (Not Annualised)												
	(a) Basic and Diluted EPS (before exceptional Items) (in Rs.)	(1.49)	(1.15)	9.16	2.24	3.33	1.27	10.00	4.37	4.94	9.76	3.18	11.06
	(b) Basic and Diluted EPS (after exceptional Items) (in Rs.)	(1.49)	(1.15)	9.16	2.24	3.33	1.27	10.00	4.37	4.95	9.76	3.18	11.06

NOTES:
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly/ Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulations 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/ Annual Financial Results are available on the stock exchange website, www.nseindia.com, www.bsindia.com and on the Company website www.modirubberlimited.com.
2. The above results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and subsequently approved by the Board of Directors of the Company at their respective meeting held on February 12, 2024. The Statutory Auditors of the Company have carried out a limited review of the aforesaid results.
3. Previous quarter/ year end figures have been rearranged and / or regrouped, wherever necessary, to make them comparable with those of the current quarter/ year end.

Place : New Delhi
Date : 12th February, 2024

By order of the Board
Sd/-
(Alok Kumar Modi)
Managing Director

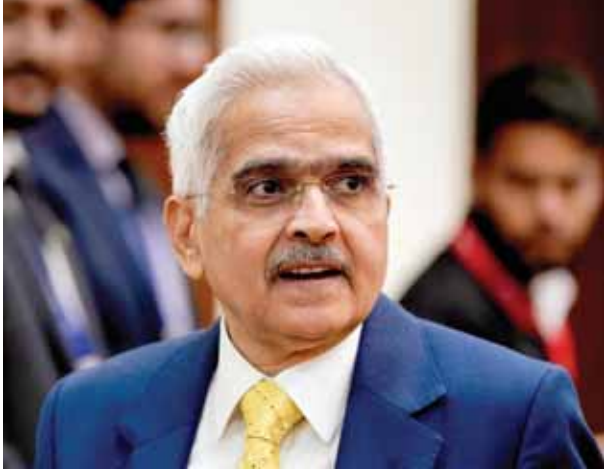
RBI rules out review of action against Paytm Payments Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), saying the decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the lender. In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29. "At the moment let me say very clearly there is no review of this (PPBL) decision. If you are expecting a review of the decision, let me very clearly say there is (going to be) no

review of the decision," Das said at a press conference after the 606th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India. The meeting was addressed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The governor said any decision against entities regulated by the RBI is taken after a comprehensive assessment. While emphasising that RBI is supportive of the fintech sector, Das said it is also committed to protect the interest of customers as well as ensure financial stability. The central bank is expected to soon issue a set of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the Paytm matter this week. While announcing the action against PPBL, the RBI had said

the direction follows persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns. Earlier on March 11, 2022, the RBI had barred PPBL from onboarding new customers with immediate effect. In its latest action, RBI has asked the Paytm Payments Bank not to take deposits/credit transactions/top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and NCMC cards, among others after February 29, 2024. However, the central bank has allowed credit of interest, cashbacks, or refunds even beyond February 29. Further, withdrawal or utilisation of balances by PPBL customers from their bank accounts, including savings



bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards are permitted without

One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake in Paytm Payments Bank Limited but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary. Gold remains flat; silver jumps Rs 400 New Delhi, Feb 12 (PTT) Gold prices remained steady at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to HDFC Securities. However, silver jumped Rs 400 to Rs 75,400 per kg from its previous close of Rs 75,000 per kg. Meanwhile, the next tranche of Sovereign Gold Bond scheme opened for subscription at a price of Rs 6,263 per gram. The issue is open until February 16. The Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve

Bank, has decided to offer a discount of Rs 50 per gram less than the nominal value to those investors applying online and making the payment against the application through digital mode. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,022 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close. Also, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.80 per ounce. Traders avoided directional bets before the outcome of the US consumer inflation data, to be released on Tuesday, which

can provide more insights about the US Federal Reserve monetary policy path, Gandhi added. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities said that the spotlight also turned to the fourth tranche of Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGB), which garnered investor attention. With stable returns fixed at 2.5 per cent, investors were drawn to park their funds in gold, especially amidst prevailing uncertainties in the global and Indian markets. "However, the price of Rs 62,130 per 10 gram may seem unattractive to some investors, particularly considering the delayed hints of US rate cuts, which could potentially support a rise in the dollar and limit the upside for gold prices in the short term," Trivedi said.

Sensex tanks 523 points on profit taking in banking, metal shares

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex plunged by 523 points on Monday due to profit taking in metal and banking shares amid mixed trends in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 as 22 of its components closed in the red and eight in the green. The barometer opened higher and touched a high of 71,756.58 in early trade. However, profit taking in Reliance Industries, metal giants and banking shares dragged the index to a low of 70,922.57 during intra-day trade. The broader NSE Nifty also closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent lower at 21,616.05 with 34 of its constituents ending in the red. Metal, banking and select oil shares succumbed to selling while pharma and IT shares bucked the trend. "An uptick in exchange margin requirements caused a decrease in positions, primarily in mid and small caps. Aside from the pharma and IT sectors, selling was widespread, with notable struggles seen in PSU banks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. In the Sensex pack, Tata Steel fell the most by 2.76 per cent, followed by NTPC (2.72 per cent) and SBI (2.26 per cent). Private banks IndusInd, Kotak Bank, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank also declined. In contrast, Wipro, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Nestle were among the nine



Sensex stocks that defied the trend. BSE smallcap index fell 3.16 per cent while midcap lost 2.62 per cent and largecap closed 0.90 per cent lower. Among the sectoral indices, utilities saw a steepest fall of 3.60 per cent, followed by realty which declined by 3.01 per cent and power that went down by 2.90 per cent. Industrials fell 2.92 per cent and energy slid 2.80 per cent, while metal declined by 2.73

per cent and oil & gas by 2.56 per cent. Capital goods, commodities, bankex and financial services were other laggards. "The premium valuation gap between mid to large caps has notched to its all-time high. Despite a robust economic forecast, corporate earnings are expected to slow due to moderated operating margins. It is going to be a challenge for the broad market to sustain the

premium valuation," Nair added. In the broader market, NHPC dropped 15.81 per cent after it reported a 19 per cent decline in profit for the December quarter. Another power PSU SJVN dropped 20 per cent to hit the lower circuit on BSE. Leading forging manufacturer Bharat Forge tanked 14.04 per cent following the announcement of its quarterly results. "Nifty declined further after a consolidation breakdown on the hourly chart, indicating an increase in pessimism. The daily chart shows the index forming a lower top, signaling diminishing bullish sentiment," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities said. In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 closed 0.9 per cent higher and China's Shanghai Composite went up 1.28 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.83 per cent. European markets were trading on a mixed note with CAC 40 of France and DAX of Germany rising, while London's FTSE 100 trading with losses. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.50 per cent to USD 81.78 a barrel on Monday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) purchased shares worth Rs 141.95 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. On Friday, Sensex climbed 167.06 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 71,595.49 points while the Nifty gained 64.55 points or 0.30 per cent to close at 21,782.50 points.

India vegetable oil imports fall 28 per cent in January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's vegetable oil imports declined by 28 per cent to 12 lakh tonnes in January from a year-ago period, industry body SEA said on Monday. Vegetable oil imports stood at 16.61 lakh tonnes in January 2023. India is a leading vegetable oil buyer in the world. In the first quarter (November-January) of the current oil year, total imports dropped 23 per cent to 36.73 lakh tonnes as against 47.73 lakh tonnes in the same quarter of previous year. According to the Solvent Extractors Association of India



(SEA), about 7,82,983 tonnes of palm oil and 4,08,938 tonnes of soft oil were imported in January this year out of total vegetables oil. As on February 1, total edible oils stock stood at 26.49 lakh

tonnes, down 7.64 per cent from that of the year-ago period, it said in a statement. SEA said prices of edible oils, which are currently low, may go up this year on lower production, global economic

issues and supply constraints. The availability of palm oil for edible oil requirements has come down as the two main producers, Malaysia and Indonesia, are diverting it for the production of bio-diesel. This could result in an increase in prices this year, it said. Global palm oil output was seasonally low in January-March 2024, leading to a reduction of stocks both in producing as well as importing countries, it added. India imports palm oil mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia and a small quantity of crude soft oil, including soyabean, from Argentina. Sunflower oil is imported from Ukraine and Russia.

Rupee rises 7 paise to close at 83 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, on softness in the American currency and easing crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets and foreign fund outflows capped sharp gains, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.01 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 82.98 and a low of 83.02. The local unit finally settled at 83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 7 paise from its previous close of 83.07. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias, positive global equities and a slight correction in the greenback. "However, any bounce back in crude oil prices amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and selling pressure



from foreign investors may weigh on the rupee at higher levels," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan

by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from India's CPI and IIP data. "Headline inflation is expected to ease to 5.09 per cent from 5.69 per cent. Investors may remain vigilant ahead of US inflation data on Tuesday," Choudhary said, adding the USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in range of Rs 82.80-83.20. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent higher at 104.15. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.51 per cent to USD 81.77 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex declined 523 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 71,072.49. The Nifty fell 166.45 points, or 0.76 per cent, to 21,616.05. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they bought shares worth Rs 141.95 crore, according to exchange data.



Tata Motors ties up with LeadIT for greener future

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Monday said it has tied up with the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), a global alliance launched by governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019. As a member of LeadIT, the auto major will be able to harness the power of global best practices, influence policy-making, and together with other members strengthen climate action plans, thereby accelerating transition towards net-zero emissions. "Our pledge to attain net-zero emissions across our Passenger Vehicles (PV) business by 2040, and our Commercial Vehicles (CV) business by 2045, is a testament to our commitment to a greener

future," Tata Motors Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer SJR Kutty said in a statement. Joining forces with LeadIT propels the automaker closer to these ambitious goals, facilitating a journey towards sustainable transformation, he added. Sweden's Minister for Climate and the Environment and Co-Chair of LeadIT, Romina Pourmokhtari said the membership signals an important commitment to net-zero from a leading global manufacturer in the supply chain. "Demand signals are crucial for the transformation of our industry. Fostering dialogues and strengthening partnerships in areas where transition challenges need to be addressed is core to achieving reduced climate emissions," she added.

SpiceJet plans to lay off 1,000 people

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Crisis-hit SpiceJet plans to hand out pink slips to at least 1,000 employees in the coming days as the airline works to significantly reduce costs and streamline operations of its depleted aircraft fleet, officials said on Monday. Faced with financial woes, legal battles and other headwinds, the no-frills carrier might ask more staff to leave as there is excess manpower now compared to the number of planes in service. A final decision on the quantum of layoffs is expected this week, one of the officials in the know said. When contacted, a SpiceJet spokesperson said the airline has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, for achieving profitable growth but did not

provide any numbers. The airline has around 9,000 employees and is now looking at reducing the strength by 10-15 per cent, the official said, adding that layoffs are necessary to reduce the overall costs and annual savings could be up to Rs 100 crore. A reduction of 15 per cent would mean around 1,350 people will lose their jobs. The second official in the know said that layoffs are expected across departments and the final list is being prepared. People from the management and consultancy are working on chalking out the contours of letting staff leave, and all the departments have been asked to give their inputs, the official added. There was no official comment from SpiceJet on the proposed job cuts. The second official explained that the airline has stopped



operations on certain RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme) routes and at those stations, there is excess manpower, especially staff with lower salaries. Relocating such people will be a challenge, the official noted. Currently, SpiceJet has a fleet of

little over 30 aircraft apart from 10 planes that are on wet lease. "As part of our turnaround and cost-cutting strategy, following the recent fund infusion, SpiceJet has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, aimed at achieving profitable

growth and positioning ourselves to capitalise on the opportunities in the Indian aviation industry. "Through this initiative alone, we anticipate an annual saving of up to Rs 100 crore," the airline spokesperson said in a statement. During a meeting with the airline's senior officials last month, SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh emphasised the importance of judicious spending and that he will personally oversee all major expenditures. The carrier will prioritise fleet upgrades, enhance on-time performance and cost-cutting measures will be implemented to streamline operations, according to an internal note last month. SpiceJet, which has undergone multiple ownership changes since inception and is currently helmed by Ajay Singh, is in the

process of raising funds from various investors. On January 26, the carrier announced that it has received Rs 744 crore as the first tranche of the total Rs 2,250 crore proposed to be raised through the issuance of securities on a preferential basis. There were reports that there has been a delay in raising the requisite funds. The airline has also availed funds worth around Rs 1,000 crore under the government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and Singh has committed to infuse Rs 500 crore. In recent times, SpiceJet also witnessed lessors taking legal recourse to take back their leased aircraft due to non-payment of dues. India is one of the world's fastest growing civil aviation markets and the domestic air traffic is on an upward trajectory. However, SpiceJet has been struggling for sometime now. In 2023, the carrier flew 83.90 lakh passengers and had a domestic market share of 5.5 per cent.

Inflation falls to three months low in January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation declined to a three-month low of 5.1 per cent in January, mainly due to subdued prices of vegetables, fruits and other food items, according to government data released on Monday. The fall indicates that retail inflation is inching towards the Reserve Bank's comfort level of 4 per cent. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation was on the rise for two straight months after touching a trough of 4.9 per cent in October 2023. In December, it stood at 5.69 per

cent. In January, inflation in the food basket eased to 8.3 per cent from 9.53 per cent in the preceding month. It was at 6 per cent in January 2023, as per the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Food inflation was lower in rural areas at 7.91 per cent compared to 9.02 per cent in the urban centres of the country. The latest data showed that inflation in 'oils and fats,' 'pulses and products,' 'spices, fruits, and vegetables' segments was lower in January 2024 compared to December 2023.

However, inflation was marginally higher in the 'fuel and light,' 'clothing and footwear,' 'cereals and products,' 'meat and fish,' and eggs segments on a month-on-month basis. As per the data, inflation was more than the national average of 5.1 per cent in Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh. The lowest retail inflation in January this year was in Delhi at 2.56 per cent. Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at rating agency Icra, said while

rabi sowing has caught up with last year's level, reservoir storage remains well below the year-ago levels in most regions, continuing to imbue caution in terms of the outlook for the rabi harvest. "We project the CPI inflation to ease below 5 per cent in February-March 2024, and average at 5.3 per cent in FY2024. "Thereafter, we estimate the CPI inflation at 4.6 per cent in FY2025, broadly in line with that of the MPC (Monetary Policy Committee), based on the assumption of a normal monsoon," she said.

Role of nursing highlighted

PNS ■ KATTANKULATHUR

Speakers at a national Conference on Friday said that nurses were at the forefront of healthcare delivery, while stressing on the importance of knowledge transfer in the profession. SRM College of Nursing, SRMIST, hosted the 8th National Nursing Conference on Friday. More than 570 participants including faculty of nursing institutions, staff nurses, Ph.D scholars apart from graduate and post graduate students of nursing from 34 institutions all over India took part in the day-



long conference. While delivering the Chief Guest address, Professor T Samuel Ravikumar, Trauma & Disaster Management Consultant, and former Trauma Centre Coordinator and Head, Emergency Nursing, CMC, Vellore, said nurses were at the forefront of healthcare delivery.

WOODS STARTS A NEW YEAR WITH NEW LOOK

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Tiger Woods is starting a new year with a new look. Just not a different color. Woods makes his 2024 debut this week in the Genesis Invitational at Riviera, a signature event on the PGA Tour in which he is the tournament host. The first order of business is unveiling what he referred to in December as the next “chapter.” Woods and Nike ended 27 years together at the end of last year. He wore the swoosh on his shirt for the final time at the PNC Championship that he played with his son, Charlie, who was wearing clothes from a different apparel company. Woods has scheduled a press conference Monday at 4 p.M. PST outside the gates of Riviera to discuss what he will be wearing in the limited tournaments he plays. All signs point to TaylorMade. Woods already plays their golf clubs, and TaylorMade Lifestyle Ventures has filed four trademark applications with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for “Sunday Red” or “SDR.” Woods announced on Jan. 8 that his relationship with Nike, which produced so many big moments on the golf course



and in commercials, had officially ended. His agent at Excel Sports Management, Mark Steinberg, said he expected “an exciting announcement” at Riviera. Woods has been teasing the

announcement on social media recently. He posted a closeup of his face a week ago Monday that said, “The vision remains the same.” On Friday, he posted a darkened picture of him wearing a red shirt that

said, “A new day rises.” Woods has worn some variation of red on Sunday his entire career because his Thai-born mother, Kultida, told him it was his power color. She also gives him a new head cover of a Tiger

each season with words in Thai that say, “Love from Mom.” Key to that is getting to Sunday. Woods played all four rounds of the unofficial Hero World Challenge in December, his first competition in nearly

eight months while he recovered from ankle surgery after the Masters. Woods made the cut in the rain-delayed Masters but withdrew on Sunday morning before completing the third round because of his injuries. He also made the cut at the Genesis Invitational last year, tying for 45th. The Genesis Invitational not only carries a \$20 million purse, because it is a player-hosted signature event the winner will get \$4 million. But unlike the other signature events, the Genesis Invitational will have a 36-hole cut to the top 50 and ties, and any player within 10 shots of the lead. Whatever the new look, it won’t be visible as it once was. Woods already was coming off four back surgeries, the last one who fuse his lower spine, when he had a car crash in Los Angeles in the days after the 2021 Genesis Invitational. He didn’t play the rest of the year. But amid concerns he might never play again, Woods recovered to play in the 2022 Masters and made it to Sunday. He has never missed the cut at Augusta National as a pro. Woods had his right ankle fused after last year’s Masters and felt optimistic about 2024. He has set a goal of playing once a month through the major season.



Sangram to face Saeed

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Making his comeback after six years, former Commonwealth Heavyweight champion Sangram Singh will face Pakistan’s Muhammad Saeed in what will be the headline event of the International Pro Wrestling Championship on February 24 in Dubai. The event carrying a prize purse of Rs 3-crore will have a lineup of five matches, including the one featuring Sangram and Saeed. “This sport of wrestling exemplifies gentlemanly conduct, and I aim to inspire the youth through this event keeping in mind the ideology of FIT India,” said the 38-year-old who won the Commonwealth Heavyweight Championship in 2015 and

2016. “Competing against Muhammad Saeed, who is an elite athlete in his own right will be the perfect way to emphasize that age is no barrier and I look forward to a great fight to complete my anticipated comeback facilitated by World Professional Wrestling Hub.” The other match ups feature Ilias Bekbulatov (Russia), 2017 European Wrestling Champion vs Damon Kemp (USA); Andrea Carolina (Columbia), Olympian, vs Vescan Cynthia (France), Olympian; Bader Ali (UAE), Silver medalist, Arab Championship vs Mbo Isomi Aron (Congo), Gold Medalist, Games of La Francophonie; Mimi Hristova (Bulgaria), Olympian vs Skiba Monika (Poland).



Davis Cup stars felicitated at inauguration of Bengaluru Open 2024

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Indian Davis Cup team, which defeated Pakistan resoundingly on their own turf recently, was felicitated during the inauguration ceremony of the Bengaluru Open 2024 at the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) Stadium here on Monday. The main draw of the tournament was inaugurated by Manjunath Prasad, additional chief secretary in the Karnataka government’s department of youth empowerment and sport. “It’s a proud moment for the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association to have Davis Cup stars participating at the DafaNews Bengaluru Open 2024. Their achievement in Pakistan was historic and inspiring,” said R Ashoka, President Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association. “We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the entire team for their remarkable victory in this historic match

and we look forward to celebrating many more successes in the future.” The Indian team thrashed Pakistan 4-0 to secure their place in the Davis Cup World Group I earlier this month. The members of the winning team — Ramkumar Ramanathan, Sriram Balaji, Saketh Myneni and Nikki K Poonacha — were present at the felicitation ceremony as they will also feature in the ongoing tournament. “We welcome all of you to the sixth edition of Bengaluru Open 2024 and wish you all the best. It will be an exciting week for the fans as top players will be in action, competing for the coveted title,” said Prasad. The ATP Challenger Tour 100 event, organised by KSLTA, will be played from February 12-18 with the likes of star Indian player Sumit Nagal, who broke into the ATP Top-100 ranking, former World No. 25 Vasek Pospisil of Canada and others vying for honours.

PTI ■ SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA)

Thomas Cup champions India will look to recreate magic when they chase the elusive crown at the Badminton Asia Team Championships, which will mark the return of double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu from injury. The Indian men’s team, which lifted the Thomas Cup in 2022 and secured a first-ever silver medal at last year’s Asian Games, will look to go all the way in the continental event this week after finishing with bronze medals in the 2016 and 2018 editions. It won’t be a walk in the park for the Indian men’s team, who will face formidable China and Hong Kong in its group A league matches. However, India, led by HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen and inform doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, will back themselves to finish in the top two and make it to the knockout stage. The women’s team, led by Sindhu, got

India chase glory at BATC



the rub of green as China is the only other team in Group ‘W’ and India are thus already assured of a knockout berth. It will be an uphill task for the

women’s team, which will depend on Sindhu and the two doubles pairs — Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand and Guwahati Masters

2023 champions Ashwini Ponnappa-Tanisha Crasto to provide them the push. For Sindhu, the event assumes extra significance as she will look to test her match fitness and regain confidence after being missing action since October last year. The 28-year-old had suffered a knee injury at the French Open and took some time to regain her fitness and then shifted her base to Bengaluru to train under mentor Prakash Padukone at PPBA. The continental competition will also be important for the players as it offers valuable qualification points in the race to the 2024 Paris Olympics. Focus will also be on the young and second string Indian players such as Thailand Open super 300 semifinalist Ashmita Chaliya, 16-year-old senior national champion Anmol Kharb and

Badminton Asia Junior Championships medallist Tanvi Sharma, who would be eager to punch above their weight on the grand stage. India will begin its campaign on Wednesday with the men’s team taking on Hong Kong and Sindh and Co. Facing China at the Setia City Convention Centre here. While Hong Kong boasts of two solid men’s singles players in World No. 18 and World No. 22 Ng Ka Long Angus, they lack a decent doubles pair and India is expected to get across their opponents. The same can’t be said about their women’s counterparts. China won’t have the presence of Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei in their ranks but the likes of World No. 8 Han Yu, World No. 9 Wang Zhi Yi and World No. 15 Zhang Yi Man could prove a handful for Chaliha and Kharb. China will also be without their top doubles pair but World No. 4 Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning will be tough opponents.

Marathon world record holder Kelvin dies in car crash

AP ■ NAIROBI (KENYA)

Marathon world record-holder Kelvin Kiptum, who was set to be a superstar of long-distance running and was a top contender for gold at the Olympics in Paris this year, was killed along with his coach in a car crash in Kenya. Their vehicle was the only one involved in the crash late Sunday and Kiptum was driving when it veered off a road and into a ditch before hitting a tree, police said. Kiptum was 24 and one of the most exciting prospects to emerge in road running in years, having broken the world record in only his third appearance in an elite marathon. His record, set at last year’s Chicago Marathon, was ratified by international track federation World Athletics just last week. His death reverberated through Kenya, where runners are the biggest sports stars. Kenyans have also gotten used to tragic tales involving their

top athletes after a number have died in road crashes, other accidents and domestic violence cases. “He was only 24,” Kenyan President William Ruto said in a statement offering his condolences. “Kiptum was our future.” Kiptum and his Rwandan coach, Gervais Hakizimana, were killed in the crash at around 11 p.M., police said. It happened near the town of Kapsabet in western Kenya, in the heart of the high-altitude region that’s renowned as a training base for the best distance runners from Kenya and across the world. A third person, a 24-year-old woman, was also in the car and was taken to a hospital with serious injuries, police said. Kiptum and Hakizimana died at the scene. Athletes and family members, including Kiptum’s father, gathered at the hospital mortuary where the bodies of



Kiptum and his coach were taken. One of the athletes, former women’s steeplechase world champion Milcah Chemos, struggled to speak while breaking down in tears. “I have no words to explain the loss of Kelvin,” she said. Kenneth Kimaiyo, a friend of Kiptum, said he arrived at the crash scene soon after it happened and Kiptum had been thrown out of the car. Photos showed the silver car

with a badly mangled roof and one of the doors flung open. Kiptum was the first man to run the marathon in under 2 hours, 1 minute in an official race when he set the world record of 2:00.35 in Chicago in October, beating the mark of fellow Kenyan and marathon great Eliud Kipchoge. Kiptum and Kipchoge were expected to provide an enticing all-Kenyan battle for marathon gold in Paris and Kiptum was

due to start his season at the Rotterdam Marathon in April, which would have been his first event since breaking the world record. World Athletics President Sebastian Coe was one of the first to offer his condolences in a statement on X, formerly Twitter. “We are shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the devastating loss of Kelvin Kiptum and his coach, Gervais Hakizimana,” Coe wrote. “On behalf of all World Athletics we send our deepest condolences to their families, friends, teammates and the Kenyan nation.” “It was only earlier this week in Chicago, the place where Kelvin set his extraordinary marathon World Record, that I was able to officially ratify his historic time. An incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy, we will miss him dearly,” Coe wrote. David Rudisha, Kenya’s two-time Olympic champion in the 800 meters, wrote on X that Kiptum’s death was “a huge

loss.” Kiptum had immediate success by running the fastest time ever by a marathon debutant at the 2022 Valencia Marathon. The following year, he won the London and Chicago races, two of the most prestigious marathons in the world. He set a new course record at the London Marathon last April and then became the fastest marathoner in the world months later. While young and new to the circuit, he had already run three of the seven fastest marathon times ever recorded and was seen as a rare talent. But he was also the latest Kenyan star to die in devastating circumstances. David Leieli, an All-Africa Games silver medalist, died in a car crash in 2010. Marathon runner Francis Kiplagat was among five people who were killed in a crash in 2018. Nicholas Bett, who won gold in the 400 meter hurdles at the 2015 world championships, also died in a car crash in 2018.

AP ■ LONDON

The Champions League narrative is so often about Manchester City and Real Madrid. The past two champions of Europe were the only teams to sweep through the group stage with six wins. They also are first in action Tuesday when the most prized competition in club soccer resumes in the round of 16. Man City is away to a Copenhagen team playing in the knockout stage for the first time in 13 years and Madrid is at Leipzig for the first leg. The two teams favored to lift the trophy warmed up with comfortable wins Saturday and goals from signature players. Erling Haaland confirmed his return to form after a foot injury with both goals in Man City’s 2-0 win over Everton, his first since Nov. 28 when Leipzig was beaten 3-2 in their Champions League group. Haaland has a Premier League-leading 16 goals and Madrid’s Jude Bellingham has a La Liga-best 15 after also scoring twice

Champions League knockout stage starts

in a 4-0 rout of second-place Girona, which is owned by the same Abu Dhabi group as Man City. But Bellingham has an ankle injury, having asked to be substituted Saturday, and is a doubt to face Leipzig. At the same time Madrid was imperious in its domestic title-chasing clash, Bayern Munich was falling to an embarrassing 3-0 loss at Bayer Leverkusen in its own table-topping game. Bayern now trails Bundesliga leader Leverkusen by five points and its run of 11 league titles is at risk again after barely holding on to the trophy on the last day last season. The 2020 Champions League winner visits Lazio on Wednesday with its aura dimmed despite Harry Kane’s 28 goals this season and coming through the group stage unbeaten for the sixth straight year. Also Wednesday, Paris Saint-

Germain hosts Real Sociedad, which was the surprise winner of a group ahead of last season’s beaten finalist Inter Milan. PSG is the in-form team though it was edged for first place in a tough group won by Borussia Dortmund. The French champion — with Kylian Mbappé in the last few months of his contract - is unbeaten in all competitions for three months, since a 2-1 loss at AC Milan. “From what I can feel and sense in and around the club and the city, all I have seen for the last three weeks is that we are playing in the Champions League. It is as if our life was at stake,” PSG coach Luis Enrique said Saturday. “We have to treat the competition calmly.” Real Sociedad has slumped and has just one win in eight league games, including four goalless draws. **REST OF THE ROUND:** The first-leg games continue Feb.



20 when Inter goes to Atletico Madrid and PSV Eindhoven hosts Dortmund. On Feb. 21, Napoli hosts Barcelona and Porto hosts Arsenal.

Second-leg games are played from March 5-13. UEFA draws pairings for the quarterfinals and semifinals on March 15. **MORE TO PLAY FOR:** This

Champions League has even more at stake. Four more entries must be decided for the 2025 Club World Cup, the FIFA event relaunching at the end of next season with 12 European teams in the lineup of 32. The Club World Cup rebrand sees a month-long tournament — a group stage and 16-team knockout bracket — played every four years in June-July, starting in 2025 in the United States. FIFA will pay tens of millions of dollars in prize money. Europe will send each Champions League title winner from 2021 to ‘24 - Chelsea, Madrid and Man City so far - plus the top eight or nine teams in a ranking table counting all Champions League results in that four-season period. Countries can enter only two teams unless it has at least three different title holders. So,

the door is still open for Arsenal. Already definitely in on the basis of ranking are Bayern, PSG, Inter, Porto and Benfica. Atletico is the next-best Spanish team in ranking so Barcelona must advance past Napoli to stay in contention. Dortmund is ranked second among German teams and will be confirmed if Leipzig is eliminated by round of 16 opponent Madrid. Also in line is Juventus, despite serving a one-year ban from UEFA competitions for financial wrongdoing. Napoli and Lazio need to advance deep into this Champions League. **BONUS ENTRIES:** Every result in the Champions League, plus the Europa League and Europa Conference League, also counts toward UEFA’s longstanding ranking table of each country’s collective

performance. What’s new is the rankings award extra places in the expanded, 36-team Champions League next season to the two countries that collectively did best in the three UEFA competitions this season. That’s key for teams who might finish fifth this season in the biggest leagues because Italy currently leads the rankings with Germany barely edging England into third place. Spain trails a little in fourth. Each Champions League win for Inter, Napoli and Lazio is good for all Italian clubs doing well in Serie A. It could be that Manchester United’s path back into the Champions League is to rise to fifth in the Premier League while English clubs’ UEFA ranking is boosted by its biggest rivals winning European trophies - Man City plus Europa League contender Liverpool. And so, the 29 games left in the Champions League through the June 1 final in London have great value beyond the 16 clubs directly involved.

ENGLAND TEAM LANDS IN RAJKOT

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Fresh from a one-week break in their pre-series base Abu Dhabi, the England cricket team on Monday returned to India for the remainder of the five-match rubber against the hosts, which is locked at 1-1 after two games. The England team landed in the city — venue for the third Test — on Monday evening. After their 106-run loss in Visakhapatnam, the England players opted to utilise the 10-day break between the second and third Test by relaxing and playing golf in Abu Dhabi. The third Test is scheduled to be held here from February 15. The visiting team will begin training at SCA Stadium from Tuesday morning, while the India players will practice in the afternoon. A day before their return to India, England were dealt a blow with their frontline spinner Jack Leach ruled out of the remaining three Tests with a knee injury. However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Basheer for the rest of the tour. Joe Root is the visitors’ fourth spin option behind the three



regular spinners. England prepared for the highly anticipated Test series against India with an extensive conditioning camp in Abu Dhabi instead of arriving in the subcontinent early for practice matches.

The second match ended with a day to spare as hosts India, having lost the series opener, staged a remarkable comeback to level the series 1-1. During the Abu Dhabi camp prior to the series, the England team spent a lot of time

working on ways to tackle the Indian spinners. While they rallied to emerge winners in the opener, the English batters were blown away by Jasprit Bumrah’s brilliant exhibition of reverse swing bowling in the first

innings of the second Test before succumbing in a record 399-run chase to a disciplined Indian bowling unit in their second innings. The fourth and fifth Tests will be held in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

In Virat absence, great chance for England to win series: Broad

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Former pacer Stuart Broad says the ongoing India-England Test series is the most evenly-matched contest that he has seen between the two sides but the visitors have a strong chance of emerging triumphant as the “fire, passion and competitiveness” of Virat Kohli is missing from the home team’s arsenal. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the just-concluded SA20, where he was a commentator, Broad said the absence of Kohli due to personal reasons is a downer but the matches so far have been engrossing. The five-match series is locked 1-1 and the two teams will now square off in the third game in Rajkot, beginning February 15. “(The) first two matches were very competitive and it is one of the most exciting India-England Test series that I have seen. It is the most level series,” he said. “India won the last Test but England’s playing style (‘Bazball’) is quite effective in India. With Virat not in the team, it is a great opportunity for the England team,” he added. Broad feels Kohli’s break has also opened a window of opportunity for the youngsters in the Indian team to make a name for themselves. “The battle between Virat and England bowlers had been great in the past. (James) Anderson and Kohli’s battles are quite famous. It’s a shame for the series and the sport that he will be missing,” he observed. “...Virat adds to the quality of any contest because he is such a wonderful player who brings fire, passion, competitiveness and great fan following to the sport. But personal matters always take preference over cricketing matters,” he said. “We saw in the last match when Yashasvi Jaiswal scored a brilliant double century,” pointed out the bowler who snared 604 wickets in 167 Tests. Broad said he is also very happy with the performance of his former new-ball partner James Anderson on



India’s unresponsive tracks. Anderson replaced Mark Wood in the second Test at Visakhapatnam and picked up five wickets. “We saw in the second Test, seamers played an important role with Jasprit Bumrah giving a match-winning performance and Jimmy bowling like that on those pitches. “Everyone expected that the pitch might spin a little bit more but seamers had a lot more success. Maybe with the moisture in the morning,” he said. “Jimmy is nearing 700 wickets and I know he is someone who always takes wickets in a winning cause,” he added about the 41-year-old Anderson, who has claimed 179 Test wickets against India in 68 tests. Broad and Anderson formed an intimidating pace partnership at the peak of their prowess but he does not believe that they were the last great Test fast bowling pair in the era of T20 cricket. But he did agree that to take more than 1200 wickets together will be difficult for another set of two pacers. “I don’t think we are the last of the great bowling partnership in Test cricket. I think Jasprit Bumrah is an outstanding Test bowler. I don’t think our partnership, in terms of wickets we have taken, will get overtaken because of the longevity of our career,” he said. “I certainly think that there will be bowling partnerships that will light up world cricket

in the next few years,” he added. “I grew up watching fast bowling partnerships like Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose, Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram, Darren Gaugh and Andy Caddick to name a few. I am sure there will be another partnership coming soon.” Describing Test cricket as the pinnacle of the game, the former England captain said a window for the format should be created in which all nations can play at the same time. “I think the charm of Test Cricket is unmatched . It is a wonderful spectacle. There are many T20 leagues now and a number of World Cups coming around so scheduling is difficult to fit. “I can certainly see a period where we have a window for Test Cricket where all the nations are playing at the same time, kids watching highlights, talking about the performances of different teams,” he said. He also advised young fast bowlers to balance their training to increase their career span. “Every bowler should find out what works for him for longevity. I liked running which I found crucial for my injury prevention. Jimmy and I did a lot of heavy weight lifting as well that really helped us. “It’s quite different in Test cricket with 25 overs a day while in T20 it’s only four. You don’t need much power, just balanced training,” he said.

KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, fails to recover

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Senior India batter KL Rahul was on Monday ruled out of the third Test against England after failing to fully recover from his quadriceps strain that forced him to miss the second match in Visakhapatnam. It is understood that Devdutt Padikkal, the talented Karnataka left-hander who is enjoying a great first class season, will replace Rahul in the squad. “KL Rahul hasn’t yet reported in Rajkot. Ravindra Jadeja, the local boy has linked up with the team. It was always a case of subject to fitness and BCCI medical team is still not confident that he is match fit,” a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. The selectors had earlier



named both Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja in the squad subject to clearance from the BCCI’s medical team. In his most recent Ranji Trophy match, the 23-year-old Padikkal scored 151 while the chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar watching his knock from the stands. Padikkal has been in excellent form this season. Having

started with a 193 against Punjab in the opening game, he struck 103 against Goa. Besides his exploits in Ranji, Padikkal also scored 105, 65 and 21 in his three innings for India A in the two unofficial Tests against England Lions. As far as Rahul is concerned, the 31-year-old batter’s extended break raises a serious question about

whether the senior India players and the BCCI’s medical team are giving proper picture about the injury status of certain players. “If the BCCI’s medical team knew in first place that Rahul’s quad injury is as serious as it looks, why in the first place was he kept in provisional squad. And why is the player sending wrong signals by posting videos of his batting on Instagram stories,” a senior BCCI official asked. Another senior player, who was recently told that he would be dropped for his poor form, pulled out on pretext of multiple injuries, something that the board hasn’t even mentioned. The case of Ishan Kishan is even more curious as he hasn’t even spoken to his

home state unit on whether he would play a Ranji Trophy match or not. With Rahul ruled out of the third Test and possibly fourth, the doors could open for Sarfaraz Khan in the middle-order now that Shreyas Iyer has also been dropped. However, there will be more selection conundrum if Jadeja takes his rightful place in the XI. Axar Patel has batted well in the two Tests so far and Kuldeep Yadav was the second best Indian bowler in Visakhapatnam after Jasprit Bumrah. As far as the keeper’s slot is concerned, time is running out for KS Bharath with Dhruv Jurel breathing down his neck, but the former could still get one last chance in Rajkot.

RANJI TROPHY

Akash scalps 9 wickets to help Railways beat Goa

PTI ■ SURAT

Railways left-arm spinner Akash Pandey achieved a rare feat as he took nine wickets for 71 runs in Goa’s second innings in a stunning bowling show to single-handedly power his side to a 63-run win in their Ranji Trophy Group C match here on Monday. Pandey dismissed eight Goa batters on the final day, while taking the wicket of opener Amogh Sunil Desai on Sunday. He bowled 26.2 overs in total in Goa’s second innings. Only two players — Premangsu Chatterjee of Bengal and Pradeep Sunderam of Rajasthan — have picked all 10 wickets in one innings of a Ranji Trophy match. Chatterjee achieved the feat in a Ranji match against Assam in 1957, while Sunderam did the same in a match against Vidarbha in 1985. Chasing 306 for a win, Goa were all out for 242 in 65.2 overs. Railways walked away with six points while Goa got none. With the win, Railways now occupy fourth spot with 18 points. With just one round of matches left in the group league, Karnataka, who got three points on the basis of first innings lead in the drawn match against Tamil Nadu in Chennai, are in top spot with 24 points. Tamil Nadu are in second with 22 points and Gujarat in third with 19. In Chennai, chasing a target of 355, TN could only manage 338 for 8 in 105 overs. The match ended in a draw and



Karnataka got three points for their first innings lead, while TN had to be satisfied with one point. Baba Indrajith was run out just two runs short of century, while Pradosh Ranjan Paul and Vijay Shankar chipped in with 74 and 60 respectively. They lost three quick wickets towards the end to fall short of target after beginning the day at 36 for 1. In Mohali, Gujarat crushed Punjab by 299 runs to walk away with six points on the final day. Pacer Priyajitsing Jadeja scalped two more wickets on Monday to complete a fine five-wicket haul for 39 runs as Gujarat shot hosts Punjab for just 111 in 39.4 overs in their second innings. Chasing a tall target of 411 runs, Punjab produced an insipid batting display as none of them could reach 20 runs with the highest being 18 by captain Mandeep

Singh. Seven of their batters were dismissed without reaching double-digit figures. Priyajitsing’s pace colleagues Chintan Gaja and Arzan Nagwaswalla took two wickets apiece, while spinner Siddharth Desai got one as the home side batters surrendered meekly. Punjab were staring at defeat after beginning the day at 40 for 4 and Gujarat completed the formalities in 25.4 overs on Monday. **BRIEF SCORES:** **In Surat:** Railways 297 & 208 beat Goa 200 & 242 in 65.2 overs (Suyash Prabhudessai 67; Akash Pandey 9/71) by 63 runs. Railways 6 points; Goa 0 point. **In Chennai:** Karnataka 366 & 139 drew with Tamil Nadu 151 & 338 for 8 in 105 overs (Baba Indrajith 98, Pradosh Ranjan Paul 74, Vijay Shankar 60; Vijaykumar Vyshak 3/71). Karnataka 3 points (for 1st

innings lead); Tamil Nadu 1 point.

In Mohali: Gujarat 339 & 290 for 8 declared beat Punjab 219 & 111 in 39.4 overs (Mandeep Singh 18; Priyajitsing Jadeja 5/39) by 299 runs.

Gujarat 6 points, Punjab 0 point.

In Chandigarh: Chandigarh 356 & 359 for 3 declared in 74 overs (Arslan Khan 147, Shivam Bhambri 98, Manan Vohra 74; Sridam Paul 1/39) drew with Tripura 438 & 121 for 3 in 34.4 overs (Bikramkumar Das 58; Arpit Pannu 1/15).

Tripura 3 points (on basis of first innings lead), Chandigarh 1.

Kerala crush Bengal, jump to third spot

PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)

Veteran all-rounder Jalaj Saxena grabbed a match haul of 13 wickets on a rank-turner as Kerala crushed Bengal by 109 runs to taste their first win of the ongoing Ranji Trophy season here on Monday. The win propelled Kerala (14) to third in the Group B table behind leaders Mumbai (30) and Andhra (25). This was Bengal’s second successive defeat of the season as the last edition’s runners-up slipped to sixth spot and their knockout qualification hopes are as good as over. Bengal had endured an innings defeat to Mumbai at home in their previous outing. The spin-bowling all-rounder Saxena followed up his 9/68 in the first innings to pocket 4/104 as Bengal were bowled out for 339 in their tough chase of 449 runs. Opener Abhimanyu Easwaran completed his second fifty of the match

after Bengal resumed the day on 77/2. But Saxena gave the breakthrough first dismissing Anustup Majumdar (16) and then halted Abhimanyu’s patient innings for 65 (119b). Playing his penultimate match of his career, veteran Manoj Tiwary also became Saxena’s victim falling cheaply for 35. Tiwary has announced that he will finally call it a day after Bengal’s last league match against Bihar at Eden Gardens from February 16. Returning to action after a two-month injury layoff, Bengal premier all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed was the lone warrior for as he chipped in with an entertaining 100-ball 80 (8x4, 2x6). Karan Lal gave him support with a 78-ball 40 in an 83-run alliance for the seventh wicket. But it was just a formality for the visitors with Basil Thampi (2/8 from 2.4 overs) wiping out the tail, first by effecting the run-out of India Test-bound Akash Deep

and then dismissing Shahbaz. **RAHANE SLAMS FIFTY, MUMBAI LOG 3 PTS:** In Raipur, veteran India batter Ajinkya Rahane struck his first fifty of Ranji Trophy season, as his 56 not out helped Mumbai bag three points by virtue of their first innings lead over hosts Chhattisgarh. Resuming the day on 97/1 with an overall 98 run lead, Mumbai declared their second essay on 253/6 as both the skippers, Rahane and Amandeep Khare, agreed for a draw before the tea break. For the home side, left-arm spinner Ajay Mandal returned with 5/63 but that was not enough to bowl Mumbai out. The sidelined India batter, Rahane’s previous scores in this year Ranji Trophy has been 0, 0, 16, 8, 9 and 1. This was his first fifty in nine innings as the Mumbai skipper scored a 78 against Tripura in the Vijay Hazare Trophy in December last year.